

**NEGOTIATING IDENTITY: INDO-TRINIDADIAN YOUTH AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS  
OF SELF DEFINITION AND AGENCY**

by

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## Author's Declaration

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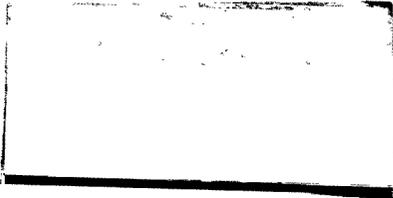
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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the experiences of Indo-Trinidadian youth and their self-identity. It seeks to generate an understanding of how Indo-Trinidadian youth have to negotiate their identity after migration from Trinidad to Canada. This negotiation comes as a result of their hybrid identity – racially South Asian but culturally Caribbean. 'Because school is the first space' of socialization that immigrant youth encounter after family, this study focuses on issues faced in school.

Using a qualitative research design, this study examines the personal narratives of eight (four males and four females) Indo-Trinidadian youth. The in-depth interviews with these youth bring forth the notion that Indo-Trinidadian youth are constantly reconstructing their identities as they negotiate between their Indian and Caribbean cultures. This paper highlights the challenges, that Indo-Trinidadian youth encounter as well as the ways in which they address them, essentially leading to a sense of agency for their self-identity.

## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

I remember it like it was yesterday; whether or not it was a dark and stormy day is beyond the point, but my first day at Irwin Castle Junior Public School<sup>1</sup> in Scarborough, as a newly arrived eight-year-old immigrant is vivid in my mind. What I believed would be a very exciting day quickly became frustrating. It was filled with questions, foreign languages and even a dance competition. I did not make any friends, in fact far from it. I left school that day with many of my classmates wary and cautious of me. As I strolled home I had a smile on my face, in fact I was beaming. I did this so my parents and older sister would not worry, but behind that beaming smile was a young girl confused about who she *needed* to be, not who she felt she was.

Sixteen years ago, my family of five - father, mother, two sisters and I - left our home in southern Trinidad and migrated to Canada. This was not our first attempt to permanently migrate "North" (we had moved two times previous to this), but it was what my parents considered to be their last. "Fortunately" (my father's word of choice) we were successful and today my family and I are proud to call Canada our home; well...home away from home.

When we arrived in February of 1995, I was excited. My eyes were as wide as could be. It was night and the ride home from the airport was wonderful. The snow against the lights of moving vehicles made it appear as if crystals were falling from the sky. It was beautiful and at that moment I knew everything in our new home would be perfect. I was looking forward to two things upon arrival: living with my cousins and going to school. We would eventually move out of my cousin's home, but my first years at school were not all I expected them to be.

That first day I walked into the school with my sisters and waited for a fellow classmate to receive me in the office and take me to my homeroom. I was a fearless child, and new places excited me. The enthusiasm in me that day kept me at the edge of my seat. As I looked across

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<sup>1</sup>This is a pseudonym. The real name of the school has been changed.

the line of chairs my sisters and I sat on, I could see my older sister biting her nails; something she did when she was nervous or in trouble. I knew she was not in trouble but could not understand why she was nervous. But I was soon to figure out why.

The door of the office swung open and there was a young girl, my age, my height and to my surprise, she looked a lot like me – in terms of skin colour and hair colour. I remember thinking in my head “She had to be from Trinidad”. As we walked upstairs she asked me “What are you?” I looked at her with some confusion and asked her for clarification. She kindly repeated “What are you, where are you from?” It made sense to me now, she wanted to know what part of Trinidad I was from, so I replied “I from Tusla Trace Penal, you know whey it is?” She looked at me with scepticism and mumbled “no”. We entered the classroom and the teacher walked right up to me and welcomed me to Grade 2. I remember looking around and seeing kids of different races: Black, White, Chinese, Indian. The teacher then asked Katelyn (the girl who received me in the office), Kasey and Aaliyya to take me and show me around during recess and lunch. At that age, I understood why the teacher asked Katelyn to show me around the school (I assumed she was Trinidadian just like me), but I did not understand why she asked Aaliyya and Kasey, because in my eyes they were *Indian Indian*<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, recess came and Katelyn, Kasey and Aaliyya never took me around, for I suddenly became Grade 2’s new mystery. “She said she’s from Tu...Tulsay...Tulsay Penan”, Katelyn said as everyone gathered around me. I stood there thinking to myself “Is she not from Trinidad? Why is she acting like she doesn’t know Tusla Trace?” Soon after this thought a plethora of questions from my fellow classmates started, and it was at that very moment the negotiation of my identity started.

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<sup>2</sup> In Trinidad the term “Indian Indian” is used to describe people who are very rooted in the Indian culture – most often people from southern Trinidad are referred to as “Indian Indian” from people from other regions. This is because of the strong Indian cultural presence in their everyday life. This does not hold true to all individuals in southern Trinidad, but the majority.

“Where are you from?”, “Are you from India?”, “She’s look like she’s from Bangladesh?”, “Do you speak Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Tamil?” “Say something in Hindi”. I looked around as I was asked these questions and replied “I’m from Trinidad”. Everyone looked puzzled. “*Trinidad*”, said one boy. “Ain’t Trinidad close to Jamaica?” “YES”, I said with conviction. Finally, someone knows where I am from; finally these weird questions can stop. “But you are not Black, you look Indian”, and then everyone agreed and the plethora of questions resumed. At this point I felt defeated; I remember saying to everyone “Leave me alone” and stormed off. As recess ended and I stood in line, I continued to hear comments addressing my identity, “She talks funny”, “What language is she speaking?”, and to my surprise I saw Katelyn talking in another language to a fellow classmate, which amazed me because, based on her appearance, I thought she was a fellow Trini<sup>3</sup>. Later I found out she was from Kerala, a southern state in India. I just turned my head and acted as if I could not hear anything.

After what seemed like a lifetime, lunch came. I opened up my lunch bag to find a piece of roti<sup>4</sup> with fried plantain wrapped in aluminum foil; something I ate three to four times weekly in Trinidad. Beside it was a Chubby<sup>5</sup> and my favourite snack, preserved red mango, imported from Trinidad. As I started to eat, Aaliyya came up to me and said “See you are Indian, you are eating roti”. Many of my classmates then rushed over to confirm Aaliyya’s statement and in all their faces I recall seeing a sense of satisfaction; finally I was no longer strange or foreign in their eyes, I was Indian. As the day went along I still tried to explain that I was Trinidadian, but no one could see past my Indian appearance, and for the next year I was Indian and only Indian. The Indian kids (those from the South Asian subcontinent) hung out with me and I hung out with

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<sup>3</sup> An abbreviation for “Trinidadian”.

<sup>4</sup> An Indian flatbread made from flour and water.

<sup>5</sup> Chubby is a soft drink made and produced in Trinidad by S.M. Jaleel and Co. Ltd. It is imported to many countries worldwide.

them, because I was “just like them”. I looked like them, acted like them, but something I could never do was talk like them. The language barrier always reminded me that though I may fit in, I did not belong.

I then moved to Markham, and entered another school. Vividly remembering the experiences of my last school, I was prepared for the question “Where are you from?” Lo and behold, the very first day at my new school I was asked the question that started it all and I calmly responded “I was born in Trinidad, it’s in the Caribbean and I am Indian, but I have lived in Canada for almost two years”. A few questions followed this response at my new school, but nothing that I was not prepared for. It was different at this school. I wanted to fit into whatever was considered “normal”. I no longer wanted to be Indian, and I no longer knew how to be Trinidadian, so I just hung out with a group of girls, mainly of European and Asian descent and the question of identity never re-emerged until high school. At this point of my life I wanted to be nothing other than a Canadian.

When I entered high school, questions pertaining to my identity were stirred up again. I was asked that same question, “What are you?” But, to my surprise there were a lot of students just like me, from the Caribbean and of Indian descent. At this point of my life, I started to self-identify as an Indo-Caribbean person. I was not *Indian* nor was I *Black*. I created my own space that allowed me to identify harmoniously with my race and culture. However, I did find myself more drawn to the Afro-Caribbean students than the South Asian students. Looking back, I think it may have had a lot to do with my first year of school at Irwin Castle Junior Public School and the struggle and difficulties I encountered there, but also because with the other Caribbean students, many of whom were of African descent, I shared a lot of things in common that reminded me of Trinidad, such as music, food and language. Another aspect that drew me closer

to the Afro-Caribbean students was their acceptance of me. I never had to fight for a place with the Afro-Caribbean students. They heard I was from Trinidad and that's as far as it went. They did not need me to justify or prove my "Trinidadianess".

However, I found the students who identified as South Asian were very suspicious of my Indian claims. "You look Indian, and yeah your great-great-great grandparents came from India, but you're not *really* Indian", said a member of YOSA.<sup>6</sup> During a discussion on Indian movies, I mentioned that my favourite movie was "Kutch Kutch Hota Hai", and everyone burst out in laughter as I said the movie title: "What a funny accent", "Say it again", "What horrible pronunciation!" It was comments like the latter that kept me distant from South Asian students, that made me feel unwelcomed and like an "outsider".

In my final year at Meadow Valley High School<sup>7</sup> I was confident in myself and my Caribbean identity, until I expressed interest in applying for a scholarship awarded by a Caribbean-affiliated association. This particular scholarship was for a student who displayed academic success, extra circular achievement and was a person from the Caribbean. I knew right away that I would be a perfect candidate for this award. I took the flyer and went to see the Grade 12 guidance counsellor, Ms. Marbow<sup>8</sup>, to express my interest in this award. She looked at the flyer, then looked at me, smiled, removed her glasses and said, "Dear, I don't think you qualify for this award, it says you have to be from the Caribbean". I quickly told her I was from Trinidad and waited for her to agree to forward my application. However, contrary to what I believed would happen, she went on to say, "although that may be the case, you are not *Black* enough to receive this award, sorry. Why don't you see if the South Asian community is offering any scholarships?" In a state of shock and a flashback of memories of Grade 2 at Irwin

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<sup>6</sup> YOSA is an abbreviation for "Youth of South Asia"; a student club at my high school.

<sup>7</sup> This is a pseudonym. The real name of the school has been changed.

<sup>8</sup> This is a pseudonym. The real name has been changed for confidentiality reasons.

Castle, I again felt defeated unable to assure the identity that I claimed for myself. Again, the way I chose to self-identify was not the way others perceived me. This moment left me asking “Who am I?” “What am I?”

### Relevance and Purpose

Identity is the perception of oneself (Roopnarine, 2006). However, this perception is constantly shifting and being negotiated (Hall, 2000) because most often identity is constructed within disparate arenas: an event, an activity, a site, a discourse (Khan, 2004a). For migrants the experience of migration can apply awareness of these shifts and negotiations. Migrants bring their own cultural conceptions of their identity which, as seen in my aforementioned experience, often does not coincide with the ideological construction and perceptions of the receiving society (Duany, 1998). For Indo-Trinidadians, affirming an ethnoracial identity is critical for survival in this new environment and helps to maintain a sense of agency to achieve academically and remain optimistic about economic and social mobility (Clay, 2005).

With the latter in mind, this research paper, which is exploratory in nature, aims to bring attention to the issues that Indo-Trinidadian youth face after migration to Canada and how they find agency in their self-identification. This research comes as a result of the hybridized identities that persons of Indo-Trinidadian heritage have. In this instance hybridized identities refer to the culturally Caribbean but racially South Indian identity of Indo-Trinidadian youth. They do not view themselves as Indians (from South Asia) and they cannot self-identify as a person from the Caribbean because in Canada a person from the Caribbean is most often defined as racially Black. Therefore, Indo-Trinidadian youth are often placed in a precarious situation when identifying within a group.

The negotiation of identity can happen almost anywhere, but it is most often occurs in school because this is usually the first place and space of socialization after that of the family. In fact, all respondents in this research concur that the first place they had to negotiate their identity beyond the boundaries of home and family was when they entered the public school system in Canada.

### Analytical framework

I felt it was important to develop an analytical framework to outline and demonstrate that there are various sources of distinction in this study. Given the exploratory nature of this project, this framework, though not thorough, proved to be valuable. After careful analysis of various perspectives, I chose to mimic those used by Clay (2005) in her research of West Indian immigrants in Canadian schools, that is utilizing a social constructivist, poststructuralist, and a critical discourse analysis approach (Clay, 2005), in order to explore how Indo-Trinidadian youth negotiate their identity after migration.

Social constructivist perspectives focus on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge (Palincsar, 1998). For the specific use of this research paper these perspectives are used to focus on human/self awareness or consciousness and its place within society (one's environment).

Poststructuralist theory helps make sense of social and cultural practices which constitute, reproduce and contest power relations (Weedon, 1997). Within the capacity of this paper, poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity and discourse seem to offer a helpful and succinct way of understanding experience as it relates to identity (Weedon, 1997). I also found this theory to be useful because within the theory emerges an understanding that "each person is

one who has an obligation to take themselves up as a knowable, recognizable identity, 'who speaks for themselves' who accepts responsibility for their actions" (Davies, 1991).

Lastly, critical discourse analysis is a type of "analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 1997, p.352). As I learned more about this perspective I came to realize that critical discourse analysis is a not specific direction of research; however it helped illustrate how identity should be understood as something which is both individual and social in nature. Burr (1995), for example, contends that interest in social constructivism and critical discourse analysis has led towards a greater use of qualitative methods, where participants' accounts of their lives are treated as valid data.

Overall, the aforementioned frameworks as applied by Clay (2005) help examine and determine human subjectivity and the powerful ideological forces of education, media, social institutions, race and racialization. Giroux (1994) for example, states that the analysis of power and privilege in a social realm can offer a critical examination of how people construct and negotiate their identities for themselves and their lived environment and that those interactions and relationships can be meaningful starting points from which to think about any human experience. As I researched and studied this topic and the accounts of the respondents, I found that Clay's application of these approaches was a useful way to engage with the information I was uncovering.

### Definitions of Key Terms

There is very little scholarly literature available on the migration of Indo-Trinidadian youth to Canada, and even less literature on the negotiation of identity among this group. However, using the limited works available and the use of inferences from literature that focuses

on Indo-Caribbean, West Indian and Afro-Caribbean youth, this research paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by identifying key issues faced by Indo-Trinidadian youth after migration.

To make certain that there is a consensus among the terms and definitions used throughout this paper, I have highlighted a few key terms. The definitions in the following section apply to these terms when used throughout this paper, unless otherwise noted.

### *The Caribbean*

The term "Caribbean" is not easily defined. According to Premdas (1995), "the Caribbean is an unified region that confers a sense of common citizenship as a figment of the imagination" (p.1). When used in terms of geography it is often associated with a site, a sea and several islands, however even as a geographical expression, it is a very vague place that is difficult to define. Also, because no country carries the name Caribbean either separately or in hyphenated form, it becomes difficult to precisely pinpoint "the Caribbean". I can attest to this difficulty because as I tried to find a concrete definition that I could apply to this research, it became clear that the term itself is subjective. This finding is further supported by Premdas who says that many people who describe themselves as a Caribbean person claim a unique identity which has its own coherent characteristics that are self-assigned. He goes on to state (which holds true to my research):

In this region, however and wherever we choose to locate its boundaries, it usually is visualized as an area populated by a diverse polyglot of peoples. There are whites, blacks, browns, yellows, reds, and an assortment of shades in-between. There are Europeans, Africans, Asian Indians, Chinese, Aboriginal Indians, and many mixes. There are Christian, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Santeria, Winti, Vudun etc. They speak a multitude of tongues – Spanish, English, Dutch, French, English, and a diverse number of creoles such as Papiamentu, Sranan, Njuka, Kromanti, Kreyol, etc. In whatever combination of race, religion, language, and culture that cohere and co-exist, they dwell on small islands and large, some poorly endowed with natural resources,

others abundantly. But, no other region; language, and culture of the world is so richly varied (Premdas, 1995; p.1).

However, I feel it is necessary to put boundaries on the term, so the reader can coherently understand the topic and issues that are addressed. There are three ways I considered defining this term: geographically, historically or geologically. Geographically the term “Caribbean” is defined as the area washed by the Caribbean Sea and is often described as the Caribbean Basin. Geologically the term “Caribbean” is the area that is defined by the Caribbean Plate and which expresses similar tectonic, seismic and volcanic features and processes. Nevertheless, for the sake of this research paper, the term “Caribbean” will be defined historically as: the area that saw European colonization, slavery, indentureship and the plantation system; referring to all the territories and countries that experience the rule of specific European countries, namely the English, French, Dutch and Spanish (Pitter-Lewis and Gooden, 2010). This definition proved most applicable because it was the European colonization that fostered the identity issues addressed in my research. Within the scope of my research, I am focusing specifically on the former British West Indies i.e. the colonies that saw Indian indentureship, a practice which was instigated by the British. After their period of indentureship was over, Indians were offered land incentives as a means to stay. This is explained more in depth in Chapter 2).

### *East Indian and South Asian*

Historically “East Indian” is a colonial term meant to describe all those in India. The term “East” was used because India is east of Great Britain. The more contemporary term “South Asian” refers to those who trace their origins to countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as well as people of Indian origins from Caribbean nations, Fiji and East Africa (Kurien, 2009).

Throughout the initial research for this project, I found these two terms being used interchangeably in the literature. I therefore use the term “South Asian” from here on because “East Indian” is a colonial term that pre-dates the newer, more politically correct term “South Asian”.

### *Indo-Caribbean and Indo-Trinidadian*

The term “Indo-Caribbean” refers to a person from the Caribbean, originally of South Asian descent. The term “Indo-Trinidadian” refers to a person from Trinidad, originally of South Asian descent.

### *Second generation*

“Second generation” is used to define a person who is born either abroad and comes to another country, (in this case Canada), at a young age to be raised, or who was born in the host country to immigrant parents (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Within the context of this research all the respondents interviewed are second generation Indo-Trinidadians who migrated at a young age.

It is important to study this group because according to Portes (1996), whose research focuses on second generation West Indian Black immigrant youth, second generation children are the fastest growing segment in their age cohort and understanding their shifts in ethnic identities is often very puzzling. Therefore, this research project seeks to reveal the issues surrounding identity negotiation among Indo-Trinidadian youth.

### Major Research Paper (MRP) Outline

This MRP includes five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a brief literature review on issues surrounding cultural and racial identity with specific examples referring to Indo/Afro Caribbean youth. Chapter 3 offers an in-depth description of the methodology I have chosen to carry out.

Chapter 4 examines the issues that Indo-Trinidadian youth face in school after migration from Trinidad to Canada and the ways in which they exhibit agency and seek acceptance from the host society. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a brief discussion of the findings.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The following literature review aims to bring forth the reasons why Indo-Trinidadian youth have to negotiate their identities after migration from Trinidad to Canada. There is a lack of scholarly work available specifically about Indo-Trinidadian identity and the negotiating that occurs. Nearly all work available has focused on Afro-Trinidadian identity. Consequently, this review of literature will draw on different themes and key determinants of identity formation and focuses on literature that discusses Indo-Caribbean identity. As noted by many scholars, the topic and notion of identity and identification is a dense and broad topic that can be interpreted in various ways because it is never unified and constantly being reconstructed (Shahsiah, 2006; Hall, 2000). There is no unanimous definition among scholars (Shahsiah 2006) and identity is usually conceptualized as being constructed socially, relationally or comparatively in nature (Shahsiah, 2006; Anthias, 1999; Bottero and Irwin, 2003; Dei, 2000; Desai and Subramanian, 2000; Dwyer, 1999; Hogg, Terry and White, 1995)...Nevertheless, the following is an attempt to provide a general overview of what research has been found in terms of how identity tends to be contested, conceptualized and negotiated among Indo-Trinidadian youth.

### Indians in Trinidad

Before attempting to deconstruct the negotiation of identity among Indo-Trinidadians, it is important to understand the historical context of the Indians in the Trinidad. In 1834, slavery had been abolished in British Guiana and the British West Indies<sup>9</sup> (Braziel and Mannur, 2003).

It was proclaimed that: "slavery shall be and is hereby utterly and forever abolished and declared

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<sup>9</sup>The British West Indies (BWI) is a colonial term used to describe the British colonies west of Great Britain. Today, the BWI is referred to as the Commonwealth Caribbean which is made up of the former British Colonies: Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

unlawful throughout the British colonies, plantations and possessions abroad” (Mohabir, 2011). The newly freed slaves no longer had to work on the sugar plantation. However, there was still work to be done on the sugar plantations and the newly freed slaves recognized and valued their labour and refused to work under the same conditions they did as slaves (Mohabir, 2011; Birbalsingh, 1993).

This left many plantations owners in places such as Trinidad with weakening economies looking for a cheap and controllable alternative labour source to replace the newly freed slaves. This alternative source of labour was eventually found in India, and in May of 1845, on the ship *Fatel Razack*, the first arrival of Indians (from the subcontinent of South Asia) in the form of indentured labourers arrived in Trinidad (Trinidad and Tobago National Library and Information System Authority, 2004). This Indian immigration to Trinidad spanned over 72 years (1845-1917) and during this time over 140,000 South Asians were brought over via ships to the island (Trinidad and Tobago National Library and Information System Authority 2004; Ramcharan, 1995). The Indians en route were subjected to abuse, poor food, and dangerous weather conditions, but nevertheless these adverse conditions enabled them to form a bond which overcame their differences of language, caste and regionalism (Trinidad and Tobago National Library and Information System Authority 2004). They proved to be effective on the plantations and their hard work eventually lead to their settlement in Trinidad. Therefore, this settlement can be considered as the grounds in which the negotiation of identity among this group begins.

When their working contracts expired, in an effort to discourage the indentured labourers from returning home to India, the colony offered land grants as incentives for those willing to stay. Many accepted the offer, making Trinidad their new home. Although in a country foreign to their customs and traditions, the Indians in Trinidad maintained many of their traditions and

today their presence is a vibrant component of Trinidad and Tobago's national culture (Teelucksingh, 2007). For example, calypso songs and melodies, primarily performed by Afro-Caribbean performers, incorporate Indian words, rhythms, topics and the use of Indian musical instruments such as the dholak, dhantal, harmonium and tassa (Reddock, 1999). In fact, in general Trinidadian music, whatever its genre – soca, pan jazz, chutney, steel band compositions or calypso – reflects the interculturalization of African, European and Indians (Reddock, 1999).

### Indo-Caribbean People in Canada

Another component that needs to be understood before deconstructing the negotiation of identity among Indo-Trinidadians is to answer the question: how did Indo-Trinidadians and, in general, Indo-Caribbean people end up in Canada?

Before the revision of the Immigration Act of 1967, Canadian immigration policies restricted immigration from the Caribbean to highly skilled professionals (Ramcharan, 1995). Of those coming from the Caribbean very few were of Indian descent (Kelly and Treblicock, 2000). However, the introduction of the Point System broke down some of the barriers that prevented the migration of persons from the Caribbean, and applicants who possessed the necessary educational, occupational, and health qualifications were granted immigration status (Ramcharan, 1995). Consequently, thousands of South Asians from the Caribbean and Guyana who qualified for migration under the new system took advantage of this more egalitarian provision and migrated to various provinces in Canada.

Similar to migration patterns today, over 65 percent of these migrants came to Ontario, many settling in Toronto and the surrounding regions (Ramcharan, 1995). Today it is very difficult if not impossible to document precisely the current Indo-Caribbean population in

Canada because the relatively recent classification of “Indo-Caribbean” has not been adopted by Statistics Canada (Birbalsingh 2011).

### Diaspora

Diaspora can be referred to as “displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration or exile” (Brazier and Mannur, 2003, p.1). It can be voluntary or forced – but nevertheless refers specifically to the movement of people across nation-states. However, like many terms and concepts within the social sciences, scholars have not all agreed on a fixed definition. Originally a term used to describe the plight of Jews living outside Palestine, today the term diaspora speaks not only to the Jewish community but to diverse groups of people and communities moving throughout the globe away from their place of origin (Brazier and Mannur, 2003).

As is the case with the literature on Indo-Trinidadian/Caribbean identity, previous diasporic studies have paid little attention to the history of the Indian migration to the Caribbean, although it has recently attracted some attention (see Premdas, 2004; Singh, 2001). Regardless, the concept of diaspora can easily be applied to the those who left India for the Caribbean because ever since they arrived in the Caribbean over one hundred and fifty years ago under the indenture system, they have been on the move (Roopnarine, 2009), first from India to the Caribbean and then from the Caribbean to developed countries, such as Canada. In fact, according to Guengant (1996), since the Second World War approximately 6 million people from the Caribbean (Indians included) have migrated to developed countries.

Diasporas play a huge role in identity formation not only among Indo-Trinidadians, but with all peoples who have experienced them. Scholars emphasize the reality that when people move, identities, perspectives and definitions become segmented (Radhakrishnan, 2003). This is

because immigrants bring with them characteristics that foster their identity up until migration, but when in the host country they adopt new characteristics, sometimes adding and taking away from existing characteristics alongside creation of new ones. Scholars have stated that the lack of scholarly attention on Indian diasporas in the Caribbean and North America has led to a poor understanding of migration, identity and inter-group relations (Roopnarine, 2009; Khan, 2004a). Therefore to understand identities that fall within the non-dominant class in Canada (in this case Indo-Trinidadian) it is important to understand the underlying reasons for the negotiation of identity and take into account the factors that lead and foster this negotiation (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006).

### Cultural Identity

In this context, cultural identity may be defined as the basic consciousness of one's own group specificity amongst other peoples, in terms of living habits, customs, language, values, etcetera. (Dorias, 1995). It can be theorized in many ways. The term in itself is contested by many and has a multifaceted definition. However, it is Hall (2003) who breaks down cultural identity into two ways that are particularly useful to this research. He first states that, "identity should be understood as a collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable and secondly, that identity should be understood as unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory – marked by multiple points of similarities as well as difference" (Hall, 2003, p.234). This idea is shared by Handa (2002) who states that culture is not static, but constantly being reconstructed and re-imagined in relation to and in combination with cultural sensibilities, narratives, and practices. Singh (1995) further supports this notion and believes that the study of ethnicity and cultural relations is one that emphasizes the non-static, dynamic and constantly evolving character of ethnicity. In short, these scholars

all affirm that ethnicity and cultural identities are constantly being reinvented in response to changing realities (Singh, 1995; Handa, 2002; Hall, 2003).

However, it is important to note that in this reality, identity is not transparent or unproblematic. Scholars argue that instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think of it as a *production* which is never completed and is always in the process of being revamped, re-synthesized and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 2003; Handa 2002). In this sense it becomes apparent that identity cannot be defined in isolation, but is understood and can only be understood when compared/contrasted against something that is considered different (Hall 2003; Handa 2003; Martin 1995; Bottero and Irwin 2003;Anthias 1999).

Martin (1995) exemplifies this in his argument of sameness. He states that “sameness, which is implied in the development of identity and, indeed, an act of identification, requires some form of *eliveness* in order for it to exist in the first place” (Martin 1995). Similar to Martin’s (1995) notion of *sameness* is Anthias (1999), who suggests that notions of identity and identification are a strategic and necessary element in the process and understanding of otherness and sameness. Therefore, one cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about “one experience, or one identity”, without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities which constitutes, precisely, the Caribbean’s uniqueness of culture (Hall, 2003).

### Hybridized Identity

Hybridized identities are concerned with the interfusion of cultural identities. The notion of hybridity suggests—most importantly in relation to racial and ethnic identities—that identities are not pure but the product of mixing, fusion, and creolization<sup>10</sup>. The term creolization is

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<sup>10</sup> “The practice of a blending and interweaving of various cultural elements together to create something new” (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006, p. 75-76).

largely specific to the Caribbean due to the cultural processes that happened in the plantations. Because of colonization, there was a mixing of the Indigenous, African, European and Asian people. These groups adopted cultural characteristics from each other – a process which is referred to as creolization.

Hybrid identities can be seen as a consequence of globalization and our changing world community. They are construed out of different fragments and as a result from a process of negotiation. According to Hall (1996) “cultural identity is always hybrid, and that the precise form of hybridity will be determined by a specific historical formation” (Hall, 1996, p.189). Therefore, hybridity can consequently be seen as a result of historical encounters between groups through colonial settings or a diverse population (Hall, 1996). These encounters and processes were based on inequalities and is not without struggle of power and power relations between cultures of resistance and domination.

Hybrid identities are not an uncommon identification among many immigrants living in Canada. Specifically in the case of Indo-Caribbean people, they are among many ethnicities that can epitomize and represent a mixture of identities because their hybridized identity demonstrates a forever changing and elastic identification. Ramcharan (1995) demonstrates this extensively in his work examining the cultural adaptations of Indo-Caribbean populations from Trinidad and Guyana to Canada. He states that members of the Indo-Caribbean community have the ability to select those aspects of their culture that can enhance their quality of life and further help them create identification. He goes on to say that the ability to selectively choose cultural maintenance has been a hallmark of Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese. In other words Ramcharan is presenting the fact that Indo-Caribbean identities are constantly being altered or determined by the processes of the environment and interaction with others. This belief of

constantly generating different notions of identity can also be seen in the work of Munasinghe (2001) who completed a study with Indo-Trinidadian youth exploring their hybrid identities.

The following excerpt taken from Munasinghe's study personifies Ramcharan's (1995) notion of selecting aspects of their culture:

By the time I was in my teens, I was a product of my environment, as Trinidadian as anyone could claim to be, quite at ease with a cosmopolitan attitude, and I had no desire to isolate myself from the mixture of races.... At this time I was putting down the roots of the mixture of characteristics, attitudes and mannerisms which comprise the Trinidadian. I was one of the boys, doing my jump-up at Carnival time, giving and taking picong<sup>11</sup>, drinking coconut water around the Savannah or eating a late-night roti down St. James.... You can call this another kind of indoctrination if you like, and it was as subtle and unconscious as my childhood racial experience. I think I can say without question that this creolising process was the experience of many others of my generation. (Munasinghe, 2001, p.106)

This quote (spoken by an Indo-Trinidadian person) demonstrates that Indo-Trinidadian people are what Viranjini Munasinghe (2001) refers to as being "ethnic in a place in-between" (p.106). Munasinghe explored this idea of being "ethnic in between" through his work on the Indo-Trinidadians in Central Trinidad. He writes about how some "Central people claiming Indian heritage situate themselves in relation to 'other' groups – East Indians from the south, 'real Indians' from India, Creoles, Whites (both local and foreign) – and negotiate their identity between the polarity they draw between being Trinidadian on one hand and Indian on the other" (Munasinghe 2001, p.106). Similar, to this notion of "ethnic in between" is what Handa (2002) calls a "culture clash" or "caught between two cultures" (p.7).

In Handa's study of second generation South Asian youth, she states that the mainstream media and social analysts that account for the experiences of second-generation South Asian youth are inadequate because they do not recognize that the identities of these youth are non-static forever evolving identities. Handa specifically defines culture as "values, attitudes, habits,

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<sup>11</sup> Teasing or cleverly make fun of (Hernandez, Ramdwar, 2006)

and customs” (p.7). Therefore, the challenge is created when confronting modern, culturally diverse societies because they (the person negotiating their identities, in this case Indo-Trinidadian youth) can be understood and regarded as a rising from value conflicts (Handa, 2002). This conflict arises for South Asian adolescents because they are said to be “torn” or “caught” between the values of a “traditional” (South Asian) culture and a “modern” (Canadian) one (Handa, 2002, p.7). However, the culture clash model is problematic for various reasons: for example, one criticism is that it tends to overlook how important race is as a determinant of identity. Firstly, the culture clash model treats the cultures in question as equals, which ignores the existence of dominant cultures (Handa, 2002). Secondly, the culture clash model tends to view conflict as beneficial to identity formation (Handa, 2002). This position is further supported by Peter Weinreich (1979) who explains that “an individual’s conflict in identification with others is an important psychological impetus for personal change. In this view ‘identity’ conflict is regarded as being more frequently a resource than a liability” (p.124).

In the end, cultural identity among Indo-Caribbean people can be viewed as something that is fluid rather than static. They are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformations and difference (Hall 2003; Handa 2002). When looking at Trinidad specifically, it can be noted that the ethnic composition of its population is very diverse and therefore youth identities will always be negotiated.

### Language

Language is an important aspect of culture. For over twenty years, the relationships between language, culture and identity has been a major area of research (Dorias, 1995). Today, it is quite common for immigrants to a new country to speak their first language amid fellow immigrants who share a linguistic similarity. This lends to the belief of shared characteristics

and a similar identifying feature. However, linguistic differences are also seen as the mark of difference, and can create divisiveness among peoples or even among different groups of the same nation (Pinker, 1995). A good example of this is in Canada, where French-speaking natives of Quebec clash with the English-speaking majority (Pinker, 1995).

The use of language to construct identity has been explored in educational settings (Adger, 1998; Bucholtz, 1999; Fordham, 1998; Toohey, 2000). Scholars have found that neither identity nor language use is a fixed notion; both are dynamic, depending upon time and place (Norton, 1995). The work of the sociologist Goffman (1963) has been influential in showing that the self is constructed entirely through discourse, making our language choices of paramount importance to our identity construction.

Most Indo-Caribbean migrants from Trinidad and Guyana have little or no fluency in Hindi, which for scholars such as Ramcharan, is seen to be a major loss of their ancestral culture (1995). Solomon (1986) notes the significance of language as a major dynamic in Black Caribbean youth identity. He argues that patois<sup>12</sup> serves as a functional language for the immigrant children who are more accustomed to speaking it than Standard English and that it also provides a sense of security and identity as well as a way of excluding teachers and students from other cultures and language groups (Henry, 1994; Solomon, 1986). Subsequently, Hernandez-Ramdwar (2008) also agrees with this and found that the use of Jamaican patois (Jamaican Creole language) in Jamaican dancehall culture is very deliberate and is a way of keeping outsiders out, and of offending the “powers that be.” (p.69). Furthermore, in Hernandez-Ramdwar’s work on Trinidadian identity in Toronto, she states that the verbal skills of Trinidadians can most definitely be seen as a marker of identity among second generation

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<sup>12</sup> The term “patois” is used to refer to the dialect of the common people of a region, differing in various respects from the standard language of the country (Oxford Dictionary, 2001).

youth (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006), making language a factor that leads to a certain identification and a definite contender in identity formation.

### Racial Identity

Similar to the notion of culture, several scholars have looked at the significance of race<sup>13</sup> (a social construction) as a determinant and ascriptive identity marker (Espiritu 1994; Ibrahim 2003; Rummens 2003; Yon 2000; Shahsiah 2006). In the case of Trinidad, Munasinghe (2001) looks at race relations under the theoretical rubric of identity. He views ethnicity as the overarching theoretical framework, encompassing both race and ethnicity, without implying that race is reducible to ethnicity (Munasinghe 2001). Studies concerned with social heterogeneity in the Caribbean have been increasingly framed within the discourse of ethnicity rather than that of race (Munasinghe 2001). Ibrahim's (2003) research on race explains that today's societies in places such as North America and South Africa are obsessed with race and can be considered overly race conscious. As a consequence of this, self-identification appears less attainable because societal processes and the dominant public discourse positions skin colour as the marker to justify differentiated identities (Hogg, Terry and White 1995; Ibrahim 2003).

Although most scholars look at and conceptualize race as a structurally-based social attribute that is ascribed to individuals of certain groups (Hogg, Terry and White 1995), other scholars view race differently. For example Rummens (2003) has chosen to treat 'race' and 'colour' as a type of identity in itself. He asserts that individuals actively select from a range of identity criteria, such as Black, White or Asian, and that outside factors do not hinder this identification. Similar to Rummens' (2003) views on race, Martin (1995) also conceptualizes

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<sup>13</sup> The term race has a long history. It is defined in many ways within different disciplines. For the purpose of this paper race is defined as the "physical type, heredity, blood, culture, nation, personality, intelligence, and achievement are all stirred together make an omelette which is the popular conception of race" (Montagu, 2007, p. 10). In societies like Canada race is used as a marker of identity for racialized people.

identification as a matter of personal choice and self-identification. However, they both fail tremendously to take into account the fact that racism exists and indeed may limit the choice for those who are marked by other (privileged) bodies. For examples, scholars such as James (1999) employ the fact that race is constructed not only by oneself, but also in relation to the constructed classification of human beings based on the historical and geographic context of individuals' experience. He goes on to state that if we were to view race through an anti-racist framework, it will become evident that certain individuals such as racialized people are pressured to identify themselves in racial terms. Yet, individuals from the dominant culture, centered on Whiteness, do not feel the need to self-identify racially (James, 1999). There are also scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) who contest that culture has come to replace race as a means of explaining and understanding difference and that cultural difference had thus become the new marker of socially constructed racial difference (Abu-Lughod 1998; Handa 2002).

The literature on Caribbean race relations is limited and the majority of work available is decades old (Duany, 1998) and mostly focuses on racial discourse of Caribbean people in North America. However, race is constructed differently in the Caribbean than it is in North America. For peoples of the Caribbean living in North America, race has played a crucial role in the formation of their cultural identities (Duany, 1998). After migration from the Caribbean to Canada, people from the Caribbean often inhabit multiple identities, which are always shifting in the context of time and space (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006). Omi and Winant (1986) explain that racial formation in North America is the "process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning" (1986, p.62; see also Hernandez-Ramdwar, 1995). This notion of race affects every

day decisions including whom we trust, our sexual preferences, what we eat, our aesthetic sense, etcetera (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 1995).

In Trinidad, race is often identified in terms of an ancestral territory, colour and phylogeny. Trinidad's Europeans, Africans and Indians were therefore associated with other lands from which they were said to originate (Segal, 1993). For the Europeans and Africans they were also denominated by colour terms: white and Black. However, for the Indians there was no colour correspondence, which is not to say such person were without pigmentation. The racial discourse in Trinidad also differentiates between those of pure race and mixed race: pure is associated with persons whose parents are of the same race, and mixed is associated with persons whose parents are from different races.

In addition, in Trinidad race is a topic associated with politics. In fact, scholars argue that in Trinidad most often, politics and political issues start with the issue of race (Ragoonath, 1998). This is because the population of Trinidad is split amongst several different ethnic and racial groups, with the major two groups being Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian. Yet, in cultural activities and festivals - such as Carnival, major sporting events in cricket and football (soccer) and even religious activities - persons of all races participate for the most part in unity and harmony. This however does not mean that there is total harmony amongst the different races, because in Trinidad racial tensions among different racial groups have a long history. There are instances where race serves as a distinguishing factor of identity with respect to participation in certain activities. For instance, in certain economies, race seems to be a major determinant. Oil workers are predominately Afro-Trinidadian, sugar workers are Indo-Trinidadian, and with respect to politics, some distinctions are also based on race (Ragoonath, 1998).

Hernandez-Ramdwar (2006) has noted some of the difficulties that race has played in identity formation among second generation youth from Trinidad living in Toronto. She states that “due to the amalgamation of Caribbean people from a variety of nations, classes, ethnicities and religions in a singular group commonly referred to as “Black/Caribbean” or “Afro-Caribbean”, anyone outside this definition is made invisible (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006, p. 120). Thus, Indo-Trinidadians, along with other races found in the Caribbean such as Chinese, Aboriginal, European, Middle Eastern or mixed descent people find difficulty in identifying harmoniously with a group that is situated within an African-defined community (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006). Although Hernandez-Ramdwar goes on to explain that she is unaware of how Indo-Caribbean people and others who are not of Afro-Caribbean descent will fit into the wider definition of “Caribbeaness”, she has noted that Indo-Caribbean people are becoming increasingly involved in the soca<sup>14</sup> music scene and through this have been very assertive and proud of their Caribbean heritage.

In similarity to culture, it can be seen that the concept of race is disputed and contested by scholars. There are still gaps and great debates about the usefulness or validity of race as a marker of identity, including among the diasporic populations of Indians in the Caribbean.

### Educational Experience of Youth

In the Canadian school environment racialized immigrant youth face unique barriers and struggles when the intertwined effects of race, class, age, and gender dictate their experiences (Desai and Subramanian 2000; Kilbride, Anisef, Baichman-Anisef and Khattar 2002). This is because school presents the newcomer with its own dynamics of adjustment difficulties; the

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<sup>14</sup> “Soca music originated in the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago. It is widely accepted to have been created by Lord Shorty (born Garfield Blackman). He noticed that Calypso music was threatened by the more popular reggae music and dying out and attempted to create a new hybrid that was more appealing to the masses. He fused Indian music with calypso music and this resulted in a more energetic hybrid called solka, which later became known as soca” (Cazaubon, 2011, [www.streetdictionary.com](http://www.streetdictionary.com))

physical environment, the social interaction networks and the teaching-learning process are all challenges within the school to which newcomer immigrant youth must face and find answers to (Anderson and Grant, 1975).

Those studying the integration of new immigrants and the children of immigrants in school have spoken about the struggle and difficulty of forming new, or retaining their already established, cultural, racial, and ethnic identities (Espiritu 1994; Fantino and Cloak 2001; Ibrahim 2003; Waters 1994). Similar to the findings of Handa (2002) and Munasinghe (2001), Ibrahim (2003), Kilbride et al. (2000) and Waters (1994), have all discussed the “in betweenness”; where immigrant youth find themselves caught between the cultural world of their families and that of the receiving society. However, there are scholars that disagree with the latter conceptual framework and have viewed the issues of self-identification as not a process of choosing, but rather reconciliation of multiple identities (Martin 1995; Rummens 2003; Yon 2000). Yon (2000) studied racialized immigrant youth in Toronto high schools and found that society’s need to label and categorize individuals undermines the complexity of youth identities because only part of their identity is recognized in the process. This creates the notion of hyphenated identity, which acts as a tool to address complex and multifaceted identities (Yon, 2000). In fact Canada’s official multicultural policy encourages the use of hyphenated names such as Chinese-Canadian, Afghan-Canadian and Greek-Canadian (Mahtani 2002), which showcases multiple identities. However, something to consider is the fact that these hyphenated identities can produce spaces of distance and difference where ethnicity becomes situated outside the notion of Canadianess (Mahtani 2002).

In addition Yon (in Henry, 1994) talks about something called a subculture which is defined as a group of people within a culture who are different from the larger culture to which

they belong. In discussion with immigrant children, Yon confirms the existence of subcultures of the different Caribbean islands and the creation of a specific identity towards sub-cultural groups can be seen as a direct response to the marginal position and sense of “difference” and “exclusion” students feel. He goes on to state that the participants in his study spoke about the growing awareness of identity upon coming to live in Canada and the process of negotiating and shifting identities that are constantly being formed (Yon in Henry, 1994). Handa (2002) agrees with Yon and expresses that for youth, community identities play a vital role in self-identification. These community identities are constructed outside the boundaries of a nation-state and are in constant negotiation through the relations between the dominant Canadian culture and the culture that exists “back home”, in the country of origin (Handa, 2002). Due to this influence, it becomes a fear of elders that if these youth, who already experience a self-identification crisis, are not properly guided, the inheritors and future transmitters of cultural practices could indeed forfeit their “authentic” ethnic identity, or in a worst case scenario, fall victim to the ills of a modern Western society. Nevertheless, expressing these group identifications and subcultures are an important component for immigrant youth, and the formation of a subculture offers students a localized sense of identity (Yon, in Henry 1994).

For Caribbean youth, affirming an identity within the school environment is critical for their survival in their new school environment because it affects how they perform, their confidence, and their relationships with individuals in the school (Clay, 2005). They bring to school their cultural knowledge from their primary communities and use this information to negotiate their realities in the new environment (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). However, very little academic literature is available specifically on Caribbean youth in Canada, and even less on Indo-Caribbean youth in Canada.

## Conclusion

Although there is very little literature available on Indo-Trinidadian youth and their negotiation with identity, the literature that is available about Indo-Caribbean youth in this review definitely provides a foundation for future investigation. Throughout this literature review, many themes emerge, but there is one particular theme that seems to be prevalent – that is the theme of complex identities among Indo-Caribbean youth. Indo-Caribbean youth have re-forming, non-static and changing identities within everyday interactions, and this exhibits how history and past experiences can affect one's self-identification.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

Academic research provides fundamental knowledge about the social world (Nueman, 2011). With this in mind, the ultimate goal of my research is to bring attention to the identity issues Indo-Trinidadian youth in Canada face after migration.

This project is exploratory in nature and uses a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is “interested in analyzing the subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events or practices by collecting non-standardized data and analyzing texts and images rather than numbers and statistics (quantitative research)” (Flick, 2009, p. 12). I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions that define the area to be explored and from which the interviewer or interviewee may diverge in order to pursue an idea in more detail (Britten, 1995). I found the use of semi-structured interviews to be most useful because I felt it allowed me to gain better access to the respondent’s feelings and responses on the issues being discussed. Also, due to the open nature of these questions, respondents could speak on emotions and attitudes, all of which could be recorded for analysis.

Alongside this qualitative research, I use narrative inquiry to further examine the issues that surround identity among Indo-Trinidadian youth. Unlike more traditional methods, narrative inquiry successfully captures personal and human dimensions that cannot be quantified into dry facts and numerical data (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytellers, whose lives, individually and socially, are stories, thus, the use and study of personal narratives is a study of the way humans experience the world (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). I found the use of personal narratives to be rich - it provided

knowledge on the topic far beyond what I expected and assisted me in explicitly outlining identity issues faced by Indo-Trinidadian youth.

### Data Source

During the month of July 2011, I conducted eight open-ended interviews with four males and four females. All participants were born in Trinidad and self identified as an Indo-Trinidadian. All but one participant migrated from Trinidad to Canada at the age of 10 or older and all participants are currently between the ages of 18 and 30. Although this research project initially specified that all participants should have migrated from Trinidad to Canada at the age of 10 and older, after the initial contact with the particular individual who migrated before the age of 10, I felt it would be appropriate to conduct an interview because of her ability to vividly retell and recount her experiences.

All participants have attained a minimum of a post secondary education. Three participants have attained a Masters Degree, one of whom is currently working on their Doctorate. Two of the three individuals with a Masters Degree have written and conducted research surrounding issues of identity among Indo-Trinidadians as part of their studies and have had experience conducting primary research. Two participants are OCT (Ontario College of Teachers) qualified, one participant is a police officer with the Toronto Police and one participant works for the City of Toronto. Four participants live in the Peel Region and four live in the City of Toronto.

### Recruitment

The individuals were recruited through social networks of friends and family. This technique of recruitment is referred to as a snowball technique/snowball sample. A snowball sample is "a nonrandom sample in which the researcher begins with one case and then, based on

information about interrelationships from that case, identifies other cases and repeats the process again and again” (Nueman, 2011, p.269).

Using this technique, I gathered contact information for individuals who would possibly be interested in participating in the study. After I had received enough contacts to complete the desired sample size I contacted them and provided them with a detailed overview of my research project. Luckily, all but one of the contacts were willing and able to participate, so I made the necessary arrangements to conduct an in-depth interview.

### Interviews

As revealed earlier, there is very little scholarly work that has focused on this issue therefore I chose to conduct in-depth interviews. According to Boyce and Neale “in-depth interviews are useful when you want detailed information about a person’s thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in depth” (2006). These interviews are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more holistic approach to the subject matter (Boyce and Neale, 2006).

Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes; which included the revision and signing of the consent form (Appendix A). All but one of the interviews was conducted either at my home, the participant’s home or at a post secondary institution. Due to the travel arrangements of one participant, one interview was done via email. Given that this study is not funded I was unable to compensate the participants for their involvement, but assured them that their time, information and willingness to participate were greatly appreciated. The respondents were friendly and willing to share their experiences. I initially thought of this process as very structured - asking questions, listening, expressing interest and recording what was said

(Nueman, 2011) - however, I quickly realized that this was not going to be as clear-cut a process as I had originally thought.

Before I started the interview I shared with each participant my own interest in this topic and also shared my migration story. I felt this to be extremely helpful because it created a secure space not only for me, but it allowed and paved way for the participant to feel comfortable enough to share his/her own experiences. After our introductions I allowed the participant to review the consent form and ask any questions before signing the consent agreement. During this time I assured the participant that his/her identity would be kept confidential, that all recordings were kept in a safe place, and only I would have access to this raw data. I also reassured the participant that the transcription of the interviews would be done solely by me and that all tape recordings would be destroyed as soon as the transcription was complete.

After the consent form was signed I began the interview by asking the participant a series of demographic questions (Appendix B: Part A). After my first open-ended question (Appendix B: Part B) the realization that my "structured" interview would become unstructured became apparent. What started off as a formal interview quickly lead to a joint production between myself (the researcher), and the participant (Nueman, 2011). Nueman (2011) refers to this as a "speech event", which is defined by him as a close friendly conversation (451). This was further made easy by my interactions with the participant. Mischler (1986) states, "the interviewers' presence and form of involvement – how she or he listens, attends and encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates topics, and terminates responses – is integral to the respondent's account" (82). This holds true to my experience because the information shared with me went far beyond what I expected. The reception I received from each participant made it very easy for me to ask the questions I wanted without feeling invasive. Researcher Sherry P. Butterfield (2004) has

done extensive work with West Indian youth in New York and also makes note of the closeness and rapport she was able to build with her participants. She credits the shared West Indian identity among her and her participants as a tool in gathering in-depth information. In an interview she conducted, the individual actually stated that he normally does not talk to people about issues with identity, but because of Butterfield's self-identification as a West Indian, he felt comfortable enough to share with her his experiences (Butterfield, 2004). I too feel that my identification as an Indo-Trinidadian provided my participants with a sense of comfort in sharing their experiences, which allowed for more in-depth non-censored information.

Throughout the entire interview I encouraged my participants to digress and share whatever they felt necessary to get their point across. Occasionally, participants would have difficulty trying to get their point across and would become slightly frustrated. This is when I started to use probes – follow-up questions - to elicit a clear and concise response (Nueman, 2011). This technique was helpful because it reduced any misunderstandings between myself and the interviewee (Nueman, 2011).

The last stage of the interview, as outlined by Nueman (2011), is the exit: thanking the participant. I made certain that the respondents knew how much I appreciated their time and offered my contact information if they had anything they felt they needed to add after I left. During this stage of the process, I had many of the respondent's thank *me* for allowing them to share their experiences. They were excited to know that their stories would be heard and that their attention was being brought to this issue – something that the participants indicated they thought was invisible.

### Researcher's Role

As I conducted the interviews, I quickly came to realize that my self-identification as an Indo-Trinidadian would be an advantage. This advantage, according to Root (1992), allows the researcher to ask questions from a position of knowing (see also Hernandez-Ramdwars, 1995). The respondents shared very personal stories about their upbringing and the challenges that they faced not only with the host society, but also in the home. Many times the respondents would say “you know how it is”, or “you must understand what it’s like”, and although most often I could relate to their story and struggle, sometimes I was unable to. Marshall and Rossman (2011) address this issue: they reminded me that it is important (for the researcher) to learn and gather information from the participants’ lives, but also maintain a stance of “empirical neutrality” (Patton, 2002; p.49), to collect data and provide descriptive representations. Keeping “empirical neutrality” became difficult at times, but nevertheless, I had to continue professionally to allow for the data to be as authentic as possible. To avoid possible generalizations, I would often probe for a description or anything that would situate their thoughts in their own words. For example, if the interviewee said “you know what I mean”, I would probe and say “explain to me what you mean”, avoiding generalizations.

### Data Analysis

According to Nueman (2011), when conducting qualitative research “you (the researcher) need to organize the raw data into conceptual categories and create themes and concepts” (510). Therefore, after conducting all interviews I transcribed each interview and started the analysis process; for the scale of this research it only included coding – “systematically reorganizing raw data into a format that is easy to analyze” (Nueman, 2011, p.501).

Following the steps outlined by Nueman, I started the process with the first phase of coding qualitative data: “open coding”. This included going through the data looking for

relevant themes. I did this by reading the transcripts and highlighting reoccurring themes, concepts, key events and critical terms. As I located the latter, I made initial notes on them assigning a code to each. I then moved on to the second phase of coding: "axial coding". This process focuses on the initial coded themes more than the actual data and assigning codes. I did this by organizing the codes and asking about "causes and consequences, conditions and interactions and strategies and processes" (Nueman, 2011, p.513). Finally, after I finished identifying all the major themes, I moved on to the last stage of coding labeled "selective coding". This stage involves "scanning all the data and previous codes, looking selectively for cases that illustrate themes and making comparisons after most or all data collection has been completed" (Nueman, 2011, p.514). As I completed this stage of the process I was able to develop concepts and make several core generalizations, giving me the confidence to begin writing my discussion/findings.

## Chapter 4: Issues in School after (Im)migration

### Introduction

Leaving one's country of origin is not an easy task. Settling in a new country is often an alienating process for many immigrants. They are forced to disconnect with their social ties and norms in their home country, leaving much of their social capital behind. It is a huge step no matter how well prepared or how confident one is about the transition.

As an immigrant, I can personally attest to the difficulty that presents itself after migration. As I reflect on my experience as an immigrant, I can confidently say that leaving the only place you know, and friends and family is indeed the easiest part; it is what lies ahead that can hold the most challenges. As explained in my Introduction, during my first day of school I was faced with issues of identity and belonging, issues that carried on right throughout my educational endeavours.

After conducting research on the negotiation of identity in the school system, I was relieved to find out that many Indo-Trinidadian youth face the same issues that I did as a child. This relieved feeling came as a result of knowing that the difficulties I overcame were not something only experienced by me, but shared by others. Although many issues were brought up during the interviews, there are two themes that seem to be most prevalent among the respondents. These themes are 1) the difficulty of not having or feeling a sense of belonging within a particular group; and 2) issues surrounding language.

The following chapter will examine these two themes and bring forth ways in which the respondents dealt with issues of identity.

### Belonging

“A sense of belonging appears to be a basic human need – as basic as food and shelter” (Pelletier, 1994, p.6). This aspect of belonging includes feelings of being valued for who you are and how you choose to identify. For Indo-Trinidadian youth entering school after migrating from Trinidad, finding this sense of belonging in the school environment was a difficult task. The way they chose to self-identify was not valued and accepted by the host society and left them feeling rejected for who they were. For Curtis, negotiating his identity after migration made him question who he was and how he would fit in. He states:

Curtis: School was definitely the first place I had to negotiate my identity after migration. Once you enter into that public space and you have a certain image of who you are then people start making assumptions that you're Indian and you're like wait a second, ya I am Indian but I am from the Caribbean, but I don't speak the language of the Indian people. And wait a second you're from the Caribbean does that mean you're just Black and look lighter skin? But you're not Black either. So that's when the questions and the assumptions start coming out. That is where you notice it the most. That is where it has the most effect on you the most and you start to thinking, wait a second, what am I? Who am I? How do I start explain all of this? Where do I fit in? And all of those other questions in that public space.

Curtis' multiple identities as a person from the Caribbean and an Indian person were not respected by the host society. They were unable and, according to him, unwilling to accept his multiple identities. This eventually left him with doubts about how he would fit in, how he would be perceived and how he would *have* to identify within public spaces. Similar to Curtis, Nadia speaks of the struggle she had fitting in. She says:

Nadia: I started first year of university at Ryerson, downtown Toronto. Whilst it was a multicultural campus, my undergraduate program was predominantly white, and therefore not a lot of West Indians. South Asians thought I was Indian or Desi<sup>15</sup> [migrant] so they would be friendly and open but I'd never really fit into their social niche. Fitting in was actually easier with white people because they were always fascinated or intrigued about where I came from, my culture and my accent. But although it was easier to fit in with the white people, I still never felt

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<sup>15</sup> A term referring to someone who is from the South Asian subcontinent living in the diaspora.

a sense of belonging and always felt that I had to reconstruct who I wanted to be in order to fit in.

In today's multicultural society, it is not unusual for individuals to identify themselves within the context of their ethnicity, race, culture, class/status and gender. Any individual can identify themselves on a myriad of levels: in a personal sense, a social sense, on an ethnic, cultural, spiritual or religious basis and by way of their moral values (Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994). As a consequence identities can be seen as flexible or even conflicting (Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994), with no one person's identity being the same as another's, and each person having his/her own unique mix of allegiances (Richardson and Wood, 2000). However, the way one chooses to self-identify (on a cultural, spiritual or religious basis and/or by way of their moral values, etc.) is not always in conjunction with the views and identification of the host/dominant society. Self-identification in this sense is a subjective matter and the self-proclaimed identities of an individual are not automatically adopted by others. Kino explains this dilemma by stating:

**Kino:** In Trinidad I never had to explain to people I was Indian and Trini. I couldn't imagine saying to people [in Trinidad] "I is an Indian". That would be dotish of me... that's like telling someone I am a man. You look at people and you can automatically assume things like gender, hair colour, skin colour and in Trinidad I think most people can tell where others are from... whether they are of Indian, African, Spanish, Chinese, Syrian or Portuguese decent. But regardless of where our ancestors came from, we all from Trinidad and we all Trinidadian... and at the end of the day that's all that matters. Is when I come here and went to school that I realize people don't watch me the way people in Trinidad do. They look at me and right away and think I is an Indian, like from India. Or sometimes people ask me if I am from the Middle East. It frustrating for me sometimes, but I understand why people assume Indian and try to relax myself. But what does get me vex almost all the time, is when people ask me where I'm really from, like I fall from the sky. If I tell you I am from Trinidad, why you have to ask where I really from? I sometimes try to reason with people, but it's still a struggle.

Kino explains that prior to migrating he knew who he was - Trinidadian. However, after migrating he could not understand why others did not see him in this sense. His self-

identification was not adopted by the host society and he was left questioning why and became frustrated by the lack of acceptance and belonging. Similar to Kino's and my own experiences, Priya shares her experience entering school after migrating from Trinidad:

Priya: School was the first space I had to negotiate my identity. Anything outside of school was with my family and when I am with them I don't ever feel a need to categorize myself or make distinctions about my identity because we all come from the same place. But in school was different, people needed to make sense of you and in my case it didn't coincide with how I wanted to be perceived. At first I didn't mind people saying I am Indian, because I recognize that my family lineage can be traced back to India. It becomes a problem to me when people don't recognize or accept that I am also from Trinidad and a lot of the person I am today is mainly... in fact, it's all shaped by my upbringing in Trinidad...Trinidadian culture. I need for people to understand that I am also a Trinidadian and not only Indian. This is important because the Indians in Canada, who are from India, are very different from me...but I don't want to come across as if identifying with them is bad, because they are good people. But, to just call me an Indian is definitely not a reflection of the person I am.

Priya expresses how her self-identification was never questioned or challenged by her family, and how she felt a sense of belonging among them. However, after entering school she was unable to find that same acceptance by the host society and their need to categorize her was upsetting. Furthermore, the host society's categorization of her was based solely on her appearance, which to Priya was only part of her identity. Her need for people to also understand that she is Trinidadian was important for her to feel comfortable within the school environment.

All the above quotes are statements made by respondents during the interview process that support the notion that identities are never unified, in fact they are increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different discourse, practices and positions – constantly in the process of change and transformation (Hall, 2000; see also Handa, 2002; Premdas, 1995; Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; Richardson and Wood, 2000). The respondents explain that after they migrated to Canada and upon entering the school system they

found it difficult to find a sense of belonging because of the perceptions of the host society. This perception is based on race, for as mentioned previously, in Canada Indo-Trinidadians are classified racially as South Asian. Their phenotypical features, skin colour, hair texture, eye shape, etcetera, are similar to people from South Asia; however, they do not view themselves entirely as a person from South Asia. Many see themselves as a mixture of many things. For example, Curtis and Kimberlin explain how they view their identities as a mixture by stating:

Curtis: There is a mix of cultures that help in my identification. I am not one or the other. There are things that are holding on to my Caribbean culture and then holding on to my Indian culture. For example, pop culture stuff. I listen to Indian music, soca music, reggae...I like watching Indian movies, I like going to fetes and living with that in this space is definitely a mix of cultures.

Kimberlin: There is the Indo-Trinidadian sub culture [religion, festivals, roti, chutney music, river limes, our own ways of cooking and speaking] and the larger Caribbean West Indian Culture (sun, sea, sand, island in the Caribbean, cricket, carnival, soca) – and I feel like I belong to both. Now having lived in Canada and moving towards permanently living here, I believe I also assimilate into Canadian culture (Tim Hortons, beer, patios, hockey).

Both respondents view their Indian culture and Caribbean culture as a representation of who they are; like Curtis said, “he is not one or the other”, but rather a mixture. For Kimberlin, she explains how living in Canada has also added to her mixture. This mixture is what scholar Aisha Khan coins as a “callaloo nation” (Khan, 2004a).

Callaloo, a stew with many ingredients, is a national dish in Trinidad. The term is used by Khan (2004a) as a metaphor that symbolizes a mixture/combination of cultural, racial and religious diversity. Therefore, in simple terms “callaloo nation” is used to describe Trinidad’s heterogeneous populations – African, Indian, European, Syrian, Lebanese, Chinese and Amerindian– as a land of many heritages, a nation of co-existing groups that influence each other. It is also used in conjunction with the term ‘mixed’, which during colonial times referred to those of colour or brown skin (Khan, 2004a). Parallel to Curtis and Kimberlin, other

respondents expressed that they felt that their identity stemmed from a combination of factors. One respondent (Curtis) who has written and researched on Indo-Caribbean identity, explained that for him his identity was “a pinch of this, a dash of that”, which epitomizes the metaphor of a “callaloo nation”, and more specifically a callaloo identity. Other respondents shared in this view as well and stated:

Candice: I think in many ways, when you think about the food we eat, the language we speak, it definitely has an Afro-South Asian mix to it. Like provision<sup>16</sup>, to me it's sort of a Afro/Creole thing we do or take up. I do think I am a mix of a lot of things, I don't know how other people might perceive me that way...but I remember in Trinidad we eat pelau<sup>17</sup> and I was going on like it was a Caribbean term, and one of my Pakistani friends said no pelau is a dish in Pakistan...so I always find it interesting to see how things like that is connecting, the way we speak and things like that....zaboca [avocado] and all these words that we use I think that is an indication of our culturally mixed identity that we sort of hold.

Priya: A part of me is Indian; my ancestors are from India...only three generations back...but I am from the Caribbean. The Caribbean has its own culture and identity and so does India. I feel I have both identities in me...they merge and out comes me, and the way I choose to identify...it doesn't fit any mould.

After Priya made this comment, I explained to her the metaphor of “callaloo nation” (Khan, 2004a). She then goes on to say:

Priya: That makes perfect sense to me... I watch my parents cook callaloo adding bajee<sup>18</sup> and crab the two main ingredients that can be seen in my case as Indian and Caribbean. But, after it cooks-up the flavour of the bajee and crab and all the spices in-between mix to create a distinct taste and flavour...it can't be done without the other. It's like when my dad makes chatak<sup>19</sup> food, he adds whatever spices he can find, and somehow, it works. In my case, I wouldn't be who I am if I was only Indian or only Caribbean, I am in my opinion a culturally mix-up person.

<sup>16</sup> Provision refers to food harvested beneath the earth's surface, for example: yam, cassava, edoes, sweet potatoes

<sup>17</sup> Pelau is a dish typically made with meat, peas and rice all cooked together.

<sup>18</sup> Bajee refers to a type of spinach.

<sup>19</sup> Chatak food refers to spicy food made from a mixture of spices that create a very distinct taste.

Priya's example of her dad's cooking exemplifies the notion of "callaloo nation", adding many different spices and ingredients that after some time together (in a pot) create a dish that is tasty and that simply works.

This metaphor of being mixed as described by the respondents is different from what is commonly understood today as being a mixed person or person of mixed race descent. When the term mixed is used to describe a person, most assume it is race mixing, that is two parents who are categorized different racially. However, in this case, the respondents refer to themselves as culturally mixed individuals. Scholars have focused on this notion of culturally mixed over the past two decades, and much attention has focused on culture as fluid and shifting rather than as bounded moulds (Khan, 2004b). This cultural mix, in reference to identity, has become commonly referred to as "hybridity" (Khan, 2004b). In the Caribbean this notion of hybridity is also referred to as a mixing or creolization.

The concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse (Meredith, 1998). It is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference" (Hoogvelt, 1997, p. 158; see also Meredith, 1998 ). This is particularly so in Bhabha's discussion and theory of cultural hybridity (1994b, 1996). This concept of hybridity "describes the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity" (Meredith, 1998, p. 2; see also Bhabha 1994b; Bhabha 1996). In this lens, "hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonised (the *Other*) within a singular universal framework, but then fails producing something familiar but new" (Meredith, 1998, p.2; see also Papastergiadis 1997).

For these respondents, this notion of hybridity holds true because their identity is not singular but incorporates many different factors (religion, food, values, family, friends) that leads to a certain identification. Consequently it becomes difficult for them to find a sense of belonging within a certain group because they are neither this nor that (Caribbean or Indian); they are in-between cultures. Their identities occur through a mixing and combining of multiple cultural identity traits outside of "exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity" (McLeod, 2000). Their hybridized/creolized identity is expressed both through the possible creation of a new identity (Bhabha, 1996; AlSayyad, 2001) or as a choice between multiple distinct identities performed by a single person (Lotman, 1990; Nagel, 1994; Song, 2003). Therefore, for these respondents to find a sense of belonging they all spoke about claiming multiple identities through adopting hyphenated identities (Hall, 1996; Mahtani, 2002).

### Hyphenated Identities

#### *Struggling to be Heard*

I am a child of the Chinese diaspora, born at a  
crossroads.

I am a Chinese American,  
A product of the city of Shanghai I have never  
known.

An immigrant and the daughter of Cantonese,  
I speak Cantonese with love, the language of  
Dim Sum and Chinatown.

I speak English with passion, it's the tongue  
of my consciousness,

It is my crystal, my tool, my craft.

I am from Taiwan, island grown, Taiwanese is  
my dream,

Ripples from my tongue, rests in my heart,

I am from Pacific Asia, a stranger from a different  
shore, deeply rooted in history.

I am from California, I love the city of San  
Diego.

I am Asian, Asia is in me, but I cannot return.

I am Chinese, China lives in me but there's no  
way back.

I am Taiwanese. Taiwan remembers me, but I  
have no home there.  
I am new. History made my hyphenated existence.  
I was born at the crossroads and I  
am whole.

—Lilly Cheng (2004)

A hyphenated identity is used to reference multiple features that individuals use to think about themselves (Cheng, 2004). In the poem *Struggle to be heard*, Cheng, epitomizes the complexity that comes with a hyphenated identity and the use of a hyphenated name. Through her poetry she displays quite elegantly how a hyphenated identity gives the person holding the title the ability to display multiple factors that lead to their self-identification. For Cheng, being a Chinese-American allows her to not only identify as an English-speaking, California-loving American, but as a Chinese, Asian Pacific, daughter of Chinese immigrants. Her hyphenated name allows her to create a new identity that incorporates the old and the new. Cheng's view is also shared by Curtis who says:

Curtis: I find that the term Indo-Trinidadian is a very specific culture... it is not like the Indian culture and it's not like the Afro-Caribbean culture so therefore by creating a hyphenated identity I am giving myself a distinct identity that is a combination of things. At the same time, I am telling people, listen this is who I am.

Curtis makes it clear that how he identifies is very specific to how he perceives himself and how he wants to be perceived by others. In his statement he elucidates the notion that he is not giving others the opportunity to mistake him for someone he is not. Kino also explains how his hyphenated identity leaves no room for error in his mind. He says:

Kino: It's so simple to me. My partner who works with me says all the time he is Chinese-Canadian. When he says this, I don't see the need to probe and ask for more detail. He is Chinese and I can verify this because racially he look Chinese but he is Canadian, and I can also verify such because we are both in Canada, working and living here. It's the same for we. Yeah, our people aren't as much as

the Chinese, but it's the same concept when I say Indo-Trinidadian, but yet it's not as understood and accepted. Racially Indian and culturally a Trini.

Kino sees his hyphenated identity as an infallible concept, two words separated by a hyphen, Indo representing Indian and Trinidadian representing Trini. When these two words are put together it illuminates his identity as an Indian person from Trinidad. However, he struggles to understand why his Chinese-Canadian friend's hyphenated identity is more understood than his Indo-Trinidadian identification. This demonstrates that it is easier for some racialized groups to not have to explain their self-identification and hyphenated identities while for others it more complex and even challenged. There is not a lot of scholarly work available on the degree of acceptance on hyphenated identities among different ethnic groups, making it an area for further research.

Similar to Kino, Candice's creation of a hyphenated identity is used to help make a distinction of who she is. For her, the hyphenated name is expressive of her identity. She states:

**Candice:** I would be okay saying and identifying just as an Indo-Caribbean, but my nationality is Trinidad. So, I choose to identify with that hyphen just because I think it is more descriptive of who I am, and it's sort of more encompassing. In my opinion without me saying anything more than I am Indo-Trinidadian people can understand where I am from and maybe put some of their stereotypes to rest.

Putting stereotypes to rest is just one of the many ways in which a hyphenated identity helped the respondents create agency and acceptance for their identification. For Nadia, a hyphenated identity meant giving others, especially individuals at school, a "snapshot" of who she is. Similar to other respondents, the hyphenated identity acts as a connection between her identity in respect to her cultural and racial background. She says:

**Nadia:** By telling others I am Indo-Trinidadian, I am hopefully letting them know that I have a combined identity. Hyphenating my identity was something I thought was necessary because it gave my friends, classmates and teachers a snapshot of who I am. "Oh, Nads is Indo-Trinidadian...this must mean she is not only Indian but

she is also Trinidadian". I did this also hoping my friends parents would stop talking to me in Hindi and Urdu [chuckle].

As demonstrated the respondents have expressed how a hyphenated identity is more encompassing of who they are, how they perceive themselves and how they want others to perceive them. Some of the respondents used the word "distinct" to express what a hyphenated identity does for their recognition by others. It gives them a sense of agency and an ability to advocate for who they are and how they want to be identified, that is all encompassing of their hybrid identity. Cheng (2004) explains that many individuals acquire their hyphenated identity status by virtue of being new immigrants, and for children in school, it is their way of combining both their cultures. Interestingly, Cheng (2004) points out that it is most often children of immigrants who hyphenate their identities because they understand more than their parents that there is a need to bridge/bond their two cultures. She goes on to explain that for Chinese Americans, it is important for them to hyphenate their identity because it becomes their reality. In school they learn one culture; in this case, pledging and honoring the American flag and American freedom, but when they go home, they parents only know their Chinese culture. Therefore, it is the children who act as architects in the uncovering of multiple identities and the creation of hyphenated identities. My respondents agree with the aforementioned, stating:

Daniel: It's funny because when I told my mom about your research she didn't understand why I had to hyphenate my name. For her she was Trinidadian and only Trinidadian... Yes, I am sure she also identifies with the Indian culture, but she didn't need to put Indian in front of her Trini identity. However, I had to... I was not forced, but I wanted others to see me for all I am. Not just my Indian ethnicity and Trini culture, but how each of these are intertwined to create a distinct identity.

Darrien: My parents look at me strange when I say I am Indo-Trinidadian. For them, they are Trinidadian. Without reservation my parents would say they are Trini. And although they may look Indian, go to temple, watch and listen to Indian and movies they never feel the need to say they are Indian. Their identification of Trinidadian is encompassing of everything they want and need, but for me it's

different. School is demanding and students need to place you somewhere, and I don't necessarily let them do it the way they want to.

For both Daniel and Darrien, their parents did not feel the need to hyphenate their identity because they identified more with a national (Trinidadian) culture which also embraces their Indianess. Although their parents are also of Indian descent, in Trinidad there was not as much of a struggle for identity by Indo-Caribbean people as there is in Canada. I wanted to understand this more and asked my parents how they identified themselves and why. They stated:

Mrs. Sirju: We are Trinidadian. We know of only Trinidad. Yeah we follow a lot of the customs in India because we were raised Hindu, and we cook a lot of Indian style food because we learn from our parents who learned from their's, but we don't see the need to go telling people we are Indian from Trinidad. Saying we are from Trinidad is good enough for us.

I went on to explain how many Indo-Trinidadian youth who migrate at an age that places them in the schooling system in Canada feel the need to hyphenate their names. They responded and said:

Mr. Sirju: Well of course Tania, you guys are in a school system that has children from all over the world. There isn't a consensus like there is in Trinidad among people here. You look Indian, all we people look Indian, and it's up to you to tell them otherwise. In Trinidad how would it sound if you told someone you were Indian?

Mrs. Sirju: Also, you have to remember that because you came here young, you have to go through a lot more of your life stages here whereas we came here at a later age and most of who we are has been created...we still growing old, but we in a certain path already, and you are still finding yours.

I found my parents take on self-identification among Indo-Trinidadian youth to be interesting and supportive of Cheng's point on how immigrant children more-so than their parents, feel the need to hyphenate their names. Although, there are some points my parents made that need further discussion, I am just interested in understanding why parents of immigrant and second generation children do not feel the need to hyphenate their name as much

as their offspring. Again, this is an area that needs more research because there is very limited data available. However, the study and examination on the difference in self-identification among immigrant parents' and second generation immigrant children will prove to be valuable because it will observe if a correlation between self-identification and different generations exist.

For many of the second generation immigrant youth it is hard to fully find acceptance from one culture or another. The hyphen is used to function as a paradoxical boundary continuously mediating between the two cultures (Chen, 2004). It lets us assume that the two cultures on either side of the hyphen are somehow connected (Chen, 2004). Scholars have argued that the hyphen is a symbol of the struggle of the second generation to blend in with the norms of their new culture while maintaining past traditions from ancestral linkages (Hall, 2000; Chang, 2004). In other words, the dilemma of identifying with two groups has fostered their creation of a hyphenated identity. They feel the need to associate with both cultures for fear that one gets neglected over the other.

Chen (2004) also states that the "hyphenated identity is also mediated by the 'others', the constraints in the social and historical system and the dominant cultural institutions (Chen, 2004, p. 21). In the case of Indo-Trinidadian youth, their hyphenated identity comes as a result of the lack of recognition and acceptance from the host society, or, as many of them explicitly stated in their interviews, a lack of belonging. Due to the assumptions made by the host society, often based on race, Indo-Trinidadian youth have found a way to exert agency in how they want to be identified.

### Third Space

Curtis: After I came out and told my parents I'm gay, I decided to try and find a space in the public sphere that I could feel as if I was a valued member, so I said let's go join the gay Caribbean group, or at least find a gay Caribbean group. So I found a group and when I went to their meeting I noticed everyone was Black. I asked if

there are any Indo-Caribbean people that come here, and they said they show up and then they kind of disappear. So, I asked myself "I wonder why is that?" Then I realized that the reason was because the culture is very Afro-Caribbean, the people are very Afro-Caribbean specific, so an Indo-Caribbean person showing up there wouldn't necessarily feel as accepted as everybody else.

So now I decide to look up the Indian gay group. I found them, and went. Everyone there was *Indian Indian* like from India or Pakistan. They all speak a different language. You have no idea what they are talking about because you just don't understand and they seem to have to no desire to talk to me because to them I wasn't a real Indian. So...I realized that I didn't really fit into the Indian gay group, and didn't completely fit into the Caribbean gay group, so I wondered if there was an Indo-Caribbean or Indo-Trinidadian gay group. NO there was not. Where do I go now? How do I find a space that I can feel acceptance for who I am and what my identity is? There was no space that fit me, and who I am. I then realized that I would have to create that space on my own and allow others like me to come in and feel accepted.

In the above quote, Curtis demonstrates how not having a space that reflected how he self-identified was difficult. He chose to explore Caribbean and Indian spaces, but none of these spaces were encompassing of his self-identification, and in retrospect made him feel like an outsider. Scholars have noted that for youth having a space and a group to belong to is important. It solidifies their identity and allows them to create a sense of belonging within the school environment (Yon, 2000). This space is what scholars refer to as a third space.

Indo-Trinidadians, as already mentioned, have a hybrid identity: Indian and Trinidadian. According to Bhabha "it is the indeterminate spaces in-between subject-positions that are lauded as the locale of the disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices" (Meredith, 1998; p.2). Therefore, Bhabha positions hybridity as an in-between space/space in-between, where the translation and negotiation of identity occurs (Rutherford, 1990), and which amount to the term *third space* e.g. "the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a *productive*, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new *possibility*; a space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorizations of culture and

identity; it is interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” (Bhabha, 1994a, p.20). For “this hybrid third space is an *ambivalent* site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity’” (p.35)

This theory of the third space describes a process by which people like Indo-Trinidadians can create a space that encompasses who they are and who they want to be seen as. This is demonstrated by Kino and Nadia, who say:

Nadia: I sort of had to create my own sense of space, because I didn’t belong with the Asians, I didn’t belong with the South Asians, or the Caucasians. In the sense, I had friends but it really wasn’t the same, I couldn’t identify with them. I could say that we do this the same way, nothing was similar, we spoke a different language and it was more so when they had their festivities... I didn’t...they were always sort of different.

Kino: It’s interesting you ask about creating my own space because looking back it’s something I definitely did. You had different groups in the school, the West Indian, Indians, Whites, Chinese, the Blacks who don’t associate with the Caribbean and well there was nothing for me. I didn’t fit into any one group, I could lime with the Caribbean boys and Indian kids, but I could also fit in well with other groups if I tried hard enough. But none of them really understood me and how I was brought up... in terms of culture I had Caribbean space to go to, but no one understood me in terms of *my* culture and background.

For Kino, he was able to float between various ethno-racial groups, but never felt a real sense of belonging. Therefore, his next step in gaining agency for his identities was challenging the status quo and creating his own space, which was ethno-specific to his identity. Similar to Kino, Darrien too floated between spaces. He states:

Darrien: I floated in between different space. For me whatever sport I was playing at the time I hung out where the majority was. When I played [basket] ball, well I was with the Afro-Caribbean group. When I played soccer I was with the European group...and when cricket was playing I just hang with the Indian kids. There was no really sense of belonging in terms of space in the school. Looking back, it was a lot of work.

Darrien’s explanation of floating between groups based on sporting activities reminds me a lot of my own high school experience. I floated among different groups, based on school

activities, band, student council, soccer etcetera. I always thought of it as a skill, the ability to interact with different people, from different cultures, with different interests. And although this may hold true, having the knowledge I do today, I can say this “floating” was a result of not really having a space of my own, a space where I felt really accepted for who I was. My identity was always in negotiation in accordance to the space I was in.

Overall, the respondents all speak of having a space to go to, but never really belonging in the space; knowing that within that space there exists differences. Their hybrid identity gives potential to their knowledge of “transculturation” and their ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion (Taylor, 1991,) which is clearly demonstrated in their attempt to be part of and negotiate their identity with different spaces. Like Darrien stated, the sport of the season determined where he fit in the most because there was not a singular group in which he could feel comfortable in.

Bhabha, however, states that this difference cannot be fixed within a universal framework and notes that different cultures, different cultural practices and the difference in the construction of cultures should not be unified (in Rutherford, 1990). In fact, Bhabha says that trying to fit multiple cultures in a unified manner, (pretending that they can exist as one) is counterproductive in the pursuit for self-identification and recognition. To assume that at some level all forms of cultural diversity can be understood through a universal concept such as race, class or both, is limiting the ways in which cultural identity needs to be understood (Rutherford, 1990). From the respondents interviewed, seven out of eight expressed this same view as Bhabha, and talked about how creating their space was necessary for them. They did not want to assimilate into a

group and adopt the norm, but rather wished to celebrate their differences and what they had to offer.

**Kino:** I grew up a certain way and knew that I couldn't always conform to others. I mean, I have my own mind, my own beliefs and like we talked about a sense of identity. Now, when I entered school there were other Indian people from the Caribbean, mostly from Guyana and no one tried to create a space. They all were either with the Indians and you can tell the real Indian and some with the Afro-Caribbean and others fitting in here and there. I started to create my own space, acted and talked the way I wanted to, and you wouldn't believe this, but some of the Indian-Caribbean people who never spoke to me before, was now talking to me and hanging out with me. It goes to show that there was a need for this space, but no one wanted to create it.

When Kino made that last statement about no one wanting to create a space, I went on to ask why he thinks that happens. Why did the other Indo-Caribbean students who were in other spaces, and seemed to be fitting in okay, never try to create their own space? He went on to say:

**Kino:** Out of fear...people don't want to challenge what is normal especially somewhere in school. Being different is not seen as empowering or liberating in no means...well at least when I was in school. Yuh main goal was to fit into somewhere that you could chill. But then when they (Indo-Caribbean students) see someone else trying to do something, then it's become a domino effect and everyone picks up...you know.

Curtis also talks about creating his own space, but unlike Kino, he had others that started the creation of an Indo-Trinidadian/Indo-Caribbean space. He stated:

**Curtis:** In school, because I had family in attendance, creating our own space was not as Difficult [as] if someone was the only person in their school. For me and my family we get together every chance we get, when we're in the school and in the public. When you are in a space with the teacher alone, you still have to negotiate your identity. When you're with the students and doing group work in the classroom you're still negotiating that identity. But at least we had an outlet to go to, an outlet that we created so we can feel like we have a space of our own in the school.

I found Curtis' statement about having the support of his family interesting. I look back and try to envision myself going to school with members of my family and I can honestly say with their support I would have felt fearless when creating a space of my own! This fearless...

behaviour would be a result of having others who identified just like me, and not being alone when challenging the status quo, which Kino pointed out earlier as the reason he thinks many choose not to create a space and rather fit in where they best can. I went on to ask Curtis, if we lived in a perfect world and there was already a space for everyone, regardless of how they self-identified, how did he think it would impact the student? He went on to say:

**Curtis:** If those spaces were already available for me when I came from Trinidad I think it would give students a sense of who they are, build their self-esteem and what they are worth based on who they are and what they feel they are. Off the bat I would find my space, not to say I would not interact with others, because I would, but I would be more comfortable, probably be more confident in my speech, my work and in making friends. I am sure it is a huge reason why there are all those clubs in high school and stuff for people to join. However, in my high school there was no Indo-Trinidadian or even Indo-Caribbean club.

Overall, a hybrid identity is positioned within this third space, as a “lubricant” in the conjunction of cultures (Papastergiadis, 1997). For these Indo-Trinidadian youth, they have created a space that provides them with a sense of belonging. Bhabha (1996) explains that there becomes a point in which one’s hybrid identity opens up to the fostering of a third space and the negotiation of identity and its meaning. In other words, national culture can never be holistic and pure because its meaning is open to ambivalence and open to interpretations by the audience. Thus Bhabha’s body of work speaks to the process of creating culture from the perspective of the in-between spaces.

### Language

Language was another factor seen by the respondents as a struggle/issue after migration. Language plays a critical role in cultural identity, as mentioned in previous chapters. It constitutes one of the single most characteristic feature of separate ethnic identity (Premdas, 1995; De Vos and Romaucchi-Ross, 1975). Trinidad is an English-speaking country, and although there is a large Indo-Caribbean population, many do not speak, write or understand any

“Indian” dialect (Premdas, 1995). The use of Hindi, Urdu, and Bhojpuri are confined mainly to the realm of entertainment and religious practices (Premdas, 1995). However, due to racial categorization, Indo-Trinidadian youth are most often seen as “Indian” in Canada and therefore are assumed to be English Language Learners (ELL), (formerly referred to as English as a Second Language [ESL]). Hernandez-Ramdwar (2006) notes that in the school system some accents are preferred over others; Caribbean accents are frowned upon by the school system and therefore students are labelled ELL/ESL and placed in special classes. This action of being labelled and placed in specific language classes was not unfamiliar to the respondents:

**Candice:** When I first came to Canada I had to take ESL classes. Identity and identification wasn't in my head then but now that I look back on it I definitely knew I was not Indian. The teachers however assumed me to be an ESL student, I'm sure because of the way I look. Because a lot of the other kids were Indian from India... and maybe because I was shy, but I was a strong English student...in fact, I think my English was better than some of the kids in the school because in Trinidad we learn British English which is more formal and proper than Canadian English.

Candice explains that her teachers placed her in an ESL class strictly based on appearance although she could speak English. Similar to her situation, Curtis explains his experience and says:

**Curtis:** When I came here from Trinidad I was placed in ESL. I knew I was speaking English and became confused when I was told I would have to take ESL. Like, when I went to my classes I was with a lot of Indian kids but they would be speaking another language. They really did have difficulty with English whereas I didn't. I may have had a thick accent, but my English was proper.

Cheng (2004) explains that language is manifested in the manner in which a person articulates his or her words and chooses or mixes particular words for expressing ideas and the construction of their realities through the organization of sentences. Although most of the literature that is available on identity and language and their relation to each other focuses on

individuals who speak more than one dialect, one can infer that even though most Indo-Trinidadians do not speak another language such as Hindi, the way in which they communicate with each other is an important aspect of their cultural identity, one that develops according to the particular needs of the people who live in a certain location at a certain period of time, who share a way of life and culture (Dunbar, Skutnabb-Kangas & Ole-Henrik, 1998). Author Bronwen Roberts (2008) writes that language can help with solidifying an identity and even overcome an identity crisis. As a South African woman, she shares how when speaking her language among people, if there was another individual from South Africa they would inevitably gravitate towards her and want to bond (Roberts, 2008). Many of the respondents shared in this idea as well:

Darrien: You know what a person from Trinidad sounds like, the accent, the words, the pitch etc... I could hear them from a mile away, and when I do I am interested to know who they are, which part of Trinidad they from...But I don't only do it with people from Trinidad. If I hear a man talking and can't tell if he from Trinidad or somewhere else in the Caribbean, I still feel somewhat of a bond with that person...a sense of comfort almost.

Daniel: As a cop I interact with people every day, and when I hear a person from Trinidad speak there is automatically a sense of sameness and commonness between us. When they hear me speak they too gravitate towards me and although we speak English, in our own dialect and way of communication we are able to talk, I am able to understand clearly issues or just reason with them.

In Darrien's and Daniel's statement, I can tell that they both feel a bond between others who speak and sound like them and can understand the language (including slang) they speak. I too can attest to this because when I hear someone with a Trini accent, I automatically want to know where they are from and feel a sense of connection and commonness.

I went on to ask respondents about school. As shown in previous chapters, these youth were not acknowledged by their peers for the way they chose to self-identify which led to a lack

of belonging. In the previous quotes, language was mentioned frequently, and although they (Indo-Trinidadian youth) looked South Asian and the South Asian kids accepted them, they always felt that there was a difference which was always verified through language.

**Priya:** If it's one thing that always reminded me and others that I was not *Indian Indian* was the fact that I could not speak a word of Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu anything of that stuff. It was how I always remembered I may fit in but I definitely do not belong. I would be able to sing Indian songs from the movies but could only do so with the music. It was unnatural for me.

For Priya, language was not only a point of difference between her and her *Indian Indian* friends, but it also acted as a reminder that she was not one of them, nor would she ever be one of them. Kimberlin too explains how language served as a reminder that she was not exactly like her South Asian friends and there was definitely a sense of Caribbean culture. She says:

**Kimberlin:** I remember one time a Jamaican boy was making a joke and he had a real thick accent, so thick I don't think most people could understand what he was saying. However, I did and I was sitting on the stairs facing the benches in which the Black Caribbean kids occupied and he was saying this joke. I started to burst out laughing because I understood what he was saying and could relate to the story, but my Indian friends just looked at me and each other in a confused way. This always served as a point of difference between me and my South Asian friends. This is when I felt a strong acceptance by the Caribbean kids.

Similar to Kimberlin's experience Darrien states:

**Darrien:** I could always joke around with the Afro-Caribbean kids because of the way we talked and spoke to each other. In this sense, I would fit in with them...we had the same language the same accent, the tone the pitch all of that was the same. I never felt like I was trying to be something I was not when I was talking to them...everything was good.

For the respondents language was yet another factor that displayed to them that they were different and that the way in which the host society perceived them was not a reflection of who they were. As Darrien explained, through the use of language he was able to find a space to channel his Trinidadian culture. Kino and Nadia shared similar experiences:

**Kino:** With the Afro-Caribbean students, I visually wouldn't fit in. But when we would

make we joke and with the guys some bad jokes, it didn't matter that we looked different [Indian and Black], all that you would see is the Caribbean kids laughing. Just like when the Indian and Chinese kids make a comment in their own language and I wouldn't know what they are saying but see them share in something similar, it was the same with the Caribbean students.

Nadia: I loved talking and chilling with the Black [Caribbean] kids. We use to joke around all the time and share in our own language. I know that sounds strange because its English, but there are some words that are not English but can't be translated in English.

When Nadia said this, I was interested in knowing what she was speaking of. I went on to ask her to provide examples:

Nadia: I mean I would say oh gosh she obzukie, and to us we know what obzukie means, but for other people they would wonder what does that mean or what language we are speaking? I would translate and say, well it means she look not put together. It was funny to me to have to do that.

Nadia's and Kino's examples illustrate how language contributes to a sense of shared identity and commonality between them and the Afro-Caribbean students. Also, we again see that the identities of Indo-Trinidadians are constantly in-flux and being renegotiated. As stated in the work of Hernandez-Ramdwar (2006), the verbal skills of Trinidadians can most definitely be seen as a marker of identity among second generation youth (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006). Yon also display this notion with his work on Caribbean youth in school stating that the dialect between students from the Caribbean serves as a functional language for the immigrant children who are more accustomed to speaking it than Standard English and that it also provides a sense of security and identity as well as a way of excluding teachers and students from other cultures and language groups (Yon, in Henry 1994; Solomon 1986). Therefore, language is a factor that fosters identity and is a definite contender in identity formation.

### ***Code Switching***

By now, there are many factors that explain and exhibit the ways in which Indo-Trinidadian youth negotiate their identities. However, with respect to language, there was one theme that really stood out and epitomizes the way in which they negotiate their identity. This theme was code switching. Code switching, as described by Poplack (2004) "is the mixing, which variously include borrowing on the lexical and syntactic levels, language transfer, linguistic convergence, interference, language attrition, language death, pidginization and creolization, among others of two languages" (Poplack, 2004). In other more simple terms it basically means switching back and forth between two or more languages in the course of a conversation. It also refers to the ability to switch dialects quickly from one conversation to the next depending on who one is speaking to and the audience.

The respondents all spoke of this notion of code switching. Priya says:

**Priya:** When I with my white or non Trinidadian friends I would speak differently but as soon as I was around my sisters or my parents, family, my accent came out. It was to a point where my friends would love to hear me speak at home. I didn't notice I was doing it until they mentioned it to me. They would say "can you speak like that with me"?...I would try but it was hard to adapt that language around them. It felt like a switch that was turned on and off psychologically. It is only until I got older my accent or slang around my friends would come out more. I don't know if it was being I was more comfortable about my identity but I knew I was comfortable in speaking that way.

**Nadia:** In Grade 6 I had a birthday party and this was the first time I had people over from school to my home. My mom and dad would talk to my friends and they would look at me for a translation. When I talked to my parents they would ask me what I said...I even had one girl ask me to teach her how to speak the way I do. I didn't realize that I had the ability to do that.

Priya and Nadia both were unaware of their ability to code switch until it was pointed out to them by their friends. Subconsciously, they are able to engage in two dialects at the same time. Demonstrating that although Trinidadian youth do not have two formal dialects, the ability to engage in Trinidadian language is more than just an accent, it is the ability to invent words and

phrases (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006), which helps create a marker of identity. To not only be able to understand a certain dialect, but be part of it lends solidarity to identity and identity formation (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006).

**Priya:** Sometimes I felt I had to change my language because of slang or words we Trinidadians use. When I am with my non-West Indian friends, I would make sure that they knew about my culture and they were aware of where I was from so it was easy to be myself around them. The only barrier we had was language; I had to speak “white” with them and not “Trini” because they never understood me. This was difficult because I felt I was constantly trying to be someone I’m not. Also, during presentations or sometimes out with friends/interviews, it was necessary for me to speak more Canadian so that people would understand what I was saying or be more open to hiring me because I can speak similarly and communicate better with Canadian society.

**Kimberlin:** I speak different when I am with other people from the Caribbean. In some way I feel free to speak any way I want, say words like “flim” instead of “film”, something I struggled with. I can have an accent and people would understand my slang. There is no thought about what and how to say things for example....doing the “dishes” we would say “wares”, or instead of “braid my hair”, we say “plait my hair”...I can use that slang and be comfortable about it.

I went on to ask Kimberlin if this made her feel comfortable in one space over another and asked her how she moved between the two. She responded:

**Kimberlin:** I felt a lot more comfortable with the Black Caribbean students in this sense because they understood what I was trying to say. With my Indian friends I was left out when they spoke their own language. I did not understand and in all honesty I didn’t really care to know what they were saying. With my non-Indian [White, Chinese, African] friends, I really had to put on a proper accent. Making sure I pronounced all the words a certain way because I would feel ashamed if I said tree instead of three in front of them... I don’t think I would say I floated, but like you have talked about throughout this interview, it’s a negotiation process. When I move from one space to another I have to switch up the way I speak in order to fit in, but with other Afro-Caribbean students I didn’t. I spoke how I would speak at home and that made me feel a strong connection to them.

Kimberlin’s response reveals that not only do Indo-Trinidadians move between spaces, that their identity is constantly being renegotiated, but also that language for Indo-Trinidadian

youth is an important marker of identity and allows them to find and secure an outlet in the school environment.

### Conclusion

Through past experiences, these Indo-Trinidadian youth were able to describe the issues they faced in school after migrating from Trinidad. Although all the interviews were done separately, there emerge many similarities among their stories of struggle and their efforts to overcome the issues and find agency for who they are. These similarities include the need for a sense of belonging in the school environment, the lack of recognition for their language capabilities, and the creation of a space that is all-encompassing of the complex and multifaceted identity of Indo-Trinidadian youth.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In this research paper I have attempted to bring forth several identity issues that Indo-Trinidadian youth face in school after migration from Trinidad. After listening to the respondents' experiences alongside some of my own I am able to support what many scholars have already concluded: identities are never fixed and always being re-negotiated in time, space and place (Hall, 2000; Handa, 2002, Premdas, 2004; Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006; Clay, 2005).

Indo-Trinidadian hybrid identities make it difficult for these youth to find a space in the school environment that is really reflective of who they are. They often have to reinvent and constantly renegotiate their identity in their efforts to feel welcomed and involved. They are classified racially as South Asian and their phenotypical features make it difficult for the host society to see them as anything but South Asian. But, their cultural Caribbean identity is a strong marker of identity to them and they feel the need to be sure it is acknowledged. Their view on their "mixed" identity is something that they do not want to suppress but make sure others acknowledge. Therefore, they have taken various steps, as outlined in the previous chapter, in assuring that they secure a sense of agency and acceptance for who they are.

Indo-Trinidadian youth have created a hyphenated identity that enables others to acknowledge them for who they are and how they want to be seen. Their self-proclaimed Indo-Trinidadian identity represents to others that these individuals are Indian but from Trinidad. This creation of a hyphenated identity gives them a great deal of flexibility in demonstrating their multiple identities. Like Cheng (2004) displays in her poem *Struggling to be heard*, a hyphenated identity may have a lot of baggage and meaning within it, but it at least gives the person holding the title the opportunity to make it into something that they want – something that encompasses who they are and how they self-identify.

These youth also spoke about creating a space of their own; a space in which they feel is all encompassing of their hybrid identity. This creation of space is referred to as a third space and came about as a result of a lack of belonging, but also acts as a tool to combat the feeling of alienation and find a real sense of agency and acceptance among their peers. According to McLeod (2000) if you are living between two cultures and it is difficult to identify fully with either, then a constructed or negotiated third space comes in useful. For the Indo-Trinidadian youths interviewed here the creation of the third space gives new *routes* for themselves as an alternative to finding their *roots* in a particular community identity (McLeod, 2000). It is a margin which resists the centre, and yet in this process of decentring it is itself transformed into something new (Ingleby, 2010).

Lastly, the participants spoke about language and how it always acted as a reminder that they do not fit in with the group that the host society most often associated them with (in this case South Asian). They spoke about how language was a very important part of their cultural identity. They explained how they felt comfortable with the Afro-Caribbean students because of the use of their language and how they shared in a dialect that to others seemed foreign but to them was comforting. They also explained how at first they were unknowingly code-switching, but then used it as a tool to help negotiate their identity in different spaces.

Overall, there are many issues that Indo-Trinidadian youth face in the school system after migration. Through self-advocacy and a strong identity that would not take second place, they were able to overcome many of these issues.

### Limitations

Given that this MRP is exploratory in nature, there are two limitations that need to be highlighted. First, this research paper uses a relatively small sample size. For this reason, these

findings cannot be generalized to the broader community based on this study alone. Also, the respondents sampled did not all attend the same school board, so the findings cannot be specific to any one school district.

Secondly, as mentioned throughout this paper, there is a lack of data specific to the identity formation among Indo-Trinidadian youth. Therefore data on other groups such as Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean was consulted and inferences were made to assist in the analysis. There are however specific differences and nuances between these two groups that could not be teased out by only referencing literature on the Afro-Caribbean community, which leads to our next subsection.

#### Areas of further study

This MRP is a relatively small research paper that only scratches the surface on identity issues among Indo-Trinidadian youth. Some potential areas of further study include examining how big a role do factors such as religion, food, music, family, friends, social networks and education play in the self-proclaimed Indo-Trinidadian identity. Other areas may examine what school boards can do to make sure newly arrived immigrants (in this case, Indo-Trinidadians) feel comfortable in their new environment. Also, as mentioned in the previous sections, more literature and research specifically on Indo-Trinidadian youth would be helpful in making concrete examples of identity issues among the group. Another area that can be furthered studied is how Indo-Trinidadian youth negotiate their identity post grade-school. Lastly, since this research paper focuses on the identity issues surrounding second generation Indo-Trinidadian youth, it may be beneficial to understand issues facing first generation Indo-Trinidadian immigrants because it can assist in understanding the experiences of other cohorts of immigrants.

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## Appendix A: Consent Agreement

### **Ryerson University Consent Agreement**

#### **Indo-Trinidadian Youth and their negotiation of identity**

**Overview:** You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:** The Principal Investigator of this study is Ms. Tania Sirju. She is a graduate student at Ryerson University in the Master's program on Immigration and Settlement Studies. Her research is being supervised by Dr. Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department at Ryerson University.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences that Indo-Trinidadian youth who immigrated to Canada between the ages of 10 and 18 have when trying to negotiate their identity. The research will review published articles as well as other documents and data, but also wants to include personal narratives and experiences of Indo-Trinidadian youth who have experienced a struggle in identity. It is hoped that this project will bring attention to the difficulty in identity creation that Indo-Trinidadian youth face after migration.

**Description of the Study:** You are being asked to participate in an interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes at a location convenient to you. The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate transcription, although if you prefer the tape will be turned off at any point. If that is the case, the interviewer will directly transcribe what you have to say. Tapes will be retained until the end of July 2011 or until transcription is complete and verified, whichever comes first. Transcriptions will be securely retained by the Principal Investigator for a period of 18 months and then destroyed. Beyond indicating that you are a youth who migrated here from Trinidad between the ages of 10 and 18 years and that you self identify as an Indo-Trinidadian, no other personally identifying information about you will be included in the transcription. The interview will ask questions about your experiences after leaving Trinidad and settling in Canada. It will mostly focus on issues around identity and your experiences trying to create your identity.

**Risks or Discomforts:** There is minimal risk or discomfort associated with this study. If you are not accustomed to being interviewed the process might make you a bit nervous, but the purpose is to learn from what you have to say about this issue so every attempt will be made to reduce any sources of anxiety. If you become anxious at anytime during the process you can stop the interview and withdraw your participation with no consequences. You may choose to not answer any question(s) for any reason and ask for the audio recorder to be turned off if you wish.

**Benefits of the Study:** The areas of potential benefits of the study are the ability to share and talk about your experiences after immigrating and help others understand or become aware of the struggle in identity construction that Indo-Trinidadian youth experience after migrating. Another

potential benefit is that this research can act as a springboard to further research that draws attentions to the importance of this issue.

There is no guarantee, however, that you will receive any of these benefits from participating in this study, however they are possible.

**Confidentiality:** As noted above, you will not be personally identified. Any identifying information on the tape will be removed when transcription occurs. The tapes themselves will be destroyed no later than the end of July 2011 after transcriptions have been completed and verified. Transcripts will be securely retained by the Principal Investigator for up to 18 months to allow analysis and review. Transcription of the tapes will be done by the Principal Investigator and their supervisor. No one else will have access to the audiotapes.

**Incentives to Participate:** There are no incentives to participate. You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:** There are no costs to participate and you will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research you may contact the Principal Investigator:

Tania Sirju  
or by email at [tania.sirju@ryerson.ca](mailto:tania.sirju@ryerson.ca)

You may also contact the research supervisor:

Dr. Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar at 416-979-5000 ext 4193  
or by email at [chernand@soc.ryerson.ca](mailto:chernand@soc.ryerson.ca)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study you may contact the Ryerson Research Ethics Board:

c/o the Office of Research Services at Ryerson University,  
350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON  
M5B 2K3

**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you consent to the audio recording of yourself.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Part A: Preliminary Question**

Before we start, I am going to ask you some preliminary questions.

1. Where were you born?
2. Where were your parents born?
3. How old are you?
4. How old were you when you arrived to Canada?
5. What Grade did you enter when you arrived in Canada?
6. Do you self-identify as an Indo-Trinidadian?

#### **Part B: Open-Ended Questions:**

1. Why do you choose to self-identify as an Indo-Trinidadian?
  - What are some of the factors that foster this identification? (family, religion, music, festivals, friends, communication)
2. I would like you to tell me about your experience (s) trying to fit into school after you migrated from Trinidad?
  - Talk about where you felt a strong sense of belonging.
  - Give me an example of a time you had to negotiate your identity? What were some of the difficulties? How did you feel?
3. When was the first time you realized that others did not view you the way you chose to self-identify?
  - How did this make you feel?
  - How did you address the issue?
4. Does space and place matter? Why or why not?
  - Do your surroundings affect how you self identify?
5. Any final thoughts on your negotiation of identity?

③ 02-01-12