

IN-BETWEEN: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION, LEISURE AND SOUTH ASIAN CANADIAN YOUTH

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The purpose of this study was to examine the social integration and adjustment process of a group of Canadian young adults who are the children of immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This study, which provides a longitudinal dimension to a study conducted in 1996, explored the following perspectives: First, the study explored the ways in which people experienced conflict with their parents, within their small ethnic communities and with their friends from the dominant social groups as they pursued their education, jobs, and their leisure. It looked at factors that assisted them to resolve conflict as well as factors which have prevented them doing so. Second, it examined the negotiating strategies developed by the young people as they attempted to balance the two sets of cultural traditions with which they were familiar. Of particular interest were the ways and to what extent they negotiated involvement in activities that are familiar to most Canadian teens and young adults, such as dating and involvement in long term relationships and/or marriage, visiting with friends outside of the home and attending social activities at school and in the communities in which they live. Third, the study examined the ways in which people sustained their involvement in some aspects of their traditional cultures while experiencing life as university or high school students or in the job force, what facilitated or hindered that involvement and the ways in which the participants planned to sustain their involvement in traditional cultural activities in the years to come. The study explored coping mechanisms and negotiating strategies developed and implemented by the young people which facilitated their ability to access the opportunities they desired in education, jobs, and leisure. All of these aspects of life were identified as major themes in the 1996 study.

Methods

This research adds a longitudinal dimension to a study conducted in 1996 and included nine of the people who participated in the earlier study. Two of them were male and seven were female. Their average age at the time of the 2001 study was 23 years of age. Interviews were conducted during the months of June, July and August 2001. Six interviews were conducted in Southern Ontario and three interviews were conducted by telephone. All of the participants had pursued post-secondary education and one person was married at the time of the second study.

This phase of the research provided an opportunity to understand the sequential and causal patterns of the changes occurring in the social integration and adjustment processes experienced by the youth. The study was designed using a phenomenological approach, which explored human experiences through the detailed descriptions of the people being studied (Creswell, 1994). Excerpts from the 1996 study were used as sensitizing concepts to inform the research process. Sensitizing concepts are topics or issues introduced by the researcher, and in this case, were extracted from the data of the 1996 study (Patton, 1990). These concepts provided the basis for further exploration of the important issues arising from the first study. The exploratory nature of the questions posed to participants allowed them the opportunity to raise new issues and for the development of new themes (Creswell, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

Results

Several major themes were evident in the data and of those the theme: *Developing a sense of belonging between two cultures* is the focus of this discussion.

The participants in this longitudinal study readily acknowledged the importance of the strong, supportive relationships they had maintained with their parents. In their late teen and early adult years they had pursued post secondary education and careers. Parents had been a major part of their support networks:

Anisha: I would sort of feel selfish if I took all those things and then at the same, same time said, "Well I don't have any respect for what or how you feel about something. This is just how I feel so I'm going to do it". So I guess it's like, I feel like they do so much for me . . . you know I don't pay for my school, I don't pay for clothes, I don't pay for the roof over my head. So I sort of feel, they deserve my respect sort of and, in that way, that they should have a say in things.

Parents provided most of the financing for university degrees for the participants and as funders and enablers of their children's education they had substantial influence over the choices made by the participants with regard to career choices. Clearly, the parents preferred that their children pursued professional careers and as a result people had completed or were enrolled in university programs in such fields as: pharmacy, dentistry, computer and electronic engineering, applied mathematics and biological sciences. Although they conformed to their parent's wishes and valued parental guidance regarding their future, participants were somewhat ambivalent about how conformity has contributed to conflict in other aspects of their lives.

The process of developing social networks was a priority for the participants, but also important was their desire to establish the friendships they desired. However, when friendships deepened and if they began dating, they

expected their parents would disapprove and most people were reluctant to tell their parents about those relationships. This participant explained the complexity of sister's situation with regard to having a boyfriend:

Rekha: It is different for me than it is for her. Not only because I'm, I think because she's the eldest, but also because of our personalities. For my sister, in her earlier relationships she never actually discussed it with my parents because she didn't want to again create an issue when there doesn't really need to be one . . . It was difficult I think mostly because she, at that point in her life had no idea what she, what she was going to do when she finished from her school. She had no idea what, about all that kind of stuff. So for my parents being in a relationship is almost a distraction when you're in that kind of part of your life.

The participants valued both the emotional and financial support of their parents that ensured their entry into lucrative careers. But they were also interested in achieving a degree of autonomy in their lives that would afford them with opportunities for leisure and a life of their own, not bound by traditions. Their pursuit of that freedom was a source of tension between them and their parents, if the parents had reason to be concerned that their freedom was interfering with career or academic achievement.

In their leisure the participants had more freedom to pursue the activities they preferred than was possible in their careers and in their academic pursuits. As a result of that freedom and due to their respect for their traditional cultural practices, leisure often incorporated both traditional Indian cultural activities as well as activity that is typical in the lives of their dominant group peers such as dating, going to dances and clubs and sports activities. In combining aspects of both North American traditions and Indian traditions, their leisure assumed a unique appearance, one that seems to be recognized and appreciated by some of their dominant group peers:

Anisha: I remember too, like it was, when I was younger, like sometimes some women would wear you know the bindi which is like, like the dot on the forehead. But it's funny cause now sort of when you go to clubs or whatever you watch, Much Music or whatever, I see so many the singers or whatever, like they'll have like you know they'll be wearing them.

For Anisha and others in the study, leisure blends traditions from India and from North America. Through blending leisure practices from two traditions, new forms of leisure were evident in their lives:

Manjit: At the end of high school I just asked my uncle; he was gone to India. I'm like, "You could pick up me up a drum, right?" I didn't expect him to bring it back. But I was like, hey you never know; and then he brought me one back and I was like, oh that's good. So then I sort of started picking up stuff. . . I've been asked to play in like some multicultural stuff as well. I want to branch out like once I get better and play along to different styles of music as well. So they do that a lot in England actually. Yeah like on the underground scene.

Another person said:

Rekha: I'm Canadian. I was born here but I would like to be more Indian. I would and I, by being more Indian I do not mean excluding myself to the Indian community. I mean just having a better understanding and appreciation of the history and the culture and the, religion and the other things of what being an Indian is.

People valued parental support that contributed to their success in university but also valued opportunities for freedom from their parents and having opportunities to shape leisure and social networks as they wished. Leisure often incorporated aspects of both traditional cultures and North American traditions and new, unique forms of leisure were evident in their lives.

Discussion

While their dominant group peers placed priority on independence, autonomy and development of identity associated with a job or career (Kelly, 1982), the children of immigrants in this study were involved in a process of creating their future in ways that incorporated an interdependence with their parents and the sustained involvement in traditional cultural activities (Herberg, 1993). Their leisure was a unique blend of two traditions and appeared to be evolving in a way that Bhabha (1996) attributes to the evolution of "partial cultures" which are "the contaminated yet connective tissue between two cultures" occurring as immigrants develop ways of incorporating aspects of two cultures in their lives (p. 54). The participants acknowledged that they faced some conflict related to exploring new social relationships and negotiating the freedom from parents they required in order for that exploration to occur. However this study indicates the rich new leisure opportunities possible for the participants who because of academic success are likely to have better than average financial security, and the power to create unique leisure situated between two cultures. Also evident was that peers who identify with dominant groups in Canada appear to be accepting of the blend of cultural traditions and have smoothed the way for the participants to wear their traditional clothing, to share traditional music and to develop new forms of leisure.

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