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BORN BROWN; RAISED WHITE

ABSTRACT
In this paper, I explore my double identity as a young South Asian-Canadian woman. In order to unravel ways in which Eastern and Western ideologies and philosophies contribute to identity and how I personally navigate this identity-based duality in my life, I share how cross-cultural familial and external expectations in addition to diverging societal normalities influence identity. By analyzing the polarity of Eastern and Western principles, and thereby recognizing the dichotomous nature of their characteristic philosophical core values, I examine the struggle that South Asian youths face to balance both worlds—how being born "brown" and growing up "white" is a balancing act. South Asian Canadians negotiate between Canadian and South Asian culture. I aspire to identify intergenerational discrepancies in values as segregated by culture, religion, art, education, and technology today. I wish to incite South Asian Canadians to introspect regarding the origins of their inner ethics and illuminate the roots of their own identities so that they may unify their multiple contextual identities in a way that appropriately aligns a sense of definition with a sense of limitlessness.

In this paper, I intend to view identity through a multidimensional prism to analyze and further understand my South Asian ancestry and identity. I strive to answer the following questions: What is identity? What does it mean to be a Canadian? What is culture? What does it mean to be South Asian living in Canada? I attempt to explore what it means to identify as a South Asian Canadian practicing a hybridized culture. I try to unravel my personal identity and the cultures I practice as a South Asian Canadian. Through my personal experience and research, I hope to examine how culture and migration intertwine to create a unique and dynamic sense of ethnic and/or national identity for South Asian communities in Canada. Children of immigrant families (such as me) face the challenge of having to negotiate between at least two unique cultures—usually the culture of their hereditary lineage versus the culture in which they grow up and live. South Asian Canadians are born "brown" and yet we are surrounded by a predominantly "white" culture and setting. I try to recognize how aspects of both Western and Eastern philosophies and ideologies shape what it means to be a Canadian and South Asian simultaneously. There are divergences and convergences in these philosophies and cultural values, and I illuminate this idea by analyzing the definition of "culture."

My experience is personal; therefore, it is limited. While I have neither a sociological background nor any prior academic knowledge in philosophy, gender studies, psychology, or any other related field, I examine my double identity as a young woman who identifies as both Bangladeshi and South Asian Canadian from philosophical, psychological, and sociological

perspectives. My work is subjective and is not intended to represent all experiences. I fully acknowledge that South Asian-Canadian identity cannot be confined to a single definition or experience, and my position provides a humble and limited perspective. I invite Canadian South Asians to examine the source of their personal values, ethnocultural roots, and orientations, shed light on their multidimensional identities, and tell stories of shared and varied experiences.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES OF IDENTITY

Identity can be understood in accordance with multiple theoretical frameworks and perspectives. Philosophical theories on self-identification (Camp, 2016) include the character theory (you are yourself based on your traits), the memory theory (you are yourself based on your memories), and the body theory (you are physically yourself). The expansion of the self is an ongoing process, as individual identity is made up of more than mere accounts of personal history (as suggested by the memory theory of identity). According to Professor Byrne (2014), a philosophy professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, identity is a duality consisting of a physical body and a nonphysical mind. Byrne credits philosopher René Descartes, the father of the Cartesian mind-body dualism theory, as the instigator of this theory. Furthermore, identity may be given, meaning it may be passed on from generation to generation; conversely, identity may be self-created, painted onto a blank canvas. While some philosophers theorize that identity is prearranged at birth, others conceptualize it to be constructed thereafter.

From a biological point of view, an individual is a living structure based on genetic codes passed on hereditarily; a prescribed set of intricate instructions are shuffled and sorted to enable a physical existence and determine psychological traits. Furthermore, one's personal physical appearance has an impact on one's identity. An individual is not, however, concretized by a definite destiny according to Western philosophy. Instead, people are generally thought to have free will and make deliberate decisions to navigate the multi-experiential existence that is life. Contrastingly, in Eastern philosophy, people are generally thought to have a determined position and path in life. According to the first perspective, identity may be regarded as a creative process—the accumulation of choices by self-actualization (Lyon, 2016). According to the opposing perspective, identity may be supposed to be pre-set. Thus, it is debatable whether ethnic background emergent from birth is an essential or accidental property of identity.

Yet, from another angle, an individual is composed of multiple identities with each position having its own internalized expectations and meanings (Heshmat, 2014). According to this theory, people assume multiple role-based, ethnicity-based, and gender-based identities. One individual may identify herself as a mother, a sister, and a daughter; these identities are merely a few of her identities based on roles within her immediate family. Aside from an array of fragmented and interrelated identities and stipulated roles, an individual is defined by his or her values and goals. Who you are may be directly proportional to what you do as well as to the reasoning behind why you choose certain actions over others. As people discover and develop personal potential and seek opportunities to implement this potential, a life's purpose is created (Heshmat, 2014). Our environment and our genetics together shape the way we self-identify; we contextualize our identities based on our surroundings, adapting our nature to that of our localization. This theory emphasizes that we are the product of both nature and nurture.

Identity is contextual and based on setting—not only time but also place. To explain the relationship between identity, space, place, and sense of belonging, I quote Bendiner-Viani and Low (2003):

> The concept of place identity—the sense of belonging to emotionally, socially, and culturally significant places—is an important facet of people's self-identity. Place identity situates psychological development in the life spaces, home spaces, neighbourhood spaces, and national/transnational/global spaces where people live and work. As a psychological construct, it highlights the significance of understanding residents' conceptions of themselves as located in a particular space and time and as members of a social community and cultural group. (p. 1073)

Our identities are interaction-dependent. Living in a multicultural setting, personal multidimensionality is complimented by the ability to flow between cultural norms. Thus, all of the spaces in which we live, grow up, work, and play shape our identity as well as our sense of place and belonging.

Evidently, identity holds numerous unique properties. No single distinctive metaphysical component can define identity, as it is a convoluted and intangible entity. A vague term, "identity" is implicitly complex and thus serves best as an umbrella term preceded by an adjective (e.g., racial identity, sexual identity, class-based identity). Socially constructed identities such as national identity, the "idea of a temporal and spatial continuity of a nation" (Fearon, 1999, p. 8), may give rise to nationalism and draw ethnic boundaries. Dependent on cultural context and ethnic background, people present themselves as they wish to be perceived: "ethnic boundaries are situational and changeable, resulting from external and internal sources that determine how people see themselves relative to the larger society and how the larger society positions them," (Plaza, 2006, p. 223).

CULTURE, ETHNICITY, AND IDENTITY

Personal identity is affected by family, friends, pop culture and media, internal and external philosophies and ideologies, and religious views, as well as one's ethnicity and cultural upbringing. Culture is, collectively, the manifestation of intellectual, social, and artistic growth—the customs, achievements, social institutions, and arts of a specified group of people. Our cultures give meaning to our identities, constructing affiliations and boundaries with other groups and individuals (Plaza, 2006). According to Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College, "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things" (as cited in Zimmermann, 2017, n.p.).

Both consciously and unconsciously, people segregate amongst themselves based on different cultures and perceptions of each other. Pigmentation of the skin has an impact on our perception of others and our self-presentation. Defined at birth, ethnic background is a key player in identity. People make stereotypical assumptions based on race, ethnicity, skin colour, and even the tonality of the colour. We tend to generalize ourselves as "brown" and "South Asian," glossing over rich linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity; in fact, "there is a myriad of ethnic, cultural and national differences within the [South Asian] diaspora" (Goitom, 2017, p. 18). Growing up as a "brown" Muslim girl in Dhaka, Bangladesh is vastly different from growing

up as a “brown” Hindu boy from rural Sri Lanka, and yet these individual experiences fall under examples of “South Asian” life and culture. The Indian subcontinent has a rich demographic diversity of culture and tradition based around religion, philosophy, art, and history. To be South Asian is far more than to be “brown”; however, the experience of living in Canada does not make one “white.”

Western society, which is predominantly white, is defined by the cultures of European countries in addition to countries that have been heavily influenced by European immigration, such as the United States of America and Canada. Conversely, Eastern culture refers to the societal norms of countries in Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Both Eastern and Western culture were heavily influenced by religion in the beginning; however, now “in Eastern culture, there is less of a distinction between secular society and religious philosophy than there is in the West” (Zimmermann, 2017, n.p.). Eastern and Western culture are juxtaposed and perceived as being in opposition to each other. Frequently, one is viewed and presented as superior to the other. Despite this fact, historically, these cultures have interacted with each other; at the same time, both have attempted to maintain their cultural and ethnic “purity.” Additionally, all cultures and cultural practices have been influenced by geography, economy, politics, and history of migration (either by force or by choice). Although ethnicity and culture are important markers of identity to an extent, we often decide what defines us in the sense that we selectively pick and choose what we incorporate into our lives. Ethnic culture is cherry-picked, and thus culture is not historical legacy; past and present cultural elements are juggled constantly, thereby shaping culture as an evolving process (Plaza, 2006).

MULTICULTURAL POLICY: SOUTH ASIAN-CANADIAN OR CANADIAN WITH SOUTH ASIAN DESCENT

According to philosophy professor Elisabeth Camp, people are composed of physical bodies and webs of overlying psychological states (2016). People exist in unique spatiotemporal locations and identify themselves primarily through a narrative view of identity in the sense that one is who one says one is; you are your story, and it is neither temporal nor teleological in nature (Camp, 2016). When one is asked to describe where one is from, the query may be interpreted in a multitude of ways. That’s because this seemingly simple four-word question—“Where are you from?”—has complicated and convoluted meanings. The question does not adhere to any integrity or specificity in comparison to questions such as, “What is your place of birth?” or “Did your family immigrate to Canada? From which nation?” One may interpret the place one is “from” as one’s birthplace, the place where one has the most familial relationships, the place where one’s immediate family resides, or the place where one grew up. Asking someone where he or she is from may be interpreted as a request to know his or her ancestral background, or it may be interpreted as a question regarding citizenship.

I am frequently asked where I am from, and my response to this question would be that my family is from Bangladesh, while I grew up in Canada. While I was born in Bangladesh, my family immigrated to Canada when I was an infant. My blood is South Asian. I was born “brown.” Canada is my home. I was raised “white.” That being said, Bangladesh is a home to me, too. Canada and Bangladesh are both places where I feel a sense of belonging. I am South Asian and Canadian; I am South-Asian Canadian. I am Bangladeshi and Canadian; I am Bangladeshi-Canadian. Such hyphenations are an integral part of my identity as a whole.

I live bi-culturally, as a Bengali speaker born in a divisional city in Bangladesh and as a Canadian. I am bilingual, and I identify myself as a Bengali-speaking Canadian. The first language I ever learned was Bengali. I was quick to learn English as I went to school. Now, I feel more comfortable speaking in English than I do in Bengali. Is Bengali my mother tongue if I feel more at ease with the English language? Fortunately, despite my Canadian education and upbringing, I am still able to speak in and understand Bengali. I can barely read or write in Bengali, and while my literacy is limited, I am proud to say that I have tried to preserve the extent of my ability to speak in Bengali. I compare myself to my younger brothers who can both understand Bengali but struggle to string together sentences as they speak hesitantly and haltingly. We were born into the same family, and yet I speak more Bengali than my brothers do; I feel more Bengali than my brothers do.

I am South Asian as well as Bangladeshi, as the former encompasses the latter. Individuals of South Asian descent comprise Canada's second largest non-European ethnic group, representing 28% of the population "that belongs to visible minority groups" (Papp, 2011, p. 6). Those who identify as South Asian trace their cultural roots back to the Indian subcontinent, consisting primarily of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Fiji. The South Asian diaspora flows into Africa, the West Indies, and other regions as well. Major South Asian religions include Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Christianity. A diverse ethnic group, South Asians "share values and attitudes towards family, community and social networks" (Papp, 2011, p. 6). The preservation of ethnic customs, traditions, and heritage language proves to be an integral arm of South Asian culture.

I am also Canadian. Canada is a multicultural nation; however, the concept of maintaining or managing multiculturalism is complicated. How does Canada ensure an inclusive, welcoming environment while also acknowledging its Eurocentric norms and allowing for differences in the traditions and cultures of smaller groups? Respect is an implicit component of multiculturalism. Equilibrating inclusivity with a sense of individuality is as complex as it is crucial.

Canadian nationality is vague and largely undefined. Often jokingly, Canadians describe themselves as polite, outdoorsy, hockey-loving Tim Horton's regulars. John Shields and Harald Bauder (2015) state that "those Canadians with the strongest sense of nationalism are also the strongest supporters of immigration and see multiculturalism and diversity as a core defining feature of Canada" (p. 24). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau states: "We define a Canadian not by a skin colour or a language or a religion or a background, but by a set of values, aspirations, hopes and dreams that not just Canadians, but people and the world share" (Hewitt, 2017, p. 12). This definition, while heartfelt, fails to acknowledge Canada's dark history based in racism and policies of assimilation. Having torn apart Indigenous communities and cultures and manifestly disregarded basic human rights, Canada drips in hypocrisy. Empty promises of change pepper Canadian politics as history is side-swept. Canadian identity, though based on a "pluralist conception…considers accommodation through…negotiation to be the best way of responding to tensions—national, regional and ethnic, religious and political—that make up Canada" (Blattberg, 2013, p. 12). Yet today, Canada struggles to accommodate its peoples in a way that is fully inclusive, respectful, and honest. Canadian culture is based on conversation and consideration, unfortunately accompanied by an unforgivable ignorance toward its First Peoples.

Canadian culture tends to promote individualism, self-sufficiency, and egalitarianism. By contrast, South Asian culture is family-oriented, prizing selflessness over self-sufficiency. As a Canadian of South Asian background, I experience such cultural tension on a daily basis. How can Canada, as a nation, accommodate so many different cultures and maintain unity? Goitom (2017) has argued that Canada has devised and implemented the policy of multiculturalism as a strategy:

> In the Canadian context, the policy of multiculturalism is a strategy implemented to manage cultural diversity…. [This] much-debated policy…is a continual concern, especially in regard to its definition, implementation, maintenance and utility as one of the social contexts and policy framework. For immigrants and their second-generation descendants, at the forefront of these challenges are questions of belonging and practices of citizenship that mobilize the minds and bodies with identification beyond the nation state. (p. 2)

Canada has been famously coined a "cultural mosaic"; this definition enables the fluidity of what it means to be Canadian. For example, I may identify myself as a South Asian person living in Canada versus identifying myself as a Canadian of South Asian descent. Such subtle divergences in communicating my identity are influential to my self-perception as well as the way others perceive me. "The inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" conceptualizes an international culture, and "it is the 'inter'…the in between space" that negotiates and translates cultures (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38). Unfortunately, despite the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences, Canada as a nation still prizes Caucasian culture and Western philosophies and ideologies above all others. Canadian multiculturalism policy is somewhat paradoxical in the sense that it assumes the equal status of all cultures while centralizing "white" culture. Due to the centrality of white culture, other cultures are marginalized. Despite its problems, the country's multiculturalism policy has merit, as it allows for a hyphenated identity rather than a singular acculturated one. Identity is fluid; therefore, we tend to morph between our South Asian and Canadian identities, choosing certain perspectives, values, and philosophies over and/or with others.

IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA: BALANCING A HYPHENATED IDENTITY

People move enthusiastically, accidentally, and reluctantly (Bose, 2018). People may move due to poverty and/or economic stagnation or seek refuge for political reasons. Many immigrate to Canada seeking higher education or better career prospects, a safer and more secure living environment, more secure childcare and healthcare systems, etc. Canada is recognized as an inclusive and welcoming nation, accepting LGBTQIA people and advocating for women's rights. With a relatively healthy economy, stable democratic political system, universal healthcare system, world-class education system, and growing technological industry, Canada offers much promise. Brian Keeley's (2009) analysis of immigration narratives and patterns indicates that macrostructures push emigrants, whereas microstructures pull immigrants (as cited in Bose, 2018). With immigration arises the challenge of reforming and adjusting one's identity by integrating oneself into a new lifestyle and cultural mindset while still adhering to one's own cultural heritage by maintaining integrity and individuality—a process that occurs over time as families integrate into the new society. Identity is shaped by "the deliberate preservation of ethnic membership, values, and a continued economic attachment to ethnic communities"

(Plaza, 2006, p. 212). Immigrants new to Canada are expected to adjust personal views and values to align with that of the nation, all while maintaining the integrity of their home culture.

Supporting Erin Tolley's (2011) work, Shields and Bauder (2015) suggest immigrants follow a series of steps as part of the integration process:

> 1) Identify with the receiving country rather than anchoring their identity in the country of origin; 2) participate with the institutions of broader society; 3) learn the official or dominant languages(s) and communicate on an ongoing basis with it; and 4) build friendships and networks that extend beyond one's ethno-specific group. (p. 15)

Based on my personal experience, this process of integration seems to be more applicable to first-generation immigrants like my parents, who migrated to Canada when I was almost a year old. Unlike my parents, I grew up on Canadian soil, learning the country's official languages within the institutions of mainstream "white" society and culture; however, as I also grew up in a "brown" family of immigrants, I maintain a hyphenated identity.

We have constructed uniquely emergent hybridized ethnic identities, finding our footing between Eastern and Western cultures. Our double identities are more symbiotic than they are dichotomous. Culture, identity, and ethnicity are collaborative entities, as becomes evident in the following quote from Plaza (2006):

> …The theory of social construction of ethnicity and hybrid identity [is conceptualized] as a fluid, situational, volitional, and dynamic phenomenon, one in which ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities. Through social interactions, individuals are able to define and express their identities as "ethnic" actors. (p. 214)

When I was growing up, I often struggled to find the balance between Canadian and Bangladeshi cultures in choosing between different norms. Growing up embracing multiple cultures, I often felt torn between the two. When speaking with my parents, I chose between English or Bengali. When enjoying a meal, I chose between using cutlery or my right hand. When planning my leisure time, I chose between friends or family. In my adolescence, my friends would encourage me to sneak out of the house or skip classes; they wanted me to defy my constraints and disobey my parents— unthinkable for traditional Asian youth. Eastern values dictate compliance, strict rituals, and a deep, unwavering respect for elders. Western values promote expression, individuality, and freedom of thought and speech. As a young girl growing up in a Bangladeshi household in a North American region, I tried my best to maintain the respect of my mother and father while remaining true to my own hybridized values.

In conclusion, identity is a multifaceted entity; it is an umbrella-term best accompanied by a preceding adjective referring to the specific defining context. What it means to be Canadian is also undefined and subject to change over time, since culture is constantly evolving. Culture is defined as a myriad of arts, literature, food, fashion, language, beliefs, and values consistent among a group of people. The South Asian-Canadian group dips into diverse pools of South Asian cultures and a rather ambiguous Canadian culture. Immigrants juggle two unique cultural identities, merging and segregating the two as personally applicable. As I was born into a "brown" family, I faced the challenge of balancing a rich and abundant Eastern historical heritage with Western heritage. Immigrant children are re-potted plants: with their intricate South Asian roots, they are transported to a North American socioeconomic climate, which causes them to fruit and flower in Western ways. How a South Asian-Canadian youth chooses

to nourish his or her Eastern roots while bearing Western fruits and flowers is an individual effort, evolving and shifting according to personal identity and active participation in South Asian and/or Canadian culture(s).

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