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## The Experiences of Second-Generation South Asian Female Students who are Attending Universities in Canada

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Graduate Program in Education  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education  
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THE EXPERIENCES OF SECOND-GENERATION SOUTH ASIAN FEMALE STUDENTS  
WHO ARE ATTENDING UNIVERSITIES IN CANADA

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Monisha Aurora

Graduate Program in Educational Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters in Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
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## **Abstract**

This study examines the experiences of second-generation South Asian women attending university. It also focuses on the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect in the participants' lives. The research questions being investigated are as follows: (1) How does cultural identity inform young South Asian women's experiences at home and at school? (2) What types of social boundaries do second-generation South Asian immigrant women negotiate, and how do they change based on their surroundings? (3) Does their socioeconomic status have an impact on these negotiations? The methods adopted were case study qualitative research. The findings discussed some of the ways in which the participants negotiated their cultural identities. Additionally, they also pointed to social class as a significant factor in determining the cultural and academic expectations for many of the participants in this study.

Keywords: Second-generation; South Asian; gender; culture; race; social class

## **Dedication**

I had the privilege of spending some time in India with my grandparents while I was writing my thesis. Looking back, I couldn't be happier that I took the time to do this as those were my last moments with them. I would like to dedicate this work to my grandmother. There isn't a day that passes where I don't think about my Nani ma, I love you.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last century, Canada has witnessed a dramatic influx of immigrants, stemming from the liberalization of immigration policy (Kurian, 1999). This has affected demographics across the country, and has also changed the education landscape. Social differences such as race, gender, and class can greatly affect experiences. Additionally, generational differences cause students to navigate between two or more cultures, one stemming from their families' heritage, and the other resulting from the hegemony of the dominant culture. The first generation immigrant experience is not synonymous to that of the second-generation; hence, it is important to explore the experiences of the second-generation immigrants (Rajiva, 1996; Sohal, 2009). In particular, the experiences of second-generation female students are increasingly complex due to multiple social factors working in tandem. As a result, this study investigates the experiences of second-generation South Asian women who are attending institutions of higher education in Canada. This is an important topic of study as there are many intersecting social factors affecting these individuals in addition to the process of identity development, which is influenced by South Asian and Canadian cultures and values (Sunder, 2008; Durham, 2004). Investigating how these women navigate their cultural identity amidst other competing cultures and values can enrich understandings of their experiences.

Listening to students' perspectives and their personal views can provide greater insight into second-generation South Asian Canadian women's experiences (Carter, 2011). It is critical to acknowledge how race, class, and gender intersect in the lives of these students and inform their experiences. Institutions of higher education act as a conduit to create and reinforce social boundaries involving race, culture, gender, and class which shape experience. As Rezai-Rashti (1995) asserts: "The struggles that women, minorities, and other oppressed people are engaged in

within schools open a “project of possibility” that could have positive repercussions in societal change” (p.5). Furthermore, schools act as sites where social processes take place (Carter, 2010). An investigation of second-generation South Asian Canadian women can facilitate positive change by establishing a sense of awareness within the education environment. It is with great hope that this study will provide further insight into the experiences of this particular group of individuals.

In the context of this study, a South Asian is defined as anyone from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and Maldives (Bannerji-Stevens, 2009; Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Ghosh, 2013). Additionally, anyone whose parents immigrated to Canada from one of these countries is being referred to as a second-generation immigrant. The experiences of these second-generation immigrant women and their participation in this study can enhance understandings through empirical research. Also, identifying the intersecting systems of oppression that exist amongst this particular group of students is essential (hooks, 1994). Rajiva (1996) asserts that: “There exists non-immigrant ethnic women whose voices are not being heard in immigrant discourse, and that these second-generation ethnic women would not identify with an identity or a politics which defines all visible minorities as newcomers” (p. 144). Through this study, I provide some insights into the experiences of second-generation immigrants as opposed to those of first-generation immigrant female students.

Experiences can build social boundaries, relationships, and perceptions of individuals and the world around them. As a result, it is essential to identify the types of experiences that students have in their daily lives. Carter (2006) asserts that:

Social boundaries, as Barth (1969) described, entail criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion. On the one hand, social boundaries may serve positive functions for racial and ethnic students, since these students use different cultural resources instrumentally to gain acceptance as “authentic” (or real)

members of a social group, to foster social solidarity, or to provide themselves with alternative means to judge their self-worth and to maintain high self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989, p.307)

Social boundaries can create situations that engender particular limitations on the basis of factors like race, class, or gender. Rajiva (1996) discusses the notion of “boundary events” as moments in which individuals become aware of their social differences such as race, due to something or someone who had made this apparent. Events such as this inform experience and identity, as they may positively or negatively alter an individual’s view or how they reflect on particular situations. In addition to social boundaries, their experiences will also differ from one generation to the next due to the varying degrees of assimilation that take place, and the nature of their influences (Bannerji-Stevens, 2009; Rajiva, 1996, 2006; Shariff, 2008; Sharma, 2008). Young South Asian women are often confronted with polarizing messages and values conveyed through a variety of experiences that stem from their community, peers, and family (Inman, 2006; Bannerji-Stevens, 2009). Identifying generational variances is essential as they highlight the contrasts between ethnic and dominant cultures.

## **1.1 Rationale**

This research is motivated by my own experiences as a second-generation South Asian Canadian woman. I grew up in two different socioeconomic neighbourhoods, one in a relatively low-income area, and the other in a high-income suburb outside of Toronto. Both experiences highlighted the significance that socioeconomic status played in my life. Home, school, community, and peers have collectively influenced my experiences and helped shape my identity. The experiences derived from all contexts have presented cultural and socioeconomic status differences. Negotiating between two competing sets of values throughout my own

identity formation process has helped me understand how race, socioeconomic status and gender make experiences more complex.

Conducting research on second-generation South Asian Canadian women allowed me to have an insider advantage as my background could have potentially presented some similar views as the participants involved in this study. However, my research thrives on the ideas that extend out of my own experiences. As Durham (2004) asserts:

When adolescence and diaspora occur in tandem, identity formation becomes an even more complex issue. The psychological transition of adolescence, already charged in terms of gender and sexuality, is then imbricated with the conundrums of the other transition—the diaspora identity that demands delicate negotiations of race/ethnicity, nation, class, language, culture and history (p. 140-141).

As a result, focusing on experience is paramount to understanding the wider scope of identity and the nature of transitioning from adolescence. Identity construction is not fixed, but is constantly evolving. Additionally, adolescent years can compound existing issues during a time of such immense growth (Durham, 2004). Race, gender, and social class considerably shape identity and can become embedded in the social climate of schools. These factors can then determine how students are situated socially. Embarking on this study has facilitated my own internal process of looking at past and present experiences, and has provided me with a critical lens for focusing on, and beginning to understand my past more clearly. Ultimately, my experiences have created an entry point into this study, and reciprocally, the entry point into an exploration of my past and present.

## **1.2 Gaps in the Literature**

Educational research among second-generation South Asian immigrant women is informative and has the potential to facilitate the production of transformative knowledge by establishing a sense of awareness for minority students in higher education (Sandhu, 2012).

Critical engagement through a qualitative investigation fostered understandings that could potentially facilitate an exploration of the types of supports considered for minority students through pedagogical practices and curriculum. In recent years, some research has been conducted on South Asians in Western societies; however, much of this research has only contributed to the immigrant experience, with little focus on the second-generation female experiences (Aujla, 2000; Rajiva, 1996, 2009; Sharma, 2008). Previous research reflects the need for more stratified sampling, in order to reflect a larger number of participants, and from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Sharma, 2008).

Academic success expectations and the limited social autonomy provided by parents are included in previous literature (Ruzicka, 2011; Sharma, 2008; Traxler, 2009). Such literature argues that young South Asian women are not expected or allowed to work due to parental concerns about financial independence as a path to more autonomy. Financial independence is seen as a way of threatening academic performance and parental control for some young South Asian women by their parents (Sharma, 2008). However, there is a gap in the literature with regards to young women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Previous literature has primarily focused on South Asian women from a higher socioeconomic background (Sharma, 2008). However, the experiences of young women who were expected to contribute to their households financially, and the pressures of adhering to possible cultural and academic expectations, were not discussed. Most South Asian women attending a higher education institution are supported by their parents financially, as most of them are not permitted to work while completing their education (Sharma, 2008).

There is limited research that has explored the representation of South Asian women in Western media and popular culture (Durham, 2004; Menon, 2014). Thakore (2014) highlights the reasons for limited representation by indicating the barriers that exist.

This is evident in the examples of South Asian women in the media, particularly those created and cast by White, American producers. As media producers favour casting women who are attractive, so too do the same media producers favour casting women of color who are attractive in terms of their proximity to White physical characteristics. (p. 153)

This view coincides with previous literature regarding prevailing hegemonic notions of South Asian beauty (Baker & Bakshi, 2011; Devayya, 2007; Inman, 2006). There is insufficient scholarly literature that recognizes the concerns of the limited representation of South Asians in Western media. These groups lack varying representations in the media, other than being cast as the “foreigner,” exoticised, or as over sexualized (Durham, 2004; Shaikh, 2012; Thakore, 2014). Furthermore, there is an existing gap in academic literature concerning second and third-generations of young South Asian women who must formulate their own understandings of identity to a greater extent than most people. The representation of South Asian women living in Western countries is only beginning to surface in the media (Thakore, 2014). Thakore (2014) argues that South Asians are increasingly appearing in American media, in which they are usually cast for roles that portray stereotypical images of them. Despite an increase of South Asian representation in American popular media, many of these roles reinforce existing racial ideologies. Representations have predominantly reflected hegemonic cultural ideas about South Asian women’s experiences, often contrary to their lived experiences, which limits autonomous social development due to parental involvement. Parents play a large role in their daughters’ lives due to their fears that are based on media portrayals of women and girls’ experiences in school (Durham, 2004). Durham (2004) demonstrates this in her research on South Asian girls

by arguing that, “their parents were unfamiliar with the realities of the U.S. secondary school experience and so obtained their information from largely mediated sources, which the girls dismissed as unrealistic and exaggerated” (Durham, p. 150). This theme is often mimicked within classrooms in terms of the literature and resources that are available or included within teaching practices (Menon, 2014). Due to the social differences between South Asian women and those in the dominant culture, it is crucial to facilitate a bridge between the media, classrooms, and their lived experiences. Cultural relevance can ease identity construction processes for second-generation South Asian immigrant women as would encourage their representation in the media and in education environments. Additionally, enabling a certain level of inclusivity that can make differences more acceptable (Sandhu, 2012).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The main questions addressed in this research are: (1) How does cultural identity inform young South Asian women’s experiences at home and at school? (2) What types of social boundaries do second-generation South Asian women immigrants negotiate, and how do they change based on their surroundings? (3) Does their socioeconomic status have an impact on these negotiations?

### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

This research draws on an anti-racist feminist framework. Anti-racist feminism challenges the idea of equality by acknowledging that gender, race, and class can act to disadvantage people in relation to the dominant structure. The basis of this framework is to enable discussions that go beneath the surface of these different facets of identity. Essentially, anti-racist feminism promotes intersectionality by examining these students’ experiences through a lens that acknowledges intersecting forms of oppression like race, gender, and class. According

to Dua (1999): “Anti-racist feminist thought interrogates the way race and gender function together in structuring social inequality” (p. 9).

An anti-racist feminist framework will facilitate greater insight into the experiences of South Asian female students. This theoretical framework is constructed on the premise of understanding how the various forms of oppression intersect. The goal of anti-racist feminism is to unpack deeply rooted inequities based on gender, race, and class (Shaikh, 2012). Western feminism is not applicable to women universally due to factors such as race, gender, and cultural identity, which can make women’s experiences increasingly complex. Western feminism does not address the cultural dimensions of these experiences (Crowley, 1991). These limitations can cause issues to be viewed through a Eurocentric lens (Mohanty, 2003). Incorporating a theoretical framework that acknowledges the social inequities faced by South Asian women is essential in order to understand the complexity of their experiences. It is not sufficient to simply understand inequities involving women, as women of colour have different experiences from white women (Mohanty, 1984). Gaining insights into these experiences can create the possibility of breaking down deeply rooted ideas, and eliminating stereotypes that are relevant to these women’s particular race, gender, and culture (Shaikh, 2012; Bannerji, 1995; hooks, 1984).

Strong (2007) notes that:

Higher education breeds middle and upper class citizens who gain greater benefits than those in the lower class. This inequity can be traced back to the structuring of the educational system, which has historically been revered as objective and elite (Gatto, 2003). In having the power to determine the credible truths of society, higher education has granted degrees that translate into political tools, economic mobility, and ultimately power for those who are able to gain access to a college or university. (p. 51)

Drawing on Strong’s understanding of attaining power and mobility from higher education, it is important to identify social class and how it has affected South Asian women in ways such as having access to education, and their expectations on obtaining an education. Social class can act

as an oppressor along with race and gender, fueling oppression depending on an individual's social class. Anti-racist feminism supports an in-depth understanding of individuals who identify as a minority or oppressed group through varying axes of differentiation. As Agnew (1996) observes, differences in race, gender, and cultural identity become more apparent in an individual's social context, in relation to others. The categories that are constructed through social differences can have oppressive effects, as they are based on race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality. Furthermore, these categories activate hierarchies that are fuelled by social differences. Gramsci (1971) demonstrates that hegemony is the way in which the dominant class can exercise its control. Thus, it is within relation to the dominant culture, class, race, and gender, that differences become more noticeable and oppressive.

Mohanty (2003) demonstrates that the vast majority of work in this field has been written by first world feminists, who write about third world women of colour. However, the young women engaged in this study may not identify as either first world or third world as their positions may be located between multiple cultures and generations. Consequently, their experiences should not be expressed through a binary view (Birk, 2009). Decolonizing practices are crucial in their representation, as cultural colonization has created a lens through which these individuals have been seen as "others" (Mohanty, 2003). The goal is not to categorize the second-generation immigrant women who identify with two or more sets of cultures, values, and norms, but to investigate the social boundaries that they negotiate. Establishing an active dialogue in which these young women are engaged can help to represent them with greater authenticity.

The connection between an anti-racist feminist framework and the context of education is to develop an understanding of how someone's lived experiences may potentially inform

educational research and practices. This approach can deliver awareness through possible decolonizing practices as it acknowledges the multilateral processes at play in shaping experiences for second-generation immigrant women. Aujla (1999) argues that the Canadian and South Asian cultures are sometimes expressed as binaries in order to demonstrate tradition and modernity differences. This research focuses on the second-generation South Asian immigrant women's identities, and how they are constructed through a multitude of factors. The term "hybrid" has been given to those individuals whose identities continue to evolve based on one or more location, culture and language (Bhabha, 1996). Hence, hybridity acknowledges the evolving and multidimensional nature that constructs identity (Dei, 2000).

Intersubjectivity enables us to consider minority women through the guise of colonial and Eurocentric views (Rezai-Rashti, 1995). The dominant class has established systems to justify their superiority through social and political relations. hooks' (1984; 2000) ideas parallel this notion, in addition to claiming that the varying forms of oppression are equally harmful. Rezai-Rashti (1999) asserts that certain colonial ideas become attached to individuals, and social differences are often blamed on culture. South Asian women's issues have often been seen as monolithic and fixed through a Eurocentric lens (Aujla, 1999; Ng 1995). Becoming cognizant of this lens enabled a critical analysis.

As hooks (1984) argues:

Classism and racism shape women's perspectives in such a way that bourgeois white women saw no need to call attention to these losses when they were not likely to be among those deprived. Concurrently, much recent attention to the issues of women and poverty (among feminists and coming from the right) implies that it is somehow more tragic, more worthy of note, more a situation in need of change because increasing numbers of white middle class women are likely to someday enter the ranks of the poor. This approach to the issue of women and poverty privileges the plight of one group of women. (p. 99/100)

Integrating a critical analysis of gender, race, class, and culture aided in a more in-depth exploration of multiple intersecting factors. hooks (1984) argues that there is a need to look at feminism and anti-racism as co-existing in order to effectively understand multiple oppressions that function at the same time, instead of independent from one another. Both feminism and anti-racism create a more holistic approach, as experiences are complex and are influenced by both sets of framework (hooks, 1984).

Institutions of higher education have the ability to reproduce ideas about race, class, and gender, due to the varying social categories that are imposed on individuals (Tisdell, 1993). Utilizing anti-racist feminist theory within an educational context will help to unpack some of these ideas and categories. Second-generation South Asian Canadian female students are faced with multiple pressures. Determining how these students are impacted in their daily lives will help identify the types of ideas and values that are rooted in a particular social environment such as school or home. Greater understandings may be achieved through a careful examination of data along with the supporting framework.

As Mohanty (2003) argues, third world women are victimized and objectified by Western women, as they are often misrepresented. The representation of this group of individuals is of utmost importance as it largely shapes how they are viewed and positioned in the world. Shohat and Stam (2013) describe how Eurocentric ideas are deeply rooted historically in terms of how people outside of the West are viewed, highlighting their marginalization by the West. Said (1993) asserts that the culture and representation of non-Europeans has typically been narrated through a European perspective, which has often become the only known perspective. Additionally, Said (1993) describes the significance of narrative, as it frames stories about the past and individuals from what is often referred to as “foreign” parts of the world. The idea of

originating from somewhere that is considered “foreign” and being identified as someone considered an “other” can create many obstacles when attempting to understand the narrative of your past, as many of these people are now placed between two cultures and sets of values. Drawing on these theories and listening to the narratives of South Asian women could provide further insights.

This study’s theoretical framework must also consider the feminist perspective within South Asian cultures and how the social organization of differences influences particular roles that are fulfilled. The collectivistic values that are promoted in many South Asian cultures involve the family and larger community, creating a level of expectations to fulfill certain roles (Ghosh, 2013). Therefore, adhering to specific norms and expectations of the collective group can create a sense of belonging for individuals. “Ethnic ties cannot be considered in isolation as delivering ‘belonging’ given that they are intersected with social relations of different types (such as those hailed by gender, generational and class categories)” (Anthias, 2008, p.8). Giguère, Lalonde, and Lou (2010) parallel this notion regarding social inclusion and the reasons for adherence to cultural-specific social norms. South Asian cultures have roles and expectations that are specific to gender, often posing challenges for second-generation South Asian immigrant women (Naidoo, 1984; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). There is an inherent power struggle where men have greater control over the decisions made at home and in the community (Talbani & Hasanali).

## **1.5 Summary**

This Chapter introduced the research problem, the rationale for this study, and the gaps in the literature. Additionally, research questions were presented in this Chapter, and so was a description of the theoretical framework and the ways in which it supported this study.

## **Chapter 2: The Literature Review**

This Chapter reviews the existing literature in relation to South Asian women in Western societies. The literature review is organized according to the following themes: second-generation identity, hybridity, gender, culture and values, social class, education, and women in higher education.

### **2.1 Second-generation Identity**

The second-generation immigrant identity development process is often different from those who are first-generation as they must negotiate between cultures and different sets of values (Rajiva, 2009). Socialization and experiences vary for individuals based on the culture and values they identify with (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Talbani and Hasanali assert: “The second generation of South Asian Canadians has very different cultural experiences from their parents and many of them have a limited encounter with their ancestral culture” (p. 617). The previous generation is attracted to their past while the current generation is inclined to assimilate to the dominant culture. However, Dei (2000) describes identity construction as a process that is multidimensional and continually evolving. Identity is complex and multidimensional because there are a number of influencing factors that shape it such as values, ideas, and attitudes (Aujla, 1999; Dasgupta, 1998; Inman et al., 2001). Based on her research, Rajiva (2006) observes that adolescent experiences largely shape women’s identities later in life. In addition, she notes how adolescent females struggle with identity construction due to contrasting values and generational differences (Rajiva, 2006; 2005).

Many second-generation women find themselves surrounded by a strong cultural divide due to the largely contrasting views of collectivist values at home, and the Western individualistic values outside of the home (Bannerjee-Stevens, 2009; Ghosh, 2013; Ghuman,

2005; Rajiva, 2013; Shariff, 2008; Sharma, 2008; Sohal, 2009; Naidoo, 2003). The conflict between the two is often a site of struggle for second-generation women, as they are not only negotiating between a cultural and a mainstream societal identity, but also between an individual and collective identity (Ghosh, 2013).

## **2.2 Hybridity**

The immersion of cultures can become problematic depending on how the values of different cultures compete. Bhatia and Ram (2001) describe the complex process of maintaining two cultural identities and the “push and pull” forces at play: parents, peers, siblings, and surroundings can clash through identity negotiation. The existence of dual consciousness and hybridity within identity can inspire difficulty within social environments. It is important to establish a sense of how individuals are affected and whether a cultural dichotomy transcends their socialization and self-perceptions. Brah and Minhas (1985) assert that South Asian school girls tend to embody the characteristics that have been prescribed to them. They argue that race, gender, and class differences arise and are reproduced through the education system and socialization that takes place with these young women. Additionally, they illustrate that stereotypes of East Indian families prescribed characteristics of quietness and shy behaviour to girls. These constructions were often based on the perceptions of South Asian girls’ families and the dynamics through which ideas of oppression and control were thought to be present at home (Brah & Minhas, 1985).

Brah and Coombes (2000) discuss the term hybridity in opposition to essentialism; therefore, recognizing the negative impact that categorizing can have on individuals who identify with multiple cultures, languages, and locations. Bhabha (1994) demonstrates the ‘third space’ as a space in which new paradigms may be explored about identity in which cultural and social

practices do not necessarily compete, instead, this space encourages authentic exploration without the pressure of categorization. The third space does not identify a fixed identity but asserts a process in which identity evolves through the constant evolution of oneself. The changes and adaptations of cultural norms, behaviours, and relationships are always changing and according to Bhabha, the third space is needed to help and negotiate such ideas (Sandhu, 2012). This notion promotes a less restrictive approach to identity development. Alternatively, Sunder (2008) describes an approach that many second-generation South Asian women have assumed when identifying with multiple cultures. This approach has involved extracting the positive aspects of both cultures and using them to construct identity, rich in both cultural values and perspectives.

Bhatia and Ram (2004) assert:

Advocating the strategy of “integration” as the endpoint or examining acculturation in terms of universal categories overlooks the multiple, contested, and sometimes painful voices that are associated with “living in-between” cultures. The concept of acculturation as a multi-voiced phenomenon allows us to think of acculturation as a dialogical process that is rooted in history, culture, and politics: a process that involves an ongoing, contested negotiation of voices from here and there, past and present, homeland and host land, self and other. (p.237)

The above excerpt illustrates how the process of identity negotiation is challenging, complex, and multilayered. It is affected by history, culture, gender, family, community, and generation. Stereotypes and past immigrant perceptions that often attach themselves to the second-generation have historical undertones. The blending of people, languages, customs, cultures, and behaviour reside in schools and public spaces, where greater understanding can facilitate awareness. Investigating the complexity of identity negotiation that causes conflict due to generation differences may alleviate misconceptions that appear to be cultural differences. Bhatia and Ram (2004) claim that cultural customs and traditions do not typically evolve after emigration due to

the family's desire to preserve the memories that were established in their native country. The second-generation often finds a larger gap between cultural differences due to their "liminal" position of negotiating between two or more sets of cultures and values as they do not fully belong to one or the other (Shariff, 2008).

Proponents of anti-racist feminism recognize the concept of "hybrid" identity and a "third space" which surface due to in-between positions among cultures, norms, and values (Ghosh, 2000). This has been informed by the socialization process that occurs in the private and public spheres through experiences. Brah and Minhas (1985) explore the identity forging process in a British context that focuses on South Asian female students. They argue that the process of identity negotiation can often become problematic for individuals due to the contrasting differences of modernity and tradition (Sunder, 2008). In addition, they demonstrate how many of these processes take place within school settings, where students have many of their experiences. Roles and certain behaviours are often assumed according to environment; this involves situational ethnicity or identity in which individuals can shift in relation to who they are interacting with (Sodhi-Kalsi, 2003; Sunder, 2008). The adoption of the hegemonic culture largely depends on how much the second-generation invests in assimilation towards the dominant culture. The need for migrant individuals to validate identity from their root cultural values is heightened upon moving to a new place (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). The difference between the first and second-generation is often demonstrated through their socialization and the level of autonomy they have in order to assimilate.

### **2.3 Gender**

Talbani and Hasanali (2000) claim that South Asian females' experiences highlight many issues regarding gender roles that involve certain rules and regulations they must adhere to.

There often exists a double-standard between males and females in terms of socializing with friends or dating (Sharma, 2008; Sohal, 2009; Talbani and Hasanali, 2000). In more liberal households, girls and women continue to highlight situations in which prescribed gender roles are maintained and enforced by parents. Control and autonomy can impede levels of interaction for girls and their ability to socialize with the opposite sex or even with individuals outside of their community (Bannerjee-Stevens, 2009; Durham, 2004; Ijaz & Abbas, 2010; Rajiva, 2005; Sharma, 2008; Sodhi-Kalsi, 2003). This often interrupts autonomous identity development as there are impeding pressures on these girls.

Family and gender norms play a large role in identity formation and negotiation as women bear the responsibility of embodying cultural values and passing these on to their children (Sohal, 2009). This is more apparent for South Asians living outside of their native country as they hold on to memories of gender norms, cultural values, and traditions from when they lived in their home country; while society has changed over time and evolved. Sohal (2009) has demonstrated the larger contradictions that exist in identity formation for South Asians who live abroad as they want to preserve their cultural heritage and have expectations for their children to adhere to the same ideals. Dasgupta (1998) describes how young women bear the brunt of the responsibility in terms of the preservation of culture, in addition to adhering to the norms and values of their culture (Ghosh, 2000; Handa, 2003). Dasgupta (1998) illustrates evident differences between boys and girls in South Asian households in terms of their expectations and the pressures that are imposed on them, in addition to greater levels of strictness enforced on girls (p. 957). This demonstrates an apparent gender bias in the socialization of South Asian boys and girls (Sharma, 2008; Ijaz & Abbas, 2010).

Parental notions of how their daughters should behave, in addition to the community, often make these differences much more evident for young women as they experience larger contrasts between their worlds. The South Asian community is one that has often created a certain code of conduct for young women; they are often closely monitored and their behaviour is watched by other members of the community, regardless of their relation to the individual (Dasgupta, 1998; Handa, 2003; Sharma, 2008). The behaviour of young South Asian women is often regulated to ensure that they do not assimilate too closely into Western society, in addition to ensuring that they are in compliance with the norms and behaviours that are approved by the South Asian community (Sohal, 2009). Women are especially affected by this, largely due to the differential treatment of boys and girls and men and women in many South Asian households (Sharma, 2008).

Young women's experiences and their parents' perceptions of their experiences are often quite different. Durham (2004) asserts:

In fact, the girls perceived their parents to rely on media characterizations of American high school life in the absence of first-hand experience of it. As they pointed out, their parents were unfamiliar with the realities of the U.S. secondary school experience and so obtained their information from largely mediated sources, which the girls dismissed as unrealistic and exaggerated. (p.150)

This excerpt exemplifies cases of young women who are forging their own ideas about their social experiences at school, while they must adhere to their parents' perceptions of their experiences. Negotiating autonomy for South Asian young women often becomes a choice in which they must choose sides. Due to the reason that most social events for young second-generation South Asian Canadian women involve such heavy cultural contrasts, they are left to either question their authority or compromise their autonomy (Durham, 2004; Inman et al, 2001; Kapadia, 2011).

Sohal (2009) illustrates the shift in roles before and after marriage for South Asian women. From her interviews, she suggests that there are differences between women's actual experiences and the roles that they are expected to play. She asserts:

These women strongly felt that they had received dual and contradictory messages while growing up. The first message was to be educated, independent, employed women who were financially self-reliant and encouraged to speak their mind and stand up for their beliefs. The second message was to be a "good" Indian girl who behaved in a manner that always represented the family in a sober, dignified way. For the women, a good Indian girl was someone who was passive, quiet, domestically inclined, and did not "rock the boat." (p.28)

Bicultural identity is shaped by both personal histories along with Canadian experiences for the second generation. Identity is a constantly shifting and changing entity as opposed to a fixed one (Dei, 2000; Sunder, 2008). Talbani and Hasanali (2000) claim that second-generation socialization for South Asian Canadians contrasts with immigrant socialization. These scholars have determined that second-generation South Asians develop their identity based highly on the Western culture that they are surrounded by, as opposed to their ethnic culture. It becomes an internal process, as opposed to one merely associated with appearance and behavior. Talbani and Hasanali assert: "Through acculturation, they learn behavioral repertoire that is appropriate to the new cultural context" (p.616). The struggles that South Asian Canadian women encounter can be attributed to certain patriarchal cultural practices and values. Gender roles amongst both cultures are not synonymous, causing a clash between the two (Aujla, 2000; Sohal, 2009).

Bannerjee-Stevens (2009) suggests that many second-generation South Asian women have grappled with identity development from adolescence due to a limited representation of bicultural South Asian females in popular culture. Media representation could demonstrate a visible understanding of South Asian bicultural identity (Durham, 2004; Menon, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Shaikh, 2012). Establishing identity development as a process that is complex, and one

that they must deal with on their own, causing many girls and women to experience issues involving anxiety and psychological stress (Alghorani, 2003; Bannerjee-Stevens, 2009; Beharry et al., 2008; Brah, 1996; Dasgupta, 1998; Samuel, 2009). Additionally, acculturative stress plays a role in many aspects of South Asian women's daily lives. More importantly, these women cannot be supported to the full extent without becoming aware of the breadth of influences that are present in their lives and their cultural contexts (Anneliese, 2006; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Durham (2004) suggests that parents rely on media representation as a source that informs their ideas about their daughters' experiences outside of the home. The intersection of generational and cultural issues can create different perceptions of the world for parents and their daughters. Many parents are worried and fearful of Western influences, and often feel the need to limit their daughters' exposure outside of their home and community (Durham, 2004; Sharma, 2008). As a result, South Asian women are not encouraged to intermingle within Western social networks (Ruzicka, 2011). Ultimately, many South Asian girls and women are in positions in which they must make difficult choices in their daily lives regarding interpersonal relationships, many overarching themes demonstrate how differences can allow greater issues to transpire, essentially, threatening the beliefs and values of the collective group (Ruzicka, 2011).

Desai and Subramanian (2000) suggest that some girls feel that they are in a difficult position due to the contrasting views between immigrant and Western parents on growing up and the types of expectations that are in place. They suggest that South Asian parents do not communicate effectively and do not view their children as any different between childhood and adolescence. South Asian parents often view their daughters as such until they are married (Sohal, 2009). There is an imbalance in gender roles within the family, which is often

compounded by the level of autonomy given to boys in comparison to girls (Dasgupta, 1998; Sharma, 2008; Sohal, 2009).

Gender has largely informed interpersonal relationships for South Asian girls and women. These relationships are often incompatible with South Asian cultural values. This is an area in which resistance between both cultures as well as identities can occur, it can also be problematic to autonomous development for women. However, autonomous development is generally in comparison with Western culture, in which case the gap between cultures widens (Handa, 1997). There is an awareness of their difference at school that is evident through race, especially in comparison to white girls (Rajiva, 2006). Rajiva (2006) points this out in her research with adolescent girls and their experiences in relation to dating and friendships. Their self-perceptions in contrast to girls of the dominant cultures, heightens differences between them. Girls from South Asian backgrounds discount their level of desirability due to racial differences; instead, they consider white girls to be more desirable to the opposite sex (Rajiva, 2006). Thakore (2014) echoes these ideas based on South Asians represented in the media, in addition to Bakshi and Baker (2011) who describe desirable characteristics considered by South Asian women, closely matching those that white women embody.

Aujla (2000) argues that many South Asian American women demonstrate an effort to assimilate to the American culture as opposed to their ethnic culture. She demonstrates that this is largely due to a predominantly white demographic surrounding them; however, despite these efforts, it is often not fully possible. South Asian women are often perceived by their physical markers, which amplifies difference, despite ascribing to Western language use, behaviour, norms, or dress. In many cases, second-generation individuals are not wholly accepted by either culture as they are inextricably linked to their ancestral heritage, while being socialized in the

dominant culture, raising questions about their own authenticity (Henry, 2003; Aujla, 2000). Visible minorities are often viewed as immigrants due to their race, despite being second or third generation. Rajiva (2007; 2013) argues that by learning the norms and culture of the dominant society, despite the belief that individuals are able to cohesively integrate, the visual non-white markers create a misperception of immigrant status, regardless of the same cultural markers as the dominant society.

Handa (2003) illustrates how South Asian beliefs largely contrast with Western ones, creating problematic outcomes for the second-generation. Race and gender can collectively generate greater inequities for South Asian women in terms of the ideals of appearance and beauty. There are key distinctions between South Asian women and Western women in terms of the standards of beauty. South Asian women are working towards fighting off particular stereotypes more than anything (George & Geneviève, 2005). Living up to Western societal standards of beauty can also be difficult for adolescent girls due to the pressures that are present at home, to dress conservatively, in order to avoid attracting attention from the opposite sex (Durham, 2004; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

Appearance and aesthetics play a prominent role for South Asian women in the West. Attitudes regarding appearance can become a catalyst to facilitate assimilation due to the impact they have. However, this can become a complex process for many South Asian women depending on their views. Many South Asian parents disapprove of some Western looks, often leaving girls to have a bicultural closet of appearances; one for their home life and another for school (Desai & Subramanian, 2000). The transition that exists during the adolescence period is complex for immigrant and second-generation young women who are often pressured by peers and parents about their appearance, which usually contrasts between the two cultures. George

and Geneviève (2005) assert: “Cultural constructions of white, heterosexual female attractiveness have real life consequences on women’s bodies and ideas of health” (p. 58). They illustrate how appearance and conformity can have a real impact both physically and mentally.

Many South Asian women in the West must deal with the images of how they are perceived within the world, whether this is positive or negative. In many cases, preconceived ideas about race, culture, and South Asian women in particular have been an important topic of study due to their contrasting positions in societies in the West. Many authors who have written about this topic have referred to the perception of South Asian women in the West, as the “western gaze” (Bannerji, 1995; Rajiva, 2009). Rajiva illustrates how the gaze becomes highlighted through naming differences between South Asians and Canadians. This mispronunciation of South Asian names amplifies differences (Beharry et al., 2008) South Asian names can create further opportunities for discrimination to take place (Navartnam, 2007). Adhikari (2012) demonstrates the transcendence of the gaze as an issue for all South Asians in the West, especially due to literature on the South Asian diaspora that reproduces “orientalist” ideas. The application of the historical context on the younger South Asian generation often causes these themes to re-emerge.

As Rajiva (2006) points out, South Asian women’s identity constructions are informed by their adolescent experiences, therefore it is significant to understand the social inequities that are reproduced in the school environment by both educational discourse and practice (Ghosh, 2000). She argues that culturally relevant pedagogy and an understanding of student experiences is important to support students academically and socially. The notion of privilege is illustrated by Sundar (2008), who claims that race, regional differences, religion, and gender are all factors that affect individuals upon being acknowledged as a form of difference. In relation to the dominant

culture, these differences can position 'minority' groups in an oppressive way, establishing power or privilege for the dominant group (Agnew, 1996; Ghosh, 2000; Sunder, 2008).

Inman (2006) states:

The "Caucasian/Aryan" features (Mazumdar, 1989), class consciousness, and successes portrayed in the South Asian educational, occupational, and income levels tend to not only create racial ambiguity but also minimize perceptions of discrimination perpetuated on this minority group (p. 309).

This excerpt illustrates how race and more specifically, variations within skin colour, can either cause discrimination or create privilege. Those who are lighter skinned, are considered to be closer to the Western ideals of beauty and are therefore greeted with greater acceptance (Baker & Bakshi, 2011). This trait equates to greater acculturative success, transcending further than appearance. Consequently, appearance of skin colour and physical features, are a determinant of success as they limit the level of discrimination that may otherwise be caused due to such factors (Baker & Bakshi, 2011).

Several authors have navigated their own identity and meaning-making processes through their own research by beginning to understand their multifaceted, and in some cases, bicultural experiences that form complex journeys of an evolving identity (Shariff, 2008; Sohal, 2009; Tee, 1996). Meaning-making and identity processes transcend varying social situations based on perspectives and roles that are created by individuals and the people around them (Sohal, 2009). These intersecting factors all play roles in identity and the process of its evolution and development. Identity development processes vary and can become quite complex due to competing cultural values. Sohal (2009) illustrates how she has come to her research through her own process of identity development by describing herself in relation to the expectations that have been set for her, by herself, her family, and her Canadian and Indian heritage. Understanding positioning, perspectives, along with the many facets involved in such processes

of identity are paramount to making sense of how we shape, forge, and ascribe to particular ideals, behaviours, and values. Additionally, the demographics that surround individuals play an immense role in representing the ethnic diversity of a school, and its effects on individuals who are visible minorities and their experiences (Shariff, 2008; Sohal, 2009).

## **2.4 Culture & Values**

Women's views of themselves have largely been determined by past experiences and the process of developing their identity (Bannerjee-Stevens, 2009; Ruzicka, 2011). Media and popular culture also play a significant role in shaping the perceptions of South Asian women in the West. Durham (2004) describes that in the United States many South Asian girls identify as American and Indian, but feel the need to produce their own identity that is a hybrid of the two. Young South Asian second-generation immigrant women are highly influenced by their mothers, because they take on a more engaged parent role. Therefore, many South Asian women feel obligated to fulfil a certain level of expectation. Girls also have a difficult time coping throughout socialization, due to the rules and expectations containing double-standards (Dasgupta, 1998). This is often justified by South Asian parents' fears regarding their daughters' social activities such as dating, going out, or potentially defying their values and cultural beliefs. There is a strong attitude amongst immigrant parents about the cultural responsibility women are expected to preserve (Dasgupta; Inman et al, 2001). Socialization for second-generation South Asian women becomes a very complex process due to the conflicting factors that influence their lives explained by the "cultural value conflict" in terms of dating, sex, marriage, and familial expectations (Inman et al., 2011). Inman (2006) asserts:

'Cultural value conflict' is defined as an experience of negative affect resulting from dealing simultaneously with values and expectations internalized from the culture of origin (e.g., South Asian) and those imposed from the new culture (e.g., White American; Inman, Constantine, & Ladany, 1999). (p. 306-307)

Many second-generation women find it difficult to negotiate their cultural expectations while trying to participate in Western society as they contrast in many ways. This includes dating, which most South Asian parents do not condone, mostly due to the social dangers associated with premarital sex (Kapadia, 2011). Americans and South Asians have contrasting views on marriage, as love and compatibility are considered prior to marriage in the West, whereas South Asian cultures heavily rely on parental involvement in mate selection (Kapadia, 2011). The social fears that South Asian parents face are the possibility of interracial marriage, in addition to facing the disapproval they must face from their community. There are claims according to immigrant parents, that a “love” marriage as opposed to an “arranged” marriage is likely the cause of the high numbers of divorce in the United States (Inman, 2006; Kapadia, 2011; Gupta, 1999). Inman et al. (2001), suggest that there is a greater internal conflict for second-generation South Asian women due to their ‘in-between’ positions of American and South Asian cultures in which many feel compelled to live dual lives; one, to fit in with American society and one to demonstrate an adherence of their parents’ expectations (Kapadia, 2011). This balance of cultural values is often difficult and the only way for individuals to develop their personal identity and experiences is to lead dual lives and a variety of roles in accordance with their social environment. South Asian women find that their second-generation identity often complicates their positions and heightens internal conflict due to a lack of complete belonging to either culture. Rajiva (2006) illustrates the difficulties of navigating between cultures due to the problematic nature of fully participating in either. Social events are viewed in contrasting ways between Canadian and South Asian cultures; they have problematic implications for South Asian parents. This balancing act is integral for most girls and women as they do not want to jeopardize

their family's position within their community or bring shame upon themselves (Bannerjee-Stevens, 2009; Sohal, 2009; Ruzicka, 2011).

## **2.5 Social Class**

Social class can act as a structure that can implicitly create boundaries, thus largely affecting individuals' experiences. It can also fuel the notion of power and privilege amongst individuals, thereby creating different experiences depending on such factors (hooks, 2000). The following will mostly depend on previously conducted case study research of young South Asian women who directly and indirectly speak of their experiences involving class. This can help identify how certain positions potentially prescribe certain roles and characteristics that may be linked to race, class, gender, or cultural expectations (Rajiva, 1996). These ideas will establish answers to questions about experiences and the nature of relationships, such as the development of power struggles and hierarchical networks. It is crucial to find out how these students identify themselves and how social class helps, or hinders in terms of navigating their identity as a South Asian Canadian female (Sunder, 2008).

Finn (2009) builds on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, which determines the positioning of individuals based on the social categories they belong to. Finn (2009) asserts: "Culture is heavily implicated in the structural reproduction of class through social networks, education, income and cultural knowledge" (p. 283). Possessing "cultural capital" can designate how one is positioned within society, school, and work. Having greater knowledge of the dominant culture through its ideas, values, and language can equate to greater mobility within networks (Bourdieu, 1973; Ghosh, 2000). Cultural capital affects individuals by influencing how they are perceived by others in society. The notion of cultural capital largely transcends into the educational environment as it informs the daily experiences of students. Ghosh (2000) asserts:

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" (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). (p. 280)

Parental pressures and expectation levels, in addition to career and education choices, are all aspects directly and indirectly affected by social class. However, cultural capital largely influences success through knowledge that has been informed by an individual's daily experiences and socialization (Ghosh, 2000).

Second-generation women struggle with the pressures they experience which typically stem from parental desires to provide a better lifestyle for their children (Eveland, 2012). This includes improved resources such as: better quality education, greater job opportunity, and a higher standard of living. Many struggles often compound for second-generation South Asian Canadian girls who are sensitive to the pressures and hardships faced by their parents (Rajiva, 2013). Rajiva (2013) argues that girls encounter feelings of guilt associated with their parents' employment difficulties, along with the added pressure of obtaining academic success. Sharma (2008) asserts: "Upholding expectations of parents and family is a major task for the second generation since they are continuously confronted with the values and norms of their Western surroundings and peers" (p. 61-62). Many first-generation parents have been restricted to a specific social class due to their level of education, or the limited recognition they receive for their credentials abroad, amplifying pressures for the second-generation. Rajiva (2013) and Ghosh (2000) both describe in their literature that second-generation South Asian Canadian women must cope with feelings associated with high expectations, along with the need to forge an identity that is independent of their parents.

Differing values create different experiences for parents and their children (Inman, 2001). At school, individuals experience barriers to integration, depending on their level of assimilation into the dominant culture (Beharry et al, 2008; Sharma, 2008). Additionally, the school environment does not support these individuals in relation to the challenges they face (Navarthnam, 2011). Despite the importance of educational support that cater programs to foster greater success; there needs to be an awareness of the complex experiences that engage these young women on a regular basis. This includes the multilayered nature of their identity-forging process and the competing sets of values they encounter (Ghosh, 2000). Ghosh (2000) asserts: “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.” (p. 281). Based on this assertion, upward mobility becomes less attainable for those who are not a part of the dominant group (Strong, 2007). Instead of creating opportunities for growth, a certain level of cultural capital is needed to socially prosper, in order to become a part of the dominant group (Ghosh, 2000).

## **2.6 Education**

Sharma (2008) proposes that South Asian women born in the United States or Canada are under immense pressure by their parents to perform well academically, for a variety of reasons; to uphold the model minority image, to utilize the opportunities that their parents had limited access to, the sacrifices made for their children, and lastly to open doors for their futures both academically and in terms of a career. Shain (2003) draws on girls’ experiences and classifies them according to their level of academic performance, illustrating that the level of assimilation into the school climate directly affects their relationships with teachers and academic success, which also contributes to higher education aspirations.

Navartnam (2011) describes the “model minority” as a perception that society has of successful immigrant groups. This term can be quite damaging for individuals as it fuels the notion of particular cultural groups as overachievers, more intelligent, or more hardworking; causing higher expectations for individuals belonging to these groups (Eveland, 2012). It does not take into account different interests, strengths, or weaknesses, but rather prefers to classify individuals according to ethnicity, as opposed to their individual capacity or level of aspiration. Navartnam (2011) and Sharma (2008) suggest that South Asian women face difficulties in regards to their education and career choices due to an overlapping set of expectations between the home and the academic front. As mentioned earlier, according to many South Asian cultures, women bear a large responsibility to carry on their traditions and cultural heritage, consequentially; they are usually pressured into the direction of a career that is conducive to having a family and raising children (Navartnam, 2011). Many South Asian parents emphasize the practicality of a career path for girls and women, promoting the ideas that are in sync with having a balanced family life; however this does not necessarily hold true for boys and men; making such processes complex and making it difficult to cope for many South Asian women. However, Navartnam (2011) suggests that education is a highly accepted career route amongst South Asian parents for their daughters, they believe that it will allow them time to be able to raise their children in addition to work.

The model minority has been established as a stereotypical perspective of most South Asians; however academic success, in addition to higher education is not achieved throughout all South Asian cultures and may differ based on region. This also differs based on religious and cultural ideas, which sometimes clash with higher education goals or aspirations (Ijaz & Abbas, 2010). Ijaz and Abbas (2010) focus on Muslim girls in England; illustrating mixed attitudes and

ideas that parents have about their daughters attending school. Many parents fear the imposition of Western cultural ideas on their daughters. In an effort to deal with this, some individuals pull their daughters out of school, either to get them married or to keep them at home. Ijaz and Abbas (2010) assert: “The notion here reflected much in relation to the attitudes of second generations. Educating daughters was a route to empowerment, self-awareness and the necessary social and intellectual tools to engage in wider society” (p. 321). This excerpt highlights the concept of using education as a vehicle for second generation Muslim girls and women, providing them with the tools and knowledge to make choices in their lives. This represents one perspective on education and careers for Muslim girls in England. Similarly, Sharma (2008) interviewed Indian women, who described their parents to be fearful of the Western culture and the damage it could potentially cause. She suggests that parents maintained high academic expectations as a mechanism to exert control over daughters, creating a reason for them to stay home. The intended purpose of this was to prevent their daughters’ social engagement outside of their home. Academic performance in this context becomes a way in which parents could protect their daughters; as a result, greater involvement in schoolwork means limited engagement in social activities (Sharma, 2008).

Sharma (2008) suggests that many young women often feel an immense amount of pressure placed on them to perform well academically. This is due to the reason that many South Asian parents do not provide their daughters with excuses not to perform well academically. Sharma illustrates this in the tone of some of her interviewees; who describe a strong level of dependence on their parents. Many of them are not permitted to work due to high expectations of achieving academic success (p. 216). Many parents are able to provide their daughters with monetary allowances in return for the expectation of good grades. However, these expectations

often leave little or no room for social lives, as their parents' hopes for them are to focus on academic-related activities, if they are to leave the house. In these cases, parents often tell their children that they will have time for socializing upon the completion of their studies. Many young women feel the need to strive for greater independence from their parents; as a result, working, provides them with a certain level of financial freedom and consequently, social freedom as well (216-217). Education, in this context, is used as a means to enforce certain rules and to keep daughters close to home. However, views on education vary and there are certain shifts taking place as some parents see education in a different light. There are some impediments to higher education goals and aspirations for South Asian young women living in a Western society, such as the threat of Western culture and values (Ijaz & Abbas, 2010). The push for marriage and a family life, often conflicts with higher educational goals for some parents (Navartnam, 2011).

Despite many obstacles, most South Asian parents in Western society promote education amongst their children, regardless of gender (Sharma, 2008; Eveland, 2012). There are a variety of views in terms of young women's education; the overall tone of most authors' research illustrates high expectations for South Asian young women to perform well academically (Ruzicka, 2009; Sharma, 2008; Tee, 1996; Traxler, 2009). Traxler asserts: "Students' educational achievement functioned as fodder for competition and increased the pressure participants felt about making academic decisions" (p. 145). This notion parallels the model minority, and parents' expectations motivate students to perpetuate it based on varying reasons; competition with peers and successful family members, additionally, in order to take advantage of the opportunities that parents have often sacrificed for their children (Eveland, 2012; Ghosh, 2000; Levitt, 2009; Traxler, 2009).

## 2.7 Women in Higher Education

According to Eveland (2012), second-generation South Asian women in higher education were faced with similar issues as their younger counterparts. Many of them were also conflicted when it came to their cultural values, as they felt pressured to succeed academically in order to live up to their parents' expectations. In her findings, Eveland discusses, while growing up these women were expected to perform well academically, with no alternative; thus, being self-motivated to achieve their goals. A large part of these expectations was based on competition with peers and people within the parent's network of family and friends (Traxler, 2009).

Finn (2009) discusses how many American South Asian college women strive to become professionals in order for their future families to continue on a path of upward mobility. She highlights the concept of "stability" as an important theme that has come up frequently with her participants, in relation to their career choice and aspirations. Finn (2009) suggests that issues of race and gender are in some cases deflected in regards to American South Asian women, who come from a middle and upper class trajectory. In this case, South Asian upper class women could share a similar position of class as white women but remained racially different; as a result, being upper or middle class does not supersede racial discrimination (Finn, 2009).

According to Birk (2009) adult women have actually felt empowered by their experiences in relation to the dominant culture. Experiences in the past have shaped their ideas about resisting racism and gender issues as adults. Birk (2009) suggests that South Asian women are often represented through a limited binary of East or West identity and experiences. Birk (2009) asserts: "In reality these binaries force an understanding of a fixed identity and a concept of either/or when in reality identities are fluid and depend on the position and location of the subject at that time" (p.35).

Deepak (2004) suggests that by joining student run organizations in university, second-generation South Asian women are actually seeking out their culture by becoming part of these cultural organizations and meeting peers with whom they may ethnically, racially, or culturally identify. This demonstrates an effort on the part of these women, to want to maintain a sense of their ethnic and cultural identity. Kapadia (2009) proposes that second-generation American South Asians create their own identity on college campuses in an effort to differentiate themselves from immigrant students but still allowing themselves to identify ethnically with their peers. Deepak (2004) demonstrates that there are many contrasting ideas, behaviours, and values that exist amongst American culture and South Asian cultures. Additionally, living amongst the dominant culture does not mean that individuals try to completely assimilate or reject the culture; they instead choose facets of both cultures that are appropriate to their lives. Naidoo (2003) similarly suggests ideas about maintaining a balance between both sets of values, by incorporating individualistic values within career aspirations and collectivistic values within their family context. Both sets of values are beneficial when applied to different areas of their lives. Naidoo (2003) asserts:

South Asian women consistently exhibit a “selectivity” in their acculturation attitudes. They are adamant about the values from their traditional culture that they wish to retain as part of their cultural self-identity and the values from the host culture that they wish to incorporate into their evolving identities. (p.56)

This demonstrates that South Asian women have used their prior experiences to help navigate their adult career decisions, interpersonal relationships, and their identity. Deepak (2004) demonstrates in her research, that second-generation South Asian women regularly negotiate between the values of both cultures in relation to dating and marriage. Dating is generally not accepted amongst the South Asian community, and is avoided by some women in her research; however, many women also aim toward becoming more traditional by getting arranged

marriages in order to preserve their culture. Deepak (2004) also presents the difficulties that are encountered by her subjects when negotiating between the values of their culture, in addition to being socially accepted by practicing the norms of the dominant culture. This would include such practices as dating, drinking, and autonomous decision-making. However, she also suggests from her research, that many parents of second-generation South Asian women are supportive of their daughters leading lifestyles that are compatible with American norms and values for the sake of being able to maintain an open relationship with them. This also means discussing and permitting them to date and become sexually active without their daughters having to hide it from their parents (Deepak, 2004). However, this does not negate the fact that it remains extremely challenging for South Asian parents to accept American norms or values, but they do it in order to maintain relationships with their daughters that may otherwise be compromised (Deepak, 2004).

George and Ramkissoon (1998) describe how gender roles are unbalanced in women's adult lives in both their domestic duties and careers. These scholars assert: "The women are often expected to hand over their paychecks as soon as they receive them, and the management of finances and the disposal of money, despite its source, is considered the husbands' prerogative." (p. 115). Careers are an important aspect of South Asian women's lives; however, according to this, women do not possess control of their earnings. Furthermore, Naidoo (2003) suggests that women have higher aspirations than before, and their independent success is becoming equally as important as their partner's success. However, these gender roles shift according to generation and length of stay in the host country, in addition to how one has been raised and those influences on the texture of their own family life. Rajiva (1996) has emphasized the importance

of understanding the experiences of these women based on their generational differences along with other social categories that shape experience. Rajiva (1996) asserts:

Most of the respondents lived the triple burden of being a woman in a sexist society, an ethnic in a racist society, and a Canadianized ethnic woman in one's own community and family. All these factors preclude a textbook set of experiences from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, giving rise inevitably it would seem to identities that are neither uncomplicated nor comfortable at times. (p. 169)

Gaining insight about the evolution of identity development for second-generation South Asian women will enable an understanding of how experiences, past and present, inform the decisions that adult women make in terms of their academic and career aspirations, in addition to their domestic lives. The social and cultural stakes can be different for women in higher education settings than secondary education settings. The evolution of identity and transition is at a different stage in higher education than during the adolescence period. Additionally, there are different support systems in place to become involved with groups that individuals identify with ethnically, such as student run organizations in higher education (Deepak, 2004).

Cultural values among South Asians in terms of career and education aspirations are often beneficial for many individuals as they emphasize success and provide many resources, creating incentives to welcome parental involvement. However, this is not the same outside of academic and career aspirations, as many South Asian women do not necessarily welcome parental involvement with dating and relationships (Ghosh, 2000). South Asian cultures consider dating in the Western sense, to be taboo and many women cannot openly date (Sharma, 2008). The idea of premarital sex and dating is problematic for South Asian parents as they fear the consequences of their daughters becoming sexually active or experienced, decreasing their prospects of marriage in many South Asian communities, getting a sexually transmitted

infection, or engaging in relationships with men outside of their culture (Deepak, 2004; Ruzicka, 2011; Sohal, 2009).

Ruzicka (2011) suggests that navigating cultural identity in higher education has presented challenges for many second-generation South Asians. Regardless of what set of culture and values someone identifies with, physical appearance reifies their ethnic identity. Henry (2003) echoed this idea, suggesting that appearance has the ability for individuals to question citizenship, belonging, and cultural identity.

Hussain and Bagguley (2007) interviewed South Asian women in the U.K. attending a higher education institution. In some cases, these women engaged in higher education programs in order to increase their stock in relation to being a good marriage candidate. Some go to university in order to put off marriage while others do it for the upward mobility it may provide in terms of attaining a valuable career. These scholars suggest that class and religion become amplified in higher education attainment, as women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds must consider their funding options. This was mostly the case for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women whereas Indian women often belonged to the middle class, affording them the ability to attend without the concern of funding. In regards to religion, Muslim women were faced with challenges such as not being permitted to attend university other than local ones, whereas this was not an issue for non-Muslim South Asian women. Parental involvement in terms of academic decisions was strongly present, in addition to financial support despite its variations depending on socioeconomic constraints (Hussain & Bagguley, 2007).

Ruzicka (2011), in her research focusing on second-generation South Asian female college students, describes how South Asian women are the primary transmitters of culture and values. By asking her participants to navigate the source of their knowledge of ethnic culture and

values, most claimed their mothers as the source. Additionally, some women support their South Asian cultural identity by making friends and joining organization in which they ethnically identify. However, there are many women who integrate into the American culture more so, as they relate more to those norms. This is the case for many women Ruzicka (2011) interviewed, claiming that their parents did not understand their interpersonal relationships in terms of socializing with friends as well as dating.

This literature has informed my study, as the participants were South Asian second-generation women in higher education. Their experiences, as they have been informed by the evolution of their identity process, were vital to understanding how they navigated situations in school and at home. Most studies and research within the field of young South Asian women that has been conducted has provided detailed accounts of first and second-generation experiences. They have focused on varying ideas about race, gender, and class, in addition to cultural and generational differences. More specifically, the research on gender and race has included young women's roles at home and school. Social class; in relation to South Asian girls and their families and the way in which they position themselves in society has been an area that several authors have also focused on within this context. Cultural and generational differences often amplify changes and differences for South Asian girls, especially second or third generation individuals; often creating more complicated terms on which identity negotiation and socialization occurs (Rajiva, 2007; Sodhi-Kalsi, 2003). Additionally, some of the research had further been outlined according to regional differences in terms of where their parents are from, what language they speak at home, along with the religion with which they identify (Levitt, 2009; Maira, 1996; Sodhi-Kalsi, 2003). The objective of my study was to begin to understand the nature of the experiences that these women have, amongst the many influencing and contrasting

forces in their lives, such as the differences in cultures, values, and people that influence them. My research will add to the current literature by focusing on women who are attending institutions of higher education, an area in which relatively little research has been conducted in relation to their everyday experiences, while living in a Western society, one in which they may or may not fully identify. This study did not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of South Asian women's experiences, rather, planned to focus on six second-generation women who identified as South Asian and/or Canadian and faced differences through the intersections of race, gender, and class. With this, I hoped to shed some light on the experiences of the women in this study.

## **2.8 Summary**

This Chapter focused on the review of relevant literature on the experiences of second-generation South Asian women and girls. The following themes have emerged from the existing literature: second-generation identity, hybridity, gender, culture and values, social class, education, and women in higher education. The literature has explored second-generation South Asian women and girls living in Western countries, their roles and experiences at home, within their family, in addition to their experiences at school. Several studies have focused on the intersections of race, gender, and class and how these social dimensions inform experience, along with the negotiations that are made between cultures and values. The reviewed literature in this Chapter helped inform the topics that guided the interview questions.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This Chapter outlines the methodological procedures used to conduct this study. It defines the case study methodology, in addition to the rationale for applying the case study method in this particular context. This Chapter also discusses the participants that have been included in this study, data collection methods, research design, ethical considerations, as well as data analysis.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The methodology employed was qualitative case study research and data was generated by conducting interviews. According to Yin (2014) “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p.16-17). The inquiry aspect relied on a more holistic approach with multiple sources of evidence, in addition to the guidance of theoretical resources. This case study methodology was designed to explore the experiences of the participants and their different perspectives. The design is single interviews within a multiple-case study.

Case study research aids in understanding issues and existing information within a particular field. Developing cases can enhance understandings of particular issues from individual experiences as it depicts real-life scenarios (Yin, 2014). It allowed for a richer understanding of the experiences of the participants. Additionally, the theoretical information served as the foundation along with the data collected. Yin (2014) describes the case study approach as an empirical inquiry, which in this context allowed for the investigation of each experience without forming generalizations. Case study research was most appropriate for this qualitative investigation, as it allowed the research to present diverse cases, based on the

individual participant and data (Creswell, 2012). The research questions led to case study research in an effort to take a more holistic approach allowing for in-depth understandings of the subjects' experiences (Yin, 2014). Dyson and Genishi (2005) assert: "In current case study research, the boundaries around social groups are more often seen as constructed between groups, shaped by history, ideological clashes, and power struggles." (p. 119). An aim of this study was also to understand the experiences of the individuals who participated as opposed to the collective group.

The interviews were audio recorded to maintain accurate understandings of the data collected. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled guided questions but did not bound participants to these questions; thus creating a sense of flexibility to discuss more or less depending on individual levels of comfort during the interview. I made my best efforts to stay true to the participants' words and responses during the interviews (Cohen & Manion, et al. 2007). Background information was addressed, in order to gain a sense of the context of the participants and their social climate. This aided in gaining an understanding of the larger themes that were going to arise from the data. There are ethical considerations to make according to Yin (2014) due to the participation of human subjects within the interview processes. This will be discussed in the next section. Additionally, the participants provided consent to participate in the study. All participants were provided with a consent form and letter of information prior to making the decision to participate. This letter was provided in order to inform participants of the extent of their engagement in the study. The intended application of this study was to investigate the social context for young South Asian Canadian women, as well as adding to existing research. The investigation of issues surrounding race, class, and gender are paramount to

understanding and conveying the perspectives of second-generation Canadian women of South Asian descent in university.

### **3.2 Participant Selection**

The participants of this study consisted of five second-generation South Asian Canadian women and one woman who identified partially as second and third-generation Canadian. The choice of the participants was purposive to this study (Carter & Little, 2007). Each participant was a student at a university in Canada. The six participants were asked semi-structured interview questions in order to discuss their experiences. The questions were informed by several topics that influence these women's lives such as identity, aspirations, and relationships. The nature of the interviews allowed for more topics to be discussed in a conversational style.

There is a gap in the literature related to second-generation South Asian women. Previous literature has primarily concentrated on the immigrant experience and South Asians as a whole as opposed to women. The intended purpose of this research was to enrich the literature and information on the experiences of second-generation South Asian Canadian female students and their reflections on the implications of race, class, and gender in their lives. The participants in this study considered second-generation Canadian South Asians are Canadian-born individuals whose parents are from one of the following places: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and Maldives (Bannerji-Stevens, 2009; Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Ghosh, 2013).

### **3.3 Data Collection**

The researcher provided individuals through one of her networks of friends and family, with the letter of information which has the researcher's contact information. Upon knowing someone who would be interested in participating, they forwarded the email to that particular person. This created a snowball effect, where participants recommended their friends, and peers

who were also interested in participating in the study. At that point, potential participants contacted the researcher via email or phone as listed on the letter of information to confirm their participation. The email that was circulated through the researcher's network of friends and family, provided a brief description of what would be asked of each participant and the researcher's contact details if they were interested in participating in an interview. The participant and the researcher scheduled a time and location that was mutually convenient. All interviews and identities of the participants remained confidential. The interviews were approximately 30 to 40 minutes length, though over an hour was spent with the participants in order to establish rapport and build a sense of trust. One interview was conducted per participant. Before the interviews were conducted, each interviewee was given the letter of information (Appendix A) to keep and the researcher retained a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) with signatures for record-keeping purposes. All copies of the signed consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet. Before the interview commenced, the researcher reminded each interviewee that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point before, during the interview, or afterwards. Data from interviews were collected using an audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher. All transcriptions were saved to the researcher's personal USB.

### 3.4 Participants

Table 1

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Program of Study
Jasmine	18	Indian	Nursing
Priyanka	25	Indian	Medicine, nursing
Sam	26	Indian	Public Health
Natasha	20	Indian	Business
Tina	19	Pakistani	Psychology

Amber	26	Pakistani	Law School
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Jasmine is a second-generation 18-year-old woman who is studying nursing. She identifies as Indian, and indicated her religious background as half Christian and half Hindu.

Priyanka is 26 years old and identifies as a second-generation Canadian of Indian descent. She is currently enrolled in online university courses in order to gain admission into a nursing program in Canada after withdrawing from Medical school overseas.

Sam is 26 years old and identifies as a second-generation Canadian woman of Punjabi descent. Her parents are from India and she also described herself as a practicing Sikh. She is currently enrolled in a Public Health program in university.

Natasha is 20 years old, she identifies as both second and third-generation Canadian of Indian descent as her mother was born in Canada and her father was born in Hong Kong. Natasha is a business student in university.

Tina is 19 years old and identifies as a Muslim second-generation Canadian woman of Pakistani descent. Tina is a Psychology student in university.

Amber is 26 years old and identifies as a second-generation Pakistani woman. She is currently attending Law School in university.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations made for this study are confidentiality, anonymity, and potential benefits and risks which are all explained in the letter of information that was provided to all participants. Considerations made before the interviews took place were to ensure a sense of rapport was established between the participants and the researcher. The researcher also made every effort to authentically represent the participants in the study to the fullest extent.

Awareness and informed consent were integral to ensure that participants were informed of the

extent of their participation. The interviews were semi-structured in order to create a friendly and conversational atmosphere, while maintaining a specific line of questioning (Yin, 2014).

Understanding the context of participant experiences was important in order to avoid assumptions about participants. The interviews were exploratory in nature as they were about participant experiences. The investigation of experiences employed a form of inquiry within a set of semi-structured interviews classified as “shorter case study interviews” (Yin, 2014 p. 111).

Certain epistemological considerations to make for this study were data collection methods and analysis as they influence the validity of the study and its methods. A constructivist epistemology is employed, as the participants are integral to building the knowledge in this study with the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The method used to generate data was by conducting semi-structured interviews. The reliability of this data stems from the participant responses that were generated during the interviews. Their thoughts, ideas, and responses directly result in the outcomes and conclusions that were being made in the study; as a result they may be viewed as co-creators (Carter & Little, 2007). As the researcher, it was important to consider my insider status due to my background, as I identify as a second-generation Canadian woman of Indian descent. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) assert: “This insider role status frequently allows researchers more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants. Therefore, participants are typically more open with researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered.” (p. 58). Despite this, it was important to consider any potential bias that could influence the research, such as personal experiences and potential similarities between myself and the participants. My role, as the researcher consisted of transmitting information. Being aware of my presence in the interview process was essential to ensure as much accuracy as possible in accordance with the subjects’ data (Henry, 2003). Cohen and Manion (2007) assert:

What is being required in the notion of reflexivity is a self-conscious awareness of the effects that the participants-as-practitioners-and- researchers are having on the research process, how their values, attitudes, perceptions, opinions, actions, feelings etc. are feeding into the situation being studied (p. 310).

The subjectivity of the researcher was considered throughout the research project, as it was inherently present throughout each process. The collection of data as well as the synthesis and reporting inevitably informed data that were generated but also reflected the researcher's perception and interpretation of data.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed and the interviews coded in order to identify emerging themes. The data analysis were organized based on the focus of the individuals' particular experiences, allowing for a more holistic approach of their particular perspectives (Cohen & Manion, et al. 2007). Patton (1990) asserts that by using a sample in which individuals have had diverse experiences, it remains possible for there to be similar outcomes and emerging themes. The data were organized and presented in relation to the emergence of themes also referred to as inductive analysis (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The theoretical framework applied to the analysis was anti-racist feminist. It challenges a limited viewpoint of individuals, typically being represented from a privileged position (hooks, 1984). Instead, it seeks to include a broad analysis of individuals who are not typically represented, such as those who are marginal or are oppressed through one or multiple forms (hooks, 1984). Hall (1992) does not view identity as fixed and claims that history has played a part in influencing how identity develops. This informs the analysis as it will draw on ideas that investigate the identity development process and the influencing factors that are and have been present.

### **3.7 Summary**

This Chapter outlined the methodology of this study. The rationale for choosing to use qualitative case study research was due to the nature of this study which focused on understanding experiences. The basis for using case study research design was explained, as it aided to understand the complex experiences of the participants', who identify as second-generation Canadian South Asian women. In addition to the data collection and analysis methods, the ethical considerations were also presented at the end of the Chapter in order to make informed ethical decisions during the recruitment, data collection, and analysis processes. The theoretical framework was also discussed in relation to its application during the analysis process.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Data Analysis**

This Chapter presents the findings of six qualitative semi-structured interviews that were conducted with one third-generation and five second-generation South Asian Canadian women. This study has been conducted to gain an understanding of the experiences of second-generation South Asian women that are attending an institution of higher education in Canada. The data have been organized according to the themes that have emerged in order to maintain the integrity of each participant's responses from the interview (Cohen et al., 2011). Once I transcribed each interview, I read the transcriptions many times to identify emerging themes. The data were coded line-by-line initially, and then had been assigned nodes to track specific common ideas in order to allow for the emergence of themes. Marshall and Rossman (2010) suggest taking two sets of notes to understand participant reactions and to look for possible categories. This strategy was employed when a set of codes and nodes were assigned to the data. Four major themes have emerged from my analysis of the data. The themes are as follows: (1) navigating difference, (2) resistance and acceptance, (3) gender, and (4) academic expectations. These themes have emerged from the process of analysis and applying codes to the data, in order to foster an understanding of South Asian Canadian women and the complexity of their experiences.

### **4.1 Navigating Difference**

The process of navigating social and cultural differences for second-generation participants of this study was often described as challenging. Some of the participants expressed how their family's cultural values in contrast to their peers' values became evident in their day-to-day lives. Identity and cultural values informed many areas of the participants' lives which were demonstrated through a variety of experiences. Sam explained that she often felt the need to "try harder" than her peers in all aspects of her life because of her family's traditional nature and

cultural expectations. She discussed a lack of understanding between her and her family due to their cultural values and lifestyle, causing her to feel caught between traditional and modern values. Sam expressed how some cultural differences became pronounced in specific social surroundings more than others. An experience in which this became apparent for her was whenever someone mispronounced her name. This may have been her reasoning for choosing a pseudonym that is easily pronounceable.

I've been very shy, and not very open. And one of the main reasons was my name and having to introduce myself. My name and having to pronounce that name, you know, you shy away from it because... you don't want the person to struggle to say your name... I see myself as Canadian, so really someone might see me and see my race, but I don't feel that until someone says something, and then I notice.  
(Sam)

The challenges that Sam faces in terms of the mispronunciation of her name are similar to those expressed in the previous literature. Differences from the hegemonic culture are emphasized through the mispronunciation of South Asian names (Beharry et al., 2008; Navartnam, 2007; Rajiva, 2009).

Situations that amplify difference or “boundary events” according Rajiva, create the need for a dual identity for some participants. Sam and Amber both felt they had to take on two sets of identities; one at home and one outside. They believed that this was due to language differences as they were expected to speak in their parents’ native language at home, and in English outside of the home, making it difficult to fully integrate into either culture (Rajiva, 2007). Amber discussed how she experienced this at home, a place, where she is reminded by her parents to speak their language in order to preserve it.

Before, my parents were much more conservative and so it affected me, it affected me in the way that I dressed and so one example is that we spent so much time at school we would converse in English, when I would come home I'd speak to my sisters in English, and my parents would be, like, no, 'speak in Urdu, speak your language so that you don't forget it.' So there were those sorts of things that

my parents were really concerned about. (Amber)

Sam discussed the expectations imposed on her to speak a different language at home and outside of the home as she felt it caused her to be at a disadvantage. She felt that it amplified her cultural differences, but that it also influenced her ability to be on an equal playing field with her peers in broader social contexts.

In a sense, as you get older you realize that your family's a little bit different, you don't do the things that other people do when you're younger. And you don't really notice until you get a little bit older, in terms of, how would you say? Not mannerisms, but even vocab. At home you're speaking a different language and you go to school, so I feel like I was always behind in vocabulary and speaking, and you don't have the opportunity to do that at home, so that was kind of a disadvantage. (Sam)

Tina described acceptance at school to be difficult in two ways: religion and economic status, which proved to be areas that were not as easy to discuss but were essential to her identity.

Sometimes I feel like, I'm Muslim, so there are times that I'm looked at because of the things that are going on around the world. Obviously it's not as intense as it has been in other countries...or as it's been in the past but once people find out I'm Muslim, it's kind of like they take a step back without even getting to know me and stuff, and it's kind of hard to talk to those people. (Tina)

Tina similarly described economic background as an issue that had negatively influenced her in social settings.

I feel that my closer friends of course, just like, they get to know me, they kind of see and then make judgments on it, and whereas with some people, it's like well if you're not really rich then like obviously, I can't talk to you kind of thing. It still exists. (Tina)

Navigating difference for Tina has largely been through experiences that have highlighted her religious identity and socioeconomic status. She has discussed how these factors have impeded how she felt able to blend among her peers. It has been demonstrated in previous literature that certain factors that impede social integration are often abandoned by individuals who are trying

to engage in the mainstream culture, instead they try to maintain a balancing act where they perform different identities (Bannerjee-Stevens, 2009; Sohal, 2009; Ruzicka, 2011).

The participants described their experiences at home as largely connected to their cultural identity. Four of six participants discussed how their responsibilities at home were greater than their male counterparts because of cultural expectations and gender roles. Four of the participants found that specific cultural demands caused them to take on different roles according to their environment. Sam identified as Canadian, but was often reminded of her cultural difference whenever someone asked her where she was from or whenever someone mispronounced her name. Cultural identity has influenced all areas of Sam's life, as she has expressed her challenges in trying to appease her parents, while having to play a very different role outside of the house. The 'cultural value conflict,' explains how the presence of competing cultural values can create tension for individuals who are trying to negotiate their identity (Inman, 2006; Rajiva, 2006). In this particular case, Sam must continually negotiate her cultural identity while dealing with many social boundaries in which her name is not easily pronounceable to some Canadians and whenever her citizenship is questioned by others.

The pressure to "become something" or to get established was emphasized amongst many of the participants. Priyanka claimed that her cultural identity was largely shaped by her profession and chosen career path. She described always feeling quite a bit of pressure to "become something" through establishing herself with both academic and professional excellence. She also identified best with people who had similarities in terms of their culture and values. Her friends were from similar backgrounds culturally, academically, and socioeconomically, as she described feeling a sense of understanding with them. Tina's experiences at home and at school were highly informed by her cultural identity. She described

the ways in which she was often positioned in relation to her religion and/or her race. The differences that Tina felt in terms of gender role expectations within her family, were also closely tied to her cultural identity. Tina described stereotypical gender roles that were present at home that would often emerge through different household chores expected from herself and her brother. She also described feeling a double-standard in regards to the level of autonomy she felt her parents gave her in comparison to the greater level of autonomy given to her brother, due to his male status. All of these areas of Tina's life were directly informed by her cultural identity and became evident through her experiences at home where gender roles emerged. Subsequent to moving out of her home, she became friends with a more diverse group. She claimed that she no longer related as much with others in her ethnic culture in her current settings, since she had been attending university and living on campus. Tina described the transition from leaving home and why she was no longer as involved in the Muslim community.

Like, we do have a pretty big Muslim community here, like we do have our own Mosque and stuff, but I feel like I've stayed away from that, in a sense because I feel like it's just, it's different here [university] than it was back at home. And so I do feel like I associate with people of various cultures and religions... It's not like [easy to relate] at this age, for me, it's just not easy for me to relate to those kinds of people. (Tina)

Tina placed greater emphasis on religion than on race or culture because she expressed how religion influenced her feelings of being different than her peers more than any other factor. She described how the portrayal of Islam in the media made her religious affiliation stand out, feeling that she needed to defend her religious identity on a frequent basis. Tina does not entirely accept or reject her religious identity, however she makes an effort to separate her religious affiliation when forging relationships with people. She felt that she was often judged based on her religion, and as a result, she kept this information relatively private. Brah and Coombes (2000) suggest an essentialist notion of identity can sometimes transpire, especially in relation to

Tina's description of the media's portrayal of Muslims. She appears to navigate her biculturalism by taking on two different identities; one at home and one at school. Separating these arenas is how she chooses to appease her family while living autonomously outside of the home.

Many of the participants described their friends as being quite similar to them in terms of their race, culture, and the types of aspirations they had. Two of the participants also pointed out that there was a level of understanding that South Asian women shared about some of the difficulties they faced, and as a result, it often made it easier to have friends from a similar cultural background.

We all come from similar family backgrounds. Our parents basically came from the same background, same social expectations, we're all generally similar in terms of our economical status, same life goals. All my friends completed their bachelors, they're all looking into higher education. Pretty much everyone is just trying to become something for themselves and we all have struggles, and I think that because of all our struggles that's how I can connect to them even more because we all go through the same thing. Even just family problems, we're all open about our family problems and we all understand that there's certain things that come with being an Indian girl, and coming from an Indian family. We all get it; we all get what it means to have certain issues in our lives. (Priyanka).

Natasha described that she had a better understanding of her roommate due to some of the cultural similarities they shared.

Umm, most of my friends are South Asian females and second-generation so I think they do share a lot of the same values as myself, and that's why we are friends, because I think that we can relate to each other in that sense, being females and being second-generation, umm so we can definitely relate in that sense. (Sam).

Sam made friends based on their shared cultural backgrounds like Natasha and Priyanka. The concept of being able to relate to others is something that was significant for most participants as they described having an increased level of understanding.

The women in this study talked about navigating differences by constructing their identity based on the norms and expectations of varying social contexts. Some of them have

described the following experiences in which they have navigated aspects of their identity: speaking in their language at home, being able to communicate effectively in professional and academic settings, fulfilling domestic roles at home, being academically successful, while being able to preserve their cultural values, appeasing their parents, and living up to numerous sets of expectations from both the mainstream culture as well as their parents' culture. Despite the number of competing values and social norms that are present, the women in this study did not talk about actively resisting the pressures and expectations that stem from their family or culture. Many of them continue to uphold an image according to their surroundings that appease their parents and cultural expectations in addition to the mainstream culture.

Many second-generation women face similar treatment as immigrant women, due to their race and ethnicity. Despite being born and living in Canada for most or their entire life, some women continue to experience moments in which they are treated differently due to their race or culture. Some women chose a specific field of study in order to limit the level of discrimination that could potentially be faced. Sam described that science was a field in which she felt, little discrimination was possible, due to the high number of immigrant students who were in it, as well as the limited levels of communication in comparison to going into teaching or certain programs that involve more writing. She felt the sciences minimized the opportunity for any racial or cultural differences to arise. "Yeah, it's science, I think everybody comes at it in the same way." She described that her family and her background did not negatively impact her chances of doing well in the sciences, in comparison to going into English for example, where students might have had varying abilities depending on their environment at home and the level of experience they had speaking in English at home in comparison to her family, who encouraged her to speak in Punjabi at home, as she described how this made her feel as though

she was at a disadvantage. Natasha described that being in the field of business, she did not feel that issues of racism and cultural discrimination arose. She believed that the field of “finance” did not leave much room for such differences to emerge, as there was not much discussion or writing involved. Despite choosing fields in which these women felt discrimination would be limited, Natasha described how some discrimination existed on an administrative level with faculty and staff at the university. This specific situation took place in an academic advising center.

So all of the people who work in there are Caucasian and every single time I’ve gone in, they’ve been rude... like one woman who was a secretary was on her Ipad with headphones in and I could see she was watching a show or YouTube or something. And she was so rude and I went to go speak to the other woman and same problem, and I saw a white person come in and completely different...they were just more friendly [with the white person], more approachable, they were more informative, whereas with me they did not. (Natasha)

Natasha was unsure whether her experience was influenced by race, but claimed that it could have been the case. She discussed instances in which certain professors have not put forth much effort to pronounce her name correctly, even when corrected. Natasha also described feeling as though she was treated differently due to her race by a certain professor who was “white, and between fifty and sixty years old”. However she explained that she had multiple experiences both positive and negative based on cultural differences.

But then I’ve had other professors who, I had a professor just now and she’s a great prof, umm... She is Indian, so I guess I kind of relate to her on that level. I really liked the fact that she said my name right, on the first day. Where that instantly was nice because I’ve had other teachers who’ve just been like oh, how do you say your name? ...so when the teacher kind of shows that extra little bit of like saying my name or giving me that extra little bit of attention it makes me want to do better in the class. (Natasha)

Amber's experiences in law created certain challenges for her regarding discrimination. She felt that it was not conducive for a woman, especially as a visible minority, to complete her program with the same opportunities as her Caucasian male counterparts.

I've noticed that in law school it's a man's world, it's not a woman's world, umm jobs that I guess are well respected are Bay street firm jobs, which are usually given to men, who are I guess willing to work 13 hours or 14 hours... This is all through the schools, so these firms come to your school and they interview there, but you have to submit your application and your resume and everything prior. And all I saw so far is that I guess, 15 males that I know so far have actually received jobs in Toronto for the summer, whereas I only know two women, umm and they're both Caucasian, so both white women who landed I guess the summer positions but there's not many others. For example, I didn't get any interviews and all other South Asian women who applied did not get any interviews either. (Amber)

Amber felt that intersections of race and gender made her experiences in law school different than some of her peers, directly impacting her experiences at school, such differences were visible not only in the classroom but also in professional experiences beyond the classroom.

#### **4.2 Resistance and Acceptance**

The women in this study are second-generation, and as a result, find themselves navigating among different cultural norms to adhere to the norms appropriate to their social context (Giguère, Lalonde, & Lou, 2010). Their identities appear to be in-transit as they are constantly shifting according to their social contexts. Hybridity in contrast to essentialism, promotes the existence of multiple positions that are not fixed by categories in which hierarchies emerge through social relations and lived experiences (Brah, 1996). These women form their identities based on the intersections of race, gender, and class, and as these axes of differentiation play out in their day-to-day lives. Some of the

participants describe having to compartmentalize aspects of their identity, in order to bring certain characteristics and traits to the fore in a particular social context.

I have a lot of expectation, like right now I'm studying, but I still have to go home and like make dinner, and being female in general, I'm expected to be home soon, and then I have a whole list of things that I need to do. (Sam)

However, identity formation is a process, some aspects of their identity may be highlighted in a particular social context through specific expectations at home or elsewhere.

Tina expressed that she would not compromise what she wanted for the sake of her parents or her cultural values. In regards to dating, Tina described that she would resist the expectations that her parents have of her, regardless of the repercussions. She said, "I don't really care, I'm in the mindset where you know if it is the right person, then I don't really think too much about [what my parents would think or say]." Hybrid individuals navigate their identities through positions that do not prescribe to any one culture or race, but are able to negotiate their identity as an amalgam of different social and cultural aspects. Bhabha (1994) has identified the 'third space' as a space in which cultures and social practices do not compete, rather a space in which individuals are able to negotiate their cultural differences. This was evident through Tina's experiences, away from home, she has created a space where she shares cultural similarities with her South Asian peers and friends but does not have the same cultural expectations as she did at home. Instead of adapting to both cultural systems, she created a third space in which her identity was free of the burden of heavy expectations that she previously experienced.

When I'm at university versus when I'm at home, I do feel like I live two different lives like with my friends... when I'm at university I don't have very many Muslim friends... I associate with people of various cultures and religions... It's just not easy for me to relate to those kinds of people [The Muslim community]... For example, like with my friend that you met earlier... we do understand each other and even though we're from two different worlds like,

two different cultures, our parents are completely, like way off, different, and just like, we've kind of learned to live with each other. And like [our] mentalities are very similar...it's not in the sense that because you're this religion I don't talk to you... she practices hers, I practice mine and we're very open-minded about it.  
(Tina)

Tina described that belonging to one community prior to university and largely socializing within it while she lived at home, did not mean she was opposed to making friends beyond the Muslim community. Instead, she was trying to explain how she felt she no longer related and wanted to make friends that were not limited to a particular cultural or religious background. Tina did not feel obligated to play a cultural role that was reflective of her social context, rather she shaped her own ideas about how she would negotiate her cultural identity at home and did not struggle with blending her cultures and religion. In her new space, she appreciated her cultural identity but decided to no longer be limited to defining herself by her cultural and religious identity through her expectations alone.

Jasmine and Natasha were able to navigate their second-generation identity by drawing on multiple aspects of their identity that worked for them. Jasmine reflected that her identity was constructed by incorporating aspects of both mainstream Canadian culture and South Asian culture, and through her experiences with the broader social context, she learned what she wanted to adopt from each culture.

I think ethnicity does play a role in it [identity]...just being Indian, I know some like European cultures... like I have a friend who is Polish and we identify really well with her... I figured out that we have very similar values like family values and stuff. (Jasmine)

Jasmine included her own family by claiming, "we identify really well with her," as opposed to saying "I." She viewed herself as being closely tied to the collectivist values of her family and community. Other aspects that she identified with were shared by both cultures, such as the expectations of obtaining a good education and a successful career.

Navartam (2011) suggests, such traits contribute to the stereotype that South Asians in the West are stereotyped as the “model minority.”

I know that my parents are paying for education at my undergrad or as far as they can take me... they had to work really hard to get to where we are now so I think that that definitely affected how I think about school and like working hard, and my parents always used to say, we came here so that me and my sister have a better opportunity and just a better education than what they had... that definitely shaped and keeps me more motivated and focused. (Jasmine)

Jasmine explained that she felt connected to both Canadian and Indian cultures and values, understanding that her parents’ intentions of moving to Canada, were to provide her with greater opportunities, while also being able to nourish them with cultural values. She claimed that knowing this provided her with an understanding of her parents’ expectations.

Natasha identified with “being Canadian” more than the Indian culture. However, she described that most of her friends were from similar South Asian cultural backgrounds. “I haven’t thought about it but I have a mix of a lot of friends, but my closest friends are all Indian or they’re all, yeah, they’re South Asian” (Natasha). Natasha considered herself Canadian but when it came to her friends, she initially thought her friends would be reflective of “Canadian” culture, but did not realize they would be from similar South Asian backgrounds until she reflected on it during the interview. Priyanka similarly described having many South Asian female friends, but contrary to Natasha, she explained that their cultural similarities were a part of their friendship. She claimed her friends could relate to each other, and there was a mutual understanding of the norms and values that were embedded in their lives. Bhatia and Ram (2004) assert that acculturation is a dialogical process and integration is part of it. Some of the participants integrate and are able to blend by relating to others based on the social categories they identify with. They are able to diffuse the effects of discrimination by creating a culture of sameness through shared differences, facilitating a type of homogenizing effect in which

individuals who felt “in-between” cultures, did not necessarily feel like such visible minorities amongst everyone else. These women reflected a similar experience in negotiating identity by establishing groups of friends who negate their feelings of being different as they relate to one another.

Many of Natasha’s views of identity negotiation and cultural differences were in contrast with other participants.

A lot of people have a cultural barrier[s] with their own parents. Their parents have just come here from India or something like that. For me, my mom grew up here and she went to high school here, she went to university here. She dealt with her parents, if they had an opposing view to her... So when my mom went through everything with her parents, and she saw her relationship with her mom and dad, or in particular, with her mom, she had more problems with her mom. So she decided that when she was going to have a daughter she was not going to have those issues. So therefore, like, I would consider my mom my best friend, she is very open with me, I’m very open with her. (Natasha)

Natasha felt, having been raised by her Canadian-born mother helped her to feel more confident in developing her own identity. She has been able to navigate easily in developing her own identity because she feels that her expectations are realistic. “I wouldn’t say I faced any barriers. If anything, I’m glad that I have the upbringing of a woman who’s already lived in Canada her whole life so therefore I’m like more Canadian than Indian.” (Natasha). Instead of describing a struggle between her cultural identities, Natasha describes how her Canadian identity is predominant, also because she does not have to switch between such contrasting roles in her home life like many of the other participants.

Amber felt at ease with the cultural expectations her parents placed on her. Amber has drawn on the cultural expectations and norms that she has adhered to during her experiences at home. However, she did not view her experiences as negative, instead she claims that she

understands how they have helped her develop interwoven aspects of both her Pakistani and Canadian cultures and values.

When I was growing up, my dad, he wanted me to stay at home, you know, a young girl, he didn't want me to move out...and I did, I stayed at home, and he basically forced me to go to [a university near home]. I guess so he could keep a closer eye on me... I did do that and now... to this day, I'm so happy that I stayed at home... but now, I did move out for law school and I feel like I'm more mature, so I can carry myself. I still have some of the cultural values that they've instilled in me during my time at home. (Amber).

Amber claimed that her parents' cultural expectations actually helped her develop, despite seeming strict at the time. She describes being more mature now, living away from home.

There were times where I had to dress, I guess, more conservatively in front of my dad in comparison to my mom. So that would mean like for example, wearing a dress that's not passed my knees in front of him, but over time, I guess since they've been in Canada, they've adjusted to that level much more. But there's still a level where I guess I have to be conservative to a certain extent, until this day even though I'm 26 years old now. (Amber)

The concept of being able to “carry herself” demonstrates an inherent cultural expectation that she must fulfil through her dress, behaviour, and mannerisms. This is something that she said, was not explicitly discussed as an expectation at home, but Amber suggested, was integral to developing her identity. Amber's comments suggest she's felt pressure to adhere to her family's cultural norms at home in order to appease her parents and not disappoint her father. However, she did not resist her parents' expectations.

### **4.3 Gender**

Gender and identity are inextricably linked; however, three of six participants discussed the ways in which their female identity informed their day-to-day life. These three participants who described being impacted by gender differences or discrimination within their family, also said they had a brother. Differences in roles and expectations became more apparent for

individuals with a male sibling at home. There are double-standards that exist between the treatment of males and females at home, by lesser autonomy given to girls and young women than their male counterparts (Sharma, 2008; Sohal, 2009; Talbani and Hasanali, 2000). Sam, Tina, and Amber all described their roles to be much more domesticated at home than their male siblings or cousins who were not expected to cook or clean at home. All three participants described their roles as more consuming due to the added responsibility of cooking and cleaning to academic and/or professional responsibilities. Sam believed that being female had a lot to do with her role at home, especially in comparison to her brother.

So like I said, I--they do have more expectations for me as a female, umm I have all those other roles that I'm expected to do. Being here in Canada, I have to have a career as well, in addition to being a homemaker and a wife, and a woman, I'm cooking, and being a wife and things like that so they do have high expectations of me, especially when you compare me to my brother. (Sam)

The male/female dichotomy was evident in other areas of participants' lives. The protective nature of parents over their daughters was something Amber discussed frequently during the interview. She described her parents having become more lenient overtime, especially in comparison to the restrictions placed on her older sister, herself, and her younger sister. She felt that they were the most strict with her oldest sister, less so with her, and much more lenient with her youngest sister. However, she did not have a brother, and as a result, her comparisons about gender roles in her household were made to male cousins, who she claimed were treated with more leniencies. Sharma (2008) suggests there are differences in the ways that men and women are treated based on how they are valued in their family unit. This notion appeared to inform the way Amber's family unit functioned in the treatment of men and women. This became apparent for her despite not having any male siblings. "The restrictions on men, I guess, or all my male cousins were a lot less, in comparison to what they were for us." (Amber). Tina

also believed that gender roles existed in her home and were more prominent because she has a brother. There were instances in which she felt there were exceptions to this; however, those exceptions were contingent on the fact that the women were not able or available to complete their expected or assigned tasks.

I would say like house work and stuff, umm it's pretty funny, but I mean the stereotype does exist. It's true. And like the women in our house, are definitely more expected to clean the house and do all that stuff, whereas, like the guys are expected to do like all the heavy lifting and stuff, but I feel like at the same time, like even though the stereotypes do exist in my house, umm it does get equally balanced out where my brother does like cook at times. And like you know, like, if my mom's not home or if she's not feeling well, he'll definitely turn the tables and start cooking and clean, and whereas for me, like if there's new furniture to be built like I've done that if he's not around. It's not like set, like well okay like that's going to be left there for him, or that's going to be left there for her, but it does exist. (Tina)

Previous literature has demonstrated differences in the types of expectations that have been placed on girls in comparison to boys in South Asian households (Dasgupta, 1998; Ijaz & Abbas, 2010; Sharma, 2008). The nature of these expectations varies on the family and the household of each participant depending on whether there are male siblings in the house.

The expectations of all the participants in terms of dating varied; however, all six participants expressed the need to establish themselves professionally before embarking on serious relationships. Of the six participants, three were in relationships. Sam was in a relationship with a man who was from the same culture and met the expectations that her parents had of her. Sam has discussed her boyfriend with her parents, however she explained, "it's not as open," despite her parents knowing of her boyfriend, she does not necessarily emphasize this information, and the relationship remains relatively discrete unless it is at a point where it is confirmed to materialize into marriage.

They actually, they know when I am dating someone they do know but umm, it's not as open but they are, I am expected to find someone, date, and get married.

They have this specific type, culture, everything that they want me to date, yeah, in terms of career as well, he's got to be career-oriented, umm...financial status, things like that. They definitely have criteria for that. (Sam)

Amber did not discuss her relationship as openly as Sam, as her mom knows of her relationship with her boyfriend but she did not discuss it with her father.

My parents are very, umm... especially my mom, she's more understanding umm whereas, my dad, we actually don't really talk much about dating. Whereas my mom, she knows everything. You know whomever I date and whenever I see the person I'm dating. So she's much more knowledgeable in that and umm dad is...He's in the dark about it. It's just, it's an uncomfortable topic unless something is set in stone where it's going to happen like marriage then that's the only time where I'd sit down and tell him. (Amber)

Neither one of Priyanka's parents were aware of her relationship status. She expressed that she wanted to establish herself professionally before bringing her relationship into the picture with her parents. Priyanka described that her parents put a great emphasis on becoming independent and reaching her academic and career goals before anything else.

I think it's because I have this level of not wanting to disappoint my parents, I think that's one thing that I've learned and have taken from them, how they were grown up, you know they never really wanted to upset their parents, so I felt like although my parents are very open about dating, I mean they would never get mad if I were dating, it's just I don't want to, I don't want to open up those doors, I don't want to expose them to something that I'm not even sure about. I don't want to quote/unquote disappoint them. (Priyanka)

It is not uncommon for South Asian women to keep their relationships hidden or relatively discrete, as South Asian cultural values promote female modesty, including dating (Sharma, 2008; Sohal, 2009). As a result, many women do not discuss their relationships unless they are leading to marriage.

Priyanka's parents are not informed of her relationship status. However, she also described her parents as relatively open-minded about whom she could date. She also explained that they were not opposed to her dating someone outside of her culture. Priyanka's decision to

not disclose her relationship with her parents can largely relate to Inman's (2006) concept of cultural value conflict because there is a contrast between both sets of cultural values, and being tied to a South Asian and Canadian culture can make individuals conflicted when participating in a society where they are trying to satisfy people who subscribe to different cultural systems and values. As a result, Priyanka does not want to disappoint her parents and tries to appease them through her professional and educational goals. She feels that by not disclosing her relationship to her parents, that they will not think she is distracted or uninterested in her professional goals. Keeping this hidden also enables her to appease her parents as well as satisfy her own personal desires by maintaining her relationship with her boyfriend. Despite being able to disclose her relationship status, she chooses not to, mostly because she would not like to involve her parents unless she is certain of her future with her partner. Amber similarly does not want to discuss her boyfriend with her father unless she is certain of the outcome. Additionally, both women do not want to convey the idea that they are not serious about their professional lives. Unless they have met their professional goals, they are not willing to discuss their current relationship with their parents.

Tina is not currently in a relationship, but described her parents as being quite particular about who she chooses to date. She believes that there is a gender bias in her home and her parents would not be offended if her brother decided to date or marry someone outside of their culture. She described that in her case, her parents have told her that if she chose to do so, they would no longer associate with her.

My parents are very strict about who I date and stuff, they do want me to marry a Muslim and umm a Muslim of the same caste but I mean I feel like for me, I don't really care. (Tina)

The participants reported a greater sense of open-mindedness among some of their parents, who

are open to the idea of their daughters dating or in some cases, are fully aware of whom they are dating. Five of the six women who were interviewed also imagined and/or already were in a heterosexual relationship with someone who shared a similar socioeconomic and cultural background. This demonstrates that despite having dual sets of cultural expectations and contrasting values, all but one of the participants wanted to remain engaged in their cultural community and among their South Asian values by dating someone who would be accepted within their family and community. Tina was the only participant who did not describe a potential mate as someone who was from a similar background but, rather, focused on character traits and compatibility.

So I feel like if my brother married someone who wasn't a Muslim or a specific caste, like they would get by it, and it would be okay. And I feel like with me, it is really strict and the discussion has come up in the house, you know like, we don't really want to associate with you at that time, if you're like this or that. (Tina)

Dating and forging partner relationships for second-generation South Asian Canadian women involves a challenging and complex process. Many women grapple with their individual desires in contrast to the expectations that are placed on them by their family, community, and peers. This becomes challenging as they discussed how mainstream Canadian culture does not restrict women from dating, engaging in premarital sex, or limiting who they can and cannot date to the same extent as South Asian cultures. However, Sharma (2008) indicates that many second-generation South Asian women feel the added pressure of having to lie to their families about this aspect of their lives, to keep their relationships hidden from their families. Most of the women in this study indicate that they can discuss who they date with their families, to some degree. However, this has become a balancing act as they still want to remain discreet due to cultural values and the image they must portray for their family. The fear for some parents of the women in this study, was expressed as their daughters not getting married by a certain age,

and/or to someone who meets particular criteria in terms of socioeconomic background, education, and culture. The threat of this idea influenced each of the participants in a different capacity as they were either somewhat open with their parents, not at all, or had limited conversations with their parents about their dating life. Openly dating could also make room for undesirable or illicit relations in the community such as interracial dating, and premarital sex, causing some women to keep this aspect of their social life a secret (Deepak, 2004; Sharma, 2008).

#### **4.4 Academic Expectations**

There are high expectations placed by parents of second-generation South Asian women. The nature of these expectations varies for each participant. However, most South Asian parents prefer and expect their daughters to have academic success with a relatively high level of education (Sharma, 2008). In the case of Sam, she found herself to be muddled between many expectations at home and school, as well as with her own personal expectations. She described her academic and career expectations to be quite high and explained that these expectations were often provoked by her parents' desire for a higher status among their children. Additionally, they wanted to be able to discuss this amongst friends and family. "My parents expect me to do well, and they expect me to come out with a career, so there's a lot of pressure there. It's about you know...umm... status among their friends and things like that" (Sam). High expectations appear to be a standard amongst most South Asian women, at least in the case of academic success (Rajiva, 2013).

Some participants described their parents' expectations to be more reasonable than others. Natasha explained that her parents simply wanted her to be satisfied within her particular academic program and career path. This did not limit their guidance to her, but she felt that her

parents provided her with a sense of independence within her decisions regarding schooling. Sam, however, found dealing with her parents' expectations to be difficult, as she did not have someone at home to guide her academic decisions and felt the strain of having to learn most things on her own. Sam did not relate to her family in terms of sharing similar aspirations, as she was one of the first individuals in her family to pursue higher education. She found her family's expectations to be somewhat contradictory because of how traditional she felt they were. On one hand she had to flourish academically and financially, but on the other, she also had to be highly involved and domesticated at home.

Amber described similar experiences as Sam, in terms of having a dual set of expectations. One set of expectations was allocated for the academic/professional woman and the other was for the domesticated daughter. During Amber's visits home from school, she expressed difficulty spending her time at home due to contrasting expectations from her mother and father.

My dad is very encouraging of my schoolwork and whatever I have to do, whereas my mom, she'd rather have me clean the house or do, like, domesticated work, especially when I come home to visit. She doesn't really see eye-to-eye in terms of the amount of work I have to do, whereas, my dad is very considerate and he would rather have me not do anything, household chores, and just continue to do my schoolwork. (Amber)

Amber's father wanted her to get educated, establish a career, and then, think about finding a mate, suitable for marriage, whereas her mother heavily emphasized duties to help prepare her for her home life. Amber's mother wanted her to get married first, then think about pursuing her academic and professional endeavours.

High academic expectations were generally common amongst all participants except for Tina, whose parents were relatively uninvolved in her academic endeavours. Jasmine's father

expected her to go beyond nursing, as he did not consider this as high of an achievement, and wanted her to become a doctor or enter graduate school.

After nursing... well umm I want to... and my dad's also telling me to write my MCAT and I believe it's third year umm and, but, if so, I'm going to see how that goes, but I'm not sure yet if I want to do that but yeah we'll see how that goes, but if not then I want to graduate and work for a little bit and then I want to do my Masters somewhere abroad. Like my parents, especially my dad, is big on graduate studies. Like he's saying like after this, you need to do something else too. (Jasmine)

Like Jasmine, Sam also expressed the expectation of having to pursue a higher level of education upon completing her undergraduate degree. When asked if she would have taken a different academic or professional path, she claimed she would.

Definitely, umm I probably wouldn't umm, even now, I think umm, I would have maybe just done my undergrad and started working as...just as anything, as opposed to trying, I spent a lot of time trying...trying to be a doctor or something you know, be a dentist and something like that and I always think, I waste a lot of time...And umm...now I realized it, and then so I think I would've maybe just done, if I would've even just done college, you know? Something. And gotten a job and that was it. Right now, I feel like that would've been a really good idea. (Sam)

Parental expectations have restricted autonomous development in a lot of ways for some of the women in this study as they have described their limited choices both professionally, and in terms of their relationships. In Sam's case, she claimed to realize that she would have benefitted from not spending so much time "trying" to become something.

Priyanka, similarly began medical school with the intention of becoming a doctor.

However, upon feeling like she could not complete the program, she withdrew.

Medicine is a great field, although I felt like it wasn't for me, it was very stressful and I felt although, it wasn't worth it for me, it was just taking a toll on my mind, my health, my sanity, and I just felt as though I could do something else that I really, really love and I won't have any regrets later on. (Priyanka)

For Priyanka, she claimed that her parents never explicitly told her to go into medicine, but it was always expected of her to go into something where she could be independent and make a good living. She claimed that withdrawing from medicine has set her back immensely but, felt that her parents were supportive of her decision. Autonomy is limited because there are inherent expectations of daughters, whether their parents explicitly discuss such expectations or not. The financial support is accompanied by high expectations to “become something.” The same level of financial support would be unlikely if these women did not go down a particular academic or career path. There is an increased amount of pressure on students because of the financial strings attached. As a result, they must make their academic and professional decisions carefully, as they often pertain to greater expectations from their family and surrounding community (Eveland, 2012; Ghosh, 2000; Levitt, 2009; Ruzicka, 2009; Sharma, 2008; Tee, 1996; Traxler, 2009).

Four of the six participants described that their parents have directly or indirectly set academic expectations. When such expectations have not been met, the results for Sam and Priyanka were to find an alternative area of study or career path that will suffice, such as trying to pursue something else in the medical field if becoming a doctor is not possible.

I didn't accomplish that [becoming a doctor] but you know, they still expected me to be somewhere close to that. And that's just always been their expectation. [Researcher: Did you always want to go into that?] I think that I initially didn't and then, they made it seem like it was important, it was important to have that money and that economic status and, it was important to them, it was important to their friends, it was important to, you know to people we knew, and then I was kind of convinced that, that's what I should do. (Sam)

Sam's parents did not explicitly tell her she needed to become a doctor but she felt that the expectation was present for her at home. Financial assistance from her parents also meant having to fulfill these expectations and left very little room for any resistance at home. The financial support came with strings attached for many of the women in the

study, as demonstrated through their parents' high expectations to enhance social standing and success that would reflect on the family. Natasha's parents did not explicitly tell her she needed to choose a particular career path but they have set the tone in terms of her academic and professional expectations.

I don't know if they necessarily expect me in a certain profession but they definitely see me in a certain profession, so my mom can see me working for the United Way. And my dad thinks that like, well to be in the United Way, I mean you can't just come out of university and just get a job there, you need a little bit more than that. So my parents have recommended that I go and become a lawyer perhaps, umm get my MBA and I know like they're not just saying it just cause they know like I hate school, it's because it'll help me, it'll open up more doors. I would say they're very opportunistic. (Natasha)

The participants expressed their ambitions and aspirations to be quite high and many of these women were supported and/or expected by their parents to achieve this. Despite not having fulfilled some of these expectations, Sam and Priyanka are still expected to try again or remain in a field that is acceptable to their parents. Low aspirations are not an option for these women, and previous research has indicated the alternative to high academic expectations for South Asians is not discussed (Eveland, 2012).

The social and cultural contexts varied for all of the participants, those who characterized their families as more traditional talked about the challenges of participating in broader, more diverse social contexts. The preservation of culture could pose greater challenges for some of the women as it created larger contrasts between their world at home and outside. Sam experienced some of these challenges due to how different her life was at home. She described how she faced challenges in terms of being able to freely speak and practice her English at home.

At home you're speaking a different language and you go to school so I feel like I was always behind in vocabulary and speaking and you don't have that opportunity to do that at home so that was kind of a disadvantage. (Sam)

Amber expressed a similar sentiment as Sam as her parents wanted her to speak in Urdu instead of English at home. “We spent so much time at school we would converse in English, when I would come home... my parents would be like, no, speak in Urdu, like speak your language so that you don’t forget it.” (Amber)

Natasha explained how her experiences at home helped her in school, as her parents guided her based on the types of struggles they experienced at her age. She believed that this made their expectations realistic and reasonable. Networking was something that was essential to Natasha’s success and she claimed to have learned this primarily from her parents. Sam experienced the complete opposite of Natasha, as she felt like she was carving her life out without any support from her parents other than financial.

Sometimes, I feel like I’m at a disadvantage, umm I feel like I have to try a little bit harder, I don’t have the same ...for example networking, I don’t feel like that, because my parents are from a different country, they don’t know that many people as other people know here. Umm, so in terms of networking I feel like I have to try a lot harder to get to know people and umm relate to them and so in that sense umm, it is a little bit difficult and I do have to try a bit harder I feel.  
(Sam)

Sam expressed that having a more traditional family impeded social practices like networking due to not being able to effectively appropriate language and norms as easily. Sam and Natasha both emphasized networking as a means to become successful academically and professionally.

So my parents know a lot of people and my dad always says it’s not what you know necessarily, but it’s whom you know. And I think being a doctor or being a lawyer definitely has to do with what you know, but, it also, if you know the right people, then you’ll get more and more connections and with all those connections, you’ll make more money. (Natasha)

Natasha had vastly different experiences due to different expectations and the nature of her cultural values at home in comparison to Sam.

Sam described some of the challenges she had experienced as a student due to the amount of responsibility she had at home. When she lived away from home, for part of her schooling, she found that she had less responsibility and could focus her time on school. Amber claimed that being at home during her undergraduate years had allowed her to learn more about her culture and values at the time. Despite being away from home for law school, Amber describes how she has retained many of those values but does not need to worry about as many of the responsibilities that she had at home. Sam lived away for her undergraduate degree and is living at home for her current degree in Public Health, proving to be difficult for her in terms of balancing both sets of academic and cultural expectations.

In terms of my education, I think when I was living away from home and being away from all the family aspects, I think I could focus on my education more. Being back at home, and still pursuing my education, I have a lot of distractions. I have a lot of expectations, like right now I'm studying, but I still have to go home and like make dinner and being female in general, I'm expected to be home soon, and then I have a whole list of things that I need to do. Whereas when I wasn't living at home I didn't have distractions. Umm, I have my brother, who's living at home and his wife and umm I'm expected to be a part of, a part of everything that happens in the house. Umm, someone's coming over, I'm expected to be there and show face. (Sam)

The academic expectations in addition to the cultural expectations posed great challenges for Sam as she felt it was difficult to balance both areas of her life.

Priyanka believed that her parents were supportive in terms of her education. During her interview, she described the pressure she was under to “become something” professionally and academically. Upon completing her undergraduate degree, she attended medical school for two years overseas and realized that she did not want to continue. Despite financially supporting Priyanka throughout her education, she claimed that her parents were understanding of her decision to withdraw from medical school.

I think because they [her parents] saw how hard I worked and they saw that it kind of affected me, and they just want me to be happy and they still want me to do something as any parent would. So they're totally supportive about it, as long as I'm going to, you know, work hard, strive for something else and make something happen, and not just sit around. (Priyanka)

Four of the six women were attending a program in the sciences in university and described being geared towards the sciences at an early age.

I think with my parents, it's definitely like you need to get into university, you need to finish your program and get a job, like work hard, and also I guess science is a huge thing too because I like science, but my sister she doesn't, she's not really into science. So she's had a hard time, like for my parents too, it's been hard because they think that you have to do science or you won't get a job. (Jasmine)

The other participants who were pursuing education in the sciences expressed a similar reason for their choice of specialization, as their parents wanted to see them become doctors.

Each of the participants discussed their parents being supportive to varying degrees in regards to their education. This included financial support, decision-making, or any other form of parental involvement. Five of six of the participants had their parents fund their education. Tina did not ask her parents to fund her education, however she explained that they were willing to help her financially, but she wanted to try and support herself as much as she could. This could possibly be the reason why Tina had more autonomy when making her academic and professional choices.

So I feel like where I am, and like the decision I made career-wise, had nothing to do with my parents and I feel like it just sprung on me because of my own personal experiences. I actually had a friend in high school who developed a learning disability, and I guess, just like going to the appointments and just like seeing how it was, it just kind of inspired me to do what I want to do, and I feel like ever since that time like it's been like if this is what you want to do then this is what you want to do. (Tina)

Tina also described her family as not being well off financially, which could potentially mean

that by not funding her education, they did not have as much say in her academic decisions. Five of the other participants had financial support from their parents. Their parents were also heavily involved in their educational decisions, lessening their daughters' autonomy. Part of the expectations that have been put in place by these particular sets of parents has been to achieve something academically. However, the definition of achievement varies by individual. In many cases, the five participants could make their own academic decisions and had limited choices within what their parents had outlined as acceptable. This included graduate studies, becoming a lawyer, and a doctor. Many of the participants expressed the need to achieve more after their undergraduate degree was completed. All participants had plans to or were already completing graduate studies.

Yeah, so my parents do pay for my education, they pay for university for me and umm they have been very supportive, I... umm failed a class in university. They know that the transition is hard but they have always been there for me. Like if I ever need help, they might not necessarily know the schoolwork I'm doing but they'll be able to get me in touch with the right people. (Natasha)

Sam describes that she was at a disadvantage in many ways because she is second-generation, and her parents did not grow up here and develop the networks of friends and professionals that people who are third or fourth generation have established. She describes that her second-generation status creates greater difficulties for her and as a result, her parents cannot provide the same level of support that her peers may have.

I've been expected to achieve a lot, I mean I have that drive, I have that encouragement to do more, to have a career, which I think is great, but to also be that woman at home, to be that traditional woman. I think it's a good thing; you're pushed to do more, so in that sense, it's positive. And like I said before, it's kind of negative because you do have so many expectations and being from a family where you're second generation, you don't have those networks, you don't have people to look up to who are in the field that you want to be in. You have to go out yourself and find these people to kind of idolize because they're not at home... I definitely think that people who are third or fourth generations have the advantage of having people to look up to, to talk to... umm... to follow, to have to

get ideas and how they should act and be in life and I don't have that, and so I have to find it on my own. (Sam)

Sam believes that many of her hardships stem from being second-generation and having to forge her own path. In contrast, Natasha's mother was born in Canada, and Natasha described having very different experiences than demonstrated by Sam in terms of the types of parental support she received. Natasha described her relationship with her parents to be very close, especially with her mother. She also described her parents as being extremely supportive in terms of her social and academic autonomy, especially regarding her relationships. Natasha had described that her parents have provided her a lot of guidance academically, professionally, and also in terms of her relationships.

I see other people who get into university and they feel like, okay, I'm here now, now it's time to go crazy. Another thing is, that I have a strong relationship with my parents so if I've ever had a boyfriend, they've known about it whereas, I know there's a lot of people who don't tell their parents. (Natasha).

Most of the participants have described their parental support consisting of financial support for their education. Among the participants, Tina was the only one who has made her academic choices independent of her parents. She explained that she worked to support herself, and to be able to make more autonomous decisions in her life. Sam described that financial support was more of a cultural aspect amongst South Asians. All participants but Tina received funding from their parents. Excluding Tina and Amber, all participants' parents were largely involved in the direction that they chose to take academically and professionally.

It was difficult to get support from them. Funding wasn't a problem, being South Asian, I feel like it's a part of the culture, that they're going to support, they were going to support me financially. In terms of other support, it was hard because they can't really relate. (Sam).

Sam described her parents as more traditional and as a result, felt she did not have the support in terms of having networks of people to connect with professionally or being able to speak in

English at home, and as she mentioned earlier, felt that it put her at a disadvantage because her parents had high expectations of her professionally but could not actually help to achieve those expectations other than financially. Amber's parents were not as involved in telling her what academic path she should pursue, however, her parents were extremely supportive financially. Their academic concerns were not great because both parents had differing views on her educational pursuits, where her mother was more concerned about Amber's future family life and her father was more concerned about her academic and professional life. Regardless of their opposing views, she claimed that they were very willing to help financially. South Asian parents appear to feel a sense of obligation in terms of financially supporting their children, especially with their education.

I think that exists more in South Asian cultures where they want you to pursue further education and they would do whatever they can, like my parents even suggested refinancing their home to help me go to school. I think that South Asian parents just have that in them to help you get that education. (Amber).

Despite not explicitly discussing her academic expectations with her parents, Amber did describe how by exceeding her father's academic expectations, it has impacted their relationship.

He's so proud, you can tell that he treats me differently than he treats my younger sister or my older sister, because my older sister only went to college. He's so proud that when someone comes over he'll say things like, that's my daughter, she's in law school, cause there hasn't been someone. (Amber)

According to my review of the literature, several scholars have found that South Asian parents go to great lengths to support their children's academic success (Navaratnam, 2011; Sharma, 2008). This is mostly done through providing financial support. Five of the six participants described their parents as being their entire or at least partial source of funding for their education. This was the case for everyone but Tina, who paid for her education.

With funding umm, we're not like that well off, so I do work, I work a lot of jobs just over the summer enough to make money and I try to support myself as much as I can over the year and then I have like OSAP debt. (Tina)

Tina was also the only participant whose parents were not involved in her academic decisions and did not pressure her into any particular academic field or profession. The other five participants' parents were much more involved in the decision-making process of their daughters' academic careers and consequently, provided greater financial support. This level of financial support was attached to greater academic expectations. Eveland (2012) points out that the expectation faced by most second-generation South Asian girls and women is to perform well academically, and because they are raised with these expectations, they do not feel like they have other options. Additionally, they are provided with all that comes with expectations, having their education paid obligates these women to fulfil specific roles.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This Chapter presented the following themes emerging from the findings of this study: navigating difference, resistance and acceptance, gender, and academic expectations. These themes were generated from the data and intended to inform the research questions.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Discussion**

This Chapter focuses on the significance of the findings and the themes that have emerged from the data collected. The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of second-generation South Asian Canadian women who are enrolled in higher education. The following research questions are discussed: (1) How does cultural identity inform young South Asian women's experiences at home and at school? (2) What types of social boundaries do second-generation South Asian women immigrants negotiate, and how do they change based on their surroundings? (3) Does their socioeconomic status have an impact on these negotiations? Additionally, the limitations of this study and the implications for future research are also discussed in this Chapter.

#### **(1) How does cultural identity inform young South Asian women's experiences at home and at school?**

Identifying the dominant structure and representing experiences that are positioned in relation to race, gender, or class are highlighted through an anti-racist feminist lens. Women's identities are packed with a history of racial and patriarchal undertones based on where their cultural origins are located. Dua and Lawrence (2005) state, "Decolonisation struggles need to be foundational in our understandings of racism, racial subjectivities, and anti-racism" (p. 248). This aligns with the framework of anti-racist feminism as it demonstrates the need to analyze with a broader historical interpretation of experiences. This means challenging the dominant structure in a way in which marginalized individuals may be represented (hooks, 2000). Hall (1992) asserts, "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything

which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power” (p. 225). Hall (1992) demonstrates the importance of investigating what identity has become and how it continues to evolve for these individuals, which informed my analysis used to understand the participants’ experiences. Identity is constantly evolving, as individuals are continually influenced by their surroundings, in addition to how social relations affect people (Anthias, 2013). These social relations can initiate certain hierarchies as individuals identify with multiple intersecting social categories through race, gender, sexuality, culture, and religion (Hall, 1992). Hall (1992) describes identity as fluid and developing through its interactions with cultural systems. Shaikh (2012) describes how using anti-racist feminist lens can help unpack some of the ideas that are attached to race, gender, and class, in addition to power relations. This lens has facilitated a greater understanding of the experiences of South Asian Canadian women with their identities and experiences in relation to the intersections of social differences (Brah, 1992).

The academic and professional expectations that South Asian parents have of their children stem from their social class and the collectivistic values governed by their family, culture, and community. Academic expectations and achievement directly relate to social class. Strong (2007) suggests obtaining university education facilitates upward mobility; hence, elevating social class for the individual and the family. Elevating social class for the family creates even higher expectations for South Asian Canadian women as they are pressured to live up to such expectations due to how their position and aspirations will affect their family and the larger community. This emphasizes the idea of “becoming something” and the importance of getting educated, as this will directly influence social class through identity and belonging for the

South Asian women as well as their families (Eveland, 2012; Ghosh, 2000; Levitt, 2009; Strong, 2007; Traxler, 2009).

Social class informs the decisions made by South Asian Canadian women and the expectations that are placed on them in terms of their careers, academics, and marriage. Their aspirations are reflective of higher social class, in addition to their parents' suitable criteria for marriage. Priyanka described what she believes are her parent's expectations of a potential mate for her, "How settled they are, what profession they come from and how they are as a person." The nature of such expectations is culturally tied in many ways, as marriage, in addition to career aspirations, affect not only the individual but the family as well. Sam conveyed similar expectations, "They have this specific type, culture, everything that they want me to date...He's got to be career oriented, [have] financial status...they definitely have a criteria for that." The expectations surrounding what criteria are suitable when looking for a mate are all factors that influence social class, such as education, career, and financial status. These are all aspects that parents look for in order maintain or elevate social class.

Upholding the model minority in the West is a notion that remains strong in South Asian cultures according to the participants. There is a negative impact of the labelling of "model minority" on individuals, as it can increase academic and professional expectations of individuals who are stereotyped as being part of the "model minority" (Eveland, 2012; Navartnam, 2011). The notion of the model minority in the literature is also observed in the data of this study, as all participants had high aspirations and were already acquiring high academic achievements. Each participant was in the process of becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a psychologist, all careers that required higher levels of education.

**(2) What types of social boundaries do second-generation South Asian women immigrants negotiate, and how do they change based on their surroundings?**

Giguère, Lalonde, and Lou (2010) suggest people adhere to social norms for the purpose of inclusion. Competing cultural values and norms can make second-generation South Asian women's experiences more complex as they construct their identity amongst the cultures and people in their lives that influence them in different ways. Varying expectations from culture and family can create an oppressive system to some extent for many South Asian women, as they must negotiate their identity according to the expectations in place. Cultural values can limit individual autonomy and enhance the pressure of adhering to particular academic and social expectations. The cultural values at home are collectivistic with actions that impact the family and community, whereas, the broader mainstream culture promotes more individualistic values significant for personal growth as instead of collective growth (Shariff, 2009). These factors add up to make experiences amongst South Asian women complex and based on the findings; they do not necessarily construct their identity in a linear manner.

Social boundaries are encountered for most of these women, and they continue to navigate around these boundaries by fulfilling their parents' and cultural expectations, in order to legitimize their identities. South Asian women's roles are largely tied to their gender, in the traditional sense, this translates to being a good daughter, wife, and mother (Tee, 1996). The patriarchal undertones of the family dynamic largely informs women's roles. Living amongst a mainstream society that also has a set of norms and values that might be different than their own brings in the added dimension of identity negotiation. The predisposed set of expectations and roles that are culturally tied and/or gender-specific has informed how the women in this study legitimize their experiences. By resisting certain expectations, they are breaking the "social

contract” with their parents of the expectations be a “good daughter” and to become academically and professionally successful. The women in this study must navigate contextually in order to appease their parents, cultural values, and the broader mainstream society. Gender relations and the imbalance of power among men and women can act oppressively to some extent as it limits personal growth as South Asian cultures promote collectivist values over individualistic ones, restricting personal autonomy. The women in this study did not convey an explicit discussion of roles and expectations that they have had with their parents. However, they all recognized that an inherent set of expectations was present. This was informed by social class, and often articulated through their parents’ stories of potential struggle upon migrating to Canada, creating a sense of obligation to their parents and their expectations. Operating within a predisposed set of rules and expectations limited agency for these women as it defined their roles for them.

Anthias, Cain, & Yuval-Davis (2005) argue that social relations have been informed by gender and sexual difference as a social construction. The axes of difference can place individuals in varying positions according to the categories with which they identify. These categories can act as an oppressor through social relations as they activate hierarchies amongst people. There are different ways in which people try to legitimize their membership and sense of belonging to social groups (Anthias, 2013). Some second-generation South Asian women in this study do so by meeting the expectations imposed on them by their parents. Many of them do not resist their roles, as there are advantages for them that are tied to meeting expectations such as living a good lifestyle, and family, and financial support.

The data from this study suggests that identity is complex and constantly evolving for second-generation South Asian Canadian women. Being part of multiple affiliations can be

challenging for some second-generation women as they must negotiate their identities based on this, as cultural values were often incompatible and contrasting (Martínez, et al. 2002; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). The interplay of these values created complex experiences for many second-generation South Asian women as they encounter varying boundaries based on their social context. For example, at home, speaking in one's ethnic language or fulfilling certain domestic roles was required, whereas in professional settings these women were required to take on a very different identity which needed to equip them to counter discriminatory practices and compete with peers. The social boundaries that emerge from these contexts occur due to the expectations in place for these women, at home, some of them are to fulfil specific domestic duties, to spend time with the family and their friends, and in university, they are expected to be high achievers to have successful careers. As Sam stated, "My parents expect me to do well and they expect me to come out with a career so there's a lot of pressure there. It's about you know... status among their friends and things like that." The expectations directly influence the family and community, which is why there is such emphasis on meeting particular educational expectations, as this is reflective of the collective group and not just the individual (Shariff, 2009).

### **(3) Does their socioeconomic status have an impact on these negotiations?**

Socioeconomic status largely impacts identity negotiations; while this notion is not explicitly discussed by the participants, it is present in their discussions of expectations and career aspirations. Priyanka indicated that her parents did not explicitly tell her to become a doctor. However, they made remarks to suggest choosing a high aspiration, such as a doctor. She said, "You have to like, just do something, where you'll be independent, and have a good standard of living. Don't settle, strive high." Priyanka also identified that many of these expectations are linked to having financial success in the future, like Sam, who discussed the

notion of “status” as being one of the reasons for her parents’ expectations regarding her career aspirations.

The South Asian parents of the women in this study all supported their daughters financially to an extent. This may have been by funding their education, allowing them to live at home at no cost, or financially supporting their lifestyles in one way or another. The social relations between South Asian parents and their daughters also initiates certain expectations. The expectation of achieving academic and professional success, can also motivate the drive for parents to help their children financially. The women in this study did not explicitly describe their expectations from their parents; however, by fulfilling their roles at home, in school, and by finding a suitable husband and career, they are accepting the social contract that provides financial assistance by their parents. Choosing to meet such expectations imposes certain restrictions on the autonomy of second-generation South Asian women; however, they do not challenge this, as most of them continue to work towards their parents’ expectations. Some of the women justify doing so by describing their parents’ stories of struggle, often creating a sense of obligation toward them, as Natasha stated, “They’ve struggled together, I mean my mom got married without finishing university, and my dad moved a lot, so they’ve struggled financially... just for a better future just for himself and for our family.” In addition to feeling a sense of obligation to their parents, there is also an inherent aspect of status that exists by obtaining a higher education, and having a professional career such as a doctor or a lawyer, which all influence one’s social standing (Bourdieu, 1984). However, this also limits second-generation women’s autonomy, as they have a set of existing expectations and collectivistic values. These expectations have been communicated both implicitly and explicitly. Many of them are faced with the “cultural value conflict,” in which they must reconcile their identity with the norms and

values of different cultures (Inman, 2006). This, creates increasingly complex experiences through negotiating tensions of living in both a mainstream culture which promotes individual growth and South Asian cultural values that promote collective growth.

## **5.2 Limitations**

The limitations of this study are that it does not represent the experiences of all second-generation South Asian Canadian women. The participants of this study expressed their individual opinions and ideas about their experiences, and the data presented is limited to their experiences. Additionally, the participants in this study are diverse individuals who have attended different institutions of higher education, grown up in different neighbourhoods and may identify with varying South Asian regions, thus creating different perspectives. Another limitation of this study is the relatively small sample that was used. A larger sample of participants could provide more data and potentially data that would be more reflective of certain regional diversity, social class, and generational difference, and could also generate more themes. Investigating the differences between second-generation South Asian Canadian women and third-generation was not as possible due to the difficulty in locating third-generation South Asian Canadian women. Generational differences among second and third-generation South Asian Canadian women were evident; however a larger sample could generate more relevant data. Interviewing a larger number of individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds was another limitation to the study due to the difficulty in locating these individuals or willingness to participate for reasons such as scheduling restraints or an unwillingness to discuss their experiences. Another limitation to my research was in the methodology, being present as the researcher changed the context and the dynamics of the interview. Acknowledging this aspect of the interview process was important, and as a result, I remained cognizant of how this could

influence the interview and settings. Context and location was crucial in this case, as I wanted interviews to take place in similar environments; however, this was not fully possible due to different university locations, noise levels, and scheduling restraints.

### **5.3 Implications for Future Research**

This study outlines themes that have been generated from the experiences of six women. One purpose of this research was to investigate second-generation South Asian Canadian women's experiences and the complexities involved. Considering there is limited research on second-generation South Asian women, it is critical to learn their perspectives through methods that generated rich data. This study has a relatively small sample, investigating a larger sample could facilitate greater understandings with diverse participants from various South Asian regions, generations and social class backgrounds. Investigating the experiences of women from various social classes can help to understand the particular reasons for high academic and professional expectations for many individuals.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study suggests that second-generation identity construction is complex for South Asian Canadian women. Most women must take on different roles and navigate between varying values and social norms within many contexts. Social, professional, and cultural expectations of an individual and the values they identify with play a large role in navigating their identity. Moreover, these expectations are also informed by identity, belonging, and social class. Investigating the experiences of second-generation South Asian women may encourage an inquiry based on the types of support and inclusivity that exist and are needed within the curriculum at a university level in addition to schools. These insights may facilitate

understandings regarding the high expectations and many pressures that are present for some South Asian female students living in Western parts of the world.

Underlying tones of social class appear to be inherent throughout each theme, this is demonstrated by the motivations for high academic and career aspirations, as well as the marital expectations that are discussed by some of the participants. The parents of most of these women provide them with financial support and certain privileges with the understanding that their daughters fulfil certain expectations. This type of exchange can be oppressive to some extent, as it uses financial security and support as a mechanism to exert control and restricts autonomy. In conclusion, the second-generation South Asian Canadian women in this study are not entirely free agents of their lives or identity, as they fulfil certain roles in response to a predisposed set of expectations that are part of a larger social contract with their families.

## **5.5 Summary**

This Chapter discussed the broader findings of this study and responded to the research questions that were posed. It focused on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and identity construction in order to understand the data. The implications for further research as well as the limitations were also discussed, providing an overview of potential improvements for further studies in this area.

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## APPENDIX A



### Letter of Information

#### **The Experiences of Young Second-Generation South Asian Women who are Attending Institutions of Higher Education in Canada**

##### **Invitation to Participate**

My name is Monisha Aurora and I am a Master of Education student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am conducting research that plans to investigate the experiences of second-generation Canadian South Asian female students. I am inviting female students between the ages of 19 to 30, who are attending a post-secondary institution in Canada to participate in this study.

##### **Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this study is to investigate the experiences of women who are attending a higher education institution in Canada, who identify as second-generation South Asian Canadian, in order to gain an understanding of their experiences when growing up between two or more cultures.

##### **If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to meet for a face-to-face interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will also be audio recorded. If you choose to not be audio recorded, you may not participate in this study.

##### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any point in time. Any data you provide will be removed and destroyed with no future effect on your academic status or employment.

##### **Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Possible benefits to participating in this study are that you may gain a greater understanding of your experience as a second-generation South Asian Canadian woman.

##### **Confidentiality**

All data will remain confidential and will only be accessible to the investigators of this study. The information collected will be used for research purposes only. You will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. The data that will be collected from the interviews will be stored in a secure place. All data that will be collected will be destroyed in five years, all data stored on electronic devices will be deleted and any paper copies will be shredded. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained in the use of all research documents, publications, and presentations as only the research team will have access to the data. The researcher will need to gain permission from the participant(s) before using data in a

publication, presentation or in a research document. No information will be accessible to anyone other than the research team that can link the participants and their responses.

**Compensation**

There will be no compensation for your time.

**Questions**

For further questions or concerns about this study please feel free to contact the researcher, Monisha Aurora at [REDACTED], [REDACTED] or the Principle Investigator, Goli Reza-Rashti at [REDACTED], [REDACTED], or Melody Viczko at [REDACTED].

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Thank you,  
Monisha Aurora

**APPENDIX B****Western  
Education****Consent Form**

Project Title: THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG SECOND-GENERATION SOUTH ASIAN  
WOMEN WHO ARE ATTENDING INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
CANADA

I have read the Letter of Information, and have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (Please Print)

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Participant's Signature

---

Date:

---

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (Please Print)

---

Signature:

---

Date:

---

## APPENDIX C

### Guiding Interview Topics

1. Tell me about yourself - age, ethnicity, year of parent's immigration to Canada, parent's level of education, your education (year).
2. Have you felt like you needed to behave differently at home or at school? If so, how?
3. In what ways have you identified with the people around you, such as your peers, family members, coworkers, etc? How has this been affected by your background or such factors as your race, gender, culture, or class?
4. How do you think that being a second-generation South Asian woman has affected your experiences in a positive or negative way? Have you faced any type of social barrier(s) due to your background?
5. How do you think being female has influenced the way your parents treat you?
6. What are/were your parents' expectations of you? Do you think these expectations are reasonable? (school, dating, etc)
7. Tell me about your friends. How do you think they share the same identity as you?
8. Have you been under a lot of pressure to do well in school? How were your parents involved in your education? (Support, decision making, funding, etc.)
9. Tell me about your experiences in a higher education institution. (social aspects, relevance of curriculum, hardships, etc.)

**APPENDIX D****Curriculum Vitae**

**Name:** Monisha Aurora

**Education:**

09/2012 – Present M.Ed, Curriculum Studies, University of Western Ontario  
Supervisors: Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti and Dr. Melody Viczko

08/2012 A/Q Course – English as a Second Language part 1

05/2012 University of Windsor – Bachelor of Education,  
Primary/Junior, Urban Education Program

07/2010 University of Toronto - Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Degree  
Double Major: History, Anthropology

06/2007 Laurentian University – Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of  
Education, Concurrent Education

**HONOURS AND AWARDS**

06/2010 President's Honour Roll, University of Windsor  
09/2006 Academic Excellence Scholarship, Laurentian University

**EXPERIENCE**

06/15 – 09/2015 Teacher, J. Addison School

05/2015 – Present Tutor, Academy of English and Mathematics

06/2013 – Present Tutor (K-8)

02/2013 – 05/2013 Research Assistant, University of Western Ontario

04/2012 – 05/2012 Teacher Candidate JK/SK, J. E. Benson Elementary School

02/2012 – 03/2012 Teacher Candidate Grade 1, Dr. H.D. Taylor Public School

10/2011 – 11/2011 Teacher Candidate Grade 6, Dr. H.D. Taylor Public School

07/2009 – 08/2009 Teacher, Literacy and Numeracy Association

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

12/2011 – 02/2012 Teaching Aide, Dr.H.D. Taylor Public School

06/2011	PBD Canada 2011, Advancing Equity – With a Focus on Gender
07/2006 – 07/2012	AWIC Community & Social Services (Toronto)
04/2006 – 06/2007	Teaching Aide, West Rouge Junior Public School
09/2005 – 01/2007	Teaching Aide, Bayview Hill Elementary School
07/2003 – 05/2004	Counselor, VCC Day Camp

#### **CONFERENCES AND SYMPOSIUMS ATTENDED**

06/2011	Advancing Equity – With a Focus on Gender Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Canada Convention 2011
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#### **MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS**

02/2013 – Present	Ontario College of Teachers
06/2012 – Present	University of Windsor Alumni
06/2010 – Present	University of Toronto Alumni