Using Phenomenology to Understand Experiences of Racism for Second-Generation South Asian Women

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to describe the lived experiences of racism for second-generation Canadian women of South Asian descent and how this affected their identity. Six adult co-researchers shared their experiences of what occurred when faced with racism. A phenomenological approach was employed, out of which five categories emerged. Findings indicated that the acculturative process in negotiating experiences of racism resulted in these women having a multifaceted, complex identity. These findings offer new understandings of how coping responses served to assist the women in this study. This study contributes to counsellor awareness and knowledge when working with ethnic groups.

RÉSUMÉ

La présente enquête a pour but de décrire les expériences de racisme vécues par des canadiennes de deuxième génération dont les parents sont nés en Asie du Sud et la façon dont cela a affecté leur identité. Six femmes adultes, toutes dans le domaine de la recherche, ont partagé leurs expériences face au racisme. Une approche phénoménologique fut employée, d'où émergèrent cinq catégories. Les résultats indiquent que le processus d'acculturation dans la négociation de ces expériences de racisme a amené ces femmes à développer une identité complexe et à facettes multiples. Ces résultats apportent une nouvelle compréhension sur la manière dont ces femmes font face à ces situations. Cette étude contribue à la sensibilisation et aux connaissances du conseiller lorsqu'il travaille avec des groupes ethniques.

People of South Asian origin are among the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2005), India has been the second highest source country of immigrants for seven years in a row. Among these immigrants are families with young children between 0 and 14 years of age, who represent the second largest age range to immigrate. Despite the growing numbers of this group, research is limited in its attention to the adjustment to Canadian culture of first- and second-generation Canadians of South Asian descent (Ghosh, 1994; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). According to Zhou (1997), a gap exists in the knowledge of how second-generation immigrants have negotiated their identity, especially in the face of racial discrimination. They may feel Canadian, but nonetheless experience racism and prejudice that situate them as outsiders.

Movement across cultures can be a traumatic experience involving a complex process of geographical, cultural, linguistic, social, and psychological changes (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001; Aronowitz, 1984). According to Lay and Nguyen

(1998), acculturation-specific challenges include perceptions of prejudice and discrimination, difficulties communicating in a new language, problems with family members, and conflict with other members of the cultural group. Aujla (2000) states that although there are no overt pressures of assimilation and "official Canadian multiculturalism may promote acceptance of diversity, the lived experience of multiculturalism is quite a different thing" (p. 48). The pressures to assimilate and "belong" can result in denying aspects of one's own culture, feeling inferior, and internalizing the dominant ideology.

Existing studies often represent the South Asian population as a homogeneous whole, ignoring the diversity of regional language, religious, educational, and immigration histories that define this community (Das & Kemp, 1997; Ghosh, 1984, 1994; Justin, 2003). In addition, the experience of South Asian women is often contained under those of males, the family, or the larger ethnic group, rather than being represented as a distinct experience. South Asian women's concept of self can be threatened by other cultures' perceptions of their ethnicity and race, as well as by their own experience of negotiating culture (Ghosh, 1994). Because threatening attitudes, beliefs, and stereotyping can impinge upon these women detrimentally, it becomes imperative for them to adjust psychologically (Kwan, 2001).

The psychological impact of racial discrimination is increasingly being considered in the counselling literature (Bhui, 2002; Sanders Thompson, 1996). Traditionally, racism has been discussed from a sociological perspective, and the group impact has received the most attention. A critical aspect of racism, however, involves the individual's response and reaction. Goldberg and Hodes (1992) note that many ethnic minorities experience racism but also add that existing research fails to provide descriptions of this specific experience on minorities. Research would suggest that counsellors must recognize the complexity of the impact of experiencing racism (Goldberg & Hodes).

The primary purpose of this research is to paint a rich picture of participants' experiences with racism and how it has affected their perceptions of self and the world they live in. This is the overarching research question: *What is the lived experience of racism for South Asian women and how has this affected their perceptions of self?* The research discovered themes common to the participants regarding the challenges they faced as a result of experiencing racism. Ethnic identity models assisted in describing the lived experiences of ethnic minority individuals as they moved through differing forms of self-awareness in relation to ethnic identification (Phinney, 1990; Sue & Sue, 1999, 2003). Findings indicated that the acculturative process in negotiating experiences of racism with the dominant society resulted in these women having a multifaceted complex identity. Despite the women's assertions that they are both South Asian and Canadian, the study reflected their struggles with integration. However, being faced with racism throughout their lives has not resulted in long-term negative psychological outcomes, assimilation, or retreat from contact with the majority culture. Understanding the experience of racism and the development of identity is critical to facilitating a more informed and supportive counselling relationship for this community of women.

BRIEF BACKGROUND: ACCULTURATION AND EFFECTS OF RACISM ON WELL-BEING

Acculturation

Many individuals making up this country's ethnic mosaic have had ancestral or personal experiences with oppression in their native homelands (Esses & Gardner, 1996). Those of African, Hispanic, Native American, and East and South Asian heritage have experienced historical and contemporary narratives of military conquest, displacement, and economic exploitation (Kalbach & Kalbach, 1995). In particular, South Asian immigrants in Canada suffered from discriminatory immigration laws at the turn of the century and socially sanctioned barriers to education and employment opportunities (Basran, 1993; Ghosh, 1994; Ramcharan, 1982). While Canadians take pride in their presumed tolerance of diversity and absence of prejudice toward ethnic minorities, new forms of stereotypes and racist practices have emerged (Esses & Gardner). Current patterns of ethnocentrism, competition, and differential power continue to place these ethnic groups in minority positions within this society.

Research suggests that stress and various psychological issues may stem from an acculturation process (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001; Aycan & Kanungo, 1998; Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999; Smart & Smart, 1995). Acculturation itself has been defined as a form of culture change that occurs when individuals of two divergent cultural groups experience ongoing and direct contact with one another (Berry, 1990).

Sue and Sue (1990) developed the Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model, a stage model that describes the movement of individuals as they react to oppression in the dominant society and struggle in their ethnic identity formation. Oppressed people experience five stages of development in understanding themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures. At each stage, beliefs and attitudes are an integral part of the minority person's identity (Sue, Mak, & Sue, 1998).

Recent conceptualizations of the acculturative process refer to it as a bi-directional and multifaceted process; varying degrees of change in values, behaviours, and interaction patterns are said to occur as a result of cross-cultural contact (Berry, 1997; Ho, 1995). A bi-directional process considers that acculturation occurs when the culture of origin and the mainstream culture are seen as relatively independent of each other. Thus, individuals may adopt many of the values and behaviours of the mainstream culture without giving up facets of self-identity developed in their culture of origin (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

Importantly, acculturation is not always a negative process. Acculturative stress may be a positive and creative force with the ability to enhance and stimulate an individual's long-term acculturation (Pedersen, 1995). Birman (1998) states that, overall, biculturalism has the ability to increase a general sense of self-worth and competence, since the ability to negotiate two cultures results in successful adaptation. This research utilized the ethnic identity model, Berry's (1990) acculturation model, and the concept of biculturalism to understand these women's experience

of racism. Each model offered a different perspective on the experiences of the participants and enriched the understanding of their identity development.

Effects of Racism on Well-Being

Research is now considering the effect of racial discrimination on minorities with regard to psychological distress, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, and Rummens (1999) state that studies of racial discrimination and hate crimes describe psychological consequences of feeling worthless, helpless, powerless, looked down upon, and fearful. Dion, Dion, and Pak (1992) found links between ethnic discrimination and higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, hostility, and interpersonal sensitivity in Canadian immigrants. Noh et al. argue that Southeast Asian refugees who have experienced racial discrimination, sometimes on a daily basis, have higher levels of depression and anxiety than those who have not experienced racism. On the basis of a survey of 5,000 adolescents in Florida and California, Rumbaut (1994) reported a positive relationship between levels of depressive symptoms and reports of discrimination experienced by immigrant youth. The weight of this evidence substantiates reports of the subjective impact of a stressful life event such as racial discrimination and confirms discrimination as a significant stressor that can jeopardize the physical and mental health of ethnic minority group members.

Although racial discrimination has been identified as an important stressor, few studies have systematically explored the way in which victims cope (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Kuo, 1995). Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, and Cancelli (2000) found that African American women preferred avoidance coping. For African Americans in general, seeking social support by telling others of an incident reduced stress, while life satisfaction and self-esteem were best predicted by avoidance coping. Southeast Asian refugees reacted with forebearance rather than confrontation when faced with racism (Hou, Kaspar, & Rummens, 2001). The more invested the refugees were in their cultural heritage, the more likely they were to experience ethnoracially-based discrimination (Hou et al.). The paucity of information on the incidence of racial discrimination reported by individual victims hinders the understanding of the magnitude of discriminatory episodes (Kuo), the impact of racism on the development of identity, and coping strategies used when confronted with racism.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Methodology

Phenomenological research follows a human science approach, which emphasizes "discovery, description, and meaning" (Osborne, 1994, p. 168). This method of research, selected for this study, searches for a deeper understanding and insightful descriptions of everyday experiences. Phenomenology focuses on the use of in-depth interviews and retrospective reflection of the experience. It is interested in the primacy of lived experience and invites participants to share their

own experiences and respond in their own ways (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1990). This approach allowed the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of what a South Asian woman understands of herself when she experiences racism while negotiating a place within Canadian culture, what were the positive and negative outcomes of her experiences, and what coping strategies she utilized.

Participants

The term "participants" represented a voluntary condition in which subjects participated and each person was seen as an equal partner in the endeavour. The adequate elucidation of the phenomenon of interest and themes determined the number of participants, and ultimately there were six participants who met the following criteria: (a) they are between the ages of 20 and 40 years; (b) they were either born in Canada or immigrated by the age of eight, hence their formative years and socialization have been based in North American Society (Justin, 2003, 2005; Portes, 1997); (c) they consider themselves to be South Asian, with a background from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, Guyana, or other countries who trace their origins to the Indian subcontinent; and (d) they are able to speak and understand English language fluently in order to answer interviewer's questions.

A variety of recruitment procedures were employed, including snowball sampling. As the sample size was initially unknown, snowballing allows participants to be recruited and interviewed until redundancy is reached. Researchers in this tradition concede that there may be individuals in the recruited sample for whom a theme is not reflective of their experience of the phenomenon; however, they do require that themes be present in more than one participant's description in order to be included in the final narrative description of the experience of the phenomenon (Klein & Westcott, 1994).

Interview Process

The interview began with an explanation of the purpose of the project, building rapport, gathering demographic information, and having participants choose a pseudonym. Data were collected with the use of the interview protocol, including 15 questions, regarding experiences of racism, reactions to those experiences, coping strategies used, and reflections on discussing experiences of racism (Beharry, 2006). Participants were free to discuss the experiences they felt were relevant. The interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in length. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to the steps outlined by Colaizzi (1978). Each participant's transcription was reviewed several times to gain a general sense of the meaning she attached to her experience. The content led to themes and categories that contained a composite textural description for the groups of participants as a whole. The process was verified with a supervisor in order to enhance the credibility

of the hierarchy that resulted from the analysis. Findings were further validated by sending a copy of the themes, categories, and narratives to each participant by e-mail. Participants confirmed the themes, and minor changes were made based on participants' feedback. Themes supported by at least half the participants' experiences were included in the final list.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Five categories or thematic clusters were identified as (a) Initial Awareness of Identity, (b) Advanced Awareness of Identity, (c) Social Interactions, (d) Support and Coping Mechanisms, and (e) Ethnic/Cultural Identity. These categories represent the overall structure of the experience extrapolated and subsumed 15 themes and sub-themes. This scheme is presented in Table 1. The order in which the themes are presented is not a reflection of the sequence or importance in which the themes emerged.

Table 1
Identified Categories and Themes

Category	Themes
Initial awareness of identity	Experiences of racism during childhood and adolescence Impact of racism on their self-identity
Advanced awareness of identity	Experiences of racism during adulthood Gender and minority constraint

Social interactions	Awareness of exclusion:
	    Labelled as an outsider;
	    Being labelled as exotic;
	    Threat of exclusion
	Within-group discrimination
	Social settings and decisions

Support and coping mechanisms	Individual strategies of coping Family/friend support Community support
Ethnic/cultural identity	Popular culture and media Self-construction

Category 1: Initial Awareness of Identity

This category is reflective of the participants' childhood experiences with a growing awareness of feeling different and excluded in interactions with others. Participants began to gain insight into how "others" viewed and interpreted them, and those insights started, in turn, to influence how they saw themselves as South Asians. Participants described experiences of racism during their childhood and adolescence and interpretations of how they saw themselves in the context of these situations.

> I was probably eight years old and I remember being in a swimming pool with a group of people and my hairbrush broke … And this was a group of friends I was with and they just would not share their brush with me because the perception was that Indians were dirty. (Indira)

These discriminatory encounters with the dominant culture were internalized, creating a standard with which the participants measured themselves. Most participants measured themselves against what they perceived to be the more "desirable" traits in the dominant Caucasian population. Participants described having low self-esteem and a lack of confidence; as well, they felt unattractive when they were younger.

> I think when I was in elementary, junior high, I was more, "Oh, I wish I could be blonde like my friends" and you know. I don't think I was ashamed of my culture but I wasn't proud of it. … "Oh, I hope they like me," and if I was blonde and whatever, and my name was Jill, then they would like me more, you know. (Anu)

The initial awareness of their identity carried with it the dominant emotions of anger and confusion at being interpreted as "different" and excluded from certain contexts. Participants' recollections of these oppressive situations indicated tension between the dominant culture and developing their identity.

Category 2: Advanced Awareness of Identity

In this category, participants began to experience a transition in their South Asian identity as they moved from adolescence to adulthood. While they continued to report events involving racism and discrimination, they also indicated self-agency in developing their own interpretations and choosing their reactions. There was less internalization of responsibility for occurrences and instead a broader recognition of how others' interpretations of their visible status can result in barriers in areas such as employment. An interesting finding was their use of humour as a means of negotiating an uncomfortable experience.

> I was with my boyfriend at the time, who was a Caucasian guy … small-town country wedding. And I remember two-stepping with him and everyone stopped … they stopped with a mouth full to watch because not only had they not seen someone of colour in their city but two-stepping, like oh my god, like what is going on … <laughing>. I kind of go through two emotions, like everyone's watching, so you're a little self-conscious and it's like, well, I hope they enjoy the show. Off we go, and who cares what they think? (Kamala)

The women demonstrated an advanced awareness of the occurrence of racism in both overt and covert ways. The increased confidence that they possessed as adults in being South Asian and Canadian allowed them to not only have a stronger voice but also to choose how they would like to negotiate situations involving racism. The ability to demonstrate self-agency and to utilize skills such as humour and insightful understandings of power and oppression became evident.

Category 3: Social Interactions

In this category, participants talked about experiences of encountering discrimination within social contexts. Participants coped with these culture clashes by spontaneously responding with minimal processing or by carrying out an in-

ternal decision-making process that allowed them more choice in their responses. Determinants of these responses were influenced by their own personal agency, the setting, and who was involved (i.e., dominant member or minority member) in the interaction. While participants stated that they felt Canadian, the question "Where are you from?" was a way of pointing out for them that they were excluded from being seen as Canadian. Indira indicated, "You don't fit the category that someone has already prejudged you on."

> I'm Canadian and people don't accept that. I find it interesting because you ask someone where they're from and they say "Yeah, I'm Canadian," and they don't believe you … I say, "Do you think you're more Canadian than I am?" I grew up here, so I don't feel that people should question that all the time. (Kamala)

In addition, the notion of being called exotic represented further lack of acceptance of their being Canadian.

> The other thing is I love [is] this "You're so exotic looking," I don't know what it means. "Exotic," it's like you are eating lizard meat or something. (Indira)

Participants indicated that having culturally mixed groups of friends at times led to comments that reflected a lack of awareness that they were of a different ethnic origin than their peer group. For these participants, if they appeared to be too South Asian, they might run the risk of rejection by their white peers. Devi commented that she would hear "Well, you're not like them, you're like us," and that would be mainstream. And her friends thought that was a compliment. "Like, 'As long as you don't act like a Sri Lankan, you can hang out with us. But if you go too ethnic on us …'" At the same time, participants felt they were judged as being "too mainstream" by others of the same ethnic background. By not conforming to the various expectations of how to act, appear, or communicate, and by rejecting the injunction to socialize primarily within an ethnic grouping, the participants risked being judged and viewed as "not legitimate" within the South Asian culture, but these participants preferred to position their identity as "being Canadian."

Participants also reported that in social settings in which something discriminatory occurred, the participant were forced to consider whether and how to respond. At times participants reported feeling angry and frustrated in having to confront someone, and at other times participants took a more passive role as a result of an internal decision-making process.

> I have a friend who is dating a guy from Germany, he calls me his little dark angel, and I haven't said anything because I know he means well, but it's just inappropriate, I think, it's completely inappropriate, he calls me black, that's how he would describe me, she's this black girl. How 'bout short? (Kamala)

This third category reflects participants' narratives about oppressive social situations that set into motion a process of deciding how to respond based on a number of factors such as the motivation of the questioner, rejection by those of the dominant culture or from within the South Asian culture, and the ability to assess whether to intervene in a situation by teaching others about racism or in-

forming them about their ethnic heritage. These women were in a constant struggle as they sought acceptance by others as both South Asian and Canadian.

Category 4: Support and Coping Mechanisms

Participants talked about various strategies and means of supporting themselves developed over years and utilized in their current lives. They spoke of individual strategies and how support from family, friends, and the community helped to strengthen their coping as they experienced cognitive dissonance when faced with a racist situation. Their stronger self-concept allowed these women to decide when to take action that would not result in personal harm. While anger was an emotion that still surfaced, these women dealt with anger in more constructive ways. In addition, there was a developed interest, understanding, and tolerance for other cultures including the dominant culture.

> I think my racial identity as I get older gets more strongly formed and [it is] much … easier to say, "My parents are from Sri Lanka, I was born in England, I lived in Holland, now I live in Canada." … I think a citizen of the world type feeling … gives me a greater sense of awareness of what it must feel like to be not from here. (Devi)

The women learned to recognize why some people might harbour prejudiced attitudes and realized that anyone could potentially have such feelings about another group. Coming to these realizations helped to develop tolerance and strategies to educate others.

Support from family and friends, especially parents, was critical in their ability to develop acceptance of their background and culture. Although participants had not always discussed experiences of racism with their parents, it was still from their family that they drew strength in learning to accept their original culture and live in Canadian culture. Anu described her family as a factor that had been a stabilizing influence for her. "I used to tell my mom, 'Well, so and so made fun of me because of this,' and my mom would say, 'Well, you know what, what do you care if they made fun of you? You're happy.'"

Having friends from various ethnic backgrounds appeared to contribute to the participants' ability to exist in multiple ethnic settings, which reinforced their idea of the diversity in "being Canadian." Positive experiences in their ethnocommunity settings helped them to feel less excluded and different from mainstream culture and inculcated an ethnic pride in their culture, which assisted in further integration of their ethnic heritage with Canadian culture. Involvement in the religious community had a strong impact on some of the participants and provided them with history, guidance, and rituals, which created a sense of belonging in their culture of origin and created another element of ethnic pride.

> I really think my religion had a big part to play. The Aga Khan is sort of a special leader of the Ismaili-Muslims. And periodically in our mosque we would hear little speeches by him, and they would always teach us different values. And those are things that I guess I paid attention to and that really made a difference in my life. And because we would go to mosque regularly, it was something that was a big part of my life. And maybe that's where some of it [tolerance] came from. (Sarojnie)

The themes in this category demonstrate how participants learned various ways over the years to support themselves when in the midst of oppressive situations. Emotions of anger and frustration were tempered to allow for a broader range of choice for them, including the desire to inform others about their ethnic heritage so as to improve understanding. For some, deriving support occurred through strong relationships with family and friends from different ethnic groups. As well, they sought knowledge about their ethnic heritage through connections with their ethnocommunity and with religious communities that provided positive experiences and strengthened their ethnic pride.

Category 5: Ethnic/Cultural Identity

In this category, participants talked passionately about being Canadian as opposed to referring to their identity only as members of a "visible/ethnic minority." Some participants felt that the media has served to normalize Indian culture and has contributed to an acceptance of this culture as part of the Canadian identity. They expressed some struggle with the mainstream's understanding of how Canadians adopted Indian practices, but overall they saw it as a positive step toward South Asian culture having a place in Canadian society.

> A lot of things are becoming a lot more mainstream and accepted. It's just infused into the social fabric. So some things you're asking questions about I think are going to be very different for new immigrants coming here. Not that they're not going to go through major obstacles and stuff like that but I sort of think wow, if I was a 12-year-old East Indian girl, what would my reality look like compared to the one I did grow up with, you know. Some things would be easier. (Devi)

In regard to self-construction of their identity and how they wanted others to see them, participants talked of wanting a balance between recognition that they were Canadian and recognition that they had a different ancestry equally important to that of Caucasian Canadians; to be accepted as who they were as South Asians as well as feeling "Canadian." Their comments reflected a higher degree of flexibility in cultural identification. In addition, it reflected their ability to define themselves using multiple social identities.

> If you had asked me that 25 years ago I would have said, "Please see me as white, please see me as white, and average, and just like everybody else." And you know what? I don't want that anymore. I'm not everybody else. I am different from everybody else. I do want to be recognized as Canadian. I do want to be recognized as a member of this society and a legitimate member of this culture and society. But I don't want anybody to deny the fact that I have an ancestry that's important. In other words I don't want them to see me as white because I'm not. But I do want to be seen as Canadian and as much Canadian as anybody else. (Indira)

In this category, participants provided their perspectives on how they observed South Asian culture being constructed in popular culture and media. The constructions that the participants currently had of themselves as South Asian and Canadian reflected not only an acceptance of who they are but also identified the ongoing complexity of negotiating identity in the larger society.

DISCUSSION

Sue and Sue (1999) state that although variables such as perception and attitude of the host society and the experiences of discrimination have a stronger impact on the acculturative experience of first-generation immigrants, second-generation immigrants are not exempt from similar evaluation by the dominant culture. Despite these women's assertions that they felt both South Asian and Canadian, the study reflects their struggles with integration through constant evaluations by the dominant society. Justin (2003) found second-generation South Asian women who identified themselves as being integrated into Canadian society or having a bicultural identity still reported facing issues of oppression. This study confirms that oppression, in the form of racism, continues to be encountered by second-generation South Asian women. Racism occurred in school settings, friendships, work settings, and many of their social interactions with persons of the dominant culture. The study confirms that racism had an effect on self-esteem and self-efficacy for the participant that was more marked in their youth than in their adulthood.

Studies have linked discrimination to psychological consequences such as feelings of being worthless or helpless and high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety (Noh et al., 1999; Rumbaut, 1994), but the women in this study as adults did not report these symptoms as a result of racism and do not present as victims. Findings indicated that the women demonstrated considerable agency in making decisions as to what to tell and what not to tell about themselves in various contexts. This personal agency became stronger as these women transitioned from adolescence to adulthood because they had been able to experiment with various coping responses.

Developing a sense of who they understand themselves to be in the context of racism has required the women to continually revisit questions and issues of identity. Das and Kemp (1997) stated that second-generation immigrants who are socialized in the South Asian culture as well as the larger Canadian culture possess the knowledge, skills awareness, and ability with which to move between these two worlds. The women in this investigation lay claim to belonging to at least two cultures.

On the surface, according to the definition of biculturalism (Berry, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2003), this study confirms that these women's experiences reflected their moving between the dominant culture and their minority culture. Previous studies on bicultural youth (Kazaleh, 1986; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) have indicated that the key to psychological well-being may be developed in becoming adept at moving between two cultural orientations. The bicultural experiences of these women were reflected in their general sense of self-worth and competence, which Birman (1998) states to be critical in successful adaptation.

The women in this study decided which identity to endorse depending on the situation. The fluid exchange between cultures can allow for a multicultural climate that reinforces multiple identities not only for the minority culture but also for the dominant culture. What it means to be Canadian is constantly changing,

and so the bicultural concept may be too narrow to account for the multiplicity of identities that people have (Justin, 2003, 2005).

The connections these South Asian women maintained with their ethnic heritage, community, and family appear to have provided sources of identification and affiliation with their South Asian heritage. Through interactions with their peers and the dominant society, they have also connected with being Canadian. Access to social supportive relationships and perceptions of feeling supported are seen as important buffers for negative consequences (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). A solid social network in both cultures is a factor that reduces negative experiences (Folkman & Lazarus). This provides the protection and support that one needs to cope with discriminatory practices (Padilla, 1994).

Participants' accounts of their experiences as they matured gave a sense of the individual coping strategies utilized with a more positive and proactive orientation. Contrary to findings in previous research by Utsey et al. (2000) that examined African American women, these participants used more confrontation as coping and problem-solving strategies. Being confrontational did not appear to be a detriment to their coping but rather served to be more empowering for these women. Expressing emotional responses in a variety of types of social situations served as an adaptive response to racism.

These women potentially created strategies that reflected their individual differences and gave expression to their own voices. Pedersen (1995) indicated that acculturative stress can be a creative force in finding a more positive outlook to adaptation. In the present study, one surprising finding is the role of creativity in coping strategies, especially since this has not been discussed extensively in the literature. For example, participants decided how and when to reveal their ethnic origin when being asked, "Where are you from?" Creativity allows for more options in coping and more power and freedom. Another unexpected positive finding in this study is the use of humour as a coping skill. This creates a new dimension for strategies that these women used for coping with racism. People who have access to their sense of humour in the midst of stress are much more resilient (McGhee, 1999). The power of self-agency is seen in the use of another coping strategy not mentioned in the literature: the utilization of teaching as a coping strategy. Participants spoke of situations in which they would decide to teach another person about their South Asian culture if someone could benefit from their it. However, if they interpreted that an individual would not be able to learn from the experience, they most often used avoidance as a means to cope with racism. Teaching and having knowledge gave them a means of having power in the situation.

Implications for Counselling

The rich narratives in this study demonstrate the importance to the counselling profession of more accountability to this population in its knowledge, attitudes, and understanding of biases and assumptions that may permeate the counselling interaction. In light of the larger amount of literature available on other ethnic groups compared to the South Asian population, the temptation to inappropriately

perceive a client through a particular lens may result in stereotyping and reductionism. Collins and Arthur (2005) state that the challenge before counsellors is to "gain self-awareness and come to know others in a way that bypasses cultural barriers and stereotypes and allows us to connect in a real and meaningful way with each other" (p. 61). Skilled counsellors are sensitive and actively engaged in avoiding discrimination, prejudices, and stereotyping. This improves the chances for successful interactions with not only South Asians but also other non-dominant groups.

The participants' experiences set out in this study reveal an inside look into some of the considerations of the impact of racism on the development of identity as a result of negotiating multiple cultures. These considerations include developmental age at the time of occurrence of racism, social support networks such as family and peers, connections to the larger community, coping strategies, and particular interactions that were considered to be more offensive than others. The participants' narratives of coping provided a context in which to explore these dimensions within a counselling relationship. In the face of discrimination and racism, assisting clients to identify skills that they may have unknowingly cultivated to handle these incidents can lead to acknowledging and strengthening their skills and competence and, in turn, their ability to move between two cultures. It is crucial that the counsellor relate first to the interpretations of experiences that the South Asian client gives in terms of the client's background, frame of reference, and norms of social behaviour, because those are the factors that influence perceptions and values.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study focused on understanding the subjective experience of adult second-generation women of South Asian descent who have been raised in Canada and how their experience of racism has influenced the construction of their identity. As well, this study has contributed to the limited amount of knowledge available regarding second-generation South Asian women and their experiences of racism and identity. Overall, the findings in this study reveal the varying tensions that second-generation South Asian women negotiate in order to make their identities compatible with their self-concept.

While several steps were taken to enhance the credibility of the findings in the study, it is important to recognize some considerations when interpreting the findings. The transferability and ability to generalize the results of this study is limited due to the small number of participants and the homogeneity of the women who participated. The methodology employed in the current investigation aggregates individual stories in search of common elements among the six participants. Individual case studies could provide even richer descriptions. In light of the exploratory nature of this research, the literature for this population and this phenomenon needs to be expanded in order to better understand the lived experience of second-generation South Asian women in Canada.

Racism is unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Investigations of its effects upon individual targets of discrimination, as well as the contextual factors and personal coping strategies that modify these effects, should be important parts of multicultural literature.

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