Can I Play?:
Experiences of non-instructional school times and their influences on identity development for young punjabi girls

by

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ABSTRACT

This study speaks to the prominence of ethnocultural difference experienced by six punjabi young girls in Grade 5 at school during non-instructional school times and the extent to which these experiences are playing a role on the self-identity formations for these young girls. This inquiry delves into how these young girls, all born and being raised in Canada, are making sense of their difference and how they are engaged in constructing identities for themselves.

A narrative method allowed for linking self-identity to the curriculum of non-instructional school times and how children’s experiences of these times plays a role in identity formation. This study reveals some of the complexities and challenges of living as a young girl of a “minority” group brings to identity construction. Complexities and challenges that I attempt to bring to surface with the aid of the in-between space of hydridity, a space Ted Aoki terms Metonymic Space, Trinh Minh-ha’s entities Hybrid Place and Homi Bhabha calls Third Space. Through the framework of poststructuralism, the process of living and constructing identities is illuminated as being multilayered and evolving as it involves negotiations and contestations between how one views oneself and other’s perceptions of you.

By participating in the co-creating and co-writing of a story titled “A Day in the Life of a Punjabi Girl”, the young girls included in this study were provided with an avenue for action and the production of a resource that could inform educators of the educational situation of punjabi girls and help them understand the life-world of these girls at this critical stage in their identity development. This resource may also help
educators make changes for future generations of these young girls, and other students from visible minorities, in the school system.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This journey began a lifetime ago, or so it seems. Since that first day, that first moment, that first step, I have been searching. Searching for acceptance and belonging – an acceptance and belonging for which I am still waiting. I haven’t had to walk all these miles on my own though, I have had hope alongside with me. Hope has kept me going - hope keeps me going - hope that walking along this journey requires “one always has to live with hope. Without it, how can one carry on any kind of struggle” (Trinh, 1999, p.17). But over the years the landscape and terrain required for walking along this landscape has become rocky and traitorous and my feet old and tired and even hope is dwindling from the burden of having to help carry me along the path. This landscape that I speak of is the hyphen living/occupying/conquering/framing the space between [Indo]-[Canadian].

...back and forth, back and forth...I walk along the single path that this label allows...

It’s a deceiving path. It looks like a short distance, but in the two decades that I have been walking along it, I have yet to reach the Canadian end. Each time I think I am nearing the other side I am thrown back to [Indo] and made to walk from there again. Each wound and scar suffered along the way justified by my urge to find an answer to the haunting question that refuses to go away: Where do I belong? I have learned from those who have walked this path before me that the answer to this question may take a lifetime - or two or three – of walking to come to or it may not come at all leaving one to wander and linger within the abyss.

After having traveled this journey as long as I have, I came to a realization that I could not rely on the limited means that this path offered to find an answer to my
question. That is, one road to travel on held together by two distinctly rigid and separate
categories Indo/other-Canadian/norm is inadequate. I had to find a suitable means that
would help me pave a new path or even new paths to help me with my quest. It was at
this moment that I decided to abandon the normal path, the one that I was supposed to
take, and ventured away from the path. This is when the real journey began, the journey
of entering cracks, destructing walls, and creating landscapes.

Scholars such as Trinh Minh-ha, Homi Bhabha and Ted Aoki helped me to
articulate and create an alternative landscape(s) to identities that I saw around me each
providing conceptual tools essential to finding my way in this landscape as I navigated
and continue to navigate the muddy water of this question, Where do I belong? With the
writings of these scholars by my side (and my old friend hope) “I,” a first generation
Canadian born punjabi, began to question and deconstruct the hypen-ated identity of
[Indo]-[Canadian] imposed upon me by Canadian society. I began to see how [Indo]-
[Canadian] served as a lumped category for those of us who “looked alike”. The only
criteria for being placed into this label, the common color of our skin disregarding the
fact that many of us, [Indos,] speak different languages, live by different cultures and
even different religions. Seen this way, the [Indo]-[Canadian] label becomes what Trinh
(1991) terms a “one-size fits all ‘other’ category” (p.16). “Other” being the key word
here. I know the “other” category quite well. I remember there was a time when I tried
to be just [Canadian], but people were quick to remind me that I couldn’t be. It was a
label I was not authorized to associate with on its own as just being [Canadian] did not
explain away my obvious “otherness”. When asked, “Where are you from? or What
nationality are you?” They were never satisfied until there was the added racial category
that would explain the color of my skin or the shape of my nose reminding me that I was not just [Canadian], I was something “other” than that. But if being not white and having to explain my obvious physical markers, my obvious “otherness,” meant having to add “something” to [Canadian], then why did [Indo]-[Canadian] not have a symbol of addition in it? Why is there a hyphen connecting/separating the two? Relying on the algebraic skills learned in first year university calculus class, I decided to solve the equation/problem to find an answer to this question. This is what I learned:

Given (from my experiences):
Canadian=white
Indo=all shades of brown

Known:
Canadian has a higher value than Indo in Canadian society.

So when solving the equation:
Indo-Canadian=?
[Indo/lesser value] – [Canadian/higher value] = (-)identity
= a negative identity value
= a lesser Canadian

The result:
A negative value, a lesser form of Canadian.

The next step – create my own identities, my own labels. Here is where I turned to the writings of scholars who were along my side in this journey and found aid in Homi Bhabha’s notion of Third Space, Ted Aoki’s Metonymic Space and Trinh’s Hybrid Place for possibilities of a new landscape to continue my journey.

This creating of a new landscape in this project implies the act of clearing a space, a space created by removing the hyphen, the obstruction if you will, and “entering into a space of shifting and moving ground” (Bruce et al, 2003, p.2). However, removing of the hyphen alone proved not be enough. I still had the generalizing acronym of [Indo] to
contend with. This is when I decided to rename in “the necessity of re-naming so as to un-name” (Trinh, 1989, p.14). I renamed my difference from [Indo]-[Canadian] to punjabi canadian. The use of lowercase letters in intentional. It is an effort to move away from the stereotyped connotations and fixed and crystallized categories that capitalized labels such as Punjabi and Canadian contain. The lowercase letters also symbolize the uncertainty of meaning for each of these labels demonstrating the fluidity of labels for individuals. A task Trinh (1992) terms “the strategic use of stereotyped expressions in exposing stereotypical thinking” (p.138).

The very tension created by the placing of these different labels side-by-side, without the hyphen, is what prompts re-visions in the ways we represent ourselves and see ourselves and find meanings and identities. A hyphen would indicate that there is only one path linking the two together whereas in the reality of lived experience of this label there are multiple rhizomatic paths linking the two; therefore, losing the hyphen implies losing the fixed boundaries that the label [Indo]-[Canadian] imposes. I propose the space between the identifying label punjabi canadian, is such a space where negotiations are complex and varied sometimes negative, sometimes positive, sometimes vague, thereby disrupting the binary of being just Canadian or hyphenated Canadian. As Aoki states, this in-between space is “a space of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty but simultaneously a vibrant site. It looks like a simple oppositional binary space, but it is not. It is a space of doubling, where we slip into the language of ‘both this and that, but neither this nor that’. To live in a site of ambiguity means to live in a space allowing fluidity as multiple selves” (cited in Low and Palulis 2000, p.67).
Speaking from a place of in-betweeness challenges the fixed boundaries of the [Indo]-[Canadian] category. Speaking from this space is not to speak from the center or the margin but rather from an empty site (Trinh, 1999, 40). This blank white space may appear to be an empty space, but as Lam (1998) suggests “the white unmarked spaces of inform one’s understandings of the landscapes of identity” as much as those spaces that are occupied by words (p. 101).

I take Bhabha’s designation of hybridity, Trinh’s site of Hybrid Place, and Ted Aoki’s Metonymic Space to help understand how the young girls who participated in this study are trying to mark out a new sense of identities for themselves as they create meaning(s) of punjabi and canadian for themselves. As Trinh (1989) remarks “despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak” (p.94). It is these leaks that this metonymic/Third Space/ Hybrid Place landscape acknowledges. As the label of punjabi and the label of canadian, when they are placed side by side leak, the resulting fluid(ity) collects in pools midst this in-between space. It is within this fluid(ity) where intercultural dialogue, learning and respect take place “hybridity, which has provided a strategic space for a range of new possibilities in identity struggles” (Trinh, 1999, p.27). Conceptualizing hybridity or the third space in this way allows for escaping cultural binaries because “one would have to reaffirm difference in working again with hybridity, constantly reopening it and displacing it in order to keep its space alive” (p.27).

This is both an academic project and a personal journey. The biographical accounts or self-reflections scattered throughout this thesis are from my journal writings as I ventured on this journey. I began keeping a journal last year and thus far, the
dominating stories within this journal are memories of childhood both having to do with school experiences and out of school experiences – my experiences of growing up in Canada. By putting these memories into words on paper my intention was to try to deal with these memories so that they could leave my memory. The exercise of journaling and reflecting on memories was an attempt to “understand” why they were not leaving and why they continue to impact my life. These writings of experiences from the in-between space dividing punjabi from canadian and canadian from punjabi, demonstrate that this space is not as lucid as it may appear to be (or as transparent as we might want it to be). “It is a space of paradoxical ambivalence with its built-in contradiction. Yet, it is a generative space of difference, an enunciatory space of becoming, a space where newness emerges” (Trinh, 1999, p.36).

Although the initial motivation for my engaging in journal writing was to come to an understanding and acceptance in hopes of their ultimate removal from my memories - from my mind – by incorporating journal reflections into this study I also take a self-reflective stance as I engage in researching autobiographically. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) remark that journal writing and autobiography are closely linked and that “our journal becomes a kind of autobiographical writing” (p.421). These journal writings have become the initial stages in my search and journey for understanding and making meanings of “me”. Ray (2000) remarks that writing autobiographically “involves a slow process of bringing one’s life to language” (p.171), a process I have just begun. Pinar (1994) notes that autobiography is an inquiry into the “architecture of self” and therefore involves “the task of self-formation, deformation, learning and unlearning” (p.217). He
further notes that this construction of self comes as “we create and embody as we read, write, speak and listen (p.220).

As my stories are a part of a meaning-making process and negotiations around identities and belonging due to my minority position, my autobiographical journal entries also involve an autoethnographic research process. Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p.739). As a writer, I find that my stories, and therefore even myself, are situated in the construction of self within a social context.

The purpose of this autobiography is my needing to know more about my meaning making processes and personal lived experiences as a child and the links between the two. Therefore, my self-reflective writings recall a child self as characterized by a current older self still contending with negative experiences. As Cortazzi (1993) posits this is the notion of multiple voices reflected in autobiographical writing, “the self then, the self now recalling then, the self now interpreting self then from the present self’s perspective, the self now thinking of possible future selves” (p.13).

Through my self-reflections, not only do I tell my stories, but I also aim to form a relationship with the reader so that he/she may have a glance at who the person is behind the words, thoughts, feelings and emotions expressed in the stories. This I hope will make the reader think and feel along with me. As Sannie Yuet-San Tang (2003) offers, “it is not as if the text is written and said once and for all. Rather the text is constantly lived and re-lived in-between writers and readers in their encounters within the inter-
textual space” (p.26). It is this in-between space to which I invite the reader to journey along with me the au/other.

These self-reflective writings are presented in alternative succession through layered chapters. Sometimes they are at the beginning of sections and at other times at the end of the chapters. This presentation may appear fragmented to some while I hope that more will see it as an alternative and refreshing change to traditional academic writing as hooks (1994) offers, “it becomes ruthlessly apparent that unless we are able to speak and write in many different voices, using a variety of styles and forms, allowing the work to change and be changed by specific settings, there is no way to converse across borders, to speak to and with diverse communities”. This way “the ‘research text’ is the story, complete (but open) in itself...privilege(ing) stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations” (Ellis & Bochner, p.745).

Scattering my self-reflections throughout the thesis, allows the reader to follow along as I journey into the search for a sense of self, a journey which has not been straightforward but as scattered as the presentation of these writings. The layers of the chapters are intended to hold equal weight within the chapter. Through the autobiography self-reflective writing, I reveal how the presentation and negotiation of lived experiences initiates change and personal growth. Through the process of writing our experiences and speaking them into words, I begin to show how experiences can scatter one for years to come.

Taken together, the layered chapters tell a story of identity development through narratives for both the six young girls who participated in this study and also for myself.
The incorporation of my personal narratives along with the narratives of the young girls and applying theoretical threads provided for a multilayered understanding of the complexities involved in the negotiations of identity.

I assume positions of both researcher and participant in this writing and, at other times, I assume the role of autobiographer where the researcher stays silent and does not say anything at all and instead let the self-reflective stories speak for themselves. By presenting self-reflections and 'data' in the form of the young girls narratives, I engage in the mixing of different modes/styles of writing. Bringing together these differing modes of writing creates “a conjoining interrelatedness that characterizes rhizomatic inquiry, and distinguishes it from conventional analysis” (Low & Palulus, 2000, p.1). These diverse author positions represent the many tensions between academic ways of knowing and experiential knowing and also reveal how I myself developed through the study of these young girls.

This study takes place in a city in British Columbia, Canada. The participants include six young girls aged 10 and 11 years all of whom were in the fifth grade at the time the study was conducted. All girls Sikh and punjabi The negotiations involved in the construction of “me” and meaning making as stemmed by their experiences at non-instructional times is the focus of this study.

There are many facets involved in the school experiences of children. The school experiences of children involve not only what occurs while sitting in the classroom, but also what happens during the non-instructional times of lunch and recess. For most children, lunch and recess can be the best part of school. It gives them a chance to get away from the books and to have fun and play. But for some children, it is the most
dreaded part of school. There is much literature on the instructional component of school and what children's thoughts and perceptions of classroom materials are. Various avenues of the classroom have been studied including the setting of the classroom, the behaviors of students, the best teaching strategies, the best learning methods, and much more. On the other hand, little research has focused on the non-instructional school times of lunch and recess.

Reflecting back on my experiences of school, some of the most memorable are from the school playground. My experiences were shaped and affected by ethnocultural inheritance, especially by my being a member of a visible minority. What is the school experience like for children from ethnoculturally diverse populations? What are their experiences of non-instructional school times? And how do they make sense of their experiences?

The above set of questions, personal lived narratives, and personal urge to find and make space for the voices and words of young girls in research form the foundations of this inquiry. I wanted to hear their words and voices, therefore, “this inquiry is about ‘entering that unsettling space’ and opening up the discursive spaces between invisibility, stereotypes, and other related matters of identity and representation that impinge on the lives” of six 10 and 11 year old girls (Lam, 1998, p.9).

This thesis takes the position that experiences encountered during non-instructional times at school may impact a child’s sense of self and in turn impact the identity(s) construction process that a child may partake in through their life course.

In this thesis, I present the everyday lived realities of six young girls experiences of lunch and recess times in their own words as they spoke of them. The thesis of this
study considered the social sense of self revealed through the narratives of these young girls. Specifically, this study looked at the reflections of self inside the sphere of experiences of non-instructional school times. This study highlights the parameters of self revealed by the young girls through their narratives. I begin by asking, what identities are young girls constructing, and destructing at the age of 10 and 11? What are the experiences of non-instructional school times for young ethnoculturally diverse girls and what role and impact do they have on their self-identity formations? To what extent does the family context negotiate or preserve identity for these young girls? How do these young girls negotiate between family and society when constructing their identities? To address these questions I draw upon insights developed within the perspective of poststructuralism.

In Chapter one, I set as my goal the clearing of some conceptual space for myself in order to discuss the concepts that would frame this project. In Chapter two, a historical review of Punjabi people in Canada is provided. Chapter three explores the literature specific to "race," self-concept and identity. Chapter four outlines the methodology that supports this mode of inquiry and also discusses the research methods used. Chapter five provides an introduction to and self-biographical portraits of the young girls involved in this study. Chapter six presents my readings and re-readings of the young girls narratives as they give meaning to their experiences of lunch and recess times. Chapter seven includes a summary of what can be learned from the narratives of the girls and also outlines implications of findings for educational stakeholders and schools. Lastly, I pay a (re)visit to childhood memories and the impact of the young girls narratives on my own journey and search for identity(s). These chapters are presented in a narrative and
conversational style of writing. My account of the research process, how I engaged within it and how the various stages of the process were performed are presented in a narrative form. Presenting this thesis in this manner was a natural extension from the contextualized stories and experiences of the participants. The narrative writing style allowed for creating a setting of the research process in a manner that also suites the intertextual nature of this thesis. This form of re-presentation “in the end...creates a metastory about what happened by telling what the interview narratives signify, editing and reshaping what was told, and turning it into a hybrid story, a ‘false document’” (Reissman, 1993, p.13). Framing the composition of the research process “in the language of ‘representation’ rather than ‘stages’ or ‘perspectives’ emphasizes that we actively make choices that can be accomplished in different ways. Interpreting experiences involves representing reality; we create and recreate voices over and over again during the research process” (p.16).

This could be termed a postructural approach to writing that “challenges the status quo of research products. This happens textually by juxtaposing a range of genres, by addressing decentred reading audiences within the text, by layering meanings, and by the occasional personal inclusion in the research of the writer’s voice and body” (Rhedding-Jones, 1996, p.29). Such a poststructural stance also “allows for a textual play with writing and meanings so that the play itself could generate knowledge and possibilities” (p.24).
Limitations and frustrations of words

I found myself struggling with how to represent this group of young girls without having to slot them into one of the general categories offered by existing literature. Contemporary language would have me and want me to use a general homogeneous label of Indo-Canadian or East Indian or South Asian to lump together individuals who are of Indian descent. In an attempt to break away from contributing to this happening of “homogeneity by label,” I decided to refer to the participants as punjabi. Thereby recognizing the young girls ethnocultural diversity without applying a general homogenizing label. My struggles and frustrations with language did not stop here. I was unsuccessful in my efforts to break away from the restrictions of language. In some instances, it was difficult to get away from using words that I did not want to use. Words such as minority, race, people of color, or colored people, Indo-Canadian kept resurfacing in the readings and in quoting and drawing from these readings, I was compelled to use these words as they were specified by a given study. It is important to disclose my dilemmas with language and words in order that the reader be made aware that these terms exist in this thesis out of necessity not desire.

Although frustrated by the constrictions experienced as a writer/author by many words, and unsure of how to break free from the strangle hold, I feel replacing old discriminating words with new ones will not solve the problem, as new words will take up discriminations of their own. Words are not neutral, therefore the problem lies as much within the words as in the meanings associated with them. The task of introducing potential ways of solving this problem are beyond the scope of my researching abilities. I take encouragement in Trinh’s words “the more these terms are popularized, the more
difficult the challenge we encounter when we use them. But we would have to keep on using them so that we can continue… ‘the verbal struggle’” (Trinh, 1999, p.40), and continue to use these words in this project with hope.
It was my protection, my shield and armor from the shrapnel of hurtful words and snickers that surrounded me at lunch, recess and after school. It wasn’t a gold and shiny shield but rather brown with fur. This shield was a winter jacket that I wore all day, everyday to school regardless of whether it was raining or 30 degrees out. I would always pull the hood up over my head and hide my hands into my sleeves and pockets in an attempt to cover as much of myself up as possible with my shield. I would pretend that the verbal assaults of “hindu” and “paki” could bounce of my shield of brown and fur and thus not penetrate into me, into my soul. Unfortunately, my shield wasn’t as strong as I thought. This was evident from the countless evenings of crying and not wanting to go to school and panic attacks in the morning triggered by the fear of what I would have to shield off in the day to come.

I lived right across from the school so I would go home for lunch when I could. I would always take a short cut home. The faster I could get home, the faster I could feel safe. Home was the safe zone where I couldn’t be touched. Nobody was allowed in unless I said so. Unfortunately, taking the short cut meant having to walk through the field and jumping over a fence, but I was willing to do that if it got me home faster. I could get home faster and out of the view of potential discriminators faster. But there were days when I wasn’t fast enough. The most memorable day was the one where I got chased through the field and out the schoolyard. I could see my home in the distance and knew that if I could just run fast enough, I could be safe. But my 10-year-old legs were no match for the teenaged ones that were pounding behind me. As I was being thrown into the ditch, I told myself I had to be faster next time. I had to become more invisible. My shield of brown and fur had failed me once again.
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PUNJABI PEOPLE IN CANADA

Given that this research is by and with young girls of the Punjabi culture and Sikh faith, a brief introduction to this culture and religion is needed. It also provides a historical context of Punjabi people in Canada. Although this background does not necessarily reflect the individual histories and stories of how the families of the young girls in this study came to Canada, it nonetheless endeavors to provide a flexible historical framework of migration. As well, situated within this history are the generations that came before me and the generations that came after me, therefore this historical review provides a look at how immigration patterns have shifted in Canada.

Also given the marked negative historical events that have characterized the early life course of many Punjabis in British Columbia, it would be difficult to “make sense” of the meaning making process without first setting and providing insights into the unique socio-historical contexts of those who came before us.

Furthermore, the majority of papers and articles I have read do not recognize, or at least do not acknowledge, the differences that exist amongst and between East Indians, South Asians, Indo-Canadians or whatever other label used to designate this group. Although typically merged together under these homogenizing labels by Canadian society and by the research community, there exists diversity and hierarchies within this population. Sihota (2000) also denotes the need to acknowledge these differences. She states, “it is important to note the diversity among the Indo-Canadian population in terms of religion, culture, language and food...so although the Indo-Canadian population may share the same mother country of India, they do not necessarily share the same cultural
backgrounds or personal experiences” (p.20). This has significant implications when one considers the generalizations that researchers aim to make with their findings.

All of the young girls involved in this project are of the punjabi culture. Punjabi people are from the Punjab, a northwestern province in India. The name Punjab is made up of two Persian words, “panj” meaning five and “ab” meaning water, signifying the land of five rivers. Agriculture is the main economy in the Punjab in fact, “seventy-five percent of its population lives in villages engaged in agricultural or allied occupations” (Dhaliwal-Rai, 2001, p.30).

“The culture of Punjab is best reflected in its folklore, ballads of love and war, fairs and festivals, dancing, music and literature. Punjab holds numerous religious and seasonal festivals, such as Dussehra, Diwali, and Baisakhi, as well as anniversary celebrations in honour of Gurus and saints” (http://www.censusindia.net, 1996). These celebrations continue among the punjabi’s in Canada as well. The dances of bhangra (traditionally a dance performed by men now both men, and women engage in bhangra) and giddha (performed by women) are a part of many of punjabi cultural celebrations.

The punjabi culture and punjabi identity has a strong collective identity, which exists amongst the community. The only way to become a member of this identity is to born into it; that is, born punjabi. The Punjabi language as mother tongue and ancestral origins in the geographical region of the Punjab are pivotal to membership as a punjabi. However, the punjabi identity is not standard in nature. In fact, it takes on many forms, who is labeled with what form depends on many things including your family lineage, your family ijist (honor), your known ways of behaving, language, caste, religious beliefs, and most importantly, the communities perceptions of you. Therefore, people of
a punjabi community “claim a common identity, but that identity encompasses a great deal of cultural diversity and subcategories” (Helweg, 1999, p.357). Perhaps this is why, “wherever Punjabi Sikhs have settled, they have demonstrated great skill in resisting assimilation” (Gibson, 1988, p.123). It is this resistance to assimilation that makes the self-identities constructed by a particular child so unique. How do they negotiate between family and society when constructing their identities?

One of the larger misconceptions that I see in research studies today is the interchangeable usage of the words punjabi and Sikh, that being the false belief that being punjabi and being Sikh is one in the same. The two are not one in the same. Sikhism is a religion whereas punjabi is a culture. It is possible for an individual to be punjabi, but not Sikh and vice versa.

Sikh is the punjabi word for disciple. The birth of the Sikh religion, in the fifteenth century, came at a time when India was in great turmoil and facing “major economic, political, and social unrest and instability” (Bolaria & Basran, p.15).

The inception of Sikhism came from the first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji and was solidified with the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The ten Gurus were: Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Guru Angad Ji, Guru Amar Das Ji, Guru Arjan Ji, Guru Hargobind Ji, Guru Har Rai Ji, Guru Hari Kirshen Ji, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, and Guru Gobind Singh Ji, each successful Guru was appointed by the leaving one and each provided their own contributions to the formation of the Sikh religion.

Guru Gobind Singh was responsible for providing Sikhs with a “distinct physical identity” (commonly referred to as the 5K’s and the turban) and the creation of the Khalsa Panth in 1699. The line of Gurus ended with the tenth Guru as he did not assign a
Guru after him. He instead told Sikhs to follow the Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Bible holding the collection of the Gurus teachings and learnings which was started by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Devi Ji) and use it as a guide in life.

Sikhism focuses on both the individual as well as the Sikh community life of a person. Although Sikh religion empathizes the belief in one God, Sikhs are also taught to respect and tolerate other religions. Equality, union, and service are key principles of Sikhism. Sikhs are expected to follow the teachings of the Gurus in their lives. The five virtues stressed by Sikhism are “chastity, patience, contentment, detachment, and humility” (Bolaria & Basran, p.24). Sikhs are not to consume intoxicants, and are expected to live life morally, and to work and earn honestly and to share their earnings.

It was the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Guru of 10, that gave birth to Sikhism and that lay at the root of Sikhism today. In Sikhism one must “accept the Will of God and thus sublimate his suffering and loss. Sikhism believing in the conquest of sorrow and suffering stipulates ceaseless endeavor” (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990, p.252). Sikhism “recognizes the existence of the same heavenly Light in every human being” regardless of their social class, caste, sex, religion, color, or creed (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990, p.3). It is because of this that the doors to the Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) are open to anybody and everybody without prejudice or discrimination. At the Gurdwara everyone is welcome to join in the Langar (Guru’s free kitchen). Doing so involves “that all should sit in the same row and partake of the same food without any discrimination of being high or low, rich or poor, and prince or the peasant” (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990, p.4). The Gurdwara is where the Guru Granth Sahib (The Sacred Volume) is kept. The Guru Granth Sahib is a collection of the Gurbani (Divine
Word) as it came to the Gurus directly from God. “It is a highly valuable possession which Sikhs have received from God through Guru Nanak and it is held in supreme reverence by them” (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990, p.251). Gurbani provides guidance on one’s journey to God and also “helps a person to live by certain directives or moral codes which are necessary for the achievement of salvation” (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990, p.251).

**Canada meets punjabis**

The entry of Indians into Canada dates back to the early 1900s at which time, the voyage from India to Canada cost 300 rupees or $65. From 1904 to 1906 432 Indians were admitted into Canada. In 1907 and 1908 this number increased into the 2000s. The admissions dropped to 9 in 1909 and from 1910 – 1962 there were no more than 88 Indians admitted any given year, and in some years there were no admissions at all. This decrease was due the fact that “during this period many measures were taken to control and restrict entry of potential immigrants from India” (Basran & Bolaria, 2003, p.99). The most eminent measures taken during this time was the “continuous journey stipulation” and the condition that individuals have possession of $200 upon entry into Canada. This stipulation meant, “immigrants who came to Canada, ‘otherwise than by continuous journey from their countries of which they were natives or citizens, may be refused entry’ (Basran & Bolaria, 2003, p.99). Perhaps the most significant historical incident of Indians in Canada under this immigration law was the Komagata Maru incident of 1914 when an endeavor was taken to under the continuous journey regulations.

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1 I use the term Indian here because although the immigrants are from India, it is not mentioned what part of India they are from or what culture they belong to.
The Komagata Maru (the passengers had renamed it Guru Nanak Jahaz) was a Japanese ship chartered by a wealthy Sikh entrepreneur named Gurdit Singh in an attempt to test the continuous journey regulation of Canada. The ship carried 376 passengers of which 340 were Sikhs, 24 were Muslim, and 12 were Hindus from Hong Kong on April 4, 1914 to the Vancouver Harbour on May 23, 1914. Upon their arrival, they were met by racist people and racist immigration policies and except for 22 of the passengers (believed to be either relatives of earlier settlers or returning residents) were prohibited from entering Canada. Despite the many attempts made by Sikhs residing in Vancouver at the time (including collecting $18,000 to pay the Japanese ship owner and also pay for food for the passengers), the Komagata Maru was forced to leave Vancouver. The Komagata Maru departed from Vancouver on July 23, 1914 at 5:10 in the morning.

"Six months of confinement on board the Komagata Maru ended for most of these passengers in another form of confinement" (Johnston, 1998). The ship arrived in Calcutta, India, on September 29, 1914 where the passengers were met by the British army and police. The British government wanted to hold the passengers in Calcutta (the government was concerned about the implications on British rule in India) when the passengers refused and instead wanted to continue on home to the Punjab, the army opened fire killing 20 of the passengers. While a few were able to escape, the majority were arrested. A number of those arrested were sent to the Punjab and were put under village arrest for the remainder of World War I.

"The Komagata Maru incident is an important episode in Canadian history and immigration policy. It brought into sharp focus the contradictions between democratic and egalitarian ethos, on the one hand, and discriminatory and racist policies of the state
towards racial minority and colonized immigrants, on the other hand” (Basran & Bolaria, 2003, p.101). On the 75th anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident, two plaques were placed in Vancouver, one at the Gateway to the Pacific in downtown Vancouver and the other at the Vancouver gurdwara on Ross Street to commemorate the incident.

Because of restrictive measures such as these and racist immigration polices, the number of Indian’s admitted to Canada remained very low. It is not until 1962 that we see a rise in admissions, totaling 584 for the year. The admission of Indians into Canada and thus the population of Indians in Canada remained rather minimal until 1967 when “the increasing demand for professional-skilled workforce led to basic changes in immigration policy” (p.104). Race was replaced with education and skills to be the principal measure for entrance into Canada. Points were allocated “based on such factors as age, education, occupations demand, skill, knowledge of the language, adaptability, and the like” (p.104). Although, the introduction of this immigration policy led to an increased number of Indian immigrants coming to Canada, immigrants from India are still among the lowest in Canada (p.106).

The initial overview provided of the punjabi culture shows how scholars and textbooks define the punjabi culture. I have found Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybrid cultures, as he explores the changing meanings of the concept of culture, most useful and relevant for this research project. Viewed this way culture exists and is defined in a different way for each of us as our experiences, both the present and history will influence how we define culture. For those who lived and experienced the Komagata Maru incident, punjabi may be something entirely different than what punjabi is to me, or the young girls. As readers, you have been provided the text book definition of the
punjabi culture as it is supposed to be and also will be provided with glimpses into what
punjabi is for the participants and for me, you then can make for yourself a hybrid
definition of the punjabi culture.

This immigration overview illustrates how Canada as a country was not always
entirely accepting of punjabi people (and may not be entirely accepting even today).
Also, an insight into what punjabi and canadian may have meant to those who traveled
along the path in search of belonging before me is obtained. As I continue on my
journey, the meanings that I have associated (and associate) with punjabi and canadian
become evident through my self-reflective writings. And likewise, what punjabi is or is
becoming for the young girls is derived through their narratives; thereby providing a
three generation look as to how meanings and cultural definitions for punjabi have shifted
over the years.
Photographs of the Komagata Maru

Passengers waiting to approval to be allowed to walk on Canada.

The Komagata Maru surrounded by police boats in the Vancouver Harbour.

Inscription on plaque at the Gateway to the Pacific in downtown Vancouver
On May 23, 1914, 376 British Subjects (12 Hindus, 24 Muslims and 340 Sikhs) of Indian origin arrived in Vancouver harbour aboard the Komagata Maru, seeking to enter Canada. 352 of the passengers were denied entry and forced to depart on July 23, 1914. This plaque commemorates the 75th anniversary of that unfortunate incident of racial discrimination and reminds Canadians of our commitment to an open society in which mutual respect and understanding are honoured, differences are respected, and traditions are cherished.

Inscription on plaque at the Ross Street gurdwara in Vancouver
Komagata Maru Incident 75th Anniversary. Dedicated to the memory of the 376 passengers (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, 12 Hindus) who arrived at Burrard Inlet, Vancouver on May 23, 1914, from the Indian sub-continent on the ship Komagata Maru (Guru Nanak Jahaz). Due to the racist immigration policy of the Dominion of Canada, they were forced to leave on July 23, 1914. Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, pays respect to those passengers by commemorating the reprehensible incident.

2 Photos obtained from the following website http://www.lib.ucdavis.edu/punjab/koma.html.
Here we go again... I groaned to myself as I heard my mother tell one of her friends that I would go with her to some government office to interpret for her. You see Kuljeet (my mother’s friend), recently got married in India. Upon her arrival at the Vancouver airport, the immigration officer retained all her jewelry including her wedding ring. Kuljeet doesn’t speak English very well and couldn’t understand why the officer did this, but knowing that she was not in the position to argue or even had the ability to argue she gave in and handed over all her jewelry. I could see Kuljeet sitting in our living room sobbing pleading with my mother to help. My mother said that all she could do was send me with her to the immigration office to help figure out what happened. I could see that Kuljeet was very upset and I understood why she would be, but why did I have to go with her? I always had to play the role of the interpreter with family members I didn’t want to have to take on that role for ‘others’ too. Having to stand in an office with a person all dressed in punjabi garb and talking loudly in Punjabi always made me angry. I didn’t want people to make the mistake of categorizing me as being one of them. It was embarrassing for me to have to translate for them. In recalling these memories, it is me - the possessor of the all mighty English tongue - who now feels embarrassed to have ever felt that way.
CHAPTER THREE: STORIES FROM THE LITERATURE

The literary sources presented in this chapter illustrate understandings about the genealogy of the term “race”; this chapter also provides an overview of studies that have to date focused on children, “race” and identity formation.

Making Sense of “Race”

The existence of the concept of race and its use within literature is problematic. Although, the origins of the word “race” in the English language can be traced to a poem written in 1508 by William Dunbar entitled, “The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sins” (Satzewich, p.26), the term was used during this time to refer “only to a class or category of people or things. These classes or categories were not seen as biologically distinct, nor were they seen as situated in a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority” (Satzewich, p.27). The meaning of the term is believed to have shifted from self-classification and family lineage to referring to inherent and biological differences in groups of people in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some argue that the shift in the use and meaning of the term came about due to “honest attempts to explain the physical and cultural diversity that had been exposed through European colonialism and overseas expansion” (Satzewich, p.28). The term “race” no longer referred to how an individual defined themselves but rather now referred to a more negative, labeling the “Other”. Coupled with the emergence of theories of Darwinism, “the concept of race as evaluation and separation between superior and inferior” was solidified, impacting the lives of many humans for centuries to come (Handa, 2003, p.41).

Appiah (1996) considers the persistence of people to racially label those who are “ethnically obvious,” a labeling that is “so hard to escape,” to be one of those impacts
This labeling is difficult to escape because “strangers, friends, officials are always aware of it in public and private contexts, always notice it, almost never let it slip from view” and therefore, by virtue of being physically different, those who are non-White are inevitably open targets to racial identification by others. Furthermore, Roman (1993) posits that “race ... all too often has been used as a synonym for groups and persons who have been positioned as racially subordinate.” Therefore, the combination of this position of racial subordination with the application of an unescapable label may bring along with it many inescapable social and psychological effects that could mold the manner in which people perceive of themselves (Appiah, 1996, p.69).

The axis of these views is accompanied by the assertion that racism is an important aspect of social reality and should not be ignored; however, in order to gain perspective on the issue of racism, race need not be the primary mode of investigation. There is a need to move beyond studies that are limited to investigating physical difference or race and that do not acknowledge the realities of feelings and thoughts associated with these differences as “thinking of race strictly as an ideological concept denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on people in their everyday lives” (Ladson-Billings, 1996, p.249).

Children and “Race”

The early 1900’s saw many studies dedicated to this issue of “race,” even with children. In fact, studies investigating a child’s perception of racial differences and personal racial identification began to surface as early as the 1930’s (McGuire, W.J., McGuire, C.V., Child & Fujioka, 1978). It was also at around this time that quantitative
measurement tools were being created to help measure these perceptions. Several measurement instruments came out of the studies including the picture test, the Draw-A-Person test, and the spontaneous self-concept test. According to Dutton, Singer, and Devlin (1998), even today these are the most frequently used tests to determine "the extent of racial identity and racial acceptance in elementary school children" (p.43). The goal of these tests is to assess the degree of racial awareness and preferences of a child, and to test the child's ability to racially identify him or herself. The central focus of these studies was to determine whether a child was aware of their race and of the differences between their race and the others around them.

One of the contributions of this research to the area of child studies is that "race is a salient factor for children at a very young age" (Graham, J.A., Cohen, R., Zibikowski, S.M. & Secrit, M.E., 1998, p.246) and that the awareness of racial differences is found in children as young as 3 years of age (Phinney & Rotherman, 1987, p.15). A critique of this research is that the feelings associated with these attitudes is not a primary area of investigation. Also, "race" was predetermined by the researchers and highlighted by them as the characteristic on which children were to respond and differentiate other children, therefore, it is difficult to determine where the children differentiate based on their perceptions of "race" as a physical marker or whether they were doing so because it was presented by the researcher (Phinney & Rotherman, 1987).

Dutton et al. (1998) state that the early school years are crucial for the formation of the child's own identity as a member of a race as well as an understanding of prejudice and fairness. Therefore, it is no surprise that "recent initiatives [1990's] include attempts
to investigate ethnic and cultural diversity in children’s peer relations both within and across national boundaries” (Ladd, 1999, p.353).

The importance of including the voices of children from a younger age in research is highlighted by Dutton et al (1988). They assert, “as most children will have formed strong racial attitudes by late elementary school, many of them influenced by the school environments, researchers should examine children from schools with various racial make-ups to determine the effects of the setting on the development of racial identity” (p.42). Dei (1997) further posits, “the term ‘race’ is itself a socio-historical construction that continues to have a pervasive influence on how students experience school” (p.242). How do children respond to this racial identification? What does it do to children’s’ self-identity? What role does the school environment play in children’s’ self-identity formations? These are all vital questions guiding the inquiry of this study.
“Race” and Me

My experiences of elementary school haunt me even today. The role these experiences played in the destruction of my cultural pride, the hatred of the color of my skin and the confusion that led to a lack of identity is undeniable. I spent my entire childhood and adolescence attempting to become white. When doctors refused to help me in my agenda, I attempted to scrub my skin white with everything from orange peels to bleach. My hatred towards my culture and race stemmed from my experiences as a student in the Canadian education system. The negativity I experienced because of my darker pigment and my ‘funny’ culture from the other children occurred most frequently during lunch and recess. As a child these times quite quickly became my most dreaded moments. Because of my experiences at school, I have yet to completely embrace myself as I am. I exist in many fragments whose union can only come through the embracing of my cultural identity by myself. This has proven to be a very difficult process, a painful process.

This is just one story, my story of what lunch and recess breaks at school felt like to a 10 year old Punjabi Sikh girl. How many other untold stories, yet, vitally important stories are out there? This is an area that warrants further investigation, as more research needs to focus on the impact to thoughts and feelings of ethnoculturally diverse children and ultimately if racial identification has an effect on the self-identity formation of children.

This is the journal entry that began this inquiry....
Self-Concept

Predominately children's sense of self has been studied through the notion of self-concept. In fact, W.J. McGuire, C. V. McGuire, Child, and Fujioka (1978) noted that by as early as 1974, there were more than a thousand studies on the issue of self-concept in existence. The term self-concept is largely used by researchers when studying one's perception of self "by means of self-descriptors" (Oosterwegel & Oppenheimer, 1993, p.5). Self-concept can be defined as a child's perception of themselves in relation to specific domains, as a result of the interactions that they may have with the environment around them (Alwaiye & Alawiye, 2001, p.139). Researchers agree that "the self-concept of children is an important aspect of their psychosocial development" (Verschueren, Marcoen, & Schoefs, 1996; Haynes, 1990; Wong, 1998).

Subsequently, there is much literature investigating self-concept in elementary-aged children. Furthermore, the domains used by researchers to study self-concept perceptions of children have, for the most part, revolved around the three areas of academic, social, and physical (Hong, 1997; Herbert & Ellis, 2002). These may include such factors as: physical maturity, peer relations, academic success, school adaptiveness, interactions with students and adults, feelings, body satisfaction, behavioral problems; the list goes on.

Self-concept has been the favored mode of investigation by researchers to determine how young children perceive themselves. Generally, self-concept is studied and determined in relation to specific domains. As McGuire et al. (1978) note, "almost all of these studies, rather than investigating what dimensions people use in thinking about themselves, present a dimension chosen by the researcher and ask the participants
to locate themselves on it” (p.511). The child is generally asked to self-identity based on only a few characteristics, chosen by the researcher. Therefore, studying the concept of self using specific domains or self-descriptors may only provide a limited, and fragmented view of a child’s self perception. Furthermore, it must also be recognized that “different domains constitute different aspects of people’s lives, and therefore the same individual moving in and out of them is bound to change and adapt to the requirements put forward by these domains” (Wang & Li, 2003, p.96), illustrating a limitation of studying self-concept using predetermined specific domains. Self-concept is used “when a sample of self-descriptors is dealt with, that is, a sample of statements about the self” (Oosterwegel & Oppenheimer, 1993, p.xi). Therefore, in studies involving self-concept “the processual nature of the self has received little attention” (Breakwell, 1992, p.3). Self-concept is defined as “the process of reflexivity or self-awareness, namely, the ability to be both subject and object to oneself” (Côté & Levine, 2002, p.70). Self-concept then does not allow for the hearing and seeing of the negotiations that take place between the individual and social as identities are formed. The study of self-concept lends itself to quantitative means where the thoughts, feelings, why and hows behind an individual’s choices are not necessarily important. Individual’s are asked to self evaluate and self categorize based on provided categories, the meanings behind these choices are not looked or examined. The use of self-concept then provides perceptions of self that are to be fixed and categorized, a view of self-identity that this study does not share.

The majority of existing research on self-concept lacks an examination of the reality that children exist in different cultural environments. Since children of different
cultural backgrounds emerge in different environments, it is reasonable that the self-concept of a child from a visible minority group might develop differently than that of a Western child. This theme is echoed by Bell (2003), who notes that “social science studies document that schooling, housing, employment, social relations, religious observation, the media, and relations with police, literally every area of social life, are experienced differently by Whites and People of Color”; therefore, “given that the lived realities of Whites and People of Color are different, it is not surprising that their perceptions of the world differ as well” (p.5). Assuming a similar position, Aoki (1983) speaks to the task of self perceptions and forming a self-identity which requires “probing [that] does not come easily to a person flowing within the mainstream. It comes more readily to one who lives at the margin – to one who lives in a tension situation” (p.325).

The self-concept of Mexican, Chilean, and Chinese children was looked at by Alawiye and Alawiye (2001) using the existing measurement scales and results “indicated similar self-concept development patterns” to those of Western children (p.139). But, it could be argued that the quantitative measurement tools that were used in the above mentioned studies could lack the ability to discriminate between ethnoculturally diverse populations. A study by Wang and Li (2003) supports this thought. Rather than using existing self-measurement scales, the authors used a qualitative approach of interviews and found that there were distinct cultural differences present in the concept of self between Chinese and American children; thereby allowing the possibility that self-concept formation may be culturally specific.

Children have a rich and diverse cultural experience. Family life of these children may have a strong focus on their culture and religion. Many daily activities and practices
in a punjabi home, for example, focus around the punjabi culture, as a result a child develops understanding of their culture at a very young age. Accordingly, their sense of self has a strong cultural component to it. It is once they leave their homes and enter the social realm of school that experiences may cause them to question their sense of self and the role that their culture plays in it. This questioning, in part, transpires when they are “othered” by their peers when they are “othered” within society (including at school) and forced to be made aware of their difference. It is when this othering begins that punjabi children then become engaged in negotiations of identity. I make this claim from my experiences of being someone from this group and my knowledge of the punjabi culture and community, as they exist in canadian society.

To obtain a more holistic perception of self, this research will not provide the participants with predetermined domains, but rather let them decide for themselves which aspects they find to be the most prevalent for their self-identity. Therefore this study will use the term self-identity as opposed to self-concept. After having reviewed much literature on each of the terms, I realized that, as Breakwell (1992) notes, “the distinction between the two concepts [self-concept and identity] has never been firmly fixed” (p.2). As there is much debate in literature about the exact definitions of these terms, I have provided a brief overview on identity to help construct a working definition of this term for the purpose of this study.

Identity is “the product of the interaction of the individual with influences in the physical and social world” (Liebkind, 1992, p.157), as such there are many components to identity including self-identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, racial identity, national identity, sexual identity, gender identity, social identity, and personal identity.
just to name a few. The complexities in negotiating an identity, that self-concept does
not permit, involves “not only when and where and how am I, but...also why am I, what
am I in relation to - not even who am I in relation to, but what, why am I here - so that
identity is in a way a response to a certain inquisition” (Trinh, 1999, p.20).

Identity studies focus “on the formation of ‘me,’ by exploring the ways in which
interpersonal interactions mold an individual’s sense of self” (Cerulo, 1997, p.386).
Interactions are not limited to specific domains and in fact traverse through all realms of
an individual’s being showing the fluid nature of self-perceptions and the meaning
making processes.

The definition of identity adopted in this study is “that the formation of an
identity, regardless of the domain in relation to which it is held, is a creative, constructive
meaning-making process in which the individual is actively involved” (Coyle, 1992,
p.188). Identity is left in whole, as there is not a specific component of identity that is
sought out and investigated. As well, I felt, it would be problematic to determine ad hoc
which elements of the girls’ identity would be impacted by their experiences of lunch and
recess. How the girls were impacted by the interactions they experience and how or if
those interactions affected their self-identity was a unique and individual experience for
each of them. Specially, this research looked at whether the self-identity of these young
punjabi girls was influenced by the perceptions of their peers of their ethnncultural
diversity. Therefore, in this context in addition to the perceptions of “me” the
participating young girls held for themselves, self-identity referred “to definitions of
individual self and personhood, and how the inner sense of self is connected to the outer
perception of self. Identity cannot be defined in isolation” (Dei, 1997, p.241). The key
research question for this thesis then becomes, if racial identification is occurring, how does it affect the self-identity of these girls?

In this study, the image of self and the resulting formation of self identity was viewed as a construction through daily interactions between self and other in social contexts; therefore, the perceptions of others about us is viewed as playing a key role in how we construct identities for ourselves. Defined this way, identity becomes an undertaking situated in, through and by “the tensions and exigencies of how one sees her self and how one is known by others when both processes are complicated by socially inscribed meanings and discourse around ethnic, race, and gender (and I would add culture and religion) differences” (Lam, 1998, p.10). It also demonstrates the fluid, messy, nature of using identity that tools for measuring self-concept may not consider. Trinh (1989) renders identity as multiplicity by suggesting that self and other and the links between them are countless and fashioned in human relations:

Not One, not two either. “I” is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered by layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see a true face. ... Whether I accept it or not, the natures of I, i, you, s/he, We, we they, and wo/man constantly overlap...[T]he line dividing I and Not-I, us and them, or him and her is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be. (p.94)

Literature examining the self-concept demonstrate how defining oneself based on domains requires clarity so that one can define oneself based on rigid, fixed, immovable categories. Literature employing identity however does not demand such rigidness, thereby allowing to highlight the muddled and untidy process of negotiations and construction of identity(ies).
Children and Play

There is numerous literature present on children's play behaviors. Studies have examined the role of play in schools, and the types of interactions that take place on a playground (Lewis & Phillipsen, 1998; Kelle, 2000; Boulton, 1993). In addition, there has been much research on children's relationships with their peers and what children's perceptions of school are, and their perceptions of their relationships with their teachers and schoolmates (e.g., Kistner, J. et.al., 1993; Dickinson et al., 2001; Hundley & Cohen, 1999; Valeski & Stipek, 2001). However, much of this research has focused on the quantitative nature of demographic factors such as race, age, gender, and socioeconomic status (Lewis et al., 1998). One of the central arguments presented by authors thus far has been whether or not play has a role in the school system. Another is determining the characteristics of the peers that children decide to interact with during play. No research has focused on the impact interactions during play at recess and lunch have on a young child's self-concept or sense of identity. How do visible minority children respond to their experiences during non-instructional school times? Do they experience discrimination? If so, how do they respond to it? What does this do to their self-identity? These are fundamental questions that have been missing from research so far and questions that this research project will attempt to address.

Research on the effects of racial identification on a young child’s self-identity has to date been missing. Connolly and Keenan (2002) note “there is now a growing body of research on racist harassment in schools” (p.341) being conducted in England and Ireland. It is derived from existing literature, that a child’s self-concept takes form and shape through a multitude of factors and it is agreed upon that “children’s self concept
appears to be domain specific" (Wong, 1998, p.605); therefore, it is crucial that this
domain be investigated in relation to self-identity. This study examines the preservation,
construction and destruction of self-identity by focusing on the narratives of interactions
young girls' experience at lunch and recess and whether these experiences involve
identification and discrimination.

**Self-identity with Family and Community**

The young girls that were involved in this study were 10 and 11 years old. The
majority of their lives involve interactions with their peers at school and interactions with
their family. Phinney and Rotheram (1987) note that this is true for most children and
that “during these years, ethnicity affects the child primarily through the immediate
environment of family, peers, and school” (p.8). In addition, Liebkind (1992) states “the
identity of an individual is formed, developed, changed and preserved throughout life in
various identity negotiations, the first of which take place between the parents and
children” (p.165).

**Identity and punjabi canadian Women**

When trying to locate research for this section of the literature review, I was not
surprised to find that research in this area is almost non-existent. The situation becomes
even worse when searching for literature with a focus on punjabi children. The voices
and words of their experiences are absent. When I was able to locate research focusing
specifically on punjabi people, they were in the form of unpublished master's theses or
doctoral dissertations. Although in some instances the words of participants were
incorporated, they mostly were those of teenagers or adults, children were once again
silent. Nonetheless, the one voice that spoke louder to me than others was that of Amita
Handa (2003). A powerful voice of a second generation South Asian (the label she uses for herself) woman, scholar, and writer. Her book, Of Silk Saris and Miniskirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture, explores issues surrounding the way identity is imagined and constructed by South Asian teenaged girls in Toronto. In her book, Handa draws on her own personal experiences of a South Asian girl growing up in Canada and the words and voices of the South Asian girls in her study to show how these young girls are constructing and representing selves in the discourses of race, nation, culture and community.

Mann-Kahalma (1997) and Sihota (2000) (both unpublished master’s projects) researched the identity formations of young Indo-Canadian (the category they use) women ranging in age from 16-27 years. Both researchers reported that when speaking of their current identities, the participants in the studies referred back to experiences from their childhood and the impact that these experiences had on their development of self-identity even today. Some of the participants spoke of experiences of racism from school. In fact, Sihota (2000) notes that, “racism encountered by participants in their young lives led them to question their ethnic background and sense of identity” (p.22). Similar findings were reported by Mann-Kahalma (1997) further asserts “in a predominately ‘white’ society, these women’s racialized identities were easily ‘announced’ on the basis of their skin colour, whether they wished it or not” (p.119). She also remarks that the experiences of racism were “quite painful for some” (p.96) and that the women responded to the racism in two ways; that is, either by rejecting their own culture for the dominant white culture or by embracing their own culture and rejecting the white culture. I would contend that this might be more complex than the duality of
either/or presented by Mann-Kahalma. It is based on these findings that this study included elementary school aged punjabi girls. By including younger aged girls, we might be able to learn about their thoughts, feelings and perceptions as they are living and experiencing their elementary school years.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Situating myself in the research

Although the young girls in this study and I have a common cultural, ethnocultural, and gender position, these similarities do not necessarily prevent the occurrence of power dynamics as "my 'hand' as a researcher is clearly not the same hand, heart or mind" as those young girls who participated in this study (Lam, 1998, p.14). My "positions" that contribute to power inequalities in this study between myself and the young girls are: my being an adult and someone who is "old" (at least in the eyes and minds of the young girls), my education level and my physical image of a "good" punjabi girl. In addition, in the research context my position of researcher and the young girls of participant in itself created a power imbalance as I was the one in "control of the research process" (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p.183). Eder and Fingerson (2002) maintain the importance of examining these power dynamics in an attempt to reduce the inequalities produced by them.

One strategy I employed to reduce the power inequality is that of reciprocity which Eder and Fingerson define as "giving something in return for receiving" information from the young girls (p.185). Incorporating reciprocity into the research design provides a means to lessen the unequal potential of the researcher-researched hierarchy. Reciprocity can take different forms and can reduce the potential power inequality, the forms of reciprocity that I chose were self-disclosure and providing an avenue for action through the production of a fictional story that could become a resource to inform educators of the current situation of young girls in the Canadian school system.
At the onset of each individual conversation, I made a point to tell the young girls information about myself – my name, what I did in school, etc. The fictional story created by the young girls serves as a form of reciprocity as it may have created a sense of empowerment for the young girls be able to share their experiences with someone and to also know that they had constructed a resource that could help educators, principals and others understand their life-world and may also help educators make changes for future generations of these girls, and other students from visible minorities, in the school system.

Poststructuralism

The main intentions of this study were to better understand the experiences of lunch and recess times, self-identity concepts, and to provide a space for voices of young ethnoculturally diverse girls; therefore, positioning this inquiry wholly on the lived experiences of these young girls required an approach that adhered to issues of difference, lived experience, and identity. As such, a methodology that would involve rephrasing or re-presenting these voices was insufficient and inappropriate. It was essential that the methodology chosen would help demonstrate the importance of personal experience as a valuable form of knowledge. Based on these criteria a poststructuralist approach was chosen.

Poststructuralism critiques and interrupts some key concepts (i.e. language, power, discourse, knowledge and truth), as they are postulated by humanism. It also "challenges the assumptions that govern binary or oppositional thinking, demonstrating how binary oppositions always support a hierarchy or economy of value that operates by
subordinating one term to another, and through deconstruction, revealing, unraveling and reversing such hierarchies” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p.19).

In particular this study was concerned with subjectivity that is “the ways in which a person gives meaning to themselves, others and the world” (Handa, 1997, p.95). A poststructural stance is applied to re-viewing the narratives of these young girls in an attempt to understand how these young girls are “both ‘made subject’ by/within the social order and how they are agents/subjects within/against it” therefore the discursive practices that constitute the subject are explored (Jones, 1993, p.2). In structuralism, individuals are labeled and identified by general dominant categories, i.e., girl. The concern then becomes that “once the differences are erased by identity, people can more easily be slotted into a hierarchy or grid and then manipulated, dismissed, and oppressed” (St. Pierre, 2000, p.480). The use of poststructuralism in this study complements the intertextual nature of the thesis. Poststructuralism recognizes the partial nature of explanation, this helps demonstrate here the multiple and hybrid meanings of punjabi or canadian that are generated by the participants as they negotiate within the metonymic space. “Furthermore, [poststructuralism] considers practice to be more fundamental than theory (Foucault, 1978), requiring researchers to focus on everyday events: as both what we study and through which we theorise” (Rhedding-Jones, 1996, p.24).

Postructuralism undertakes a critique of the humanist view of identity and subjectivity which dominate modern day thinking in an attempt to shift “the focus away from a humanist understanding of identity, where the individual is conceptualized as a
rational, cohesive, fixed and unitary actor separate from the social world, to a focus on subjectivity; how we participate in creating our sense of self(ves)” (Handa, 1997, p.74)³.

Poststructuralism offers a more multifaceted understanding of how we come to construct our identities as “all the identity categories – race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age wellness etc. … must be taken into account as we think about people’s lives” (St. Pierre, 2000, p.480)⁴. They posit that an individual is the “intersection” of these various grouping, therefore “race or wellness, at different times, might be as important to someone as gender” (p.480). “‘I’ is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. ‘I’ is, itself, infinite layers” (Trinh, 1989, p.94). Post-structuralism emphasizes that subjectivities are multiple and intersect along race, gender, class and so forth and therefore, stresses the fluid nature of identity and the notion of self as multiple. Therefore a poststructuralist view does not eliminate the subject but rather “rehabilitate(s) it, decentere(s) it, and repositione(s) it, in all its historical-cultural complexity” (Peters, 1998, p.16)

Such a methodological stance within an educational domain is advantageous as “poststructuralism attempts to work productively with, rather than against, the complexity of human existence” (Lee, 1992, p.2). Drawing on a poststructuralist method of analysis permits the examination of non-instructional school times within the young girls narratives to produce “an account of the extraordinary complexity and contradictoriness” of race relations “as they are negotiated moment-by-moment” within the domain this domain of school (p.4).

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³ Emphasis in original text.
⁴ Emphasis in original text.
A poststructuralist framework yields an examination of these young girls’ narratives and the processes involved in identity development as entailing personal experiences and as well social constructions; therefore alluding to the fluidity of identity as it shifts based on the discourses one adopts and resists. Therefore, subjectivity, how we understand the world and our positions in it, is negotiated through the range of discourses to which we have access. The method of self-reflective journaling, interview transcripts followed by a re-telling of the narratives of the participants allows for the research to develop in a poststructural nature and “to put forward the notion that ‘the subject’ is a site of conflicting discourses” (Rhedding-Jones, 1996, p.25). The aim is to illuminate the multiple meanings of punjabi and canadian the participants are generating for themselves through playground and classroom events and how these definitions play a part in the identity construction processes of the participants.
Method: How the Inquiry Unfolded

Poststructuralism provided a methodological framework for this study to answer my research questions. This section summarizes the particular procedures I engaged in to carry out this inquiry within this framework.

Seeking participants – Where and How

The young girls were recruited from a city in British Columbia where the population is over 100,000 (Statistics Canada Census of 2001). Of this there are 16,780 persons of the Sikh religion. It is the second largest religious population in this city, the first being Protestant with 56,250 people, therefore providing for a large presence of punjabi people.

As I was interested in inviting young girls from the punjabi culture for this study, my approach for finding participants was to go to the city's punjabi school, which is held at the local gurdwaras in the city. Children of the punjabi culture are often sent to punjabi schools by their parents to learn about their culture and learn to read and write their language. Typically the punjabi school classes take place on the weekends and after school. I attended such a punjabi school when I was a child and having returned to the scene after close to twenty years, I realized how much things had changed. There are now 3 gurdwaras in this city each with its own following. The punjabi community in this city is divided as to which gurdwara they attend. One's political and religious beliefs will determine which gurdwara one will attend. Since which gurdwara one attends seems to make a difference on how one is perceived within the Punjabi community, I looked to my mom for advise on which gurdwara to approach. As I represent my family in the social realm, my actions impact the opinions the punjabi community holds of my family and
ultimately the family honor. I did not want to jeopardize the families’ “ijist” or honor in the punjabi community. My mom told me that our family was not dedicated to one or another, this decision was based on the belief that the gurdwara is a place to show your respect for God not a place for politics. So she gave me the blessing to go to any gurdwara of my choice. The punjabi school at the new gurdwara in town was contacted as it not only held classes on teaching and learning the punjabi language and culture to children, but also had a band class that taught children how to play traditional Sikh instruments. I thought this school might be more appealing to younger children and thus would have a larger pool of young girls to speak to about my study.

To help gain access to young girls for participation, a meeting was set with the teacher of the punjabi school. The teacher taught both the punjabi language classes as well as the band classes. At our meeting, I informed her about the research study and asked for her permission to attend one of the scheduled classes to talk with the students about my project in hopes of finding volunteers to participate (see Appendix A). The teacher agreed and a meeting was scheduled to attend a Friday night class to speak with the girls about the research project. The teacher arranged to have the 10 and 11 year old girls from her class meet with me in a private room in the gurdwara.

During my talk with the girls, I briefly introduced myself and as well the research project (see appendix B). The girls were told that participation in the project would entail one individual conversation that would take about an hour and two group conversations where all the young girls would get together participating as a group to write a story. Prepared packages were sent home with those girls who expressed interest in participating. The packages included: an introduction letter to the parents explaining the
purpose of the study, this letter was in both English and Punjabi (see Appendix C); a parental consent form in both English and Punjabi and as well as a child consent form (see Appendix D and E). The consent forms provided detailed information about the study, how to contact my thesis supervisor or me, what participation would involve, potential benefits for participating and as well, potential drawbacks for participating. They also specified that if at anytime the young girl did not want to continue on with the study or the parents did not want their daughter to remain in the study, she and the parents had the right to withdraw at any time.

I told the girls that they should take the packages home and review the contents with their parents, and call me if they were interested in participating but only if their parents also agreed to their participation.

Within the next week I had nine calls from young girls, and in some cases from parents, about participating; however, not all of the calls I received were from individuals whom I had met at the punjabi school I had attended. Some of the calls were from parents who had heard about the research project through friends. Therefore, in some cases, I was the one seeking and looking for participants and in others, they found me. Although I had not initiated it, the participant selection had snowballed.

Two of the nine young girls did not meet the criteria therefore could not be included. Seven did meet the criteria so I scheduled times to meet with each young girl for an individual conversation.

In addition to the calls received about young girls wanting to participate in the study I also received calls from parents who did not want their daughter to be a part of my research study. Perhaps the parents were skeptical of the research world and me as a
researcher of punjabi decent. This skepticism is something that Bariana experienced when recruiting South Asian women for her study in Toronto. Bariana (1997) explains this skepticism and distrust:

"the Sikh society is very insular, protective and secretive, open first to its family members, and second to the same kinship, case and clan members... At times I felt being a member of their culture was a definite benefit and other times I felt it was a curse because the role of researcher made me an outsider, a foreigner, a traitor..." (p.15)

**Identifying participants**

**Age**

The young girls involved with this research were 10 and 11 years old and were all in Grade five. They were all at the age and point in a girl’s life that she stands at the “edge of adolescence” at the “crossroads in a women’s development” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.1). Fuhrmann (1986) refers to this age group as being “at the onset of puberty” (p.31).

Involving young girls of this age was important when considering that it is by age 8-12, that children begin to “internalize, to act upon, and, in turn, to perpetuate society’s expectations” (Dutton et al, 1988, p. 42); therefore it was necessary for me to consider the feelings and thoughts of this age group and how they conceptualize self-identity as they may have the capability and perception of self-identity and the ability to negotiate it in terms of social interactions they encounter at lunch and recess times.

The study of self-identity has been limited to research involving adolescents and adults. This is primarily based on the theory that the undertaking of identity formation “includes the ability to know and understand oneself as an individual, as well as recognizing ones’ particular place in society” (Sihota, 2000, p.20), a capability believed
to require a certain degree of psychological, biological, and social development. As girls
at the ages of 10 and 11 years are believed to be at the initial stages of entering realm of
the womanhood (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Fuhrmann, 1986), it is logical to infer that
they will also be at the initial stages of the thinking processes that accompany this stage.
Therefore, this study included girls in Grade 5 (ages 10 – 11), as the level of
psychological, biological, and social development believed to accompany the formation
and construction self-identity may be occurring by this age.

Again, this study involved young girls from the punjabi culture; therefore coming
from an ethnic background, and being a visible minority, they may be engaged in a
reidentification process of self-identity formation a process that children from non-
minority backgrounds may not be engaged in at this age. In fact, Liebkind (1992) notes,
“if and when identity problems among minority children do occur, the most vulnerable
age seems to be the age group 11-12. This is due to the special developmental stage of
identity formation coinciding with the minority experience” (p.172).

Sex

This study involved only female participants. It is well documented that self-
concept formation for females and males involves different processes (Vandergriff &
Rust, 2001; Guiney & Furlong, 2000; Marsh, 1991). Therefore, it was beyond the scope
of this research project to study the identity formation of both males and females.

Ethnocultural diversity

In addition to being female and in Grade five, the participants were all from the
punjabi culture. My personal position, lived experiences and the stories I carry are a
result of my being punjabi and being female. It is also my personal position of being
punjabi that draws me further to this group and wanting to understand the changes that punjabi girls face. I am a past member of the world that these young girls inhabit and am a current member of the world that they might one day belong to; therefore, my personal reflections and experiences will be more accurately expressed from this perspective.

Furthermore, although there is a growing number of punjabi people living in this area of British Columbia. In Canada 271, 210 report Punjabi as a mother tongue. British Columbia has the largest Punjabi speaking population in Canada, 45% of the Punjabi speaking community of the country overall (Statistics Canada, 2001). Despite the recent growth in numbers of the punjabi community, this group has not yet been talked to and included in research; therefore, there is much to be learned from listening to the voices of this population for a larger understanding of human experience.

Sample Size

This research included six young punjabi girls from the fifth grade. The young girls are Piyal, Harneet, Sukhy, Bal, Inderpreet and Simi. This sample size provided a sufficient number as the focus of this research study was to gain insight into the experiences of these girls, insight which may not have been achieved with a larger sample. Other studies looking at identity construction using qualitative methods and using smaller sample sizes include studies conducted by Loewen (1996); Lam (1998) and Sihota (2000). Loewen (1996), notes fewer participants allowed for a “greater understanding of the ideas and thoughts they have” and also “allowed for the reflection and dialogue needed for an extended degree of expression” (p.38). Sihota similarly used a small sample size of five and found that it was sufficient. As there was also a group component to this study, my intention in limiting the sample size to six was also to

5 These are pseudonyms that I have given to the young girls.
provide sufficient time for the young girls to equally participate in the generation of the fictional story.

As well, larger sample sizes lend themselves more to surveys or questionnaires, where the thoughts and feelings involved with the lived experience are not of the primary importance. Furthermore, as I chose not to use such a research design for this study, a smaller sample size was more appropriate (this point is further exemplified in the section that follows).

**Telling Stories – The Conversations and Self-Reflections**

The collecting of stories involved three separate procedures. I had both individual conversations and group conversations with the young girls to provide a space for them to tell their stories. And the third component of telling stories involved my included personal stories of my experiences as a child growing up in Canada. This was the self-reflective component of collecting stories.

The use of individual conversations in addition to group conversations provided a means to dwell midst the space of in-betweeness through a combination of two narrative methods. The two methods also show how this site of negotiation can become a messy “metonymic site of intertextuality, a site where the subjectivities of the characters involved collide, disperse and co-emerge as a bricolage of narratives” (Low & Palulis, p.68). This metonymic site provides a way to get in, and expose the complexities of identity(s) negotiations.

Hearing and collecting stories from the young girls involved conversations, “the relationship with the girls … was a collaborative one in which we would be participants
in the study together, working to achieve an ongoing conversation guided by respect” (Loewen, 1996, p.33).

To create and encourage an atmosphere of respect and promote conversations, a list of questions was not prepared before hand rather the interviews elicited narratives by using semi-structured approach. Using such a framework over a structured one, “encourages rapport building and empathy, allow for greater flexibility to explore interesting areas as they arise, lessen power differences, enables participant to ask researcher questions, and usually results in richer ‘data’” (Lam, 1998, p.85). The conversational prompts I selected (see Appendix F) were open-ended questions about non-instructional school times and experiences of being punjabi. This allowed for the interviews to venture based on what the young girls would bring up in their conversations.

Transcriptions

Both the individual conversations and group conversations were tape recorded with the permission of the young girls and their parents. Between the individual conversations and group conversations, I spent approximately four hours with each of the young girls. The individual conversations were transcribed verbatim. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcribed text and validate their accuracy. The group conversations, however, did not require transcribing, as it was the co-created story written by the young girls that was used as text in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Since this research project involved young girls to open up and express their personal feelings, it was recognized that there might be the potential for emotional
"confusion, frustration and perhaps disruption to the girls' thinking" involved for these young girls as they brought their stories forward (Loewen, 1996, p.45). It was of the utmost importance that the well being of the young girls was protected. The young girls were asked to share their personal experiences of being at school during lunch and recess. Although the stories they chose to share and to bring forward were up to them, there was a possibility that some stories may be uncomfortable for the young girls (e.g., stories of racial discrimination).

Both the young girls and the mothers were informed about this potential risk. The young girls were informed verbally at the individual and group conversations and as well as in written form on the consent forms that if at any time they were to feel uncomfortable as a result of telling these stories, arrangements could be made for them to speak to a professional, for example, a counselor. If preferred, arrangements could also be made for them to speak to someone from the community. They were also notified that in situations where it was felt that there was a need to share something with their parents, I would need to do that. This access was important particularly where the girls may have experienced discrimination based on their being a member of a visible minority group and where this discrimination may have led to emotional trauma. The young girls and their mothers were made aware of this potential risk at the onset of the project. However, as expected the experiences were diverse and complex, and there proved to be little risk to the participants.6

The Individual Conversations

In all cases, it was the mother that contacted me about their daughter's participation and scheduling of times. For the individual conversations, I arranged times

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6 Review and approval by the University of Victoria Ethical Review Board was obtained.
to meet with the girls individually at a location of the mother’s choice. In every case, individual conversations took place at the homes of the young girls.

Before each individual conversation, each young girl and their mother read and signed a consent form. An effort was made to verbally emphasize what participation would entail. Both the mothers and the young girls, were encouraged to ask me questions at any time during the conversation. It was also verbally stressed to both the girls’ and their mothers that participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point during the study.

This method of verbally explaining important aspects of the study certainly seemed worthwhile as it was during this verbal speech during one of the individual conversations, that one girl decided that she “did not feel comfortable” sharing her stories of lunch and recess times and did not want to proceed with the study. I told her that was fine and that she did not have to participate if she did not want to. However, the girl’s mother became quite insistent on wanting to know the reason for why she felt uncomfortable speaking about her experiences. I was concerned about why she did not feel comfortable sharing her stories too, but did not want to push the matter, because it might upset the young girl. I explained to the mother that participation was voluntary and that it was okay if her daughter did not want to participate. She responded by saying that she was concerned about why her daughter would not share and said that she would talk to her to make sure that there was not anything happening at school about which she should be worried. She was told it was a good idea and thanked her for her time.

The remaining six co-participants each had an individual conversation, which was approximately 45 minutes in length. This took place over a course of two weeks.
The Group Conversations

After each individual conversation, in order to reaffirm consent for participation in the group conversations, each young girl was asked if she would be interested in joining the others in group conversation to co-write a story about being punjabi. All six participants agreed both verbally and in writing. One of the young girls asked if she had to tell the others who she was, a comment that took me by surprise. I told her that if she did not want the other girls to know her real name then she did not have to tell them, she could instead use another name. She asked me what name would be used and could she use the same one? (The young girls were told I would use a fake name in my writing to ensure confidentiality). At that time no decisions were made for pseudonyms; the young girls were referred to by the first initials of their names in my journaling. I told Bal that in my notes references to her were “B,” the first initial of her name. She decided that she would introduce herself to the other girls by using this pseudonym. Bal thought it would be cool because, in her words, “it’s like being a secret agent on a spy show.”

I thought about Bal’s comment about not wanting to tell the other young girls her name then realized this might be a concern for some of the other girls as well. At the individual conversations, they were given the same option of using a pseudonym. Each young girl to my surprise adopted the idea. Some of the girls ended up using the first letter of their last name as their fake name because their first initials were the same. Each of them introduced and knew each other by the initials B, S, K, P, I, and H.

Although both written and verbal consent for their daughter’s participation in both the individual and group conversations had already been obtained an effort was made once again to obtain verbal consent from parents about participation in the group
conversations after each individual conversation. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary. All parents once again reaffirmed their agreement to have their daughter participate in the group conversations.

The site chosen for the group conversations was the local library. This location was accessible to all parents and comfortable and safe for the young girls. After obtaining agreement from all the young girls' parents (their mothers in this case) on this location, I scheduled two group conversations each to be an hour and a half in length. The group conversations took place over two days. In total, approximately four hours was spent with each of the co-participants.

I arrived at the library early to meet each girl in the parking lot as they arrived. As the parents were already taking time out of their day to drive the young girls to the library, I did not want the parents to have the added hassle of trying to find the room in the library. The mothers once again confirmed the time to pick up their daughters and then left. I told them that I would be in the parking lot with the girls so that they would not have to hunt for us in the library. As more of the girls arrived and began to surround me, they started to retreat into their shells and were quiet and shying away from one another. I had anticipated this, as this was the first time that they were meeting each other. Having already met the young girls and having a sense of what their personalities were, I knew that it would not take long for them to become comfortable with one another.

After all of the young girls had arrived, they were led into the library and into the booked room. The library used this room as their education room so there was not much furniture in it; it had one long rectangular table and several office chairs. There was one
chalkboard in the room. The young girls entered the room and each claimed an office chair and sat down. I turned around to set my things down on the table and when I turned back, all the young girls were swiveling in their office chairs with all eyes on me.

As with the individual meetings, a set method or strategy had not been arranged as to how the group conversations would progress. Each of them was there to write a story just how that was going to transpire was still a mystery to me. Large poster paper and felt pens were available. My intentions were to provide the opportunity for each young girl to contribute. The best way to do this was to hang large sheets of poster paper on the walls enabling the participants to walk around and write what they wanted to, but I knew there had to be some structure so that a story could be written collectively.

To begin each girl was asked about suggestions for writing a story that would include being punjabi and school. After a very long moment of silence I suggested that we could write about “A day in the Life of a Punjabi Girl” and all of the girls began to nod their heads with enthusiasm in agreement. This suggestion was made only when the girls did not have a suggestion of their own. After deciding on the topic, I determined the next best thing to do would be to have the young girls figure out what activities are involved in a 10 year old punjabi girl’s day. So I asked the young girls to shout out suggestions and they would be written down on the board. At first the suggestions trickled in slowly and shyly with a young girl making a comment here and there, but after a few minutes all the girls got involved and more comments flowed. They giggled as I frantically wrote on the board in an effort to keep up with them. The timeline created by the young girls was reduced to: getting up; going to school, classes, recess, classes, lunch, classes, going home, and visiting relatives.
There was some debate among the young girls as to when the fictional girl’s day should end. They finally agreed that home life after school should be made a part of the day because after all as Simi put it, “a punjabi girl is supposed to go see her Aunt and Uncle and eat ludos and samosas. I do.” And the rest of the girls agreed.

After the timeline had been decided, we moved on to who the characters of the story would be. Again, the question was posed to the group and their suggestions were encouraged. The characters they decided on were Mom, Dad, brothers and sisters, Aunts and Uncles, teacher, friends, principal, and a bully. After the characters had been chosen, they needed to be given names. The name for the key character in their story, the punjabi girl, was chosen first but not without a long-standing debate. The young girls were equally divided on two names, three wanted the name Simran and the other three wanted the name Sara. They looked for a tie-breaking vote from me, but I told them that this was their story and they had to make all the decisions themselves including this one. It took a few minutes but the Simran group won the debate by persuading the Sara group that Sara could be used as a name for one of Simran’s friends. This was enough to lure one of the pro-Sara girls on to their side. Choosing names for the remaining characters was not as controversial. The young girls decided to leave Simran’s parents as just Mom and Dad. Simran was given two brothers, Kenny and Jasjot and two sisters, Sasha and Nisha. Her relatives in the story were Auntie Elizabeth and Uncle Raj and baby cousin Manjit. They named their teacher Miss Basran. The names picked for Simran’s friends were Miya, Aashwariya, Chelsea, Sara (staying true to their promise) and Jessica; and the name selected for the bully was Francis. The young girls had had a very productive first group conversation, by the end of the hour and a half; they had created a timeline for their story
and had chosen the characters for their story. Once our time was up, I took the young
girls outside and we waited in the parking lot together for their rides to arrive. I said
goodbye to each young girl and told her I’d see her again tomorrow.

The second group conversation began the same way the first one did. Each young
girl was met outside and then we walked into the library room together. This hour and a
half was going to involve writing the actual story so the night before, the elements were
taken from the timeline decided on by the young girls from the first group conversation
and each one was used as a heading on a poster board for a total of nine poster boards.
To ensure that the process of writing the actual story was strictly for the young girls, and
that each young girl would have the opportunity to share her thoughts, I put up the large
poster boards all around the room each headed with a component from the timeline the
girls had created the day before. Each girl was handed a marker, given the choice of their
own color, and asked to walk around the room to write their thoughts under each heading.
They looked at me and looked at their markers and then looked at each other, but nobody
moved. I realized I had to do something, so I suggested working in groups. And they all
agreed. The girls were divided into two groups of three and asked to start at opposite
ends of the room to avoid bumping into one another. Soon after, a story began to emerge.
After each girl had an opportunity to visit each poster board, they were asked to go
around one more time and read everything on the boards and add or change things, which
they did individually. Each girl made editorial comments and also added and removed
things with care making sure to ask the rest of the young girls before changing anything.
They were certainly making sure that this was a group story. At the end of an hour and a
half, they had written their story titled, “A Day in the Life of a Punjabi Girl.” The two
group conversations provided ample time to write the story.

Self-Reflections

The third component of narrative gathering involved keeping a self-reflective journal. This consisted of memories from elementary school and childhood. I had actually began writing my personal experiences of discrimination from childhood last year as a way to “get past” them and to stop and limit the impact they were having on my life long after they had been experienced. I chose to incorporate my personal journal into the study because research is an opportunity for an author to “reveal themselves legitimately in their work, to include an explicit subjective presence in our writing” (Jones, 1992, p.25). I also kept notes of my experiences with the individual girls and our group conversations.

Narrative Method

When assessing what a child’s experience with school has been or what their perceptions of school have been the majority of research in the past has utilized the aid of quantitative means such as questionnaires and surveys (Crick & Ladd, 1993; Valeski & Stipek, 2001). Overall, the methodological approaches used to date are limited in their ability to capture the sensitive and unique individual nature of experiencing school. Research form has been an “artefactual-social rhetoric of crafting the world into effective objects” (Haraway, 1991, p.185). In her study of Armenian American children and cultural identity, Imbens-Bailey (1997) found that “a major drawback of these previous methods is that they do not enable participants to qualify their response with contextual material” (p.345). This is one of the gaps that this research project attempts to address.
This is not to say that a quantitative method of data collection is incorrect but rather it shows its limitations as it calls into question the ability of such methodological tools to reflect the depth of a child’s experience. This opinion is echoed by Helweg (1999), he states “quantitative analysis certainly has its place, but many ethnic indicators are not easily isolated to statistical verification; and in some cases, it is not a factor but a configuration of components that set forth a group’s ethnicity” (p.359). As quoted in Hatcher and Troyna (1993) “quantitative methods can only report what is happening; qualitative look at the why and how”. Since it was the experiences of punjabi girls that were of interest, there was a need to use a methodology that would allow for the understanding of the “how’s” and “why’s” of these young girls’ interpretative experiences. This study departed from the methods used by many previous studies, particularly extensive questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, instead using a descriptive approach where listening and documenting conversation were of primary importance. With these considerations in mind a narrative method of story listening and story telling was instrumental in adopting “a method that taps into the experiences of the individual” (Mann-Kahalma, 1997, p.56).

Employing a narrative method to unearth meanings embedded in the daily interactions at non-instructional school times allowed me to gain insights into the experiences of these young girls and their negotiations and re-interpretations of their sense of identity.

Performing narrative inquiry within a poststructural frame helped to explain the lives of the girls as well as their complex environments as it is a method of inquiry that offers “the configuration of a narrative (story), drawn from multiple data sources,
offering insights into how people construct meanings of their experiences” (Oliver, 1998, p.245). Narratives also helped to show the “ambiguities as Metonyms live in the contradictions and paradoxes of our narratives…and engage us in resonating conversations wherein ambiguities are ‘contested, enacted, and inhabited’” (Low & Palulis, 2000, p.68).

The use of narrative methodology within the field of education began “as an opportunity to give voice to teachers and students” (Conle, 2000, p.53). Narrative can be seen as an “inquiry into lived phenomena” (p.53) where “objects of inquiry are facets of the inquirer’s own life and their social contexts [and] data are constructed out of memories and their interpretations” (p.27). Narrative methodology provided an avenue to preserve the experiences of these young girls in their own voices and words.

A narrative approach validated the young girls’ feelings, voices and perceptions since, “as a research methodology, narrative analysis is particularly powerful for understanding the fullness and uniqueness of human existence” (Oliver, 1998, p.247). Moreover, through the process of listening to the stories of these young girls, valuable insight about what their experiences of non-instructional schools times are, in their voices was gained which in turn can “help broaden the lens and provide a deeper level of understanding into the lives” of girls. (p.247). The narrative approach was the best method here as it provided an opportunity for finding out and trying to understand how the girls made sense of things in their stories and how their feelings and thoughts were affected. In this way, “stories bring our past together with our present and offer vision of possible futures” (Oliver, 1998, p.245); therefore, awareness may be provided into how complex the meaning making process for these girls might be.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE VOICES: MEETING THE YOUNG GIRLS

Individual conversations were viewed as an opportunity for the young girls and myself to become familiar with one another. Each individual conversation began by giving details about myself, such as my age, where I lived, went to school and what I was studying in school. The girls were asked to tell me a little about themselves. This helped create a comfortable atmosphere.

The first and in some cases the only question asked to get the conversation flowing was what it is like being a Punjabi girl in school. Other questions were also used as prompts and invitations to encourage conversations just in case difficulties were encountered (see Appendix F). All conversations were tape-recorded with the permission of both the participants and their mothers.

Piyal

My first individual conversation was with Piyal. Her mother had heard of my research project through a friend and had contacted me to see if her daughter would participate. She was the first parent to call. I set up a time to meet with Piyal the very next day.

Upon arriving at Piyal’s home, I was greeted at the front door by her grandmother who escorted me into the formal living room. I was told to sit down and make myself comfortable and that Piyal was on her way down. I was a little nervous but excited to meet Piyal. Would she be shy, or boisterous, or bubbly and giggly? I didn’t have to wait long. She walked in and said hi very quietly and then sat on the couch perpendicular to mine. She almost disappeared into the large oversized couch. Piyal’s mother entered the

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7 The names used in this work are pseudonyms.
room and once again confirmed with me that I would only be speaking to Piyal about school and that there would be no personal questions about the family. I reassured her that questions about family would not be asked. Once she was reassured that I would not pry into their family life, she offered me a beverage and left the room. Conversation began after an initial introduction. She talked very quietly and in fact at first it was difficult to hear her speak. Initially she was shy and did not smile and was fidgeting, seemingly nervous. But as the conversation continued, she began to loosen up, and smile, and even giggle as she spoke. At this point she seemed comfortable.

Harneet

My second individual conversation was with Harneet. I met Harneet at the Punjabi school where initial participation in the project was sought. When I arrived, Harneet's mother had just arrived home from work and was outside hosing down her work boots. Her mother told me to go on in through the front door and that Harneet was waiting for me in the living room. I let myself in and walked upstairs noticing Harneet. She was the only one in the room and was reading a book. Two pictures, one of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and one Guru Gobhind Singh Ji, were hanging above the fireplace, just as they always have in my parents' home. As soon as Harneet noticed me, she came up to me, shook my hand, said “hello and nice to meet you” and asked me to have a seat. After sitting down, Harneet sat on the same couch next to me. She certainly wasn’t shy. She spoke in a loud, clear and very articulate voice. She was intelligent and an extrovert. I remember thinking it felt like speaking to someone twice her age. She was not uneasy during our conversation and exuberated a level of maturity and confidence well beyond her years.
Sukhy

Sukhy became a part of this project through the Punjabi school. When I arrived at Sukhy’s home, I was greeted at the door by her aunt who lead me to the living room. In addition to Sukhy, her grandparents, mother, uncle, and sister were all in the living room watching a Hindi movie. Sukhy’s aunt introduced me to everyone in the room and then told Sukhy to take me to her room so that we could be in a quiet place. Sukhy’s younger sister insisted on going into the room with us, she promised that she would be very, very quiet and not “bug” her older sister. Sukhy’s mother asked if that would be alright with me. I told her that wouldn’t be a problem as long as Sukhy didn’t. Sukhy said she would only let her come if she promised not to say anything at all. The sister promised. We entered the room and I could tell that the two girls shared this room. Sukhy plopped herself onto her bed and her sister on hers. I took the computer chair. They had a lot of stuffed animals between the two of them; the room was overflowing with teddy bears, ducks and other creatures. It looked like a kid’s room with toys and books scattered about. Sukhy was a carefree spirit. She opened up to me immediately. I remember the feeling during our conversation; it was like talking with an old friend. Every now and again I would glance over at Sukhy’s little sister who would smile back at me. She was obviously thrilled with what was going on although I’m not sure that she understood it all.

Bal

Bal became a part of this study because her mother had heard of my project from someone and had called me to inquire about it. Upon arriving for my individual conversation with Bal, her mother insisted I have tea and something to eat. I declined
politely a few times but she was persistent. After tea and cookies, Bal’s mom told her to take me to her room so that we wouldn’t be disturbed. Bal pulled herself away from the cartoon show that she was watching and led me to her room. I felt badly that she had to leave a show in which she was obviously engrossed. Bal had a small room that was very neat. There wasn’t a single thing out of place. Bal sat on her computer chair and told me that I could sit on her bed. She was quite comfortable with me right from the start. She was smart and soft spoken.

Inderpreet

I met Inderpreet at the Punjabi school. She had expressed interest at the Gurdwara in immediately being a part of the study. I insisted that she needed to go over the contents of the package with her parents and obtain their permission, which she did. Inderpreet answered the door upon my arriving at her home. It was after supper and her mother was busy tidying up and trying to round up the rest of the kids for their evening baths. Inderpreet had had a bath earlier because she knew I was coming. Her mother said the best place for us to talk would be Inderpreet’s bedroom because the other kids would keep interrupting. Inderpreet took me to her room. Her room was bare; it only had a bed. There was no other place for us to sit so we both sat on the bed. Inderpreet was relaxed during the conversation and quite open with me about her experiences.

Simi

Simi became a part of the study quite literally at the last minute. The group conversations were to begin the next day. Simi’s Mom worked with the mother of another girl in the study. On the phone her mother told me Inderpreet’s mother informed her that my research project was important and that our community should do whatever it
could to help me out. She also informed me that she was “aware” of who my Mom was and that she knew I came from a good family that could be trusted; I wasn’t going to do anything to harm Simi or her family. She was informed that the group conversations were to begin the following day and if possible to have an individual conversation with Simi before the group conversations the next day. She told me to come over as soon as possible that evening.

Simi’s mother, her younger sister and Simi herself greeted me at the door. Her mother welcomed me in and thanked me for meeting with Simi on short notice. Simi and I were left to converse in the dining room while everyone else retreated to the family room, which was at the back of the house. Simi was outgoing, bubbly and giggly. She spoke loudly and used a lot of Punjabi words in her conversations. I could tell that she liked being the center of attention.

Self-biographical portraits of the story tellers

Each of the individual conversations took place at the homes of the young girls. In all instances, I was escorted to a quiet room in the home and left to converse with the young girls by myself. Since the individual conversations represented a first time meeting, the first part of the conversation was allocated to introductions. I thought this might also help the girls become a little more at ease. Conversations usually began by asking the girls a few basic questions including, how many siblings they had, where their parents were born, where they were born, what their favorite food was, what their most favorite and least favorite subject at school was and what they wanted to be when they grew up. The following part of this chapter is reserved for the participants to introduce
themselves. Each profile is reconstructed and paraphrased from the transcribed text from the individual conversations that each young girl had an opportunity to review.

Piyal

I am 10. I was born in Abbotsford. I have two sisters and 1 little brother. Two [are] older than me and one [is] younger than me. My Mom was born in England and my Dad in India. I've been at the same school since kindergarten. Sometimes at lunch and recess we play basketball and sometimes we play tag or we walk around with friends. I can speak a little bit of Punjabi. I went to India when I was three I think. I don't remember much. It was fun. My favorite food [is] aloo parotas. My grandma makes them for me when I come home from school. I want to be a teacher when I grow up. My favorite subject is fine arts 'cause I like to draw. I don't like Math that much.

Harneet

I am 10 years old. I was born in the MSA Hospital in Abbotsford. I have one brother and two years ago my family adopted a child. The adopted child is a girl and she's 11. I have been at this school for six years. I started here in Kindergarten. This school goes to Grade five. I will need to go somewhere else next year for Grade six. I like lots of subjects but I have to say I enjoy reading the most. I like the Harry Potter books and Archie comics and I like a lot of different stories. I want to be a dentist when I grow up. I wanted to be a doctor but I don't really like all the blood and stuff that I see on T.V. so a dentist is pretty close. I like sciences. What's my least favorite subject? That's a hard one. I like all subjects. Normally at lunch and recess our class is um taking pictures for the school newspaper. I got to take pictures on Tuesday and Wednesday at
Sukhy

Me I’m 10. I was born in Abbotsford. I have one sister and two cousin brothers. Wait three cousin brothers and three cousin sisters. They’re all younger. Both my parents were born in India. My dad came when he was 1 years old and my mom I think it was 1992 or 1993. I’ve been at this school since Grade one. I try to play with my best friends at lunch and recess and sometimes I just walk around with Anita. Sometimes we play “cops and robbers” and sometimes we play “Pirates of the Caribbean”. We made up our own third version of it. When it snows, us people throw snowballs but we aren’t supposed to because there’s rocks. You could get hit in the eye. We play basketball. We skip, play soccer, volleyball in the gym, if the gym is open and I forgot what the other game’s called. It’s when there’s little balls hanging from the pole and you hit it with your hands. Then we play on the swings or play on the bars and do flips on the monkey bars, the dome and what’s it called….it's like a little ship but it doesn’t have a roof or anything. I want to be a cop when I grow up because there are things that happen in my life or probably a dentist to make more money. My favorite food isn’t food, it’s meat pork chops. My favorite subject is English but it gets boring because we get to have spelling bees. It’s more fun when we have substitutes because you get to play more games. Personal planning is my least favorite subject. I know how to speak Punjabi.

Bal

I’m 10 years old. I was born in Abbotsford. I’ve been at this school since Kindergarten. I have two sisters and they are younger than me. Both of my parents were
born in India. My favorite subject is Science because lots of times I get A’s and B’s in
that - I never get C’s. My least favorite subject? Math, because it is hard. We like to
play on the swings or tell scary stories around the field or we skip. I want to grow up and
be a nurse ‘cause I could save peoples lives and help them. I speak Punjabi. My favorite
food is pizza.

Inderpreet

I’m 10 years old. Port Alberni is where I was born I think I came to Abbotsford
when I was three years old. I have 1 brother and two sisters. They’re all younger than
me. I started at this school in kindergarten. My parents were born in India. Yup, I speak
Punjabi. My favorite subject is Art because I like drawing and I’ve been drawing since I
was four. My favorite picture that I drew is a picture of animals. I don’t like Science
class. At lunch and recess times I like to play spy games, tag, basketball, soccer, and
sometimes we go to the domes and swings. My favorite food is pizza. It’s good and I
like the pineapples. I want to grow up to be a doctor.

Simi

I’m 11. I was born in Canada. I have one brother and one sister. One’s like a
baby and one is older than me. My parents were born in India. I started at this school in
kindergarten. My favorite subject is fine arts because I like to draw. I really like to draw
people. I want to grow up to be a teacher because I like to teach kids. I can speak
Punjabi. My favorite food, let’s see there’s so many .....watermelon and roti. We play
soccer and sometimes tag and grounders. I don’t like to be it. Sometimes we just walk
around.

* * *
After including the biographical portraits of the young girls, I felt including my own profile was important. Many of the self-reflections and narratives scattered throughout this thesis are narratives of a 10-year-old Mandeep. A biographical portrait of a 10 year old me is one based on reflections modified by the present. In addition a profile of the present Mandeep is included. The reader may gain an understanding of my feelings as well as my place and position today as I continue to venture on my journey and search for an identity.

Mandeep – the past

I’m 10 years old. I have two brothers and one sister. My cousin sister lives with us too. She’s only five. My two brothers are older than me and my sister is younger than me. My parents were both born in India. My Dad came to Canada in 1970 and my Mom in 1972. Perry Mason and “Murder She Wrote” are my favorite T.V. shows so my Mom thinks that I should become a lawyer when I grow up. So I will be a lawyer when I grow up. My favorite food is aloo parotas. I can eat almost three of them and that’s a lot for a little girl like me. My favorite subject is Math because I always do well in it. I don’t like Social Studies class because I have to read about boring things. I like to play with the skipping rope and I also like to play on the big tractor tires in the field. I can speak Punjabi and am just starting to learn how to read and write it too. It’s hard to learn.

Mandeep – the present

I’m 30 years old (I can’t believe I’m admitting to this). I am indian, punjabi and canadian – not all together and not just any one at any given time. I am single. I have one sister, one brother and a sister-in law, and two nieces. I was born here in Canada. My parents immigrated to Canada in the 1970s. I am currently working on my MA in
Education and hold a BA in Sociology and Psychology. I hope to be a university professor when I grow up. My favorite food is still aloo parotas.

**Confessions from a researcher**

The challenge of re-telling the stories of the young girls with which I was faced with, left me numb. The young girls had told me so much knowingly and unknowingly that I felt the obligation and responsibility to make sure that my re-tellings of their stories did justice to their experiences, their feelings and their thoughts. My journal entry below reflects the difficulties researchers can have trying to move beyond the established conventions for thinking and talking about analysis. For this reason, I deviate from traditional research writing that hides the messiness of our thinking and conceptual development throughout the course of a research project. Here is my journal entry completed after listening to all individual and group conversations:

*What does being Punjabi mean to these young girls?*

From the individual conversations this is what I learned:

- Punjabi means coming from a bad environment
- Punjabi involves having visible markers
  - Punjabi means being too dark
- Punjabi means having a religion
  - Punjabi means having statues for Gods
- Punjabi means having cultural markers
  - Punjabi means having funny food
  - Punjabi means having a culture
  - Punjabi means having a different language
  - Punjabi means having different foods
  - Punjabi means having a different history
  - Punjabi means power through language (speaking about other kids who don’t understand them)
- Punjabi means being different from everyone else
- Punjabi means having strong link to family
  - Punjabi means who your parents are and where they are from
  - Punjabi means being from India
Punjabi means your voice will not be heard (told teacher being picked on but nothing done about it – Mom had to step in)

This is what I heard the young girls say about being Punjabi in their co-written story:
Punjabi involves having visible markers
  shiny black hair
Punjabi means being teased
Punjabi means having cultural markers
  Food ludos, samosas, burfy
Punjabi means having a strong link with family
  Going to visit Aunt’s and Uncles
Punjabi means believing in God

My thoughts after having generating this immense list:
Are these young girls attributing what they are experiencing to their being punjabi – to their skin color? – do they see this? If they do not, then is it discrimination? Do they see the stereotypes? Do they see them as being wrong? Are they too young to understand the interplay of race in the school system?

The above listed statements provide a glimpse into what definition the term punjabi is beginning to hold for the young girls. Each young girl has her own take on what punjabi is and to some degree this definition is being formed by the daily interactions they experience around their culture.

During this research, I constantly questioned my ability to address the complex and intricate meanings of identities the young girls might speak of during our conversations. I do not inhabit the bodies and experiences of young girls growing up in-between punjabi and canadian in Canada today. I am an outsider to the terrain of being young and growing up in the world today. In constructing this story of research, my age, my “understanding” of my ethnocultural diversity, class, identities and life situation provide both insights and restrictions as I try to interpret (read and reread) the narratives of these young girls. These are my biases that impact the re-readings and re-tellings of the young girls narratives that I offer here.
CHAPTER SIX: MY TELLINGS AND RE-TELLINGS OF THE NARRATIVES

In a sense, in the narratives of the young girls there is little to further investigate or scrutinize. Therefore, I offer my re-reading and re-tellings of the spaces where I re-recognize the young girls speaking from the in-between metonymic space of the lived curriculum of non-instructional school times, which provides a “rereading of education and its ‘difficulties’ as vibrant sites of tensioned anxieties – sites that are not clean and controlled...but as sites always already incomplete, complex, and ambiguous” (Low, 2003, p.58). As this re-reading is begun, I am aware that “textually incites the messiness of curricular practices not yet tolerated in education” therefore, “there is no easy way to enter this conversation” (p.60).

A similar re-reading and re-telling of the young girls narratives demonstrates the various paths that each is venturing onto as they speak from and negotiate within the space between Punjabi and Canadian. As they engage within this space, they engage in a meaning-making process, which involves identities and as well as cultures. I plan to let my participants define for themselves their Punjabi culture and their Canadian culture and intend to look for their own self-descriptors of emerging identities based on the hybrid definitions they are creating for themselves.

Consequently, my intention to use the young girls stories in their original form as ‘data’ and fuse my own personal stories from childhood with theirs created a new narrative, one that would bring together the past with the present, to help initiate learning for the future. This process of fusion also allows for my words and the young girls’ words to hold equal weight in this study. Therefore, tellings and re-tellings would be
constructed through the young girls’ narratives, and my personal reflections from past school experiences.

My re-tellings of these narratives involved connecting common themes distributed throughout the young girls narratives. There were several common issues about identity and learning that were addressed by many of the young girls. It is these common themes that shape my re-tellings. What follows is a delicate balancing act between analysis, and narratives speaking for themselves to address the research questions that guided this inquiry.

In this thesis I examined how narratives of self-identity are constructed in relation to the curriculum of non-instructional school times and how young girls’ experiences during these times may be essential to their identify formation. While many of the issues and concerns that these young girls voiced from the place/space in-between two cultures/two labels were familiar to me as I had experienced them myself, what I did find unfamiliar were some of the thoughts and emotions they experienced during their meaning-making process speaking to the individuality of the meaning-making process.

I was struck by the similarities and differences between the experiences of these young Punjabi girls and my experiences from 20 years ago both within the school context and family context. This chapter provides an overview of the common threads interwoven among the narratives of young Punjabi girls from the individual conversations and as well for the story co-written by the young girls. Following each narrative, I provide a re-telling of these young girls experiences, a re-telling framed by the lens of my lived experiences and identity journeys and our minority status – our shared in-betweeness. Key areas within both the family and school context were disclosed through
narratives that revealed how their experiences engage them in negotiations around cultural, gendered, religious, and ethnic identities of self. Also, I attempt to demonstrate how the strategies they implement to cope with these negotiations are situated within and therefore locate them within various discourses. The common threads of self-identity interwoven in the individual conversations construct the names of the headings to follow.

**Constructing identities through family**

Examining the standpoint that existed for me as a child by the measures of my standpoint today, there is a realization that the beliefs that I thought were mine were borrowed from my parents and the identity which I thought was mine, was in fact created for me by my family; it was my duty to accept it and make it mine. In essence my identity was not my own. I was Punjabi because that was the culture of my parents; I was Jat as that was the caste I was born into; I was Sikh because that is the religion and faith of Punjabi people - each one a part of my identity, all given to me - not chosen by me.

As with my experiences of being a 10-year-old Punjabi girl growing up in British Columbia, the young girls also emphasized the importance of Punjabi culture and their family to their constructions of identity. The following passages from individual conversations demonstrate the association these young girls are making between their self-identity and that of their families. For Bal, it was the fact that her family was from India that impacted her meaning of Punjabi and shaped how she constructed her cultural identity. Although she was born here in Canada, it was the birthplace of her family members that she used to define who she was as is illustrated from the following excerpt:

Bal: My family they're all from India. Not many people were born here. My mom and dad and grandma were born in India and most of my relatives yeah they were too.
Mandeep: So what does being Canadian mean to you then?
Bal: That you were born here.
Mandeep: You were born here, right?
Bal: Yeah.
Mandeep: So then aren’t you Canadian?
Bal: No. I’m Punjabi more because my family is um like most were born there.
Mandeep: What does being Punjabi mean to you?
Bal: Um sort of makes you feel special because you’re different from everybody else that lives around you… most of the people. ‘Cause you have different ways than other people and um well everybody thinks that the culture is fun but I think that dancing and all that is fun.

* * *

The following is a dialogue that transpired between Harneet and I after she told me that she attends Punjabi class every Saturday morning at 3 o’clock that that she has not missed a single class in the last in 3 months.

Mandeep: Wow, that is impressive; you wake up that early every Saturday morning?
Harneet: Ah ha.
Mandeep: And you haven’t missed a single one yet?
Harneet: No.
Mandeep: Why is going to Punjabi school so important to you?
Harneet: My parents and my adopted sister and um my other family are from India. When I went to India to I saw my relatives there. I learn about… I like to learn about Punjabi culture. My family is Punjabi and I am Punjabi too.

* * *

Here is what Sukhy, Piyal and Inderpreet had to say:

Mandeep: You said that you don’t have too many Canadian friends. What does Canadian mean to you?
Sukhy: Canadian friends are like my white friends.
Mandeep: So Canadian means being white?
Sukhy: Yeah.
Mandeep: Okay, then what would you call yourself?
Sukhy: Punjabi.
Mandeep: Why do you choose that?
Sukhy: My family is all from there. Like they’re from India and we are Punjabi.

* * *

Mandeep: What does being Punjabi mean to you?
Piyal: Um it’s good I guess. I have lots of Punjabi friends. You have big weddings a lot of people … white people … um Canada weddings don’t really have those kinds of weddings. My aunt she got married this month. I was the wedding and we had 11 flower girls. White people don’t have that many.

* * *
Mandeep: You said your friend that bugged you was a canadian friend. Do you think you are canadian?
Inderpreet: I'm Indian and I'm proud to be Indian girl.
Mandeep: Why... What makes you proud to be Indian?
Inderpreet: Like the Gurus like they fought against the Muslims in India.

Bal, Harneet, Sukhy, and Inderpreet all chose to identify with a punjabi or indian identity. It appeared that each young girls decision to do so was strongly anchored in their family roots. For these young girls, identity seemed to be embedded in their family ancestry and roots in India, and their family culture being punjabi. Their families being from and having lived in India and belonging to the punjabi culture both took precedence for these young girls over their place of birth and where they lived, that is, Canada.

The recognition by these young girls (or being made aware by others) that they were different and not white led them to “other” themselves from the canadian label; therefore in negotiating identities, these young girls are associating “normal” with “whiteness” and their difference with “otherness”. This is illustrated by Bal’s comments. Although Bal mentions that being canadian would apply to those who are born in Canada, she does choose to use this label to apply to herself even though she was born in Canada.

Bal’s decision to choose and refer to herself as a punjabi girl rather than a canadian girl may be due to her locating her identity in her punjabi culture. She cannot just be canadian in her mind because of the daily cultural practices in which she is involved. The definition of canadian that Bal and these other young girls have created for themselves is one that does not embrace the punjabi culture. The “other” then becomes their daily life experiences, which are part of their punjabi culture. The identity and label of canadian becomes reserved for those who not only are born in Canada but who also do
not have a distinctive cultural belonging or difference. Lam (1998) refers to this as “identity as representation,” a representation that impacts how one views themselves within the Canadian society; this was certainly revealed through the narratives of the young girls (p.129).

Simi was the only young girl who chose to identify with both the labels canadian, and punjabi. In the following passages from separate conversations with Simi and, it is clear how important the “place” that her family comes from is to her self-identity. Simi is talking about how many homes she owns:

Simi: I have been to India a lot. Last time there was a lot of weddings and that’s why I went and for school, too. I live in India and I live and come back and live here in Canada cause I have two houses...I have one at India and one...so I have three houses at India and one house here that’s my real one.

Mandeep: Why is the house here the real one?
Simi: Because I was...I lived here when I was born...I only go to India to live when there’s like weddings and stuff and school.

Mandeep: So do you think that you are canadian or punjabi then?
Simi: No I think I’m both cause I live here and I lived in India. Yeah, so I’m both.

Simi’s cultural identity construction is linked with her place of home and where she lives. Since she has homes in both India and Canada she asserts that she is both punjabi and canadian. Although all of the young girls had been to India, some more than once, Simi was the only one who had lived in India for an extended period of time. The other young girls have all only lived in Canada yet they chose not to identify with the canadian identity. I was struck by the fact that though Simi being the only young girl who had spent the least amount of time in Canada was the only one who chose the label of canadian. Perhaps living in India for several months at a time and being away from Canada, one of her places of home, Simi has the opportunity to reflect on what she misses
while she is gone. When living in India she has the opportunity to in a sense step outside of Canada and view it as an outsider and as a result expand her worldview. Her life experiences therefore, may have helped her create a definition of canadian that is inclusive of her and her difference.

**Travels to India – My Family’s Land**

These young girls had a level of attachment with their family ancestry and culture that might be explained by the awareness and understanding that they had of their ethnicity, culture, and family homeland of India. An understanding that helped create a definition of the punjabi culture which was unique to each of them is an awareness that might have been heightened by their all having traveled to India. All six of the young girls had been to India at least once. Five of the young girls had been twice or more than twice and one had actually lived in India for several months. Traveling to India seemed to be an important trip to make for all of them.

Sukhy: I went to India when I was two and ...wait six and ... wait no eight. And this time I’m going again.

Mandeep: So do you like going to India?

Sukhy: It’s the funnest thing ever to do. It’s because when everybody goes to stores we don’t have to pay anything. The bill comes to the grown ups. Better than here.

* * *

Harneet: Once when I was four. Well, I remember that almost everyday we visited the gurdwara and went to the market and there we bought special treats in the evening. It was pretty fun.

* * *

Bal: Yah I’ve been to India twice. When I was 1 and then when I was seven years old. I had a good time in India.

* * *

Simi: I have been to India a lot. Last time there was a lot of weddings and that’s why I went and for school, too. I live in India and I live and come back and live here in Canada cause I have two houses...I have one at India and one ...so I have three houses at India and one house here that’s my real one.

* * *
Inderpreet: I’ve been to India twice. I was there when I was three and this last December. I had a lot of fun.

* * *

Piyal: I went to India when I was really small ... a baby I think.
Mandeep: Is that the only time you were in India?
Piyal: No we went again a couple years ago.
Mandeep: Did you like it?
Piyal: It was fun.

They all had wonderful and positive first hand experiences and memories of India. It was not just a place that their parents spoke of or a place that their family came from, they had actually been there and seen it. The “sameness” that these young girls may have experienced in India may have made them relate to it more positively, and impacted how they define Punjabi for themselves. The number of trips that these young girls have made to India may also say something about their parents. Perhaps, by making these trips the parents are trying to create a bond and a link between India and their daughters.

I have never had the opportunity to travel to India. I found that the young girls exhibited a connectedness to India and their Indian roots at a level that I cannot... have not... and probably will not ... be able to until I have been there. Therefore, the hybrid definition of the Punjabi culture that I create for myself is different from that that these young girls are creating for themselves, which helps explain the different paths we each are walking on as we search for our identity(ies).

Religion and Identity

Religion was a central part of life for the three young girls that became a part of this study through the Punjabi school. This was evident in the fact that they attended Punjabi classes three to four times a week. So I thought it necessary to determine what role religion played in the lives of the other three young girls who became a part of the
study not through the support of Punjabi school. Here are their responses to my question of “Do you and your family go to the gurdwara?”:

Bal: We don’t go to the gurdwara that much, but we do go like for Visahki day.

Piyal: We go to the gurdwara once a month in Richmond. We just had an *akand path* (religious ceremony) for my brother and we will probably have one again in the summer.

Simi: I don’t go much. But we go for weddings and *akand paths*.

Religion does not seem to be as central to these young girls’ lives as it is for Inderpreet, Harneet and Sukhy, but it does still play a role. The fact that they go to the gurdwara although it is more or less for special ceremonies such as weddings or religious celebrations, by virtue of their family going to gurdwaras they are identifying with Sikh religious identity. Therefore, all of the young girls had a religious identity, for some however, religion was more significant in their lives than others.
"Your children speak Punjabi very clearly Phanj (sister)."

"Hanji (yes), we always speak Punjabi with them at home."

Growing up and on occasion even now, people have tended to comment on my siblings and my ability to speak Punjabi "clearly." What they mean by "clearly" is that we speak Punjabi without a Canadian accent and therefore our spoken Punjabi is close to that of people from India. This is a rarity among children born and raised in Canada whose Punjabi speaking abilities are tainted by the Canadian accent that comes with learning and speaking the English language. Generally Canadian born punjabi’s Punjabi speaking abilities are described as being like that of a gora (white person) speaking Punjabi. That is a white/English washed version of Punjabi. I never thought much about these remarks when I was younger, but when I became a teenager; I wanted nothing to do with them. I was aware that my "clear" Punjabi stood in the way of my achieving my goal of being white. There was always the potential for someone to confuse me for being an immigrant if I continued to speak Punjabi “clearly” and I did not want this to happen. So I began to speak Punjabi with an intentional Canadian accent so that people would not make the mistake of linking me with an immigrant status. I wanted to make it known that I was born in Canada. It was a difficult task, at first, to add a Canadian accent on my Punjabi words and drown them, but with practice I had perfected this skill. It is one skill that I do not have use for anymore. Through my identity search I have a new found respect for my mother tongue and recognize the importance of it to my identity.
All of the six young girls had a good understanding of and were able to speak Punjabi. In fact, it was the language they used most frequently at home. In some conversations their use of the Punjabi language and its importance to them was revealed.

Harneet: Punjabi is my home language because my entire family came from India and I know Punjabi and it gives me an advantage in life I could go get more job opportunities but mostly it is my home language and I have to learn how to use it.

Simi: I’m happy being Punjabi at home not at school.
Mandeep: Why do you say that?
Simi: Because we have at school... we have to talk English so when the teacher... when the teacher hears you talking Punjabi you get in trouble so that’s when like you have to talk English so that the teacher can understand you.

Sukhy: It’s fun, it’s fun and you’re not like different people. Like other people talk different languages that you don’t and you can understand a couple of other people that you don’t know. Fun to have a different language. You eat different foods. You don’t go to churches you go to temples and nothing else.

Mandeep: Do you speak Punjabi? 
Bal: Yeah.
Mandeep: Do you speak Punjabi at school?
Bal: No I don’t talk Punjabi at school cause there’s a lot of not Punjabi people at school so if you wanted to say something bad about them you could say it secretly (laughs).

Literature focusing on the link between identity and language has found that "ethnic identity is intrinsically connected with language. Language interweaves the individual’s personal identity with his collective ethnic identity" and is “frequently a highly salient feature of cultural differences between groups and can become the most potent symbol of ethnic identity” (Liebkind, 1992, p.150). Through these exchanges, Harneet, Simi, Sukhy, and Bal each emphasized how language plays a crucial role in their identity conceptions and meaning-making processes. Language was a link to their...
culture and thus a link to their identities as punjabi/indian. Language also gave them an “advantage” or power, a secret power that was at their disposal when they needed it. The ability to speak their mother tongue of Punjabi had a positive meaning in the experiences of these young girls and therefore was a positive component to their identity. As a result, when the meanings they have around their Punjabi language are threatened, it risks their altering their perceptions of their language, which is visible in my conversation with Simi. For Simi the Punjabi language is strongly linked to her emerging punjabi identity. When she gets in trouble with her teacher for speaking her language, Simi reevaluates her punjabi identity as being good only at home. She indicates she was only happy being punjabi when she was at home where she will not get in trouble for speaking Punjabi and exhibiting what to her is an important part of her identity.

What I find problematic as I venture into the metonymic space of pedagogy here is that Simi was getting into trouble for speaking Punjabi during non-instructional school times. We are required to speak English inside our classrooms so that the teachers can understand us, but should she not be allowed to speak her other language outside of the classroom? This is a messy question which shows the complexities of teaching and learning and being an other within the Eurocentric school curriculum, which spills into the non-instructional school times as well. I have no answers to this question to offer, but rather present some issues that need to be considered when attempting to answer this question. There is the issue of other children on the playground who may also be around the young girls when they are speaking their mother tongue and who do not understand them. Is this an exclusionary act towards these other children on the part of the young girls who are speaking punjabi? These young girls have the ability to speak English, but
should they be required to do so at school at all times? Are there times when it is acceptable for these young girls to speak punjabi at school? Who is the one who decides when they may or may not speak punjabi?

**Constructing identities through conversing others**

The young girls seemed to choose similar if not the same labels for themselves and others that looked like them. When they spoke about culturally similar people, they referred, to them with the same label that they used to refer to themselves, that is the labels of indian, punjabi. The labels the young girls chose to use to describe someone in their stories were based on the skin color and/or culture of that person. canadian and Christian was used to refer to *gora* or “white” people and likewise when speaking of others the ethnocultural group they belonged to became the category by which the young girls labeled and identified them. The following excerpts from Inderpreet and Bal illustrate this point:

Mandeeep: Why do you think you choose more punjabi friends?
Inderpreet: I chose punjabi friends because sometimes I don’t feel like talking English so then I can talk Punjabi with them. We talk normal like we talk at home but when my other friend is there she’s canadian we speak English and she doesn’t get mad if we speak Punjabi. Sometimes we teach each other our languages she’s from Vietnam.

* * *

Bal: Because there’s not that many like canadian people there and there’s lots of punjabi there and you can make lots of punjabi friends.

Here again, young girls reserve the label of canadian strictly for white people. Indicating that for these young girls anyone who was not white, i.e., vietnamese, could not be canadian and is thus identified by their difference. A phenomenon that Howes and Wu (1990) note is not new, “past researchers have emphasized the importance of differences in skin color in predisposing children to perceive dissimilarities between
themselves and cross-ethnic peers...skin color may not be as salient as differences in language, culture, and interpersonal style” (p.537).

What is also revealed through these narratives is how the young girls are also engaged in the process of using physical markers to classify and categorize others. They maybe engaging in this process in part due to the pre-established discourses they are immersed within designating how we are supposed to think about our differences as classifiable and hierarchicable.

Identity through friends

The school I attended during my Grade 5 year had predominately white students and there were not many non-white students. Piyal, Sukhy, and Simi each described their school as not having many punjabi children whereas Inderpreet, Harneet and Bal indicated that their schools had a lot of punjabi children. Interestingly though, even with this demographical difference, their experiences of non-instructional school times were similar.

Although Piyal mentioned that her school did not have a lot of punjabi children, she tended to only play with punjabi girls. She mentioned that she did not have many white friends.

Piyal: I have a lot of punjabi friends but only 2 white friends. One of my white friends has been my friend since kindergarten. I can find other Punjabi girls to play with at school, but when they are sick or something then I don’t have anybody to play with.

Similarly, Inderpreet who mentioned that there were a lot of punjabi children in her school, also played with more punjabi girls than canadian girls.

Mandeep: So who do you usually play these games with at lunch and recess?
Inderpreet: I have a little bit of friends from my class. I have five um that I usually play with.
Mandeep: What are their names?
Inderpreet: Kiran, Jazzy, Preety, Rakhi and Raman.
Mandeep: Those are all punjabi names, right?
Inderpreet: Yeah, most of my friends are punjabi only one of them is canadian.

Researchers Howes and Wu (1990) note that “we cannot assume that cross-ethnic friendships...within a school peer group will be sufficient for children, particularly minority children, to develop self-esteem and self-identity” (p.540); therefore, the ethnocultural groups of their friends can be a factor in the negotiating of identities for the young girls, specifically tied closely to who their friends are is how these friends treat and perceive them. An excerpt from my conversation with Simi is an indication of this.

Simi explains how her being punjabi is at times the focus of negative comments by her friends:

Simi: There aren’t that much punjabi people in my school. I have two best friends. One’s Rachel and one’s Kendra. Kendra is my friend more because she um cause she likes to play with me cause I’m her only friend she likes to play with me only she likes me a lot only she’s my only friend I have and she likes me.

Simi also had this to say about her friend.

Simi: Ummm well I don’t know. I totally swear at my friend Kendra because sometimes my friend Kendra she gets mad at me and then she gets for like three days she gets all nice. Because, okay, like I’m playing with her and I like I start to play at least I play with her at lunch I say in class, Rachel will you come and play with me so she [Kendra] doesn’t know. She’s in grade 4 and I’m in grade 5 and she gets mad at me because I’m playing with Rachel for no reason. I don’t know why. When she gets mad at me she bugs me about talking Punjabi.

Mandeep: What do you mean by that like what does she say about you talking punjabi?
Simi: The girls tease the boys for being like talking too much punjabi. I just ignore them sometimes like I get bugged teased too.

Mandeep: So you mean you get bugged because you speak punjabi?
Simi: Yeah.
These friendship dynamics are not unique to Punjabi girls, and perhaps are indicative of the dynamics that Grade 5 girls experience. Nonetheless, how our friends perceive us is of importance as “negative peer feedback would lead to an increasing dissatisfaction with self...there is a close relationship between the development of an understanding of self and an understanding of others” (Morgan & Kafer, 2001, p.524).

Peer relations can play an important role in identity development. We can receive pressures both positive and negative from our peers; pressures that can make us feel good and bad and ultimately impinge on how we see ourselves.

**Gender identity**

When describing who their friends were and who they played with most frequently, I noticed that none of the young girls mentioned boys’ names when referring to friends nor did they mention playing with boys. Also, since the majority of Punjabi names are androgynous as they can be applied to both boys and girls, I wanted to clarify the sex of the friends that the young girls mentioned. In each instance the young girls stated that all of their friends were girls and that they did not play with boys.

Simi: The boys get in trouble for talking Punjabi. Because there’s lots of boys...Punjabi boys at my school and there’s like 5 or 6 Punjabi girls. The girls tease the boys for talking Punjabi. I just ignore them ...

*I* *I* *

Inderpreet: I don’t play with boys.
Mandeep: Why?
Inderpreet: Well like we make fun of each other but not for real. We play a game...we like play a game like magic and stuff. My friend got this one guy and I got this other guy and then they started telling the other guys and then the guys started making fun of us.

*I* *I* *

Sukhy: Almost all the bullies in school are boys. So they’re always in this little group. They push all the girls. But then if we get mad we go and we feel like punching them but we don’t cause that’s not good.

*I* *I* *

Piyal’s response was simply “I never play with boys.”
There were two themes that were constant in these narratives. One being that girls and boys do not play with one another and the second that boys were the troublemakers, or the ones getting into trouble and in some cases even instigators of violence. This troublesome dynamic was also observed by Loewen (1996) who states this teasing and bugging by boys was a "commonly mentioned complaint against the boys...particularly teasing about physical appearance" (p.90). Made all the more problematic when "the sense of objectification that this represents acts to reinforce the importance of appearance as an attribute of femininity...and to be viewed primarily as a physical object is to experience denial of self as a whole person with thoughts, feelings and actions" (p.107). This boy/girl dynamic also shows that these young girls are no longer perceiving themselves as non-gendered children, but have began to construct a gendered identity for themselves. This reminds us that "the dominant gender narratives, and the processes of learning 'the usual' gender-differentiated positions, are clearly not interrupted. There is no 'pure' (or non-gendered, or non-patriarchal) space within which girls develop" (Jones, 1993, p.4).

Discrimination goes unnoticed

All of the young girls involved in this project had some personal experience of discrimination. For some it was a frequent event, for others less so. Interestingly though, how the discrimination impacted their feels and consequently their perceptions of self differed amongst the young girls. Some found the experiences to be particularly hurtful while others did not let it bother them. What follows is a narrative from my conversation with Inderpreet where she speaks of an experience that is blatantly racist, but does recognize it to be.
* * * *

Inderpreet:  We’re safe at school and like there’s no one that can hurt you and stuff. People say I have a unibrow and stuff like that and well my friend, well she used to be my friend, but she’s not anymore and she used like used to call me names. We were playing she bugged me she said I was dark and when I came back from India I got darker but she bugged me before too. So I don’t play in the sun that much.

Mandeep:  Why don’t you play in the sun that much?
Inderpreet:  I don’t want to get darker.
Mandeep:  How does it make you feel when your friend says that to you?
Inderpreet:  I feel bad when she says that.
Mandeep:  Is this friend of yours punjabi?
Inderpreet:  No she’s canadian.

Inderpreet has taken the criticism and basis of others’ harassing her, that is the color of her skin, and is attempting to change it and make it go away. She does not see the problem lying in the comments of these others but rather perceives the problem as lying in the color of her skin, her darker skin, and essentially lying within her. She views it as her problem and therefore she is the one who needs to fix it. So she decides to rectify the situation and make the teasing go away by making her darker skin go away.

This description of Inderpreet’s decision and actions is witness to the defining power of the discourse of difference or otherness. The effectiveness of comments made by other children at school is noteworthy; they have had the effect of spurring Inderpreet to change so that she might be more normal, which implies not being dark. Inderpreet is negotiating her identity through the rejection of her darker skin. By trying to stay out of the sun and lighten the color of her skin, she is trying to remove this physical marker as part of her identity. Although she is not rejecting her ethnicity altogether, which is evident from other narratives in our conversations, she is rejecting the darker color of skin that is a marker of her ethnicity. Here decision to alter he skin color is worrisome on its own, but made more problematic by the fact that she does not realize or perceive this
incident to be an experience of discrimination. According to Handa (2003), the denial of the existence of racism is a feature of racism in the context of tolerance. “This suggests that the discourse of multiculturalism makes racism invisible” (Handa, 2003, p.94).

Having the perception and taking the stance that her school was a safe place with respectful multicultural environments seemed to eliminate the possibility that these experiences were actually discriminatory acts towards her. It is as if the policy preached by their school had blinded her and she no longer were able to see racism when it appeared.

Inderpreet is staying within the discourse of “safe stories” (Lam 1998) to describe her experience. That is she is voicing her experiences and telling her stories in a manner that does not disrupt the dominant discourse “which reinforces and legitimizes the position of the dominant group, offering a ‘self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen’ in a light which both flatters and benefits them” (Bell, 2003, p.5).

Recognizing discrimination – counter-narratives

Sukhy and Piyal also spoke of experiencing discrimination at lunch and recess, however, they did recognize these acts for what they were and labeled them to be wrong and hurtful. Here are their poignant words:

Sukhy: Kids always call me blackie and brownie. I don’t think I’m black... I ca...I have a black knapsack. I wish I were gori (white) cause if I was born like that then I wouldn’t have these problems.

    *    *    *

Piyal: It makes me feel bad about being punjabi like watching the news sometimes our friends come up to us they’re like ‘ha your environments are bad’ and that makes me feel bad.

Mandeep: What do they mean your environments are bad?

Piyal: Like your people. When they are almost going in jail all the time.
I refer to the experiences narrated by Sukhy and Piyal as counter-narratives because “counter-narratives of subordinated groups serve to confirm their experiences and bear witness to their lived reality in the face of a dominant culture that distorts, stereotypes and marginalized that reality” (Bell, 2003, p.6). Both of these young girls identify these experiences to be discriminatory and voice them to be; therefore they are countering the narrative of the dominant discourse by voicing their discriminatory experiences. Lam (1998) terms these narratives as “unsafe stories” as they cross into an “unauthorized discourse” that highlight the structures of racism within society (p.161).

Those young girls who name discrimination and provided counter-narratives about it spoke about the feelings involved with these experiences.

Sukhy: Sometimes you feel bad, but not all the time because sometimes you feel good, because you know what they’re saying isn’t true.

Piyal: It makes me feel bad when I’m teased.

Simi: I don’t like it when kids make fun of my culture. It makes me mad.

Having feelings whether they are mad, bad or sad are important to help cope with such experiences. Not seeing racism when it appears means not feeling these emotions a coping mechanism that can be exhibited externally. Therefore, the problems become internalized and this is what might lead to making decisions like the one Inderpreet has about trying to lighten the color of her skin. Having these feelings also helps to make connections between issues that are negative and positive. Positive experiences generally elicit happy and good emotions and feelings; negative experiences produce feelings of sadness, or anger. Thus, these emotions can help us make sense of an experience.

These young girls’ safe and unsafe stories provide a glimpse into dialogue occurring within themselves for identity constructions and creating cultural definitions.
What is also learned is that experiencing negative comments based on physical difference thrusts these young girls into cultural and identity negotiations as they face negativity head on.

**Experiencing multiculturalism**

In response to my question of whether there were any times at school where the young girls could celebrate being punjabi, this is what they had to say:

**Harneet:** Last year for Diwali our school there’s this punjabi teacher she picks a few students from the school to present about Diwali in front of the entire school, right, and class presentations and after they give them treats. I was one of those presenters and at recess I also did that and we had to wear a punjabi suit. It was pretty fun and we got to see everyone’s different clothes it was great to see everyone representing their culture.

* * *

**Inderpreet:** My school celebrates Visakhi and Diwali and I think that’s it. For Diwali we’d always dress up in punjabi suits and um the... in a room they have food and they set up and sometimes in the gym they put the music on and then we dance and parents get to go to.

* * *

**Sukhy:** There are performances at school um where punjabi people singing and dancing like talent shows. I like that because I know the songs and the dancing too.

**Piyal:** No, but we have Valentine’s Day and wacky hair day.

Simi and Bal both responded with no.

From the descriptions provided by Harneet, Inderpreet, and Sukhy, multiculturalism can be perceived as a positive policy perhaps even accommodating and supportive of differences. They were able to wear their cultural clothing to school and partake in cultural dances. Inderpreet was the only girl who had the opportunity to speak to her school about what her culture meant to her, an act I feel is of utmost importance for educating each other in schools. This is also noteworthy as she was the only young girl
who had a punjabi teacher in her school. This narrative may reveal the importance of having teachers of diverse cultural backgrounds in our schools; their insights may help to make multiculturalism what it has the potential to be.

What is also interesting is that although these young girls identify these experiences from multicultural day as positive, their narratives also revealed where multiculturalism lacked and failed them. A complexity made more challenging by the definitions and discourses surrounding what multiculturalism is and what it should look like in our schools. For the most part, schools are content with multiculturalism being just a day to celebrate differences with *ethnic* foods and *ethnic* music. This, I would argue, is a limited view of multiculturalism, as long as schools perceive multiculturalism to mean nothing more than *ethnic* foods and music, the limitations experienced by *ethnic* students. In the following quotes the young girls speak to how the curriculum does not reflect their ethnic and cultural differences and thus show the difficulties of enacting multiculturalism in schools.

Inderpreet: I um I want to learn more about punjabi and not that much about Can...like Christian people. I want to learn more about Gurus like our Gods.
Mandeep: So you want to learn more about punjabi culture at your school?
Inderpreet: Yeah.

* * *

Sukhy: I want to learn how to make a website on punjabi people and I'd have that commercial with the *giani* (man with turban) who does a lot of stuff with the basketball and then it says I'm proud to be punjabi at the bottom. My website will have that to.
Mandeep: What part would your website have?
Sukhy: It would say I'm proud to be punjabi.
Mandeep: Did you say you would have the commercial on your website too?
Sukhy: Yeah.

These comments expose the limitations of curriculum and the notions of multicultural exchange. Sukhy and Inderpreet both express how they do not see
themselves and their culture reflected in the curriculum. A curriculum that is based on
eurocentric views.

Inderpreet: Sometimes we teach each other our languages she’s from Vietnam.

*   *   *

Simi: I teach my friends... my canadian friends punjabi. My friend Kendra she
wants to learn what .. how to say cat and then I say it means billi so like
she says billy goat. Its so funny and her ... I taught her sat sri akal
(hello) and that's it.

Inderpreet and Simi’s comments indicate that they cannot rely on their schools or
the curriculum taught at their schools to provide them with the diverse learning that they
desire. They seek out sources of information on their own to satisfy their desire to learn
more about their culture and other cultures on their own. Handa (2003) found similar
results in her study with South Asian teenaged girls and she remarked, “this particular
brand of multiculturalism contradicts governmental rhetoric, which claims that removing
discriminatory attitudes and misunderstandings is to be achieved in part through
multicultural education” (p.93).

Linking common threads - a collection of voices and experiences

The idea of having the young girls co-write a fictional story came during one of
my meetings with my thesis supervisor. I thought such a story would be a means to
“educate” school administers, principals, teachers and even students about what the
experiences of punjabi girls within the education system were and also to make visible
the hidden curriculum of non-instructional school times as fiction “provides potential
discursive spaces within which new knowledge and understanding can be produced”
(Gough, 1994, p.59).

From the time the idea of having the young girls co-write a story was conceived,
to the time that it started being written, it had always existed as and held a fictional
classification in my mind, but as the young girls began to write this story, I quickly began to realize that there was more purpose to this story.

Although the young girls were co-writing this story as a fictional narrative, as the sentences and words began to emerge on the posters, I noticed that some of them seemed to have been drawing upon personal experiences to include in this joint story. I could see where the young girls had written themselves or elements of themselves into the story, blending their personal experiences into one. I introduce three pieces from the story and their authors to illustrate this point. Harneet was the smallest girl in the group. She was petite and also small in stature. One of Harneet's writings in Simran's story was "Francis begins to tease her again. He says she's short and can't run very fast." She has given Simran the characteristic of being short, a characteristic that she also has. Bal was the young girl in the group who had long thick hair that she wore in two braids. One of Bal's contributions to the story was "Francis pulls on her hair and spits in it. Simran asks him to stop. She ignores him." Furthermore, Piyal, was the quietest member of the group, she wrote "Francis keeps bugging her. Simran stays quiet." Again, similar to the Harneet and Bal, Piyal has given Simran a characteristic of herself. It became obvious that what I initially thought would be a fictional story created by the girls was in fact a compilation of the girls' lived experiences in the form of a fictional story.

The young girls seemed to be making personal affirmations through this story. The fictional life of Simran, although derived from their imaginations, was also mirroring the young girls lived experiences and identities. After observing this, I had difficulty in determining how I would go about retelling this story. I could not decide whether to treat it as a fictional story or as both a fictional and non-fictional story. I initially thought that
this was a distinction that needed to be made in order for further “analysis” to ensue. So I
turned to literature speaking to fiction and its place within the realm of research. It is
here in this inquiry that I realized that the distinction I was trying to make was not
necessary, on two levels. The first being that the boundary between fiction and non-
fiction is not fixed and concrete. The division between the two quickly began to dwindle
“the distinction is simultaneously obvious and muddled” (Roosevelt, 1998, p.84). The
second reason for abandoning this line of thought was that I realized this was not my
decision to make. Yes, I was the one who had to determine what were some of the
meanings behind what was written but I was not the one who wrote the story. The
decision of what category this story fell into was already made by the young girls who
co-wrote it – it was fiction. As authors, they were creating a fictional story and it is with
this classification that I proceeded with the rereading and retelling of it. And thirdly, it
was my biased definition of seeing fiction as an act of “making up” that was holding this
story in less regard than it deserved. It was obvious that I had to reframe my definition of
fiction.

The definition of fiction guiding this reading, re-reading, and re-telling is that
“fiction is a site, or an occasion, for the productive, sometimes, disruptive, educative
encounter of the child-writer and the world of culture, imagination, morality, hope and
doubt” (Roosevelt, 1998, p.82)\(^8\). Taking on this definition, fiction then is a source that
provides for the reader personal facts about the writer as well as “an approach that
obliges us, again, to construct some meaning with the writer, through the medium of the
text” (Roosevelt, 1998, p.93)\(^9\). It is worth mentioning that since “there can be no sharp

\(^8\) Emphasis in original text.
\(^9\) Emphasis in original text.
dividing line between the fictional and the ‘actual’ world as far as features or activities are concerned; the fiction writer has no resources to draw upon other than the ones we all possess” therefore components of a fictional narrative can be autobiographical as well as invention (Roosevelt, 1998, p.84). Furthermore, “the boundary between fact and fiction has been blurred if not destroyed in part because it is now clear that much of fiction has strong autobiographical, experiential, and observational elements” (Rosenblatt, 2002, p.894).

Another pivotal argument to be made here is that if “the narrative act is the essential, generative, meaning-making act...then as teachers and readers part of our work is to make meaning with the child-writer” (Roosevelt, 1998, p.82). Therefore, meaning making from my perspective as the reader will involve a re-reading of the fictional narrative taking into consideration the threads identified in the personal narratives from individual conversations. Taking this stance when reading and re-reading the text what becomes unmistakable is that every facet of life that surfaced in the young girls individual conversations was also reiterated in the co-created story. Family, friends, discriminators, authority figures were all part of Simran’s life as well. Below I provide a portrayal of each character in the story based on my reading of the story and also an overview of what purpose I think the character plays in the story. I also attempt to link the common themes found in the individual conversations and within Simran’s story.
A Day in the Life of a Punjabi Girl

By Bal, Harneet, Inderpreet, Piyal, Simi and Sukhy

(snoring noise) zzz...snort....fff.....zzz

Mom walks into the bedroom and says, “Good morning Simran. It’s time to get-up.” Ooohhhh Simran mouns. She’s still tired and doesn’t want to wake-up. Four minutes later, Mom comes back, “Simran are you up yet?” Simran mouns again, “uhhhh.” Five minutes later, Mom comes back. “Wake-up Simran! Or you will be late for school!” With her eyes squinting, Simran gets out of bed rubbing her eyes. She goes to the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face. She puts her dress on and goes back to the washroom to have her mom comb her hair. She asks if she could have her hair pulled back into a ponytail instead of her usual two braids. Her mom lets her. Now it’s time for breakfast so Simran goes to the kitchen. She has Froot Loops and toast for breakfast. She watches cartoons and eats until she is full. Mom says, “Simran, it’s time to go to the bus stop.” Simran runs to her room to grab her backpack before she leaves for school.

Simran reaches the bus stop and sees her friends, “Hi Miya, Aashwariya, Chelsea, Sara, and Jessica”. Just then, the bully, Francis, pushes Simran. Simran and her friends stand-up against Francis and tell him to stop. Soon after, the bus arrives and all the children form a line to get on. Francis pushes his way to the front of the line and gets on first. Then Simran and her friends get on. The only seat left is the one in front of Francis. So Simran and her two friends sit there. Francis starts to pick on Simran again and this time he puts gum in her hair. Simran tells the bus driver as she gets off the bus. The bus driver then says that Francis cannot sit near Simran again. Simran will have to wait to get to school and have her teacher help get the gum out of her hair hopefully she won’t have to cut it.

When Simran gets to school she stands in front of her classroom door and waits for the school bell to ring so that she can go inside. “ring, ring” She then goes to her classroom and takes off her jacket and changes her shoes and sits down at her desk. Because it is Monday, at the beginning of class everyone sings Oh Canada. Then everyone sits down, takes out and hands in their homework from the day before. Simran was good and did her homework. The teacher Miss Basran starts the class with Math. Simran’s tired and thinks that Math is boring most of the time. She keeps looking at the time. The next subject is Social Studies. Simran thinks it is fun, she learns a lot about history. Then it is time for P.E. and Simran really likes P.E. because it is kind of like playtime and it also means the end of classes before recess.
It's time for recess and Simran plays jump rope with her friends. Simran does not notice Francis tug on the rope and she falls. She tells her teacher what Francis did and the teacher gives Francis detention and says that she will call his parents too. Then Simran goes back to play basketball with her friends this time she sees other kids getting bullied and hurt. Simran tells the teacher again.

After recess, Simran has French and Fine Arts. She likes both subjects, especially Art class because she likes to draw. Her favorite things to draw are libraries, houses, gardens, flowers, animals, and people. After Art class it is time for lunch. Simran has watermelon, potato salad, bread, a cupcake and buys milk at school. Simran and her friends want to sit together so they move their chairs together. After eating, Simran and her friends play jump rope again. She also plays basketball and soccer on the fields. Francis begins to tease her again. Francis says she's short and can't run very fast. Francis pulls on her hair and spits in it. Simran asks Francis to stop. He won't listen. She then ignores him. Francis keeps bugging her and Simran stays quiet. Lunch is over and it is time to go back to the classroom.

Simran has Computers, Music and Science classes. She likes Computer class because she likes to type and play games. She's not sure if she likes Science, it can be boring sometimes. She really likes Music class because she gets to play the drums. After Music class it is time to go home. Simran needs to catch her bus from the front of the school. When the bus comes Simran and her friends get on together and the bus driver will not let Francis sit near Simran. So Simran has a relaxing bus ride home.

When Simran gets home she tells her Mom about the things that Francis did. She thinks he bugs her because of her culture and her shiny black hair. Her Mom says that she will phone the principal tomorrow. This makes Simran feel good because she knows that tomorrow they are going to sort things out. Simran then does her homework with her Dad's help. Afterwards she plays with her two brothers, and two sisters. Her brothers are Kenny and Jasjot and her sisters are Sasha and Nisha. They cannot play for too long because the family must go to their Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Raj's house to visit their new baby cousin Manjit. When Simran goes to her Aunt and Uncle's house she eats ludos and burfy and samosas. When they go back home, Simran says her prayer and goes to sleep, waiting for a new day.
The characters

Simran

Based on what the young girls wrote here is Simran’s biographical profile:
I’m 10 years old. I have two brothers and two sisters. My favorite classes are Computers because I like to type and play games and Music because I get to play with the drums. I like to play jump rope, basketball, and soccer at lunch and recess. I’m not sure if I like Science, it can be boring sometimes. I think Math is boring most of the time. I like to visit by baby cousin.

The similarities between the young girls narratives and Simran’s narrative is the games she plays at lunch and recess and also in the subjects that she does not like. Math and Science were the two most disliked subjects mentioned by the young girls themselves. Similarly, soccer and jump rope were the sports that were played at lunch and recess times by the young girls.

A poignant difference between what the young girls spoke of in their individual conversations and Simran’s story was that the young girls did not speak of any physical violence against them at non-instructional schools times whereas, Simran experiences being pushed, tripped, and spat on.

Francis

Francis is the antagonist in the story the troublemaker and cause of Simran’s worries. I was not surprised that the young girls chose the antagonist to be a boy. Individual conversations revealed that they associated boys with being troublemakers and instigators of trouble. I believe Francis plays a larger role in the individual life stories of these young girls; he represents the negative experiences they have encountered at school
during play times. Based on this it could be deduced that being teased is a central component of their identity as students. I also noticed that in the story the only times that Francis picks on Simran is when there are no authority persons around or at least when he knows they are not watching and cannot see what he is doing.

**Friends**

As in the young girls own lives, Simran also only has female friends, but contrary to the real life experiences of the young girls, Simran has more white friends than Punjabi friends. Also contrary to what the young girls shared with me in their individual conversations, Simran’s friends aided and all helped her when Francis was teasing her. This was not the case in the real lived experiences of the young girls, in fact in their personal experiences their friends were some of the one’s who were responsible for the teasing. Nonetheless, I think that friends play an important in both the real lives of the young writers; they are there to help not hurt you.

**Role of Principals and Teachers**

In the individual conversations, Sukhy mentioned that when she encountered discriminatory remarks and recognized them to be discriminatory, they did not receive intervention from her teacher as she had hoped. By telling the teacher she had hoped that the name calling would stop, it did not. So Sukhy’s mother intervened and took matters in to her own hands and talked to the instigators herself to ensure they would stop. In the story however, Simran approaches authority figures in the story for help - the teacher and the bus driver are all called on to help. Each time, Simran’s requests help she receives it. The bus driver resolves Francis’ teasing and physically assaulting of her by making sure that Francis is not permitted to sit near Simran again. At recess Francis tugs on the
skipping rope causing Simran to fall. She then calls on her teacher for help who assigns Francis detention. Once Simran goes home she tells her mother what Francis did to her and her mother promises to call the principal in the morning. Again this puts Simran's mind at ease.

Here Simran recognizes that these instances are wrong and asks for help. This does not happen in all instances of the young girls own lives. Not only do the young girls not always recognize something to be wrong when it is, but they do not always get help from persons with authority when they ask for it. In the story then, persons with authority serve the purpose of keeping the girls safe and they are perceived to be the ones who will help when help is needed. By having Simran ask for help, the young girls are showing that they are aware that help exists and that they are aware of how to get this help if they wanted and needed to at school. Perhaps they do not always ask for help at school because they are uncertain as to what the repercussions might be with the students who are causing the trouble. “Telling on” someone might lead to more harassment at school than reduce it. There is also the issue of parents finding out about troubles at school, the young girls may not also want to get their parents involved.

Family

The theme of family and the importance that it played in these young girls narratives resonated in Simran’s life. All of the young girls had siblings, Simran also had siblings and visited her relatives. A point I think is evident of their behaving in a culturally correct manner. They included this part because that’s what punjabi people do – visit families and eat samosa.
Each of the young girls families consisted of grandparents, their parents, and their siblings. In Piyal’s case she even had Aunts and Uncles and cousins living in the same home. The extended family household is a unique characteristic of the Punjabi culture.

I noticed pictures of the Gurus in every house that was visited. As with my parents’ home, they are strategically located on the fireplace mantel. Their physical appearance, apart from the Mary Kate and Ashley t-shirts was similar to mine from 20 years ago. They all had long black hair. Some pulled their hair back in a single ponytail while others had their hair in two braids. Additionally, all of the young girls lived in extended family households.

**Religious identity**

Religion was a part of all of the young girls lives, more so for some than others therefore it was not surprising that Simran was also given a religious identity. She prayed before going to bed.

**What Simran’s story tells us**

What can be gleaned from a thorough read of Simran’s story is that she experiences a lot of hardships during her day at school. Her home was a safe haven; therefore she enjoys being there. She has a healthy and happy family life in which relatives play an important role. Simran’s culture and religion play an important role in her life. Her story resonates with me as it is not far from many days that I experienced at school as a child. The narratives from the individual conversations and voices from Simran’s story accentuate the pervasiveness of discriminatory experiences based on ethnocultural difference in the school experiences of these young girls. Furthermore, the
impact of these on children’s feelings and experiences is also displayed. It was also observed that culture is a key component of identity and sense of self for young girls.

A space for parent voices

Before I proceed with the narratives of the young girls, it is important to allocate the following space for parent voices heard during my conversations with the young girls. After completing individual conversations with Harneet, Piyal and Sukhy, their parents’ expressed the need to talk to me further. Their words and thoughts were so heartfelt that I decided it would be important and appropriate for me to provide space for their voices.

* * *

A father’s fear - afraid of becoming “too canadian”

In conversations with the young girls, the salient role that family and parents played in their lives and their identity formation was revealed. Here, the young girls sense of belonging to the category punjabi or indian was strongly linked with their families’ connection with India and the punjabi culture. By aligning themselves with their families and parents, the young girls chose their parents’ culture to identify with over the culture of Canadian society or whiteness.

The theme that culture and family were tightly tied together emerged from the conversations but there were no mentions of tensions between home life and school life by the young girls. This may be due to the fact that typically the “culture conflict” that is spoken of with ethnic minority children generally surfaces near the teenage years. Although the young girls did not bring up any issues of culture conflict, one of the young girl’s fathers expressed his concern about potential conflicts he thought might arise with his daughter in the future. Harneet’s father expressed concern about having to deal with
this issue with Harneet in the future and was indeed attempting to do everything he could to avoid that day.

Harneet’s father shared his worries over raising a punjabi girl in a “white” society to me. He said he was doing all that he could think of to make sure that Harneet gets all the proper education and “training” so that she makes the right decisions in life. He mentioned that one day she might want to date, something he noted that is not an accepted part of the punjabi culture. He went on to say that he would be willing to make an exception if Harneet wanted to date a punjabi boy and the two were not going to view dating as “something to do just for fun” and were actually serious about marrying one another. But then he said, as he glanced down at the floor, she could bring home a “gora” (white boy) too, and “what would I do then. I don’t know. I guess I’d have to accept it, what other choice would I have, but that’s not what I want for Harneet.” He asked me if I had always kept my hair long or if I had just started growing it out. “No,” I told him, “I have always kept it long. It’s just a personal choice.” “See Harneet, your phanji (sister) has kept her hair long because she thinks it’s good. My Harneet has really long beautiful hair too.” Harneet smiled as her Dad complimented her. He also sought my guidance on how to bring up a punjabi girl in a Canadian society so that she would turn out like me, me who he saw as “well cultured, educated, well versed in the punjabi culture and who still kept her hair long.” He asked me if I could offer him any advice on how to ensure that Harneet would know how to react if she were ever confronted by an adverse situation. I was shocked that someone was seeking advice from me, me having been so confused and living life in a haze, hoping to walk out of this haze as a whole person someday. Obviously, this was not the way Harneet’s father saw me. I didn’t
really know how to answer his questions given that his perceptions of me and my knowing of who I was were so different. I responded with my impressions of Harneet from the short time that we had together, “Harneet is a smart, and confident punjabi girl and in my opinion, she will be just fine.” He nodded in agreement and added that she was a very good student and always at the top of her class. How to balance the two cultures and how could he ensure that Harneet would retain the important parts of her punjabi culture? These were key questions for him. The sheer number of studies that focus on the “culture conflict” issue are indicative that the concern Harneet’s father is exhibiting is the essential canadian question. The impact on the family when a child does choose to become “too” canadian and take on many values of canadian society as opposed to their cultural values is evident. Sihota (2000) examined the cultural identity formation of Indo-Canadian women and she notes that those who deviated and those who wanted to assimilate to the Western ways may have done so as “they may have felt [they had] two cultures which [did] not blend together easily” (p.19). However, the consequences of assimilating or exhibiting behaviors, which suggested desires for assimilation were enormous; these children were branded within the community as the “bad kids”. Another product of being “too” canadian that may be at the root of Harneet’s fathers concerns. The perceptions the Punjabi community holds of you are critical to a family’s honor of “ijit,” which in turn has incredible consequences not only for the children, but for the parents as well.

In her work with minorities, Rezai-Rashi (1998) found that “sometimes, the attempts to assimilate may lead to students’ alienation and a loss of identity. This, in turn, may lead to conflicts between the students, their parents, and their larger cultural
Rezai-Rashi further contends “I have come to understand the tremendous amount of pressure that is placed upon minority female students to assimilate into the dominant western culture” (p.78).

**Experiencing racism overseas**

After our conversation came to an end, Piyal’s mother came into the room and sat down next to me. She asked me why I was doing this research. It was exciting that Piyal’s mother was interested in my motives. She was informed that the study was examining what Punjabi girls were experiencing today. It was at this point that she shared with me a little about what it was like for her and her siblings growing up in England. She said that at that time, punjabis were at the “bottom of the pole” within the “brown” minority groupings, pakistani’s being at the top. She said this meant that racial discrimination not only came from the White’s but also from the “brown” minorities that were at the top of the pole. She has been in Canada now for 15 years and since then she has returned only once to her homeland of England. When she did return, she was surprised to see the difference that 15 years had made. punjabi’s now were at the top of the pole and in fact were the instigators of trouble within minority groups. They see themselves as “being the best” now she said. Since being in Canada, she said she has observed a difference between the two countries. She stated that she did not experience racism towards her the way she did when she lived in England. In fact, she said that she thought things were better for the kids living in Canada today and that Piyal didn’t seem to be having too many problems with that at school. “I think things are better these days than they were for us. In fact, I don’t know how my brothers and sisters and I turned out ‘okay’ after what we experienced.”
A mother takes control

I went to say my good-bye and thank you after my individual conversation with Sukhy had ended, and remind Sukhy’s Mom about the group conversations to take place later that week when she asked me to have a seat, and I did. Sukhy’s mother spoke of the name calling that Sukhy was facing at school. She said that after Sukhy complained to her that children at school were calling her “brownie” she told her to tell her teacher and principal about it which Sukhy did. However, nothing was done about the situation and the name calling continued. The mother spoke to the teacher and principal again but the name calling continued. Finally she said she got “fed up” and spoke to the kids herself. She said that she talked to the children herself and said that the name calling better stop or that she’d have a talk with their parents. Sukhy hasn’t been called a “brownie” since.

Sukhy’s mother having to take matters into her own hands affirms that “schools need to implement a clear and firm policy to deter and deal with racism incidents, as part of their wider policies of bullying and conflict between children” (Dei, 1997, p.244).
Everybody was sitting on the floor huddled in a little group in front of the teacher who was propped up on a chair. We were going to do an exercise where we each had to take turns reciting our parents’ names and our home address and phone number. The teacher started calling on us one by one. As I heard the other kids say their parents’ names, I began to realize that my parents’ names were not like theirs. Their names were different. My stomach began to tighten up as my turn neared. I didn’t want to say my parents’ names out loud. I didn’t want to be laughed at...I knew I was going to be laughed at....

“Okay Mandeep. It’s your turn now. Tell me what your Mom’s name is and what your Dad’s name is first and then tell me your address and phone number.”

“My address is 2233 Evergreen Street and my phone number is 992-6354. My mommy’s name is Mom and my Daddy’s name is Dad.”

I hoped that the teacher wouldn’t notice my attempt to hide my parents’ names, but she noticed. She was smarter than me. Can you tell me what your Mommy and Daddy’s real names are?

I hummed and haaaed and thought about whether I should just say their names, but the fear of being laughed at was too great that I couldn’t. So I decided to lie: “Mommy and Daddy are their real names.”

The teacher persisted, “What do big people call them? My big people name is Diane. Is there a big people name that other big people call your Mommy and Daddy?

There was nothing she could say that would persuade me share by parents’ names with this group. Nothing at all so I stood my ground and repeated what I had before, and finally she moved on to the next kid. Yes, I had won the battle! I didn’t get laughed at and I didn’t get in trouble from the teacher. My Mom got a call from the teacher that evening, she thought my mother should teach me what their real names were. She said it was important if I were to ever need help. I told my Mom why I didn’t share with the class what their names were. I thought for sure she would understand. She didn’t. She was hurt that I would be ashamed of their names. I had won the battle, but I had lost the war. I was sent to my room to spend the remainder of the day by myself. I didn’t have a problem with being by myself, I didn’t like my Mom being upset with me. She was my best friend. I loved her more than anything in the world and it made me really sad that I upset her. That night I prayed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s picture and asked him to make my Mom happy with me again. I bargained with him and told him that I would give up my favorite snack, toast with ketchup on it, if
he would make my wish come true. That night my Mom came into my room to say goodnight, she told me never to lie to my teacher again and to tell my teacher the next day in private their names so that the other kids won’t hear. She kissed me on my forehead and left. I haven’t had toast with ketchup since.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARIZING LEARNINGS FROM STUDENT VOICES

In order to understand how experiences of non-instructional times impacted the construction of self-identities for ethnoculturally diverse girls, narratives of six young girls enrolled in Grade five at schools in a city in BC were collected. These narratives provided a glimpse into how punjabi canadian identity becomes negotiated in the canadian school system. Entering the metonymic space of non-instructional school times highlighted how this transpired.

A poststructural framework helped to illustrate how the meaning making involved with identity(ies) construction(s) is complex and intersects both the individual and social realms. With these young girls, I engaged in conversations about their encounters primarily at lunch and recess times of the school day. Despite being from different schools with different demographic traits, most of the young girls had similar experiences. They spoke of experiencing discrimination based on their culture, and ethnocultural diversity. Two of the girls also shared narratives that demonstrated how multicultural education may be making difference in the school experiences of these young girls. For these six young girls, learning about themselves involved negotiating a racialized identity that required a process “of constant negotiation with those around” as “identity is the ‘product of agreement and disagreement’ and open to change.” This process also involved “internal negotiations” for these young girls displaying the complexities involved in this process (Craib, 1998, p.4). For most of the young girls, identity was enacted in their everyday negotiations and involved their family life as well as their social networks. This task for them involved negotiating between self-perceptions of themselves, their understandings and self-meanings of their punjabi
cultural ancestry and the views that others held of them exhibiting the complexities involved in the process of negotiating subjectivities.

This research process provided an opportunity for the young girls to share their experiences of non-instructional school times with someone from the same cultural and religious background as them. Through this sharing, learning arouse about the experiences of young girls at non-instructional school times; learning that can help make the school experiences of future generations of punjabi girls a positive and valuable one, but only if we dare to listen and take seriously the concerns voiced in their stories. Furthermore, listening to and providing space for their words and voices within this research countered the current lack of student voice in literature, especially the punjabi student voice.

Looking at a younger age and narrated identities

By focusing on younger children, this study addressed the lack in existing literature on self-identities and the impact of racial discrimination in younger children. Wilkinson (2000) asserts research on elementary schools is a priority. In an attempt to determine when children and youth develop prejudiced attitude and also in implementing action plans for future change, secondary grade it might be too late. It was evident from the conversations that these young girls were engaged in negotiations of identity construction, they had begun their journeys midst the in-between hybrid space of punjabi and canadian.

Some of the identities in these young girls were engaged were racial identities, cultural identities, ethnic identities, gender identities, student identities, and religious identities. I saw how the processes they were engaged in when negotiating these
identities were situated in difference and sameness in relation to dominant cultural discourses. Self-identities were constituted based on how the young girls spoke about themselves in relation to their peers, and the dominant discourse of white being normal. The binary of white/color was the dominant theme through which these young girls were working. This research visited the ways in which young punjabi girls negotiate, resist and contest and in some instances fall victim to this dominant discourse due to their experiences at school.

**Identities with non-instructional school times**

The inquiry process revealed the vital role interactions and experiences these young girls had during lunch and recess played in their identity negotiations. The accounts of identity negotiations by the young girls in the conversations highlighted how cultural, ethnic, religious, student and gender identities were impacted by experiences at non-instructional school times. The young girls’ reactions to the comments they encountered from their peers at school and also how those words were internalized and impacted on the construction process of their identities revealed that “identity is grounded in the dual processes of how one sees herself and how one is seen by others” (Lam, 1998, p.250).

**Constructing identity through family**

In hearing the young girls speak about their families and punjabi culture it became evident that for all of the young girls, their parents and families’ indian origins and punjabi cultural ancestry were instrumental in how their cultural, ethnic and religious identities were forming and transforming.
A key focus of this research was to observe how the young girls negotiated between the family and school contexts in constructing identities. Narratives from the conversations showed that the ethnic, cultural and religious identities were tied and rooted within the family context. At home, these young girls lived a life engrossed in daily punjabi routines, a context that reinforces and fosters their cultural, ethnic and religious identities, however the interactions that some had at school forced them to negotiate their ethnic and cultural identities. In their experiences of lunch and recess the "othering" they experienced at the hands of their peers plummeted them into the discourse of difference and visibility. The harmful impact that peers perceptions had on their cultural, ethnic, and religious identities was apparent in Inderpreet and Sukhy's narratives. Inderpreet had resorted to not playing in the sun in an attempt to lighten the color of her skin so that people stop calling her dark. Sukhy on a similar note wished she were born "white" so that she would not be teased about her dark skin color. Both girls have constructed negative impressions of their darker skin based on their peers' perceptions of it being a negative characteristic. Their determination and wishes to be and become "white" could be based on their perceptions that "white" means normal and "white" means not being teased, products of being part of a dominant discourse of white normalcy.

We are not all the same

Studies that do not generalize between and amongst diverse ethnic groups under the restricting and constructed label of 'minority' are eagerly awaited by individuals such as myself. Under the rubric ethnic labels such as Indo-Canadian, East Indian, and South Asian, the varied and diverse experiences of thousands of differences, cultures, classes,
languages, and religions have been homogenized. “Each group is constituted of myriad national and ancestral origins, but the dominant ideology of the European-American epistemology has forced each into an essentialized and totalized unit that is perceived to have little or no internal variation” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p.262). It is important to debunk the research that homogenizes ethnoculturally diverse groups into one. There is a great need to address this gap in research and to pay tribute to the uniqueness of diverse ethnocultural groups. It is crucial that we attempt to understand the needs of the children from diverse ethnocultural populations so that we can better understand their experiences of school. This study provided the experiences of six young punjabi girls and although I feel that their lived experiences should not be generalized to speak for all punjabi girls currently in the canadian school system, there is much to be learned from their lived realities.
I was once again being dragged to a friends get together. I had had a long day and the last thing that I wanted to do was shmooz and mooz and mingle with people I didn’t know. They would ask me what I was doing, I would tell them that I was a graduate student working on my MA, they would ask me in a very interested voice, “oh in which subject,” I would respond, “In Education” they would give me a nod or an ahhhh. The polite way of saying “you’re not gonna get very far with that.” I looked around saw a few familiar faces said my hellos and did my catching up and then it happened.

“Hi, I’m Amarjit.”
I turned around to find a fellow brown woman standing behind me. She had her hand extended awaiting a handshake from me. I shook her hand and introduced myself, “Hi, I’m Mandeep”.
“Are you a friend of John and Gracie’s?”
“Yeah, I know them from school.”
“Oh, I’ve known them a long time now. I’m good friends with John’s parents.”
“Oh that’s neat.”
“So what do you do?”
I moaned a little on the inside…..“I’m working on my MA at UVic.”
“Oh, in what area?”
“Education.”
“I actually did my MA in Education at UVic too, but that was many years ago.”
Ahh someone who wasn’t going to put me down.
“So what area are you interested in?”
Oohh I gulped, this part didn’t go over too well with people either.
“Children and their experiences of racism at school,” I responded.
“Oh wow. Good for you. You’re not going to find too many people in the Education system admitting to any of that going on. I know - I’m a principal at a local school here.”
Did I hear correctly? A person working in the school system admitting that there was racism in our schools? Up until know, I had only heard denials from Principals and administrators. Racism was not in their schools. Now I was interested.
“Actually,” Amarjit continued, “there was an incident that occurred not too long ago at my school that I think was really a wake up call for a lot of the staff, students and community. You see, the school I work at is comprised of predominately white students. A few weeks back, I arrived to work to find a slander of racist slurs spray painted on the wall of my school. They were
directed at me, the principal. The staff and parents were shocked and outraged. I wasn’t shocked but I was outraged. Anyways I received a whole wack of flowers and letters from parents letting me know how sorry they were that this happened to me and that they couldn’t believe that someone in their community could do such a thing. This denial of racism’s existence...it comes from - our schools aren’t doing anything to help. We have this multicultural education,” she paused to snicker, “all it is is a band-aid policy to make us believe that they care. Anyways could rant on forever so I’ll stop now. You keep up the good work. I would be interested in seeing your final paper.”

And off she went to mingle on.
Experiencing curriculum through multicultural education

Obviously the multicultural band-aid cannot heal the hurtful wound of racism. The band-aid is too small and the wound too large.

“Canada’s policy of multiculturalism has helped to create and maintain a particular narrative of Canadian nationhood. The official discourse of multiculturalism, intended as a way of managing cultural diversity, has in essence constructed a fragmented identity for Canada, one that is hierarchically organized, producing insiders and outsiders. This fragmentation is played out in the lives of the outsiders, who experience an everyday racism hidden by a public discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism.” (Handa, 2003, p.70)

Critical education recognizes the limitations of multicultural education as it focuses “narrowly on the celebration of visible “ethnic” and “cultural” differences, with the implicit goal of promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance” (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993, p.xiii).

The current multicultural approach in schools of “adding” on culture and ethnicity or more specifically adding on samosas and ethnic music to the curriculum does not reflect multiculturalism as it is experienced and lived by ethnic minorities it does not involve “seeing the world through their eyes” (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993, viii). How much longer are multicultural days going to involve “adding” on ethnic “things”? Let’s take the initiative and change how schools speak of and teach of multiculturalism. Well where do we start you ask? We can start by listening to and learning from what the young girls in this study had to offer. “To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (hooks, p.130).
While most existing research on young children’s perceptions of self explores, examines and assesses their self-concepts, young children rarely speak for themselves. This research has provided the opportunity to hear what these young Punjabi girls live with in our schools on a daily basis. “Teachers should be educated to relate to their students’ life experiences and to learn from them firsthand about the structural and institutionalized barriers minority students and their families face in their everyday lives” (Rezai-Rashi, 1995, p.14). I recognize that teachers are only human and they cannot possibly learn everything there is to learn about the diverse ethnicities within our society. The young girls in this study demonstrated the vast knowledge they have about their culture; let them teach others and their peers about their culture. Such an effort made on the part of an educator might help show that the knowledge these young children have about their culture is valuable and important and consequently might help contribute to a sense of ethnic and cultural pride for them.

As Inderpreet talks about her Vietnamese friend she says, “sometimes we teach each other our languages”. It seems these girls are doing amongst peers and friends what could also be taking place within classrooms. These young girls have taken the initiative to learn about each other’s diversities. They are learning about the uniqueness and power of diversity; let them share their knowledge in classrooms. And why not also let parents get involved and teach about the valuable diversity and knowledge they have to offer. It is not the difference we each have to offer that is the problem but rather the treatment we might receive based on our difference that is of concern. Diversity and difference needs to be embraced and the negative views that go along with them to be eliminated. Such initiatives on the part of educators might help achieve this.
Forging links between the experiences of “minorities” and critical educational theories allows to “open up dialogue among scholars and educators about how minority perspectives can challenge and inform existing educational practices” (Giroux & Freire, 1995, p.15). However, such an endeavor would involve “heeding the voices of those minority students that have been silenced for so long” (Rezai-Rashti, 1995, p.5).

Come with me.

Let us see what such an endeavor might look like....

* * *

The PA system squeaks on, “uh hum...hello students this is your principal speaking. Before I sound the bell for dismissal, I wanted to remind everyone that tomorrow is the first day of “Understanding and Respecting Cultures Week”. You have all been provided with programs detailing the events and booths that will be part of our week long learning. Be sure to have a look at it and note where you are to be tomorrow morning. That’s all for now, have a good afternoon everyone and I will see you all tomorrow. Arrrrhhhhhhhh”

Mehna smiled as she thought of what tomorrow was going to bring. She loved Understanding and Respecting Cultures Week, she always learned so much about her other cultures and even her own and she really enjoyed hearing the stories people from the community had to share. This year was even more special as her grandmother was going to be one of the speakers tomorrow. Mehna’s grandmother had come to Canada in 1947. She often spoke to Mehna of the hardships she endured when she first moved to Canada and the challenges that she had to overcome in a new country. Mehna loved to
hear her Grandma tell her stories; she knew that the students in her school would also enjoy them.

Mehna looked at the program one more time before going to bed. This week was going to be great. Mr. Romez was going to share his experiences of school, university and searching for a job. Mehna’s friend Chau had written poems about her experiences of racism and how they hurt her and she was going to read them to the school at the assembly. Mehna was rooting for her friend, she knew how difficult it might be for Chau to share her stories, she was brave and Mehna respected her for that. Mehna found inspiration in the stories people had to share. It excited her to know that she too could overcome challenges, and negative experiences and that it was not her difference that was the problem that needed to be changed but rather the negative viewpoints and opinions of others. For Mehna the best part of Understanding and Respecting Cultures Week was the final assignment that came at the end of it all, that is students had to write about what they had learned and devise a strategy to help eliminate racism from their schools and communities. The students always came up with great ideas and every year the teachers and principal chose one of the strategies offered by students to implement in their school. One day she knew these ideas might become reality.

* * *

Multicultural days at school should include lived realities and feelings that are involved with racial discrimination and harassment. Let’s go beyond playing ethnic music and eating ethnic food, because the experiences of multiculturalism for “minorities” in school and canadian society certainly have. Quite frankly, multicultural education and “celebrating diversity” are inadequate, as diversity first needs to be valued
before it can be celebrated. We as a society have not yet learned to value diversity so let's not jump the gun to celebrating it just quite yet. There is much unlearning that needs be done first along with much new learning.... Unlearning racial differences, and learning not to be racist, unlearning hurtful words, learning respective ones.

**Critical pedagogy**

Here, I offer a dialogue and meeting place between the narrations of non-instructional time experiences provided by the young girls, my personal childhood experiences of school and critical pedagogy theory to criticize the current curriculum of schools.

If racial contact through schools can change racial attitudes and decrease racism, then it is important to explore further these environments as venues for change. (Dutton et al., 1998, p.51)

There is urgency for educators to recognize the differences that students bring to the classroom, not just in terms of how they learn but also of how they view and see the world. The reality that each child brings a unique eye to the classroom can no longer be ignored or overlooked. This is the message that resonates in the work of anti-racist researchers such as George Sefa Dei, Roxana Ng, and Gloria Ladson-Billing and many others. “Students do not go to school as disembodied youth. They go to school with bodies that have race, class, gender, and sexuality. Educators have to deal with that” (Gismondi, 1999, p.11).

Although the students in our classrooms are reflective of Canada’s diversity, school curricula remains rooted in Eurocentric beliefs which are blind and insensitive to diversity. Research has shown that most non-white students “are engaged in individual and collective struggles to make identification with the school system, in terms of
classroom teaching, the learning materials, and the general school environment” (Dei, 1997, p.245). The consequences of this continued exclusion, insensitivity and failure is immeasurable.

This is what the young girls had to say about what they wanted to learn about in school. They were aware that their interests are left out of school curriculum. They want to see more of themselves represented in what they are learning in school.

Inderpreet: I um I want to learn more about punjabi and not that much about Can...like Christian people. I want to learn more about Gurus like our Gods.

Sukhy: I want to learn how to make a website on punjabi people and I'd have that commercial with the giani who does a lot of stuff with the basketball and then it says I'm proud to be punjabi at the bottom. My website will have that to.

* * *

The racial discrimination experienced by these young punjabi girls at school along with the neglect they feel on part of the curriculum is leading them to question their sense of identity and ethnic background. They enter the school system with a strong sense of self and a perception of “me” that is based on their ethnic and cultural ancestry. A self-identity that begins to deteriorate through their experiences at school and in some unfortunate circumstances, this may cause some of these children to leave the school system with fragmented identities. School practices must take responsibility for their role in eroding these young girls’ sense of self and self-identity and take action to put an end to it. “The curriculum must include information about the deleterious effects of prejudice and racism” (Wilkinson, 2000, p.9). Let’s not wait for change to come about let’s make it ourselves! Policy makers, educators, administrators and all others with vested interests in the education system need to recognize that for these young girls, “their very minds and bodies – are at stake here, as the so often alienating daily experiences of so many
persons of color inside and outside of ‘our’ educational institutions so clearly document” (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993, p.vii). “The challenge to family, community, teachers, administration and other educational stakeholders is to address questions of educational equity, social difference, identity and knowledge production in the school system, and beyond” (Dei, 1997, p.244). It’s time that this challenge is accepted. We do not tolerate drunk driving, we do not tolerate murderers, sexual offenders, we need to stop tolerating racism – it is a wrong within society that needs to be eliminated not tolerated.
"We" meaning all of us who were not white and in this case "we" were all Indo-Canadian=brown were rounded up and escorted to the ESL room by our grade 5 teacher. I remember feeling scared and confused. Why was he taking us to the ESL room? The ESL classroom was just for the kids who had trouble speaking English. I wasn't one of them – I had practiced hard not to be one of them. Once we were all seated around the table, my teacher began to tell us why we were there. I don't remember his exact words but there were something like this, "I've brought you here to discuss a change that I think would be good for all of you. I think that you should each have a Canadian name that you use at school. This way your classmates will have an easier time with pronouncing your names and you will fit in in Canada better." All of us nodded our heads in agreement. I felt butterflies in my stomach. A Canadian name – Wow. In my mind, this made me one step closer to reaching my goal – of becoming white. He then went around and assigned us each our Canadian names. Ultimately the last few letters of our names were dropped and a "y" was added so Mandeep became Mandy, Jasdeep became Jessy, Harjit became Harry, and so forth. Before we were let out of the ESL room, our teacher reminded us once again that from now on, we were to strictly go by our new Canadian names and he wasn't kidding. I remember I once forgot to write Mandy on an assignment and wrote Mandeep instead. There were red ink marks underlining Mandeep to remind me that I had forgotten. And that is how Mandeep became Mandy. Another incident that contributed to my fragmented identity.
Dealing with racism in our schools

“Schools need to implement a clear and firm policy to deter and deal with racism incidents, as part of their wider policies of bullying and conflict between children [and] need to find ways to engage in the curriculum to help children engage with how race works in their lives” (Dei, 1997, p.244). Students need to be told that racism in any form whether it be verbal lashes or physical assaults is unacceptable. There needs to be consequences for such actions, detention is not enough. Get the parents involved when children engage in racist acts at school. It should not be brushed off as “kids just being kids”.

Future research

Such research is a necessary step in eradicating any potential negative experiences during non-instructional school times for other young punjabi girls and to shed light on the role that school environments can play in children’s lives and how these venues can be involved in positive changes. It is also imperative that the role that schools can play in the generation and deconstruction, of self-identity for punjabi girls and students of other ethnoculturally diverse groups also be addressed. Providing a place and an opportunity for children to express their voices may serve to be empowering. Through sharing their stories and experiences, children may begin to see that they are not alone in their development, this may provide a sense of comfort for them. In addition, this may serve as the needed intervention that could change the course of action. Maybe some children may be prevented from wandering down the tragic pathway of self-hatred as many do.
Future research should also examine those children who are on the other side of racism, that is those who are racists in an effort to understand what their motives are for their behavior and to help alleviate these behaviors and attitudes.

Furthermore, for individuals who are visibly not white, the color of their skin is central part of who they are and a foundation of their identities. Therefore, research involving such individuals should not shy away from involving questions about being ethnically obvious. It is part of their lives, it is only right that any research involving these individuals would address that. Additionally, parent voices and experiences of their children's school incidents may also serve to be a fruitful area to further explore. Finally, longitudinal studies involving narratives should be conducted to determine how interpretations of experiences shift and change with age.
Facing “race”

I’ve known race and racism for quite some time now. In fact, I’ve lived with race and its spawn racism for 25 years. They have come to visit me often – too often. Race always comes first followed close behind by racism. Along the years, how I view them and how I have responded to them has shifted. When I was a young child, the two monsters seemed enormous in size to me. In fact, when they would approach me they would tower over me.

They scared me. My only response and strategy to get away from them was to run and hide.

During my teenage years, as I began to grow, race and racism began to shrink in size just a little bit. They were now at a level that if I kinked my neck back far enough, I could see their eyes and sometimes I would even have the courage to look back, to look them in the eye, but I could only glance for a second. They still frightened me.

Each and every time they would pay a visit, the anger inside me would grow larger and larger – why did they have to come?

They’re not welcomed visitors...

they should just leave....

leave me alone......

Race and racism’s unwelcome visits left me filled with anger inside, the anger growing with each visit. It grew so much inside me that it soon began to take over my body.

I could feel it growing....

....feel it taking over every inch of my body....

The pressure from the anger made me feel like I was going to burst. As an adult in my early twenty’s I once again experienced a shift in responding to these unwelcome visits. Now when race and racism came by, I stood strong in my position and not only looked back but in some case even stared back. My anger having no room left to grow in my body began to take the form of verbal lashes.

Verbal lashes, which were making me, become a hideous creature just like race and racism. It was coming to the point where I didn’t have to kink by neck too far back to look into their eyes. I was becoming so ugly that I was almost their size. Being that close to them, I could see the smirk on their faces. They enjoyed my verbal lashes. This was a position I was not comfortable being in, but at least I was letting them know that I wasn’t gonna take sitting down anymore. In my late twenty’s, I began to realize that verbal assaults were not the way to make these two go away, in fact they seemed to be thriving and growing from them. I had to alter my method of dealing with them...but how?

what did I need to do...

how could I make them go away...
AFTERWARDS: WHAT HAVE “I” LEARNED?

"Cultures are like a train on a journey of change. Maybe we can never claim to be in a culture; we are always on the border of it, trying to hold it in our hands, like a slippery pig refusing to be caught. Or maybe we are that slippery pig who refuses to be restrained by the hegemonic Culture. Thus we see the importance and possibility of challenging dominant meanings about Other cultures”
Sannie Yuet-San Tang, 2003, p.29

I come to the end of this project with no answers to this haunting question of belonging. However, I do not feel the urgency to find that answer as I first did when I began this journey. The haunting has become less frequent. As I continue this journey, my pace has slowed down. I am no longer hasty in which path to choose, I take the time to think about where I need to go - not where others want me to go, or where I’m supposed to go to. I take the time to look around and take solace in those I see walking on this journey along with me and to learn from them. As au/other, and participant I have transcended and abandoned rigid borders and found comfort in the muddled and messied landscape of the Metonymic Space. A space that does not require answers...

I come away with no answers, but rather knowing that I am not alone...

here, where many have gone before me, there may be many after me...

What follows is a journal entry I wrote before I entered into this journey with these young girls. As I already know and as someone else once told me, this entry is dark and troublesome. The page that follows my ventings is what my journal entries have become after having gone through this process – an absence of entry. I think there is no more that needs to be said...all is said without having to be said.
Ventings of a Punjabi Woman

"Perfect Human?"

When I look into the mirror
I can't see my eyes, or lips or cheeks...
I see
What

"Ohh Canada"

My lungs know no other air
My nose no other smell
My feet no other land
You are no stranger to me

Why do I remain unrecognized
and unknown
to you

Why am I still a stranger to you?

"Color anyone?"

Why do I have to be called "colored"?
Why am I a "person of color"?
To me...
This implies
that I have been altered from some original state....
some "blank" "clean" state...
into a messed up state an alteration from some norm to other....

Did anyone think that maybe to be blank and clean is to be colorless and thus color deprived?

And to have color is to be color privileged.
This chapter is purposely open-ended because this journey - this collective journey between au/other, participants, and readers - has/is a long one - and at this point – also an open-ended one.
References


Appendix A: Script for Meeting with Teacher

Hello, my name is Mandeep Basran. I am a MA student at the University of Victoria in the faculty of Education. For my MA thesis, I want to look at the experiences of Punjabi girls at lunch and recess and how these experiences impact their self-identity. In order to help find girls to participate in this study I want to speak to girls that attend the Punjabi classes here on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I am seeking your permission to make a 5-10 minute presentation at the beginning of a Friday evening Punjabi class. I will give the presentation in front of the entire class, but will make it clear that it is girls aged 10-11 who are currently in grade 5 that I am speaking to. My presentation will include:

Introduction of myself:
My name is Mandeep Basran. I am a MA student at the University of Victoria in the faculty of Education.

Brief summary of what my research study is about:
My research involves looking at the experiences of Punjabi girls at lunch and recess and how this impacts their self-identity.

What participating in the study will entail:
Participating in this study will involve your sharing stories with me about your lunch and recess times at school. You will be involved in individual meetings with just you and me and also group meetings, where all the girls participating in the study will get together and work together in the writing of a story.

To those girls who express interest in participating, I will hand out a package that will contain an introduction letter to the parents, a parent consent form, a child consent form and an envelope. I will explain to the girls that should go over the contents of the package with their parents and make a decision with their parents on whether or not they wish to participate. They will be provided with my phone number and asked to call me if they decided to participate in this project.

I will appreciate any help you could offer. Please feel free to ask any questions.
Appendix B: Presentation to Girls from Punjabi Class

My name is Mandeep Basran and I go to school at the University of Victoria. I am looking for girls aged 10 or 11 who are in grade 5 to participate in my research study. My project is about what Punjabi girls experience at school during lunch and recess times and how what they experience makes them feel about their identity.

Participating in this study will involve your sharing stories with me about your experiences at lunch and recess times at school. Participating will involve one individual conversation with just you and me (about 40 minutes to an hour) and also two group conversations about one and a half hours each, where all the girls participating in the study will get together and work together in the writing of a story.

I will hand out an information package to all of the girls. This package will contain an introduction letter to the parents, a parent consent form, a child consent form and an envelope. I will explain to the girls that they should go over the contents of the package with their parents and make a decision with their parents on whether or not they wish to participate. If they would like to participate in this study then I will ask that they call me on the number provided on the consent forms.

Are there any questions?

Thank you for your time girls.
Appendix C: Introduction Letter to Parents

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is Mandeep Basran and I am a Master’s student in the Education M.A. program at the University of Victoria. I am currently in the process of seeking participants for my M.A. thesis research. The primary aim of this research project is to invite Punjabi girls to express their feelings about how interactions during non-instructional school times influence their self-identity. In conducting this research, I hope to help shed light on an area that has been lacking in research. This research will provide important needed information about the formation of self-identity in younger children of visible minority groups, especially Punjabi girls.

I am seeking your support regarding the participation of your daughter in this study. Please read the attached documents carefully as they provide detailed information about what your daughter’s participation in this study may entail. If you would like your daughter to participate, please call me at the number provided and we can arrange for times to meet one another.

I am willing to meet with you personally or talk to you on the phone, to provide you with more information about my research. If you would like to contact me, please do not hesitate to do so at 250-888-8436. Your assistance in helping to facilitate this study is greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Mandeep Basran, BA
Master’s Student, University of Victoria
Faculty of Education
Phone: 250-888-8436
E-mail: mkbasran@hotmail.com

Thesis Supervisor:
Dr. David Blades
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Faculty of Education, University of Education
Phone: 250-721-7775
E-mail: dblades@uvic.ca
Appendix D: Parental Consent Form
Can I Play?:
Experiences of non-instructional school times and their influences on identity development for young Punjabi girls

INTRODUCTION
My name is Mandeep Basran and I am a Master's student in the M.A. program in Education at the University of Victoria. I am currently in the process of recruiting participants for my M.A. thesis research. The primary aim of this research project is to provide a space in research for Punjabi girls to express their feelings about how interactions during play at non-instructional school times influences their self identity. In conducting this research, I hope to help shed light on an area that has been lacking in research. This research will provide important and needed information about the formation of self-identity in younger children, more specifically, the formation of self-identity for Punjabi girls.

WHAT YOUR CHILD IS ASKED TO DO IF SHE PARTICIPATES IN THIS STUDY
If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she will be involved in three to four separate meeting sessions. The first of these meetings will be an individual meeting with her and will be approximately one and half-hours long. This time will be used to familiarize myself with your daughter and your daughter with me. I will also use this opportunity to ask your daughter to share stories about her experiences at lunch and recess at school with me. The location of these meetings will be decided by yourself and your daughter, some examples are your home, the Gurdwara, the local library, etc. The second and subsequent meetings will last approximately 1 hour each. These meetings will be group meetings where all the young girls involved in this project will be asked to write a story together. In total, 6 – 7 hours of your daughter’s time will be required to participate in this study. If both you and your daughter give consent, the meetings will be tape-recorded, if not, I will take notes.

Your agreement to allow your daughter to participate in this study must be completely voluntary. At all times you have the right to withdraw your daughter from the study, in which case, the collected data (if any) will not be used in the analysis. You may also ask any questions about the study at any time.

BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPATING
This research will provide for an opportunity for the young girls to share their experiences about what they are going through with someone. This will give them someone to talk to. Through this sharing, learning may arise about the experiences of Punjabi girls at non-instructional school times; learning that can help make the school experiences for themselves and future generations of Punjabi girls a positive and valuable one.

POTENTIAL HARM FOR PARTICIPATING
If at any time your daughter feels uncomfortable as result of bring forward and sharing her stories, I can arrange for a professional, for example, a counselor, for her to contact.
CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Your anonymity and your daughter's anonymity will be protected. To protect your daughter's privacy, any personal information that she might share with me during individual conversations (meetings between just your daughter and myself) will not be disclosed at the group conversations (meetings between your daughter, all other participating girls and myself). Also, where information from the individual meetings is used in the final writing of my Master's Thesis, a pseudonym will be used to protect your daughter's identity.

The group meetings are to provide a place where the girls can get together to create a fictitious story. Since this story will be fictitious and not a story of actual personal experiences of your daughter or any of the other participants, any direct quotes from the group meetings will not in any way put at risk the privacy of your daughter.

As well, all the young girls who participate in the group meetings will be informed to keep the identity of the other girls involved and what they say during group meetings confidential. All information will be stored on a disk, which will be seen only by myself and my supervisor. Hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet, again, access will be restricted to myself and my supervisor. Data from this study will be destroyed after 10 years. I will shred all hard copies and electronic files will be deleted.

USES OF THE DATA

The data will primarily be used in the writing of my Master's Thesis; however, the findings from this research may also be used to generate journal articles and academic presentations. At the completion of the study I will send you a copy of the final story that the girls will generate during group meetings and if you like, I will also provide you with a copy of the final thesis.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any further questions about the study you may contact me by phone at 250-888-8436 or by e-mail at mkbasran@hotmail.com. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. David Blades, at 250-721-7775 or by email at dblades@uvic.ca. If you have any questions or concerns about your daughter's participation in this study you may also contact the Associate Vice-President, Research at 250-472-4362.

DECISION ON PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

I allow my daughter to participate in this study
I do not want my daughter to participate in this study

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions for your daughter's participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. This copy is for you to keep.

I, ____________________________, voluntarily agree to allow my daughter to participate in this study.

(Print Name)

(Parent's Signature) (Date)

Participant Copy
Consent Form for Parent
Can I Play?:
Experiences of non-instructional school times and their influences on identity
development for young Punjabi girls

INTRODUCTION
My name is Mandeep Basran and I am a Master’s student in the M.A. program in Education at the University of Victoria. I am currently in the process of recruiting participants for my M.A. thesis research. The primary aim of this research project is to provide a space in research for Punjabi girls to express their feelings about how interactions during play at non-instructional school times influences their self identity. In conducting this research, I hope to help shed light on an area that has been lacking in research. This research will provide important and needed information about the formation of self-identity in younger children, more specifically, the formation of self-identity for Punjabi girls.

WHAT YOUR CHILD IS ASKED TO DO IF SHE PARTICIPATES IN THIS STUDY
If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she will be involved in three to four separate meeting sessions. The first of these meetings will be an individual meeting with her and will be approximately one and half-hours long. This time will be used to familiarize myself with your daughter and your daughter with me. I will also use this opportunity to ask your daughter to share stories about her experiences at lunch and recess at school with me. The location of these meetings will be decided by yourself and your daughter, some examples are your home, the Gurdwara, the local library, etc. The second and subsequent meetings will last approximately 1 hour each. These meetings will be group meetings where all the young girls involved in this project will be asked to write a story together. In total, 6 – 7 hours of your daughter’s time will be required to participate in this study. If both you and your daughter give consent, the meetings will be tape-recorded, if not, I will take notes.

Your agreement to allow your daughter to participate in this study must be completely voluntary. At all times you have the right to withdraw your daughter from the study, in which case, the collected data (if any) will not be used in the analysis. You may also ask any questions about the study at any time.

BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPATING
This research will provide for an opportunity for the young girls to share their experiences about what they are going through with someone. This will give them someone to talk to. Through this sharing, learning may arise about the experiences of Punjabi girls at non-instructional school times; learning that can help make the school experiences for themselves and future generations of Punjabi girls a positive and valuable one.

POTENTIAL HARM FOR PARTICIPATING
If at any time your daughter feels uncomfortable as result of bring forward and sharing her stories, I can arrange for a professional, for example, a counselor, for her to contact.
CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Your anonymity and your daughter’s anonymity will be protected. To protect your daughter’s privacy, any personal information that she might share with me during individual conversations (meetings between just your daughter and myself) will not be disclosed at the group conversations (meetings between your daughter, all other participating girls and myself). Also, where information from the individual meetings is used in the final writing of my Master’s Thesis, a pseudonym will be used to protect your daughter’s identity.

The group meetings are to provide a place where the girls can get together to create a fictitious story. Since this story will be fictitious and not a story of actual personal experiences of your daughter or any of the other participants, any direct quotes from the group meetings will not in any way put at risk the privacy of your daughter.

As well, all the young girls who participate in the group meetings will be informed to keep the identity of the other girls involved and what they say during group meetings confidential. All information will be stored on a disk, which will be seen only by myself and my supervisor. Hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet, again, access will be restricted to myself and my supervisor. Data from this study will be destroyed after 10 years. I will shred all hard copies and electronic files will be deleted.

USES OF THE DATA

The data will primarily be used in the writing of my Master’s Thesis; however, the findings from this research may also be used to generate journal articles and academic presentations. At the completion of the study I will send you a copy of the final story that the girls will generate during group meetings and if you like, I will also provide you with a copy of the final thesis.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any further questions about the study you may contact me by phone at 250-888-8436 or by e-mail at mkbasran@hotmail.com. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. David Blades, at 250-721-7775 or by email at dblades@uvic.ca. If you have any questions or concerns about your daughter’s participation in this study you may also contact the Associate Vice-President, Research at 250-472-4362.

DECISION ON PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

I allow my daughter to participate in this study
I do not want my daughter to participate in this study

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions for your daughter’s participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. This copy is for my files.

I, __________________________________________, voluntarily agree to allow my daughter to participate in this study.

(Print Name)

(Parent’s Signature) (Date)

Researcher Copy
Appendix E: Consent Form for Child
Can I Play?:
Experiences of non-instructional school times and their influences on identity development for young Punjabi girls

INTRODUCTION
My name is Mandeep Basran. I am a student at the University of Victoria. I am doing a research project on what Punjabi girls experience at school during lunch and recess times and how what they experience makes them feel about themselves.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO IN THIS STUDY
If you take part in this study, I will meet with you three or four different times. Your parents and you will decide on where the meetings will take place, for example at your house or at the gurdwara. The first meeting will be about 1 hour and a half long and it will be a time for you and me to get to know one another. I will also take this opportunity to listen to your stories of lunch and recess. Then there will be another three or four group meetings. These meetings will bring together all the girls that are part of this research therefore, there will be 3-5 other girls at these meetings. These group meetings will also be about 1 hour long. At these meetings, I will ask you and the other girls to help write a story together as a group. In total participating in this study will require 6–7 hours of your time.

If at any time you do not want to stay a part of this research project, you can tell me and we will stop. I will verbally review the consent process with you at the beginning of the individual and the group meetings and remind you that they may withdraw from the study at anytime without any negative consequences. You can also ask me any questions you want about the research project at any time.

WHY YOU MIGHT WANT TO BE A PART OF THIS STUDY
This project will give you a place to tell your stories and to talk to someone about your experiences. A lot of learning about what young Punjabi girls like you experience at lunch and recess will happen, learning which is really important for the future. What we learn may help your school experiences and those of other Punjabi girls in the future be positive and valuable. If at any time you feel uncomfortable as a result of telling your stories, I can refer a professional, for example, a counselor, for you to contact. Also, if there is an instance where I feel that there is a need to share something that you shared with me with your parents, I will need to do that, but only if I feel that it will help you.

YOUR PRIVACY
Your anonymity will be protected. To protect your privacy, any personal information that the you might share with me during our individual meetings (meeting between just you and me) will not be disclosed at the group meetings (meetings between you, all other participating girls and myself). Also, when information from our individual meetings is used in writing the final thesis, a fake name will be used to protect your identity and privacy. The group meetings are to provide a place where all girls participating in this study can get together to create a fictitious story. Since this story will not be a real story and will not be a story about your personal experiences, any direct quotes from the group meetings will not in any way put at risk your privacy.
If you participate in the group meetings with all the girls in the study, you will have to keep the other girls' names and what they say during group meetings private and they will keep your name and what you say during group meetings private as well. All information that you will give me will be kept on a disk and only I will see it. The paper copies will be kept in a locked cabinet that only me and my supervisor will have access to. Data from this study will be destroyed after 10 years. I will shred all hard copies and electronic files will be deleted.

USES OF THE DATA
The data will primarily be used in the writing of my Master's Thesis; however, the findings from this research may also be used to generate journal articles and academic presentations. At the completion of the study I will send you a copy of the story that will be created during the group meetings and if you and your parents want, I will also provide you with a copy of the final thesis.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you want to contact me, you can call me at 250-888-8436 or e-mail me at mkbasran@hotmail.com or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. David Blades, at 250-721-7775 or by email at dblades@uvic.ca. You may also speak to the Associate Vice-President, Research at 250-472-4545, if you have any concerns about your participation in this study.

DECISION ON PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

I would like to participate in this study
I would not like to participate in this study

If you sign below that means that you understand what you just read and that I answered all the questions you may have had. It also means that you want to be a part of this study. This copy is for you to keep.

I, ____________________________, want to be a part of this study.

(Print Your Name)

_________________________________  _________________________
(Sign your name here)                               (Date)

Participant Copy
INTRODUCTION
My name is Mandeep Basran. I am a student at the University of Victoria. I am doing a research project on what Punjabi girls experience at school during lunch and recess times and how what they experience makes them feel about themselves.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO IN THIS STUDY
If you take part in this study, I will meet with you three or four different times. Your parents and you will decide on where the meetings will take place, for example at your house or at the gurdwara. The first meeting will be about 1 hour and a half long and it will be a time for you and me to get to know one another. I will also take this opportunity to listen to your stories of lunch and recess. Then there will be another three or four group meetings. These meetings will bring together all the girls that are part of this research therefore, there will be 3-5 other girls at these meetings. These group meetings will also be about 1 hour long. At these meetings, I will ask you and the other girls to help write a story together as a group. In total participating in this study will require 6 – 7 hours of your time.

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If you want to contact me, you can call me at 250-888-8436 or e-mail me at mkbasran@hotmail.com or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. David Blades, at 250-721-7775 or by email at dblades@uvic.ca. You may also speak to the Associate Vice-President, Research at 250-472-4545, if you have any concerns about your participation in this study.

DECISION ON PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

I would like to participate in this study
I would not like to participate in this study

If you sign below that means that you understand what you just read and that I answered all the questions you may have had. It also means that you want to be a part of this study. This copy is for my files.

I, ________________________________, want to be a part of this study.

(Print Your Name)

_________________________________  _____________________________
(Sign your name here)  (Date)

Researcher Copy
Appendix F: Prompts for Inviting Conversation

1. What is it like being a Punjabi girl?
2. Tell me a story about being Punjabi in school.
3. Tell me about lunch and recess. What is it like?
4. Who do you play with at lunch and recess?