Gendered Violence, Representation and Resistance
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"SURREY JACKS": A VIOLENT PROTEST MASCULINITY

ABSTRACT

British Columbia's Lower Mainland has seen an increase in homicidal shootings and gang violence, which overwhelmingly occur in the predominantly South Asian communities of Surrey and Abbotsford. Thus, the Lower Mainland's Indo-Canadian community has become synonymous with this kind of violence, as most of it occurs between South Asian men. Community members and politicians consistently pose the following questions: Why are young men from affluent families participating in violence and selling drugs when they do not suffer from a lack of money? What are some of the push and pull factors for these specific men in joining gangs and selling drugs? Consequently, most community solutions have been quick to use the law as rectification; discussion is lacking regarding the ways in which the gender identity of these men is an important intersection in finding a solution to the problem. This paper explores the following questions: How do these young men navigate their hybrid, bicultural identity as Indo-Canadians and understand themselves in relation to the dominant notion of a white, hegemonic masculinity? How does the adoption of a kind of protest masculinity known as "Surrey Jacks" render both the young men and the community at large susceptible to racist stigmatization?

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, British Columbia's Lower Mainland has seen an increase in homicidal shootings and gang violence. The shootings and gang-related activity overwhelmingly occur in the cities of Surrey and Abbotsford, which both have predominantly South Asian populations. Thus, the Lower Mainland's Indo-Canadian community in particular has become synonymous with this kind of violence, as most of it occurs between South Asian men. There have been numerous accounts of South Asian men engaging in violence with one another, resulting in the death of boys as young as sixteen and seventeen and mindless shootings in public. Community members and politicians consistently pose the following questions: 1) Why are young men from affluent families participating in violence and selling drugs when they do not suffer from a lack of money? 2) What are some of the push and pull factors for these specific men when it comes to joining gangs and selling drugs? As a result, most community solutions rely on law-enforcement to rectify the problem. There is little or no discussion of how the gender identity of these men factors into the search for a solution, though a culture of male bravado in the South Asian community clearly intersects with violence and gang-related activity. In this paper, I explore how these young men navigate their hybrid, bicultural identity as Indo-Canadians and how they understand themselves in relation to the dominant notion of a white, hegemonic

masculinity. I also discuss how the adoption of a kind of protest masculinity known as "Surrey Jacks" renders these young men as well as the community at large susceptible to racist stigmatization. This paper illustrates the multidimensionality of South Asian male-on-male violence by positing it as a feminist issue and exploring the phenomenon's gendered nature. I believe a more comprehensive analysis of "Surrey Jacks" will provide a much-needed layer to community understanding of why young Indo-Canadian men resort to violence and gang-affiliated activity. This paper provides context to the ongoing violence taking place in Surrey, British Columbia and introduces "Surrey Jacks" as a form of protest masculinity. In seeing this protest masculinity as stigmatizing and racist, I wish to suggest that seeing young men within the confinements of their "Surrey Jack" protest masculinity limits their potential and hinders their possibility of engaging with healthy masculinity.

CONTEXT

As reported by the community online publication *Vancouver is Awesome*, there have been 208 shootings in Surrey between the years of 2015 and 2017 (Kronbauer, 2018). As of July 2018, there were 29 shootings in Surrey in 2018 so far, with many more since last reported (Zytaruk, 2018). Almost every week, there is a news headline about some deadly, dangerous homicidal shooting taking place largely in residential areas, right at peoples' homes. Likewise, Surrey has become synonymous with danger and death, as the city's slogan "Surrey: The Future Lives Here" gets taken up and switched to "Surrey: The Future Dies Here" in reference to the city's violent neighbourhoods. There has been a rise in community and political response to the ongoing violence in Surrey. In June of 2018, community members hosted the "WAKE UP! Rally" at Surrey City Hall in response to the shooting death of two teenage boys aged 16 and 17. Over one thousand people were in attendance, including prominent community members, police officers, and politicians. Similarly, since Surrey's recent municipal election, there has been a strong push to end Surrey's contract with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and adopt a municipal police force that will be better equipped to deal with the concerns of Surrey's predominantly South Asian population.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

There has been a steady increase in media depictions of Surrey as an unsafe and dangerous place. Tom Zytaruk, Senior Reporter for the *Surrey Now-Leader* newspaper, often writes stories covering the shootings in Surrey, and in many of his articles, he posits Surrey as a threat. For example, in his 2018 article titled "Get tough on reckless killers," Zytaruk reports on two different incidences where visitors to Surrey from out of the province were hit by bullets during non-targeted drive-by shootings. While his article was supposed to report on a shooting incident in Vancouver, it quickly shifted to a discussion on Surrey and how it was an unsafe place for visiting folks. This kind of rhetoric creates and adds to commonly held perceptions of Surrey as a dangerous place, which is problematic for many reasons. For one, it treats the entirety of Surrey as a dangerous place, while only a few neighbourhoods are more predisposed to shootings than others. Second, because Surrey is home to a large South Asian population, people begin to pin stereotypes of violence on the brown people that live there. It's not Surrey that's unsafe, it's the brown people living within Surrey who are unsafe.

Likewise, there has been a lot of discussion and debate as to who is to blame for the shootings. One such debate revolves around Punjabi singer, Sidhu Moosewala. As *Global News* reporters Sonia Deol and Jesse Ferreras reported in an article titled "They carry guns in South Asian gangster rap videos. In real life, many haven't touched one" published on January 31st, 2018, there is a debate around whether "South Asian gangster rap music" pushes young men into a life of violence, gangs, and drugs. Sidhu Moosewala is a Punjabi singer and lyricist who is extremely popular among young South Asian boys. While he was born and raised in India, his music combines elements of the east and west, hip-hop, and rap music—a blend that is appealing to many who are part of the South Asian diaspora. Moosewala, in particular, is criticized for his portrayal of gangs, guns, and violence, as he's seen as glamorizing a reality that is not glamorous at all. Thus, many parents, community members, and the media strongly believe that "South Asian gangster rap music" is the reason why young Indo-Canadian men engage in violence and gang-affiliated activity, neatly writing off any of the other myriad possible reasons for this engagement. Here is where I feel there is a gap in how the contentious issue of violence and gang-affiliated activity among young Indo-Canadian men is framed and understood. Often, blame is pinned on forces external to the community or on themes around delinquency, bad parenting, or in this case, the media. Nonetheless, issues that manifest within the community itself are overlooked—especially issues around gender.

A HEAD START ON GENDER
The South Asian community, like the rest of our society, is patriarchal and has sexist tendencies. As an exemplification of this point, while change is occurring, women and girls in the community have long experienced surveillance and the policing of their behaviour. Men have been afforded a lot more freedom than their women counterparts, whether in regards to access to public spaces or making life decisions. While the community has been busy preventing girls from going out, holding them back and policing their behaviour, there has been an omission when it comes to protecting and disciplining the boys. Within this patriarchal, sexist space, men also experience sexism, which has further contributed to the problem. South Asian men and boys have been taught to fear femininity and to internalize their emotions. They have been taught that they cannot cry, have emotions, be vulnerable, or be "too girly." Instead, they must be tough, work hard, and earn a high income. This manifestation of sexism is problematic because it, too, polices identity. Most importantly, it holds men and boys back from accessing support, and thus it gives way to harmful, violent forms of expression.

Notions of male bravado are not new to the South Asian diaspora. Among the Sikh population of Punjab, the caste system is "based on political superiority, land ownership and labor," and *jatts*, or farmers, are considered the highest in the hierarchy of caste (Gill, 2012, p. 113). A combination of their role as landowners and the nature of their labour, caste status, and high levels of income has afforded *jatts* many privileges. The *jatt* identity has also created a culture of male bravado and hypermasculinity. The nature of their work required *jatts* to be strong, tireless labourers, and the privileges that came attached to this identity reinforced notions of superiority. As *jatts* make up "the largest group in the Punjabi diaspora" and their gender identity has become "an integral part of popular culture discourse [both] in Punjab and in the diaspora," it becomes hard to divorce the community from a culture of hypermasculinity

and male bravado as the diaspora takes up the same strong, macho characteristics of *jatts* (Gill, 2012, p.113).

OTHER INTERSECTIONS

Issues around gender are further problematized and magnified for these young Indo-Canadian men as they experience the difficulties that come with being second-generation Canadians from an ethnic immigrant community. While their parents experience barriers as first-generation immigrants in a predominantly white supremacist state, these second-generation individuals experience a different set of barriers. For instance, second-generation individuals often have hybrid identities influenced by their traditional ethnic backgrounds as well as the western, Canadian society in which they live. Not only do they act as cultural bridges between their family and Canadian society, but they also experience cross-cultural conflict in trying to navigate both identities. This phenomenon is not new, as we see in Homi Bhabha's long discussion on hybridity in *The Location of Culture.* Hybridity can be seen as the process of translating and reproducing certain identities while existing in two places at once or "in between" two identities (Bhabha, 1994). Second-generation Canadians, too, exist in between two identities and as bridges for cultural translation.

While some excel in the formation of their hybrid identity, some Indo-Canadian individuals fall through the cracks. One manifestation of this "falling through the cracks" is the creation among men of a protest masculinity in the face of a dominant white masculinity that views their ethnic masculinity as "not good enough." In "Being Brown in a Canadian Suburb," Heather Frost (2010) discusses the notion of "hegemonic masculinity." Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant way of doing masculinity and being a man, and it is often anchored in whiteness. As Frost states, "There exists no absolute, universal masculinity, but a plurality of competing alternatives organized hierarchically around the hegemonic version" (Frost, 2010, p. 221). While some South Asian men can integrate into Canada's notion of a hegemonic masculinity, many young men adopt an alternative "protest masculinity [which] provides a means for confronting and challenging their powerlessness and exclusion" (Frost, 2010, p. 221). These young men, in their adoption of a protest masculinity, resort to "excessively macho behaviours and hypermasculine practices including violence, criminal activity, and/or alcohol abuse" (Frost, 2010, p. 221).

"SURREY JACKS"

The "Surrey Jacks" identity is, therefore, an example of a competing alternative protest masculinity that is organized around Canada's hegemonic masculinity. A quick search of "Surrey Jacks" on Urban Dictionary shows many definitions of the term at various points in time. For example, a definition from 2007 describes "Surrey Jacks" as "frequently drinking 'Crown Royal' (alcohol)," calling each other "PANCHOD'S! (sister fucker)," wearing expensive clothes, and traveling in groups with either their friends or their cousins ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.). The same definition also mentions how "Surrey Jacks" "tend to switch between languages (Punjabi/Hindi and English)" and are visible supporters of many Canadian sports teams, such as the Vancouver Canucks, Calgary Flames, and Edmonton Oilers ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.). Another definition defines a "Surrey Jack" as "a south asian gangster usually with [the following] characteristics:

Ha[ving] high hopes of becoming a successful gangster/dealer, ha[ving] so many enemies (usually of the same ethnicity) that he is afraid to walk in groups of less than four, [and] smok[ing] weed, fuck[ing] bitches, and drink[ing] liquor on a regular basis. ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.)

While both of the above definitions date back to 2007, a more recent Urban Dictionary description of "Surrey Jacks" from 2018 says that "Surrey Jacks" are "Indo Canadians who wear black air forces and a shit ton of Jordan clothing [and] only wear black. [They are supposedly] the gangsters of surrey" ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.). Notably, while approximately 10 years separate the oldest and most recent definitions of "Surrey Jacks" on the website, specific identity markers have persisted over time.

The descriptions of "Surrey Jacks" cited above are illustrative of a number of points. Firstly, they indicate that "Surrey Jack" is a hybrid, bicultural identity. The boys and young men alternate between using their mother tongues—Punjabi and Hindi—and their taught language, English. By wearing jerseys of various Canadian hockey teams, the young men participate in dominant white Canadian popular culture. The idea of traveling in groups made up of cousins or family members is also indicative of the value many Asian cultures place on family and kinship. Secondly, Frost's notion of protest masculinities resorting to "excessively macho behaviours and hypermasculine practices" (Frost, 2010, p. 221) is highly prevalent in the definitions of "Surrey Jacks." "Surrey Jacks" are supposedly young men who are involved in a lot of violence and criminal or immoral behaviour, and they resort to recreational drug and alcohol use. Their behavior is also described as hypermasculine, as exemplified by the degradation of women.

STIGMA

The very specific definition of protest masculinity links "Surrey Jacks" to engagement with drugs and alcohol and participation in gangs and violence, all of which are stigmatized within our society. As Erving Goffman (1963) illustrates in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity,* there are groups of people who exist as separate or outsiders based on a categorization of stigmatizing attributes. Stigma becomes problematic when we cannot see individuals beyond their stigmatization. When we reduce certain individuals to the sum of their stigmatized characteristics, we see them as undesirable, dangerous, or discredited (Goffman, 1963). Thus, labeling "Surrey Jacks" as violent and gang-affiliated is not only stigmatizing, but it also posits them as outsiders and fails to allow society to see them as anything but transgressive.

The stigmatization of "Surrey Jacks" is, therefore, reductive and limiting. It places the men who embody aspects of this specific protest masculinity into a detrimental box and thus prevents folks from seeing these men as anything other than a threat. For example, the very distinct style of dress for "Surrey Jacks" is often seen as troublesome and dangerous. Many boys who wear certain brands of clothing and shoes or have certain haircuts are often policed by community members. There are numerous cases of young boys being asked to leave public spaces soon after entering simply because they were "dressed like troublemakers." Police officers are more likely to pull over South Asian boys driving expensive luxury cars to question their means of affording such cars. Likewise, many restaurants in Surrey routinely have police officers come by to check the I.D.s of customers. While they claim to be preventing the serving of alcohol to minors, police officers most often check the I.D.s of young South Asian men who

are dressed in a particular way. What the police officers really want to do is to ensure that there is not a gangster in the room. Similarly, if these young men display signs of aggression, anger, or hurt, they are automatically viewed as a threat. While there may be a multitude of factors behind their aggression, such as intergenerational trauma, family strife, or mental health concerns, forms of aggression characteristic of "Surrey Jacks" are perceived as dangerous.

A PROBLEM FOR SOUTH ASIANS OR A PROBLEM FOR CANADA?

In light of the factors discussed above, "Surrey Jacks" can be seen as a direct result of the entanglement of many dimensions: patriarchal, sexist attitudes in the South Asian community; barriers faced by second-generation Canadians; and exclusionary hegemonic masculinity. Even with so many multifaceted reasons behind this violent protest masculinity, the issue is reduced to a South Asian problem rather than a Canadian problem. In addition, while stigma gets attached to these young men, it also gets attached to the Lower Mainland's South Asian community at large.

The Urban Dictionary definition of "Surrey Jacks" posits these young men as violent, sexist alcoholics who engage in immoral and criminal activity. Through association and conflation, this violent and sexist behaviour is seen as representative of all South Asian folks, particularly all South Asian men—and this conflation gets picked up and deployed by individuals like Zytaruk when they report on incidents of crime in Surrey. The term "Surrey Jacks" is itself highly stigmatizing and reductive, as it suggests that South Asian men who adopt this kind of protest masculinity only exist in Surrey, while in fact there are many South Asian men across the country who are adopting protest masculinity in cities just as diverse as Surrey. This rhetoric begins to frame Surrey and the South Asians living in Surrey as dangerous. As Goffman (1963) would say, both become stigmatized and categorized as "the other."

It's also important to deconstruct the rigid confinement of the "Surrey Jack" identity because the label contributes to a form of internalized stigma among the men themselves. As society continues to highlight the negative aspects of their identity, little to no room is left for the boys to see themselves as complex, multidimensional beings. They have little opportunity or allowance to question the role that toxic hypermasculinity plays in governing their lives. As certain aspects of their identity are constantly picked at by society, a hostile environment is created, and this leads to even further displacement. Eventually, they come to see institutions such as schools, the police, family, and community as untrustworthy.

HEALTHY MASCULINITY

Growing up, many "brown boys are exposed to three main competing versions of masculinity: their father's first generation Punjabi version" (the traditional hypermasculine *jatt* masculinity), "the white variety of their peers; and the Surrey Jack, a form of protest masculinity constructed by other Punjabi young men" (Frost, 2010, p. 221). With only three main competing versions of masculinity to choose from—and with their father's traditional masculinity seen as outdated and out of context, while strong societal emphasis is placed on the protest masculinity of "Surrey Jacks"— discussions and possibilities for healthy masculinity are rendered invisible or impossible. Frost (2010) found that "many of the brown boys [in her study] blame the Jacks' and their aggressive behavior for fueling negative mainstream perceptions of Surrey's Indo-

Canadian males" (p. 222). While Surrey is home to many successful Indo-Canadian men who display healthy forms of masculinity, these examples seldom get highlighted because of the over-exposure of "Surrey Jacks."

To address the problem of these limited available versions of masculinity, I emphasize a need for significant discussion regarding 1) gender as a legitimate factor in addressing male brown-on-brown violence in Surrey and 2) what healthy masculinity looks like to South Asian men. This is because while a discussion of hypermasculinity as possibly harmful is largely absent in the South Asian community, there is an even bigger negation of gender norms as a possible explanation for the recent violence in the community. This is not to suggest that the community does not recognize its own complicity in the harm; however, there is a tendency to look for external reasons rather than challenging harmful ideas that have been part of the fabric of the community for decades.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

In exploring themes of gender in relation to the ongoing violence in Surrey, we must historicize the community's violence by looking at how a culture of male bravado specific to the community is not new. As I've already begun to do in my interrogation of the role played by the reinforcement of a *jatt* identity, we must further explore relationships between young South Asian men and their fathers as well as how notions of masculinity get passed down through the generations. There needs to be more conversation regarding how intergenerational trauma within the community and the parents of second-generation South Asians in Canada are implicated in the displacement of youth. While there is an abundance of opportunities for the empowerment and wellbeing of girls, there are not many such opportunities for boys. There are many initiatives for boys in the form of sports or athletics, but there are not enough safe spaces for boys that focus on emotional wellbeing or discussions of selfhood.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As discussed in this paper, a culture of sexism and patriarchy exists within this particular South Asian community that affects not only the community's women but also its men. While there has been a strong push within the community to challenge the sexism against women and girls, there is not nearly enough conversation of how men also suffer because of patriarchy. An interrogation of masculinities in the Lower Mainland's South Asian community is important because the impacts of toxic hypermasculinity are detrimental to everyone. Such hypermasculinity in its various forms has pushed many men into the prison system, prevented them from forging meaningful relationships, kept them from accepting and openly discussing problems with their mental health, and even gotten some of them killed. Women are also negatively affected by toxic hypermasculinity, with many enduring various forms of abuse, trauma, loss of self-identity, and other impacts. Probing masculinities would provide much needed answers for the causation of such events.

In framing and understanding the shootings taking place in Surrey, examining gender as an intersection is highly necessary. Such examination helps to provide answers to the questions that were initially posed: Why are young men from financially well-off families privy to this kind of violence? If it's not money and fame they're seeking, then what is their involvement in violence and gangs providing them? As this paper has shown, involvement in violence and

gangs happens for many reasons. Firstly, it is representative of a sort of protest masculinity that some South Asian men adopt as they find themselves lost within the multicultural mosaic of Canada. Secondly, violence occurs when these men are denied safer ways of releasing emotions such as anger and frustration. Lastly, the constant reinforcement of their masculinity as problematic fails to provide them with any alternative in the form of a realistic and attainable healthy masculinity. In addition, I acknowledge that the process of learning and unlearning something as deeply rooted as masculinity will be challenging for the South Asian community. While some of us can recognize the harmful impacts of rigid gender roles in our community, there are many people who are not able to conceptualize men in other ways.

In conclusion, I assert that young South Asian men dying in the Lower Mainland is a Canadian problem and not merely a South Asian problem. This is true simply because western notions of white supremacy and colonialism are implicated in the violence. As a place that prides itself on being a peace-keeping, multicultural nation, Canada still has a lot of work to do in addressing the racism and violence that permeates non-white communities. While I firmly believe that change must come from people who have membership in the affected community, we cannot do it alone.

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