EXPLORING THE MENTAL HEALTH AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF SOUTH ASIAN

IMMIGRANTS IN ONTARIO

by

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Abstract

Many South Asians in Canada experience mental health challenges and report a lack of culturally sensitive support. Immigration is seen to be a key determinant in the mental health of individuals, and the acculturation process can significantly influence one's cultural identity. This study seeks to examine the mental health and cultural identity of South Asian immigrants in Ontario through their immigration experience. Eight South Asian individuals who immigrated to Ontario within the past 15 years participated in a one-hour virtual semi-structured interview. They were asked about their immigration experiences and how these experiences affected their mental health, interpersonal relationships, and sense of cultural identity. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis and the aid of NVivo 15 to extract prevalent themes. The results suggested that many South Asian immigrants experience mental health challenges including anxiety and depressive symptoms, yet are met with a lack of accessible and culturally sensitive resources. Many participants described changes in their cultural identity. While some experienced initial discrimination or challenges adjusting to a new culture, most reported that they now see their identity as a balance between South Asian and Canadian. Among the three men and five women interviewed, no significant gender differences were observed, however the age at which one immigrated may appear to play a role in how willing they are to accept Western culture, as well as their desire to stay in Canada or move back home. This study highlights the importance of implementing culturally sensitive mental health care that is more readily available to South Asian immigrants, as well as additional resources that can help facilitate the immigration and acculturation experience.

Preface

        This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (Project #7057).

Acknowledgements

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, whose immigration story inspired me to pursue this research. I will always remember their sacrifices and unconditional love. My gratitude for them is unwavering.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Migration and culture are important social determinants of mental health (McKenzie, 2019). South Asians, who are those with ancestry in countries that originate in South Asia, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, have an immigrant population that forms 80% of the South Asian community in Canada, with the remaining 20% composed of second-generation and beyond immigrants (Buchignani, 2010; Rai & Reeves, 2009). As of 2021, the South Asian community is the largest racial minority group within Canada, with the highest number of South Asians residing in Ontario (10.8% of the province's total population) (Statistics Canada, 2023; Government of Canada, 2023). This research seeks to examine the impact of immigration on the mental health and cultural identity among South Asian immigrants in Ontario. Due to their large and increasing population, as well as the mental impacts of immigration which will be further discussed in Chapter II, this community acts as a key group in identifying concerns surrounding the immigration process, and therefore provides valuable insights that can help inform policies and practices to allow for better support for incoming immigrants. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, data from this study was compared with the existing literature to gain a stronger understanding of this subject matter. The following text will describe Berry's Model of Acculturation (1997), which will act as the core theoretical model to examine the data from the interviews.

Theoretical Framework

A widely used theoretical framework for examining acculturation is Berry's (1997) Model of Acculturation. It maintains an ontological position rooted in realism, where the universe is viewed as having an objective reality (Ngo, 2019). As such, it maintains that despite individual variance in acculturation, there are key psychological experiences which are universal

(Ngo, 2019). In this framework, the acculturation experience is shaped by the individual adaptation strategies that immigrants choose to implement. These strategies are compared across two different dimensions, the retention or rejection of one's native culture and the adoption or rejection of the host culture (the culture the individual has immigrated into). Specifically, these two dimensions are assessing whether the individual finds it more advantageous to maintain strong connections with their native cultural identity or forgo this identity in exchange for the new culture's. Based on this, four different acculturation strategies emerge. First, assimilation, which is when the individual chooses to embrace the dominant culture at the cost of cutting ties with their own. The second is separation, in which the individual rejects the dominant culture in order to maintain their native culture. The third strategy is integration, which sees a reconciliation of both the dominant culture and one's native culture. Lastly, there is marginalization, which is when the individual rejects both the dominant culture and their native culture. While Berry's framework does not delve deeply into whether strategies may change at any point during the acculturation process, it nonetheless maintains that one of these four strategies are implemented when joining a new culture. This model will be used in Chapter V to see if participants have adopted any of the four strategies when immigrating to Canada, and how this may have impacted their mental health and/or cultural identity.

      The ontology employed in these interviews is that centered around critical realism. Contrary to the realist perspective, critical realists would argue that while there may be one, universal reality, the mechanisms contributing to that reality and the perception of that reality can differ greatly between individuals (Chirkov, 2024). The epistemology employed is that of social constructivism, where instead of singular, objective truths, knowledge and meaning (such as in the case of identity formation) are gathered through the sociocultural norms and interactions

within a community (Varshaver, 2023). In other words, an individual's thoughts and feelings about themselves and their role within society is 'constructed' based on their surroundings, people and environment alike. Though Berry's (1997) ontological view which posits acculturation as a universal experience may seem to contrast with these views, this study is conducted with the belief that these views can be reconciled. For one, it aligns with Berry's view in that acculturation may indeed be a universal process experienced by immigrants, however due to factors which can impact the acculturation experience, such as age at the time of migration, the acculturation experience can differ greatly between participants. Furthermore, in some cases, participants may not feel that they have undergone an acculturation process at all, particularly if they immigrated at a very young age. This would mean their upbringing and lived experiences would be relatively equivalent to that of someone who was born into the host culture, and as such, the bidimensional model may not be universally applicable for all immigrants. Nonetheless, it will be the participants who report a significant acculturation experience that will have Berry's (1997) model applied to their responses to see if a particular acculturation attitude aligns with their experience.

Acculturative Stress, Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment

Sam and Berry (2010) describe acculturation as the experience of adjusting to a new culture. This process is often accompanied by various stressors unique to the acculturation experience, which lead to the phenomenon known as acculturative stress. This phenomenon often induces changes in one's mental health, such as symptoms of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, but the severity to which one experiences any of these will differ based on a multitude of factors such as age, gender, and social support (Berry et al., 2006).

Some literature which shows the impact of age during immigration is a study conducted by Cheung et al. (2011). The results, which were obtained from a sample of 2321 Hong Kong immigrants in Vancouver, provided support for a "sensitive period of acculturation", such that the younger participants were at the time of immigration, the quicker they were able to acculturate, and the longer they stayed within the host culture (Canada), the more they identified with the host culture. Interestingly, neither age at time of immigration nor duration in Canada seemed to influence how much they identified with Chinese culture, suggesting that host culture and native culture identification are independent constructs influenced by different variables, which supports a bidimensional model of acculturation.

Psychological wellbeing is often used synonymously with mental health, characterized by the abundance of positive emotions in relation to negative ones, as well as a higher rated life satisfaction (Huppert, 2009). For the purposes of this thesis, mental health and psychological wellbeing are used interchangeably. Another construct of acculturation is sociocultural adjustment. However, as opposed to wellbeing, it refers to the sociocultural skills (such as language fluency and cultural knowledge) one needs to successfully operate within the host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

When discussing these two types of adjustment in relation to the four acculturation strategies, meta-analyses by Schmitz and Schmitz (2022) suggest that the integration strategy has a strong positive correlation with both psychological and sociocultural adjustment, while the marginalization strategy has a strong negative correlation. Separation and assimilation were seen as falling somewhere in the middle, though for sociocultural adjustment, separation had similar observable patterns as marginalization, albeit less pronounced.

The following text will compare the collectivist South Asian culture and the individualistic Western culture to establish the degree to which they differ.

South Asian (SA) Culture vs. Western Culture

South Asia is known for having a collectivist culture (Deepak, 2005). This type of culture values familial bonds where every person is contributing for the collective good of their family or community. Due to this strong kinship, South Asian families typically have a large support network.

Contrarily, Western culture, which is commonly observed in North America and Europe, is more individualistic, in which autonomy and freedom of expression are commonplace and prioritized (Deepak, 2005). In such societies, people are often independent, relying less on others for their contributions and seeking to make decisions on one's own accord.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) depict the differences in Western and non-Western cultures through their categorization of two different selves, the independent self and the interdependent self, the former which is commonly found in the West, and the latter which is commonly found in non-Western cultures like South Asia. In the West, the self is more so treated as an individual, autonomous entity, guided with the primary purpose of asserting their own beliefs, values, and other internal attributes into the social context they are in. Contrarily, the interdependent self provides precedence to the thoughts and feelings of others over one's own autonomy. This categorization of the self is viewed as being in close connection to others, and follows the idea that individuals are guided by their desire to form and strengthen interpersonal relationships and assimilate with others. The researchers describe the psychological implications of the two types of selves, specifically in relation to the types of emotion each typically harbors and how this impacts their worldview and wellbeing. Compared to the "ego-focused emotions" of the

independent self, the "other-focused emotions" of the interdependent self often fosters emotions involving altruism, empathy, and benevolence. These emotions are the driving force behind facilitating and maintaining social connections, and as such, in order for an interdependent self to be in tune with their identity, they must be able to experience and exhibit these emotions well. The consequence of not being able to do so is an inability to function optimally, potentially leading to negative well-being outcomes, including ambivalence or a lack of confidence.

Bicultural Identity

When South Asians immigrate to a Western culture, the discrepancy between the collectivist and individualistic ideals often causes a crisis with their identity (Berry, 2005). In some cases, immigrants may face challenges in adapting to a new culture while striving to preserve the cultural values and traditions that shape their identity, though certain models of acculturation declare that it is possible to do both (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001; Berry, 2005).

These immigrants are known as 'bicultural', in that they possess two different cultural identities. To measure the compatibility of two cultures within an individual, Benet-Martinez et al. (2002) coined the BII (bicultural identity integration). A high BII meant that both cultural identities were perceived by the individual to be well balanced and harmonious, and conversely, a low BII meant that the two cultural identities were perceived as competing and irreconcilable. However, as Benet-Martinez et al. (2002) did not take into account personal variables which may influence BII, Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) decided to build upon the older study to include these variables. In their study, first-generation Chinese immigrants with an average age of 24.5 were assessed based on their level of acculturation, bicultural identity, and personality. The key findings of this study were that cultural distance (how distinct or similar both cultures are) and cultural conflict (the compatibility between both cultures) exist as two separate

psychological constructs which influence bicultural identity. Predictors of cultural distance include scoring low on openness, weak bicultural competence, experiencing linguistic acculturation stress, and aligning with a 'separation' acculturation strategy. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) suggest that in such cases, individuals find it difficult to harbor a combined identity of their two cultures, thus leading to a perception that dual cultures cannot be bridged. Predictors of cultural conflict include scoring high on neuroticism, experiencing linguistic acculturation stress, discrimination, and poor intercultural relations. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) suggest that in such cases, individuals feel difficulty maintaining a consistent identity, and thus believe they are tasked with having to pick between the two cultures. Challenges arising from one's bicultural identity can often lead to immigrants seeking social support, and the following section will outline the importance of ethnic matching when obtaining this type of support, both at the therapeutic and community level.

Ethnic Matching

A study conducted by Chao et al. (2012) showed that among clients with severe mental illnesses, those who were ethnically matched with their therapist had a stronger working relationship than those who were not. Additionally, those who reported having a stronger working relationship also reported greater life satisfaction. Despite no participant in this study reporting that they suffered from a severe mental illness, Chao et al.'s (2012) study still supports the idea that immigrants would feel more comfortable speaking to a clinician of the same background.

Outside of therapeutic settings, the above phenomenon appears to be present within local communities as well. A study conducted by Salami et al. (2019) demonstrated that immigrants tend to initially feel a close connection between members of their ethnic group before branching

out and feeling connected to other communities within their local area. This study was done using participants who were service workers for immigrants, most of them being immigrants themselves. Despite not including the perspective of recent immigrants, this study nonetheless supports the idea of ethnic matching and complements Chao's (2012) study by suggesting that ethnic matching is important for immigrants not only in a working relationship with a therapist, but also to foster a sense of belonging in the host country.

South Asian Immigrants in Canada

In Canada, South Asians experience the highest rate of work-related discrimination within the overarching Asian Community, at a reported 52% (Government of Canada, 2023). In Toronto, Ontario, South Asian populations were seen as viewing mental health as a highly stigmatized subject (Islam et al., 2014). Out of various ethnic groups experiencing major depressive disorder (MDD), South Asians were reported as having the lowest rate of seeking treatment and the highest rate of health care needs being unmet, at 48.2% (Gadalla, 2009). Among the South Asians who reported that their health care needs were not met, a third of them (33.3%) mentioned a lack of resource availability being the main reason (Gadalla, 2009). When it comes to mental health care accessibility, South Asian populations are shown as having numerous barriers, including a lack of awareness of the services available to them, clinicians not exhibiting adequate cultural sensitivity, stigma, language barriers, and a skeptical outlook on mental health supports (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009). In addition to the aforementioned stressors from that outside of the family, dynamics within the home may also exacerbate mental health issues, particularly among South Asian youth (Islam et al., 2014). Studies suggest that migration may induce a 'cultural clash' between parents, who are first generation immigrants, and their children, who were born and raised in this new country (Islam et al., 2014).

The following section will discuss the existing literature surrounding South Asian immigrants, touching upon their acculturative stress, mental health, and cultural identity. These studies will help inform the current understanding of this topic, and will be revisited in Chapter V to examine consistencies, differences, and guide future research as well as interventions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the existing literature around the mental health of South Asian populations in Canada centers around mental disorders such as major depressive disorder (MDD). While studies examining a clinical diagnosis seem to garner more attention from researchers, there is a lack of research regarding the cultural identity and acculturation experience of South Asian immigrants in Canada that uses a heterogenous young adult population. The current literature that has looked at the mental health of South Asian immigrants has done so by prioritizing the adolescent or older adult populations, with much of the young adult population being excluded. The young adult population is important to study as Canada's population is increasing at a fast rate, with an estimated quarter of the population being 65 years old or more by 2031 (Ries, 2010). Due to this, young adults who are entering the workforce are crucial contributors to the nation's economic and social state. Additionally, as these young adults are often in the midst of starting families, it is vital to ensure their well-being for their children who will eventually be future contributors themselves.

One study, conducted by Islam et al. (2014), compared four different mental health outcomes and their prevalence rates, risk factors, and protective factors between first-generation and second-generation South Asian immigrants. The study used data from five different cycles of Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) data spanning from the years 2007-2011, and examined the South Asian working adult population, who they defined as being 25-64 years old. Of the four mental health outcomes explored, two were based on self-reports of a clinical diagnosis, while the other two were based on self-perception. The first two included mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder, etc.) and anxiety disorders (phobia, panic disorder, etc.), while the other two outcomes included self-perceived mental health and self-perceived life

stress. The results indicated that between first-generation and second-generation South Asian immigrants, the prevalence of mood disorders did not vary significantly. However, for anxiety disorders and self-perceived stress, South Asian first-generation immigrants experienced significantly higher rates than second-generation immigrants. Interestingly, for self-perceived mental health, second-generation immigrants had a higher prevalence for reporting poorer mental health. This may be because second-generation immigrants have a higher mental health literacy or feel less stigma regarding mental health for self-reports, thus being more honest with their responses. For South Asian first-generation immigrants, some risk factors for poor mental health outcomes included being female, having no children under 12 years old, and immigrating prior to adulthood. This study supports existing findings that South Asian immigrants are at increased risk of experiencing mental health challenges, however a key limitation was that due to its design, the time of immigration was not considered or provided by participants, meaning their mental health challenges may have existed even prior to immigration or due to reasons unrelated to the immigration experience. Additionally, since some populations of South Asians living in remote regions were not included in the study, and the fact that not all South Asians that fell into the age range chose to participate (unweighted n of 3918 compared to a weighted n of 5,962,903), the rates of mental health disorders and self-perceived mental health statuses are not true estimates and are difficult to generalize. Nonetheless, this study emphasizes the need to improve access to mental health support for South Asian immigrants.

A qualitative study, conducted by Choudhry (2001), followed an exploratory design in which elderly first generation South Asian immigrant women were interviewed to examine the impacts of immigration on their mental health as well as the role their cultural values and beliefs played in the resettlement process and life outlook. In total, 10 participants between 58 and 78

years old were interviewed, with 8 of them practicing Hinduism, and the other two practicing Sikhism. All participants were sponsored by their family when immigrating. The recency of immigration ranged from 4-26 years prior to the study. The results indicated that South Asian immigrant women experience many stressors when leaving their native country to immigrate to Canada, including feelings of isolation, status changes, and financial difficulties, all of which impact their family relations. These results suggested that immigrating as an older adult and being the dependent of one of their children may exacerbate the stress that is normally present during the immigration process. Many participants, despite coming to Canada with hopes of a better quality of life, feel at odds with the culture in the West clashing with their native culture. This was evident when participants described wishing that their children would follow more traditional practices, though they still placed a high importance on progress (both economic and social). As such, participants were conflicted: they encouraged adopting modern practices of the West for the sake of development, but not when it came at the cost of their native cultural values. Participants described an intergenerational clash as they saw their children and grandchildren being too distant from their traditional values, and felt as though their South Asian culture was declining as opposed to being passed down the family. The author suggested that governments should take measures to provide more support to immigrant families, such as through financial assistance to help ease the financial burden that many of them experience. The author also states that older adult women should not feel like a liability and deserve access to financial security and adequate healthcare, along with culturally sensitive support to help mitigate feelings of stress and isolation.

In a study conducted by Samuel (2009), the impact of immigration on South Asian women in the Atlantic provinces of Canada was explored. The main goal of the study was to

assess how their beliefs, values, and heritage, all factored into the acculturative stress associated with the immigration process, and the psychological impacts that resulted. The study consisted of 14 participants, all of whom were women practicing Hinduism and between the ages of 30 and 55. All 14 participants held an undergraduate degree from India and were employed in the respective provinces they immigrated to. Participants were recruited if they matched specific criteria (being of South Asian descent and residing in Canada for a minimum of 2 years), and were contacted through local ethnic organizations. Participants completed an interview lasting approximately 2 hours which covered topics such as familial relations, employment, mental health, and coping strategies. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and notes were taken throughout regarding participants' responses and body language. The results of this study highlighted some major sources of acculturative stress experienced by participants and the outcomes. Intergenerational conflict was one such source which all 14 participants reported experiencing. Participants described feeling distant from their own children, who had adopted new values upon immigration. The children were described as feeling embarrassed by their parents' inability to speak English fluently, often avoiding public settings where they would be together. Another source of acculturative stress, discrimination, was prominently cited as occurring in the workplace, where participants felt as though their education and skills went unrecognized by their employers and colleagues, and that the credibility of their work was questioned by customers due to their race. Depression was a common outcome that was discussed by all 14 participants. For some newly wed participants, this came as a result of trying to find their place in the family as a new wife while simultaneously adjusting to a new cultural environment, and for others, the physical environment itself was a massive source of acculturative stress, with some participants discussing the cold weather and snowstorms as an

unpleasant change. In order to mitigate the acculturative stress, most participants used emotion-focused strategies. 12 of the 14 participants described talking to friends and families as an outlet for the challenges they were enduring, and many participants reported feeling that professional support sources, such as therapy, would not be able to provide adequate help due to a presumed lack of cultural understanding from the therapists. Groups and associations involving other South Asians were also cited as a means of obtaining support.

In a 2004 study conducted by Bhattacharya and Schoppelrey, South Asian immigrants in the United States were interviewed to examine how their beliefs prior to immigrating compared to their lived experiences after immigrating, and how any discrepancies may have contributed to the acculturative stress endured. Participants of this study included 75 sets of South Asian parents who had immigrated to the United States within the preceding 2-5 years with their children. Participants were between the ages of 32 and 45, resided in Queens, New York, and had children between the ages of 11 and 17 who were failing in school. Participants were referred by school counselors. All interviews were conducted in-person. During the interview, participants were asked to discuss three main facets of their immigration experience: their pre-immigration beliefs and thoughts about the United States (including their reason for immigrating), their experiences upon immigrating, and their current views about their life success and expectations for their family. All participants reported immigrating to achieve a better life in the United States, including obtaining wealth and higher status. Interestingly, despite waiting years to immigrate, participants described being largely unaware of the customs and traditions of the United States, such as the transportation, education, and employment systems. Regarding their post-immigration experience, many participants discussed working jobs that they would be overly qualified for back in their home country, such as driving public

transportation vehicles. Life success was reported by participants as being much more difficult to achieve than expected. Participants placed a high value on education, as even in their native countries, a higher education correlates positively with socioeconomic status. As such, participants emphasized the importance of education for their children, who were a means for them to improve the status of their family. The language barrier was a larger issue for the participants than it was for their children, who were often acting as a spokesperson for their parents during social interactions at a variety of places. As such, this further reinforced the notion that success in the United States would be achieved through their children, and thus participants passed down their goals and dreams to their children. Bhattacharya and Schoppelrey (2004) discuss how this can contribute to family conflict, as the children may feel an overwhelming pressure to succeed from their parents, and the parents may feel disappointed if their children are not able to fulfill their expectations. The researchers outlined some limitations within their study, most notably that the sample was too narrow, with all participants coming from the same place (a referral by a single agency located in NYC), thus making the findings difficult to generalize. Additionally, the study did not take into account the children's perspective regarding the expectations of their parents, yet made inferences based on pre-existing literature. The researchers also discuss how the participants' discussion of their pre-immigration beliefs may have been influenced by their experiences after immigration, thus resulting in inaccurate accounts. Future studies should include more referral sources, as well as potentially examine the child's perspective to deepen the understanding of familial conflict in relation to acculturative stress.

The existing literature primarily looks at the topics of mental health and cultural identity with a homogenous population, both in terms of gender and age group. Much of the

aforementioned studies focus on the older adult population or contain a sample of all women, and as such, this research seeks to examine the young adult population who have been underrepresented in South Asian mental health literature, as well as utilize a mixed sample of men and women. As briefly addressed earlier, this research can raise awareness of how immigration can impact the South Asian community's mental health, and as a result, may help facilitate changes in our social practices and government policies that allow immigrants to better integrate themselves into our society and reconcile their native cultural identity and values with a newfound way of life.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to examine how the immigration experience impacts the mental health and cultural identity of South Asians in Ontario ($N = 8$). The goal is to offer insights into how mental health support for South Asian immigrants can be improved, and to identify resources that could ease the immigration and acculturation process.

This chapter provides information about participant recruitment, participants, study design, and data analysis.

Participant Recruitment

Different modalities of recruitment were used to recruit participants, including social media posts and emails to individuals and organizations (for example, mosques, temples, immigrant centers, etc.). However, only individuals who were emailed by the primary researcher or notified of the study through a mutual friend signed up to participate in the study. The potential consequences of this type of recruitment are mentioned in Chapter V. Participants were required to sign and complete a letter of information (LOI) consent form and a screening questionnaire.

Participants

Eight South Asian immigrant participants were recruited via direct means (email) or indirect means (through a mutual friend or peer). As theoretical saturation was reached after eight participant interviews with no new themes emerging, no further participants were recruited. As per the screening criteria, participants had to be at least 18 years old, of South Asian descent, and have immigrated to Ontario within the last 15 years. Out of these eight participants, three identified as male and five identified as female. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 36. The average age during immigration for participants was 15.25, with the youngest immigrating

at 4 and the oldest immigrating at 30. The 36-year-old participant was the only one who was married and had children. Five of the eight participants were from Pakistan, two from India, and one from Sri Lanka. Six of the participants immigrated to Mississauga, one immigrated to Brampton, and one immigrated to London. All participants were permanent migrants, and seven of the eight participants were enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at an Ontario university.

Study Design

This study consisted of a 1-hour semi structured interview with each participant. The benefits of a semi-structured interview is that it allows for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences and allows for a conversation that is neither too rigid (as in the case of a structured interview), nor has the likelihood of deviating from the main research questions (as in the case of unstructured interviews) (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006). Participants received a $20 gift card from Indigo or Amazon, based on their preference, as compensation. Participants were offered the option to do an in-person interview or online interview via Zoom. All eight participants selected the online option. Out of all eight participants, only one participant kept their camera on during the entire interview, although all participants turned their camera on during the introduction. The interview began with a general introduction to the study, followed by reviewing the consent form. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any point and were free to skip a certain question or omit certain details of their experience if they felt uncomfortable. At the start of the interview, participants were reminded that the conversation would be recorded. The interview began with general demographic questions, such as: *What is your age now? At what age did you immigrate to Canada? What is your native country?* The interview was intended to be an informal conversation as opposed to a

formal interview to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their immigration experience. Once the demographic information was collected, participants were asked the following research sub-questions: 1) What was your immigration experience like? 2) What were some of the cultural changes you had to adapt to? 3) How did immigration impact your mental health? 4) What was your connection to your South Asian culture and how has it changed after immigration? 5) What were some types of support you received? 6) What were some types of support you wanted or needed? 7) How did immigration influence your relationship with family and friends? 8) How do you feel about your current identity and experience in Canada? Once the interview had completed, participants were reminded of their ability to withdraw from the study and thanked for their participation. Compensation was administered within 2-5 business days to each participant.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their 6-phase procedure, was used to analyze the data set. The first phase of the procedure, immersion, involved reading the transcripts of each interview multiple times to become familiar with the data. Using NVivo 15, the next two phases were completed. With key sections created for each research sub-question (8 sections total), relevant codes were created in the second phase. In the third phase, these codes were then sorted into broader themes, and using the 'visualization' tool in NVivo, a display of the most prominent themes was generated, resulting in 2-3 themes per research question. A thematic map, common in the fourth phase, was not deemed necessary. As per the fifth phase, themes were named and defined, and a report was generated in the sixth and final phase (displayed in table format in Chapter IV).

The following section will discuss my positionality and how it impacts this study. I will describe the advantages my South Asian identity brings, as well as the steps employed to mitigate some of the potential disadvantages.

Positionality

As a South Asian second-generation immigrant, over the years, I have heard pieces of my parents' immigration story, including their adjustment to the environment, the customs, and some of the discrimination they faced early on. These experiences helped shape their understanding of Canada and the West, and as a result, put them in a position to ensure that I would be able to grow up successfully in this world. Despite this privilege, I have sometimes been at odds with my own cultural identity, experiencing an inability to balance my South Asian heritage with my Canadian upbringing. For my South Asian peers who have immigrated from their home country, I have noticed that those feelings seem to be amplified for them, and as such, served as additional motivation to look at the South Asian young adult population to examine how immigration has impacted their mental health and cultural identity. I believe my positionality has offered both benefits and potential drawbacks in the creation of this study. The most notable benefit was that by sharing the same social identities as the participants (ethnic background and age group), I was able to understand and empathize with their unique concerns, thus fostering an environment of familiarity which, theoretically, helped them feel more comfortable sharing their experiences. However, because I share the same social circles as my participants, this may have prevented them from sharing certain details. Prior to data analysis, I ensured that I was practicing reflexivity by examining how I may project my biases onto the datasets, specifically when coding and creating my results section. More specifically, as a South Asian individual, I knew that I may be unconsciously wanting to represent my culture in a

positive light, and thus may choose to downplay or minimize the significance of responses that

perhaps expressed aspects of my culture unfavorably. To prevent my biases from impacting my

viewing of the transcripts during the code generation portion of the study (and subsequent

portions), I took a neutral stance and grounded my reading of each transcript with Berry's (1997)

framework in mind, along with my ontological and epistemological positions in critical realism

and social constructivism. Using this as a focus, I examined each transcript, took relevant notes

and quotations, and began my code generation process as per Braun and Clarke's (2006)

thematic analysis procedure.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter will provide tables for each research interview question/section and its corresponding themes. Following this, the data about each theme will be provided below. A set of representative extracts for each theme (raw data from the interview transcripts) will begin from Appendix B.

Table 1.0

Immigration Experience – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Chaos	This theme addresses how participants felt that their immigration experience was chaotic.
Leaving Friends/Family	This theme addresses the sadness participants felt having to leave their friends and family when immigrating.
Nervousness	This theme addresses how participants felt nervous during the immigration process.

Table 2.0

Adjusting to a New Culture – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Environment	This theme addresses the changes in the environment that participants needed to adjust to, including architectural layouts, weather/climate, etc.
Social Customs	This theme addresses the shift in how people behave and think in the West compared to back home. This includes mannerisms, social interactions, and common social role expectations.
Systems	This theme addresses the change in systems that participants had to adjust to, including the education, academic, and banking systems, as well as statutory holidays.

Table 3.0

Mental Health Changes – Key Themes & Descriptions

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Intense Sadness	This theme addresses the feelings of intense sadness that participants felt after immigrating.
Isolation	This theme addresses the isolation and alienation participants felt after immigrating.
Calmness After Settling	This theme addresses the factors which helped participants feel more situated after immigrating, resulting in calmness.

Table 4.0

Connection to South Asian Culture – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Strong Connection to SA Culture	This theme addresses how participants had a strong connection to their South Asian heritage prior to and at the time of immigration.
Fear of Losing SA Identity	This theme addresses how participants felt afraid that they would lose touch with their South Asian heritage.
Disconnecting from SA Heritage	This theme addresses how participants consciously or unconsciously disconnected from aspects of their South Asian identity after immigrating to Canada.

Table 5.0

Types of Supports Received – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Relatives	This theme addresses how the relatives of participants have helped with the transition to Canada.
Newcomer Settlement Program	This theme addresses how newcomer settlement programs have helped with the transition to Canada.

Table 6.0

Needed or Wanted Supports – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Culturally Sensitive Care	This theme addresses how participants would have preferred more culturally sensitive care after immigrating.
More Resources	This theme addresses participants' desire to have more resources in place to help with the transition process.
SA Representatives	This theme addresses how participants would prefer to have more South Asian representatives in different settings (therapy, school, etc.).

Table 7.0

Relationship with Family & Friends – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Intergenerational Conflict	This theme addresses how participants have dealt with intergenerational conflict within the family.
Closer to Immediate Family & Friends	This theme addresses how participants feel closer to their immediate family and friends after immigration.

Table 8.0

Current Identity and Experience in Canada – Key Themes & Sub Themes

KEY THEMES	DESCRIPTION
Acceptance of Western Traits	This theme addresses how participants have adopted Western traits after immigrating.
Balance	This theme addresses how participants feel as though their cultural identity is balanced between their heritage and host culture.
Embracing a New Identity	This theme addresses how participants are embracing a new integrated identity.

Immigration Experience

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"What was your immigration experience like?"* were 1) *chaos,* 2) *leaving friends and family,* and 3) *nervousness*. This sub-question explored participants' thoughts and feelings before, during, and immediately after immigration.

Chaos

This theme was observed through all participants, highlighting a potentially universal experience of immigration irrespective of native country and host country. Participants mentioned the tedious process of packing, assembling family, and filing paperwork as extremely stress inducing, with many participants discussing how all of this occurred in a very short time frame. One participant discussed only having a week to pack all their belongings, and since it was the first time they had ever been aboard a plane, the entire experience was noted as being very emotionally taxing. Another participant discussed the amount of time his family had to wait to get the paperwork done before they could leave the airport, describing the experience as "horrifying". Many participants discussed how, because they were young at the time of immigration, it is likely that the experience was more nerve wracking simply due to it being novel.

Leaving Friends and Family

Another theme present across all participant interviews was the sadness that came from leaving friends and family behind. One participant recalls an extra layer of emotion because they knew the friends they were leaving behind would still be together, making the move sting more as the friend group would carry on without her. Another participant discussed the loneliness that came with leaving friends and family behind and having to start from scratch. All participants

discussed how leaving behind certain family members and relatives made the immigration process emotionally painful.

Nervousness

Feelings of nervousness were present among all participants at the time of immigration. One participant recalls having many thoughts racing through their mind about what life would be like in Canada, and two other participants discussed how the unfamiliarity regarding the country led to them being very anxious. One of these two discussed not wanting to leave their house without their parents or being left alone at any point in time after coming to Canada. Another participant discussed their nervousness stemming from the fact that they had very little time to mentally prepare for the move. Overall, participants seemed to have varying reasons for their nervousness, and the nervousness appeared to manifest in different ways (racing thoughts, separation anxiety, etc.).

Adjusting to a New Culture

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"What was it like adjusting to a new culture?"* were 1) *environment,* 2) *systems,* and 3) *social etiquette*. This sub-question explicitly explored the acculturation process and sheds light on the sociocultural adjustment and psychological adjustment participants experienced.

Environment

Many participants reported the environment as a strong physical shift. Some shared their experiences adjusting to the extreme weather and climate difference, including having to purchase new clothing they were not used to (winter jacket, boots, etc.), their first time encountering ice and snow, and being shocked by how quickly the sun sets in the Winter. Other participants reported being shocked by the architecture of Canada, such as the raised, triangular

roofing as compared to the flat housing in Pakistan, the more detailed playgrounds in Canada, the existence of basements which are not common in South Asia, and more. While some of these environmental aspects, such as the architectural ones, did not have any profound effects on the participants, some, such as the weather and climate, did. The lack of sun and the cold weather during the Winter had led some participants to miss the warm, tropical weather of South Asia, while some even reported family members experiencing seasonal depression because of it, subsequently affecting participants' wellbeing as well. Additionally, one participant reported learning about black ice the day that they slipped on it prior to heading to school, leading to some difficulty in adjusting. Due to the drastic environmental differences between South Asia and Canada (the West more generally), it appears to be one of the largest shifts that these immigrants experience. Participants who moved here in their adolescence or childhood had a higher rate of being surprised by environmental differences. This may be due to lack of exposure regarding Canada and the West prior to immigration. To support this, many participants reported not having any concrete expectations of what life in Canada is like, and reported having very limited exposure to Western media such as shows, books, and more.

Systems

Among the significant sociocultural changes participants reported adjusting to, the systems in Canada were among the top. A primary point from this theme was the difference in banking systems. This included taxation, currency, and financial institutions themselves. Two female participants, aged 28 and 21 respectively, reported doing mental conversions of currency to see how much each purchase would equate to in their native currency. Both discussed how the conversion made it seem like each purchase here, regardless of how big or small, seemed expensive, but both participants also addressed that once they understood how different the

economic conditions are between both countries (specifically with regard to income and cost of living), they realized that costs were manageable and trying to convert to their native country was not a fair comparison. Although one of these participants described going into a "spiral" doing these mental conversions, they both showed an ability to adapt to the financial differences after settling here. Tax rates were also reported as being shocking, as one participant mentioned that back in India, tax rates are not as high as the 13% seen in Canada, nor is everything taxed. This seemed to be quite an abrupt shift for the participant, who also discussed wishing that prices for products were listed with tax included, as that was another thing they felt difficulty adapting to. Despite these examples of adjusting to the financial system seeming like a more difficult change, there was an aspect of this system that was received with overwhelming positivity. One participant discussed how fees for secondary school not being a requirement was a welcome surprise for their family, as back home in India, schools had very high fees. They also discussed how the government in Canada was shown to be more helpful in providing financial support for children under the age of 18, whereas in India, no such support was provided. Transitioning to the education systems, some participants discussed the transition from a common all-girls or all-boys school back home in South Asia to a co-ed school system in Canada being quite difficult to adjust to. One of these participants described eventually shifting to an all-girls Catholic school in Brampton, which induced a sense of familiarity. Furthermore, uniforms are commonplace for students in many South Asian education systems, which was another change a participant reported having a difficult time to adjust to, as seeing the way people can freely express themselves through their attire was not common back home.

Social Etiquette

For this theme, many participants reported feeling out of touch with the way they should conduct themselves in order to fit into society. Behaviours, actions, and even common social roles were all things participants needed to adjust to. One participant reported that she felt as though people in Canada are not as helpful as back home, and that strangers will only do the minimum amount necessary to offer help, compared to back home where the culture is more hospitable. Another participant discussed the concept of working as a teenager being foreign to her, as in South Asian countries, it is uncommon for someone to work before their early 20s. However, this was noted as being a nice adjustment, as she discussed the excitement around being able to spend her own money freely. This participant also contrasted the concept of group events and get-togethers in both cultures by discussing how it was a shock to realize that it is common for individuals to pay for themselves when invited to restaurants. Back home, they discussed how the person hosting the event is the one who pays for the guests, so separate billing as seen in the West seemed unusual. Though this did not cause any long-term distress in terms of adjustment, and though money was not an issue, it nevertheless was an uncomfortable experience as the participant had to call their parents to bring money to pay for their meal. None of the participants reported any major distress or negative feelings arising from adapting to the social etiquette of Canada and the West, but compared to the social environment back home in South Asia, Canada's society was noted to be more 'cold' and 'distant'.

Mental Health Changes

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"How did immigration impact your mental health?"* were 1) *intense sadness,* 2) *isolation,* and 3) *calmness after settling in.* This sub-question explored the direct mental health changes experienced by participants following immigration.

Intense Sadness

Feelings of intense sadness were commonly mentioned in participant interviews. One participant reported it being extremely difficult being away from her family, planning for her mother to come visit but complications arising after her mother contracted a serious illness. As her focus shifted to making sure her mother's health was in good condition, it placed a heavy emotional toll on what was already an exhaustive immigration experience. Another participant described the first two years after immigrating being extremely "emotionally exhaustive", saying that she used to call her mom after school and cry about how she did not want to be in Canada or in school. She adds that as a teenager, crying was the only way she knew how to express her feelings. Another participant described their sadness stemming from leaving behind their friends and family, a theme which was explored earlier. Participants had differing reasons for their sadness, much like they did for their feelings of nervousness during immigration, and both seemed to be equally prevalent. Whether it was the result of extenuating circumstances (mother's illness), school, or beginning a new life, the immigration process did not appear to be easy for anyone and seemed to have substantial mental health effects for most participants, particularly within the first few months.

Isolation

Feelings of isolation were common in most participant cases. One participant described the isolation being at its peak during COVID. They reported not being able to access any therapy despite needing it, and that the workbooks and phone calls that were offered were simply not good enough to help. Another participant recalled the isolation affecting more than just them, but their family as well. One participant discussed how her mother experienced seasonal depression during the Wintertime, describing her as "going crazy" due to the lack of light and noise outside,

something that was not common back home. Similarly, another participant cites the lack of family being the reason for feeling alienated from the rest of society, describing how shifting from a large family to a smaller one into a condo was a big change.

Calmness after Settling in

Despite initial feelings of sadness and isolation, many participants reported their mental health returning to a neutral state with the routine of school. Two participants who described school being a helpful tool in overcoming their sadness mentioned how it kept them busy and distracted them from the pain that they were feeling. After settling into the school schedule, it helped ease any feelings of homesickness and give them an environment where they could meet new people. Another person describes a moment in which they had a realization (after meeting people at school that were their age) that life in Canada was a lot "slower". They mention being able to think more clearly, feel calmer, and subsequently have their feelings of sadness fade away.

Connection to South Asian Culture

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"What was your connection like to your South Asian heritage and how has it changed?"* were 1) *strong connection to SA heritage,* 2) *fear of losing SA identity*, and 3) *disconnecting from SA heritage*. This sub-question explored participants' feelings about their heritage identity/culture and Canadian culture.

Strong Connection to SA Heritage

When assessing the connection participants had to their South Asian culture, most participants reported having a strong connection. One participant mentioned that he was raised with strong South Asian core values, a big portion of which centered around his religion. The values from his religion and culture were cemented in him from a young age, making his

connection strong prior to immigrating. Other participants similarly reported a strong connection through maintaining familial connections and using the native language frequently. Overall, this theme suggested that many participants, regardless of age at the time of immigration, had a strong connection to their South Asian heritage, which provides a helpful basis for assessing any changes in their cultural identity in other themes which will be discussed below.

Fear of Losing SA Identity

A strong theme that emerged during this interview question was a fear of losing or disconnecting from the South Asian heritage. One participant discussed how crucial it was for them to maintain their native culture, and as such, is wanting to return home for some time in order to make sure her children can grow up in an environment that strengthens their cultural traditions and religion. She mentioned how because her children are in their formative years, she does not want them to lose their connection with their heritage by being raised in Canada, where it is harder to maintain one's SA identity. Another participant mentioned how she refused to speak in English at home so that she could stay connected to her heritage via her native language. She described how speaking in English for the majority of the day at school induced a fear that she may lose her mother tongue, so making an active effort to hold onto her roots and culture by speaking Tamil at home was extremely important for her. One participant discussed how as he grew older, he learned that it was important to cling to his cultural roots, as by not doing so, his memories would likely deteriorate and could not be recreated. The participant further discusses how seeing his cousins who have also immigrated to Canada slowly disconnect from their South Asian heritage (losing their native language skills, forgetting their life back home in Pakistan) served as motivation for him to maintain his South Asian identity to ensure that assimilation into the West did not come at the cost of losing his roots. Overall, this theme highlights how many

South Asian immigrants fear losing connection with their native culture and identity, and thus make conscious efforts to preserve this aspect of themselves.

Disconnecting from SA Heritage

A few participants noted that they had disconnected from aspects of their SA identity. Some of this was involuntary, and some of this was done consciously in an effort to fit in with their peers. One such case involved a participant who discussed how one of the first disconnections came from her appearance. She mentioned leaving her traditional clothing for more Western attire, such as jeans and a t-shirt, and feeling "too cool" to engage in cultural activities or dress in her native attire. Interestingly, however, this participant mentioned how this may have been simply a product of aging and going through adolescence, as this is usually the time where people feel the strongest desire to fit in and be accepted. Another participant reported losing her South Asian accent, though noted that this change was gradual and not a conscious change.

Types of Support Received

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"What were some types of support you received?"* were 1) *relatives* and 2) *newcomer settle programs*. This sub-question explored the types of support that participants accessed or received to aid the acculturation process.

Relatives

Many participants reported receiving support throughout the immigration process from their relatives. One participant described having family friends in Canada, many of which were of a similar age, thus providing opportunities to play and feel more comfortable settling in. Another participant discussed a family friend who lived their entire life in North America and

was able to explain the culture to their mom, providing helpful information and reducing the 'shock' associated with discovering new cultural traditions and norms through experience. Another participant discussed having extended family (aunt, uncle, and cousins) who helped them transition into Canada. One cousin provided a lot of helpful information regarding school, such as all the supplies she would need, etc. Another participant discussed family friends helping them get groceries, furniture, and necessities needed for their home.

Newcomer Settlement Programs

As briefly discussed in some of the previous themes, some participants participated in newcomer settlement programs or were in touch with settlement workers. One participant who volunteered at a newcomer center described being surrounded by people in a similar position to them, new to Canada and learning more about the culture. Knowing that they were not alone, and having helpful staff, allowed for a smoother transition experience. Another participant described someone at the airport who helped them with their luggage, documents, and gave them a description of things they would need and steps to follow as they settled into Canada. He describes the staff member as speaking very slowly and being very patient.

Needed or Wanted Supports

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"What were some types of support you wanted or needed?"* were 1) *culturally sensitive care*, 2) *more resources,* and 3) *Having SA representatives*. This sub-question explicitly explored which supports participants felt would benefit their psychological and sociocultural adjustment best.

Culturally Sensitive Care

Many participants reported desiring culturally sensitive support after immigrating here. One participant discussed how she felt as though her couples counselor had a difficult time

understanding the traditional gender roles in South Asia. Another participant discussed how they decided to deal with their problems internally, as they felt nobody would be able to understand her concerns since they were specific to South Asian culture. She elaborated that others may instead view South Asian culture unfavorably if she were to open up about her feelings. Both participants implied that they would have an easier time discussing their mental health concerns and struggles with the immigration process if they were speaking to someone who could understand the intricacies of South Asian culture. Rather, by not having such an opportunity, dealing with it internally was the only option for many participants.

More Resources

A common point of discussion amongst participants was the lack of available resources when they immigrated to Canada. These resources included mental health support and sources that could help facilitate their adjustment into Canada. One participant discussed the stigma around mental health in South Asian communities where most mental health concerns are dismissed and seen as nonexistent. They go on to describe how their mother, who was experiencing seasonal depression after coming here, had no idea what she was feeling, and how their family could not even address it because they were not aware of any helpful resources. Another participant explicitly described how the only source of help was a newcomer center, which mainly focused on helping immigrants find jobs rather than trying to understand the education system. For a teenager, the information provided by this resource was not applicable, and they would have appreciated having a counselor or staff member who could have helped her through her mental health struggles. This information suggests that some newcomer centers may cater towards more of the practical aspects of immigration, but would greatly benefit by implementing therapy and counseling services as well. Another participant discussed the need

for more procedural based resources as opposed to FAQs, as this would help immigrants understand exactly what to do to establish themselves in this country, something the participant described as a "seamless transition rather than something that's emotionally taxing".

Having SA Representatives

Many participants discussed how having more South Asian representatives in healthcare settings, schools, and newcomer settlement programs would have made their immigration experience much more comfortable. One participant, who had a Pakistani settlement worker at school recommended by their friend, discussed how important it was in terms of being able to openly speak about their feelings and struggles, as they think it would not have been as easy with someone outside her ethnicity. This participant described how they believe "every person needs to have that familiar face here", implying that this would help combat any feelings of alienation upon immigration. Another participant described wanting support from South Asian representatives who had gone through the immigration process themselves, as she believes that would lead to a higher quality of support. As well, this participant discussed how it is important for governing bodies and healthcare facilities to recognize that having counselors and therapists of the same culture as their patients is important in understanding key issues the patients may be going through. Another participant shared a similar sentiment, stating that a team of practitioners should consist of representatives from multiple cultures, similar to how governments have a system of ambassadors who represent their nation.

Relationship with Family and Friends

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"How did immigration influence your relationship with family and friends?"* were 1) *intergenerational conflict* and 2)

closer to immediate family. This sub-question explored how the interpersonal relationships participants had were influenced after immigrating to Canada.

Intergenerational Conflict

Intergenerational conflict was a common theme which emerged when participants were asked about how immigration had impacted their relationship with their family and friends. One participant described a clash of expectations with her mother-in-law who was already residing in Canada, shortly after she and her family had immigrated. She and her husband came to Canada expecting that they would spend the first few months exploring and settling in, but instead were met with expectations from her mother-in-law to secure a job and provide for the family almost instantaneously. She also described how her mother-in-law had certain expectations from her children, such as being in bed by 7PM, all of which contributed to a difficult time for both parties to adjust to living together. Another participant described a clash with her mother regarding her future career and education path. This participant wanted to pursue architecture in college, but because colleges in South Asia are looked at in a negative light, or more specifically, 'inferior' to universities, their mother was against the idea and wanted her to instead pursue computer science. As a result, the participant had to take many challenging courses to please her mom, but was met with poor grades and long bouts of anxiety due to the pressure of pursuing something that she was not passionate about. The participant described struggling to explain to her mother that colleges in the West are different from back home, and that many fields involving practical skills or trades require college. This was also observed, albeit on a smaller scale, with another participant who discussed how their parents had a hard time accepting the independence she had gained after going through university. She described her parents still wanting the "child" in her, and that their difficulty accepting her change may be attributable to the fact that South Asian

culture is more collectivist as opposed to the independent culture observed in the West. Another participant described conflict arising as the result of having to build new relationships with family that lived in Canada that she was previously in little contact with. She describes not knowing how to build a relationship with her cousin and feeling as though her cousin disliked her.

Closer to Immediate Family

While intergenerational conflict was a common theme, many participants also reported growing closer to their immediate family. One participant reported growing closer to her siblings by being able to pass on information and knowledge that she acquired growing up, such as things pertaining to post-secondary education. This in turn also helped her connect with her mom better, as they both worked together to help guide her siblings. Another participant described growing closer to her sister as the two were able to spend much more quality time together as compared to back home. Similarly, another participant shared that because it was only their immediate family immigrating, the experience made them a lot closer to each other, having gone through something life changing together. Another participant, who grew up away from their father, was able to establish a strong connection with him after joining him in Canada. She described their relationship as not only solidifying after being in each other's company in person, but also mentions that their 'true' relationship had officially begun at this point as well.

Current Identity and Experience in Canada

Key themes which emerged from this interview question: *"What is your current identity and how is your current experience like in Canada?"* were 1) *acceptance of Western traits,* 2) *balance,* and 3) *embracing a new identity*. This sub-question explored how participants perceive their current identity, and what their current experience in Canada is like.

Acceptance of Western Traits

Many participants reported accepting traits of Western society, whether that includes fully adopting those traits themselves, appreciating them, or simply accepting them as a part of life in Canada. For example, one participant noted that she appreciated the independence in the West, where everyone is expected to contribute as opposed to relying on others. She discusses how she has instilled this trait in her children by having them help with chores such as washing the dishes. Even after receiving comments from her family back home about it, she simply states that this is something she has learned from Canadian culture and will implement into her family's lives, regardless of outside feedback. Another participant discussed being more open in terms of clothing. As someone who was previously very conservative with their attire, they are now more willing to dress in a manner that reveals more skin than they were previously comfortable with, specifically citing how she now wears shorts above her knees. Another participant discussed the more 'free' culture in Canada, describing how common it is to drink and attend parties. Despite never drinking himself, he acknowledged that being offered a drink and being in environments where drinking is taking place is nearly impossible, and thus he has simply accepted it as part of life in the West.

Balance

All participants described their identity being a balance between their South Asian side and Canadian side. One participant described taking part in Western holiday celebrations at her workplace but noted that she set boundaries when such activities conflicted with her cultural or religious values (the consumption of alcohol and non-halal food). She also compared her own conservative upbringing to the more liberal upbringing of many of the children who are born and raised in Canada, who have access to social media, devices at a young age, etc., and says that she

will find a middle ground when it comes to raising her own children. Another participant described not having one culture be more dominant over the other in terms of her own identity, adding that she celebrates holidays from both cultures and is an equal split of Indian and Canadian. One participant shared a similar sentiment, although described her identity as a "balancing act", stating that she teeters one way or another, but ultimately, she is both Canadian and South Asian. Despite some participants acknowledging that they will not fully adopt certain traits that are common in the West, they clarify that this is primarily because those traits would conflict with their key religious or cultural values, such as drinking being prohibited in the religion of Islam. Participants recognize that their identity consists of Western traits as well as their core South Asian traits, and all of them seem to discuss this dual identity in a positive light.

Embracing New Identity

With the balanced identity that each participant referred to possessing, many participants discuss this new identity as a welcome and necessary change in their personal development. One participant described the growth she was able to experience here by becoming founding members of a Muslim festival, something she admits would never have occurred back home. Another participant described the immigration process as strengthening her desire to help others, and that because she feels like a Canadian now, she can help new immigrants who were once in her shoes. Another participant described her new identity as something that has helped her reconnect with her roots. Having initially felt some reluctance to fully express her South Asian side in Canada, she became empowered to wear her Indian clothing to her high school graduation, describing it as one of her proudest moments. Feeling Canadian, but also proud to be Indian, was an uplifting experience for her, and helped her realize that the people in Canada are less judgmental than she initially assumed. Another participant described having lost a certain

aspect of her South Asian identity that she "needed" to lose, mentioning how her once egotistical and ethnocentric South Asian identity had instead been transformed into something better, allowing her to join the culture here whilst still embracing her native culture in a healthier manner. Another point from a participant was how maturing had filled him with a desire to explore Canada more, and that going back home would be returning to his comfort zone, a place where progress and growth are halted. He acknowledged that his new identity has given him a growth mindset, and that he is continually in pursuit of self-improvement.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

As highlighted in the previous chapter, 2-3 key themes emerged for each of the eight interview questions. This was done in order to gain a strong understanding of each aspect of participants' immigration experience, including the mental health changes, the acculturation experience, changes in cultural identity, relationship with family and friends, etc. As some of these themes overlap, this section will simplify the results by grouping the relevant research sections into two categories which are the focus of this thesis: mental health and cultural identity. This will reveal the major trends observed across all eight participants and how they compare or deviate from the existing literature.

Immigration and Mental Health

Mental health was explored through the section which directly addressed participants' mental health changes, as well as the sections involving their relationship with friends and family, immigration experience, types of support received, and desired support. These five sections were responsible for addressing which factors and sources of acculturative stress contributed to their mental health, the resources available to mitigate them, and what resources they would have personally preferred.

Many participants reported feeling intense emotions involving sadness and isolation upon immigration, which according to the work of Choudhry (2001), Samuel (2009), and Berry (2005), is a common outcome among those experiencing acculturative stress. Much like the study conducted by Samuel (2009), the physical environment, intergenerational familial conflict, and discrimination were sources of acculturative stress for many participants within this study. Intergenerational familial conflict was primarily evident in three female participants. One participant reported being at odds with her mother regarding her career and academic ambitions,

as her mother held a more traditional mindset and wanted her to pursue an occupation that she felt would result in more life success. This was also consistent with the results of the Bhattacharya and Schoppelrey study (2004), which found that many South Asian immigrant parents often hold specific expectations regarding their children's education, as they want them to be able to secure a better life for themselves and the rest of the family. Another participant reported familial conflict happening as she chose to dress less conservatively (compared to her native country), something her parents were not initially pleased with but eventually warmed up to. This example aligned with the work of Choudhry (2001) and Islam et al. (2014), which show evidence for immigration often creating an intergenerational clash between parents and children, where parents often feel as though their child is being 'lost' to the host culture. In both participants' cases, after some difficulty, their parents managed to let go of some of their traditional beliefs and become more supportive and understanding towards their children. Among participants who reported feelings of anxiety, sadness, and isolation upon immigration, all reported that these feelings subsided within a year of their stay. For some, this was the result of school serving as a means of keeping them busy, and for others, simply assimilating and finding a social circle helped improve their wellbeing. This is consistent with studies showing that difficulties with psychological and sociocultural adjustment among student sojourners are highest at the time of resettlement and tend to fade over time (Ward et al., 1998). However, because the student participants in this thesis were not sojourners but permanent domestic students, it is worth noting that there may be differences in adjustment since the sojourners knew they would eventually return home, and thus may have taken more risks when trying to integrate for the duration of their stay.

As Sam and Berry (2010) have mentioned how social support may influence the acculturation process, it was hypothesized that participants' relationships with family and friends would be a key predictor in terms of their mental health, such that the relationship would act as an independent variable and their mental health would act as the dependent variable. While this was the case in most participants (N=7), one participant reported their mental health asserting influence on their relationship with their family and friends, thus reversing which variables acted as the independent and dependent ones. More specifically, because this participant was in a dark period of adjustment and isolation following immigration, they contacted their close friends and family back home less, and often took out their frustration on their immediate family, leading to fractured relationships. Though no other participants discussed a similar experience, this may be worth exploring in future studies as it suggests that for immigrants, mental health and one's relationship with their family and friends are two variables that experience reciprocal causation, which is where an independent variable (or a 'cause') can become a dependent variable (or an 'effect') and vice versa, thus mutually influencing each other (Svensson, 2018). For the remaining participants, their relationship with family primarily acted as a means of social support, helping ease the process of settling in and providing comfort during a difficult transition. This is consistent with the results of Samuel's (2009) study which suggested that South Asian immigrants often seek to dissipate their acculturative stress through emotion-focused strategies, such as confiding in friends and family.

In addition to this, some participants reported receiving support from school counselors and staff at newcomer settlement programs. More specifically, participants reported that the South Asian representatives at their school or in these programs were able to offer a higher degree of support, and that they felt more comfortable opening up to them since they believed

their concerns were better understood. Some participants who received support from such sources noted that they were initially unaware of them, highlighting the importance of improving the awareness of the types of support available to immigrants. The oldest participant was the only one who sought professional help. They noted that the second therapist they received help from, who was of South Asian descent, was able to provide much more effective support than their initial therapist. Other participants who did not have access to the same kind of support discussed how South Asian representatives or culturally sensitive care would have improved their mental health after immigration and made the acculturation process smoother. This aligns with the results of the study by Chao et al. (2012), which showed that ethnic matching helped yield better mental health outcomes and a greater working relationship. As mentioned in Chapter I, despite no participant in this thesis study reporting that they suffered from a severe mental illness, Chao et al.'s (2012) study is still applicable in that it suggests that an ethnic match between a patient and worker results in a stronger quality of support, which was evident in some participant interviews. Some younger participants reported gravitating towards fellow South Asian peers initially, likely to gain a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar territory. This is consistent with a study conducted by Salami et al. (2019) which suggested that when trying to form connections with others, new immigrants tend to reach out to members of their ethnic group first. Through the results of these interviews and with additional evidence from Chao et al.'s (2012) and Salami et al.'s (2019) study, the importance of ethnic matching is highlighted not only in a working relationship with a therapist, but also within communities to foster a sense of belonging in the host country.

The following section will delve into the impact of immigration on participants' cultural identity.

Immigration and Cultural Identity

Cultural identity was explored through the sections assessing participants' experience adjusting to a new culture, current identity and experience in Canada, and connection to SA culture. These three sections were responsible for examining participants' thoughts and feelings towards their heritage (SA) culture and host (Canadian) culture, how they would describe their current identity, as well as the sociocultural adjustment process.

Many participants reported having strong connections to their South Asian heritage prior to immigration and not wanting to lose aspects of their heritage identity. All participants except for the youngest discussed that the longer they were in Canada, their desire to fit into the host culture was just as strong as their desire to retain aspects of their native culture. This would align most of these participants with the 'integration' strategy as coined by Berry (1997), in which immigrants place a high emphasis on both native cultural maintenance and host culture adoption. Interestingly, the adoption of host culture traits was noted by participants as being both conscious and unconscious, with a duality emerging in the case of the former. This duality stems from the fact that some participants willingly adopted traits or practices they deemed desirable, such as splitting an equal household workload among family members (as opposed to following traditional South Asian familial roles), while some traits and practices were adopted out of compulsion and a fear of being outcast, such as dressing or behaving a certain way. As stated in Chapter 3 of this paper, Berry's (1997) model does not explain in detail whether adoption of the host culture is via compulsion or via free will, and whether this yields any significant differences in psychological adjustment. In this study, the participants who reported feeling compelled to adopt certain behaviours did not discuss any long-term mental health effects, but rather that some changes were uncomfortable and took time to adjust to. Future studies may look to explore

differences between compulsion and free will regarding the adoption of certain host characteristics and the potential psychological outcomes of both options. While some adjustments in social mannerisms and practices were seen as minor changes that would improve assimilation, major changes such as those that would conflict with strongly held religious or cultural values were less likely to be made, such as in the example of the oldest participant who refused the consumption of non-halal food and alcohol at workplace events. Though it may have left a negative impression on fellow coworkers, maintaining core values was of more importance, which speaks to the psychological phenomenon regarding how certain traits are more malleable than others (Steimer & Mata, 2016). More specifically, personality traits which are perceived by oneself to be weak are often easier to change, and contrarily, traits which are seen as strong are often less resistant to change (Steimer & Mata, 2016). As participants' mannerisms and social etiquette may be perceived as 'weak' in that it is preventing them from assimilating well, these are likely to be more malleable, whereas traits that participants deem as strong, such as their religious values, are more prone to being maintained. Similar to the adoption of host culture traits, the loss of heritage culture traits and practices seemed to occur both consciously and unconsciously, and often in tandem with the adoption of host culture traits. For example, unconscious changes in some participants, such as the loss of their South Asian accent, often occurred simultaneously with the adoption of the Canadian accent and slang. Though this may reflect a more unidimensional model of acculturation (where maintenance and adoption exist at two separate ends of one continuum), or present as aligning with the 'assimilation strategy', some participants reported that this change was context-specific, such that it was only evident in public settings (while their native accent and mother tongue was more prominent at home), thus displaying both adoption and maintenance. Other participants described how over

time, they regained some of their lost SA traits or are making a conscious effort to, whilst still adopting the host culture. This would suggest that younger adults may be more prone to assimilate shortly after immigration, but eventually choose to integrate once they are settled in. Conscious changes with the loss of heritage traits brought about the same duality as observed in the conscious adoption of host traits, with the loss occurring either due to personal benefit or fear-based compulsion. An example that illustrates the former is in the case of the oldest participant, who decided to break the stigma surrounding mental health in South Asian culture and seek out a therapist to address her emotional needs. This is also a prime example of the 'interdependent self' by Markus and Kitayama (2001) in South Asian culture, where people are expected to put others at the forefront of their decision making and dismiss their own personal struggles in order to avoid disturbing the peace of those, namely family, around them. The participant discussed how she could not suppress her emotions in an effort to carry on the norms of her heritage culture, and decided to find support outside the family despite any potential backlash. By prioritizing herself, her 'self' had shifted from interdependent to independent, likely owing to the fact that she was now in a cultural environment where therapy was not stigmatized, and being independent was not shunned. An example that illustrates a conscious change due to fear-based compulsion is in the case of one female participant who described how she stopped wearing her traditional clothes outside as she feared it would make her an outcast among her peers. Interestingly, this participant also mentioned how this may have been due to her age, as being a teenager often naturally comes with the fear of not fitting in and the desire to be accepted. This provides support for the work of Chueng et al. (2011), whose study suggests that there is a sensitive period of acculturation, such that the younger one is during the time of immigration, the more likely they are to try to fit in and adopt host culture traits and values.

Notably, much like the adoption of host culture traits, the loss of heritage culture traits often involved traits that were not strong, deep-rooted parts of one's identity (such as religious or cultural values), but rather parts that were more malleable or prone to change, as evident in the accent example.

In terms of participants' current identity, all participants (*N*=8) reported that their identities are balanced. The degree of this balance (how much they identify with one culture over another) differs slightly between each participant, however seven of the eight participants reported it being mostly equal, while the youngest participant reported feeling slightly more Canadian than South Asian. This speaks to the bicultural identity integration (BII) as depicted by Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005), in which these participants would be described as having low cultural conflict (whereas a high cultural conflict would indicate that participants feel they must choose between the two cultures) and low cultural distance (whereas a high cultural distance would indicate that they feel their two cultures are too distinct to exist together). To further emphasize the prevalence of 'balance' as a key theme in participants' current identities, the oldest participant shared how when she raises her kids, she will instill values and follow practices that are representative of both South Asian and Western (Canadian) culture, trying to find a "middle ground". All participants except for the oldest discussed how they see a future in Canada. All participants reported that this country has provided them with opportunities for self-growth that they would not come by if they were to return home, with some participants even discussing how being here has given them a newfound appreciation for their South Asian roots. This may be owing to nostalgia, as some literature suggests that immigrants experience temporal nostalgia (longing for the past) and spatial nostalgia (longing for a specific place), especially when they have a stronger connection with their ethnic identity (Smeekes & Jetten, 2019). This

may be because the experience of acculturation provides a better opportunity for one to reflect on the key cultural differences between their native culture and host culture, allowing them to appreciate aspects of their heritage culture that they may have otherwise taken for granted. Considering their current perspective about their cultural identity, all participants seem to be aligned with the integration strategy as coined by Berry (1997). However, it is worth noting that the youngest participant did not experience a significant sociocultural shift, considering they came to Canada when they were 4 years old. As a result, aligning with the integration strategy was less of a conscious effort/motivation, but rather a byproduct of growing up in Canada as a South Asian at a very young age. Taking into account the social constructivist perspective, this may suggest that the acculturation strategies are not always consciously chosen or implemented, but can sometimes be forced upon someone by the host culture due to existing social structures.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that since all interviews were conducted online, and only one participant had their camera enabled during the duration of the Zoom interview, any details present in participants' body language were not accounted for. While body language can be misinterpreted, it may have provided information as to what participants felt comfortable or uncomfortable discussing, or helped highlight the emotional gravity of certain experiences that they recounted. Additionally, despite the sample size being heterogeneous, it was too small to examine sub-group patterns, such as differences in acculturation and mental health between men and women. In the future, by starting the recruitment process earlier, as well as having more in-person modes of recruitment, larger sample sizes can ideally be collected for similar studies. Another limitation may stem from the fact that participants were acquaintances or shared a mutual contact between themselves and the researcher. While it is possible that this may have

made participants feel more comfortable discussing their experiences, it is equally likely that this may have impacted how much participants were willing to reveal about their immigration stories and themselves due to a fear of potential judgement. Lastly, allowing participants who immigrated within the last 15 years, particularly when studying the young adult population, may mean that participants were very young at the time of immigration, which was the case for one participant who immigrated at the age of 4. Though this participant was able to remember details about their immigration experience, in most cases, immigrating at a young age would likely make it difficult to recall the experience, and moreover, it would likely mean that they would not be much different from first-generation immigrants identity-wise, as they would have grown up in the host culture during their key formative years. Narrowing the criteria to only include participants who have immigrated in the past 3-4 years may be a better strategy to employ in future studies examining the young adult population.

In the following chapter, the key takeaways of this study will be discussed, along with their implications for the South Asian immigrant population in Ontario.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This study was one of the first qualitative studies to focus on the immigration experience, mental health, and cultural identity of young adult South Asian immigrants in Ontario. Based on the results of this study, it would appear the young adult population of South Asian immigrants in Canada tend to use more emotion-focused strategies when navigating acculturative stress that follows the immigration experience, such as speaking with their family and friends. Common sources of acculturative stress include the physical environment, discrimination, and an intergenerational clash with parents. Most of these young adults discuss the importance of having more readily accessible support that is culturally sensitive, as well as having more South Asian representatives in settings such as school, the workplace, or newcomer programs to help facilitate their transition to Canada. The results of this study also suggest that young adults tend to follow the integration strategy as coined by Berry (1997), in which they maintain their heritage South Asian culture while also adopting the host Canadian culture, thus having a balanced bicultural identity. However, it was worth noting that upon immigration, some participants were more closely aligned to the 'assimilation' strategy, in which their desire to fit in came at the cost of cutting ties with their South Asian roots, suggesting that strategies may be malleable and prone to change with the duration of stay in the host culture. The results also suggest that while acculturative stressors may lead to poor mental health outcomes initially, the longer one stays in the host country, the easier it is for them to acculturate and obtain better life satisfaction. Future studies should seek to incorporate larger sample sizes to examine sub-group differences with respect to mental health outcomes and cultural identity. Additionally, in-person interviews may allow for a better assessment of body language, which may provide helpful indications as to which subject matter is particularly distressing when discussing immigration

experiences. In terms of community and provincial policies, the data from this study suggests that there should be more allocation towards resources for new immigrants which support both psychological and sociocultural adjustment. With regard to psychological adjustment, culturally sensitive care and increased ethnic representation in support systems (therapy settings, the workplace, and schools) are desired by immigrants to help improve their wellbeing and transition into Canada. Sociocultural adjustment may be facilitated with guidebooks or mandatory programs which help immigrants adjust to various changes in education, banking, transportation, social etiquette, and more. Furthermore, better advertisement and promotion of these resources would be helpful, as many young adults reported being unaware of the existence of newcomer settlement resources until being notified by fellow friends and family. To help combat stigma which can often contribute to the intergenerational clash SA immigrant families experience, family modalities of therapy and the promotion of mental health literacy may induce more help-seeking attitudes amongst immigrants. Discrimination can be addressed within the country through anti-hate policies centered around combatting negative stereotypes and hate speech both in-person and online, and education/training which help promote inclusivity and cultural awareness.

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APPENDIX A

Email subject line: Request to Recruit Participant(s) for Thesis Study RE: South Asian Immigrants' Mental Health & Cultural Identity

 Hello. I'm Nadeem Qureishi. I am conducting research about the mental health and cultural identity of South Asian Immigrants in Ontario. This interview is part of my Master's thesis at McMaster University's Health, Aging & Society department in Hamilton, Ontario. I'm working under the supervision of Dr. Chelsea Gabel of McMaster's department of Health, Aging & Society.

 I'm inviting you to participate in an interview that will take approximately 1 hour for which you will receive a $20 gift card as compensation. The interview will take place online via Zoom (a video conferencing platform), or in person at Kenneth Taylor Hall, Room 221 at McMaster University, as per your preference.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be of South Asian descent (born and raised in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, or Nepal), be at least 18 years old, and have immigrated to Ontario within the last 15 years.

 For the full details of the study, please read the attached Letter of Information.

 We would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

 We will send you a one-time follow-up reminder in a week.

 If you are interested in participating or if you have any questions, please contact:

Nadeem Qureishi   Dr. Chelsea Gabel

Qureishn@mcmaster.ca   Gabelc@mcmaster.ca

 This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (Project #7057)

APPENDIX B

Immigration Experience

Chaos

"And then the whole process was also just like traveling over here packing everything. It was long and tedious."

We only had a week to pack up everything and come here because we had to land before the 25th of August. So we basically packed up everything, the 4 of us, and we had about 14 bags filled with our clothes and utensils and everything. And this was the first time I was coming out of India. So there were a whole lot of emotions. My first plane ride, it was horrible.

I wasn't really that big enough to help like, yeah, I couldn't lift any of the luggage or couldn't really help [my mom] or give her any advice or anything. So that was very nerve wracking, I guess for my parents too, the day that we landed that was very, very hectic to get the papers processed. It took way too long and from there we had to wait like another hour before we got called back, and verifications were happening. So the whole initial immigration process was absolutely horrifying.

Sad about leaving friends

All of my maternal side of the family was still [back home], so I was really really like, you know, gutted to be saying goodbye to them and my brothers and my nieces and nephews, and, like everyone, all of my close friends from school and everyone.

I was really upset because my friends were going to go on and they're going to be together for the next few years, and I have to leave everything in between, so especially for, like a teenager at that age, it's gonna be a little bit a little bit daunting.

Well, there were a lot of tears when I actually moved, because I had a lot of friends there. [The] majority of my family was back home. That's what I was used to, so moving to a new country where I didn't know too many people except for my dad pretty much.

Nervousness

I think it was just anxiety a little bit where, just going to a new space, was giving me a little bit of anxiety like, 'how [is] it gonna be, what's gonna happen? How are people gonna perceive us? Are we gonna be okay in the new school?' So all of those questions were kind of going on in my head at that time.

"My dad was already here, he came a year before me, but it was just me, my mom and my brother. So I was the oldest one. And so it was just very scary."

I didn't want [...] to be, I would say, alone at any point. Like not going out alone, not being alone. I just wanted to be inside my house with my parents. So I would say [I was] more scared and anxious about the outside [...] because everything was very unfamiliar, like even the street at night and everything. So that was like very, I would say nerve wracking.

"So the nervousness, yes, was definitely there. I knew I was immigrating to Canada only like a

couple of months before."

APPENDIX C

Adjusting to a New Culture

Environment

"I think because we came during wintertime, everything was like, we were shocked that it would go dark at 4 o'clock. So that was our biggest, like, culture shock, like, 'Oh, my God!' It's dark, and it's only 4 pm."

"That was the very first time, actually, we saw basement houses. In India we don't have basement houses. So it was one of the first things that was very much surprising, that there was a house under the ground."

> The winter was really bad. We had never seen snow…there are not many locations in and outside, like around India, where you see so much snow. So it was the first time we were, like, shopping out for, like, big jackets that have to have, like, a minus 30 degree temperature taking capacity.

"It was extremely hard for us to find places to eat out that are vegetarian, like [...] that has vegetarian food without us being worried."

Systems

> When I came here I went to Senior Kindergarten, and Senior kindergarten here was a lot more play. It was all more like, I remember we start the day off by, like, singing, like whatever the day is, whatever the weather is, stuff like that. A lot of arts and crafts. A lot of doodling of that. Then, as compared to Pakistan, the thing I remember is I was doing a

lot more writing like pencil and paper. I don't know what I was writing, but I just remember [...] a lot more academic focus, and there was a uniform involved as well.

"Because I was in high school. It was kind of like a big change for me, especially going from, like all girls, to a co-ed system as well."

I did find it very, very intimidating when I first started [...] It's so weird, like, I was dressed in all black, and I didn't even know how to open my locker. So I was just wearing my coats, like, the whole day. I didn't know how to get to my locker. So it was just very, very scary.

When we moved here it was always like a conversion. We see something that's $2. We instantly converted it into like Indian rupees, and we're like, 'Oh, my God! This is like $600 in India', which is like a lot in the literal sense. It would be like $600 [...] But that is the kind of turnaround that you get over time when you start earning in Canadian dollars. And then you're like, okay. So the cost of living is not as bad as the style of living here, you know, like you're earning, and you're spending, and you still have something in between that you can keep for yourself. And oh, my God! The biggest relief here was that schools didn't have fees. You didn't have to pay any fees in the education system, whereas in India you had to pay a lot of fees, especially in private schools. (NB) So to think about tax for every single thing. And we would have appreciated it if you know, you say 'this is the value', like, the price that [it] says on the back of the label, and that's what you pay. Instead of that times 13.

Social Etiquette

People are not as helpful. Because, yeah, this was one more thing, like, everybody's really worried about like, I guess I don't know, like liability is a big thing here. So like people are not gonna say or do more beyond what they are stipulated in their contract for, people are not going to stick their neck out to help someone.

The whole idea of, like, working at a very young age is not native to us Indians at all, like we don't in India. We don't start working up until the age of, like, 25, but here, when I started working at the age of 18, I was like, 'Oh, my God!' This is like very much new, but it was also like a lot of fun, because then you're like earning, and you're spending on yourself, and you don't have to worry about how much you're spending because you're earning it right?

I did not know that when you go to a restaurant and they invite you, you pay for what you eat. So I didn't take any money with me, and then somebody there told me that it's going to be, like, a split bill. Everyone orders what they want to eat, and then they pay for themselves. In India it's quite different, if I invite somebody to my birthday party, we pay for the whole thing.

But suddenly I had to be a Canadian girl, like change my mindset with the norms of the Western world, and also you know, change everything about myself; The way I dress, like, put on makeup, the way I do my hair, the way I talk to people, my opinions, my values, everything shifted.

APPENDIX D

Mental Health Changes

Intense Sadness

It was really bad being away from her. Like not being able to like, you know, be there [at] the time. So the whole excitement of like, 'okay, my mom's gonna visit. Okay, she's gonna come.' Like she sent me [a message saying] 'Go, I'm gonna visit you [...] and don't worry. Be happy.' So that whole thing never panned out so like no one has visited because everyone has been taking care of her.

So those 2 years were mostly very much emotionally exhausting every single day, like, as soon as I leave from school I used to call my mom. I cried a lot that I never want to be here. I don't like school. [...] As a 16 year old at the time, or 15 and a half, I didn't even know how to talk about my feelings other than crying.

"The time that I was leaving was horrifying, [it] was extremely stressful. [...] I was extremely sad. [...] Before leaving I had my days of crying. I got my friends, and I cried, I'm like, 'what would I do without you guys?'"

Because of the whole COVID angle, it was like mentally [...] very isolating. Even during COVID, I couldn't get any therapy, like it was just through workbooks that were mailed. And it was on a phone call. It was like, really crappy, like, that's not therapy, right? So it didn't work out. It was really really really bad.

She (mom) was home alone, and she said that in wintertime, since the beginning she

would go crazy because it got so quiet and so dark, and I think for her she experienced it

like she experienced the seasonal depression very early on.

So it was like me, my mom, my brother, and then my mom's older sister and her family,

and my mom's mom, like all of us, lived in one house [back home]. So suddenly, living in

a condo, which is like 4 of us, was a drastic change. It was a little bit of an isolating

change.

I just wanted to stay inside until I was familiar enough, I guess. But I wouldn't even [stay

home when] my parents are going out to get groceries or something, [...] I would just go

with them. So that would be the biggest thing that I think it was just like anxiety about

like everything that's

new and then just scared of the surroundings.

Calmness after Settling in

So those first two weeks, I'm pretty sure, I cried a little bit, but then, like the third week

of June, I was in school and I didn't have time for crying. I had to figure out how to get to

classes, so that was a great distraction. And then, after that, [in] July and August, I was

volunteering, and then [in] September I was back in school. So for me, I think I had

school as a great distraction that just stopped my crying.

As soon as I came, I started school, like there wasn't a lot of time in between. So that kind

of took my mind away from thinking about going home. Because like I was more

engaged, there were students that I could see and talk to every day, the teachers were very nice. So it was very like, like I think it was a stimulating environment that didn't make me feel as homesick as I would if I was just like, you know, just if it was like, let's say the beginning of summer break.

One week into school when I started meeting real people, people who were my age, people who were talking to me. I just drastically remember that moment when I realized that life is slowed down here. and it's not as fast paced [here] as it is there. [...] I find myself much more calmer. I find myself able to think clearly, and all those intense feelings of sadness that I had just mellowed down.

APPENDIX E

Connection to South Asian Culture

Strong connection to SA Heritage

It was obviously how my family raised me, because, like how my family raised my home, religion is kind of like the same right? It's not like we act too hard upon it, but we don't take it too lightly as well. So we are strict [in] that regard. So it was just basically how [I was] raised [...] like the values that [were] instilled in me.

I try to stay in constant [contact]. I try to stay in constant contact with my grandmother as well, just so I could keep my language, keep my memories intact. So I would say [...] I'm pretty connected to my Pakistani heritage.

"So being born and raised back home definitely, definitely my South Asian, my Sri Lankan culture, religion, everything was a major part of me. I felt very in touch with it, very integrated with it."

Did not want to lose SA Heritage

One of the reasons we're considering going back [is] my daughter is 10, and she's [soon] approaching [...] her teenage years, and I think these are formative years where I want them to be, both of us, me and my husband, both want them to be closely connected to, you know, heritage, our culture, our traditions, our religion.

"I didn't want to let go of my South Asian, or my Sri Lankan heritage. I didn't want to let go of my culture. I didn't want to let go of what I valued."

All my communication was in English, so I refused to talk to my parents or my brother in English at home, because I was really scared of forgetting Tamil, like I have seen my Canadian cousins, who [...] cannot communicate fluently in Tamil, even though, like their parents are fluent in Tamil, I had a fear that I was gonna completely lose touch with my mother tongue, so I refuse to talk to her in English at home.

"I realized it's important to hold on to your roots and culture. Because if I forget that, then no one else is going to come and create those memories again."

It didn't really occur until maybe I would say high school, but [...] like the hobby and the passion and everything that [I] was doing, I kind of stayed connected to it just because I missed doing it. So I thought if I stay connected to it, then I won't miss it. And then as I grew older, I realized that, no, this is a part of my identity now because all of my cousins, they kind of adopted the West entirely to the point where they forgot a lot of their life in Pakistan. So after seeing that and after seeing like, like how much they kind of like, how, how much they have lost, like to the point where they don't even understand a lot of Urdu terms, like they speak only in English. So having realized, having seen that, I realized that it is even more important to hold on to our roots and make sure that I don't forget that.

Disconnecting from SA Heritage

When I came here the only Urdu speaking that happened was in my house. So I didn't get exposed to that [native]culture outside of my house, so that really kind of, I would say, impacted my understanding of the language.

"I think all 3 of us have kind of forgotten how to read it properly. So our grammar and our reading has gone down."

We kind of just were focusing [...] more on school and just getting through the whole thing. And I kind of forgot, like we kind of left our Pakistani identity a little bit on the sidelines. We were just trying to get adjusted to everything.

The first thing we [do when we] come here is reject our appearance. [...] It's like, you kind of leave your salwar suit, or you kind of leave all of that for like jeans and t-shirt. [...] The first couple years [...] like I was too cool, if you will, to like, participate in all the like religious things we did at home, or like I was too cool to wear like my South Asian earrings or my South Asian clothes to school, because, you know, like I want to be like [the] cool kids, [...] I want to wear [...] what's trending. [...] It's a bit like wanting to fit into the culture, of course, but also it's like the thing with age, like when you're a teenager, you make a lot of decisions where you just want to fit in with people and just want to be accepted by like your social circle? Right? So was it a cultural push? Probably. But was it also just like my hormones talking? Probably.

APPENDIX F

Types of Support Received

Relatives

We did have a few like family friends that we had like when he came. We had a lot more than we have now, because I found that, like growing up, a lot of the other family friends kind of moved away from Canada. So, coming in, there was a lot of support. There were a lot of good family friends, and [...] they had kids my age. So it was just like a good blend and mixture of everything. Right? So I was able to adapt to a lot of the culture there. And we did get that support that we needed.

[Our family friend] immigrated a year before us, or like a few months before us, and he lived all of his life in the U.S.A. and Canada. So he understood the North American culture, and he explained it to my mom.

So it's like my aunt, my uncle, and 2 cousins, and they were really helpful to our entire family to just help us feel welcome, feel like we have a community, feel like we have somebody to talk to. I remember my female cousin specifically, she's 3 years older than me, and she was born in Canada. She helped me a lot in regards to school like she would talk to me. She would talk to me about her experience, I remember, like before school started. She sat me down and told me all the school supplies that I had to buy stuff like that. So she was really helpful for me, specifically.

"We had a few [family friends] that came to pick us up at the airport. Then they helped us move

to where we were, to help us get groceries, furniture, everything, they were very helpful.   "

APPENDIX G

Needed or Wanted Supports

Culturally Sensitive Care

"So our couples counselor is a white man, [...] I feel like it's harder for him to maybe understand the, you know, those distinct gender roles, which honestly, within the 5 years of me coming here."

> So then she suggested [to] me a psychiatrist who's [...] a man, A) Muslim, and B) South Asian. So he literally, like 'chop, chop, chop' [...] asked me questions back to back. 'But why do you do this? Okay, but then, what happened after you [did] this? But then why would you think of doing that?' And like he does that in every session, and like he challenges, [...] he's given me a whole different perspective of looking inwards and trying to fix things like acknowledging things are wrong, and then fixing them as opposed to other therapy which was like 'It's fine to feel this way. And you're okay to feel this way'.

> I sought to deal [with it] on my own, because I think if I did tell it to anybody outside, it would be something that they wouldn't understand, because, first of all, it was more so like a cultural thing. If I did tell it to somebody here, they might see it as something that's very negative for our culture, even though it's something very simple. So I didn't really seek out any help outside.

More Resources

I think there's also a big stigma [with] brown parents or just brown families, [it] is that mental health doesn't exist. [...] And my mom, at first she didn't understand, 'why am I feeling sad?' Because it never occurred to her that she might be going into depression. but we also didn't know a lot of like resources around us. We didn't have any, or like we didn't. We didn't know how to get to them.

I think my biggest challenge when we moved here was the lack of resources, because the only place that we ever went to was the newcomer center, and it was more for the people who immigrated and wanted to look for jobs. [...] It did not help me a lot in trying to understand the education system here. By the time it was our turn to actually pass on that knowledge there were a lot more resources than what we had.

It was mostly how to find a job where to do your groceries. [...] I would have wanted a little bit more, especially for a 16 year old who's changing an entire country, leaving behind the friends and leaving behind the family. I think I wanted, like maybe a child therapist or a counselor who could have [...] walked me through my feelings.

I do recommend that the Service Ontario, like Service Canada websites are all more filled with just newcomer resources, with like, step by step, 'do this, do this, do this', more systematically rather than just FAQs. So I think that way it's much more streamlined for those people to say, 'okay, so now that I know that I'm moving here, what is my first step? Look for a home. Look for this person. Look for that person', [...] I think it'll be more simplified for them. [...] That would make it a very, very seamless transition rather

than something that's emotionally taxing, because it's already going to be emotionally

taxing.

Having SA Representatives

Because I think if that settlement worker was not Pakistani and someone from here, or

some other race, I wouldn't have been able to open up as much as I could, but

coincidentally, because she was Pakistani, I was able to and I think every person needs to

have that familiar face here who, even though it's their job, but who still is like, you

know, trying to help you.

I would definitely have wanted more support from the actual resources that were

available. But with people who actually understood the community more, like getting

help from people who live here, sure, but getting help from people who, immigrated

[and] went through the whole process [who] kind of know where we're coming from, and

then helping us, might have done a better job [for] me being able to accept a lot of things.

If you're going to a different province, I think that would be one of the biggest things that

they would have to also understand and accept [is] that they do need counselors and

therapists that belong to the same culture for them to be able to understand some of the

issues that we might be going through.

Mental health [and] things like that, where you can see yourself, whether it be like an

immigrant or somebody like more specifically somebody who is a South Asian,

somebody who is a Sri Lankan, somebody who's a female Sri Lankan. See? The more

you can connect to other people, and they can understand your experience better the easier the integration is, the easier it is on your mental health.

So you know how we have [in] governments the system of ambassadors as somebody who's representative of [other] countries being here and telling to the other countries how it is [...] so that we have updated information. [...] That's from a credible source. I think that sort of community engagement must be there. With practitioners as well, mental health practitioners.

APPENDIX H

Relationship with Family and Friends

Intergenerational Conflict

But we were sort of expected to contribute within a couple of weeks or a month. So my husband had to start looking for a job very, very soon. So sometimes, like you think like your family who you're moving to also have their own expectations, and if they're not communicated, then it could go wrong. So I guess we had different expectations of how to spend our one or 2 months. [...] It didn't pan out in the way I expected, like, okay, we'll be living together. I had some expectations. 'Okay, she would take care of the kids, and we could xyz, [...] go out, or something', or like I could do things around the house while she's taking care of the kids, like I could cook or something, but she was working full time. So it wasn't fair, obviously, for her to use her weekend. [...] We had very different expectations of each other and she had different expectations from my husband [...] even from like what she thought the grandchildren [should do], she would tell them at 8 o'clock or 7 o'clock, go to their room and not come out [...] so it was difficult to adjust.

Because I wanted to study architecture, and I couldn't find any good schools or any information on how to go about it. And people were suggesting, go to college, and college is going to help, and that's where my mom and I clashed a lot. Where in her mind [...] they're like 'College? You're not going to go to college and waste your time. [...] You have to go to university and do computer science and everything.' And because of her, I had to take a lot of tough courses like, I wasn't brilliant in math [...] and lo and behold, my marks weren't that great. I just passed but at the same time it was giving me a lot of

anxiety that my mom isn't understanding [that] I can do college and then go to university, like it's something I want to do.

Like the first group of people I had to build relationships with in this country was my family, who I knew by name, but didn't know too much about, so I had new cousins that I had to become close to. I had new aunts and uncles who I had to like, understand how they worked. And I remember one of my cousins…I just did not know how to build a relationship with her, and I felt like, you know, like I was again 12 years old. I thought she hated me.

But here I leave home at random times, because my classes are scheduled differently, and I think that is a little bit of [the] adult moments they're still not ready to accept. They still want the child in me.

Closer to Immediate Family

That's how I helped her help my siblings as well, because now I understood how the outside processes work, how the outside world, [how] post-secondary world works. It really helped her that I knew about it. And it kind of helped her guide the kids, too. So it worked like that. I would say, yeah, we both kind of helped each other and helped our siblings.

I think my sister and I have gotten closer, because we know that we're there for each other. Even though we all have schools and colleges and all of that, I think we still have those moments of our time which we wouldn't have as much back home.

Once I got into my twenties, me and my mom, we worked on our relationship, and we kind of understood, like, 'okay, I see where you're coming from.' And I explained everything, 'that this is how the system works here, like it's gonna be fine. Nobody looks down on someone who goes to college like we do back home.' [...] Now our relationship is pretty strong, like we are like best pals right now.

"Now it's more just me and my immediate family. So that changed, definitely, and that's one of the changes, but it definitely made us a lot closer to each other."

The only contact I had with him was like phone calls or Skype calls. That was pretty much all the contact I had with him, so definitely immigrating here meant I actually got to live with my dad. And we finally formed a solid relationship like I got to know him better. He got to know me better, aside from, like, to the screen. So that meant, like our relationship, pretty much solidified, but almost started after I immigrated.

APPENDIX I

Current Identity and Experience in Canada

Acceptance of Western Traits

I would say, certainly, like, we will take back some things that definitely like [...] doing our own chores primarily, sort of like getting the kids to do their own chores. Right? This is what I think of. A Western culture is like, everyone puts their weight in. And so likewise [...] my kids will help with the chores around the house.

"I would also take back a lot more of the creative aspect of Canada and a lot of the human rights aspects."

"Some aspects of Western culture have been really beneficial, obviously like the cleanliness aspect of it."

I think my openness has just become a little bit more like I'm being very acceptable to the openness here in terms of like the attire and the clothing, [...] but it did take me a long time to kind of start wearing shorts that were way above my knees.

I'm just coming to accept that this is something that living in the West [...] we have to live with. Like, like anywhere you go, people are going to drink, people are going to offer you drinks and this isn't something that you can totally run away from.

Balance

I'm part of the office culture and part of the Western culture here. But I'm also not giving up on some of my core tenets, [...] I'm not gonna just eat whatever's on the menu. I'm going to look for vegetarian, or I'm going to skip, or I'm gonna be part of the Christmas party, but I'm going to excuse myself before things get too wild [...], if it's just going into the night with a lot of drinking and stuff. So you know, I would say, like a middle ground.

Yes, the Western mindset is a little more liberal whereas what I had was more conservative. But what I'll do for my kid is somewhere in the middle. So it'll definitely be like a little bit of a give and take.

I have not adopted any one culture dominatingly. I sort of have that understanding and balance where we celebrate holidays from both the cultures. And it's just that we celebrate Diwali, and we also celebrate Christmas. So I've just become more accepting of both the cultures and have a sort of balance between the two. There is not one over the other or the other over the one, and I also haven't given up on my Indian culture like, I would say. I am still as Canadian as I am Indian.

Even till now, it's like, it's a balancing act. I have to be a Canadian girl, but at the same time I also don't want to lose the fact that I'm a Sri Lankan girl. [...] After like 10 years now I don't think I have mastered the middle point, yet I feel like I kind of like teeter one way or the other, but like now, the way I look at it. I'm a bit of both.

Even though like I still adopted to the culture here, I still, you know, my roots are still

connected. And I still have that part of my identity is just like kind of like like half and half, like half Canadian half Pakistani

"I'm proudly Indian. I'm proudly South Asian, but I also identify, I have those moments, and I'm like, 'Oh, I'm Canadian. I'm totally Canadian.' So that, and I think I like doing that."

Embracing New Identity

"I helped found with my friend a whole Muslim festival that we are now an NGO, you know, we're getting funding. And we're doing all of this stuff. We're the founding members. That thing would never happen [back home]."

I also was able to give a lot of information to people coming from my country like immigrating on student visa. Obviously the process is very much different, but I was able to help them, and I think that's where I started feeling like, 'now I'm a Canadian, but I'm an immigrant Canadian where I can help people'. I can help them take a little bit away on the struggle part that I had to go through or my family had to go through.

I was very much conservative and very much like 'I can't wear any Indian outfit to school', because I didn't want people to judge me for wearing what I did. But eventually, like, on the day of my graduation, I did wear my Indian attire to my graduation. I did not wear like a proper dress, like the way people wear here for their prom or whatever. But I did wear an Indian attire when I went there, so that was one of the biggest proud moments for me that I wore that, and nobody judged me. And in fact, everyone

complimented me on my dress. And I was like, 'Okay, people aren't that judgy over here?'

I accept the culture here, and I am part of the culture here. And you can see, like Canadian characteristics in me [...]. I think I lost the part that I should have lost. [...] I'm not mourning over it. I'm grateful that I've become a much refined version of who I am.

So now I was like, I'm entering high school and I am more mature. I am more confident. I can explore more things. I can understand things better. And in Pakistan, it was more like going back to your comfort zone type of thing. Like all the people there, I know. All the places, I know. So now it's like, well, now I can explore all these new things, and that was more of an alluring thing than staying in Pakistan. So that's what I wanted.

This is a different mentality, different culture. Here you empathize or you have someone to empathize with. That's certainly gonna make you feel like you're sane, like you're not imagining things, but the next step to grow out of it is to then understand that people have to change, and you have to adopt the mentality of the Western culture here.

For me the biggest change was essentially going from [an] introverted, quiet kid who didn't talk too much, who didn't initiate friendships, who was [...] just a wallflower, to becoming someone who had to be social, because in this country, like, if you want to like, get ahead and get stuff done, you cannot just sit back and wait for it to happen. You have to go and get it. That's what I learned.

I lost friends as well, [...] the friends that I was so upset about leaving back home. [...] One of them is not even my friend anymore, and a few of them just have their distance, right? They're like, 'Yeah, you live [away].' And I respect that. I'm like, it's fine. I live away. I don't have to be present in your life. I think that maturity is something that I only gained after coming here.