COLOUR, CULTURE AND DUAL CONSCIOUSNESS:
ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

April 2000

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For

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AND
THE SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S CENTRE (SAWC)

This study was made possible by financial assistance from
Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Settlement Directorate, Ontario Region
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Rationale

South Asian youth have immigrated with their parents who came to Canada for any number of reasons – better overall life, better economic and educational opportunities, safer and healthier lives, and in some cases, civil war. The youth, regardless of the reason for immigrating, are faced with high unemployment rates, peer pressure to fit in and significant pressure from their families to succeed academically and pursue professional careers, strict codes of behaviour around gender relationships and dating. (Council of Agencies Serving South Asians/ South Asian Legal Clinic (CASSA/SALCI), 1995; Kuran, 1983, 1991; Wadhwani 1999).

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and the South Asian Women’s Centre (SAWC) undertook this research to explore and document settlement issues faced by immigrant youth of South Asian background who came to Toronto at or over the age of 8 and are now between 16 and 24. The research is part of a larger study that is examining the gaps in settlement services for newcomer youth in Ontario. This research was conducted under the aegis of the Centre of Excellence in Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University with financial assistance from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Settlement Directorate Ontario Region.

This study is about exploring, deciphering and decoding the lived realities of South Asian immigrant youth living in Toronto. It should be noted that although the collective term South Asian is used, it is used with the knowledge that the collective known as South Asian is very diverse and nuanced in a myriad complex ways. The term is also used in a political way in that the term has come to define individuals and groups whose roots can be traced to the Indian sub-continent. More importantly the term is used to reflect a consciousness and a self-definition arising out of dialectical relations between the dominant culture and cultures within it that are considered outside the ruling relations and no more than marginal because of racism (Smith, 1987: 1; Tatum, 1992; Hills Collins 1990).
South Asian youth, for the purposes of this research, includes 16 to 24 year old youth whose origins or ancestors would be from the Indian sub-continent that includes the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Thus, youth coming to Canada anytime after the age of 8 or later as newcomers from countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, as well as South Asian youth born in England, and countries of Africa, the Middle East are included as participants for the study. The study focused on youth from the various ethno-cultural and linguistic groups to help reflect the diversity within the South Asian community in Canada. This included youth from Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Urdu speaking communities. Moreover, by reaching out to different groups we included South Asian youth from the major religions – Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism.

The purpose of the research was to explore the settlement challenges and concerns faced by immigrant youth of South Asian background to help meet their needs and assist them to integrate in a new culture while maintaining their cultural identities and strengthening their family structure and support.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore and document issues faced by immigrant youth
- To identify challenges in the settlement process of immigrant youth
- To identify and lay the groundwork to bridge gaps between youth views and the views of parents
- To lay the first steps towards building alliances between parents and youth.

The findings of the research will be helpful for policy makers and practitioners in educational, social and community agencies, as well as staff within the health system, to make effective interventions when working with South Asian youth and their families. It is hoped that the findings of this research will not only enhance the services delivered by South Asian agencies through the ongoing participation of youth and their families in identifying barriers to accessing appropriate services and support but also inform organizations and agencies within the broader Canadian society of the need to remove the prevailing systemic barriers.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of this study a literature search of Canadian sources was done to help locate existing studies on South Asian youth in Canada. The search was done not so much to start the current work with a set of formal propositions but rather to see what was available to help locate this project within a context of existing material on South Asian youth.

Although there are studies on South Asian immigrant needs and the adjustment and adaptation of South Asian families in Canada, they do not deal directly with youth experiences. The experiences, concerns and difficulties are dealt with indirectly by talking of what issues are being faced by South Asian families in general. Then there are reports on youth living in the Greater Toronto Area within the broader societal context. These reports are about youth issues and needs in general; the only study we found dedicated specifically to South Asian youth was by Wadhwani, Z., 1999.

The reports on youth issues and needs have been usually undertaken by mainstream organizations, like the City of Toronto (Toronto Youth Profile, City of Toronto 1999); Central Toronto Community Health Centres (Making Money, Toronto, 1999) to name just a couple. These reports provide a good overview of youth profiles, issues, needs, as well as new policy and programming initiatives to stimulate discussions about difficulties faced by youth. The stated purpose of all these studies is to help improve educational, recreational, health and the broader social services for youth in general. The latest report: Toronto Youth Profile, states clearly that "it
is hoped the profile will contribute strategy for youth that engages youth as partners in shaping the city's future, builds on best practices, and forges partnerships to create economic and cultural opportunities for youth." (City of Toronto, 1999: 1).

While these reports are necessary to help set policy and programming to meet the needs of youth, they are superficial in terms of dealing with the specific challenges and concerns of ethno-racial youth, such as South Asian youth. Merely citing statistical information on current demographics is not sufficient for exposing or revealing the lived realities of South Asian youth. The presence of South Asian youth and youth from other so-called visible minority ethno-racial groups is quite evident and has, in fact, been evident for many years. Simply knowing about the presence of visible minority communities and their youth has not made any significant changes in structural or systemic barriers with regard to services (James, C., 1995). Moreover, while statistical information is necessary, qualitative data is equally important for providing insights into the psychosocial processes that occur within youth. Therefore, in essence, it could be argued that mainstream organizations and their commissioned studies typically continue to consciously or unconsciously either obfuscate or render the lived realities of racial minority youth invisible. This conscious or unconscious expression of racism would undoubtedly be reflected in policies and programs because one cannot develop a policy or program for that which one does not see. Hence the maintenance and development of policies and practices predicated on domination, segregation and marginalization of racial minorities continue. This does not come as a surprise to many in the marginalized groups because many members of these groups have come to learn first-hand that often truth lies outside the establishment. Many of the members of marginalized groups also know that their indigenous knowledge and wisdom is negated by the establishment whose decisions affect the quality of their lives by continuing to make decisions on partial truths.

It is interesting to note that the role of racism and its impact on employment opportunities for youth is evaded by merely stating that "differences in employment patterns and income levels do exist but that it is too complex to determine what caused these differences," (City of Toronto, 1999: 10). Moreover, these differences are dismissed not only by stating that these are too complex, but also by indicating that long-established ethnic communities, such as the Chinese community, have their own infrastructure that these communities provide a wide range of opportunities for their own youth (City of Toronto, 1999: 10). The reasons for this are not examined. Could it be that youth from the so-called ethnic communities face barriers in accessing jobs in mainstream organizations and have little choice but to look for opportunities within their communities of origin? This report alludes to the possibility that by accessing opportunities within their own communities youth might be restricting their mobility (City of Toronto, 1999: 10). The way this restriction is constructed is problematic in that it lays blame at the feet of visible minority communities and youth rather than examining structural and systemic racism within the larger dominant Canadian society. Discrimination experienced in accessing jobs is a serious difficulty, sometimes posing impenetrable walls for especially the first generation racial minority immigrant youth.

Another important report dealing with concerns and challenges faced by youth in Ontario is the study commissioned by the Ontario Government, Report on Race Relations to Premier Bob Rae (Lewis, S., 1992). This report deals with racism as the central systemic issue and its implications for racial minority youth with regards to educational, recreational, social services and employment opportunities. It is about anti-Black racism as Lewis, himself, concluded, "it is true that while every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is the Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward Equity slam shut." (Lewis, 1992: 2).

However, while focus on Black youth is not an issue per se, the report reveals a gap in that it does not examine and explore or problematize Black/African Canadian identity. In other words, the study does not examine complex questions such as how, why, by whom and for what purpose
or utility is this identity constructed in Canada. In fact, some would say that this report is about Caribbean African Canadians and not continental Africans and that the diversity within Black/African Canadians is not addressed. Moreover, the social construction of Black/African Caribbean Canadians also poses difficulties because it often seems to refer to Jamaicans of African descent. The question then is, whether anti-racism has become about Black anti-racism, and specifically about anti-racism for Blacks from the Caribbean and not about racism experienced by continental Africans and other racial minority groups.

Once again, we see the experiences of South Asian youth made invisible even in broad or general studies on racism and anti-racism. Perhaps a partial answer for this erasure lies in Henry’s explanation of how racism against South Asians is constructed. Henry explains that contradictory stereotypes of South Asians as both visible and invisible are created by racism (Henry, 1983: 46). Hence, the racist phenomenon of, "now I see you, now I don’t," when it comes to South Asian presence and realities in Canada.

While it could be argued that studies dealing with general issues of adaptation and settlement of South Asian adults and families do in fact deal with youth issues, however, there is a gap because the focus is from the adult perspective. As mentioned earlier, the only study specifically on South Asian youth issues, albeit suicidal ideation, revealed through our literature search, is the one by Wadhwani (1999). Since it is the only one focusing solely on South Asian youth, it will be dealt with singularly.

Wadhwani’s study focussed on the specific issue of suicide ideation amongst South Asian youth in Canada was prompted by the recent notable increase in suicides amongst South Asian youth (Wadhwani, 1999: 4). The study reveals a disturbing and distressing trend amongst South Asian youth. She reports that:

- 30% of the 104 participants in her study indicated that they had considered suicide;
- of those who considered suicide, 50% thought that "family pressures" were the number one cause or reason for thinking about suicide as an option;
- 60% of her participants cited school as the main source of stress;
- 80% of those who had admitted to having engaged in suicidal thoughts were females;
- 60% of the participants who indicated that they were "always depressed" had considered suicide (Wadhwani, 1999: 77).

The significance of Wadhwani’s study lies in the fact that it is the first one (known to us) that deals specifically with South Asian youth. Her information on the sites of conflict and contestation are useful, especially her section on "To Be Young and Brown in North America-Issues of Identity" (Wadhwani, 1999: 21). The information on Intergenerational Differences, Dating and Marriage are helpful in thinking about factors impacting on South Asian youth settlement and integration.

Most of the existing literature on South Asians in Canada reviewed for the study being undertaken can be broadly or arbitrarily categorized under the following headings:


These categories are not mutually exclusive; however, for the purposes of this study, the literature explored, as mentioned earlier, is arbitrarily categorized only to facilitate discussion.

1. **Literature on immigration, settlement and adaptation**

The literature and especially earlier works on immigration, settlement and adaptation do not take into consideration historical and structural factors impacting on and adaptation patterns (Basran, 1993). The researchers do not examine the reasons for South Asian immigration within the context of colonialism, imperialism and/or capitalism and globalization (Shakir, 1995). Moreover, the researchers do not provide a critical analysis and the implications of immigration or of state policies such as multiculturalism. The earlier writings do not examine the ideology or principles on which the policies are predicated. Some authors seem to assume an inherent neutrality and objectivity in Canadian policies. For example, the immigration policy and practices that prefer educated and skilled immigrants is not questioned. The adverse effects of devaluation, demoralization, unemployment and under-employment are not examined, hence, the undeniable reality of racism is left untouched.

Within this literature on immigration, settlement and adaptation some authors do attempt to negate racist notions of immigrants being a drain on Canada and its social institutions, especially the social services sector, by statistically arguing that immigration is, in fact, economically beneficial to Canada (Kurian, 1991: 425). Many of the authors do not problematize the Canadian institutional policies, programs and structures and their differential impact on South Asians and other immigrant communities. Kurian, for example, states: “While the general successes of Indian immigrants is quite evident, there are some aspects of their life which could be remedied making their lifestyle in tune to life in urban North America.” (Kurian, 1991: 421). Thus, it can be said that many writers and earlier works place the burden of adaptation entirely on new immigrants and not a burden to be shared by Canadian society. Adaptation is not seen as a mutually reciprocal or interactive dynamic between Canadian society and new immigrants, as such most of the earlier works pathologize immigrants facing difficulties. Their focus is on individuals and the difficulties faced by immigrants are analyzed in relation to the specificities of individual situation rather than examining the failure of Canadian society to meet the needs of all its members. Lastly, the earlier works could be described as apolitical in that issues of power, privilege, control and how these are distributed are largely overlooked.

2. **Literature on needs and settlement services**

Literature on needs and settlement services clearly articulate the extent and nature of services needed due to the cultural, linguistic specificities, as well as immigration trends. For example, Tamils being the largest ethno-cultural groups among the broader South Asian community have unique linguistic needs as well as issues arising out of the need to immigrate because of the civil unrest and open warfare in Sri Lanka (CASSA 1994, 1998; CASSA/ SALCI, 1999).

These studies also explore the reasons why mainstream agencies are failing South Asians. They report that mainstream agencies are unable to provide services that are culturally appropriate and sensitive because of systemic racism and language barriers.

The needs outlined by these studies focus namely on employment, language and family issues (CASSA, 1994, 1998 and CASSA/ SALCI, 1999). Therefore, it is found that South Asians do not access mainstream services because clients themselves are very aware that the mainstream...
If there is a need for agencies to understand the cultural needs of all groups how can it be put into practice

Agencies do not understand South Asian culture and this is further exacerbated by the prevalence of racist stereotypes (CASSA/SALCI, 1999).

It is interesting to note that the identified needs seem to remain the same no matter when the study was done; however, the extent of the need seems to increase. The studies on service needs are very useful for policy and programming; however, the continued shortage and inadequacies within existing services persist because of a lack of funding. In fact, it could be argued that the rate of cuts or availability of funding dollars is diametrically opposite to the rate of growth in the demand for settlement services (CASSA, 1998).

Within this political reality of funding restraints existing settlement services are faced with unrealistic expectations from funding organizations to increase efficiency and financial accountability in spite of the doubling or tripling in the need for services. While financial accountability and efficiency are not bad principles to uphold, the implied message is problematic in that it suggests that the settlement sector is not good at matters of money. This perspective sidesteps the more important issues of access, availability and effectiveness of services which are all tied to funding. Instead, as Richmond states, settlement service agencies are being strongly encouraged to forge partnerships and to collaborate (Richmond, 1996). This approach to surviving funding cuts is not very healthy because it does not take into account the inequities in resources that exist among settlement agencies. In a sense this proposed strategy is fostering partnerships among unequals. As Richmond states, there is an irony in this because funding structures are on the one hand encouraging partnerships and on the other encouraging competition among agencies for the limited supply of dollars. In fact, this is quite evident in an example cited by him, bigger and more powerful agencies collaborate with smaller agencies to build up their own at the expense of the smaller agencies (Richmond, 1996: 10). He goes further to say that the funding climate is, in effect, generating fear and a sense of crisis among agencies.

These studies also argue that mainstream agencies are known to make only superficial attempts at addressing the needs of South Asians and other racial minority communities. For example, some mainstream organizations have employed some racial minority staff, but have not made fundamental changes in their policies and structures. In short, these attempts amount to mere tokenism. According to Agnew, even white feminists or organizations run by white feminists end up exercising tokenism because, while they have included some of the interests of South Asian women in their work, they remain structurally unchanged (Agnew, 1993). Thus, as Shakir states, “the cultural/linguistic/racial ‘inappropriateness’ of mainstream services to South Asian immigrant women’s needs is not a case of neglect or oversight, but a manifestation of cultural imperialism”. (Shakir, 1995: 1). As a strategy to transform this, Shakir suggests “that a true model can only be achieved if the very articulation of South Asian women’s needs and experiential reality decenters the mainstream discourse and leads it to develop a new epistemological map which, along with the concrete struggles of the marginalized classes, changes the structural relations of power that exist in Canadian society.” (Shakir, 1995: 2) Therefore, Shakir’s analysis and critique is very helpful in understanding how South Asians in Canada find themselves facing and negotiating problematic institutional policies and programmatic services located in the context of cultural imperialism.

3. Literature on family and women’s issues

Literature on women and family, especially the earlier works, focussed on husband-wife relations, decision-making, structure and changes in the face of a new environment. Most, except Shakir’s, analysis is predicated on the notion that South Asian culture is pre-modern and hence the persistence and perpetuation of patriarchy. Therefore, it is believed by many that cultural traditionalism or pre-modernity is at the center of greater gender inequalities among South Asian families. Thus, many authors hold the view that assimilation and or acculturation of South Asian women into the modern Canadian culture or “Westernization” will lead to gender equality. Implicit
in this position is the assumption that gender equality is a creation of advanced industrial or modern societies. (Kurian, G., 1991; Srivastava, R.P., 1983; Siddique, M., 1974, 1977 and 1983)

Naidoo and Davis deal with what they call transition and duality of the experiential realities of South Asian women in Canada. According to these authors, South Asian women in Canada have an unflinching commitment to their family and home; deeply held values entrenched in their cultural heritage; and they simultaneously exhibit future oriented aspirations which are very contemporary. (Naidoo, J., and Davis, J., 1988).

The problem with many of these writings is that they see gender oppression of South Asian women in Canada as simply being located in South Asian culture. This is not only a simplistic view of gender inequality within South Asian families in Canada, but also very reductionist. Most of these works not only reduce South Asian culture but also ignores gender differences as well as differences among South Asian cultures. The traditional/modernization or westernization dichotomy framework is simplistic in that it is binary and ignores the complexities by treating South Asian women as an unproblematic universal category. These authors also fail to identify the specific ways in which gender inequities and oppression among South Asian families in Canada are uniquely created and maintained by historical factors such as racism, classism and cultural imperialism.

South Asian feminists like Shakir, Srivastava and Ames, challenge the reductionist view mentioned above as well as White socialist feminists by pointing out that their analysis is based on racist stereotypical assumptions of South Asian women being passive victims of oppressive cultural structures like the family (Srivastava, A., and Ames, M., 1993; Shakir, U., 1995). These authors as already cited above highlight the need for a critical analysis of Canada’s multiculturalism policy and racism and how these homogenize differences (Srivastava and Ames, 1993 and Shakir, 1995). Srivastava and Ames and Shakir help us to understand the prevalence and persistence of gender inequities experienced by South Asian women in Canada identifying not only the historical specificity of South Asian women’s gender oppression, but also the impact of cultural imperialism, racism and classism in construction of gender relations in an advanced capitalist society like Canada.

Unlike many studies on issues facing South Asian families, Shakir locates her analysis within a larger reality of disempowerment, marginalization and racism. She contextualizes these in a way that is specific to the historical experience of South Asians rather than a simple manifestation of male violence or patriarchy. By integrating culture, cultural imperialism and racism, Shakir demonstrates that culture is important not only in creating oppression, but also in the social construction of resistance (Shakir, 1995: 9, 16).

Shakir’s work is also important in reminding us that the racist understanding and criticisms of South Asian cultural practices and especially those related to the family and gender oppression should be evaluated according to different criteria from those which apply to White culture. She also reminds us of the importance of challenging the racist view and portrayal of South Asian women as passive by identifying their sites of resistance; also the social construction of resistance. In short, Shakir proposes a more complex conceptualization of South Asian women living in Canada, their cultural, economic, political and social locations, than conveyed in current literature. She helps us challenge the stereotype of passive, impotent South Asian women constantly struggling and battling their cultural heritage or systems and to broaden our perspective of South Asian women as constantly negotiating and re-negotiating their identity and cultural location.

As mentioned earlier, there is very little material on South Asians in Canada, even less on South Asian youth. This disturbing lack of information raises critical questions like—why and what does this gap mean, particularly when one takes into consideration the history of South Asian presence and contributions in Canada. Therefore, it is within this context of a significant lack of Canadian
literature on South Asian youth that this project is being undertaken. It is hoped that this project will assist us with the process of understanding the experiential realities of South Asian youth living in the Greater Metropolitan Area and its surrounding municipalities.

SECTION 3: LOCATING THE RESEARCH AND SOME WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

The immigrant settlement and adaptation process can be particularly trying if the person is young and facing two environments that are dramatically different. However, one must explore these in relation to identity development since the youth are not only confronted with the developmental challenges of adolescence but also adjustment problems as immigrants and intercultural conflicts resulting from value differences between the host culture and the culture of origin (Naidoo, J. 1984; Waski, S.P., Siddique, C.M. and Waski, F.M. 1981). Moreover, the already difficult process of adaptation is exacerbated when the contingencies mentioned above are at work in a racialized society like Canada. Therefore, the pivotal question "Who am I?" during adolescence takes on a myriad of nuances for ethno-cultural and racial minority adolescents. In addition to the question, "Who am I?" asked by all adolescents regardless of ethno-racial or gender identity, for South Asian youth it becomes equally important to ask, "Who am I ethnically?" "Who am I racially?" and "What does it mean to be South Asian in Canada?"

A. Framework For Analysis And Some Underlying Assumptions

Identity is embedded in both psychological and social processes, therefore understanding how South Asian youth deal with questions related to identity development, construction, reconstruction and maintenance become very important in a racialized country like Canada. Moreover, since identity is socially constructed with a complex of psychological processes, identity development must be understood in relation to its social and historical context. Identity formation is "...a process of simultaneous reflections and observations, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself [herself] in the light of what he [she] perceives to be the way in which others judge him [her] in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he [she] judges their way of judging him [her][in the light of how he perceives himself [herself] in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him [her]. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity-consciousness." (Tatum 1997:19).

The underlying assumption from which the researchers enter this work rests on the belief that skin colour racism is a given in Canadian society. Therefore, in Canada, a person's skin colour becomes extremely relevant in how s/he is treated, what s/he can access, what opportunities are available, basically what would be the quality of her/his life. The next contention is that oppression on the basis of skin colour and the domination of certain individuals and or groups of people by others is a reality. Therefore, an integrated anti-racism framework will be employed to understand and report on the issues of adaptation and settlement of South Asian youth in the context of Canadian society. It is an integrated framework because it offers a tool for analyzing and addressing racism and the other interlocking oppressions of ableism, ageism, classism, heterosexism and sexism. The framework is very useful in understanding how the interlocking social constructs and categories of gender, class, ethnicity, and race impact peoples' lives in an overlapping and cumulative manner. It is particularly useful in understanding the complexities of the lives of youth living in a racialized society because "it moves beyond a narrow preoccupation with individual prejudices and discriminatory actions to examine the ways that racist ideas and individual action are entrenched and (un)consciously supported in institutional structures (Dei, G. 1996 : 27).

Another reason for using an integrated anti-racism framework is because it helps to understand how differences affect and mediate people's lives while also facilitating a discussion on how we can within our differences create solidarity regardless of colour, culture, sexual orientation or
abilities and capacities. This framework, according to Dei, also helps to "explore how difference is named, lived, experienced, imagined and acknowledged ..... define, conceptualize, and perceive "difference" from the standpoint of those who occupy the margins of society and continually have to resist their marginality through collective action." (Dei, 1996 : 37).

This framework also facilitates the exploration of South Asian intra-group similarities and differences as in the case of Tamil youth who have a different pre-immigration experience of civil war unlike the rest of the South Asian community. In other words, the integrated anti-racism framework helps one to examine the heterogeneity within the larger collective group known as South Asian without flattening its diversity as is often the case within a racist paradigm. The framework also allows for examining the impact and implications of religion as in the case of Muslim and Sikh youth. The data will be analyzed in terms of the principle factors in the marginalization of South Asian youth and their identity development, construction and reconstruction in Canada as they cope with the challenges of settlement and integration.

Having outlined why an integrated anti-racism framework is used, it would be amiss not to comment even if it is briefly on the problems of language. It should, however, be stated briefly, that language of colour and "race" is inappropriate and misleading. The term "race" is misleading because it is based on erroneous biological assumptions that physical differences such as skin colour, facial features including hair colour and texture are somehow related to intellectual, moral or cultural superiority or inferiority. "Race," from an integrated anti-racism framework, is a socially constructed concept that has no basis in biological reality. It is rather a construct in that it derives its meaning and significance from its social definition that affects the lives of members of the worlds’ majority people/racial minorities (Henry et al 2000).

Moreover, to refer to groups who have little or no institutional power as visible minority or people of colour is objectionable not because they are loaded terms but also because every person has colour, White being a colour just as much as Black or Brown. To confine the term to the so-called "non-White" members of society is perhaps another manifestation of unconscious racism because it suggests that such a person is reducible to her/his colour and the only significant feature of this person. It should be made clear that this does not suggest that a colour-blind approach be taken because it is also problematic in a racialized society.

Members of racial minority groups are also very aware of sometimes being referred to by the seemingly less offensive term, immigrant. This may be less offensive, however, it is problematic in that it is misleading because Canadian history is a history of successive waves of immigration. The term immigrant is appropriate, as it will be used in this report, when referring to the fact that someone is a recent arrival, according to government policies, ‘recent’ refers to up to three years. It can be argued that it is also quite acceptable if the term were strictly used, regardless of colour, to refer to members, of Canadian society that are not naturalized or have not gone through the legal process of becoming Canadian citizens. Language of colour becomes a problem when the term immigrant is indiscriminately applied to members of racial minority groups regardless of their length of stay or settlement in Canada.

The point of taking time to outline some concerns with language was to show that apparently innocent and even well intentioned terms contain an ideological bias and that there is always the potential in these terms to be highly offensive to those they are meant to describe. In light of the above, for the purposes of this study the term skin-colour will be used instead of "race" since skin-colour carriers with it more than the significance of "colour" alone. Wherever necessary to make a particular point the term "race" will be used with caution. With reference to using the term "immigrant," it is used as it is applied to recent arrivals who qualify for services under the ISAP program or as stated above when referring to non-Canadian citizens regardless of racial or cultural identity.

SECTION 4: METHODOLOGY
Methodologically, we employed a qualitative research approach because it would be most appropriate in facilitating an exploration of the dialectical relationship between the culture of racial minority youth and the dominant mainstream culture, but also the coping and survival strategies engaged by South Asian youth in their own words. The specific qualitative method of inquiry employed was focus group discussions.

A Project Advisory Committee was set up to provide guidance and direction to the researcher; outreach in the community; and help in recruiting participants. Once consent forms and publicity materials were ready, 30 organizations (settlement agencies, schools, community colleges and universities) were contacted to help in recruiting participants.

There were a total of 13 focus groups that were actually held – 6 with girls, 5 with boys, one with parents alone and one mixed group with parents and youth. Of the 13 groups, 4 were pilot groups, which helped us in finalizing the discussion guide, and for the purposes of analysis, data from 9 focus groups has been used.

The Project Advisory Committee was very helpful in developing the discussion questions. The questions were open-ended and used language that was easily understandable. It allowed the participants to really engage in a dialogue with each other and the facilitator. It also allowed room for probing and facilitated a fuller understanding of the issues and concerns. The participants also completed a brief questionnaire that helped us develop a socio-cultural profile.

The data analysis involved several steps. Firstly, to transcribe the focus group discussions. Secondly, to summarize the quantitative data and attach numerical values to assist with developing the participant profile. Thirdly, the analysis entailed the structuring and coding of the narrative data. We engaged a flexible framework directed by the words of the youth and parents. The data was then arranged and cross-referenced according to the themes that emerged from the narratives.

Some Reflections on the Process

The project has meant experiencing excitement, anxiety and frustration. The excitement was largely evoked by the youth who shared their experiences openly and candidly. It is quite a privilege to be trusted by the youth. Therefore, when working with participants of any research, but especially youth and members of marginalized and disenfranchised groups, this trust was handled with considerable respect.

Points of tension and frustration came largely from the fact that often researchers are required to work with a methodology and tools for their study on criteria and principles established by persons outside the experience of the principal participants of the study. However, the biggest challenges we experienced were in recruiting participants because:

- of having to recruit youth that fit tightly into the age criteria (16-24) together with the simultaneous requirements pertaining to their immigrant history;
- we could not plug into existing programs since there are very few services for them; when there were some youth programs, there seemed to be a lack of trust or level of disengagement experienced by both the youth and staff of various agencies and organizations;
- many youth had to work and could not make it if they were called in for work;
- some youth were not allowed to stay after school by their parents; and
- entry into some of the communities was not easy;
We share these reflections with the hope that some of these challenges will be addressed in the future by policies, programming and by changing some of the ways in which we design and do research with some communities and population groups.

SECTION 5: FINDINGS – Demographics, Profile and Findings and Discussion

A. Demographic Highlights Of South Asians In the GTA

- South Asians constitute the second largest visible minority community (24.7%) or 329,840 in the GTA. (CASSA/SALCI, 1999: 4)
- South Asians represent 8% of Ontario's population. (CASSA/SALCI, 1999: 4)
- There are 49,305 South Asian youth between the ages of 15 and 24 with a majority 58.1% of the youth arriving between 1991-1996 (CMA Toronto, Census: 1996).
- The employment to population rate for South Asian youth, 15-24 years is 37%, with 35% for females and 40% for males. (CMA Toronto, Census: 1996).
- The unemployment rate for South Asian youth, 15-24 years is 24%, with 27% for females and 22% for males. (CMA Toronto, Census: 1996 in CASSA/SALCI, 1999: 8).
- The unemployment rate for South Asian youth is about 22% while the rate for youth in general is about 15%. (Metro Toronto: Access and Equity Centre, 1996)
- South Asians speak many languages – Bengali, Gujarati, Farsi, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Urdu, to name but a few. (CASSA/SALCI, 1999: 4)
- A study done by the Toronto Star found that 38% of South Asians surveyed earn less than $30,000 per year. Of these South Asians earning less than $30,000, 15% earn under $20,000 with only 10% earning more than $75,000 per year. (CASSA/SALCI, 1999: 5).  

A. Participant Profile

There were a total of 94 youth that participated in the project of which 31 were part of the pilot focus groups and the remaining 63 were in the focus groups. The data gathered from the 63 youth was analyzed and used to produce this report. A brief profile is given below:-

- Of the total number of 63 participants, there were 32 females (50.8%) and 31 males (49.2%).
- The majority of the youth were between the ages of 16-18, with 18 (28.6%) being female and 20 (31.7%) being male. Overall age breakdown reflects the fact that most of the participants, both males and females were in grades 11-13.
- 18 females and 14 males totaling 32 (50.8%) of the participants were from Sri Lanka. The next largest representation, 11 (17.5%) or 5 females and 6 males were from India; followed by 5 females and 5 males totaling 10 (15.9%) from Pakistan; with 2 (3.2%) males being from Kenya; with 1 (1.6%) female each from Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia.
- In line with the above, 32 (50.8%) youth indicated that their mother tongue was Tamil. There were 13 (20.6%) of the youth who were Urdu speaking; 7 (11.1%) who spoke Punjabi; 2 (3.2%) who spoke Gujarati and only 1 (1.6%) each for Bengali, Hindi, Katchi and Sindhi language groups.
- Religious representation amongst the participants, 31 (49.2%) were of the Hindu faith; 16 (25.4%) were Muslim (religion was Islam); 9 (14.3%) were Sikh and 2 (3.2%) were Christian.
- With regards to the parents' level of education, the youth indicated that 55 or 44% of their parents had post-secondary education. Of the 55, 30 (24%) were fathers and 25 (20%) were mothers. The percentage at the lowest level of
education, that is, only some high school education, was greater for the mothers; 19 (15%) compared to 17 (13.5%) for the fathers.

- Of the 115 parents who are in Canada with the children, 38 (33%) of the fathers and 22 (19%) of the mothers were working. Only 4 (3.5%) of the fathers were not working outside the home as compared to about 19 mothers (17%).
- 24 (38.1%) were from a nuclear family; 7 (11.1%) were from extended families; 1 (1.6%) was from a single, sole parent family and the remaining 4 (6.3%) indicated ‘other’ without explaining what ‘other’ meant.

C. Highlights from Focus Groups: Findings and Discussion

As human beings we are undoubtedly social and in need of a sense of belonging from the day we are born till the day we die. This need is most pressing in our adolescence, when we are ‘growing up’, trying to find our place in this world as potential adults, to define who we are and where we belong in this world order. South Asian youth involved in this study shared their stories about how they deal with the questions of identity and belonging as they adapt to a new culture.

Negotiating Identities: What the participants had to say about Identity: Culture and Colour

Male: I speak Punjabi all the time. … I am proud of my culture. If I’m going to speak English and act like a White person, that ain’t going to make me White, right. … So, I just say, you know what, if you’re going to be classified by culture or your colour, represent your culture all the way.

Female: Ultimately it is about a person making a choice. Sometimes one decides to wear it in spite of your parents not wearing it because of your own consciousness of your religious identity.

The participants have brought all the dimensions of racialization – language, colour of skin and culture – into focus and have used them almost as interchangeable constructs. This reflects the fact that racial minorities face prejudice and discrimination on account of the fact that they speak differently, dress differently, have a different skin colour and follow different religious and social customs. All these, which are an integral part of their cultural identity makes them ‘targets’ for racist behavior, and consequently are seen as key to pride in one’s cultural identity. As a response to racism and the everyday indignities that they face in everyday encounters with the dominant culture the youth adopt traditional dress, for example, Muslim girls who choose to wear the “hijab”, or Punjabi youth who take pride in speaking their mother tongue as a form of resistance. The youth do in fact, begin to focus on their cultural identity of origin in the face of racism as explained by Tatum (Tatum, 1992: 15). Tatum explains that this is in keeping with Parham’s Immersion/Emersion stage of identity which is “characterized by the simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one’s racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness.” (Ibid).

The educational institution is often the first place where the youth encounter skin-colour racism. The schoolrooms and playgrounds become arenas where visible minority youth learn more than science and basketball – they learn that no matter what their skills and capabilities are they will always be seen as inferior because of the colour of their skin. These narratives clearly illustrate that children from the South Asian community are targets of racial harassment, which includes racial slurs, ethnic and racial jokes, threats and physical assaults. What they also illustrate is that the youth have had to come up with their own responses to this form of harassment. There were no quoted instances of how institutions or authority figures such as teachers dealt with such incidents.

Male: We support each other, doesn’t matter what kind of South Asian you are. We get in there to help our guys out even when they are not part of our small group. I can remember even in
school...there were like 20 White guys, they were making fun of us. They were like calling us Pakis and stuff. And we just jumped them.

The youth informed us that they had to come up with their own strategies to deal with harassment in schools because of a general unwillingness to report racial conflict, harassment or violence since principals, teachers and other educational officers are hesitant to deal with racism. This is supported by McCaskell who reported that teachers were reluctant to report racist incidents because they did not want to be seen as lacking control over their classes; department heads did not report them because it "looked bad"; principals were reluctant to report them because they reflected negatively on their school; and superintendents did not report them because they were supposed to provide leadership. (McCaskell, 1993).

Male: If you are Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, you may have frictions between each other...but if an outside group, say like, West Indian or Black people come or White people come, or Chinese people come and try to mess with any one of us, they are all going to combine and they are all going to go after that group.

Even though under normal circumstances the diverse South Asian ethno-cultural groups see themselves as being culturally distinct and not part of a 'homogeneous' South Asian community, when threatened by another racial group they see their coming together as the best defense available to them against White supremacy and everyday racist harassment. Therefore, this coming together is also how individual youth come to adopt a consciousness of the collective South Asian identity. Thus, the collective known as South Asian is constructed through a dynamic created by both internal and external factors namely inter-racial relations of dominance/subordination or the dialectical nature of oppression and activism (Hill Collins, 1990:95). According to Tatum this happens in response to "a society where racial-group membership is emphasized, the development of a racial identity will occur in some form in everyone. Given the dominant/subordinate relationship of Whites and people of color in this society, however, it is not surprising that this developmental process will unfold in different ways. ... Faced with the reality that he or she cannot truly be White, the individual is forced to focus on his or her identity as a member of a group targeted by racism." (Tatum, 1992: 14-15).

All we want is to fit in...

Male: Because when people from outside come here and they don't have a job...they go out and do drugs, gangs and violence and everything. I think the reason they try to do that is cause they try to fit in. Because a lot of people are not willing to accept you, ... it would click in your head, that it seems people here do drugs, they are in gangs, they go clubbing, whatever. So, you think, in order to fit in, you must do all of these things.

Male: But they should know themselves that, if I have to do that to fit in, then that's not worth it. But they want to fit in so badly....

The participants in the study clearly reveal the limited options that South Asian youth have in terms of making life choices and the tremendous pressure they face to "be cool" or "one of the gang". Faced with racist attitudes and racial harassment, the youth are drawn towards other racial minority youth, namely Black youth, who are respected or even feared by the dominant group. Belonging to or becoming a part of this 'select' club often brings in "power" and "privileges" which is other wise denied because of the colour of their skin. It is not surprising then that the youth find the pressure to belong to this group difficult to counter or resist since male youths know that they are "respected" for the real or perceived physical strength that these groups supposedly have; 'supposedly have' because of prevalent stereotypes that are embedded in racism. Therefore, several youth spoke of adopting elements of pop culture associated with the Black youth culture because it is the "hip thing to do", hence many South Asian youth were described
as being "Black Wannabes." The disturbing reality is that many racial minority youth are left to resort to physical means to solving problems that should be addressed systemically. This also reveals that they are responding to a broader culture which sanctions physical and psychological violence to the point that it fosters fear and implicitly supports violence as a solution.

Th girls, however, had a different perspective. While the boys clearly stated that they come together regardless of their inherent diversity, the girls seem to face the challenge of getting accepted by their own cultural group as well as the dominant White group. The girls did not face overt physical violence. Some of the females who spent a longer time in Canada expressed that they had strived so hard to 'fit in' and be 'accepted' that they feared that any attempt on their part to support the newcomers might lead to exclusion from the group that they have strived so hard to fit into and be accepted by. This is also due to the socialization process that young South Asian girls go through where they are told in many ways that it is not desirable to 'stand out' in a crowd or to draw attention to themselves. In a society dominated by Whites, this might get translated into acquiring some kind of pseudo-White status. This dual consciousness in many South Asian youth results when they, "become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection while hiding a self-defined standpoint from the prying eyes of dominant groups" as explained by Hill Collins. (Hill Collins, 1990:91).

It is also evident from the study that youth attending schools that have a significant number of South Asian students are able to adapt and fit in better than youth attending White majority schools. Moreover, the youth in schools where South Asians are in the majority expressed a sense of confidence and a stronger self-concept as opposed to exhibiting internalized inferiority. Plus youth who have been in Canada longer start playing a kind of mentor role for the newcomers.

Male: *For me, the school that I go to is very multi-cultural and its kind of really interesting to be in a school of this sort because you feel confident,…*

Female: *…you're new in the country and you have no one, if you have someone who talks your language and then could translate stuff for you its much easier for you to communicate with other people. And you have some kind of support rather than being alone.*

Some schools seem to have recognized the very important role that peers from similar backgrounds/cultures can play. Pairing a new student with another student who acts like a cultural broker, a ‘buddy’, and makes the process of settling in and making sense of the new environment much easier.

The youth demonstrated agency as powerful mediators in negotiating their identities during the process of controlled enculturation/acculturation to maintain a duality or bicultural identity through their dual consciousness. They also exhibited a critical understanding of media as an apparatus of the ruling class. Many of the participants saw television, in particular and the media in general, as perpetuating many stereotypes that already exist about minority ethno-racial or ethno-cultural and religious groups. With this knowledge and understanding of media as part and parcel of the "ideological apparatuses of the society" (Smith, 1987:17) the youth were critical consumers of the messages the media put out. The youth were very clear how this exclusion meant that their ethno-cultural or indigenous knowledge, values and beliefs were not recognized as having a part in developing a contemporary Canadian identity. Many youth who demonstrated this awareness did however, acknowledge how media in general, and television in particular, came through as a powerful socializing agent. Some participants, as revealed by the following words, felt that watching television had helped them learn how to speak, how to act, and basically behave like a 'typical teenager'.


Male: It was basically see what the culture and the ways are - the behaviour - on the TV and I saw all these things,...I was, you know, able to adjust quite easily

Parents just don't understand...

Female: I think a lot of Indian families, South Asian families for that matter, don't understand the youth or today's culture. They just go back into their days when they were young and say, we couldn't do this when we were your age so why should you be able to do it.

Male: I think that parents need to understand what you're going through in school. You are going through different stuff from there, that they need to change their ways too, a little.

The issues revolving around conflicts between parents and children due to the cultural differences between the country of origin and Canada came up more in the female groups. This is understandable given that in the South Asian tradition it is the women and the girls who are seen as the 'custodians' of family values and culture. Consequently, parents are more anxious about their daughters retaining traditional values and customs. As an extension of the double standards that prevail in patriarchal societies, many male siblings within the South Asian culture also seem to appropriate the role of parents when it comes to deciding what is "acceptable" for their sisters and cousins. However, patriarchal dynamics within immigrant families must be understood in relation to racism and cultural hegemony. Often excessive insistence and adherence to "culture" and "tradition" is a reflection of relations of power in Canada as opposed to something intrinsic to the culture of origin or its traditions, in this case, South Asian culture being asserted or valorized. Altered notions of "western" culture and values are pitted against "our culture and traditions" not from naivete but in response to power relations and de-legitimization and the threat of losing one's identity. Therefore, many South Asian parents here are reacting to this perceived threat of cultural eradication when imposing "excessive" demands on their children.

Male: Like she [his sister] can't go to school wearing like a mini skirt and like a little top that shows her stomach, because I know how guys think, too, right. And I refuse to let her wear that.

Parents, as evidenced by the words below, also seem to be seeking constant affirmation from their peers that they have been 'good' parents and have done a good job of raising their children with their culture and traditional values intact.

Female: ...you're the middle class, working folks, you know you don't want your children to go astray because you have a reputation to keep.

This is partly due to a desire to recapture some of the lost social and economic status through children who are not just doing well, academically or professionally, but also have retained traditional values. The manifestation of this could range from dressing appropriately, to speaking the mother tongue, to knowledge of religion, scriptures, to marrying the girl/boy that the parents choose. The greater the difference between the economic circumstances in the country of origin and Canada, the greater the level of discomfort and conflict because of the perceived loss of power and control over their children who are seen as becoming something else by adapting more rapidly to the new culture.

This is also a reflection of parental anxiety that if the children become too well adapted into the Canadian culture, they will be 'abandoned' to institutionalized care facilities, such as homes for the aged, a very "western" concept. Therefore, the parents also want to control the friendships and peer group contacts that the children make. They want to control and limit external/western
influence by encouraging friendships to be maintained within one's own ethno-cultural linguistic group or the larger South Asian community.

Male: *Its diverse out here. They somehow don't want us to blend, unless we are blending with people they like, you know.*

Female: *I can have Indian friends over, not others.*

Parents who participated in the study felt that they should impose some restrictions on where the children went, with whom and for how long. While some parents were of the opinion that the children should go straight to school and come back home. Others felt that some exposure to the larger society was good as long as they (the parents) had control over the process of acculturation. This need to maintain parental control should be understood in the context of the broader "immigrant" experience. In other words, it is important to understand this inter-generational discourse or the inter-generational gap in the South Asian community from the perspective that there is a gap between mainstream cultural-social values in relation to power as experienced by "immigrant" parents in their everyday realities in Canada. In reality, parents in the face of external forces of dominance have to legitimize their values and the children/youth are simultaneously having to negotiate and "construct" a new reality that is inclusive of them in Canada. In essence, both the parents and their children/youth are reacting to structures of dominance. Parents are reacting to dominant social values structures that are culturally specific to "western" society and the youth are reacting to parental as well as societal structures of domination. Ironically, within this process, larger societal structures such as the media and education tend to "de-legitimize" and weaken parental structures.

There was greater parental concern about the daughters with many of them expressing the opinion that they would be reluctant to let their daughters go out alone, even if it is to the library. In addition to the gender dimension, there is also clearly a religious dimension to the experience of conflicts within the home arising out of cultural differences. Girls from Muslim families seem to face the maximum parental pressure, though there are significant differences from one family to the next. The girls felt tremendous pressure since they have to fit into a certain mould to be accepted among their peers and at the same time, adopt a completely opposite set of behaviors for their parents. One of the coping mechanisms that girls seem to develop to survive this schizophrenic kind of existence is to start living dual lives.

Female: *I know some people who come to school and change the way they dress cause they don’t, dress up like that when they come out of [their] house because of their parents. They come to school and they change the way they look and everything. They put their makeup. Yeah, like they have makeup stored like in their lockers and they just come to school plain and they would never do all that stuff, at home.*

There has been no documentation of what effects this has on the mental health of the girls but participants in the study did indicate that ‘feeling stressed out’ or depressed was not unusual as stated by several female youth.

Female: *It’s really hard for the girls. Do you know how many of the girls are depressed.* (General agreement in the group).

Coming from a culture where the concept of dating did not exist when they were growing up and even today it is not really common practice, parents have a hard time dealing with relationships that their children have with the opposite sex. Firstly, it means acknowledging the growing sexuality and sexual awareness of the children. Secondly, it seems to symbolize an erosion of cultural values and all that is ‘bad and wild’ about western culture. Lastly, coming from a culture where arranged marriages are still very much the norm, the parents are concerned that the
children might select their own partners, especially someone from a different ethno-cultural, racial or religious background. Again, as mentioned earlier, this should be understood from the perspective that the parents are experiencing added pressure with regards to dominant culture and the loss of power and the fear associated with their children potentially losing their ethno-cultural identity.

However, there were also examples given where the parents while not being completely supportive or understanding, still did not think that the only response was to disown the child. They are working together at finding a more positive outcome. Some of the participants also suggested that the children might be underestimating and pre-judging the parents.

Female: Like a friend of mine, her parents didn’t kick her out of the house, they were supportive. Okay, you were stupid, you made a mistake, you were young, it’s over with. Let’s just start fresh. And they know she’s still with the guy, there’s no point in breaking the relationship now that you’ve gone so far. So might as well talk, and in a couple of years get married.

There is also evidence that parents are also trying to change and adapt to the new culture with different norms on many issues including parenting and the relationship between parents and children. Sometimes, when there is more than one child in the family, the older children rebel and this may lead the parents to realign their expectations.

Female: My parents have changed because they realize that... Things aren’t the way they are back home

The parents, who participated in this study, came through as being very aware of the pressures that the children were feeling. Yet they were torn between what they had been brought up to believe was right and had accepted unquestioningly and the need to justify any restrictions they may place on their children in terms of clothing or food or friendships etc. Some of the parents felt that they were engaged in a losing battle by stressing values such as delaying gratification, perseverance, hard work and persistence. Values they (the parents) believe will help their children to overcome barriers since some their children did not share the thinking that these values were enough to address racism. Parents who are still struggling to find economic security expressed that they find it difficult to meet some of the expectations the children might have in terms of their life style.

The children were made fully aware of the difficulties the parents were facing and the reasons for continuing to stay in Canada in spite of the problems and challenges. In fact, the children were often told that the reason the parents were willing to go through all these hardships and indignities is so that they (the children) can have a better life here, instilling in them a sense of responsibility and obligation. Perhaps it is this strong sense of indebtedness to the parents that helps to keep the family together and retain cultural identity.

Some parents expressed that the children needed advice but would be reluctant to take it from parents who were seen as being too old or out of touch with the way things happen in Canada. In the process of resettlement and trying to fit into the new culture parents in the face of external realities imposed by the dominant culture lose some of the traditional authority and the children start looking elsewhere for positive role models. But there is still a lot of reluctance to seeking counselling or accessing programs that would help parents and youth to ease adaptation and settlement. The reluctance is largely based on a lack of confidence in the programs designed and developed within the structures of the dominant society to have the capacity and ability to understand the cultural values and beliefs of those considered "outsiders" to the system and society. Moreover, both the parents and youth believed that their culture will be automatically deemed as problematic rather than locating the difficulties within the context of the complex "immigrant" experience as mentioned earlier. Several youth expressed that often the suggested
solution to their problems was to leave home which was seen as an entrenched authoritarian environment beyond change. This according to many youth and their parents was untenable and totally unacceptable.

The parents are sensitive to the fact that the children often had very little say in the decision to immigrate and in most cases were very reluctant to leave the home country and all that was friendly and familiar for something that was unfamiliar and at times, overtly hostile.

Father: ...after coming here they face such a different environment and so many stress and strains here that they can't cope with that. It is a shock and if we pressurize him more, he will break...

My mom is more understanding...

Even within the parental relationship, there are differences in the way mothers and fathers deal with parenting issues. Mothers are usually referred to as the emotional support, the mediator, the buffer between the children and the father, and often as someone the youth feel closer to and more comfortable in discussing any problems that they might be facing. The mothers traditionally play this role in many South Asian families and even if they are also working outside the home, are still seen as being responsible for the upbringing of the children and will often get blamed for any rebellion on part of the children.

Female: Yeah, I think my father is more strict than my mother. My mom’s, more into, they’re young now, so if they’re not going to go to the movies now, when are they going to go to the movies. If they are not going to wear the clothes now, when are they. Not that she promotes it, she’s more liberal.

Male: ... like my mom knows I guess all of my friends. And she knows who I hang out with and who I had a fight with, or whatever. Like my mom’s sort of close to me so she knows certain aspects of life pretty well.

Across all participants, male and female, as well as across all ethnic and religious backgrounds participants reported that it is the mother who is the person they would feel more comfortable talking. Even going so far as to say that at times the mother knows about their friends, especially those of the opposite sex but would not tell the fathers. So it seems like the mothers are not averse to doing some deception of their own on behalf of the children!

I don’t want to become a doctor....

Many parents are willing to experience downward mobility in their careers and social status as they see it as a sacrifice they are making to ensure a better future for their children. Even when parents had come here due to other factors such as civil war or conflict in the home country, they felt that the children had gained because Canada had better educational facilities than the home country.

Father: So purpose of coming to this country is all for the betterment of the career opportunities for children.

Mother: ...in Canada the choice is more varied and moreover technology, the application of technology in learning, no way we can compare to Canada.

This translates into a lot of pressure on the kids to perform well academically. There is also the expectation that the children will go into careers that are valued in their community. Children who
want to pursue other careers other than professional courses or computer technology find that parents are not very supportive.

**Male:** Our parents want us to have like office jobs because the jobs they have now are, they have the low jobs.

**Male:** How you are doing at school is always a big impact. Because remember, that's the main reason all of our families came here.

**Male:** ...want their children to go into an educated career instead of athletic career, right. So, and if the kids want to go into an athletic career, they don't support them enough.

Many of the girls expressed the desire to enter into careers that are not traditionally seen as being available to or expected of girls. It also raises the question of whether the girls would have been able to have such non-traditional career aspirations if they had remained in their home country.

**Female:** I want to be computer teacher.

**Female:** I want to be an air force pilot.

**Oh my god! You can speak English!**

Language and the many prejudices around whether and how you speak English are one of the major issues that children from racial minority groups have to face in school. It is also a way in which the system distinguishes and discriminates. Aptitude and skills tests that are not appropriate for someone who comes from a different country and a different educational system are used to and often students of South Asian origin are denied access to advanced level courses based on these tests.

**Male:** They see a brown person who doesn't speak English well and think that all brown people can't speak. They'll stick them in ESL [English as Second Language].

**Male:** They just look at your English knowledge and they'll put you in ESL for other subjects too.

There is also a tendency for counsellors and teachers to have lower expectations from these students. Often, the counsellors seem to encourage these students to think about alternatives to university education such as community colleges or trade schools even when the children have good test scores and overall good grades, reflecting the racism that is so ingrained in the White Canadian consciousness. It is also very ironic, because most participants in the study stated 'better educational opportunities' as the reason for immigrating to Canada.

**Male:** They took my tests in math and English, my scores were well above average. The counsellor told me you should go into community college and maybe handi-work is good for you

In recent years, the largest category of immigrants from South Asia has been the 'independent' or 'skilled worker' category. Thus, increasingly these children are coming from families where the parents are educated, often very highly educated, and place a great deal of emphasis on education as a way to better one's position in life and society. Unless, counsellors and teachers recognize the importance that is placed on education as a vehicle for upward mobility and increased life chances, South Asian youth will not get a fair deal out of this education system which is seen as having so much to offer.
The participants also offered some wonderful insights about how the curriculum content and design could help in dealing with some of the racism and prejudices that exist because there is very little knowledge or understanding about racial minorities and their contributions to Canada. This brings up the very critical question: what role do we see the education system playing in building a nation that is inclusive, equitable and accepting of all minorities?

Female: We should learn about different cultures, their countries, their histories, their importance in the world. I'm not going to stop a person on the street, you know, I'm Pakistani and this is my culture... You seem to learn it at school, that's the general thing.

Even schools that have a number of students from a specific ethnic community because of their location do not have courses for the mother tongue. Even if they are offered, they are offered on Saturdays and not as part of regular day school – almost like an extracurricular option. Also, many of the students work weekends making it difficult for them to attend these classes.

Male: Like West Humber, at least 65-70% of the school was Punjabi, right. Like TCI, there's a lot of Punjabis there too. I think they should, like they have Spanish courses.

Male: ... because Spanish is not an official language of Canada, so why not Punjabi.

Even in other activities like sports, the schools often do not offer options that the South Asian youth excel in such as cricket or soccer as opposed to hockey, football or basketball. The youth also pointed out that sporting activities were largely limited to competitive sports. Students who could compete for their schools had access to space and sports equipment thus leaving youth simply interested in "having a good time" and not being necessarily part of specific organized activities such as physical education or competitive sports with other youth no access.

Cultural stereotypes are reinforced by racist behaviour on part of teachers. No amount of anti-racist policy statements can counter the powerful impact of seeing people who are considered role models behaving in a discriminatory manner.

Female: ...sometimes they don't know how to explain to class, right. So, he just embarrass everyone in front of the class.

Male: I don't think any teacher who sits in a class and hands out assignments and expects them back the day or the day after who doesn't know what your real life is... after 3:00 you are working 12:00 in the morning or whatever. He doesn't know what you are going through. But he expects his work done just because that what he gets paid for. He doesn't care what you going through, right.

According to some students, sometimes, the teachers are not racially consciously discriminatory but they may place demands on the students without being aware of the special needs and challenges faced by these students. Students also demonstrated an understanding of how racial minority teachers who could be positive role models to the youth are often themselves victims of discrimination not just from the system but are also seen as being powerless in countering racist behavior from the students, as revealed in the following words.

Male: ...he's an Indian teacher. And all the students are really very bad with him, even [saying] things like shut up stupid, they just don't listen to him.

At the same time, many of the participants also felt that the school system was very good here in spite of all its limitations. They feel that the schools here offered more choices in terms of courses
one could take and there was not so much emphasis on performance in standardized exams and ranking the students on the basis of the academic performance.

**Male:** I love the access that we have here, the electoral options and things like that, I love the opportunities that are here

The youth also shared experiences of having teachers who were supportive and the difference this made in the process of adaptation.

**Male:** I had a nice teacher. He was really nice – he doesn’t look like he was going to come after you – he tells you everything word by word so we could understand.

**Female:** It helps when you talk to teachers, ask them if you will be able to handle the course and they help you after school.

These stories serve to focus on the critical role that the educational institutions and the teachers play in this phase of their lives and how efforts to make schools safer for children from minority groups needs to become a priority.

All the participants in the study have learned to cope and to find "happiness" through their "dual consciousness" prompted by their lived experiences in their new environment. For some, Canada has provided opportunities that were not available in the home country. Though many of them have been here for many years, many sadly expressed that a sense of belonging is still missing. Canada is not yet home.

**SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS**

Freedom to speak one’s language, practice one’s culture and religion are enshrined in various human rights legislation and policies at both the provincial and federal levels. As Canadians, we are bringing up our children with the belief that, no matter who you are, regardless of class, race, or gender you have equal access to Canadian political processes and services within the economic, education, health and social sectors. Yet the experiences of South Asian youth participating in this study bear the hallmarks of a fundamentally inegalitarian society. The experiences of South Asian youth reveal that the processes of injustices are at work despite the professed ideology of egalitarianism and meritocracy. This could only persist through an entrenched and rooted ideology of language superiority and cultural supremacy buttressed by the established “ideological apparatuses of society” (Smith, 1987: 17), such as education and media in a racialized society.

Skin-colour racism and discrimination is the most powerful social reality that compels them to become conscious of their status as “other” and to survive the accompanying devaluation many youth develop knowledge of and pride in their cultural, racial and religious identity as a means ofgrounding themselves. This experience of discrimination was also a very powerful unifier as experienced and expressed by South Asian youth. The experiences related to being marginalized took precedence over other difficulties that are specific to particular ethno-linguistic or ethno-religious or national origin and pre-immigration history. Regardless of pre-immigration history, ethno-linguistic or cultural differences, overwhelmingly, the youth revealed that the issues related to skin-colour racism and discrimination were of paramount interest to them not the “uniqueness” of the diversity within the broader South Asian community.

The youth articulate and analyze the tensions within their dual or bifurcated consciousness generated by the conflict between how they see their culture and themselves and how they are perceived and treated by the dominant culture. The comments of the youth clearly reveal what strikes them as unjust and how they have come up with strategies to survive. They demonstrate
an understanding of the material barriers and existential experiences of everyday indignities in their everyday encounters. Some Muslim female youth and Sikh males involved in this study said that sometimes they find themselves having to comply with two competing values systems. On the one hand their religious requirements while simultaneously having to meet their own need to fit in the larger youth culture within the Canadian context. South Asian youth have come up with creative ways to manage these competing demands. They see themselves as being in the process of imbibing two systems of values and expectations leading to an emerging bi-culturality.

No significant differences were found in educational expectations for males and females. Females expressed interest in “non-gendered” careers. This reveals the diversity of lived realities within South Asian women and challenges the commonly held stereotype of South Asian women being oppressed and restricted. An outdated stereotype that could have serious negative implications for youth seeking direction from teachers and guidance counselors who might hold the view that South Asian culture is homogeneously traditionalist and sexist. Muslim females also expressed a strong sense of agency that came across through their comments about wearing the hijab. Some of the Muslim young women insisted that wearing a hijab was based on choice and freedom to decide as well as religious pride and faith and not solely because their religion expects women to be modest. Their decision was based on rejecting external definitions and the controlling images of Muslim women by the media. Hence the youth are engaged in constructing independent self-definitions as a form of resistance and self-valuation reflecting the dialectical nature of oppression and activism. (Hill Collins, 1990:95)

In the face of these experiences South Asian youth have devised strategies to cope with a sense of realism and pragmatism to help them live up to their parents’ expectations. Expectations they think they must honour because of the sacrifices their parents made by immigrating and the difficulties and hardships their parents’ endure in the name of doing everything within their capacity to ensure success for their children in a society where there is very little hope for themselves. The youth revealed an acute awareness of their parents struggle to maintain their positional power as parents in spite of odds being stacked against them. Both youth and their parents find themselves experiencing shifts in their respective roles within the family and especially in the outside world. In the face of barriers such as language and unfamiliarity with mainstream institutions, youth often find themselves in the position of intermediary, translator, interpreter and negotiator for or on behalf of their parents. Some parents can only access mainstream institutions with their children as cultural brokers. Without the assistance of their children they are at a risk of being very isolated. This creates awkwardness for the youth and places an unwarranted burden on them. Parents on the other hand find their power, authority and ability to control their youth somewhat compromised. Needless to say, this experience of shifting roles places both parents and youth at risk with profound implications for family dynamics. It is these differences in the existential realities between South Asian parents and children that exacerbate the already challenging process of adaptation and settlement for youth and their families, hence the inter-generational challenges. However, a sense of unmitigated duty and obligation seems to keep the family in check or survive with complex challenges and great difficulty in a new country as all members try to establish a sense of home.

The role of parental expectations is something all youth have to deal with, however, in the case of South Asian youth this takes on special significance. The youth are under tremendous pressure to succeed because their parents endure many unwarranted burdens especially when seeking access to employment in a society that does not recognize their credentials and experience. It is within this reality that many South Asian parents tend to assert “excessive control.” In the face of everyday struggles imposed by external constraints, parents try to create and maintain spheres of influence and control by exercising parental authority and control within the family.

Parents realize that in such an environment, South Asian youth have to swim up stream while non-racial minority youth have the privilege to drift with the tide. The youth have to understand how teachers, counsellors and others in this society operate against them and their culture in
order to confront systemic barriers to their full participation and success. Regardless of gender, the youth consistently seem to suggest that maintaining an intact sense of cultural identity and keeping their parents' expectations in focus helps them to maintain a balance and continue working hard. Implied in this is also a sense of cautious optimism that they will be respected and accepted by working hard. South Asian youth strongly influenced by their parents' orientation to work and education reveal high aspirations of social class. In spite of their awareness of the major constraints imposed by systemic barriers their aspirations remain unaffected.

Within the context of school, it seems as if much of the youths' time is spent in coming up with strategies to deal and cope with teasing, harassment, name-calling and systemic discrimination within the educational system that fosters Euro/Anglo-centric cultural supremacy. The youth have to come up with strategies on their own to avoid the effects of stereotypes and violence perpetrated by their non-South Asian peers, and reality that some of their teachers have very low or negative expectations of them. Many of the youth expressed a lack of faith in the system to do anything about any of the above mentioned problems. The emerging dimensions of coping strategies seem to indicate that they draw on their own abilities and a sense of security by consciously seeking out other South Asian youth to create a feeling of belonging and cultural identity with their South Asian peers. The youth are very aware of the differences that exist within the collectivity known as South Asian. They did not see these differences as operating antagonistically in the context of their lives here in Canada. The youth regardless of their specific ethno-cultural, linguistic or religious identity demonstrated the need to coalesce despite the intra group differences when faced with an external threat. The youth revealed that this strategy was critical in fighting off attacks on their pride and dignity from other non-South Asian youth.

While they recognized the invaluable assistance and direction given them by some teachers they indicated that they have to constantly battle against many teachers and guidance counsellors who ask them to lower their expectations. Many felt impeded by teachers' assessments of their abilities as well as not having good reliable information and advice about educational opportunities. Through this study, the youth tell us about how the education system continues to make the error of applying culturally biased intelligence, aptitude and general knowledge and skills tests to immigrant children. The youth also expressed serious concerns about being classified as being inadequately prepared to deal with the demands of the curriculum, not having the ability or capacity or intelligence resulting in them being placed in a wrong or inappropriate grade level when they arrive as newcomers.

In addition, from what the youth told us, it can be concluded that it is still not recognized by educational leaders how much of what is taught is biased and offensive to immigrant children. Muslim youth expressed that they found representations of Muslims as terrorists, violent and evil is difficult to accept. The youth expressed that the education system must play a critical role in confronting and changing the stereotypes that exist in society by having curricula materials that reflect the presence and contributions of South Asians not only in Canada but also in the global context. Having curricula activities and reading materials that reflected their diversity and their contributions would help them maintain their pride in their cultural identity as well as address their marginalization in Canadian society. They also expressed that the South Asian community should become actively involved in challenging the education system. They thought that South Asians should learn from the African Canadian community about lobbying for change. The youth recognized that having Black History/Black Liberation Month is an important, meaningful and necessary first step in the process. They expressed that the education system needed to go beyond this and to have curricula materials and activities that included all ethno-cultural and racial groups that all students must be exposed to.

The youths' experiences within the school are such that they have become disillusioned and very suspicious of the system that is supposed to facilitate equality of opportunity and access to better life chances. The youth consistently expressed that schools should be a caring place that makes all students feel and think that they belong and have something to offer as well as contribute.
Comments made by the youth reveal that they are acutely aware of systemic discrimination and how this places them at the center of the struggle between what the school expects of them and the expectations of their parents. Not to mention their own expectations which might not be consistent with those of either the school or their parents. Being conscious of these dynamics many students did not have any recourse to challenge the discriminatory practices since in many cases they felt that they could not turn to their parents or the South Asian community for help. Often this left many of the youth feeling like they had no control over their lives. Many of the youth felt angry and other said that they were left with vulnerable ego states and a weakened self-esteem because of the perception of having little or no control. To cope with these feelings, some of females expressed that they had experienced depression and some said that they turned the anger towards themselves. Some of the males coped by engaging in fights or indulging in false escapes such as drinking or taking drugs.

Along with comments on what the education system should do the youth mentioned that Canadian media should become more responsible in their treatment and representation of South Asians. They also indicated that the South Asian community had a role to play in ensuring positive and balanced representations in the media by using political processes to reduce the racial harassment targeted at South Asians.

A. Recommendations

There are very few services available for youth in general, however, services for South Asian youth seem to be even fewer. In the absence of formal support services, many South Asian youth rely on informal supports usually provided by friends and family. It is in the context of this paucity of services and the experience of discrimination that the youth came up with these recommendations.

The participants came up with many suggestions on how parents, teachers and the larger community can help make this process of transition an easier one. Their "needs for support" and suggested recommendations are organized under education, social services, parents and the larger community. However, for many of the recommendations to be fully realized, we must as Canadians confront and deal with skin colour racism before we can remove systemic barriers.

Education

1. Make the curriculum more inclusive by specifically including content that gives the students an understanding of other cultures and traditions. There is also a need to ensure that the younger generation recognizes the many ways in which ethno-racial minority groups have contributed to the development of Canada as a nation. Schools should actively educate to promote anti-racism, and anti-discrimination.
2. This inclusive framework needs to go beyond the classroom. After-school programs should be geared towards including students of all cultures. Sports that are more popular in South Asian countries like cricket and soccer should be introduced. This way the newcomers would find at least some activities that are familiar and it would also give them a sense of belonging.
3. Schools also need to give serious thought to the process by which newcomers are systematically restricted from taking advanced level courses even though they may perform well in aptitude tests either because of the discriminatory practices or because of the way in which the ESL program works.
4. School guidance counsellors need to approach their counselling from an integrated anti-racism framework which would help them make their interventions more insightful and address the needs of all students regardless of skin-colour, culture, class, ability, sexual orientation, etc. (see framework for analysis).
5. There is a need to develop more accurate ways of determining where a student should be placed in terms of grade and levels of study. School boards need to put resources into developing aptitude tests that are not discriminatory or Euro/Anglocentric.

6. ESL classes need to be flexible, graduated in level and be of a high quality to integrate students into their subject areas at the level of sophistication they need for their academic work rather than the "same size fits all" structure that currently exist.

7. The mentoring or 'buddy' system needs to be institutionalized, so that already integrated youth can help newcomers gain an understanding about the school and its education system, as well as, the "Canadian" culture.

8. The Settlement Education Partnership in Toronto (SEPT) program should seen as an integral part of educational services with full recognition of SEPT workers as part of the educational team and not as outsiders or interlopers "spying" on teachers. When students outside the City of Toronto heard about this program from other focus group participants expressed a keen interest in having SEPT extended to their areas.

9. Schools that have a large number of students from a similar ethno-linguistic South Asian background should find ways to provide classes for the mother tongue as part of regular school rather than in the evenings or over weekends. And

10. Schools should have more cultural programs to help foster a greater understanding of different cultures among the students.

**Social Services**

1. Counsellors are needed to act as mediators among youth, parents, and teachers, as intergenerational issues come up in the process of settlement and integration. Community centres should offer programs for youth and parents which would help resolve some of these issues.

2. The youth need drop-in centres where they should be able to get together, participate in games and learn while having fun.

3. There is a need to provide youth with information about the services and opportunities available in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. For example, youth who need to work and support or supplement the family income know about how they can continue with their education. And

4. Agencies such as Coalition of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and South Asian Women's Centre (SAWC) could establish a South Asian Youth Council for the Greater Toronto Area. The Council should play an advocacy, liaison and facilitation role with local school boards and principals, settlement services, municipal departments and other social/health institutions to implement some of the other recommendations.

**Parents**

1. The basic shift that the youth want from the parents is in terms of their attitudes and their desire to steadfastly hold on to traditional customs that are not necessarily appropriate in the new environment and can result in making the adaptation process more problematic than it already is.

2. To recognize that their children go to schools which are multi-cultural and are likely to have friends who may not necessarily be from the same ethno-cultural or ethno-racial background. They need to be supportive of this kind of diversity as it would help the children adapt in a multi-cultural multi-racial setting. And

3. To become aware of how the educational system really works and what is the long-term implication of their child getting put in ESL and not being allowed to take more advanced
courses. Parents need to first educate themselves so that they can combat discrimination in the schools.

**The larger community**

1. The larger South Asian community has the responsibility of taking a more active interest in the way the schools are run. The community needs to get involved in making the educational system more inclusive and equitable.

2. The community to support initiatives by youth that are aimed at celebrating their culture and traditions. The youth today feel alienated not just from the dominant White society but also from leaders and people of influence from their own communities. And

3. Media should go beyond paying lip service to multiculturalism and human rights and have stories and articles that reflect the positive aspects of the South Asian community, especially the youth.

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