GETTING BY HIGH SCHOOL: IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF PUNJABI YOUNG MEN IN SURREY, B.C.

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the lives and educational achievements of young Indo-Canadians, specifically the high school aged sons of Punjabi parents who immigrated to Canada beginning in the 1970s, and who were born or who have had the majority of their schooling in Canada’s public school system. I examine how these young people develop and articulate a sense of who they are in the context of their parents’ immigration and the extent to which their identities are determined and conditioned by their everyday lives. I also grapple with the implications of identity formation for the educational achievements of second generation youth by addressing how the identity choices made by young Punjabi Canadian men influence their educational performances. Using data collected by the Ministry of Education of British Columbia, I develop a quantitative profile of the educational achievements of Punjabi students enrolled in public secondary schools in the Greater Vancouver Region. This profile indicates that while most Punjabi students are completing secondary school, many, particularly the young men, are graduating with grade point averages at the lower end of the continuum and are failing to meet provincial expectations in Foundation Skills Assessments. To understand the identities and educational experiences of young Punjabi men, I conducted semi-structured interviews with prominent community members, teachers, school administrators and young Punjabi men and women attending Getting By High School, a public secondary school in Surrey, B.C. I apply the theory of segmented assimilation as formulated by sociologists Portes and Rumbaut (2001a) and work with the concept of masculinities from critical men’s studies to describe the linkages between place, identity and educational achievements by evaluating the effects of school, family and community contexts on the lives and identities of the 15 young men I interviewed. I argue that for this group of young men, life in Surrey’s Indo-Canadian community has provided the conditions for the development of a “brown” identity which while protecting them from the pernicious “Jack” has translated into a lack of scholastic effort and academic mediocrity. I conclude by addressing the implications of my findings for the theory of segmented assimilation.
Preface

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Dedication

For Papoo, We did it!
Chapter 1

Introduction

On October 11, 1991 a young Indo-Canadian man named Parminder Chana was allegedly murdered for dating the sister of known gangster Rajinder “Little” Benji. Almost two months later, after witnessing Chana’s murder, Sanjay Narain was reportedly thrown from the Cleveland Dam in North Vancouver for gossiping about what he saw. By 2003, 60 more young Indo-Canadian men were shot, burned, stabbed, strangled, or beaten to death in the Greater Vancouver Region. By 2009, over 100 Indo-Canadian men between the ages of 18 and 35 had been murdered; all of them victims of what local politicians, police and the press portray as an ongoing Indo-Canadian “gang war.” The number of murders, and their often gruesome and public nature, quickly garnered the attention of Vancouver’s public and has sustained local media coverage and community concern for over two decades. Most of what we know about the Indo-Canadian community in the Vancouver region has come from local newspaper and television news reports, myopic accounts, upon which rests the assumption that the gangster’s short and tragic tale is the only one that the community’s young men have to share. This dissertation grew from the belief that these young men had more complex and compelling stories to tell and out of the need to decipher the meaning and significance of the Indo-Canadian gang within the context of immigration: Is this gang activity an isolated phenomenon, affecting a small proportion of young Indo-Canadian men, or is it indicative of a broader trend towards downward assimilation amongst the children of one of Canada’s largest immigrant groups?

The New Second Generation

In 2006, 4 million people, or 15.6% of the population aged 15 and over in Canada, were second
second generation Canadians, meaning that although they were born in Canada, either one or both of their parents were not (PRI, 2009); the figure is closer to 20% if those young people who immigrated to Canada before the age of 12 are included in this demographic group (Abdurrahman, Chen, Corak, 2008). Though relative to first generation (foreign-born) Canadians, second generation Canadians are primarily of European origins, reflecting earlier trends in immigration, this pattern is changing as new immigrants from an increasingly diverse array of nations and ethnic backgrounds settle and raise their children in Canada. Signs of this shift are already evident. For instance, while 14% of the second generation aged 15 and over belong to a visible minority, the figure increases sharply to 34% among second generation young people between the ages of 15 and 24 (PRI, 2009). This diversity is most evident in Canada’s gateway cities - Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia - where nearly two thirds of visible minorities presently reside (PRI, 2009). While the rise in the volume and ethno-cultural diversity of immigrants has inspired a wealth of studies concerned with the economic and socio-cultural adaptation of new Canadians, the majority of this work has assumed an adult perspective, focusing on the integration experiences of adult newcomers while largely overlooking the experiences of their young sons and daughters. Yet these young Canadians are important “agents of sociocultural change” (Kobayashi, 2008) who in many ways will determine Canada’s future as a multicultural society, re-shaping the country’s ethnic and racial relations and our normative assumptions about what it means to be Canadian. Given that many members of the second generation are “between cultures” and from racialized backgrounds, their

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1 Strictly speaking the second generation refers to those people born in Canada to immigrant parents though some researchers apply the term more broadly to include both native born children who have at least one foreign born parent and/or the “1.5 generation,” to include young people who were born abroad but who emigrated at an early age, typically before the age of 12.

2 42.9% live in Toronto and 17.3% live in Vancouver.
experiences in schooling and as they enter the labour force have much to teach us about the economic implications of Canada’s immigration policies and about how well mainstream institutions are coping with an increasingly diverse population. In recognition of the significance of the second generation for the economic and cultural future of Canada, Canadian researchers are now joining scholars in the United States and Europe in contending with the lives of the new second generation.³

In Canada, research on the second generation is relatively recent but growing. The work of Monica Boyd (2000, 2002), a pioneer in the field, and that of her colleagues (Boyd and Norris, 1994; Boyd and Greico, 1998), inquires into the socio-economic success of the adult (24 years and older) offspring of foreign born Canadians. Their contribution is now being complemented by work on the education outcomes of the children of immigrants (Abada, Feng and Ram, 2008; Aydemir et al., 2008; Jedwab, 2008a) which addresses in particular how well members of the second generation are performing relative to their parents. Other researchers are attending to the more subjective aspects of the lives of second generation groups including their experiences with racism and discrimination (Reitz and Somerville, 2004; Reitz and Bannerji, 2007), their modes of identification and identities (Desai and Subramanian, 2003; Potvin, 1999, 2007; Hébert, Wilkinson, Ali, 2008), their notions of belonging (Chow, 2007; Jedwab, 2008b; Wilkinson, 2008a), interpersonal and intrapersonal cultural conflicts (Lalonde and Giguère, 2008; Giguère and Lalonde, 2010), and their forays into the labour market (Rootham, 2008; Wilkinson, 2008b). Taken as a whole, this body of research suggests that the experiences of Canada’s new second generation are diverse and varied, and demand a reconsideration of our historical understanding of immigrant incorporation and adaptation into mainstream society as a

³ The “new” second generation refers to the native born children of post-1965 immigrant arrivals.
“positive” and relatively uncomplicated process of *straight line assimilation* (PRI, 2009) – a task that is well underway in the United States.

Straight-line assimilation theory expects a relatively uniform and linear pathway to immigrant adaptation, predicting that with the passage of time, immigrants will ultimately be “absorbed” into “mainstream” society, such that they come to resemble and merge with the native born population (Alba and Nee, 2003). Implicit within this model is the promise that full assimilation will lead to economic success and social status, that immigrants achieve upward mobility by “shedding [the] old cultural identities” and “embracing the main elements of the culture of the dominant society” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway, 2008, 6) In fact, many of the theory’s early proponents, “tended to assume that assimilation was both probable and desirable […] they saw assimilation as closely tied to upward mobility and often wrote as if assimilation, acculturation and upward mobility were virtually the same thing” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 6). The concept of straight-line assimilation, however, was derived from the experiences of the descendants of an earlier (1880-1925) era of immigration, describing the experiences of primarily white southern and eastern Europeans. Not only are today’s newcomers different in terms of their visibly identifiable (non-white) characteristics and their origins from “everywhere but Europe,” they are entering a society which is far more fragmented and heterogeneous than early twentieth century North American, and their economic opportunities are more constrained by a bifurcated labour market (Clark, 1998). Changes in the composition of immigrant flows and the context of immigration have made social scientists skeptical of the applicability of straight-line assimilation to the experiences of contemporary immigrants and their children.

Though based primarily on anecdotal evidence, in 1992 Herbert Gans “inverted” the straight line model of assimilation (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 8) by proposing the notion of “second
generation decline” which he argues:

could happen if the children of the immigrants, having shed the immigrant parental work norms, do not find the income, job security and working conditions they expect but are not asked to take, or they turn down, jobs involving minimum security, low wages, long hours and unpleasant working conditions, because they have become sufficiently Americanized in their work and status expectations to reject ‘immigrant jobs’ (Gans, 1992, 182).

Recognizing that upward economic mobility appears to elude some members of the second generation while others pursue multiple pathways to incorporation, Alejandro Portes and his colleagues, Min Zhou (1993) and Ruben Rumbaut (1996, 2001a, 2001b) re-conceived the process of immigration adaptation, proposing segmented assimilation as a new conceptual framework. Although assimilation continues to operate as the main mode of immigrant adaptation, this model “represents a major advance in that it refocuses analytical attention on identifying [the] contextual and structural factors” (Beans and Stevens, 2003, 100) while also acknowledging the important role of ethnicity and culture in determining immigrant adaptation. Rather than being received by a monolithic, unified “mainstream,” Portes et al. posit that contemporary immigrants and their children are received by and encounter many different versions of society, so that the key question for sociologists is not “whether the second generation will assimilate to U.S society but to what segment of that society it will assimilate” (2001a, 55). The type of assimilation that children of immigrants experience - “successful,” “unsuccessful” or “even negative” (Bean and Stevens, 2003, 100) - ultimately depends on their national origins, socioeconomic status, modes of incorporation, and their family and community resources:
[t]he varying modes of incorporation\(^4\) of the first generation endow the second generation with differing amounts of cultural and social capital in the form of ethnic jobs, networks, and values and expose it to differing opportunities. This in turn exerts differential pulls and pushes on the allegiances of the second generation (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 9).

Where second generation students live and attend school figures heavily in determining their life chances, delimiting their exposure to social worlds and to a certain range of identities. Of particular concern with respect to downward assimilation are students who assume oppositional identities as a result of their contact with their native minority peers – where opposition translates into the rejection of education and slippage into such undesirable outcomes as dropping out of school, drug (ab)use, and involvement in youth gangs. Segmented assimilation may be defined empirically as a “set of strategic outcomes in the lives of young second-generation persons,” including employment, occupation and income, and language use and preferences (Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2005, 1016). But given that many members of the new second generation are still coming of age,\(^5\) researchers have often looked to their educational performances and attainments for evidence of segmented assimilation. Assuming that educational success is related to success in the labour market, and that, in particular, the attainment of advanced educational credentials is a pre-requisite for professional employment, scholars interpret educational failure as an early indicator of downward assimilation. Though social surveys and ethnographic studies examining the educational performances of second generation high school students in the United States provide ample support for the theory of segmented assimilation, the theory has not been tested in Canada where research on the new

\(^4\) Modes of incorporation refer to the elements which comprise the context of reception including governmental policies, the attitudes of the native population and the character and resources of pre-existing co-ethnic communities (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a).

\(^5\) In the United States, one out of six Americans aged 18 to 32 and one out of four of all Americans under age 18 were members of the new second generation (Kasinitiz et al., 2008, 1) while in Canada, members of the second generation are on average 35 years of age; just over 50% are under the age of 35 (Aydemir et al., 2008, 9).
second generation has only just begun (Boyd, 2008).

About this Study: Objectives, Research Questions and Methodology

This study is concerned with the lives, experiences and educational achievements of young Indo-Canadians, specifically the high school aged sons of Punjabi parents who immigrated to Canada beginning in the 1970s, and who were born or who have had the majority of their schooling in Canada’s public school system. In undertaking this research, I was interested in uncovering the ways in which these young people develop and articulate a sense of who they are in the context of their parents’ immigration; how they forge identities to incorporate various aspects of their ethnicity, race, and gender and the extent to which those identities are determined and conditioned by their everyday lives. Crucially, I was also concerned with the implications of identity formation for educational achievement, the degree to which the identity choices made by young Punjabi Canadians influence aspects of their educational performance.

A first objective of this research was thus to determine how Punjabi high school students are performing academically in the Canadian public school system. Armed with this quantitative profile, I then sought to determine the process(es) of identity formation that lead to aspirations of educational achievement, or to the absence of such aspirations, among Punjabi high school students, and to tease out the connections between educational achievement and place – a geography of educational performance – by considering the relationships between where Indo-Canadian youth live and attend school, how they self-identify and their educational achievements. In examining the identities, educational experiences and achievements of Punjabi youth, I sought, then, to address several interlocking research questions:

How are Punjabi students performing in public high schools?

How do they arrive at these identities?

How are family, friends, peers, educators and the broader Indo-Canadian community involved in their process(es) of identity formation?

What is the significance and meaning of their identities in terms of everyday practices and behavior? That is, how are these identities made manifest on a daily basis?

To what extent do their identities affect their attitudes toward schooling, their educational motivations and aspirations, and their performances?

To what extent are these identities contextual and/or articulated out of particular spaces and places? That is, what is the role of place in shaping these identities?

The profile of Punjabi academic performance presented in Chapter 2 is based on annual student level data collected by the Ministry of Education of British Columbia and following from Roessingh and Watt (2001), addresses both the educational achievements and the year-to-year educational progress of Punjabi students enrolled in public secondary schools in the Greater Vancouver Region (GVRD). A request for data for the following variables was submitted and obtained through Edudata Canada, an educational information broker at the University of British Columbia: home language, gender, public/independent school, G.P.A. for graduating students, grade level, district code (i.e. where student is attending school), date of graduation and foundational skills assessment 3 point scores for numeracy, reading and writing for each student enrolled in all of the GVRD’s 12 school districts in the years between 1995 and 2005. A student’s progress over the course of their high school careers was determined through an analysis of 5 cohorts (A-E) where Cohort A refers to students enrolled in Grade 8 in the 1995-1996 academic year and Cohort E refers to students enrolled in Grade 8 in the 1999-2000 academic year. In addition, students’ progress and achievement were compared according to
home language and home language and gender. All analyses were performed by one of Edudata’s statisticians.

To develop an understanding of Punjabi students’ identities and educational experiences I conducted over 50 semi-structured interviews with prominent figures from the region’s Indo-Canadian community, including teachers and school administrators, but most importantly, with Punjabi high school students, between the ages of 16 and 18, at a public secondary school in Surrey, B.C. I interviewed 15 young Punjabi men and 15 young Punjabi women, and while the young men were the focus of my analysis, the young women helped me to make sense of the young men’s narratives by sharing their own experiences and offering their perspective on the young men from their school and community. At the outset of my research, I entertained various possibilities for recruiting youth participants for instance, through community clubs, gurdwaras (temples) and so forth, but because of my interest in education, I ultimately decided that it would be most appropriate to access young people through the public school system. While gaining access to participants can pose problems for any social researcher, the process can be particularly arduous for youth researchers, who in order to gain the consent and involvement of legal minors cases must go through their adult “gatekeepers,” which typically involves a long “chain of negotiation” (Valentine, 1999, 145)

Before obtaining access to students I was required to gain permission from the Surrey School Board to conduct research in its school district. With the Board’s approval I would then be permitted to approach school principals about interviewing their students. Though I applied for this permission in October 2005, I did not receive approval from the Surrey School Board until March 2006. During this delay, I was met with typical bureaucratic problems such as
unanswered phone calls and emails as well as misplaced paperwork\textsuperscript{6}. However, the stated reasons for the lengthy delay were the Board’s concerns over my proposed methodology and the content of some of my interview questions. My original research plan was to combine more extensive ethnographic style observation with interviews. The Board, however, judged that observation was too “intrusive” and “stressful” for students and that certain questions such as, “Do you or your family participate in any religious activities?” and “Do you have any connection to your parent’s home nation?” were “too sensitive.” I received approval after I removed the contentious questions and agreed to conduct no formal observation of students in their classrooms or on the school grounds.

As I waited for the school board’s decision, I conducted interviews with twelve members of the Indo-Canadian community who I identified through media reports and newspaper articles and included retired teachers, a documentarian, a motivational speaker, an editor of a local newspaper, police officers and several others who were active in Indo-Canadian community organizations. With one exception, all of these interviews were conducted between May and August 2006 in public locations, usually at a reasonably quiet coffee shop selected by the interviewee. By the time I had completed this round of community interviews I had established contact with several school principals and had gained permission to begin research with students at \textit{Getting By High School} in September 2006.

Once I was welcomed into \textit{Getting By High School}, I encountered my second major challenge of access – gaining the trust of the school’s Punjabi young men. My initial goal was to

\textsuperscript{6}Interestingly, though Waters (1999) conducted her research on West Indian youth a decade earlier in New York City, her problems gaining access recall those I detail here. In her very instructive methodological account, Waters describes her experiences gaining access to public schools as a “nightmare” and “[d]ealing with the Board of Education […] a truly Kafkaesque experience” (1999, 357).
interview between 30 and 60 Punjabi students, with an even gender split. To recruit students, I worked closely with one of the school’s vice principals who invited me to give a short presentation one day after school to a group of about 30 students and who subsequently made a number of announcements on my behalf and allowed me to hang a few posters advertising my research. In my presentation and on the poster I outlined the purpose of my study, explained that I was interested in learning about their daily lives and activities, and I was careful to emphasize that participation was voluntary and that parental consent was required. I also mentioned that, as is common with researchers working with youth respondents, I would be awarding them with a $10 gift certificate for Chapter’s, a popular chain store which sells books, dvd’s and cd’s, to thank them for their participation (McDowell, 2001). Very quickly I had interest from female students and I managed to conduct seven interviews by December 2006. I got along well with these young women and they were very talkative and forthcoming, and though unsolicited, provided incredibly intimate details concerning their boyfriends, their parents and their communities. I attributed their candour to my gender and the fact that most of them thought I was much younger than I actually am, which seemed to relax them, allowing them to view the interview like a gossip session with a girlfriend rather than part of formal research. As I learned more about the workings of the Indo-Canadian community in Surrey, I also came to realize that these young women perhaps appreciated my “outsider” status in that it allowed them the opportunity to talk openly with no danger of me reporting back to their parents. This group of young women, all of whom aspired to post-secondary education, also seemed keen to be associated with a doctoral study, and to know that they were helping me with my schooling. They also appeared to appreciate being able to ask questions about university, so the interviews
were perceived as being mutually beneficial and thus they took on a very natural and familiar rhythm. The situation with the boys was far more complicated.

I routinely asked the girls whom I interviewed to ask their male friends if they were interested and while the girls said they would try, they did not expect results. According to the girls, the boys felt that they had “better things to do.” I quickly learned what Williamson (1997, 7) meant when he said that “young men […] know their minds, have their reasons for their orientations towards their lives, but when it comes to research, may well appear to be nihilistic and uncooperative; after all research is hardly at the top of their priority list or planning agenda.” While I did succeed in getting consent forms into the hands of a number of boys, these were never returned. This struggle went on for a number of months until I finally interviewed one of the school’s guidance counselors who took an active interest in my project and offered to help. He provided me access to a business class in which students were in the same classroom for the entire school day and allowed me to conduct interviews throughout the day in a private room at the back of the classroom. In introducing and explaining my project to the Punjabi boys in the business class, I used the same presentation that I had prepared in September; I did not mention the issue of gangs but rather emphasized to the boys that I wanted to hear about them and what their lives were like. In introducing me as a researcher, however, the guidance counselor made it explicit to the young men that an interview was their chance to tell someone how they felt about the reporting of the gang violence and the stereotypes of Indo-Canadians. The mention of gangs was the ‘hook’ that got these boys interested and within a month, I had conducted interviews with 15 boys and with 7 more girls. Having this teacher, an older Punjabi man, vouch for me and to explain the research in a way that resonated with these young men was critical and once the young men were in the interview room with me, most of them were as chatty and
forthcoming as their female counterparts. As I conducted the interviews, I reflected on my difficulties gaining access, realizing that these students were hugely aware of the way they are negatively stereotyped by the “white” mainstream. I have no doubt that many of them assumed that as a white researcher I was there to find more evidence to support the portrayal of Indo-Canadian men as delinquent gangsters. The endorsement from the counselor helped to settle and ease this worry and ultimately helped me to gain access to a group of young Punjabi men for interviewing.

My experiences in gaining access to this group of students not only made me keenly aware of my outsider status but they made me re-think my research approach as I was forced to consider more thoughtfully how my race, gender and class position were informing how I framed my project and the questions I was asking of the young Punjabi men I interviewed. I am “white.” My father is British, a first generation Canadian, and my mother, born in Toronto, is the daughter of Ukrainian immigrants. Both of my parents are professionals; my mother is a general practitioner and my father is a general surgeon. I attended an all girls’ private high school and have spent my entire adult life studying at university. Given my background, I was extremely anxious as I proposed this research not only because I worried that it would be difficult to establish common ground with and gain the trust of Punjabi young people but also because I feared contributing to the stigmatization and racialization of young Indo-Canadian men. For this reason, I made the decision very early on that I would not research Indo-Canadian gangs but rather that I would treat the issue of Indo-Canadian gang violence as an important part of the context for my research. Once I began conducting research, however, I realized that my decision to not focus on gang violence, though well intentioned, was not ethically responsible. If, based on my own desire to protect these young men from negative stereotypes, I had
neglected to explore how gang violence was affecting young Punjabi men, I would have been misrepresenting the lives of the young men I interviewed and would have been unfaithful in my recounting of their experiences. Indo-Canadian gang violence and the men who are caught up in it matter to these young men and to why they identify as “brown” and as such, they must matter to me as a researcher, despite my own misgivings and inclinations. My decision to refer to the young Punjabi men I interviewed as “brown” throughout my dissertation is based on a similar logic.

There exist a number of more neutral terms which could be used in reference to the young men from my sample; Punjabi, Punjabi Canadian, Indo-Canadian, South Asian and East Indian are all labels which circulate in Vancouverites’ common vernacular, some of which are also in use by Statistics Canada. I chose “brown” as the label which I would use in reference to the young men I interviewed because it is the term that they use to self-identify, to describe themselves and their friends. Though other terms, for instance, Punjabi Sikh Canadian may more accurately reflect the national, ethnic, linguistic and religious heritage of the boys and their parents, these terms do not resonate with their everyday lives; they do not have the same meaning or hold the same weight for these young men. In identifying as “brown” the young men I interviewed are attempting to distinguish themselves from other Canada born men of Punjabi Sikh heritage and for this reason, it is important to hold on to and emphasize that distinction by employing the term “brown.” However, I encourage readers to be cautious in their own usage of the term, to ensure that they do not apply the term indiscriminately but rather be aware of and appreciate its contextual and contingent nature. That is to say, not all young Indo-Canadian men or men of Punjabi parentage living in other parts of Greater Vancouver or Canada identify or want to be identified as “brown.” Similarly, in the chapters to follow I present findings
concerning the lives and experiences of young Punjabi men which cannot be understood apart from their context. That is, the identities and educational outcomes which I observed at a secondary high school in Surrey, British Columbia must be interpreted as the consequences of a complex interplay between structural factors – historical influences and contemporary community, school and family contexts - and personal and collective agency.

**The Indo-Canadian Community in Greater Vancouver**

Although the first immigrants from India arrived in 1903, Canada did not welcome a significant population until the 1970s, following the liberalization and de-racialization of its immigration policies (Basran and Bolaria, 2003). A shift towards a “points” based system of admittance and the related decision to increase annual immigration targets served to increase the total number of new arrivals to Canada each year and to transform the composition of flows, reducing the proportion of European and American immigrants while increasing the number of Asian, Latin American and African entrants (Hiebert, 2000). Each successive wave of immigration has brought increasing ethno-cultural diversity to the nation. In 2006, Canadians reported over 200 different ethnic origins, 11 of which have “passed the 1 million mark,” and approximately 16% of the nation’s total population self-identified as members of a visible minority, an increase of nearly 3% since the 2001 census (Statistics Canada, 2008). In 2006, South Asians surpassed

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7 Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of a respondent’s ancestors where ancestors are typically more distant than a grandparent (Statistics Canada, 2008).

8 Visible minorities are defined as “persons, other than Aboriginal persons, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” The following groups are included in the visible minority population: Chinese, South Asians, Blacks, Arabs, West Asians, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans, Japanese, Koreans and other groups, such as Pacific Islanders (Statistics Canada, 2008, 11).

9 “South Asian” is a broad category used by Statistics Canada for identifying populations according to ethnic origin and/or visible minority status. It refers to a heterogeneous group of
Chinese to become Canada’s largest visible minority group, representing a quarter of all visible minorities or 4% of Canada’s total population; 1,262,900 people identified themselves as South Asian in 2006, an increase of 37.7% over the 2001 population (917, 100 individuals) (Statistics Canada, 2008). “East Indian” was also one of the 15 most frequently reported ethnic origins among members of Canada’s second generation in 2006 and was one of only three in the top 15 origins that was of non-European heritage10 (Jantzen, 2008). Relative to second generation youth of “Canadian, British or French only” (CBF) and most European ethnic origins, East Indian respondents “stand out since they are much younger;” 91% of East Indian individuals were between the ages of 15 and 34 years of age in 2006 while only 20-40% of individuals from CBF and European groups were between 15 and 34 (Jantzen, 2008). Similarly, over 90% of second generation respondents reporting a South Asian heritage were below the age of 35 in 2006 (Jantzen, 2008). South Asians are expected to maintain their status as Canada’s largest visible minority group, as the population is predicted to more than double to between 3.2 million and 4.1 million by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2010). Though over a million South Asians now reside in Canada, their settlement remains highly concentrated at both the provincial and urban scales.

In 2006, South Asians represented the largest visible minority group in Ontario, accounting for 28.9% of all visible minorities in that province, and were the second largest visible minority group in British Columbia, representing 6.4% of B.C.’s total population (Statistics Canada, 2008). Mirroring this national pattern, over half (54.2%) of the country’s people originating from the subcontinent of Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal (see 2006 Census Dictionary).

10 The top 15 ethnic origins included American, Russian, Portuguese, East Indian, Chinese, Polish, Ukrainian, Dutch (Netherlands), French, Italian, Irish, German, Canadian, Scottish and English (Jantzen, 2008).
South Asian population live in Toronto (CMA), Ontario, while another 16% reside in Vancouver (CMA) (Statistics Canada, 2007). In addition, over one third (36.3%) of South Asians residing in the Vancouver region were Canadian born in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). By 2001, approximately 80% of B.C.’s South Asian residents were living in Vancouver (CMA), 46% of whom were residing in Surrey, one of Vancouver’s suburban municipalities and the second largest city in B.C. (Statistics Canada, 2001). By 2006, over half of B.C.’s South Asian population was living in Surrey, with South Asians accounting for 27.5% of Surrey’s total population; only one other municipality in Canada, Brampton, Ontario, had a higher proportion of South Asian residents in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Though often ‘lumped’ together, South Asians are an internally diverse group in terms of their ancestral heritages, religions, linguistic backgrounds, histories of immigration and so forth. It is therefore important to distinguish that the South Asian community in Vancouver (CMA) has historically been, and continues to be, dominated by Sikhs from the state of Punjab in northwestern India. The first Indian immigrants to arrive in Canada were male Punjabi Sikhs who came to work in Vancouver and other parts of British Columbia. Until the 1960s, Vancouver’s South Asian community remained synonymous with the Sikh Punjabi community. Today, the most common country of birth among Surrey’s immigrants is India (52,635), which is distantly followed by the Phillipines (12,640) (City of Surrey, 2008a), and though the official languages of India are Hindi and English, 19% of Surrey’s residents identified Punjabi as their mother tongue\textsuperscript{11} while 15% 

\textsuperscript{11} Mother tongue is defined as the first language spoken at home and still understood. Punjabi was second only to English (56%) as the most commonly identified mother tongue in 2006. No other language was identified as a mother tongue by more than 3% of the population (City of Surrey, 2008b).
identified it as their home language\textsuperscript{12} (City of Surrey, 2008b). In the 2005 academic year, 17.5% of students enrolled in public schools in the Surrey School District identified Punjabi as the primary language spoken in their home; in 2009 this figure had risen to 19.9% (BC MED, 2010). At Getting By High School the proportion of Punjabi speaking students is even greater: 33.9% in 2005 increasing to over half (56.7%) of the student body by September 2009 (BC MED, 2010).

Despite its long history in the region, its size and consistent and predicted growth, with the exception of Nayar’s (2004) recent study of the Sikh diaspora, Vancouver’s Punjabi community has not often been the focus of research. Scholarly work that has been conducted is often historical in nature, dealing with various aspects of “East Indian,” “South Asian” or “Sikh” immigration, settlement and adaptation (Johnston, 1979; Buchignani and Indra, 1985; Johnston, 1988; Barrier and Dusenbery, 1989; Buchignani and Indra, 1989; Paramjit, 1994; Singh, 1994; Verma, 2002; Basran and Bolaria, 2003). While more recent studies have focused on dynamics within South Asian families (Kurian, 1991), “women’s issues” (Naidoo, 1987; Naidoo and Davis, 1988) and to some extent the lives of the children of Indian immigrants (Ghuman, 1994, 1999, 2003; Dhruvarajan, 2003; Handa, 2003; Nayar, 2004), as Nayar (2004, 4) critiques, these studies commonly “lump all the different communities from the Indian subcontinent together as ‘East Indians,’ ‘South Asians,’ or ‘Indo-Canadians,’ undermining their “vibrant diversity” and potentially obscuring those experiences unique to particular sub-groups. While Ghuman (2003), a British psychologist, has addressed the extent to which South Asian (not specifically Punjabi) students in Vancouver are “overachievers or underachievers” through interviews with parents and teachers, researchers have yet to examine the educational performance of Punjabi

\textsuperscript{12} Home language refers to the language most often spoken at home. Once again Punjabi was second only to English (70.7%) as the most common home language.
students in Vancouver, in terms of quantitative indicators, either across time and/or space, or in relation to their peers, or the relationship between where Punjab young men live and are educated, how they identify and how they perform academically. And yet, the anecdotal evidence provided by local media reports suggests that Punjabi young men may be engaging in behaviour and adopting identities which are antithetical to their academic success.

In the following chapters, I uncover the linkages between place, identity and educational achievements by applying the theory of segmented assimilation to evaluate the effects of school, family and community contexts on the lives of a group of Punjabi young men living and attending a public high school in Surrey. Following an analysis of quantitative indicators of educational achievement in Chapter 2, I examine the influence of external factors - parental modes of incorporation, an oppositional subculture and racial discrimination – on how these young men identify racially and ethnically (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4 I provide a detailed analysis of these identities at which point I move outside of the theory of segmented assimilation, drawing on the theorizing of critical men’s studies, in particular the notion that there exist multiple versions of masculinity or ways of “doing male,” to allow me to provide a more empirically accurate and nuanced conceptualization of the identities of Punjabi young men. In Chapter 5 I address the influence of Punjabi families and the broader Indo-Canadian community on these young identities before discussing the consequences of their identities for their educational achievements in Chapter 7.

By first establishing a profile of Punjabi academic performance in the Greater Vancouver Region, I am contributing to a much needed understanding of how second generation young people, in particular those from a racialized background, are performing in Canada’s public school system. My research thus grapples with the educational implications of recent
immigration trends, and provides data useful for evaluating the consequences of increasing ethnocultural diversity in Canadian schools and to intervene constructively to improve the life chances of second generation youth before they enter the labour force. In examining the identities of Punjabi young men, I further seek to contribute to a greater understanding of the process(es) of identity formation amongst members of Canada’s new second generation, how axes of identity such as age, ethnicity, race, and gender intersect and interact, of the nature of youth identities as lived realities, and ultimately of what it means to be young, “ethnic” and “Canadian.” In addition, by examining the nature of the relationship between place and academic performance, and the role of identity as a mediating factor, this study seeks to determine the extent to which the American theory of segmented assimilation holds in a Canadian context and whether or not there is evidence of second generation decline among young Indo-Canadians. In the process of testing the theory of segmented assimilation, I will also be addressing a critical lack of research on Vancouver’s Punjabi community and help us to better understand the experiential realities of a large, culturally and economically significant population of young Canadians.
Chapter 2

Punjabi Students in Vancouver Area Public Schools: How Are They Faring?

A principal objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of how Punjabi\textsuperscript{13} students are faring academically in British Columbia’s public high school system by deriving a profile of Punjabi students’ educational performances. For this purpose, a student’s \textit{educational performance} is understood to be a combination of both \textit{educational achievement} and \textit{year-to-year educational progress}; while achievement can be measured through annual testing, the analysis of progress requires that indicators of achievement be ‘tracked’ over time, as a student proceeds through high school (Roessingh and Watt, 1994, 2001). In view of this, the portrait of Punjabi educational performance presented here considers the achievements and progress of Punjabi students by gender relative to their peers (students of non-immigrant and other immigrant parentage) between 1995 and 2005. Based on this profile, it is evident that while most Punjabi students in the Lower Mainland\textsuperscript{14} are completing secondary school, many of these students are graduating with grade point averages at the lower end of the continuum and are failing to meet provincial expectations in the core areas of numeracy, reading comprehension and writing. Although this is true for both Punjabi boys and girls, Punjabi boys tend to fare even worse than their female peers, emerging at the lowest end in most of the analyses. Before discussing Punjabi students’ educational performance in greater detail, I contextualize my

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Throughout this chapter, I use the term “Punjabi” to refer to those students, grades 8-12, enrolled in public secondary schools throughout the GVRD who identified Punjabi as the \textit{Primary Language Spoken in the Home} for the purposes of the Ministry of Education’s student level data collection.
\item The Lower Mainland includes the following 12 school districts: Abbotsford, Langley, Surrey, Delta, Richmond, Vancouver, New Westminster, Burnaby, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, Coquitlam, North Vancouver, and West Vancouver.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
findings by discussing some of the most salient empirical research on immigration, ethnicity and educational achievement in Canada.

**Patterns of School Performance in Canada: Immigration, Ethnicity and Education**

Relative to the United States, research on minority education and the relationship between academic achievement and immigrant status/parentage in Canada is sparse. Comparative quantitative surveys have been complicated by the fact that, until recently, standardized educational tests were not regularly administered in Canadian jurisdictions, such that there have been no nationwide benchmarks for evaluating student achievement. Similarly, while isolating the second generation requires information on a respondent’s birthplace along with their parental birthplace (first generation), between 1971, the year of the last Canadian census to inquire into parental birthplace (Boyd, 2000) and 2001, the year that questions pertaining to parental birthplace were re-introduced into the Canadian census, there was no national statistical record from which to acquire such data (Aydemir et al., 2008). Perhaps more importantly, however, scholarly attention has been deflected away from the education of students from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds by the dominant discourse of privileging “positive multicultural rhetoric,” which some educationalists argue has “engendered a complacency about the status quo such that issues of systemic racism in education are thought by many educators to be primarily a U.S. rather than a Canadian problem” (Cummins, 1997, 412). For the past 25 years, scholarly attention in Canada has thus been directed towards investigations into the linguistic rights of minority groups rather than issues pertaining to educational equity and the unique educational experiences of students from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds (Cummins, 1997; James
and Burnaby, 2003). To date, research on the scholastic performance of second generation and ethnic minority youth in Canada has largely been subsumed within studies which address how English Second Language (ESL) learners, or language minority students, are faring in “English only instruction” (Gunderson, 2007). Given that such studies typically do not differentiate between ESL learners who are foreign born (first generation) and those who are born and raised in Canada (second generation), we must be careful in interpreting the results of research assessing the performance of ESL learners with respect to its implications for second generation students. Nonetheless, this work does reveal some noteworthy trends.

Based on an eight year study at a large urban high school in Calgary, Alberta, Roessingh and Watt (1994, 2001) determined that the drop-out rate for ESL students remained constant at 74 percent; a very high figure in comparison to the “generally accepted” province wide high school dropout rate of 30-35 percent. In general terms, Roessingh and Watt (2001, 13) assert that “ESL students are at a high risk for drop-out, and that, in the absence of systemic/structural change, the educational success of ESL students is unlikely to improve.” Following on Rossingh and Watt’s well publicized studies, at the behest of an urban school board, Derwing et al. (1999) examined the completion rates of 516 former ESL students educated in Alberta’s secondary school system. They found that 46% of ESL learners failed to gain either a diploma or the 100 credits necessary to continue education in an adult program. Though this rate is considerably lower than that reported by Roessingh and Watt, they conclude that “[b]y any count, ESL high school students are not graduating at the same rate as the other students in the province, whose overall completion rate is approximately 70%” (Derwing et al., 1999, 537). More recently,
based on data obtained from the Vancouver Reception and Placement Centre’s ESL database, Pirbhai-Illich (2005) examines “the pathways to graduation” for 184 English Language Learners registered in one of three language support programmes and enrolled in Grade 8 in the Vancouver School District in 1996. She finds that while 65% of these students ultimately graduate from high school, 23% of all students were required to take additional courses at adult learning centres before obtaining their diplomas; only 14.1% of students were characterized as “permanent drop-outs” (Pirbhai-Illich, 2005). While correlation tests find that English proficiency and immigrant status are the variables most strongly associated with graduation, Pirbhai-Illich suggests that, other demographic variables, including gender and a students’ country of origin, likely proved statistically insignificant because of her small sample size (2005, 168).

In a much larger study Gunderson (2007) compared the grades received by 2,213 immigrant students in provincially examinable courses including English, Math, Science and social studies with those obtained by a random selection of 5,000 Canadian-born students enrolled in the Vancouver school district between 1991 and 2001. While he reports that “immigrant students’ achievement as measured by grade point average in the same examinable courses is roughly the same as that for Canadian-born students, except for math courses, where their grades are higher,” he cautions that “there are underlying features that put this seemingly

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15 All newly-arrived immigrant students wanting to attend school in the Vancouver school district must first register with the Vancouver Reception and Placement Centre (Pirbhai-Illich, 2005).
16 57.8% of the students in her sample entered Canada with their families under the “entrepreneurial” immigrant class and 75% of students were arriving from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or the Phillipines.
17 Like Pirbhai-Illich (2005), Gunderson uses data acquired from the Vancouver Reception and Placement Centre.
18 Students attending secondary schools in British Columbia must pass final examinations in certain provincially prescribed courses in order to be eligible for university admission.
good outcome into a less positive context” including the fact that “overall averages mask significant smaller group differences” (Gunderson, 2007, 165-169). In particular, he finds considerable variations in the achievements of different ethno-cultural groups. Gunderson, for instance, describes the results for Mandarin speakers as “astounding,” in that these students “scored significantly higher” than Canadian-born students across subject areas and maintained “phenomenally high” math averages (2007, 169). In contrast, Spanish and Vietnamese speaking students as well as those from the Philippines and India tend to perform below Canadian born students across most subjects and grades. Gunderson’s data further reveal that students from India19 “do less well in the examinable academic courses as they progress through secondary school. As fewer are enrolled in ESL classes, their grades decrease” (2007, 172). Gunderson concludes that while differences in achievement associated with linguistic and national groups can be partially explained by variations in the socio-economic status of immigrant families20, he adds that the “causal relationships associated with these amazing differences in achievement are complex” and also relate to “the alternatives families have to help their children succeed in school” (2007, 176).

Garnett’s “exploratory examination of the academic trajectories of the 1997 grade eight cohort of ESL students” enrolled in secondary schools across British Columbia echoes Gunderson’s conclusions, revealing that:

ESL trajectories vary widely by other background factors. Ethno-cultural background predicts them robustly. Chinese achievement is particularly high, and to a lesser degree, so is that of Korean and Persian students. By contrast, Spanish, Vietnamese and Philippino students are less

19 Gunderson (2007) specifies that while students “from India” speak a number of different languages, none of these linguistic groups are “large enough to form a reliable group across grade levels” (172).
20 For instance, the Mandarin speaking group of students was “largely composed of socio-economically advantaged students from Taiwan” and “had the largest percentage of ‘entrepreneurial’ class families” (Gunderson, 2007, 175).
likely to graduate and exhibit lower rates of participation and performance in academic subjects (2008, 181-182).

“Unlike Gunderson however,” as Garnett himself distinguishes, “the larger population of South Asian language speakers\(^\text{21}\) in this study appears to navigate trajectories more closely resembling NESs (native English speakers)” (2008, 182). In reconciling this discrepancy, it is important to note that Garnett’s study is based on the achievements of a single cohort of ESL learners, is province-wide rather than Vancouver-based and uses different datasets\(^\text{22}\). Garnett’s findings nonetheless support an earlier study conducted on the academic achievements of “selected ethnocultural adolescents” in Toronto and Vancouver secondary schools (Samuel et al., 2001).

Part of a larger study involving a survey of 1,954 students from Caribbean, Chinese, East European, Latin American, South Asian\(^\text{23}\) and Canadian backgrounds, Samuel, Krugly-Smolkska and Warren (2001) interviewed 131 students to learn more about their educational achievements. Based on the students’ self-reported “mean average mark” received in their last semester, Samuel et al. (2001) conclude that Chinese, East Europeans and South Asian students “scored higher marks on an average (77%, 76%, and 74% respectively) outperforming Canadian students (73 %), “with the Caribbean and Latin American students not far behind” (69). These findings, however, are of limited value given that they are based on self-reported results obtained over a single semester and that the researchers do not distinguish between the grades of South Asian

\(^{21}\) Here, South Asian languages include Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, and Urdu.

\(^{22}\) As with the present study, Garnett (2008) based his analysis on educational data acquired from the Ministry of Education. He also, however, acquired data on “average family” incomes by postal code from the Canadian Council on Learning.

\(^{23}\) “Most” of the “South Asian” students in their sample were from India, but “fewer” numbers also came from Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Samuel et al., 2001, 64).
students living in Vancouver and those in Toronto. In addition, their interviewees included both Canadian born and immigrant students.

In a rare attempt to compare the high school graduation rates of students of immigrant origin with those of students who are not of immigrant origin in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, Ledent, Murdoch and McAndrew conclude that “all other things being equal, students whose language at home is different from their language of instruction are more likely to graduate than students educated in the language they use at home” but that “there are significant differences in the relative position of [the 10 linguistic sub-groups]” (2010, 128). In Vancouver, Chinese language speakers were the most likely to graduate, followed by Punjabi language speakers with Spanish speakers faring “significantly worse.”

Not surprisingly, conclusions regarding the achievements of South Asian students relative to other student populations vary depending on the data analyzed, its source, and the ways in which student populations have been defined. Most significantly, with the exception of Ledent et al.’s analysis, by addressing the achievements of “South Asians” en masse, the aforementioned studies may be masking significant inter-group variations reflective of differences in national origins (e.g. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and so forth), histories, settlement patterns and so forth. The present study therefore seeks to complement existing accounts of immigrant educational achievement in Canada by examining the specific academic achievements of Punjabi language speakers in the Vancouver region.

24 The researchers report that their “results are somewhat similar regardless” of whether youths of immigrant origin were defined by language used at home or place of birth (Ledent et al., 2010).
25 The Chinese linguistic sub-group was the only group common to all 3 cities but students from this group were most likely to graduate in all cases.
26 Zhou and Sao Xiong (2005) demonstrate very convincingly how the “multifaceted experiences” of the children of “Asian” immigrants are lost in analyses which aggregate the achievements of vastly different ethno-cultural groups under the homogenizing “Asian American umbrella.”
About the Data

For the purposes of analyzing Punjabi educational achievement, data for the following variables were culled from the British Columbia (B.C.) Ministry of Education’s (MED) province-wide student level data collection, which is comprised of enrolment, demographic and achievement data for all students attending public and independent schools across B.C. for each academic year, from 1995 to the present:

a) Home Language;

b) Gender;

c) Public/Independent School;

d) Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) of graduating students;

e) Grade level (8-12);

f) District Code (in which of the 12 districts the student was enrolled);

g) Date of Graduation and;

h) Foundation Skills Assessment 3 point scores for Reading, Writing and Numeracy.

Unfortunately, the MED does not collect data on the nationality/birth place or immigrant status of students or their parents. It is therefore impossible to establish a student’s ethno-cultural background or generational status (first or second generation) from this database apart from what a student selects as the primary language spoken in the home at the beginning of their high

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27 Since September 1990, the MED has gathered educational data at the individual student level and for each school and school district in the province. This data, however, is not publicly accessible. In order to obtain this data I worked with an analyst at Edudata Canada, an educational “information broker” located at the University of British Columbia, who helped me to complete the MED’s Research Agreement, to acquire and satisfy the terms of MED approval, and to subsequently analyze the raw un-aggregated student level data.
school career. For this reason, *Home Language* is employed as an imperfect proxy for ethnicity. By aggregating data according to the language spoken at home, the educational performance of Punjabi speakers is compared with all other Non-English speakers (that is, students from other immigrant parentages), English Speakers and Chinese Speakers. To track educational progress, that is, students’ achievements over the course of their high school careers, students were further organized into 5 cohorts (A-E) where Cohort A refers to students enrolled in Grade 8 in the 1995-1996 academic year, and Cohort E denotes students enrolled in Grade 8 in the 1999-2000 academic year.

Finally, given that the intent here is to provide a glimpse of how Punjabi students are performing academically in B.C. schools, I have excluded students with unique schooling experiences which can be expected to differ considerably from the wider student population. As such, unless otherwise specified, students enrolled in French immersion, special education programmes, or independent schools, and those students who self-identified as aboriginal and/or adult learners were not included in the study’s student population and/or the attendant analyses. ESL students, as in those students who were “ever enrolled” in an ESL programme were, however, included.

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28 A student’s language group was determined by the primary language spoken in the home that was indicated by the student upon entering high school in Grade 8. This group therefore likely includes both first and second generation students.
29 Given that Chinese immigrants are such a sizeable and growing population in B.C. and that Chinese languages (including Mandarin, Cantonese and Other) are the primary languages spoken by a high proportion of Non-English speaking students in the province, Chinese speaking students are distinguished as a meaningful reference group.
30 Had “ever ESL” Punjabi students been excluded from the analysis, many cross-tabulations would have been precluded due to insufficient sample sizes, that is where n is equal to or lesser than 5.
The distribution of students across home language groups and cohort years are shown in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Distribution of Students by Home Language Group and Cohort Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Home Language Group</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Punjabi</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>2098</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10966</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>2370</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10505</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>2446</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>10544</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>2156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>2634</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>10370</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>2162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>10024</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>1801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of Punjabi Students Across the Lower Mainland

Of the 12 school districts in the Lower Mainland, Surrey stands out as the district with the largest population of Punjabi students, both in terms of the proportion of and absolute number of students. For instance, as Table 2.2 indicates, while Punjabi students accounted for just over 4% of the total number of students entering public secondary school in September 1995, in Surrey, they represented 18% of the district’s eighth graders. This figure remains relatively constant over the study period, increasing slightly in September 1999, when Punjabi students comprised close to 20% of grade 8 enrolment. The proportion of Punjabi students across the rest of the lower mainland remained similarly stable between 1995 and 1999 with less than 5% enrolled in New Westminster, Maple Ridge and West Vancouver, between 6 and 10% in Abbotsford, Langley, Delta, Richmond, Burnaby and North Vancouver, 11% in Coquitlam, and 16% in Vancouver.
As Table 2.2 indicates, Punjabi students continue to figure most prominently in Surrey’s public schools (elementary and high schools). In 2000-'01, approximately 14% of Surrey’s public school students (elementary and high school) spoke Punjabi at home, and this figure has risen, with close to 19% (over 12,000) of students reporting Punjabi as their home language in 2007. Since 2000, Punjabi has appeared second only to English on the Surrey School District’s list of the “Top Ten Languages Spoken in Home” as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.2: Proportion (%) of Punjabi Students by School District*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
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<td>7.9</td>
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<td>18.3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Westminster</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnaby</td>
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<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maple Ridge</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coquitlam</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Vancouver</td>
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<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>West Vancouver</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures are based on the number of Punjabi students entering Grade 8.

Source: Ministry of Education Longitudinal File. Statistical Analysis performed by Edudata.
Table 2.3: Top Ten Languages* Spoken in the Home by Public School Students in Surrey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>66.75</td>
<td>65.16</td>
<td>63.83</td>
<td>62.83</td>
<td>62.24</td>
<td>60.96</td>
<td>59.10</td>
<td>58.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>15.07</td>
<td>15.77</td>
<td>16.43</td>
<td>16.85</td>
<td>17.51</td>
<td>18.26</td>
<td>18.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other than English and Punjabi, languages appear alphabetically. 
Source: Ministry of Education Student Statistics for District 036 – Surrey & District Student Counts.

**Academic Achievement by Home Language**

**Grad Flag**

MED assigns a *Grad Flag* to all students who have been registered in one of the province’s secondary schools. This is a dichotomous, yes/no, variable. A student receives a “y” if they “graduate,” meaning that they obtained either a Dogwood or school leaving certificate within 6 years of entering grade 8. Conversely, an “n” is assigned to those students who do not obtain a certificate within the designated 6 year time-frame. In interpreting this data, it is important to note however that an “n” is not synonymous with dropping out. An n indicates only that a student did not graduate from a B.C. high school, and therefore provides no indication of whether or not a student transferred out of B.C., graduating in another province or country, or if in fact, the student did drop out. Bearing in mind this caveat, the proportion of students who failed to receive a grad flag were analyzed (Table 2.4).
Among Punjabi students who began Grade 8 in 1995 (Cohort A), 2.5% did not receive a grad flag 6 years later and for Cohort B students, the proportion was about the same. The proportion of Cohort C and D students not receiving a grad flag, however, was smaller. The percentage of students receiving n’s is consistent across the Home Language Groups; no Home Language Group has a significantly larger proportion of students not receiving a grad flag, and this is true for all of the cohorts. These figures are fairly unremarkable in the sense that they indicate that Punjabi students are performing on par, if not slightly better than their peers in terms of their likelihood to graduate from high school. While this trend is quite encouraging, suggestive of a strong academic performance, it is belied by Punjabi students’ grade point averages.

Table 2.4: Proportion (%) of Students by Home Language Group Not Receiving a Grad Flag within 6 years of Enrolling in Grade 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Punjabi</th>
<th>All Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data for Cohort E was not available at the time of analysis.
Source: Ministry of Education TRAX File. Statistical Analysis performed by Edudata.

Grade Point Averages

GPAs are calculated cumulatively over a student’s high school career, based on a student’s “best” 52 credits at the time of graduation, and range from 0.00 to 4.00. For the purposes of analysis here, GPAs have been grouped into corresponding letter grades where a “C-“ is 1.00 to 1.99, “C” is 2.00 to 2.49, “C+” is 2.50 to 2.99, “B” is 3.00 to 3.99 and an “A” is 4.00. GPAs between 0.00 and 0.99 are referred to as “<C-.” In interpreting this data, Gunderson’s (2007, 161) explanation is useful:
The traditional view is that grades should fall into a normal distribution with the grade of C representing the mean, the median, and the mode, whereas A’s and F’s represent the bottom and the top of the curve. The traditional expectation is, therefore, that average achieving or ‘normal’ students should receive a grade of C.

As illustrated in Table 2.5, students from all Home Language groups are represented equally in the < C- or failing range, suggesting that Punjabi students who complete high school are no more likely than their peers to have underachieved to this extent. However, Punjabi students are less likely than their peers to finish high school with an A average. The most significant variation between students from different linguistic groups occurs in the C-, C/C+ and B ranges. Relative to other groups, a higher proportion of Punjabi students are falling in the C/C+ and C- ranges. Of course, this also means that compared with their peers, a lower proportion of Punjabi students are graduating with B averages. In the C- to C+ ranges, the variation is most pronounced between the Punjabi and Chinese students; in fact, the performances of the two groups are almost reversed. While, Chinese students feature the highest proportion of B students, Punjabis have the largest share of students with C averages. Most significantly, the proportion of Punjabi students graduating with a C- exceeds that of Chinese students by between 3 and 6 times. This pattern is made more explicit in Table 2.5.
Table 2.5: Proportion (%) of Students in Each G.P.A. Range by Language Group and Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G.P.A.</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Punjabi</th>
<th>All Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;C-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>9.0</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/C+</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.6: Proportion (%) of A and C- Students by Home Language Group Relative to Share of Total Cohort Population with a Recorded G.P.A.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total Pop</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of A students</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of C- students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total Pop</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of A students</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of C- students</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total Pop</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of A students</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of C- students</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punjabi</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total Pop</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of A students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of C- students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Here, the same GPA data is re-analyzed to compare how students from the four language groups are represented in the “A” and “C-” ranges relative to their shares of the total cohort populations with a recorded GPA. While consistently over represented in the C- range, Punjabis are the most under-represented group in the A range whereas Chinese students are over-represented in the A range and under-represented in the C- range. Students from Other Language Groups are also under represented in the A range yet surpass even Punjabis as the most over represented in the C- range, while English students are evenly represented in the high and low range. The disparity between the G.P.A.s of Punjabi, English and Chinese students is further shown in Table 2.7.

While the median G.P.A.s for Punjabi students are the lowest averages (in particular, the boys), falling between 2.62 and 3.04 (C+), the median G.P.A.s for Chinese students range from 3.17 to 3.54 (“B”).

---

31 A proportion of students have no recorded value for their GPA at the time of graduation. This means that these students did not graduate in the district in which they first enrolled. Totals in Table 2.5 do, therefore, not sum to 100%.
Table 2.7: Median Grade Point Average for High School Graduates by Home Language Group *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Girls</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>b) Boys</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Adapted from Pratt, 2008; does not include data for the “Other” Home Language Group or Cohort E.

**Foundation Skills Assessment**

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is an annual province-wide assessment of B.C.’s students’ academic skills, administered each spring to Grade, 4, 7 and 10 students attending all public and provincially funded independent schools. The purpose of these yearly assessments is to provide a ‘snapshot’ of how well students are acquiring basic skills in the core areas of Reading Comprehension, Writing and Numeracy. Given my interest in the performance of high school aged students, only the 3 point scores (Does Not Meet Expectations, Meets Expectations, Exceeds Expectations) for Grade 10 students in the 3 relevant subject areas are analyzed. Additionally, because FSAs were first administered in 1999, this data is only available for Cohorts C-E. With the exception of writing scores for Cohorts D and E, the proportion of Punjabi students not meeting expectations exceeds that of all other language groups, especially so with respect to the numeracy scores, while the proportion of Punjabi students exceeding expectations is below that of all other language groups. The numeracy score results mirror the GPA findings, with a much higher proportion of Chinese students exceeding expectations than
all other language groups (Table 2.8). However, while the percentage of Punjabi students not meeting expectations on the numeracy test far exceeds that of the Chinese students, the discrepancy, although still significant, is less pronounced relative to the English and Other Language students.

Punjabi students perform better on the reading tests, with a greater proportion meeting expectations than on the numeracy tests (Table 2.9). Furthermore, while the percentage of Punjabis not meeting expectations is the highest with respect to the other groups, the proportions of students not meeting expectations are higher than those for the numeracy tests across all of the language groups. English students fare best on reading tests, with fewer students failing to meet reading expectations and more students exceeding expectations than the other language groups.

English speaking students produce the best results on the writing tests, with the lowest proportion of all language groups not meeting expectations (Table 2.10). Punjabi students in Cohorts D and E produce the next strongest results, with a higher proportion of students attaining scores that meet expectations. Nevertheless, higher proportions of Chinese and English students generate scores that exceed expectations.
Table 2.8: FSA Numeracy Scores by Home Language Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohorts</th>
<th>Chinese (%)</th>
<th>English (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Punjabi (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Meet Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceed Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.9: FSA Reading Comprehension Scores by Home Language Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohorts</th>
<th>Chinese (%)</th>
<th>English (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Punjabi (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Meet Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceed Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.10: FSA Writing Scores by Home Language Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohorts</th>
<th>Chinese (%)</th>
<th>English (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Punjabi (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Meet Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceed Expectations</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


32 Note that columns in Tables 2.8-2.10 may not sum to 100% as a certain proportion of FSA tests cannot be scored because of “insufficient meaningful information” or because the “student did not respond.”
Academic Achievement by Gender and Home Language

In terms of their G.P.A.s at the time of graduation, female students outperform their male counterparts across the GVRD and across cohorts (see Table 2.11). When the student population is not disaggregated into home language groups, the gender split is relatively even in the C+ range while substantially favouring females in the upper “B” and “A” ranges and males in the “C” and lower ranges. This gendered pattern of educational achievement was expected. Gender achievement gaps at the secondary school level have been well documented by educationalists in a number of international contexts and the attendant issue of “failing boys” has been hotly debated for over a decade, particularly in Britain (see for instance, Epstein et al., 1998; Francis, 2000; and Griffin 2000). Though Gunderson (2007) finds that, consistent with the pattern for Canadian born students, immigrant girls outperformed boys in all provincially examinable subjects, the research on gender and educational achievement, deals far less with the combined effects of gender and race/ethnicity on scholastic achievement, such that the relationship between

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33 The Ministry of Education requires that cells with counts of 5 or fewer not be known to researchers. Due to this stipulation, too many cells were ‘masked’ by Edudata to allow for the analysis of the Grad Flag variable according to gender and home language groups.

34 I use the term “gender split” to refer to the proportion of female students relative to male students who earned G.P.A.s in a particular grade range. For instance, in Cohort A, female students accounted for 44% of graduating students with G.P.A.s of C- or lower, while male students accounted for 56%. In this case, the gender split is 44/56 (see Table 11).

35 “Are Girls smarter than boys?” appeared as a headline on the front page of The Vancouver Sun on Saturday June 20th, 2009. The article presents evidence concerning the gender gap in B.C.’s secondary schools and argues that some educators are dismayed by the fact that “female students are leaving their male peers behind” (Steffenhagen, 2009, A22). Steffenhagen (2009, A22) reports that the problem is so severe that “nearly a third of B.C.’s schools districts have developed programs to improve boys’ performance” and suggests that educators are turning to the materials of Barry MacDonald, the author of *Boy Smarts – Mentoring Boys for Success at School* for guidance.
G.P.A, gender and home language group (i.e. ethnicity) in the Lower Mainland was not as predictable.

Table 2.11: Gender Splits (% F/% M) by G.P.A. Range for Total Cohort Populations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G.P.A.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;C-</td>
<td>44/56</td>
<td>41/59</td>
<td>42/58</td>
<td>45/55</td>
<td>43/57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>28/72</td>
<td>26/74</td>
<td>32/68</td>
<td>27/73</td>
<td>29/71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>38/62</td>
<td>40/60</td>
<td>39/61</td>
<td>39/61</td>
<td>41/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>49/51</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>47/53</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>47/53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>59/41</td>
<td>58/42</td>
<td>58/42</td>
<td>59/41</td>
<td>57/43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>75/25</td>
<td>72/28</td>
<td>71/29</td>
<td>74/26</td>
<td>71/29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total populations refer to the population of students in each cohort from all home language groups with a recorded GPA.


When we take into account both gender and home language group variables, the pattern of achievement which emerges is more complicated, with the severity of gender gaps differing, in many instances quite significantly, between home language groups. As indicated in Table 2.11, though overall, male students predominate in the lower G.P.A. ranges (below C+), this trend is most pronounced among Chinese language speaking students; Chinese boys comprise a healthy majority, in some instances accounting for close to 75% of Chinese students with lower GPAs.

Though boys outnumber girls in English and Other language speaking groups in the lower C range (<C-), the female to male ratio is less pronounced than for Chinese students. This changes however in the C- and C ranges where the gender splits for English and Other language speaking students come to more closely resemble those of Chinese students. The pattern is less definitive for Punjabi speaking students in the <C- range, with girls making up a larger proportion of students in three of the cohort years (A, D and E) and boys representing the overwhelming majority in Cohort B and just over half of Punjabi students in Cohort C. However, gender gaps
more closely approximating those of the Chinese, English and Other language groups emerge more fully in the C- and C ranges, where Punjabi boys comprise the majority in all cohort years. While overall, the gender splits in the C+ range for each cohort year are relatively even (Table 2.11), this is a consequence of the fact that the lower proportions (<50%) of female Chinese and English students are offset by a reverse trend in the Other and Punjabi groups of students where females appear in higher proportions (>50%), except in Cohort C. In the B range, the gender splits are relatively consistent across all home language groups and cohort years with females representing between 53% and 60% of “B” average students. Similarly, girls typically comprise the majority of A students. The gender splits for Chinese, English and Other students are fairly consistent across cohort years, with females comprising between 67 and 81% of the A student body. Once again, the pattern for Punjabi students is less clear-cut, with Punjabi girls representing between 50 and 100% of A students, except in Cohort D where boys comprise the majority at 67%.

Unfortunately, because of the insufficient sample sizes, that is 5 or fewer students in the A and <C- categories, the extent to which these findings concerning the gender gap in the highest and the lowest ranges can be seen as significant is uncertain. That said, the gender difference between the median G.P.A.s (Table 2.7) lends support to the existence of a wider gap between Punjabi females and males than either English or Chinese students. Punjabi females have consistently higher averages than their male peers but the extent of the discrepancy varies, from 0.26 to 0.42 points apart. The gap for English students is smaller, ranging from 0.29 and 0.35 points, whereas for Chinese students, the gap between the higher female medians and the male medians is consistently between 0.25 and 0.27 points.
Table 2.12: Gender Splits (%F/%M) and Spreads* by G.P.A. range, Cohort and Language Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G.P.A.</th>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;C-</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>35/65</td>
<td>25/75</td>
<td>21/79</td>
<td>36/64</td>
<td>30/70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>45/55</td>
<td>45/55</td>
<td>46/54</td>
<td>46/54</td>
<td>41/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>40/60</td>
<td>39/61</td>
<td>50/50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>22/78</td>
<td>46/54</td>
<td>63/37</td>
<td>57/43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>20/80</td>
<td>23/77</td>
<td>23/77</td>
<td>14/86</td>
<td>18/82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>28/73</td>
<td>25/75</td>
<td>33/67</td>
<td>29/71</td>
<td>30/70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37/63</td>
<td>32/68</td>
<td>35/65</td>
<td>26/74</td>
<td>39/61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>25/75</td>
<td>29/71</td>
<td>24/76</td>
<td>29/71</td>
<td>19/81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>28/72</td>
<td>30/70</td>
<td>37/63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37/63</td>
<td>42/58</td>
<td>42/58</td>
<td>41/59</td>
<td>39/61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>40/60</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>43/57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>44/56</td>
<td>42/58</td>
<td>39/61</td>
<td>46/54</td>
<td>40/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>49/51</td>
<td>49/51</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>48/52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>56/44</td>
<td>51/49</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>51/49</td>
<td>55/45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>43/57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>53/47</td>
<td>54/46</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>53/47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>59/41</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>58/42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>62/38</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>58/42</td>
<td>62/38</td>
<td>59/41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
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<td>60/40</td>
<td>59/41</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>62/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>72/28</td>
<td>63/37</td>
<td>81/19</td>
<td>67/33</td>
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<td>73/27</td>
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<td>73/27</td>
<td>76/24</td>
<td>76/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>100/00</td>
<td>67/33</td>
<td>33/67</td>
<td>82/18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education, FSA Files. Statistical Analysis by Edudata Canada

In addition, across the cohorts, more females than males do not meet expectations on the FSA numeracy tests, while, correspondingly, more males are attaining numeracy scores which exceed expectations (Table 2.13). Notwithstanding this, the majority, 62-66 percent, of both male and female students are obtaining numeracy scores which simply meet expectations. The pattern is reversed when we examine students’ reading comprehension scores. Here, a greater proportion of female students are exceeding Ministry expectations while more male students are failing to meet expectations. Additionally, there is greater variability with respect to the proportion of
students meeting expectations, with a greater share of females (62, 64 and 73 %) attaining scores in this range than males (59, 60, 69%). The pattern for writing scores mirrors the reading score findings. More males than females do not meet expectations, while females are more likely to produce scores which exceed expectations. Again, the writing scores for the majority of both male and female students are meeting expectations. The share of students with scores meeting expectations, however, exceed those for both the reading and numeracy tests - 75, 80 and 85 % of females, and 62, 75, and 79 % of males for Cohorts C, D and E respectively.

Table 2.13: Gender Splits for FSA Tests for Total Cohort Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Gender Split (%F / %M)</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
<th>Reading Comp</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NME*</td>
<td>23.6 / 19.65</td>
<td>15.0 / 23.54</td>
<td>21.56 / 35.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>6.43 / 10.49</td>
<td>10.10 / 5.10</td>
<td>2.35 / 1.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>66.28 / 66.10</td>
<td>73.12 / 69.02</td>
<td>75.19 / 61.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NME</td>
<td>19.59 / 17.24</td>
<td>19.46 / 26.75</td>
<td>6.85 / 15.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>8.38 / 10.74</td>
<td>9.15 / 6.38</td>
<td>5.27 / 2.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>64.01 / 64.87</td>
<td>64.48 / 60.44</td>
<td>85.62 / 78.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NME</td>
<td>21.17 / 16.74</td>
<td>24.46 / 30.08</td>
<td>6.00 / 12.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>8.68 / 13.44</td>
<td>8.19 / 6.21</td>
<td>8.64 / 4.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>61.99 / 62.48</td>
<td>62.46 / 58.51</td>
<td>80.15 / 74.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NME, EE, ME mean, respectively, “Not Meeting Expectations,” “Exceeding Expectations”, and “Meeting Expectations”

When we disaggregate the student population by gender and home language group in Table 2.14, it becomes readily apparent that female and male Chinese students dramatically outperform their counterparts from all other home language groups on numeracy tests, with Chinese males producing slightly better results than Chinese females. In all 3 of the cohort years, approximately one quarter of Chinese males achieve numeracy scores which exceed expectations.
and females are not far behind, with approximately 20% of Chinese females exceeding expectations. These results are in stark contrast to Punjabi students’ scores. Over 30% of females are failing to meet expectations on their numeracy tests, while males fare slightly better, hovering just below 30%. Very few Punjabi students are attaining numeracy results which exceed expectations; this situation is particularly severe for Punjabi females, as no greater than 2% of their scores, in any cohort year, exceed numeracy expectations. That said, Other students are not scoring much better than their Punjabi peers. In Cohorts C-E, close to 30 percent of female Other students and approximately a quarter of male students are failing to meet expectations. Although only small proportions of male and female Other students exceed expectations on their numeracy tests, less than 10% in all instances, these results are two times better than those of the Punjabi students! English speaking students, produce slightly better numeracy results than the Other students but still lag far behind the Chinese students. In fact, the gendered pattern of numeracy scores for English students closely mirrors that of the total student population’s (see Table 2.12) – with the majority of both male and female students meeting expectations. This pattern is largely repeated for students’ reading comprehension scores – with scores for Punjabi students emerging as a grave exception.

Not surprisingly, English speaking students generated the best reading scores out of the four language groups, with English females consistently outperforming all of their peers. English females are responsible for the highest proportion of those reading scores which exceed expectations - at 12%, 12% and 9% for each of the cohort years; these figures surpass those for all other females and males by significant margins (in some instances, by as much as six times). The majority of English males and females are however just meeting expectations – with
between 64% and 75% of females and 60%-71% for males scoring within this range. Chinese students are not far off with approximately 69%, 66% and 63% of female students and 68%, 59%, and 61% of male students meeting reading expectations for Cohorts C, D and E respectively. Even so, in each of the cohort years, over a quarter of Chinese males and approximately a fifth of females are failing to meet expectations. Other females are faring worse than either Chinese males or females and the case is still more severe for Other males. 25%, 30% and 38% of females and approximately 33%, 38% and 41% of males speaking Other home languages are not meeting reading expectations for Cohorts C, D and E respectively. Punjabi females are performing on par with Other males, with 28%, 38% and 40% of females not meeting expectations in each of the cohort years. Punjabi males, however, stand out from their peers with the highest proportion of their scores not meeting expectations. In Cohort C, approximately 41% of Punjabi boys failed to meet reading expectations; in Cohort D, this figure reaches 47% and in Cohort E, is at it highest - and the highest for any of the language groups - at 50%.

In Cohort C, the proportion of students who do not meet expectations on the FSA writing tests are high for all language groups and relative to the comparable figures for numeracy and reading comprehension, with proportions ranging from a high of 47% for Punjabi boys and a low of approximately 34% for English boys and a high of 26% for Punjabi girls and a low of 20% for English girls. While the writing results for Cohort D and Cohort E show marked improvement, the proportion of boys not meeting expectations, still exceeds that of the girls for all language groups. English boys perform the best of all males with only 11% and 13% of them not meeting expectations in Cohorts D and E respectively. English females, along with Punjabi girls,
outperform all other students on their FSA writing tests. Only 4% and 5% of English females do not meet writing expectations in Cohorts D and E, while Punjabi females perform comparably well with 4% and 6% for the same years. The writing results for Other and Chinese females do not stand out, falling between the male (low) and female (high) extremes.

Table 2.14: Gender Splits for FSA Tests by Cohort and Home Language Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Punjabi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NME</td>
<td>10.36 / 7.20</td>
<td>23.30 / 20.27</td>
<td>85.4 / 26.4</td>
<td>38.7 / 32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>17.60 / 23.76</td>
<td>5.08 / 8.93</td>
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Note that columns in Table 2.14 may not sum to 100% as a certain proportion of FSA tests cannot be scored because of “insufficient meaningful information” or because the “student did not respond.”
b) Reading Comprehension

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c) Writing

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Concluding Remarks

Though with limitations, the educational data gathered by the Ministry of Education provide an essential starting point for understanding the educational experiences of Punjabi youth in Vancouver, B.C. Contrary to findings concerning ESL/immigrant students in general, the data suggest that Punjabi students are no more at risk of dropping out of high school than their native
English speaking peers. In fact, almost all of the young men and women in this sample acquired either a Dogwood diploma or a school leaving certificate within 6 years of enrolling in grade 8. While this finding is encouraging in that high school completion is an obvious baseline measurement of achievement, the circumstances under which Punjabi teenagers, in particular, young men, are completing high school is less reassuring. Relative to their peers in the Lower Mainland, a greater proportion of Punjabi students are failing to meet provincial expectations in the core areas of numeracy, reading comprehension and writing and are graduating with grade point averages which are at the lower end of the continuum. In sum, Punjabi students are not failing nor are they excelling; their performances are poor to middling and not strong enough to carry them into university education. In Chapter 3, I begin to unravel the meaning behind these statistical trends by turning to the sociological theory of segmented assimilation.
Chapter 3

The Theory of Segmented Assimilation

“Perhaps the single most influential concept in the contemporary study of the second generation,” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway, 2008, 8), segmented assimilation has emerged as a model for explaining the multiple and divergent educational and labour market trajectories of the children of post-1965 immigrants to the United States. In emphasizing the influence of structural and contextual factors on the ways in which second generation youth self-identify and are able to marshal their family and community resources, the model of segmented assimilation “provides perhaps the most adequate depiction” of immigrant incorporation in that it “offers a basis for understanding the dynamics of both success and failure” (Bean and Stevens, 2003, 101). I begin this chapter by introducing the theory of segmented assimilation as the conceptual framework informing my subsequent analysis of the educational (under)achievement of young Punjabi men in Surrey, B.C. Following from this initial conceptual discussion, I review some of the most salient empirical research on the educational achievements of the second generation in high school and early adulthood in the United States before addressing the extent to which segmented assimilation has been observed in Canada. In discussing the limited Canadian findings I identify some of the potential difficulties in applying the theory of segmented assimilation in contexts beyond the United States. From here, I offer some concluding remarks before embarking on my analysis in Chapter 4, where I begin to apply segmented assimilation theory to explicate how life in Surrey’s Punjabi community predisposes certain young men to identify as “brown.”
The Theory of Segmented Assimilation

Beginning in the early 1990s leading American sociologists working in the field of immigration and ethnicity became preoccupied with the economic prospects and life chances of the new second generation\(^\text{37}\) (see Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997; Waldinger and Perlman, 1998; Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004). Their studies were in large part “impelled by the fears of second generation decline” (Gans, 1992, 173), that is, the hypothesis that as the children of post-1965 immigrants mature and enter the labour force, they will be less prosperous than their parents and many members of earlier second generations, and in some cases will be unable to escape “persistent poverty” (Gans, 1992). Their concerns are rooted in the fact that not only are the majority of today’s newcomers and their offspring visible minorities, encountering “a mainly white society not cured of its racist afflictions,” (Waldinger and Perlman, 1998, 5) but they, unlike immigrants of the early twentieth century, confront a restructured, service based, hour glass economy in which it is much harder to secure and advance through well paid blue collar employment. The net result is that today’s immigrant children “face a different, more difficult set of options” than children of earlier waves of immigration (Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004, 377). Waldinger and Feliciano argue that the contemporary U.S economy presents immigrant children with a “cruel choice: either acquire the college, and other advanced degrees needed to move into the professional/managerial elite, or else accept the same menial jobs to which the first generation was consigned” (2004, 377). Yet many immigrant children are not performing well

\(^{37}\) The new second generation technically refers only to the native born children of post-1965 immigrant arrivals. However, researchers often apply the term more broadly to include both native born children who have at least one foreign born parent and youth born abroad but who emigrated at an early age, typically before the age of 12. Although the biographies and characteristics of these two groups likely differ in many respects, they are aggregated for the purposes of considering the impact of immigrant parentage (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001).
enough in high school to advance to post-secondary education and/or are unwilling to accept “immigrant wages and hours,” relegating them to socio-economic positions below those of their parents (Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004).

The prospect of second generation decline challenges the straight line assimilation model which until recently served as the “master concept” guiding sociological understandings of immigrant adaptation and intergenerational mobility (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). The theory of assimilation anticipates a relatively uniform, linear, and uncomplicated pathway to immigrant adaptation, predicting that with the passage of time, members of successive generations will be “absorbed” into “mainstream” society, eventually shedding their home culture, to resemble and merge with the “native” population (Alba and Nee, 2003). Implicit within this model is the promise that full assimilation results in upward mobility: that the descendants of immigrants are expected to enjoy greater economic success and social status than their predecessors. The straight line assimilation model, however, has proven inadequate for explaining the diverse experiences of America’s new second generation. For in today’s America:

neither valedictorians nor delinquents are atypical among immigrant children…While immigrant children are overrepresented on lists of award-winners or on academic fast tracks, many others are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviours, school failure, street gangs, and youth crime (Zhou, 1997, 72).

To account for such divergent outcomes, Alejandro Portes and his colleagues, Min Zhou (1993) and Ruben Rumbaut (1996, 2001a, 2001b) re-conceived the process of immigration adaptation, proposing segmented assimilation as a new conceptual framework. Although assimilation continues to operate as the main mode of immigrant adaptation, this model provides for a more nuanced account of the process by acknowledging the importance of structural context and the role of ethnicity and culture in determining immigrant adaptation. Rather than being received by
a monolithic, unified “mainstream,” Portes et al. posit that contemporary immigrants and their children are received by and encounter many different versions of society, so that the key question for sociologists is not “whether the second generation will assimilate to U.S society but to what segment of that society it will assimilate” (2001a, 55). The type of assimilation that children of immigrants undergo depends on how they and their families manage the three major challenges to their educational and occupational success: the persistence of racial discrimination; the bifurcation of the American labour market; and exposure to a “consolidated” “marginalized” inner city population (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a).

Immigrant families are not equally equipped to deal with these cultural and economic threats to their children’s educational success. Some families lack the resources to “provide access to economic goods and job opportunities” and/or “those that reinforce parental normative controls” (Portes et al., 2005, 1012). In some instances, where strong ethnic communities have been encouraged to flourish by governments and host societies, ethnic networks are able to offset the effects of inadequate parental resources. Accordingly, how immigrant children ultimately “adapt, react, and assimilate into different segments of American society” reflects:

the history of the immigrant first generation, including the human capital brought by immigrant parents and the context of their reception; the differential pace of acculturation among parents and children, including the development of language gaps

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38 Consonant Acculturation describes situations where immigrant parents and their children seek and together work towards “integration” into the “American mainstream” and the “gradual abandonment of the home language and cultural occurs at roughly the same pace across generations” (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a, 54). Selective Acculturation occurs when “the learning process of both generations is embedded in a co-ethnic community of sufficient size and institutional diversity to slow down the cultural shift and promote the partial retention of the parents’ home language and norms” (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a, 54). Dissonant Acculturation takes place when “children’s learning of the English language and American ways and simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture outstrip their parents’” and often leads to role reversal, whereby children, due to their knowledge of their new society, assume parental
between them and its bearing on normative integration and family cohesiveness; the
cultural and economic barriers confronted by second generation youth in their quest for
successful adaptation; and the family and community resources for confronting these
barriers (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996, 2001a, 2001b) (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

This means that not all immigrant children are equally susceptible to downward assimilation.

Rather the model predicts three possible outcomes for immigrant offspring which are depicted in
Figures 3.1 and 3.2. The first scenario of upward mobility applies to the children of immigrant
parents who possess high levels of human capital, have fully assimilated into white mainstream
middle class society, and who use their socioeconomic resources to protect their children from
negative counter cultural messages, discrimination and to support their children’s educational
endeavours. The second scenario of downward mobility most often applies to the non-white
children of immigrants who are subject to racism and have assimilated into an oppositional
native born minority underclass culture which discourages academic achievement and whose
economically disadvantaged families do not have the skills, resources, or co-ethnic ties to
combat these destructive external influences. In the final scenario, the offspring of less
prosperous immigrant parents attain middle class status by deliberately maintaining strong
economic and cultural attachments to their ethnic communities, advancing by way of their
community’s support, networks and resources rather than their family’s socio-economic assets.

responsibilities and serve as their parents’ cultural broker, leading to an erosion of parental
authority (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a, 54).
As the children of immigrants follow these various paths to incorporation, they relate and respond differently to the question of their ‘ethnicity’:

[there are groups among today’s second generation that are slated for a smooth transition into the mainstream for whom ethnicity will soon be a matter of choice…There are others for whom their ethnicity will be a source of strength […] There are still others…whose ethnicity will be a mark of subordination. These children are at risk of joining the masses of the dispossessed […] (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 45).]
As Rumbaut (1994, 754) summarizes “such divergent modes of incorporation will be accompanied by changes in the character and salience of ethnicity…by divergent modes of ethnic self-identification.” For members of the second generation, the processes of (re)constructing, selecting and adopting certain ethnic self-identities are subsumed within the larger process of immigrant incorporation. Second generation ethnic identities are thus conditioned by and are manifestations of young people’s acculturation experiences, parental modes of incorporation, their parents’ socio-economic status, and family composition (see Figure 3.3). These factors act together in different ways, allowing for multiple approaches to identity resolution, and to the construction of different types of ethnic identities - some of which impede academic success.

Figure 3.3: Determinants of Adaptation Across Generations

There is concern that some of today’s second generation youth may be adopting the “oppositional identities,” “adversarial outlook and deviant lifestyles” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001, 59) of inner city youth subcultures. As Zhou (1997) explains:
[t]here has been a growing ‘oppositional culture’ among young Americans, especially among those who have felt oppressed and excluded from the American mainstream and who have been frustrated by the widening gap between a culture that highly values freedom and materialism and the reality of a dwindling economic future. Many of these American children have responded to their social isolation and their constrained opportunities with resentment toward middle-class America, rebellion against all forms of authority, and rejection of the goals of achievement and upward mobility (69).

Second generation youth who “become American” by assimilating into the values and norms of the inner city express solidarity with their minority peers through opposition founded upon “the central notion that the plight of the minority is due to the hostility of mainstream institutions” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 6). For school aged youth, opposition translates into the rejection and devaluation of education as a mechanism for advancement and an acceptance of values and attitudes which are antithetical to school success\(^39\). Indoctrination into an oppositional culture amounts to a process of “learning not to learn”\(^40\)” (Suárez-Orozco, 1987, 164) such that it is the “willful refusal to learn, not the failure to learn,” which ultimately undermines academic achievement (Zhou, 1997, 78).

Here it is important to note that the “oppositional culture explanation” or “resistance model” (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998) was first proposed by educational anthropologist, Ogbu (1978, 1991) to account for racial disparities in educational performances

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\(^39\) Similarly, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) propose that children of immigrants develop *adversarial identities* around “rejecting – after having been rejected by – the institutions of dominant culture” and consider mainstream adaptation to be a denial and rejection of their ethnic identity (107). As with other marginalized youth in America, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) find that the children of immigrants who are structurally marginalized and culturally subordinated respond to this “poisoned mirror” by assuming an adversarial stance, which in some instances, can involve seeking an identity, security and a sense of belonging through gang membership.

\(^40\) This process of “learning not to learn” recalls the type of social reproduction documented by Willis (1977) in his seminal volume *Learning to Labor*. In opposing authority, conformity and educational achievement, Willis’ working class ‘lads’ ultimately reproduce their parent’s class position by dropping out of high school and taking up working class jobs.
in the United States. Ogbu (1991, 9) argues that involuntary (non-immigrant) minorities, such as blacks and Native Americans, “who were brought into their present society through slavery, conquest, or colonization” interpret and react to events and phenomena such as blocked opportunities, discriminatory or derogatory treatment, and prejudice, differently than voluntary minorities, or immigrants who generally feel that their move to the new society is economically beneficial and will result in greater freedom and opportunities. The variation in outlooks results from discrepancies in the groups’ underlying cultural models, that is, their respective “understandings of how their society or any particular domain or institution works” and “their places in that working order” (Ogbu, 1991, 7).

Immigrant minorities tend to treat social, political and economic barriers as temporary and surmountable given enough time, work and education. They typically evaluate their present situation positively, relative to what they left “back home,” which works to engender a sense of optimism. Their “folk theories” of success treat education as the key to upward mobility and in many instances, immigrants will devise their own “survival strategies” to cope with structural barriers, for example, by developing ethnic businesses and niche economies. Finally, their socio-cultural identities are not developed in opposition to the dominant or mainstream group(s): their socio-cultural identities “existed before emigration,” “they bring with them a sense of who they are…and they seem to retain this social identity at least during the first generation” (Ogbu, 1991, 12-13). Furthermore, they tend to exhibit a high degree of trust toward members of dominant groups and their institutions and downplay discrimination as a justifiable cost of immigration. In contrast, non-immigrant minorities tend to view the barriers facing them as “permanent” and “institutionalized” and rather than comparing their experiences with life in the “homeland,” evaluate themselves in relation to members of the dominant group, alongside whom they
“conclude that they are worse off than they ought to be for no other reason than that they belong to a subordinate and disparaged minority group” (Ogbu, 1991, 14). Rather than placing their faith in education, the non-immigrant “folk theory” to success emphasizes the importance of collective change to redress structural unfairness and inequality. Their survival strategies seek to “increase opportunities or the pool of resources” for their members and typically involve some form of collective action but, according to Ogbu, also include “sports, entertainment, hustling, drug dealing and the like” (15). Quite unlike immigrants, non-immigrant minorities have constructed their social and cultural identities after their involuntary incorporation to serve as “coping mechanisms under subordination.” As such, they tend to conceive of their identities and cultural frame of reference in opposition to those of their dominant ‘oppressors’ and treat cultural differences as “symbols of identity to be maintained” rather than to be overcome.

Ogbu argues that these “minority responses” work alongside societal and school forces to influence a child’s school performance such that: “school performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to the fact that the nature of the minorities’ interpretations and responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure” (1993, 88). Relative to the immigrant minority model, the non-immigrant cultural model makes it difficult for children to overcome cultural/language barriers, and interpersonal and inter-group problems that they encounter at school, and actually orients children toward “anti-academic success” (22). For instance, children of non-immigrant minorities may be encouraged to “get ahead” through means other than education, or to try and “make it” without hard work, leading to a slackening of school effort and a poor work ethic. They may also be taught to equate the language and behaviour required at school to be symbolic of the dominant group, which “results in conscious or unconscious opposition or in ambivalence toward school
learning” (27). For the children of non-immigrants, it thus becomes more difficult to “accept and follow school rules of behaviour and to persevere at their academic tasks” (Ogbu, 1991, 28).

Though the theory of segmented assimilation as proposed by Portes et al. incorporates aspects of Ogbu’s “oppositional culture explanation,” it moves well beyond his theorizing by addressing whether - and under what structural and socio-cultural conditions – it is possible for the children of immigrants to develop or adopt non-immigrant minority identities.

**Educational Achievement and the New Second Generation**

Sociologists determine the extent of an adult’s integration into society by examining occupational attainment and income, but for the young children of immigrants they consider their educational attainments. Attending and succeeding at school are thus conceived of as essential first steps towards adaptation into American society and key determinants of socio-economic mobility. For instance, dropping out or failing out of high school are seen as early indicators of downward assimilation.41 Scholars of America’s new second generation have thus taken a keen interest in the educational achievement and attainment of various immigrant and ethno-cultural groups in the United States, and have revealed substantial disparities, particularly between African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans and whites and Asian Americans. Kao and Thompson summarize this “racial and ethnic hierarchy in educational achievement” as follows:

> high achieving Asian American groups, such as South Asians, Chinese, and Koreans outperform whites on a number of measures, but low-achieving Asian American groups, such as Cambodians and Laotians, have outcomes comparable to African Americans.

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41 Other indicators include early childbearing (among young women) and being arrested and/or incarcerated for committing a crime (among young men) (see Rumbaut, 2005 and Portes et al., 2005).
Similarly, Hispanics, Cubans, and to a slightly less extent South and Central Americans have much higher educational outcomes than Mexicans\(^{42}\) (2003, 435-436).

In seeking to explain these group differences in the United States, studies on the new second generation have addressed the extent to which the educational attainments of the children of immigrants are influenced by various socio-cultural and structural factors including parental education and socio-economic status (Kao, 1995; Kao, Tienda and Schneider, 1996; Portes and MacLeod, 1996); racial/ethnic identity (Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Gibson, 1989; Waters, 1994, 1996, 1999); family structure and ties (Kibria, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994; Zhou and Bankston, 1994); social capital (Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler, 1994; Zhou and Bankston, 1994, 1998; Portes and MacLeod, 1999); patterns of language acquisition and language use (Bankston and Zhou, 1995; Rumbaut, 1995); and the context of immigrant reception or modes of incorporation (Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler, 1994; Rumbaut 1995; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Portes and MacLeod, 1999). Demonstrating the multiple paths and varied educational outcomes of second generation youth, these studies have provided invaluable empirical support for the theory of segmented assimilation, contributing to its refinement and to one of the most comprehensive and rigorous tests of the theory to date.

In 2001 Portes and Rumbaut co-authored, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*, in which they expand significantly on the theory of segmented assimilation as they present the results of a 12 year, cross-national and longitudinal survey of the children of immigrants from 77 different nations living in San Diego, California, and Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Florida (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001b). The *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study* (CILS) traces and compares the experiences of over 5,000 high school students based on

\(^{42}\) This profile is consistent with findings presented in other studies (see for instance Portes and MacLeod, 1999; Hirschman, 2001).
surveys administered in 1992, when students were in grade eight or nine, and again in 1995-96 when students were in their final year of high school (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001b). A third ethnographic phase was completed in 2002 and involves intensive study of a sample of 55 of the original respondents living in South Florida (Portes et al., 2005). The CILS thus permits the analysis of the social, cultural, and psychological adaptation as well as the educational performance of the children of immigrants.43

Portes and Rumbaut (2001a) examine the relationships between the type of ethnic identities44 adopted by second generation youth and parental socioeconomic status, family structure, measures of acculturation (i.e., nativity, length of U.S. residence, citizenship and linguistic adaptation), and subjective outlooks (i.e., perceptions of discrimination and the extent to which the child’s and parents’ self-identities are perceived as the same). They find that while some of the associations changed over time,45 acculturative factors and subjective outlooks remain significant throughout high school and that length of U.S. residence and use of English at home point toward the use of a plain American identity; children who have at least one American born parent are more likely to use a plain American or hyphenated identity; friendships with ethnic peers are most characteristic of a foreign national identity; bilingualism is most common

43 The CILS formed the basis for several earlier studies on the second generation including Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler, 1994; Rumbaut, 1994; Rumbaut 1995; and Portes and MacLeod, 1996.
44 Their study conceives of the process of ethnic identification as beginning with self-labeling or self categorization. To determine the way in which the children of immigrants ethnically self-identified, the students were asked “How do you identify, that is, what do you call yourself?” and examples of “national and ethnic designators” were provided alongside the question (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 359 25n). Based on their self reported definitions, Portes and Rumbaut identified four mutually exclusive types of ethnic self-identities: foreign national-origin identity (e.g. Nicaraguan or Japanese); hyphenated American identity (e.g. Cuban American or Filipino American); “plain” unhyphenated American national identity; and a “pan-ethnic” minority-group identity (e.g. Asian or Hispanic).
45 For instance, in 1992 female respondents were less likely than males to label themselves as American but by 1995 this was no longer the case.
amongst those children who identify with a “pan-ethnic” label such as Black or Hispanic, whereas English monolingualism is associated with unhyphenated Americans, and limited bilingualism is common to hyphenated Americans; and reported experiences with discrimination were less common amongst students who had adopted an American identity and more likely amongst students using a foreign national label.

The ongoing significance of young people’s subjective outlooks, in particular their perceptions of racism, supports the notion that broader social forces, operating outside the sphere of the family, are at play in the process of identity formation for second generation youth. Where children grow up, live and attend school figure heavily in their lives and identity choices. Portes and Rumbaut (2001a, 171) contend that regional location (in the case of the CILS, either southern California or southern Florida) and the type of school environments, in terms of their location and ethnic composition, are decisive factors as “they delimit the youths’ exposure to different social worlds, shape differential associations with peers in those contexts, and influence ethnic socialization.” For instance, they observe that children living in the San Diego area were more likely than those living in Florida to use a foreign national label. While Portes and Rumbaut (2001a, 173) acknowledge that part of this discrepancy may be attributable to the different nationalities concentrating in each region, and “their different experiences of settlement and incorporation, as reflected in children’s eyes,” they do not dismiss the possibility of “something unique to common regional experiences transcending the effect of other factors.”

They found a more definitive relationship, however, between school experiences, perceptions of American society and youth self-identities. Portes and Rumbaut (2001a, 186-187) emphasize “the effects of having attended inner-city schools in early adolescence and having experienced discrimination at that age” on ethnic self-identities. As they explain: “[i]inner city schools lead
away from immigrant identities and toward American ones, primarily panethnic categories” reflecting a “process of socialization in which second-generation youths attending inner-city, mostly minority schools learn to apply to themselves the labels with which their native peers identify – Hispanic, Latino, black, and Asian” whereas students who attended “nonminority suburban schools are much less likely to adopt these commonly stigmatized labels” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 187). With respect to racial identities, youth who had none or few second generation friends and who attended inner-city schools in early adolescence are more likely to self-identify as black, reflecting a heightened awareness of a racial minority status” learned from their the native minority peer culture (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 188). The social context of school environments are thus seen as key influences in the formation of ethnic and racial identities amongst second generation youth.

In terms of academic achievement, Portes and Rumbaut, report that overall, second generation students in San Diego and Florida perform well in school; their scores on standardized academic tests and grade point averages (GPAs) in junior high school are on average higher than the school district norms, yet by the time they finish high school, the achievement gap between “native” students and children of immigrant parentage has narrowed such that their “mean advantage” is reduced to “insignificance” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 237). Portes and Rumbaut also report that both U.S nativity and long term U.S residence among foreign born youth are associated with lower GPAs; they conclude that the length of acculturation is associated with lesser school effort, “the longer a child of immigrants has lived in this country, the lower the importance he or she attributes to school grades and the more his or her schoolwork habits approach the (low) average of the general student population,” (215) resulting in the attainment of lower grades. Nativity and length of acculturation, along with
parental socioeconomic status (SES), family composition and school context all exert strong influences on academic achievement in junior high school. “High status” “intact” families tend to provide children with an academic advantage, while U.S nativity and long term residence have the opposite effect on achievement. Additionally, second generation youth who attend minority inner city schools fare “consistently worse” than students at schools with a higher than average socioeconomic status\(^4\). Portes and Rumbaut (2001a) find that students educated at suburban schools where less than 10 percent of the students are low income (i.e. receive a subsidized lunch) are more likely to perform well on math and reading exams, accruing a 20 percentile point gain on both types of test, “regardless of individual and family characteristics” (242). The type of junior high school that students attend retains an influence throughout high school, with suburban middle class schools generating an early advantage leading the researchers to conclude that educational achievement is a “predictable process” which in many ways is determined in early adolescence.

In particular, whether second generation students go on to earn a high school diploma is largely determined by their grades in junior high school, the type of school they attended and the objectives and self image that they develop during this period. While 7 percent of their student sample was classified as “drop outs,” Portes and Rumbaut emphasize that “among students who attended a middle-class junior high school, had an A average there, and planned to graduate from college, the probability of leaving school drops to zero” (255). Their results further show that the children of immigrants in their sample have lower drop out rates than the district averages, a

\(^4\) Portes and Rumbaut find that the “average school SES is the obverse of the proportion of students eligible for the federally subsidized lunch program” – the lower the proportion of student receiving subsidized lunches, the higher the average status of the student body (242).
fact which they attribute to their parents’ “immigrant drive” to keep their children in school.
While, in the aggregate, second generation youth are performing well in school relative to their peers of native parentage, there is considerable variation between groups with respect to grades earned and graduation rates. For instance, in the San Diego and Florida sample, the children of Chinese and Korean immigrants tend to excel, earning grades far above the average, while students of Mexican and Haitian parentage typically struggle with lower than average grades. Mexican students stand out further, alongside Nicaraguans and Cubans, because of their greater tendency to drop out before acquiring a high school diploma (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a).

The New Second Generation in Early Adulthood

In 2005, Rumbaut draws on more recent findings from the CILS, 2000 Census data and the Current Population Survey (CPS) to examine the “turning points in the transition to adulthood” – postsecondary educational attainment, incarceration and early childbearing among the young adult children of immigrants. Comparing foreign born and U.S. born adults, 25 to 39 years old, by gender and self-reported ethnicity, Rumbaut finds that while the proportion of college graduates are “about the same” for the two sample populations, the proportion of the foreign born with less than a high school diploma is three times greater than that for the U.S. born, suggestive of upward mobility for all ethnicities. However, “there are very wide differences between groups” with “the most highly educated groups by far” being the Chinese, Indians and Koreans; with Filipinos, Vietnamese, Cuban and South Americans following; and Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Laotians and Cambodians “near the bottom of the hierarchy,” exhibiting higher dropout rates than college graduation rates (Rumbaut, 2005, 1050). Returning to comparisons between first and second generation populations, the foreign born from non-Hispanic white groups are more likely to have acquired college degrees than those who are native born by 8%
and while this pattern holds for non-Hispanic blacks, foreign born blacks are “far more likely” to have college degrees than to have dropped out of high school while the reverse situation is observed for native born blacks. In addition, females are reported to outperform males for every ethnic group, “almost without exception” (Rumbaut, 2005, 1050). Results from the CILS surveys conducted between 2001 and 2003 in San Diego, California, support these national level findings, revealing once again “pronounced differences in educational attainment by gender as well as ethnicity” (Rumbaut, 2005, 1073). Women “still outperformed the men just as they had in GPAs in junior high school and high school,” and an ethnic hierarchy in terms of those groups attending vocational schools and 2 year community colleges as opposed to those groups attending 4 year colleges, graduate, and professional schools is evident (Rumbaut, 2005, 1074 and Table 8). Rumbaut (2005) further concludes that this pattern of educational attainment, measured in terms of total years of education attained, is, as predicted by the theory of segmented assimilation, determined by age, gender, ethnicity; family structure/composition and parental SES; early educational expectations and behavioural indicators and early (high school) achievement indicators (particularly GPA earned in high school). Similar conclusions are reached by Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller (2005) based on their analysis of the third wave of the CILS survey results from South Florida.

In their discussion of “segmented assimilation on the ground,” Portes et al. (2005) examine how family structure and socio-economic status, and the mode of incorporation experienced by different immigrant groups influence five key adaptation outcomes in early adulthood: educational attainment, occupational status, family income, the probability of having children and the probability of having been incarcerated (1023). They report that the “process of educational attainment ‘builds on itself’ starting from [these] family factors;” while having
lived in an intact family (both biological parents present) in early adolescence and parental SES contribute to advantages in educational attainment (as measured by total years of education acquired), early academic achievement is the more powerful influence, “with each higher grade in junior high school yielding approximately a 2-year gain in education” (Portes et al., 2005). In terms of acquired income, Portes et al. (2005, 1026) observe “the persistent effects of gender and race.” Women in general earn less than men, and second generation Haitians and West Indians earn on average approximately $16,000 less than other groups, a fact which the researchers attribute to low parental human capital and persistent racial discrimination in the labour market. Educational attainment is however a “strong predictor” of occupational success; with lower levels of education closely linked to the increased probability of early childbearing (for young women) and incarceration (for young men). In this respect, Portes et al. (2005) suggest that “[e]ducational attainment in early adulthood is less an ‘inhibitor’ of crime and incarceration than its logical opposite. Young people who have attained a college degree or higher seldom do time in prison; those who dropped out or did poorly in school commonly do” (1028-29). By way of conclusion, Portes et al. (2005) offer that:

> [t]he results from our study are almost frightening in revealing the power of structural factors – family human capital, family composition, and modes of incorporation – in shaping the lives of these young men and women. While we stop short of the conclusion that ‘context is destiny’, there is little doubt that the opportunities for a successful career and a respected standing in society are widely divergent (1032).

Following on the work of Portes and Rumbaut (2001 and 2005), Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway (2008) assess how the second generation are faring as adults in their volume *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. The book is based on a three part study of five groups of different immigrant backgrounds living in New York City: between 1998 and 2000, a telephone survey was conducted with 3, 415 young second generation
adults (aged 18 to 32) living within metropolitan New York; face to face interviews were later conducted with 333 of the initial telephone respondents; finally, between 2000 and 2002, ethnographers undertook research in “domains where second generation and native groups were interacting” including such places as community colleges, university campuses and various workplaces

(Kasinitz et al., 2008, 13). The study is unique in that it seeks to compare second generation groups with black, white, and Latinos of native parentage: Dominicans and South Americans relative to mainland-born Puerto Ricans, West Indians in comparison with the children of native born African Americans and Russians and Chinese relative to native born whites. The researchers find that in terms of educational attainment, the second generation is performing “somewhat better” than their native born counterparts, although they admit that the high drop out rate of Dominicans is troubling, and that the young women are “getting more education than their young male counterparts, despite the challenges in some instances of becoming a parent” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 138). That said, like Portes et al. (2005), they observe that “ethnic segmentation” which first becomes “deeply apparent” in high school continues into post-secondary education (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 138). In explaining these group differences, Kasinitz and his colleagues place particular emphasis on the nature of ethnic group resources which they argue are essential for successfully negotiating America’s “educational sorting system” (2005, 143). They maintain that to “realize high expectations, families need good options available to them, good information about how to pursue those options, and the resources to realize them” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 171). By way of conclusion, they suggest that the “negative impact of race” on educational attainment “stems not so much from individuals

47 The ethnographic findings are the focus of an accompanying volume Becoming New Yorkers (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway, 2008).
48 Native born whites were chosen as the “clearest benchmarks” for the Chinese given the lack of an “obvious large racial comparison group” (Kasinitz et al., 2008).
developing an ‘adversarial outlook’ on education as from the ways in which deep patterns of racial and class inequality channel some members of the second generation directly into poor performing schools in which, not surprisingly, they do less well” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 171).

Evidence of Segmented Assimilation in Canada?

Though Canadian scholarship on the new second generation lags behind American research, in recent years the issue of intergenerational mobility of the earnings and education of the children of immigrants has garnered increasing interest. Using 2006 census data, Jedwab (2008) examines intergenerational differences in university attainment and finds that the children of Asian and South Asian immigrants “tend to obtain university degrees to a greater extent” than the Filipino, Black, White and Latin American second generations with the children of Korean immigrants having the highest proportion of university graduates and Latin American populations having the lowest.\(^49\) Using data from the Statistics Canada 2002 *Ethnic Diversity Survey* (EDS), Abada, Feng and Ram (2008) also report on ethnocultural group differences in the university educational attainment of Canadian children of immigrants.\(^50\) Consistent with findings detailed in Chapter 2, they report that at approximately 90%, the “proportion of high school graduates are about the same for all groups” but that there are “vast inter-group differences” when it comes to university completion rates (Abada et al., 2008, 12). The researchers conclude that:

\(^{49}\) 65% of Korean, 60.3% of Chinese, 56.7% of West Asian, 52.6% of South Asian, 43.2% of Southeast Asian, 47.6% of Japanese, 38.1% of Arab, 36% of Filipino, 31.7% of Black, 30.8% of non visible minority and 23.1 of Latin American second generation youth (15 years and older) obtained university degrees (Jedwab, 2008).

\(^{50}\) Here, the second generation includes Canadian-born children of at least one immigrant parents and those who immigrated to Canada at 12 years of age or earlier and who were between the ages of 25 to 34 at the time of the 2006 census. The second generation population is further categorized according to country of birth and region, as in “Western countries” and “Non-Western countries” (Abada et al., 2008, 10).
With similar individual and family characteristics, 59% of youth of immigrant parents from China are estimated to obtain a university degree, followed by those from India (46%), and from ‘other Europe’ (47%). In contrast, 22% to 23% of youth of parents from the Caribbean and Latin America, and less than one fifth of youth of Filipino immigrants are estimated to obtain a university degree. As a benchmark, nearly one third of the children of Canadian-born parents completed university (Abada et al., 2008, 22).

The researchers further conclude that difference in national origin is a “much more salient” predictor of university completion rates than gender and family income (Abada et al., 2008, 22).

In terms of intergenerational mobility, regardless of national origin, the children of immigrants tend to surpass their fathers’ generations in terms of the proportion of university graduates\(^51\) (Abada et al., 2008, 15). Not surprising given their use of similar data\(^52\), Abdurraham et al. (2008) support that “the information as a whole suggests that all groups made gains over their parents,” “though in some cases not as great in absolute levels because of the higher starting point of their parents” (13). This analysis further suggests that parental earnings are not correlated with the years of schooling for second generation children and “indeed, if anything, lower earning parents have more educated children” (Abdurraham et al., 2008, 20). These statistical analyses are instructive in that they reveal ethno-cultural variations in educational attainment but are limited in the extent to which they speak to the question of segmented assimilation in Canada as they fail to examine why such ethno-cultural variation exists. In this regard, the work of Boyd and her colleagues (2000, 2002; and Greco, 1998; and Norris, 1994) stands out, as the researchers actively engage with the theory of segmented assimilation.

\(^51\) There are only 3 exceptions to this finding: children from parents born in the United States, the Philippines and “other countries” (Abada et al., 2008, 16).
\(^52\) 2002 EDS data was used in addition to data from the 2001 census and the 1981 census, which provided information on immigrant parents. This analysis differs from the one conducted by Abada et al. (2008), however, in that the second generation population is defined only by region (e.g. Asia, Africa, Southern and Eastern Europe) rather than by particular national origins (e.g. China, India, United States).
Boyd and Norris (1994) examine the socio-economic success of the adult (24 years and older) offspring of foreign born Canadians using data from the 1986 General Social Survey (GSS). They find “evidence of second generation success,” particularly for those adults with two immigrant parents, who enjoy on average “higher educational attainments and occupational status” than their parents (cited in Boyd and Grieco, 1998, 854). Boyd and Grieco (1998) revisit the subject of intergenerational mobility using data from the 1994 GSS. While still finding evidence of second generation success, they also report evidence to “support the view that the magnitudes of achievement vary for different immigrant origin groups” (854). In the 1994 GSS, 103 respondents were between the ages of 25 and 60, born between 1930 and 1969 and their birthplaces were primarily either North American or European. Second generation offspring with one or both parents born in areas of Europe other than the United Kingdom or Ireland exhibited the highest degree of intergenerational mobility. Although their findings indicate the influence of parental nationality, Boyd and Grieco (1998) caution that, given their small sample size, they must be treated as “illustrative rather than definitive. Yet they go on to suggest that it is “likely” we will see “varied outcomes” in the second generation as researchers take stock of post 1960s immigrant offspring, “including those of color and non-European origins” (Boyd and Grieco, 1998, 873).

In 2002, Boyd undertook this task, analyzing the educational attainments of second generation adults (age 20-64) from both ‘visible’ minority and ‘not-visible minority’ groups to determine whether there is evidence of segmented assimilation in Canada. Based on the multivariate analysis of several different educational measures and data from a 1996 national Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) which asked respondents to indicate if they belonged to one of the ten specified visible minority groups and to indicate if their parents were
born outside Canada, Boyd concludes that her findings offer “no support for the ‘second generation decline’ argument” and “are not consistent with the patterns expected from a segmented underclass model” (Boyd, 2002, 1047). In fact, she reports that adult immigrant offspring who are visible minorities “exceed the educational attainments of other not-visible minority groups” (Boyd, 2002, 1039).

In reconciling her findings with American derived results, Boyd reasons that her failure to observe indications of downward assimilation amongst the Canadian second generation may be related to three factors. First, her research examines the achievements of the adult offspring of immigrants between the ages of 25 and 64 whereas the majority of American based work focuses on children, teenagers and/or young adults, typically under the age of 18 and still living with their parents (Boyd and Grieco, 1998). Secondly, her analyses aggregate the attainments of diverse ethnic groups. For instance, the category of visible minority includes the following ten subgroups: Black, South Asian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, South Asian, Filipino, Other Pacific Islanders, West Asian and Arab and Latin American (Boyd, 2002). She speculates that “[i]t is possible that greater stratification and even educational decline would be observed if information on specific racial groups was available” (Boyd, 2002, 1055). Finally, Boyd (2000, 2002) argues that the discrepancy in socioeconomic outcomes is a reflection of differences in national context. Although, beginning in the 1960s, both the United States and Canada removed their respective barriers to immigration from non-European countries, such that both nations have seen a shift in the source countries of immigrants, the demographic composition of their respective flows differ. By the 1980s, immigrants to the United States arrived primarily from Mexico and Latin America, while the majority of Canada’s immigrants came from South and Southeast Asia. Perhaps most crucially, Boyd (2000, 143) maintains that the assimilation of immigrant offspring into an inner-


city underclass “remains the scenario least likely to be successfully transposed from U.S. research” because of differences in Canada’s history with race relations.

As Boyd explains, the model of underclass assimilation is conditional upon the existence of a large involuntary minority population living in close proximity to recently arrived immigrants. While impoverished inner city Black populations are routinely conceived of as involuntary minorities in the United States, Boyd maintains that Canada’s Black population cannot be similarly understood (Boyd, 2000, 2002). She reasons that Canada never developed the “[b]lack/white fault line of race relations and stratification that has so powerfully shaped U.S. history, politics and policy” (2000, 143). She acknowledges that while discrimination and racialization have shaped and continue to operate in Canadian society, she rightly points out that:

the particular configuration of forces shaping race relations in the United States – reliance on slavery to maintain the plantation economy, a civil war rooted in a pervasive and pernicious system of black exploitation, and subsequent actions by the white majority to maintain power over blacks in the South – were not replicated to the same extent in Canada (Boyd, 2002, 1043).

Furthermore, while a black community formed in Nova Scotia following the American Revolution, Canada’s black population remains relatively small, too heterogeneous in terms of national origins, socio-economic conditions and so forth, and not geographically dominant enough to serve as a reference group for new immigrants and their offspring. Boyd continues that in fact, relative to the United States, “[i]t is not clear that Canada has a comparable underclass residing in its large cities” (Boyd, 2000, 144). The absence of a dramatic racial divide and a “clearly discernible” underclass reference group, leads Boyd to conclude that the downward mobility which has been so thoroughly documented in the United States will not be observed amongst Canada’s second generation youth.
In the interest of addressing the extent to which the American “underclass” and “ghetto” discourses apply in Canada, several studies have been undertaken to examine the relationships between spatial concentrations of poverty and patterns of ethno-racial and immigrant settlement in Canadian cities. In their attempt to identify immigrant “underclass” districts (census tracts) in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver in 1991, using criteria consistent with U.S. based research, Ley and Smith (1997, 2000) conclude that “the underclass concept has limited purchase in Canada’s largest cities” (1997, 41). In fact, their four variables of deprivation overlapped in only one census tract in Toronto (CMA) and one in Montreal (CMA) (1997, 23). While their analysis demonstrates that indicators of multiple deprivation are indeed “interlocked,” “their binding is looser and their incidence less extreme than has been identified in some large American cities” (Ley and Smith, 1997, 29). Furthermore, while Ley and Smith (2000) report that the relationships between patterns of deprivation and the distribution of immigrants are “positive” between 1971 and 1991 in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, “these correlations vary in strength from moderate to low” (56). Following from Wilson (1987), Kazemipur and Halli define “ghetto neighbourhoods” as those districts with at least a 40% poverty rate. Applying this definition to Canadian census tracts using 1991 census data, they suggest that certain ethnic groups are over-represented in “ghetto neighbourhoods” in various CMAs including the Vietnamese, Spanish, Aboriginals, Filipinos, Blacks and Portuguese (2000, 129). However, using a more elaborate method of neighbourhood classification, Walks and Bourne (2006)

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54 Walks and Bourne (2000, Table 1, 281) adapt a neighbourhood classification scheme from Johnston et al. (2002, 2003) whereby census tracts are defined along a continuum ranging from
observe that, based on 2001 census data, there is an “absence of urban ghettos anywhere in Canada” and that “while in some cities levels of low income appear related to differences in the neighbourhood concentration of minorities, in others they appear to have little relevance” (285).

While this research certainly lends support to Boyd’s (2000, 2002) argument that, according to American derived standards, there is no Canadian urban underclass, this literature does not rule out the existence of a Canadian style underclass – a unique manifestation of Canada’s distinct ethno-racial composition and history of immigration which is similarly capable of equipping young visible minorities with an identity that is “accompanied by negative social and economic consequences” (Boyd, 2000, 142).

For instance, as Kazemipur and Halli (2000) explain, though “[p]revious research, especially in the United States, had suggested the 40% poverty threshold, beyond which the neighbourhood’s social organization would begin disintegrating” and “there are “many socio-economic similarities between Canada and the United States [that] may encourage us to safely use the same threshold in Canada,” the lower rates of crime in Canada, lead them to wonder if perhaps “ghetto behaviours” emerge at a lower threshold of poverty in Canada (159-160). While Ley and Smith (1997, 41) similarly propose that the while the underclass concept is inappropriate for describing the circumstances of the Canadian “immigrant” population as a whole, it may have “some appropriateness with small subgroups identified more purposefully.” Here, they draw attention to Henry’s (1994) ethnographic study of one of Toronto’s Caribbean communities which finds:

“isolated host communities” or neighbourhoods with fewer than 20% visible minorities, to “ghettos” or neighbourhoods with at least 70% visible minorities and where 60% of the population is of a single racial or ethnic group and at least 30% of all members of that group from the entire urban area must be living there
a growing ‘underclass’ composed of youth born to (immigrant) working class parents or single mothers who are increasingly frustrated by the barriers of poverty and racism that they experience in Canada. They feel uncomfortable in the school system… and are easily led to drop out. Some succumb to the easy money and lifestyle of drug dealing and other forms of hustling. They develop a cynical, negative view of Canadian society and feel marginalized (269).

Ley and Smith (1997, 44) suggest that “more qualitative ethnographic research” is thus “necessary” for examining the “cultural aspects of the underclass thesis that cannot be accessed by formal census statistics.” Following from Ley and Smith’s (1997) suggestion that the “sometimes confining underclass literature […] is capable of further expansion” to “move beyond the particularities of American racialisation,” here I suggest that the concept of an underclass may require contextual adjustments, to reflect critical national, regional and local differences as well as lived realities. While according to American definitions, Canada has no inner city underclass, this is not to say that there is no evidence of similarly inclined and ideologically powerful sub-cultural reference groups operating within Canadian cities - perhaps Canada simply has its own ‘brand’ of underclass which is equally pernicious for second generation youth ‘on the ground.’

Putting aside the question of an underclass, in a more recent presentation of the socio-economic profiles of second generation youth, aged 20 to 29, living in Canadian CMAs at the time of 2001 Census, Boyd (2008) finds that members of second generation groups are more likely than members of third-plus generations to graduate from high school. Further to this, with the exception of Black and Latin American visible minority young people, members of second generation groups are also more likely to obtain a Bachelor’s degree or other advanced university degree. Consistent with American studies, Boyd (2008, 23) also reports, however, that “wide variation exist[s]” between groups, with Chinese and South Asians being the most likely to be attending school between 2000 and 2001 (61% and 60% respectively) or to have university
degrees (40% and 32% respectively). Despite Boyd’s earlier arguments, here she concludes by affirming the basic concept underlying the theory of segmented assimilation, summarizing that “[t]hese variations in outcomes clearly demonstrate that the second generation visible minority experience is not a homogeneous one – some groups do well, others do less well” (Boyd, 2008, 23). Boyd (2008, 23) is ultimately left wondering “what produces these differences between visible minority youth?” and “given that visible minority groups are heterogeneous in origins, what are the socioeconomic outcomes for specific groups subsumed under homogenizing labels such as ‘South Asian’ and ‘Black’?”

**Concluding Remarks**

In proposing the theory of segmented assimilation, Portes and Rumbaut maintain that they did not intend to provide “an exhaustive set of hypotheses” but rather a framework of “ideal types” of inter-generational mobility to instruct further empirical analysis and which “in turn” is thus susceptible to refinement” (2001a, 69). While some scholars assume more optimistic interpretations of their data (see for instance, Kasinitz et al., 2008), the theory’s fundamental logic – that immigrant incorporation is a “cumulative process where immigrant backgrounds and contexts of reception influence early adaptation outcomes that, in turn, condition subsequent ones,” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 69) has been well supported by social surveys and ethnographic case studies in the United States. The extent to which the theory of segmented assimilation can travel, to reflect the realities of second generation youth living in other national contexts, most notably here, in Canada, however, still needs to be determined. As Boyd (2008, 23) observes, research on second generation youth in Canada “is still in its infancy” and “[t]here still remains much to learn.” In the following chapters I seek to bridge this gap in our knowledge by applying the theory of segmented assimilation to the experiences of young second generation
Punjabi men living in Surrey. I begin this analysis in Chapter 4 as I address the influence of parental modes of incorporation on the lives of Punjabi young people and present evidence regarding the two main obstacles faced by Punjabi young men in Surrey: an oppositional subculture and racial discrimination.
Chapter 4

Life in Surrey’s Punjabi Community

To make sense of Punjabi students’ educational performances, my analysis follows from those performed by Portes and Rumbaut (2001a) and others (Portes and MacLeod, 1996), applying the theory of segmented assimilation to evaluate the effects of school, family and community contexts on the lives of Punjabi students living and attending a public high school in Surrey. In this chapter I begin this analysis by examining their parents’ mode of incorporation as well as introducing the two key obstacles to educational success encountered by young Punjabis living in Surrey: the existence of an oppositional subculture and racial discrimination. In so doing, I describe how life in Surrey – being raised by Punjabi immigrant parents, growing up with and alongside the children of other Punjabi parents, and attending school where the majority of students are also Punjabi – has given rise to a unique set of experiences and perceptions which have provided the conditions for the development of a “brown” identity amongst some Punjabi males. At school, this identity translates into a lack of scholastic effort, which has helped to foster a culture of educational mediocrity characterized by apathy and complacency. I elaborate on the educational consequences of the “brown” identity in Chapter 7 but here I demonstrate the extent to which place – where young people are raised and educated - can be seen to influence identity construction.

Making Sense of Punjabi Students’ Educational Performances

The theory of segmented assimilation assumes that the “adaptation of second-generation youths is conditioned by what happens to their parents” (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a, 46). What new immigrants bring with them in the way of education, financial resources and employment
experiences gives some an early competitive advantage when it comes to succeeding occupationally and economically in their new country. However, just as critical are the contextual factors which greet new arrivals, determining how their human capital can be implemented and maximized. *Modes of incorporation* refer to the elements which comprise the context of reception including government policies, the attitudes of the native population and the character and resources of pre-existing co-ethnic communities (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001a). Together these governmental, societal and communal structures influence the adaptation of the second generation by facilitating, or impeding, access to the moral and material resources which are essential for surmounting barriers to successful adaptation. Given that the parents of the students I interviewed at Getting By High School immigrated to Canada between the 1970s and 1990s, I begin my evaluation of the factors influencing their children’s educational achievements by outlining the modes of incorporation for Punjabis arriving in Vancouver during these decades. Following this discussion, I will address the barriers encountered by Punjabi youth, particularly the extent to which there exists a youth subculture, capable of threatening academic achievement.

**Modes of Incorporation**

**A Brief History of Punjabi Immigration, Employment and Community**

Immigration from India to Canada is a twentieth century phenomenon, with the first East Indians arriving in B.C. in 1903. The early arrivals were overwhelmingly single male Sikhs

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55 I use the term “Punjabi” rather than “Sikh” in recognition of the fact that the contemporary community with origins in the Punjab represent a range of religious backgrounds including Sikh, Hindu, Moslem and Christian.

56 “East Indians” refer to people of Indian origin. While there is no country known as East India, the term was created by the British and until the 1980s, was used commonly in Canada.
from the state of Punjab, most of whom belonged to the farming Jat caste, and who were introduced to Canada through their service with the British military. In 1897, a Sikh regiment of the British Indian army visited British Columbia on its return journey to India following their involvement in Queen Victoria’s Jubilee celebrations in London, England. Impressed by their “positive” treatment in Canada, this event is credited with instigating South Asian immigration to Canada (Buchignani et al., 1985; Basran and Bolaria, 2003; Nayar, 2004). The Sikh pioneers came with the purpose of earning money to remit to their families in India, intending themselves to eventually return. Due to the increasing regulations and restrictions on Japanese and Chinese immigrants, B.C. was experiencing a shortage of ‘cheap’ unskilled labour. Sikhs benefitted and found work easily in the burgeoning forestry industry, helping to construct the Canadian Pacific railway, on fruit orchards and cattle farms, and to some extent, salmon canneries. As news of the employment opportunities in Canada spread back to India, immigration rapidly increased.

In March 1906, 300 Indian immigrants were living in B.C., by June, another 325 had arrived and in November alone, 700 new arrivals set foot in B.C. Prior to this influx, South Asian immigration was governed by “no special legal restrictions” and received almost “no governmental or press notice” (Buchignani et al., 1985). Beginning in 1906, while the flow of immigrants from India was still relatively small, “it had enormous symbolic value in a white population already panicked by the ‘spectre of non-white immigration’” and Indian immigrants, like their Japanese and Chinese predecessors, were confronted by increasingly virulent anti-Asian sentiments, hostility, ostracism and exclusion (Buchignani et al., 1985, 18). In fact, “South Asian immigrants were labelled the least assimilable of all the Asian immigrants” (Lee, 2007, 21) and in 1906, a local Vancouver newspaper reported that “South Asians were ‘a caste

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57 Prior to the 1960s, the South Asian community was synonymous with the Sikh community and I thus use the two terms interchangeably in discussions relating to the pre-1960s period.
more apart than even the Chinese […] totally unfitted for a white man’s country.” (cited in Lee, 2007, 21). “The cry of a white Canada was raised” and anti-Asian sentiment coalesced into a “full fledged movement” as provincial members of parliament, trade and labour councils, church representatives, business groups, and various citizens’ organizations became united in their opposition to continued South Asian immigration into B.C. (cited in Lee, 2007, 26). Provincial legislatures attempted to exclude South Asians by denying them the right to own property, to work in certain professions or open businesses, and to attend school (Basran and Bolaria, 2003, 98). In April 1907, South Asians were denied the vote in Vancouver which in turn prohibited them from voting nationally: in order to vote federally, an individual needed to be registered provincially. For the next 40 years, South Asians would be excluded from the Canadian political process and from all other processes which required residents to be registered as provincial voters (Buchignani et al., 1985, 21).

Banning South Asian immigration, however, was complicated by British rule in India. The Canadian government was concerned about generating further resentment toward the British in India and fuelling a growing revolutionary movement. Eventually, on January 8, 1908 the Canadian government enacted “continuous journey” legislation which stipulated that “immigrants may be prohibited from landing or coming to Canada unless they come from the country of their birth, or citizenship, by continuous journey and on through ticket, purchased before leaving the country of their birth or citizenship” (Mehta 1984, 17). Although there is no explicit mention of South Asians, it was clear that this order was directed at immigrants from India as a “continuous journey” from India to Canada was simply not possible at the time: there was no direct travel from India to Canada and steamship companies stopped issuing tickets from India via Hong Kong, the only other available route (Johnston, 1979). This effectively halted
Indian immigration, and between 1909 and 1913, only 101 immigrants from India were permitted into Canada (Nayar, 2004).

The Komagata Maru “incident” has become emblematic of B.C.’s racist immigration regime. In 1914, Gurdit Singh, a Sikh businessman, tested the continuous journey legislation by chartering a Japanese ship, the Komagata Maru, in Hong Kong to transport over 376 East Indians to British Columbia. The ship arrived in Vancouver in May, 1914 where it was detained off the coast for over 60 days, during which time no passengers were permitted to step foot on Canadian soil. The ship was eventually turned back to India where it was greeted in Calcutta by the British army and police. Passengers on the Komagata Maru were rumoured anti-colonialists and it was feared that the ship’s arrival in Punjab could spark unrest. Rather than being able to return immediately to their families, the British police were required to detain the passengers temporarily in Calcutta. When the passengers did not comply, the police “open fired,” killing 20 and injuring several others; another 193 were arrested. A plaque commemorating the 75th anniversary of this “unfortunate incident of racial discrimination” was installed at the Gateway to the Pacific in downtown Vancouver “to remind Canadians of our commitment to an open society in which mutual respect and understanding are honoured, differences respected, and traditions are cherished” (Basran and Bolaria, 2003, 102).

In spite of the harsh reception, the early Sikh community managed to develop the beginnings of a tightly knit “ethnic” community and plant the seeds for its subsequent growth (Chadney, 1989). By 1910, the few South Asian Muslims and Hindus that had immigrated to

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58 For a detailed account see Johnston (1979).
59 The Government of Canada also required that new arrivals from India enter with at least $200.00 each, were subject to medical and sanitary examinations, and their admittance was dependant on extant labour conditions (Chadney, 1989, 187).
Canada had returned to India or moved to the United States, leaving a community comprised largely of bachelor Sikhs. Prohibited from being joined by their families and isolated from ‘white’ society, this small group of men relied heavily on each other and worked very hard to establish a sense of belonging and security. Men banded together, living as many as 12 to a household, sharing duties, pooling resources and reducing expenses in order to save more money to send home to their wives and children. Sikh institutions, particularly gurdwaras (temples) also became particularly important. The Vancouver Sikh Temple opened in January 1908, and its governing body the Khalsa Diwan Society was registered in 1909; soon after gurdwaras were established in Victoria, Abbotsford and New Westminster (Hans, 2003, 222). Gurdwaras served as anchors and “binding agents” for the community, providing Vancouver’s Sikhs with a “sense of identity, place, order and pride” (Hans, 2003). More than places of worship and social gathering, gurdwaras provided unemployed Sikhs with financial aid, help with their job searches, langars (free community meals) and in some cases, even accommodation. In this way, the South Asian community ‘went on the defensive,’ uniting to become self sufficient.

In terms of labour market opportunities a “racial line had been set: South Asians were to be unskilled blue collar workers if they were to work at all” and it was understood that they would be the “last hired and the first fired” (Singh, 1994, 40). Severely limited by discriminatory hiring practices and labour policies, Sikhs distinguished themselves by being hard working and efficient. Word spread amongst employers that Sikhs would perform dangerous work for less pay than either their Japanese or Chinese competitors and many Sikhs managed to transition out of more menial work into better paying and consistent positions in lumber and shingle mills throughout the Fraser Valley and on Vancouver Island, particularly around Nanaimo; by 1924, 609 of 680 South Asian workers were employed in mills (Buchignani et al.,
During the Great Depression only one fifth of South Asian mill workers were employed at any given time, but the community helped its own, and South Asians rarely sought government relief and fared better than their Japanese and Chinese counterparts (Buchignani et al., 1985). By WWII, South Asians were once again enjoying permanent employment in mills and by 1947 South Asian entrepreneurship was on the rise. Five percent of B.C. lumber businesses were owned by South Asians and family run businesses and partnerships selling fuel and operating trucking companies became significant sources of employment (Buchignani et al., 1985, 99). Despite their economic successes, the community remained socially and culturally isolated, politically and legally disenfranchised and dominated by India-born males.

Although in 1919 the Government of Canada approved of a resolution passed by the Imperial conference which allowed “domiciled Indians” to bring their wives and under age children to Canada, few families could afford the trip or overcome the other practical hurdles, including an inadequate system for registering families in India (Buchignani et al., 1985). Prior to WWII, 5,000 Indian men migrated to Canada as opposed to only 400 women and 423 children (Basran, Bolaria, 2003). The Canadian government made no genuine attempts to grant franchise to East Indians until 1947 when they were afforded the right to vote in federal and provincial elections; in 1948 East Indians could vote municipally in B.C. (Basran, Bolaria, 2003). Notwithstanding this, Indian immigration remained restricted through the 1950s, governed by a quota system; in 1952 100 new arrivals were allowed entry from India each year, raised to 300 in 1957 (Basran, Bolaria, 2003). In 1958 South Asian Canadians were also permitted to sponsor their parents and relatives from their extended families (Buchignani et al., 1985). While most Sikhs arrived during this period by way of family sponsorship, the Canadian government simultaneously eased restrictions to allow for the entrance of more white collar professionals.
(Johnston, 1988). Consequently, the character and composition of B.C.’s South Asian community began to show signs of increasing complexity and diversity.

While virtually all of the community’s founders belonged to the Jat caste, by the 1950s at least 20% of B.C.’s Sikh community were members from various other castes. These newcomers also came from many different villages across the Punjab and brought with them different cultural values, forms of identification and “modern” ways of thinking, some of which “clashed” with the more traditional ideals of the community’s founding fathers (Buchignani et al., 1985). Changes to immigration policy also meant that Canada’s South Asian population was no longer synonymous with the Sikh community. In contrast to earlier decades when most Indian immigrants to Canada were Sikhs from the Punjab, the 1950s and 1960s brought a more diverse flow, from various ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds and from other regions of India and Pakistan (Buchignani et al., 1985). These newcomers also tended to be well educated and highly trained professionals and their arrival served to introduce class divisions into a community that for half a century had been composed primarily of peasant labourers and farmers. The newcomers also expanded the scope of South Asian settlement which until this point remained localized in southwest B.C. These professional immigrants pursued employment opportunities across Canada, to places with no history of South Asian settlement (Buchignani et al., 1985, 111). Yet the total South Asian population in 1961 (6,711) had still not exceeded its size in 1908 (Buchignani et al., 1985, 11), before Indian immigration was strictly regulated, and British Columbia remained the heart of the country’s Punjabi and South Asian communities.

Canada’s largest influx of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent began in the early 1970s during which time the Canadian government liberalized and deracialized its immigration policies in favour of a “points” based system. In 1967 racial quotas were eliminated and skills
and education became the primary criteria for admittance to Canada (Basran, Bolaria, 2003). As a result of these shifts, the proportion of immigrants entering Canada from Europe and the United States declined while those from non-traditional source regions including Asia, Latin America and Africa increased (Hiebert, 2000) and rates of immigration from India remained high throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1971 and 1982 approximately 200,000 South Asians arrived in Canada, 84,892 of whom were from India (Buchignani et al., 1985, 115-116). These new arrivals represented a range of ethnocultural backgrounds but even so, in 1978 Sikhs still accounted for two thirds of Indian immigration to Canada (Wood, 1978), the majority of whom continued to arrive by way of arranged marriages or through the family sponsorship programme (now known as “family class” immigrants) (Nayar, 2004).

As immigration levels increased, the Canadian government sought to limit flows by instituting new restrictions on independent immigrants. For instance, in 1980, the immigration department required prospective employers to demonstrate that there were no qualified Canadians for a given position before hiring an immigrant (Johnston, 1988). Consequently, it became more difficult to enter Canada as a professionally or technically skilled independent immigrant; in 1984, only 4% of immigrants from India entered as independents while 94% were sponsored relatives (Johnston, 1988). Consequently, while newer, post 1950s South Asian communities “owe their existence to the points system and contain a much higher proportion of professionally or technically qualified people,” most immigrants from the Punjab have been sponsored by relatives in Canada, are arriving from rural villages and are seeking unskilled labour (Johnston, 1988, 4). A survey in 1980 revealed that of 602 Sikh households in Greater Vancouver, 65% of the male household heads and approximately 80% of their wives had not been educated beyond high school in India, that 60-70% of surveyed men were working in
factories and that 42% of those immigrants who had arrived since 1975 spoke no English (cited in Johnston, 1988, 3). Johnston (1988, 4) argues that the transformation of immigration policies and restrictions “has perpetuated a sharp distinction between the Punjabi\(^{60}\) community in British Columbia and other Indo-Canadian\(^{61}\) communities” in terms of the occupational profiles of its members.

Based on their review of 1991 national census data, Basran and Bolaria (2003, 159) find that while “pre-immigration factors [...] have opened up diverse employment avenues, sectorial concentration and inequality continue to persist.” Sikhs are more likely than Hindus and native born Canadians to be employed in agriculture, manufacturing and construction, and transportation and communication but are less likely to work in the service sector (Basran, Bolaria, 2003). Similarly, Sikhs are less likely than either of these two reference groups to work in managerial, administrative, professional, and technical occupations and far more likely to work in crafts, trades and manual occupations (Basran, Bolaria, 2003). In his discussion of labour market segmentation in Vancouver, Hiebert (1997) documents that while Indo-Canadian\(^{62}\) males are represented in a range of occupations, they tend to specialize in the taxi trade and processing/machining (particularly in the lumber industry), and that Indo-Canadian women are concentrated in farming and manufacturing.

Consistent with these labour market trends, most of the mothers of the 15 boys I interviewed perform wage labour for which no post-secondary education is required including

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\(^{60}\) Johnston (1988) uses the term Punjabi in reference to a community which he acknowledges is “coming to mean exclusively Sikh” (abstract).

\(^{61}\) The term Indo-Canadian came into usage in the 1980s to refer to individuals who are born in Canada but whose origins are on the Indian subcontinent (Nayar, 2004).

\(^{62}\) Hiebert (1997) does not distinguish between Indo-Canadians of different religious affiliations but does qualify that the Indo-Canadian community in Vancouver is dominated by Sikhs.
positions in factories, a greenhouse, a supermarket and a recycling depot; food preparation at a golf and tennis club; hotel housekeeping and janitorial work. Only two of the boys’ mothers work in careers for which they attended college; one is a dental assistant and the other a counselor for abused women. Similarly, the majority of the boys’ fathers work in blue collar or low end service positions including factory work, driving taxicabs or trucks, construction, maintenance, managing a drugstore, serving as a security guard and working in a butcher’s shop. Three of the boys’ fathers co-own and operate businesses with family members in construction/contracting in addition to their own private business ventures. One of the boys’ parents own and run a restaurant together. Two of the 15 boys mentioned that their fathers had attended some college; one of their fathers studied for a year in India while another boy’s father studied at university in Canada but did not complete a degree. Most of the boys speak both English and Punjabi at home; three boys say that their household converses primarily in English, while two boys say that their households converse mostly in Punjabi. Only one of the boys says that his parents do not speak English and that they speak only Punjabi at home. All of the boys’ parents immigrated to Canada directly from the Punjab; three of their mothers and one of their fathers arrived in Canada as teenagers, all other parents arrived as adults. Four of the boys’ explicitly mentioned that their parents’ marriages were arranged while one boy offered that his parents, who had met in Canada, shared a “love marriage.” All of the boys in my sample lived in houses owned by their parents, with their mothers, fathers and siblings. Three of the boys also lived with their paternal grandparents and one boy’s household also included a cousin from

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63 Two of my interviewees’ mothers had recently left their jobs in housekeeping and warehouse work to stay at home while two of the boys’ mothers had always stayed at home.
64 For more on family based entrepreneurship in Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community see Walton-Roberts and Hiebert (1997).
India. At the time of their interviews, all of the boys and their families had been living in Surrey for at least a decade.

Over half of Vancouver’s South Asian population presently resides in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey and nationally, only one other municipality has a larger proportion of South Asian residents\textsuperscript{65} (Statistics Canada, 2007). South Asian residential settlement has historically been concentrated in the Vancouver region, mirroring the community’s occupational clustering in wood processing and agriculture. Prior to the 1960s, Sikhs tended to reside around sawmills located in False Creek, in Vancouver’s inner city, but by 1971, as employment in the city declined two new clusters of settlement emerged outside of the city: the south Main Street corridor and around the border between New Westminster and east Richmond (Hiebert, 1998). In the ensuing decades, South Asians continued to congregate in suburban areas, outside of Vancouver proper. Between 1971 and 1996, the proportion of the region’s South Asian population residing in the City of Vancouver declined from 61.1% to 20.9% such that by 1996, approximately 44,505 South Asians were living in Surrey (Hiebert, 1999). By 2001, approximately 80% of B.C’s South Asian residents lived in the Vancouver CMA, 46% of whom resided in Surrey (StatsCan, 2001). As illustrated in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, South Asians\textsuperscript{66} are now the second largest visible minority group in the Vancouver region, accounting for approximately 10% of the total population, and representing 27.5% of Surrey’s population. Yet Surrey is “not just an ‘ethnic’ suburb” (Walton-Roberts, 1998, 316) but rather “is many places in one,” as its

\textsuperscript{65} 27.5% of Surrey’s population identifies as South Asian while the figure in Brampton, Ontario is 31.7%.

\textsuperscript{66} “South Asian” is a broad category used by Statistics Canada for identifying populations according to ethnic origin and/or visible minority status. It refers to a heterogeneous group of people originating from the subcontinent of Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal (see 2006 Census Dictionary).
neighbourhoods are spatially, socially and symbolically differentiated (Dowling, 1996, 77). Of Surrey’s six communities which include Cloverdale, Guildford, South Surrey, Fleetwood, Newton, and Whalley, the latter three are home to the greatest concentrations of South Asians. For instance, while Southern Asia is the most common region of birth among immigrants living in Whalley, Newton and Fleetwood, and India is the principle country of origin, immigrants living in South Surrey and Cloverdale are more commonly from Europe (City of Surrey, 2008a). Similarly, while Punjabi is far more likely to be spoken in Surrey’s households than in other immigrant households across Vancouver, as illustrated in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, it is not the first ranked home language in Guildford or South Surrey where Korean and Mandarin rank one and two respectively (City of Surrey, 2008b). Even at the neighbourhood scale, Indo-Canadian residential settlement exhibits a very distinct localized geography in Vancouver – a pattern which is in part a legacy of how the community has protected itself from an often intolerant host society. This pattern is depicted graphically in Figures 4.0 and 4.1.
Table 4.1: Visible Minority Groups, Counts in 2006 for Canada, British Columbia, Vancouver CMA and Surrey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Population by Visible Minority Groups</th>
<th>Total Visible Minority Population</th>
<th>South Asian</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Latin American</th>
<th>Southeast-Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>31,241,030</td>
<td>5,068,090</td>
<td>1,262,865</td>
<td>1,216,570</td>
<td>783,795</td>
<td>410,695</td>
<td>304,245</td>
<td>239,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>4,074,385</td>
<td>1,008,855</td>
<td>262,290</td>
<td>407,225</td>
<td>28,315</td>
<td>88,080</td>
<td>28,960</td>
<td>40,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver CMA</td>
<td>2,097,965</td>
<td>875,300</td>
<td>207,160</td>
<td>381,535</td>
<td>20,670</td>
<td>78,890</td>
<td>22,695</td>
<td>33,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey</td>
<td>392,450</td>
<td>181,005</td>
<td>107,810</td>
<td>20,205</td>
<td>5,015</td>
<td>16,555</td>
<td>3,785</td>
<td>9,235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2007.

Table 4.2: Visible Minority Groups, Percentage Distribution in 2006 for Canada, British Columbia, Vancouver CMA and Surrey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Population by Visible Minority Groups</th>
<th>Total Visible Minority Population</th>
<th>South Asian</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Latin American</th>
<th>Southeast-Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver CMA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2007
### Table 4.3: Language Spoken Most Often at Home by Immigrant Status in Vancouver, CMA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language spoken most often at home</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Non-Immigrant Population</th>
<th>Immigrant Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-official languages</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Languages</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td><strong>4.2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2007

### Table 4.4: Language Spoken Most Often at Home by Immigrant Status in Surrey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language spoken most often at home</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Non-Immigrant Population</th>
<th>Immigrant Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-official languages</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td><strong>14.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>28.4%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese languages</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2007
Figure 4.1 Distribution of Punjabi as Home Language Across Vancouver
Figure 4.2  Distribution of South Asian Population Across Vancouver (CMA)
Portrayals and Perceptions of South Asians in B.C.

In the early years of Indian immigration, routine discrimination imposed nearly “total isolation” on Vancouver’s Sikh community such that social relations with other Canadians were “almost non-existent outside of work” (Buchignani et al., 1985, 27). Few Sikhs had Canadian friends or participated in Canadian organizations or institutions until the 1950s when the children of the first pioneers reached maturity and started families. Nevertheless, because the Canadian born population remained small well into the 1970s, the Punjabi community in Vancouver retained an “immigrant outlook,” heavily influenced by its India-born founding fathers (Johnston, 1988, 2). In fact, in 1980 of 489 Sikh families surveyed 52% reported that they had “virtually no social contacts with other Canadians and only 10% said they had a lot” (Johnston, 1988, 15). Given the significant social distance between Vancouver’s Sikh community and ‘other’ Canadians, local media has been particularly important for disseminating mis/information about this closed-off and insular group. Indra argues that particularly in cases where different ethnic groups are lacking first hand experiences with one another that “newspapers and other mass media constitute the most important informational inputs which they have about those of different ethnic backgrounds” (1979, 166). Upon surveying 100 Sikh men in Vancouver for their opinions on how they had been covered by the press Indra finds that this group conceived of the media as the “single most important source from which Canadians derive prejudicial ideas of them” and felt that they were “actively disliked” by Canadians, more so than the 12 other ethnic groups included in the survey. However, she concludes that:

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67 The delayed appearance of a significant second generation is a consequence of restricted immigration. As Johnston (1988) explains most of the men who immigrated prior to 1908 and stayed in Vancouver raised their families in India. Their children would join them in Canada as adults, sponsored by their fathers throughout the 1950s. As such, it is not until this generation began raising families that we begin to see a Canadian born generation.
[p]erhaps the most damaging effect of this press coverage was that it forced a number of Sikhs to reassess their place in Canadian society. Sikhs commonly saw little difference between the creators of the newspapers and the ‘dominant majority.’ Consequently, they took their press portrayal to be indicative of how they were regarded by other Canadians (Indra, 1979, 186).

_Early Years_

The first Sikh immigrants arrived in a “white man’s country,” perceived by its British and Anglo Canadian settlers as “one of the last frontiers of the white race against the yellow and the brown” (Buchignani et al., 1985, 5). To protect against an ‘Oriental invasion,’ ‘white’ society denied Sikh newcomers the right to vote, to serve on juries or in the military, or to be employed in government or public works, and restricted their access to public facilities and services, housing types, education, and certain workplace rights (Buchignani and Indra, 1989). These formal and informal restrictions were justified and legitimated by an inherited British ideology of race which conceived of Sikhs, and other racially defined ‘others,’ as biologically inferior and of a “lower level of civilization” than B.C.’s white Anglo elites (Buchignani, Indra, 1989). Similarly, the early mainstream attitudes towards and perceptions of the “Hindoos”68 in B.C. were informed by “an interconnected anti-Asian racism gripping the Pacific coast in the early twentieth century” (Lee, 2007, 19). As Lee (2007) recounts, Asian “exclusionists” in British Columbia “drew inspiration from their fellow activists south of the border” in Washington to form provincial branches of the _Asiatic Exclusion League_ (AEL) in July 1907, following the rapid increase of

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68 Despite the fact that early immigrants from India were almost exclusively Punjabi Sikhs, the term “Hindoo” was used derogatorily during this period to refer to all immigrants from the Indian subcontinent regardless of their religious or ethnic heritage (Nayar, 2004). It was replaced in the 1930s by the more neutral term, ‘East Indian.’
Chinese, Japanese and South Asian immigration (26). Anti-Asian sentiments were shared on both sides of the U.S-Canada border such that “stereotypes, rhetoric, and exclusion strategies circulated throughout the Americas, inspiring and consolidating a hemispheric Orientalism” (Lee, 2007, 39).

Given that most British Columbians had no, or very limited, contact with South Asians, the press played an important role in generating and perpetuating negative stereotypes. One commentator of the period described India as a “hotbed of the most virulent and loathsome diseases such as bubonic plague, smallpox, Asiatic cholera and the worst form of venereal disease” and Indians as an “unwholesome group of starved decrepit humanity” (Verma, 2002, 112), while the editor of the Vancouver Sun in 1913 characterized Sikhs as a “semi-barbarous race” (Singh, 2001, 185). The press routinely problematized the Sikh population, portraying South Asians as deviant and “filthy” “members of heathen cults” who were prone to violence and whose very presence threatened to upset civil life and order in Vancouver (Indra, 1979). These negative stereotypes became well entrenched and though never expressed with the same degree of vehemence as in the earliest years of Sikh immigration, anti-Asian sentiments prevailed in B.C., serving to stigmatize the South Asian community throughout the early half of the twentieth century.

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69 Lee (2007) illustrates the linkages between America and Canadian anti-Asian racism in her historical account of race riots which “rippled up and down the Pacific coast” in the spring, summer and fall of 1907, beginning in San Francisco and passing through Bellingham, Washington before ending up in Vancouver, B.C. (19).

70 According to Indra (1979), the media’s portrayal of South Asians prior to WWI stands as the most negative accorded to any ethnic or racial group in British Columbia’s history.
Post 1965 Era

The ban on immigration and various legal and political restrictions meant that the South Asian community remained small and for the most part, out of the media spotlight, so much so that by the 1960s most Canadians had forgotten or were unaware of the hostilities that had been directed at the Sikh pioneers. Sikhs arriving in this era entered an entirely different ethnoracial landscape than their predecessors. Earlier stereotypes had largely dissipated, they were met with increasing tolerance towards all forms of ethnic and racial diversity and their settlement went relatively “smoothly,” “without the complications of racial prejudice and discrimination” (Buchignani et al., 1985, 209). As Sikh and other South Asian immigration increased in the 1970s, however, their relations with the mainstream turned contentious once again.

The first signs of friction appeared in B.C. between 1968 and 1972 as an increasing number of Sikh sojourners sought work in the forestry industry. Intent on returning to India wealthy, they were disinclined from spending money locally and did not establish social connections with the non-Sikh community. Resentment built as local workers began to perceive Sikh immigrants as a threat to employment and these concerns soon gave way to cultural and racial critiques. Sikhs were seen as “aloof” and “untrustworthy,” (Buchignani et al., 1985, 210) so fundamentally different from native born ‘white’ Canadians that they would never fully belong, threatening the very basis of the Canadian way of life (Buchignani, Indra, 1989, 160). “Paki” replaced “Hindoo” in popular racist vernacular, and was indiscriminately applied to South Asians in communities across Canada, and instances of “Paki-baiting,” vandalism, harassment and racist attacks against South Asians were reported through the 1970’s in B.C. (Buchignani et
A national survey conducted in 1976-1977 of Anglo-Celtic Canadians supported that of 24 ethno-racial classifications, South Asians were the least likely category to be selected as being “Canadian,” “similar to me” or even “likeable” (Berry, 1977) and beginning in 1975, the press in B.C. began to associate the rise in South Asian immigration with a number of social and economic ills (Indra, 1979). Based on a content analysis of newspaper reports from 1967-1976, Indra (1979, 179) finds that while the Vancouver Sun has maintained its “historical fascination with South Asian violence,” its coverage expanded during this decade to include issues relating to aspects of South Asian cultural difference “concentrating almost exclusively on the problem aspect of ethnic relations: interethnic violence and vandalism, cultural impediments to intergroup communication, and (bad) relations between South Asians and the press” while continuing to emphasize the community’s “disrespect for the law” (Indra, 1979, 179). The well established perceptions of Vancouver’s Sikh community as violent and conflict ridden gained further support throughout the 1980s and 1990s as unfortunate events continued to garner the community unwanted media attention.

On June 23, 1985 Air India Flight 182 departed Toronto for Bombay, India. As the plane flew over Irish air space, it disappeared from radar screens, crashing into the Atlantic Ocean 90 miles off the coast of Ireland. All 329 passengers, 280 of them Canadian, were killed. The subsequent 16 year investigation revealed that the bomb onboard was of Canadian origin, allegedly planted by Sikh extremists. As the local press reported on the tragedy and the ensuing trials of the suspected bombers held in B.C. Supreme Court in Vancouver, the Sikh community became closely associated with this brutal act of terrorism (see first-hand accounts of the tragedy

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71 Though comparable data is not available for the 1970s, according to a study on “ethnic conflict in Vancouver” conducted by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, between 1983 and 1985, 40.5% of Indo-Canadians living in South Vancouver experienced racist name calling and 22.6% reported seeing “anti-Indo-Canadian” graffiti (Robson and Breems, 1985, 64).
and trials written by Vancouver based journalists Bolan, 2005 and Jiwa and Hauka 2006). The parallel news coverage of gurdwara based conflicts occurring throughout the 1990s between Sikh moderates and fundamentalists did nothing to improve the Sikh community’s public image. Basran and Bolaria (2003) maintain that by focusing on the outward conflict and violence of two “warring factions,” local press failed to bring any understanding to the substance behind the religious dispute, reducing it to a trivial quarrel over the appropriateness of allowing tables and chairs when serving langars. Local press coverage gave the impression that “Sikhs have inappropriately brought their troubles and problems with them to this country” and that “these political and religious conflicts pose a threat to peace and security in Canada” (Basran and Bolaria, 2003, 171).

In 1979, Indra (1979, 177) wrote that:

[a]s they have for over 50 years, South Asians continue to be associated with deviant practices which do not characterize the portrayal of other groups. South Asians are still defined by the press to be a ‘problem,’ in that their presence in Vancouver is seen to bring with it certain difficulties or liabilities for others or for the immigrants themselves. In this sense, South Asians have not yet been incorporated by the press into Vancouver society. Rather, they pose certain challenges to that society and thus continue to be ideologically placed outside of it.

Over 20 years later, Basran and Bolaria (2003) similarly contend that:

[f]rom the headlines, use of language, and the media’s construction of the issues, a particular image of the Sikh community emerges. This image is not particularly flattering. It characterizes the community as conflict and violence ridden, with a tendency to settle disagreements and disputes through violence; one with no aptitude for reasoning and democracy, as a ‘troubled’ community requiring inordinate use of public resources including the police and courts to maintain harmony and peace within it and to reduce its threat to the general public (167-168).
The effect of ongoing negative press coverage took its toll, further distancing and alienating Vancouver’s Sikh community from the mainstream. Immigrants arriving from the Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s could find comfort in joining a sizeable community of co-nationals with a long history in Vancouver characterized by strong kinship ties and networks of obligation (Johnston, 1988). In a situation such as this, new arrivals had the advantage of drawing on the assistance and resources of their co-ethnics. The co-ethnic community can help “cushion the impact of a foreign culture and provide assistance finding jobs,” but only “within the limits” of its “own information and resources;” the assistance that an ethnic community can provide in terms of helping newcomers to secure employment is “constrained by the jobs held by their more established members” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 48). In the case of Surrey’s Punjabi community, this has meant jobs in lower end services and blue collar wage labour, although many Indo-Canadians have also benefitted from the support of the ethnic community to become independent entrepreneurs or to start family run businesses (see Walton-Roberts and Hiebert, 1997). While adept at helping new arrivals to integrate economically in Canadian society, the Punjabi community is less well equipped in assisting with their socio-cultural adaptation.

Actively discriminated against and excluded by the Canadian government until the 1960s and faced with an ongoing barrage of negative stereotypes from the local mainstream media, the “general opinion of the first-generation immigrants is that their culture is devalued in the larger society” (Dhruvarajan, 2003, 170). Based on her study of the Sikh diaspora in Vancouver, Nayar

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72 In 1991, the Angus Reid group reported that “barely a majority” of mainstream Canadians across Canada “felt comfortable around Arabs, Muslims, Indo-Pakistanis and Sikhs” while another “[t]en to twenty percent felt uncomfortable around these four groups” (Driedger and Angus Reid, 2000, 163).
(2004, 200) observes that first generation\textsuperscript{73} Sikhs “tend to stay within the Sikh community, more specifically within their kinship group, even down to the level of their village in the Punjab...from the very start, people get connected with the local Sikh community through their kinship relations.” In this way the community remains “ethnically insular,” detached from and wary of the mainstream with which it has limited social interaction (Nayar, 2004, Chapter 7). This socio-cultural distance is further exacerbated by the Punjabi community’s spatial segregation in Surrey. In fact, some residents of Surrey like to joke that the Alex Fraser Bridge, which passes over the Fraser River to connect cities on its southern and northern shores, is the longest bridge in the world, since it transports drivers directly from Vancouver to the Punjab\textsuperscript{74}! Historically unfavourable governmental policies in concert with a prejudiced reception by ‘white’ Canadians and the concentration of Punjabis in a working class community have left the Punjabi community disconnected and isolated from mainstream society. Consequently, some young men within the Punjabi community have developed their own cultural and economic strategies to deal with and respond to decades of marginalization and discrimination.

**Cultural Barriers Confronted by Punjabi Boys**

Of the three external obstacles to adaptation identified by Portes and Rumbaut (2001a), the two most salient for the young men in my sample are *racial discrimination* and *inner city subcultures*. While inner city Black populations are routinely conceived of as *the* underclass reference group in studies of second generation adaptation in the United States, Boyd (2000, 2002) is correct in maintaining that, due to its small size, socio-economic heterogeneity and

\textsuperscript{73} For the purposes of her study which addresses three generations of Sikhs in Vancouver, Nayar (2004) actually refers to this generation as second-generation, referring to the stage of life and position within the family unit rather than time of arrival in Vancouver.

\textsuperscript{74} Here it is worth noting that before it became known as a destination for Indo-Canadian immigrants Surrey had a reputation as a tough working class community.
dispersed settlement, Canada’s Black population cannot be similarly understood; particularly so in Vancouver where Blacks represent only 1% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2007). Boyd’s conclusion is however based on national level analyses which aggregate ethnic groups in the single category of “visible minorities” and does not account for the existence of urban subcultures operating in cities across Canada to affect the way in which particular groups of second generation youth identify. For the children of Punjabi immigrants living in Surrey, the underclass reference group exists within their own ethnic population.

The Emergence of an “Indo-Canadian Gang” Subculture: ‘A Lost Generation?’

According to statistics compiled by the Vancouver Police Department, between 1993 and 2003, 62 young Indo-Canadian males were murdered in the Greater Vancouver region (Tyakoff, n.d.). Most of the victims were shot; others were burned, stabbed, strangled or beaten to death; four bodies were never found. Many of the young men were killed in public – at movie theaters, inside nightclubs or on the street, while others were killed in their own homes (Tyakoff, n.d.). By March 2009, 50 more young Indo-Canadian men had been murdered and the numbers continue to rise as Greater Vancouver struggles with what the police and press refer to as an

75 A seemingly parallel situation may have emerged in Britain where Singh and Singh Tatla (2006) observe that “[t]here is growing evidence that more and more Sikh youth are becoming trapped in criminality, as demonstrated by the rise of the Sikh prison population and the links with inner-city crime” (176). They also report that the “emergence of Sikh gangs in localities such as Southall and the West Midlands [areas with large Sikh populations] has given rise to allegations of widespread drug dealing as well as the control of extensive criminal networks spread across Asia” (Singh and Singh Tatla, 2006, 177). In the 2006 novel, Londonstani, journalist and author, Gautam Malkani fictionalizes this criminal subculture, telling the story of “South Asian youths living in a gangsta subculture” in London (Burnham, 2006). The novel is based on research he conducted for his undergraduate thesis at Cambridge University which contends with South Asian teens struggling to integrate in British Society (Burnham, 2006).

76 At the time of writing, the most recent victim was a 23 year old Indo-Canadian man from Surrey. “Known to police,” the young man’s body was discovered in his car in the parking lot of a public park in Surrey on October 25th, 2009 by RCMP officers on patrol (Chan, 2009).
ongoing Indo-Canadian “gang war.” The violence, which reportedly began in 1990 when a young man was murdered “for dating a gangster’s sister” (Clancy, 2002) escalated rapidly as young men engaged in drug related disputes and exchanged retaliatory “tit for tat” assaults. The number of murders along with their sheer brazenness has sustained media attention for nearly two decades, raising the profile of Indo-Canadian based crime, and bringing Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community, particularly its young men, under scrutiny.

In December 2002, Renu Bakshi, a Punjabi reporter wrote of the young men killed:

[w]hile the mode of attack varies, victim profiles are interchangeable. Their obituaries describe men in their early 20s. Eulogies honour ‘nice’ boys from good families. Most discernible of all, the victims are predominantly Sikhs whose background, by birth or by family, is in India’s Punjab region. No other Indian sub-community in the nation has lost so many young men to murder. Even with large Hindu and Muslim populations in Canada, this bloody gang war is unique to B.C.’s primarily Sikh community.

To address heightened public anxiety and “possible misconceptions about ‘Sikh youth violence’ and ‘criminal gang activity,’ ” the Federal Department of Canadian Heritage commissioned research in 2003 to bring greater understanding to the emergence of youth violence within the Indo-Canadian community (Tyakoff, n.d., Executive Summary). The subsequent report, South Asian Based Group Crime in British Columbia: 1993-2003, maintains that:

Contrary to public opinion, public safety officials in BC have indicated that South Asian-based youth violence and adult crime is not entrenched or sophisticated compared to other crime groups. The violence is not directly related to criminal business organizations; in other words, there is no gang hierarchy present. Instead, it is comprised of loosely-knit and opportunistic groups of roving South Asian male youth and young adults who band together in pursuit of wealth, status, and power. Many violent crimes

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77 In 1998 the number of homicides involving Indo-Canadians doubled in Greater Vancouver while homicide rates in Canada were on the decline (Tyakoff, n.d.).
78 Separate focus group sessions, with 5 to 10 participants in each, were conducted with young Indo-Canadian males, young Indo-Canadian females, white collar professionals, community leaders, single Indo-Canadian mothers, Indo-Canadian social workers, law enforcement officials, Crown prosecutors based at Surrey courts, youth workers and multicultural planners (Tyakoff, n.d.).
are driven by sporadic acts of revenge which has fuelled a tragic cycle of violence that continues to tear away at the fabric of Indo-Canadian society in BC. (Tyakoff, n.d.).

The report finds that the majority of South Asian males involved in criminal activity are between the ages of 16 and 25 and cautions that a “growing number of Indo-Canadians, specifically high school aged males at risk, are embracing a criminal lifestyle,” threatening to “create a lost generation of South Asian youth” (Tyakoff, n.d.). Representatives, leaders and esteemed members of Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community have since publicly expressed similar fears.

At a high profile forum held in June 2002, over 200 politicians, police officers, Sikh temple and South Asian community leaders including such prominent Indo-Canadians as former B.C. premier Ujjal Dosanjh, former federal Fisheries Minister Herb Dhaliwal, and former B.C. Supreme Court Justice Wally Oppal met to discuss solutions to bring an end to over a decade of violence (Bolan, June 17, 2002). At this meeting, Oppal was quoted as saying that the Indo-Canadian community was producing a “disproportionate number of killers” and that “[w]e [the Indo-Canadian community] have obviously gone wrong somewhere;” he proceeded to advise forum attendees to focus on discouraging youth from joining gangs rather than dissuading already criminalized youth, reasoning that as “[b]rutal as it sounds, I think we may have to write those people off” (Bolan, June 17, 2002). Responding to pressure from the Indo-Canadian community, the Liberal government established an Indo-Canadian Gang Task Force in the fall of 2002. By the end of 2004, however, 6 more young Indo-Canadian men had been killed (Bolan, June 10, 2005) and the task force was disbanded, to be re-formulated later as B.C.’s Integrated

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79 Ujjal Dosanjh served as B.C.’s Attorney General, provincial Premier and is currently a Member of Parliament. Herb Dhaliwal served as the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Natural Resources. Wally Oppal is a former B.C. Supreme Court Justice and was elected B.C.’s Attorney General in 2005.
Gang Task Force. A former head of the task force, Police Inspector Kash Heed\(^8\) told reporters at a press conference in 2005 that “we are not going to stop the violence in the community right now. Our best hope is to control it and suppress it whatever way we can,” reflecting that “[t]here are some members of the East Indian community […] that are a lost generation” and some “that seem to love this gangster lifestyle” (Salim, Oct. 27, 2005). At a dinner hosted by the South Asian Bar Association, Oppal likened the violence to a “cancer” and called upon South Asians to “take ownership” of the problem in their midst and “get involved in the fight” (Bolan, Nov 21, 2005).

At the grassroots level, various community-based organizations formed in response to the ‘crisis’ facing their youth most notably VIRSA Sikh Alliance Against Youth Violence (Virsa means heritage in Punjabi) and the Unified Network of Indo-Canadians for Togetherness Through Education and Discussion (UNITED). Amar Randhawa, a co-founder of UNITED, told a reporter that he formed the group because “[he] was sick and tired of waking up every morning and hearing about another Indo-Canadian dead;” his own cousin was shot to death in 2002 (Steffenhagen, November 3, 2003). In July 2005 a “Group of 10: Community Response to South Asian Youth Violence” was formed by the Canadian Department of Heritage. 10 men and women, aged 24 to 70, living in communities with “substantial South Asian populations in the Lower Mainland” were selected from 27 nominees to “review all available information regarding the problem of violence and crime within their community and identify a more integrated approach to address this growing concern” (The Group of Ten, 2005, 4). In November and December of 2005 Vancouver’s *Headlines Theater* casted members from the local Indo-

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\(^8\)Elected as Liberal Member of Parliament in 2009 and appointed Solicitor General, Heed also served as the Superintendent for the Vancouver Police Department and as the Chief Constable of the West Vancouver Police Department.
Canadian community to present *Here and Now*, a play set in the community, designed to address the roots and consequences of youth violence. The production, using techniques of “forum theater,” encouraged audience members to propose solutions to the play’s conflicts; after a first full performance, members of the audience are invited to intervene in an additional run through of the play, by assuming actors’ roles in attempts to steer scenes towards “safety” (Besla, 2006). The play was performed 21 times for audiences at the Ross Street Temple in Vancouver and the Surrey Art Centre. Every night the play’s director asked members of the audience to stand if they were affected by issues addressed in the play. Kashmir Besla, the “community scribe,” recorded that after each performance, at least 95% or more of the audience stood; on four occasions the entire audience stood (Besla, 2006, 6).

In 2007, *Daaku* (Punjabi for outlaw), a novel portraying the “violent and ruthless world of Indo-Canadian gangs” was released. Promoted on its back cover, as a “bullet-riddled grand tour of Indo-Canadian gangland,” Daaku’s author, Ranj Dhaliwal, says that the book is based on his encounters with the “Indo-Canadian underworld” and what he learned about ‘the Game’ growing up in Surrey, B.C. At the time of the book’s release, Dhaliwal was volunteering with anti-violence programmes in the Indo-Canadian community and shared with a reviewer at the Globe and Mail that he had “lost friends and acquaintances in gang killings, and has other friends in jail” (Bartley, 2007). In his review, Bartley describes the novel’s daaku, Ruby Pander, as the “hell raising son of an alcoholic father and doting, ineffectual mother” and recounts that “[b]eatings at home and racist abuse at school have made rage [Ruby’s] motive force […] South Asian gangs form his embattled peer group; street drugs, vicious brawls and break-and-enters are his entertainment” (2007, D6). Though Bartley is critical of the novel’s literary merits and contribution, he is impressed by Dhaliwal’s “character work,” “the distressing can’t-look-away
credibility of Ruby and his buddies. They’re strutting, gym-pumped, hair gelled peacocks, with the same bird-brained codes of blood honour and sexual conquest. It’s all desperately sad, partly because we’ve been told it’s all too real” (2007, D6). In fact, on Daaku’s back cover, Dhaliwal confides that: “When I see Ruby, I see a bit of myself.”

Director Baljit Sangra, struggles to understand and educate her community about the root causes of Indo-Canadian gang violence in Warrior Boyz, a documentary for the National Film Board of Canada (Green et al., 2008). The film follows three Indo-Canadian young men: Jagdeep, a high school drop out, former gang member and ex-convict who is now committed to educating youth about the realities of gang life; Vicky an 18 year old male with a difficult past who is working to graduate; and Tanvira 15 year old who has been kicked out of his parents’ home and school and whose constant companion is a baseball bat which he carries for self defence. In telling their stories, Sangra recounts the pressures faced by these young men from their peers to earn respect and show their toughness but she also highlights the important role of families and educators in combating the lures of gang involvement. Not long after the release of Warrior Boyz, A Warrior’s Religion (Amar, 2009a) was screened at select locations in Vancouver and Surrey.

Directed by Mani Amar, a first time documentarian and social activist from Victoria, B.C., A Warrior’s Religion, assumes the tone of an editorial, and features footage from interviews Amar conducted with community leaders, media personalities, prominent figures in Vancouver’s South Asian community, former gangsters and several young Indo-Canadian men.

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81 This young man will not share details about his life or ‘what went wrong’ for fear of endangering his family.
82 She focuses in particular on the close relationship that Vicky develops with his high school’s principal and the principal’s role in keeping this young man out of trouble.
who are still gang involved. In weaving together segments from these interviews, Amar, like Sangra, attempts to make sense of the violence but more importantly seeks to demonstrate the scope of the problem. His message of awareness is very much directed at his own community.

On the documentary’s official website, Amar writes in the “synopsis”:

Sikhism is a predominant religion in the South Asian community in Greater Vancouver. And, statistics show that most of the gang-related murder victims were Sikh. I believe awareness is most needed within this group. As a Sikh, I am able to use my own knowledge and personal experiences to communicate this awareness.

Violent crimes have increased significantly in this community over the last few years. The community chooses to live behind the walls of ignorance and denial. It is time to break down those walls to create much needed acceptance and awareness. Bringing change to this cultural minority is just the start (Amar, 2009b)

**Youths’ Encounters with the Gang Subculture**

Although the number of “hard core” gang members\(^\text{83}\), those known to be affiliated with organized crime groups, is estimated to be quite small relative to the size of the total Indo-Canadian population, their presence is inescapable and deeply felt by youth in the community. Punjabi young men and boys, some as young as 10 years old, have been made familiar with the lifestyles and criminal exploits of “Indo-Canadian gangsters” through community gossip, spread through an extensive and tightly knit network of acquaintances, friends and relations, and of course, through local television and media coverage. In fact, the Group of 10 suggest in their report that:

\(^{83}\) In May 2009, Kim Bolan reported that the number of Indo-Canadian “organized crime groups” had increased from 5 in 2003 to 11 in 2009 (Bolan, June 6, 2009). In 2003 Bakshi wrote that “just 250” of B.C.’s Indo-Canadians are “suspected” of being involved in criminal gangs (August 13, 2003).
In some notable cases, perpetrators of crimes and acts of violence received so much media attention and community attention that they reached hero status. To some in the South Asian community, these perpetrators are revered for their daring acts of violence and their defiance against mainstream Canadian society (2006, 8).

The most high profile and influential of such figures is Bindy Johal. Johal, the ‘notorious’ leader of the “Indo-Canadian mafia,” shot to death on the dance floor of a Vancouver nightclub in 1998 at the age of 27, is still talked about, idolized and revered by many young men in the Indo-Canadian community.

Johal loved the attention that came from being a “gangster,” and he played to the media, which in turn loved him for selling papers (Mani, personal interview, April 2009). Jas, an RCMP sergeant who was born in India and immigrated to Canada at age 6, reflects:

[At the beginning, that’s what it was like for some of these characters that first started 15 years ago, it was the status, they wanted to be famous, or infamous, and from there, the media took over […]

Now he says there are young boys picking fights on the school yard, boasting that “we’ve [Indo-Canadians] been gangsters forever” (personal interview, August 2006). According to Amit, a community out-reach worker and a second-generation Indo-Canadian in his early thirties, youth in the community talk about Bindy Johal with a “kind of excitement;” they see him as “cool” because he stood out as “somebody,” a South Asian who “everyone” knew (personal interview, June 2006). Mani Amar, a thirty two year old Sikh, describes in A Warrior’s Religion how a mythology developed around Johal. He was glorified for not only talking back to the media and standing up to rival gangs but because “all the white kids were scared of him.” Arun, a thirty two year old fourth generation Indo-Canadian, who conducted research on gangs for his undergraduate thesis, agrees that Johal remains a “popular hero” because he:

stood up to all the other gangs […] he made South Asians cool. Before, back in the day, it was like if you were East Indian and have an accent, you’re like a taxi driver and that’s
bad. Where with like Bindy Johal, he stood up to Hell’s Angels and stuff, but he stood up to everybody. He didn’t take any shit from anybody. So they [youth] look at that and they say, hey, you know, that’s the guy that I want to be. He stood up for us and that’s cool. He was a rebel (personal interview, May 2006).

Both Mani and Arun suggest that Johal’s influence is in part due to the absence of other role models. Mani, who spent considerable time interviewing former and active gang members, asks rhetorically in his documentary and in my interview with him, “who else is there [for young Indo-Canadians] to look up to?” Arun, who interviewed twenty five active gang members, maintains “that there is no other role model in the South Asian community that has had the impact that he [Johal] has had” (personal interview, May 2006). He elaborates that the gang members he spoke with all claimed to have “some sort of connection to him [Johal], leaving him to reflect “I don’t know. It’s amazing to see. I mean, we had like Ujjal Dusanjh and Wally Oppal and guys like who were successful and yet the kids don’t mention them at all. They don’t care. They’re just like, they talk about mostly the gang members” (personal interview, May 2006). Although ongoing talk within the community has helped to perpetuate the celebrity of ‘gangsters’ within the community, many youth have more personal encounters with the subculture.

From Vancouver Island, Mani was able to recruit and earn the confidence of a number of gang members simply by using his social connections in the Indo-Canadian community, meeting young men to interview for his documentary through friends and acquaintances. Having grown up in Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community, Arun found it similarly “easy” to connect with gang affiliated young men:

[...] my family’s been here four generations and I grew up in the community. So I grew up with a lot of these same individuals that were involved in this type of lifestyle and with the social networks, ah, like, the South-Asian community is very unique in terms of its social networks. I mean, you could, I mean, you could have a cousin, a brother, and
they could have connections to these kinds of issues. [...] it’s very easy to kind of get involved in these networks and that’s one of the things that actually affects getting involved is, you know, it’s so easy to become involved simply because everybody knows everybody. It’s that type of a community (personal interview, May 2006).

In fact, Mani insists that every Indo-Canadian knows someone from the community who is criminally involved. In explaining how violence in the community, “spills over” into schools, Julie, one of the guidance counselors at Getting By High School reiterates that:

[t]here’s always somebody’s cousin or always somebody’s brother, or always somebody’s neighbor, there’s always somebody involved in something, and it’s not good. And it’s not talk, it’s actually happening [...] family members, friends, whatever, acquaintances involved in drive-by shootings. Doing the drive-by shootings. Shot at a drive-by shooting. Stabbing somebody [...] It exists and it’s out there (personal interview, May 2007).

Mary, also a guidance counselor at Getting By High School, agrees that students “get a taste of what’s going on” through older brothers and cousins, and they end up bringing the “gangster attitude to school” (personal interview, May 2007). Of the students I interviewed, many had personal experiences with aspects of the criminal world.

Although Aarti is not entirely sure “what’s going on with” her 20 year old brother, she suspects that he’s been “corrupted by his friends” and is selling drugs. She says that he used to be so good but now regularly leaves the house in the middle of the night and she’s heard about her brother’s friends at school. She tells me that “you just hear so many things about them, like a lot of them are drug dealers, I know that as a fact. And like he’s [her brother] hanging out with them, so obviously I’m getting the idea that he might be doing something stupid too” (personal interview, December 2006). Anita also worries about her 19 year old brother. He drinks a lot and she overheard him talking to his friend about how he and some friends had beaten up a “white boy walking on the street” and “took his wallet and left. She suspects that he might be “involved in something,” getting into fights at least “cause I’ve seen bats and stuff in his
closet…like these bar things, and I know what those are for” (personal interview, March 2007).

Amrik has a 24 year old cousin who is a drug dealer. His family knows and he has been arrested, been to court and been to jail but she believes that he is too heavily involved to get out. She explains that “it’s just the fact that once you’re in you can’t get out. That’s just the way [drug] dealing is” (personal interview, January 2007). She goes on to tell me that three of her brother’s cousins, who she was also close too, had recently been murdered; one was found dead in his truck, another was “set up by his friends,” shot to death at his hair dresser’s. Although the young men that I interviewed talked less about their friends and relatives, they shared details of their own encounters with violence. Ravinder tells me that a house near his was shot up a couple of weeks ago, probably related to “drug dealing gangster stuff.” Tim’s next door neighbour’s house has been “shelled twice” and he has friends who will “show off” their guns at parties (personal interview, November 2006). Ryan knows that some of his cousins’ friends are dealing drugs. Amit also knows of a family friend who used to deal drugs. Most significantly, all of the young people I spoke with were either friends with or familiar with a 17 year old student at their school who was nearly stabbed to death in March 2007. Sam recounts that he and a friend were attacked as they were preparing to leave a house party. As they were putting on their shoes outside, they were approached by two men armed with knives; one man had a “hunting knife with teeth in it.” Sam was stabbed in the stomach and saw that his “buddy got stabbed in the back.” As he ran to his car, “bleeding a lot with his intestines hanging out,” he tells me that “I was going crazy for a second. I was thinking of my whole life and everything, right? My brother and everything.” Fortunately, Sam made it to the hospital where his injured appendix was removed and the two holes in his intestines were repaired. He returned to school bandaged and
sore but fairly confident that this type of thing will not happen to him again: “It’s not like you get in a car accident you’re going to stop driving a car now, right?” (personal interview, April 2007).

Racism and Discrimination

Jon and Kam feel that some of the customers they deal with at their supermarket jobs are “racist.” Jon explains that “I’ll ask them [customers] if they need any help and they’ll say no to me and then they’ll go ask someone who is like right next to me and they’re white” (Personal Interview, March 2007). Sajjan says that he encounters “a lot” of racism while playing league soccer. By way of example he tells me about a time his team was playing in South Delta and members of the opposing “white” team made derogatory comments about Sajjan’s friend’s turban and the Indo-Canadian players’ facial hair (Personal Interview, March 2007). At school, Davinder feels that teachers expect “brown” kids to “do bad” and that he’s perceived differently than the white students because of his wardrobe: “if I come in with a hat backwards and my pants lower than what [they] should be, I’m considered a brown kid. You know, one of those nightmares that teachers don’t look forward to […]” (Personal Interview, March 2007). Davinder’s experience, however, may be an anomaly as the other young men I interviewed felt that their white teachers perceived them and treated them no differently than their white peers. For instance, Harjeet contends that “[m]y class is actually, like, everyone’s equal. Like I don’t think the teachers can tell skin colour. Like, they’re pretty good about it (Personal Interview, March 2007). Having grown up in neighbourhoods and attended a school where they are surrounded by a large co-ethnic population, these young men appear to have been spared more personal and overt encounters with everyday racism. They have not been protected, however, from the mainstream media’s accounts of “Indo-Canadian gang violence” and the attendant
stereotyped perceptions of Indo-Canadian young men as violent criminals, gangsters, drug dealers and thugs.

Writing in the *Vancouver Sun*, Jagdeesh Mann bemoans the fact that “[i]n a single decade, the adjective ‘Indo-Canadian’ has become glued to a new family of nouns such as ‘gangs,’ ‘shootings,’ and ‘violence.’ As a result, a new generation of young people is growing up to discover the meaning of terms like ‘racial profiling’ and ‘under suspicion’” (June 10, 2006). Similarly, in a November 2005 Gary Mason editorialized in the *Vancouver Sun* that:

Not surprisingly, all the shootings have created problems for those good Indo-Canadian kids who show up at nightclubs looking for nothing more than a little fun. Many are not being allowed in. Bouncers who don’t want problems are carrying out racial profiling. It’s unfair. It’s wrong. Yet many people ask: Who can blame the bar owners? (November 26, 2005).

Amit says he’s heard such stories, of groups of young Indo-Canadians getting turned away at nightclubs in Vancouver because “they don’t want any trouble. Kind of similar to the United States where you know African Americans are you know, denied entry into certain places just on the basis of their culture” (personal Interview, June 2006). Priya, a second generation Indo-Canadian community worker, agrees that today’s young people are confronted by a “big ball of stereotypes, a lot of interpretations and a lot of assumptions” and that it can be really “frustrating” to be seen, “not as person but for the colour of your skin” (personal Interview, June 2006). When she was in high school in the late 1990s, she recalls flipping through the newspaper, reading about “another shooting” and “praying, please don’t be brown. Just because it’s such an insult […]” She says that she and her friends “refuse” to go downtown now, not wanting to wait in line for two or three hours outside of a club in the hopes that “maybe we’ll get in.”
Jas of the RCMP, speaks to the power of the negative stereotypes surrounding Indo-Canadian men, remarking that even he is affected by comments murmured in stores and at the gym; he explains that “[o]nce you start creating those stereotypes, [it] makes life difficult for everyone in that culture. Matt, a motivational speaker from within the Indo-Canadian community, thinks “the media has betrayed the Indian kids” by providing them with only negative images of men from their culture, “[t]hey’re either the ones who are selling drugs or the ones who want to look like they’re selling drugs” and to the people on the “outside,” who are reading those press accounts, “[t]hey’re just all doing it then, right?” (personal Interview, May 2006). He says that while there are positive influences out there, in the Indo-Canadian community, because the “media’s not showing them every week” it seems as if “that’s all there is right now” and it’s the “only influences these kids have” (personal Interview, May 2006).

While eclipsing the achievements of successful Indo-Canadians, the Group of 10 (2006) also fears that the negative media portrayals may operate as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, ultimately leading to further violence as young men attempt to live up to their “gangster” image. Arun explains the logic that if you are a South Asian male, you are already perceived as a gang member, so “if that’s how people view me, then that’s what I’m going to become” (personal Interview, May 2006).

Rather than being drawn to and attempting to emulate the gangster lifestyle they have heard so much about from the local media, the young men I interviewed at Getting By High School were critical of the coverage and the way it has served to associate the behavior of a small proportion of young men with the entire Indo-Canadian community. Sajjan expresses frustration that:
they [the media] make anyone seem like they’re part of that gang or whatever. And there are certain people that are, right? But then if, if you just keep thinking that every single person is like that, you’re just not going to be able to trust them […] If someone was to be like, just think something in that way of me, even though I’m not part of anything or my friends, right? […] I don’t know. I just feel, like, disrespected (personal Interview, March 2007).

Similarly Kris wonders if he went into Vancouver if that “someone might see me like being brown with my group of friends and stuff. They might think that like I’m really bad or something.” Rob wonders why “Caucasian” violence does not receive the same degree of attention as violence within his community:

So like when white people do something bad, like or they kill each other or whatever, it’s not made as a big a of a deal as is brown people. That’s what my mom says to me. Like that’s what she thinks, right? Like, I kinda agree with her too, right? Like, um, I think it was last year or the year before […] two white guys, a whole bunch of white guys actually, killed two brown guys. Two brothers right? And that didn’t even make the papers. It didn’t even make the papers. And then, you’ll get like every little thing about like Indo-Canadians doing this or that or whatever (March 2007).

Ryan and Harjeet suggest that the coverage of “brown” men in Vancouver is becoming similar to that of “blacks” in the United States in that all “brown” men are thought to be gangsters.

**Concluding Remarks**

Over the past 20 years, a subculture of violence and criminal activity has emerged within Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community. While members of the community continue to debate the factors contributing to its proliferation and strategies for its amelioration, nobody seems to dispute that such a culture exists, that it is entrenched and that it poses a real threat to young people. Youth encounter this subculture through their social networks, through their daily experiences and through the local media’s coverage. This exposure is worrisome for Punjabi young men not only because it tells them about who they can be but because it tells them about how ‘other’ people see them. For the young men I spoke with at Getting By High School, this
latter influence is particularly significant as most of them feel that the reporting of “Indo-Canadian gang” violence has served to generate negative mainstream perceptions of Indo-Canadian young men. In fact, reading these press portrayals is the only time that the majority of these young men time can recall feeling discriminated against. Given the social and governmental reception of Indo-Canadian immigrants in Vancouver, the Punjabi community has historically been and continues to be ethnically insular and socially and spatially segregated. Circumstances arising from this real and perceived isolation make it difficult for parents of today’s Punjabi teenagers to effectively manage and confront the influences of a gang subculture or the media’s representations of Indo-Canadian young men, leading some young men to distance themselves further from mainstream ‘white’ culture in favour of an identity as “brown.”
Chapter 5

Being “Brown”

“Brown” is commonly heard in the hallways, classrooms and administrative offices at Getting By High School. While staff, teachers and students often use the term extemporaneously to refer to and describe a large and growing body of South Asian students, many young men of Punjabi parentage apply “brown” more meaningfully, as a form of self-identification, in some cases favouring it over other national (Canadian), religious (Sikh) or ethnic (Punjabi) labels. For them, “brown” is more than a simple adjective or a quick discursive means for categorizing students in the school’s auditorium; it is a way of being, imbued with very specific notions of what it means to be a second generation young Punjabi man living in Surrey. According to the theory of segmented assimilation, the process of ethnic self-identification is subsumed within the larger process of adaptation (see Chapter 3, Figure 2). Second generation ethnic identities are thus conditioned in part by their parental modes of incorporation, their parents’ socio-economic status, family composition and young people’s type of acculturation experience. However, as Portes and Rumbaut (2001a, 171) remind, “[t]he story of the forging of an ethnic self-identity in the second generation […] plays out on a much larger stage than that of the family.”

Extrafamilial contextual factors such as the type and location of schools attended by young people also help to shape the type of ethno-racial categories adopted by second generation youth in that they “delimit the youths’ exposure to different social worlds, shape differential associations with peers in those contexts, and influence ethnic socialization” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 171). In this chapter, I address the influences of school, family and community to explore how and why the “brown” identity has emerged at Getting By High School. In so
doing, I draw on the work of critical men’s studies to address a limitation of the theory of segmented assimilation, allowing for a more empirically accurate and nuanced conceptualization of the identities of Punjabi young men. I focus on the narratives of six of the “brown boys” to illustrate how their ethno-racial identities are bound up with their understandings of masculinity, how brown has evolved as an alternative way of “doing male” which contests a white hegemonic masculinity but more importantly, confronts the “typical Indo-Canadian male” or “Surrey Jack” which has emerged in Surrey as a form of subordinate protest masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Getting By High School

Getting By High School is located in a neighbourhood that is heavily populated by South Asians. In the early 1990s, 30% of its students were some form of “minority,” and by September 2006 this figure had risen to approximately 70%. When Principal Coor first started working at Getting By High School, Indo-Canadian gang violence was a “major concern” because as she explains, while there have:

always been episodes of violence wherever I’ve gone […] here it could escalate very, very quickly because people are so connected with cousins and friends […] The problem with the violence isn’t necessarily the two people who are having conflict. It’s the whole swarm factor around it. And so I found that four years ago, this was in…in a moment things would escalate from being kind of ordinary to…ah, being scary, violent, and very unsafe for the other kids (personal interview, June 2007).

In his three years as the safe school’s liaison, Dan, the self described “eyes and ears of the school,” has had to resolve these types of conflict and in fact, he considers one such instance a high point in his career:

84 From hereafter, I use “brown boys” to refer to the 15 young men I interviewed in spring 2006. 85 Neither the school, nor the Ministry of Education collects statistics concerning the birthplace of students or their parents, and/or their respective ethnicities. These figures are estimates made by the school’s administrators.
three car loads of people showed up on this property […] to harm somebody at this school. And they were out front, and they were looking for… it was gonna be nasty. These are two towering kids. And you know, I got right in between them […] that’s the most foolish thing you can possibly do. But… ah, I got right in between them. And I spoke to them. And ah, basically said, ‘Look, you know… um, out of respect for me… ah, I don’t want this to happen. I know you don’t mind hating each other, but I’m not moving, and I know you care if you hit me.’ And so after some time I… I… you know spoke to the drivers, and I introduced myself in Punjabi, something like that. And so people left. Nobody got hurt. And it could have been absolutely ugly (personal interview, June 2007).

However, the school no longer experiences these sorts of problems. In fact, there have been no fights at Getting By High School since Principal Coor began suspending students for participating in and/or watching fights, and put in a place a “simple rule” prohibiting students from calling family or friends to school to “solve their problems.” Sanjay, one of the school’s vice principals, says that he has been less worried about the presence of a gang ethos since the administration gave several of the more disruptive students “opportunities to change or move on.” He explains that:

[i]n the first couple of years [here], and even last year, we had a group of boys that were involved in some pretty shady things in the community. They, for the most part, tried to keep a low profile here at the school but, you know, they were involved in things like stabbings, jumping other young people. They were involved in drugs (personal interview, June 2007).

Although they have been concerned about particular students, most faculty and staff agree that there is no real evidence of a gang culture at Getting By High School and that the school’s ethno-racial dynamics are a cause of far greater concern.

The administration continues to be discouraged by the school’s very obvious ethno-racial divide. In fact, the school’s principal and two vice principals agree that “segregation,” the fact that “white” and “brown” students “stay away from each other,” is the “biggest” problem facing their school. The evidence typically offered by educators and students of this divide is the

86 Most of these boys re-located to other schools.
seating arrangement in the cafeteria which finds “brown kids with the brown kids” and “white kids with the white kids.” From the way that faculty and staff discuss the interactions between “brown” and “white” students, of how antagonism and disrespect have given way to mutual tolerance but not yet to meaningful acceptance or ‘mixing,’ it is clear that though they understand “brown” and “white” in relation to, and most often, in opposition to one another, the meaning of “brown” and “white” remain ambiguous.

Ruth, a youth care worker, speculates that “[brown] probably means in this school that you’re more top dog. Ah, because of the high population. So, um, that they have an appearance and reputation to live up to.” Vice Principal Sanjay suggests that:

I think students see themselves, you know, as having certain characteristics that, you know, are characteristics of a brown person. I mean you hear kids joke about it, but, you know, ‘I don’t ski. I’m brown.’ Right? ‘White kids do that.’ Or, ‘I don’t get an allowance, I’m brown.’ Right? In fact, you know, I’ve heard people my age say things like that. I’ve probably said it myself. Right? Uh, but I think when you say it often enough, and enough people around you say it, it becomes real (personal interview, June 2007).

Principal Coor admits that the term “brown” “took me a little bit by surprise […] because I thought, you know […] it didn’t feel right, but now, it’s just part of the common language in the school.” She added, “[i]t’s probably not politically correct, but […] you do hear it often. You do hear brown and white.” The safe school’s liaison concurs that “even though it took [him] a long time to say the word,” he became more comfortable after realizing that Indo-Canadian students “want to be called brown. They’re okay with being brown” (personal interview, June 2007). From his perspective, “brown” serves as a generic descriptor, a form of “easy colour coding” (personal interview, June 2007). “It’s meant as an identifier…like to say tall. Tall, brown kid. You know? Or short, white kid” (Anne Coor, personal interview, June 2007). For the faculty and staff, “brown” has evolved into a kind of short-hand, for the purposes of quick ethno-racial
identification of the schools 1,000 plus students and in this way, it can be understood as a manifestation of the school’s changing demographic. The predominance of South Asian students - the majority of whom are of Punjabi parentage – allows for and encourages the use of this simplistic ethnocultural label over more nuanced or complex categorizations because as Sunil, the school’s career counselor, suggests, in most cases “you know when they [students] say brown, they’re just meaning, you know, Indian kid. I don’t think there’s anything more to it than that” (personal interview, February 2007).

Yet, “brown,” as used in reference to Indo-Canadians living in B.C.’s Lower Mainland, is a relatively new term. Many of my adult interviewees, themselves Indo-Canadians raised in the region, including Sunil, could not recall the term being used when they were in high school. In fact, when I asked Amit, a 32 year old community outreach worker, if he heard the term when he was growing up, he stated quite adamantly:

No, not at all. Like if somebody, even if I was, you know, in Surrey and somebody was to call me brown or Hindi or Paki or whatever. You know, which is --- those were derogatory terms at the time, you know? Like, you just didn’t, you just didn’t say that kind of stuff (personal interview, June 2006).

But now, he observes that the situation is different:

Well you know how African Americans will use the N word to identify themselves, I find that you know brown people kind of do the same thing, like ‘what’s up brown guy?’ or you know, they kind of, they use derogatory terms to identify themselves, each other as they see each other, you know. I just find that you know its something that I didn’t notice - a couple of years ago it would be like you know ‘what’s up?’, they call them by the names and stuff but now it’s all of a sudden they sell themselves, they identify as brown first or whatever… (Amit, personal interview, June 2006).

Julie, a guidance counselor, maintains that “brown” is probably the most popular term used by the “westernized” Punjabi Sikh kids. Sanjay agrees, maintaining that labels such as Indo-Canadian or South Asian are “something we put on them” and that if students need to “refer to
each other in some way, the brown kids would call each other brown” (personal interview, June 2007) or as Raj, a 17 year old Punjabi student, insists “everyone says it” (personal interview, March 2007). While all of the students in my sample did mention “brown” throughout our interviews, only the young men communicate the desire to be identified with it.

The young women with whom I spoke typically want to be seen as either “Canadian” or “Indo-Canadian.” For instance, although Teja refers to “brown people”, when I asked her how she identifies, she said “I call myself Canadian” because “being Canadian is just…to me it’s being treated as everybody else” (personal interview, January 2007). Ramy thinks that “brown” and “white” sound “unintelligent” and instead “likes” to be called Indo-Canadian and while Amrik self-identifies as “Indo-Canadian because that’s just who I am” she clarifies that she wouldn’t say “that hot Indo-Canadian guy,” she’d say “that hot brown guy” (personal interview, January 2007). Unlike their female classmates, the 15 young men in my sample all identify to varying extents as “brown.” For several of the boys, it is their preferred form of self-identification – the label that they would assign to themselves if given the option to describe their ethnicity. For the others, while not necessarily choosing to label themselves in this way, “brown” factors heavily into their self-conceptions as they use it to characterize their friends, their behaviour, their musical preferences and so forth. Despite having attended the same high school as the “Indo-Canadian” young women, the young men have chosen to identify quite differently as “brown,” a distinction which not only suggests the powerful influences operating beyond the school’s walls to shape the subjective outlooks of these teenagers but also of the importance of gendered experiences with race and ethnicity.

As Portes and Rumbaut (2001a, 64) note, gender “enters the picture in an important way because of the different gender roles that boys and girls occupy during adolescence and the
different ways in which they are socialized.” They suggest that “as a general rule, females tend to be more under the influence of their parents because of the less autonomous and more protective character of their upbringing” ultimately making them “more likely to conform to parental expectations and to experience the challenges of the external environment differently than their male siblings” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 64). Waters’ study (1996, 1999) of West Indian immigrants in New York highlights the significance of gender effects on ethnic and racial identity, as she finds that, although there was no difference in terms of the number of boys and girls that adopted certain identities (American, ethnic American or immigrant), the meanings attached to “being American” varied by gender. Though both West Indian boys and girls perceive “being American” as meaning black American, boys encounter “a more violent environment,” more “overt hostility” and more “exclusion” from the mainstream than the girls (Waters, 1999, 317), such that the African American identity adopted by the boys is sharply differentiated from the mainstream, assuming an adversarial or oppositional tone, whereas the girls associate being American with more freedom and greater equality. Waters (1999) suggests that because the West Indian boys in her study were more “violently stigmatized” for their race, the choice of how to identify “appears harsher and more all-encompassing” (322) than for the girls, particularly so when failing to conform to aspects of a black identity, or “acting white,” can also mean being perceived as a “faggot” (320). Like the young men in Waters’ study (1999), the young men I interviewed conceive of their race and ethnicity differently than their female peers, in large part because of how young Indo-Canadian men have been negatively portrayed in the local media, yet their decision to identify as “brown” rather than Indo-Canadian, also reflects how they have come to understand masculinity in relation to their ethnicity. The theory of segmented assimilation treats gender and race as fixed independent variables rather than as
mutually constitutive analytical categories, and thus overlooks how second generation youth are simultaneously gendered and racialized (Lopez, 2003, 5). It is for this reason that I turn now to the theorizing of critical race, feminist and men’s studies for a more complex analytical approach to the concepts of gender and masculinity.

**Theorizing Race and Gender**

In their seminal work on the social construction of race, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) call for an examination of the intersections between race and gender, stating that:

> It is crucial to emphasize that race, class and gender are not fixed and discrete categories and that these ‘regions’ are by no means autonomous. They overlap, intersect and fuse with each other in countless ways...In many respects race is gendered and gender is racialized (1994, 68).

It is now widely agreed within critical race and feminist theory that gender and race, along with other social categories including sexuality, age, dis/ability and class, are empirically inseparable, “intermeshed and inter-related.” They “flavour” and give meaning to each other” in different ways across different contexts and times (Archer, 2003, 21). The concept of “intersectionality,” first offered by Crenshaw (1989, 1994), a critical race theorist, is an attempt to capture theoretically the interconnected and interdependent nature of race with other categories of identity (Valentine, 2007). Other social scientists have developed similar terms and introduced various conceptual frameworks (see Valentine, 2007), all of which serve to challenge “the singularity, [and] separateness of a whole range of social categories” (McCall, 2005, 1778).

Informed by this approach, race, ethnicity and gender are here conceptualized as intersecting categories and my analysis of “brownness” seeks to demonstrate this interplay. I foreground the interrelationship between race and masculinity, not to discount the importance of other
categories in constituting young people’s social identities, but because this emphasis was articulated by the young men themselves. Similarly important to my interpretation of the “brown” identity is an understanding of masculinity as a heterogeneous category, which is both “temporally and geographically contingent” (Berg and Longhurst, 2003).

Theories of Masculinity

Historically, sociological enquiries into gender in western post-industrial societies have focused on male/female relations, with particular emphasis on the subordinate position of women (Connell, 2005). Research on men and masculinities, however, has surged over the past two decades prompted in large part by R.W Connell’s seminal publication “Masculinities” (1995) (see Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 1995). Connell’s work has been critical in advancing the concept of multiple and differing masculinities, such that theorists now conceive of a range of masculinities, with many different ways of ‘doing male’ (Harland, Beattie, and McCready, 2005). To make sense of and distinguish between the various versions of western masculinity, Connell (1995, 2005) works with a framework based upon the processes and relations which construct ‘patterns’ of masculinity, including: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalized masculinities (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the “currently most honored way of being a man,” it requires “all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, 832). While the hegemonic form of masculinity is culturally exalted and authoritative, it is neither fixed nor everywhere the same; it is merely a position within the existing pattern of gender relations and is therefore “always contestable” (Connell, 1995, 76). Furthermore, while the hegemonic form is normative, it is “not normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, 832). The hegemonic
ideal is associated with aggression, fearlessness, strength, control and risk-taking – the attributes required to sustain and reproduce patriarchal power (Brownlow, 2005). In western societies, the hegemonic male is typically epitomized by the white, rational, openly heterosexual and economically successful man (Connell, 2005). Complicit masculinities are constructed in ways which share in the political, social and economic benefits of patriarchy, “the patriarchal dividends,” without assuming the “risks or tensions of being the frontline troops” (Connell, 1995, 79). These forms, while not seeking to dominate, are complicit with the hegemonic versions of masculinity which effectively put and/or keep women and other types of men ‘in their place’.

While it is generally recognized that men, en masse, benefit from their dominant position over women, Connell’s theory allows for the reality that patriarchal dividends are not evenly distributed across all male populations. As he explains:

Other groups of men pay part of the price, alongside women, for the maintenance of an unequal gender order. Gay men are systematically made targets of prejudice and violence. Effeminate and wimpish men are constantly put down. Black men, in the United States (as in South Africa) suffer massively higher levels of lethal violence than white men (Connell, 1997, 64).

Commonly, working class, ethnic minority and homosexual enactments of masculinity assume subordinate or marginalized positions in the gender hierarchy. Connell (2005) clarifies that while processes of domination and subordination operate between groups of men, the dynamics of marginalization operate between masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups. Accordingly, while hegemonic, complicit and subordinate masculinities refer to relations internal to the gender order, marginalization acknowledges the “interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race” dynamics which further complicate relationships between masculinities (Connell, 2005, 80).

It is within the context of this framework that Connell (1995, 2005) introduces the notion
of “protest masculinity” as a type of “marginalized masculinity, which picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty,” where young men’s claims to power and status are repeatedly denied and negated by their economic and/or cultural weakness (2005, 114). As Connell further explains:

These men have lost most of the patriarchal dividend […] If they accept this loss they are accepting the justice of their own deprivation […] One way to resolve this contradiction is a spectacular display, embracing the marginality and stigma and turning them to account (2005, 116).

Protest masculinity is a strategy for some young men to confront and challenge their powerlessness and exclusion using the limited resources that are available to them. In the psychological literature, protest masculinity characterizes instances of extreme forms of “sex-typed behavior” and is understood as an “unconscious defensive maneuver on the part of males who are in conflict about or who are insecure about their identities as males” (Broude, 1990). Where other outlets to social recognition are blocked, young men may resort to excessively macho behaviors and hypermasculine practices including violence, criminal activity, various forms of delinquency, and drug and/or alcohol abuse. Protest masculinity amounts to a “frenzied and showy” (Connell, 2005, 110) collective performance, incorporating exaggerated male stereotypes and conventions, that ultimately resembles “a cul-de-sac” in that “the performance is not leading anywhere” – at least not in mainstream terms (Connell, 2005, 117).

This line of theorizing informs us that masculinity is socially constructed, contingent upon the ways in which gender interacts with other social structures and the cultural resources that are available in different settings. Given this understanding, it is now common to recognize that not only is there no monolithic version of masculinity but that masculinity is something that is done in different ways in different contexts, such that, in a given setting, we may observe
white masculinities and black masculinities rather than a black masculinity or a white masculinity. Yet as Frosh et al. (2002, 3) remind us “[t]his is not to say that boys and men create themselves out of nothing;” they draw upon already available discourses and understandings of masculinity. It is in this regard that the “explicit recognition of the geography of masculinities and the interplay between the local, regional, and global levels” is of particular importance (Hopkins and Noble, 2009, 814). In conceptualizing masculinities as “strategic” “performances which are undertaken in particular contexts, drawing on specific resources and capacities,” (Hopkins and Noble, 2009, 814), my understanding of “brownness” builds on the contribution of geographers whose work demonstrates the ways in which youthful masculinities are place based, born out of particular local and regional circumstances (see for instance, McDowell, 2003; Van Hoven and Hörschelmann, 2005; Nayak, 2003, 2006; and Hopkins, 2007). In becoming “brown,” the brown boys are working with the unique discursive material that has been made available to them through their experiences as the children of Indian immigrant parents who have grown up and attended school in a predominantly South Asian neighbourhood in Surrey, B.C. Although in Vancouver Punjabis are still considered a minority population, at Getting By High School and in parts of Surrey, the brown boys are part of a sizeable majority which means that apart from contact with their fellow “white” students, teachers, coaches and counselors, the brown boys have very little exposure to “white” mainstream society. As such, while the brown boys do take into account the “white” version of masculinity presented by their school peers, in learning to be men, they are most heavily influenced by their father’s first generation Indian version of masculinity and an alternative form of protest masculinity being offered up by other Punjabi young men.
The Surrey Jack

The Surrey Jack\(^{87}\) is a type of protest masculinity that has been adopted by some young Indo-Canadian men living in Surrey. Most of my interviewees had no trouble explaining to me who Jacks are; it’s all about how they “act, talk and present themselves” (Rob, personal interview, March 2007). Jacks are a very visible presence and “well known” throughout Surrey, with an easily distinguishable aesthetic including spiky hair with blonde tips, chin straps\(^{88}\), (imitation) diamond stud earrings, low slung pants and baggy tops. A Jack’s life revolves around partying, heavy drinking, doing and in many cases, dealing drugs, provoking fights, and “messing around” with different girls. Jacks are not concerned with school or potential careers, and many are expelled\(^{89}\) from or are unable to cope with attending regular public schools with their peers, and are enrolled in “Work and Learn”\(^ {90}\) programmes. Jacks are especially well-known for picking fights. This fact was repeatedly emphasized by the brown boys who describe Jacks as “idiots” who “fight for no reason,” and “cheat on their girlfriends” (Sam, personal interview, April 2007), and as guys who seek out fights in order to “prove themselves” (Rob, personal interview, March 2007), to demonstrate their “authority” and to “improve their reps” in Surrey (Harjeet, personal interview, March 2007). Kam, 17 specifies that “[t]hey’ll drink to the

\(^{87}\) Although all of the students that I interviewed were familiar with the term, none of them knew of its origins.

\(^{88}\) Chin straps refer to a particular style of facial hair which involves grooming hair in such a way that the side burns connect with the beard below the chin.

\(^{89}\) Students are typically expelled or ask to leave a school for disruptive and/or dangerous behavior, failing to attend and/or for drinking/drugs. Amrik describes one of her male friends and his peers as “typical Surrey Jacks.” The boy was expelled from Getting By High School for chasing after another student with a shank. When she asked him why he did this, he answered that ‘I did it because he [the boy he was chasing after] jumped in when my buddy was fighting his buddy. Like he wasn’t supposed to. So I just got pissed.’

\(^{90}\) Work and Learn programmes operate out of one of the Surrey school district’s 5 learning centres for grades 10-12 and “feature flexible hours and small group instruction, and allow students to work at their own pace. Individual learners may be employed full time or part time while attending school” (Surrey School District, 2008).
point they can’t drink anymore, they’ll start random fights, [and] do drugs.” Jon and Sunny think that guys refer to themselves as Jacks to send a message that they are “hardcore” (personal interviews, March 2007) but Ryan discerns that while some guys might be labeled as Jacks because they party a lot, real Jacks “have no lives” (personal interview, March 2007).

The girls agree that Jacks “suck at school,” (Aarti, personal interview, December 2006), are “slackers” (Teja, personal interview, January 2007) and “basically failures” (Valerie, personal interview, December 2006). Several of the girls perceive Surrey Jacks as “stereotypical brown guys,” meaning that, from the female perspective, they are “players” - promiscuous, lacking respect for women. According to Mandy, “[t]here’s sort of like a stereotype that [brown] Surrey guys are like, you know, just want to pick up girls, have sex with them, and Surrey girls are just girls that want to have sex with guys” (personal interview, December 2006). Amrik describes Jacks as “like the thugs and stuff of Surrey” and “all he wants to do is like just do stuff…things with girls⁹¹” (personal interview, January 2007). Uma summarizes that:

[a]ll they [Jacks] do is go to a park and blaze. Smoke marijuana and smoke cigarettes and drink. And act dumb, right? And then, there are the ones that like, you know, go after the sluts, the girls and stuff like that. They’re harsh, like players and stuff like that...They’re with one girl but they’re doing something with another (personal interview, January 2007).

Uma knows that “it’s not a good thing being a Jack,” but she still admits, while giggling, that they are “very hot” and that girls “go for them” because of their looks (personal interview, January 2007). Though most of the faculty and staff that I spoke with at Getting By High School were not familiar with the term “Jack,” Mary, one of the school’s guidance counselors, says she learned of it while working at another large local high school where, for a while, a group of boys

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⁹¹ She goes on to explain that this often results in a “fuck and chuck” which occurs when the Jack immediately loses interest in a girl after they have engaged in sexual acts.
wore t-shirts emblazoned with “Surrey Jacks;" they had the “slick” appearance and some even had tattoos in “gangy looking lettering” (Personal Interview, May 2007). Mary likens Jacks to roosters, as “it’s all about the show” but she has heard less about them since being employed at Getting By High School. The female students would probably attribute this to the fact that there are no real Jacks here, only “semis” and “wannabes.” According to the girls, some of the brown boys try to emulate the Jack style and attitude but fall short of achieving them. Some of the brown boys agree that while their friends may seem like Jacks, “deep down,” it’s not who they want to be. Brown boys may appear tough to outsiders but their claims to violence rarely extend beyond posturing while the Jacks are known to follow through on their claims.

In fact, many of the brown boys blame the Jacks and their aggressive behaviour with fuelling negative mainstream perceptions of Surrey’s young Indo-Canadian men. Some of the boys go even further, holding the Jacks directly accountable for the “gang violence” reported on by the local and national media. Sam is adamant that:

[t]here are no gangs. It’s just fights. There are no gangs at all. There are no like red bandanas and it’s not like Compton. Oh, yeah. This gang, don’t mess with that gang, blah, blah, blah, this and that. It’s nothing like that. There are no gangs. I don’t know where they get the word gangs from. There are no gangs. Just a bunch of brown guys, friends, getting together, they’re going out, they’re getting hammered, they say stupid things, this guy says something stupid, other guy says something stupid, this guy gets mad and he can’t control his, you know, liquor or something like that. And he kills him. And the next thing you know, they are saying it’s gang related…Most of them don’t even know one another […] (personal interview, April 2007).

Davinder likewise maintains that the violence is “not gang related. It’s just people being idiots. We [Indo-Canadians] don’t have gangs.” When asked why he though the media would report that the violence is gang related, he reasoned:

92 T-shirts featuring the “Surrey Jack” logo continue to be available, as of March 2010, online through a company offering customizable clothing.
Because a gang makes it that much more worse. If you’re in a gang, you’re the worse person in the world. And I think that’s what they’re trying to do. They’re really trying to emphasize how bad Indo-Canadian kids are because they’re in a gang. But once you put that label on a person of being in a gang, everything flips[…] Now it becomes a whole bigger problem than it already was (personal interview, March 2007).

For many of the brown boys, the media’s Indo-Canadian gangster and the Surrey Jack are one and the same and when it comes to the matter of articulating who they are, the brown boys do not appreciate either label. Although two of the young men in my sample acknowledge that some people may perceive them as Jacks, none of them self-identify in this way or want to be associated with a “gangster” identity. It is possible that their aversion to the Jack identity may have been feigned for my benefit, precisely because the young men are so attuned to its stigma and negative connotations, yet their opposition was so well and consistently articulated throughout our interviews that I have rejected this explanation. Rather, the “brown” identity has been deliberately crafted by these young men as a response and a challenge to the prevailing Jack identity which is often indiscriminately applied to young Indo-Canadian men from Surrey.

While in their younger years several of the brown boys appear to have experimented with aspects of the Jack identity for instance, by picking fights, using drugs, or misbehaving at school, now, as “brown” young men, they are seeking to distance and disassociate themselves from the Jacks. But more than this, in defining themselves as “brown” they are struggling to adapt the traditional gender scripts passed down to them from their Punjabi fathers and older male relatives while simultaneously contending with their white peer’s version of masculinity. Relative to the “white guys” at their school, the brown boys consider themselves more athletic, more manly, more attractive and generally, more popular. Their socializing, however, often comes at the expense of their studying and although the brown boys claim to value education, they admit to being “lazy” and “ slackers.” While being “brown” means being more popular and less studious
than the “white” guys, relative to the Jack, it means attempting to be more moderate and exercising self control. The brown boys, for instance, malign the Jacks for their hyperheterosexuality, for “letting their lower section” talk for them and while many of the brown boys have girlfriends or have dated, they try instead to be “good guys” and treat women with greater respect. Perhaps most importantly, while the brown boys take pride in their physicality, unlike the Jacks, they prefer to prove themselves through athletics, rather than “random” violence. Though they will not instigate fights for “no reason,” they will defend themselves if they feel that their masculinity is being threatened. For instance, most of the boys interpret ethnic teasing as a serious form of “disrespect,” a direct assault on their manhood, and as justifiable grounds for fighting. Singh et al. (n.d.) suggest that, in fact, most young South Asian males are instilled with this “masculine trait” as they are “taught to be strong, fight if necessary to maintain respect, never back down, and to be proud of the family name” and are “raised to be heirs to the family name, and to carry on the status and respect a family has garnered” (11). The brown boys further distinguish themselves from the Jacks by deciding not to use drugs but their attitudes toward drinking alcohol are largely informed by their fathers and earlier generations of Punjabi men. Mani, a Sikh documentarian, explains that heavy drinking is “accepted and perpetuated” by Punjabi men in Vancouver as a “traditional” aspect of life in rural Punjab (personal interview, April 2009). Singh and Singh Tatla (2006) support that:

> [c]onsumption of alcohol has always been very high among Sikhs, with the per capita rate among Sikhs of Punjab among the highest in the world, but recent studies have shown a growing epidemic. Consumption rates are higher than in any other ethnic minority and in the white community; Sikhs from Punjab seem to be particularly prone to high levels of consumption; in one study 80% of men of Asian origin who died from alcohol related liver disease were judged to be of Sikh origin (177).

Singh and Singh Tatla (2006) observe that “a particularly distinctive feature of British Sikh society today is the high rate of alcoholism among males” (177) and though not supported with
data, Kurian (1991) reports that alcoholism is a similarly “serious problem” in South Asian communities in Canada. Though a subject that is not openly discussed within the Indo-Canadian community, those members with whom I spoke view alcoholism as a “huge” problem amongst Punjabi men in Vancouver. In fact, Jas, an RCMP officer, tells me that he has always been “totally against” drinking because his father was an alcoholic. Mike, a police officer, also shares that he has “personal” experience with “dads drinking” while Matt, a motivational speaker, blames his generation for “perpetuating old cycles that should have been broken,” the men at wedding receptions who are “drinking, drinking and drinking while the women are sitting.” While most of the brown boys admit to drinking, four of the brown boys abstain for fear of becoming like their fathers who, they say, are alcoholics. In the following six narratives, I draw out this distinction between the brown boys and their fathers while elaborating on how the brown identity is made manifest on a daily basis in terms of the boys’ friends, their weekday and weekend activities, their attitudes towards women, their perceptions of Surrey, their aspirations, their role models and their overall demeanor and ways of carrying themselves. In so doing, I will demonstrate how brown is constructed not only in relation to the masculinity embodied by their Punjabi fathers but also relative to those of the Surrey Jack and their white male schoolmates.

The Brown Boys

All but two of the brown boys were recruited through their business co-op class and were interviewed in March 2007, three months before their high school graduations. All of

93 Descriptions of these young men also appear in a table in Appendix A.
94 Tim and Mohan expressed interest in my project after hearing one of several announcements made by Vice Principal Sanjay and were interviewed in November 2006 and December 2006 respectively.
them were well dressed in casual clothes, typically in jeans or track pants, a t-shirt and/or a hooded sweatshirt or sports jersey with a pair of one of the latest brand name sneakers on their feet. A couple of the boys wore diamond studs in their ears and a few noticeably wore cologne. They were well groomed, clean shaven or with trimmed goatees and their hair was styled with gel or pomade. Initially, they appeared aloof, disinterested and maybe even a little bit arrogant. They exuded an air of self confidence and assuredness that I was not expecting to encounter from a room of teenage boys. However, once in the private interview room, the boys were, with few exceptions, well mannered, affable, and at ease. They were forthcoming and talkative, quite willing to discuss their social lives and academic careers though more reticent when our discussions turned to more personal matters relating to their families, dating, and in some instances, their futures. At the time of their interviews, eleven of the boys were 17 and four had recently turned 18. All of them are second generation Canadians. While their parents are Punjabi, most of these young men were born in the Lower Mainland: 7 in Surrey, one in Richmond and one in Vancouver; 4 were born in other parts of Canada, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Calgary, Alberta and Brampton, Ontario, and two were born in India but immigrated to Canada before the age of 6. All of them now reside with their families in Surrey, all but three within walking distance or a short drive from the high school they had been attending since Grade 8. Of the 15 boys, one is an only child, one has an older sister, 5 have a brother, and 8 of the boys have two or more siblings. While a few of the young men mentioned that they were Sikhs and that

95 Following several attempts to solicit interest from male students by way of posters and announcements, I was permitted access to a twelfth grade classroom for the purposes of recruiting additional interviewees.
they occasionally visited the gurdwara with their parents, none of them viewed themselves as especially religious or observant of the Sikh faiths.\(^{96}\)

**Rob, 17**

Rob smiles and laughs a lot during our interview. He is good humoured, cheerful and friendly. He loves basketball and is apparently quite good; he has been on the school team since Grade 8. Rob’s dad has always wanted his sons to be “tough” – “not vicious” but tough – and “fortunately” for Rob he’s met this parental expectation by being “successful” in sports. After school, if he’s not playing in a game, you can find him practicing or hitting the weight room with his friends and teammates. On some afternoons he “hangs-out with the guys” but Rob quickly defends that this does mean that they are “doing anything stupid” like “beating people up.” He insists that he and his brown friends prefer to stay home and play video games, watch a funny movie or listen to music, “everything except country.” He admits, however, to having another group of friends who are “not so nice.” With them, there is a “different kind of atmosphere […] I think they’re all like, like they have little self esteem” and feel that they have to “prove something to each other.” They make a point of belittling newcomers to the group in efforts to appear “big” and “cool.” The first time he hung out with these friends he recalls that they tried to embarrass him in front of the crowd. These boys do not attend Getting By High School though where he says most of the boys are “good guys.”

While there are kids who smoke weed and drink “religiously,” he and his friends only do so “every now and then,” although this was not always the case. When he was younger he smoked weed, at first only on week-ends and then almost every day, until “one day I was like, …

\(^{96}\) For instance, none of the young men wore a turban.
‘oh, what the hell am I doing?’ And I just kind of stopped.” His reasons for curbing his drinking, however, are a little more complicated. When we first addressed the issue, he explained that he and his friends want to stay in shape for sports, later he added that his parents, especially his mother, would not approve because he is under age, and finally, towards the end of our interview, he offered that his father and grandfather are alcoholics and that “like, I know what [alcohol] is going to do. So, what’s the point? I don’t want that.” He maintains that “most Indo-Canadian parents, like dads are alcoholics. Like, out of all the kids I talk to I bet you everybody will say, ‘Yeah, my dad’s an alcoholic.’” He goes on to explain that if you ask an Indo-Canadian man why he drinks, he will answer by saying that it is generational, that he saw his father drink and his grandfather drink before him so that “it’s normal when I get to that age.” He adds that “cause of my dad…I’ll probably have the odd beer or whatever, right?”

When Rob and his friends do go out on weekends, it is usually to house parties in Surrey; the parents are away so kids have the house to themselves for drinking and dancing. Rob’s socializing is normally limited to Surrey because he, like most of his friends, does not have his driver’s license but he suspects that even if they could drive they would elect to stay in Surrey; they “don’t need to go anywhere else to have fun.” Although he likes living in Surrey because “everybody knows each other,” he admits that there are “lots of things” that he does not like about “here.” He reasons that “there’s like areas of Surrey where you like watch yourself or whatever. ‘Cause there’s like…there’s like…I don’t know what’s wrong with kids these days. They’re just dumb.” Earlier in high school he and his friends used to go to a nearby cinema on the weekends where:

like every guy in our grade would go. Like all the Indo-Canadians or whatever. And then like Indo-Canadians from other schools would be there and there would always be fights […] Like serious fights. Like big brawls. Like weapons.
Although he has seen guns at fights, so far no one has used one because as he understands it:

I guess it’s like an unsaid rule that you’re not going to use the gun. You’re gonna bring it just for intimidation, right? But it won’t be long before some idiot uses one. I’m pretty sure. Well, that’s just in high school. Older, there’s…there’s people using guns…like older Indo-Canadians. They’re using guns already right? But, I’d say in high school, generally no one is going to use a gun. People will use knives, bats, pipes, bottles […] and bear mace.

Rob recounts that a lot of “bottling” – where kids strike each other in the head with beer bottles – and a lot of fights happen at parties. The fights usually begin with a comment but escalate because “obviously if you feel like you’ve been insulted or something right [and] all your friends are there. And usually your friends egg you on or something right?” When asked if he’s been in such a situation, he answers excitedly:

Oh yeah, yeah! I was at a party once, and um, I was sitting next to this girl and it just happened to be this guy’s girlfriend. I swear I didn’t talk to her. I didn’t watch her right? I wasn’t even looking at her! I was just sitting there [but] she went up to her boyfriend and tells [him] that I was like talking to her or whatever […] So, I like try to avoid him, right? I think I could’ve beat him up. Like I probably would have, right? But it was at my friend’s house, and I didn’t want to…like…[trails off].

On another occasion, Rob was bottled at a local park. He and his friends were on their way to meet some girls when they encountered another group of boys from their school who were drinking with a “guy” that Rob “didn’t like.” As it turned out, these boys “didn’t like one of the guys” that was with Rob, so they threw bottles at the other boys’ heads as they were leaving the park. Although he says that it didn’t hurt, Rob and his friends “just ran. We just left right away.”

Despite the close calls, Rob says he is not concerned for his personal safety. He makes concerted efforts to remain a bystander, and to steer clear of fights where he fears that “anything could happen.” He does, however, worry about some of his friends and peers who he insist “try to be good” but that “some of the paths that I think they might take aren’t too good for them” in
terms of drugs and violence. He has spoken with them, told them that “you don’t even have to talk like that, or you don’t have to act like that, or portray yourself like that. Like, just try to enjoy life instead of living it this way.” Rob perceives that his efforts may be wasted and that it’s a “lost cause by now.” Rob has been heavily influenced by the decisions of such friends along with those of his father and his grandfather. His father is a “steady alcoholic” and his grandfather and uncle served time in prison for committing a violent crime (possibly 20 years, although Rob is not certain). He does not consider these men role models rather he prefers to “look at how people mess up” and learn from their mistakes. That said, he recognizes the depth of his grandfather’s experience and although he thinks it “sounds kind of weird” feels most comfortable and at home with his grandfather and his grandmother who make him “feel safe and good.”

Rob also likes spending time with his girlfriend. She is not Indo-Canadian but this is not unusual for Rob who has had “a lot of girlfriends,” many of whom were not brown. He says that he’s just “not so much attracted to them as I am to other girls.” The fact that Indo-Canadian girls “might have a brother or an uncle or a dad that wants to beat you up or something” might be a factor in determining this (lack of) attraction. In fact, when Rob went on a date with a brown girl, she told him that if her brother saw them together, “he would break your legs,” Rob recalled while laughing, that “he never called her back.” He faces a different situation with his present girlfriend who is “teased” by her friends because she is “considered white” and he is brown. For instance, they will ask her “why are you going out with that Hindu?” For the most part, he interprets their remarks as “good natured,” indicative of the racial teasing that he says is popular at this school, but occasionally it does “piss him off.” But he says, “[i]t’s just the way it is in high school. Like, most of the white girls like the brown guys.” In his interpretation, the white
girls at school prefer brown boys because of the “big difference” between white and brown boys. According to Rob, “we’re more athletic […] confident, and like, I guess guys [his emphasis]. They’re more like…like wimps, I guess. Like I know a couple of them [white boys] too. Like I can…I can just say that. And I guess when they [white girls] see us, they see like more like men.” Their appeal to girls accounts for part of the brown boys’ popularity at Getting By High School.

When we finally touch on what it means to be brown, Rob says that for some “it’s like a quick way of saying East Indian,” for others saying you are brown means you “gotta be like a Surrey Jack or something.” He is also very aware that “with Indo-Canadians being brought into the media,” having brown skin can elicit certain reactions which he attempts to deflect:

Like whenever we’ll go somewhere, like if we go there in a group, or there’s like five of us, you can notice…you can feel people looking at you differently. Like I feel people looking at me differently […] Just like people that aren’t like East Indian are looking at you. Of course, ‘cause they think, ‘Oh, here’s these guys again’ […] then people are like so quick to judge, right? So then, I try to talk extra loud and try to sound as polite as I can, right? So people, they’re like, ‘Oh, they’re not so bad’ or whatever, right?

When I ask Rob how he identifies, what label he would pick to describe himself, he initially responded “like say I’m brown?” After I clarified some more, he paused, reflected and said “I don’t know…I’ve never really been asked that kind of question. I’d just say ‘I’m Rob.’”

Harjeet, 17

Harjeet is well spoken and easy going. He thinks that his friends would describe him as athletic with a good sense of humour and “smart when he wants to be.” He enjoys going to school at Getting By High, although back in Grade 8 and 9 he says that there were a lot of fights, usually over “like racism stuff,” where the “main thing [was] white versus brown.” He describes
how the fights began:

[It’s] like usually when you’re in a crowd. That’s like when they start. Like one white guy would walk by and brown guys would say something or one brown guy would say something, or walk by a bunch of white guys and they’d say something.

Now that he’s in Grade 12, he says that “there are no fights [between white and brown students] but everyone’s just separated.” Most of his friends are brown. He attributes this to his limited opportunities for “socializing with like the white people.” He further explains that “I guess there’s no barrier to interact but here it’s like, white people don’t come up to you or brown people won’t go up to them.” For example, if he sat down with a group of white students at lunch “they won’t say anything but they’d be like, ‘what are you doing here?’ […] if you don’t know them then it would be kind of really awkward for you. Everybody would be looking at you and stuff.” In terms of isolating differences between white and brown students, Harjeet observes that the incompatibility between the two groups can be traced back to how they are parented. He insists that white kids are given more freedom at home:

[s]o that sometimes they do talk more or they’ll talk back or whatever. But, like, most of the brown kids will hold it in till later when no one’s looking kind of thing. And they they’ll like, if something happened in class, they’ll wait till like after class and then go up to the person or something.

Outside of school, he gets to interact with more white guys on his soccer team and will even “go out with them sometimes on the weekends.”

Harjeet is passionate about soccer and plays on the school’s team and a league team which means that he is on the field at least 5 times a week. Until a recent injury he also practiced and was quite talented at karate. The bulk of his remaining free time, at least 20 hours a week, is spent working at a self serve gas station which he describes as “pretty chilling.” He got the job because after his parents purchased him a new car, he did not want to continue asking them for
money. Amidst his extracurricular activities, he usually spends about 15 minutes per night on his homework but boasts “not even that sometimes. Sometimes I just cram quickly before a test or something.” Despite the fact that he “doesn’t try,” Harjeet says that, except for failing two courses in Grade 11, his grades have been “good,” mostly Bs. Last year’s “mess up,” however, has meant that instead of applying for local universities, Harjeet is now planning on transferring to SFU or UBC after a year of college where he hopes to eventually pursue a degree in law. He knows that if he studied harder and took harder courses that he could “pull off an A” this year but now that he’s committed to going to college he “doesn’t see the need” to expend any extra effort. He figures that he will “start trying” next year. Until then, he has time to spend with his friends.

His group of friends has dwindled over the course of high school. Back in Grade 8 and 9, he recalls that “everyone in my grade was supposedly friends” but now, “it’s becoming weak and down to like 25, 20 and like that’s just like everyone you hang out with” but even then, he only counts 5 or 6 of these people as “really close.” Some of these boys are athletic like Harjeet, and play on the basketball team, but “a lot” of the others are “just bums.” On the weekends, they may play basketball or football if the weather is nice but in the evening drive around Surrey looking for a party. He says, while laughing, that his friends drink every weekend, but he only drinks “sometimes.” He is often their designated driver, explaining that it is “better” for him not to drink. He does not think however that his father would mind if he did because according to Harjeet, “[i]t’s just like a given thing. If you’re brown and you’re a guy, you drink.” In his family, the “thing” is that “the guys are all alcoholic.” His uncle was hospitalized for an alcohol related illness; “he drank so much he only had like one percent or two percent liver left.” Harjeet’s father has been “weeding out” alcohol but will still drink at big parties. Harjeet
qualifies that his father does not get “really drunk” at these events but he only has a couple of drinks, because “you have to, right?” particularly at wedding receptions. He goes on to explain that it is permissible for a brown man not to drink at a wedding if he is “like one of those religious people with like a turban,” but otherwise “if a guy’s like ‘Oh, I don’t drink,’ he’d be getting harassed all night. ‘Come on, come on, drink, right?’” Harjeet knows some women who drink but while they might have a glass of wine with dinner, the men favour hard liquor, and many of them even make their own moonshine, “like 100 percent liquor.” When I ask if his family makes it, he laughs, responding “Yeah. Like every brown person is capable of getting like moonshine […] Like every brown person knows someone who has made it or like drank it before.” According to Harjeet, violence is similarly ubiquitous in Surrey.

When I ask him if he likes living in Surrey, Harjeet remarks that “Yeah, it’s alright. Kind of dangerous.” By way of example he offers that:

[y]ou know you watch those movies and like there’s always a cop car in the background? Around my house, like around here, that’s all you hear. Like 24-7 there’s always like a cop car, an ambulance, a fire truck. Something. It’s never quiet around here.

Even though one of his friends was recently stabbed and there have been “lots of fights with bottles and stuff like that,” when he’s out with a group of friends, he does not worry about his safety. He figures that regardless of precautions you might take, “sometimes it’s just like you can’t win it right? If you’re just walking around somewhere and a couple of guys come up to you, not much you can do about it.” The type of guys picking fights are brown people, “that’s all we see around Surrey” he says, “just like a Jack I guess.” In Harjeet’s opinion the Jacks are looking for respect and to “take it” from people who have it. While he laughs and comments that he “doesn’t really care” about being respected in Surrey, he admits that some of his friends do

97 Also Davinder’s friend.
and will fight over it - he just happens to be there.

Harjeet has learned from his father’s life to stay out of trouble. When Harjeet’s father and uncle first arrived in Canada, they “got into a lot of trouble” and “used to do stupid things” mostly related to fighting. When Harjeet was a child of 3 or 4 years old, his father went to jail for two years after he “brutally” beat a man on his way home from a party. Now he has “turned his life around,” and Harjeet describes him as “clean” with “his life on track.” He experienced the consequences of his father’s actions “first-hand” and witnessed the devastating impact on his family, in particular, his grandparents who were “crushed” to see their youngest son go to jail.

Notwithstanding these lessons, Harjeet has been involved in fights. For instance, in Grade 9 or 10, Harjeet remembers that four or five white guys said things to him and some friends after school, “like ‘oh, you’re Hindu, you’re this and you’re that’.” Harjeet and his friends left, only to return with more “buddies,” and then proceeded to wait for the white boys outside. Harjeet says chuckling, “then a confrontation happened.” Although he appreciates that neighbourhoods in Surrey can no longer be considered “family environments,” he feels that the news reporting on Indo-Canadian young me is getting “out of hand.”

In making his case, Harjeet compares Surrey to Los Angeles, California:

Just like in L.A. there’s always like all this like – African Americans are always, like, they’re always saying that they’re doing something wrong and stuff like that. Like that’s what Surrey is turning into now. Like the Indo-Canadians are like the gangsters, the drug dealers and stuff like that. That’s what we’re known for now. We just have that stereotype put on us now because of the news and stuff like that.

Furthermore, according to Harjeet, these negative perceptions of Surrey and Indo-Canadians are spreading such that amongst “brown people, Indo-Canadians, or East Indian, whatever you want to call that, Surrey is known worldwide.” In fact, when Harjeet visited California someone was
like “Oh, you’re from Surrey”” because in his mind, “[t]hey already know, like somehow what’s like going down.” He adds that while Surrey was already known as “where every brown person usually lives,” now it’s “worse,” known for “where all the brown gangsters live.” In light of the fact that “whenever we turn on the news it’s Indo-Canadian did this, Indo-Canadian did that,” he would rather be referred to as East Indian, although between friends, he uses brown. He does not think that brown is a negative term and neither is white. At least nobody seems to mind being called white when they joke around in the cafeteria.

Davinder, 17

Davinder is handsome and earnest with a maturity beyond his years. His family moved to Surrey from Manitoba in 1996 and like his older brother, he is moving back there to attend university in the fall. University is cheaper there but he is also eager to re-connect with his family and to experience life “out there,” “away from home” in Winnipeg where he will be able to “roam around the city and have a great time, and not worry about anything,” instead of constantly “looking over his shoulder” in Surrey. He declares that “[y]ou have to be strong to live here.” A few days before our interview, a friend and classmate was stabbed while leaving a house party and Davinder was understandably shaken:

[…] you hear things like that, and you’re just wondering, wow, ‘if I’m walking home who knows what’s going to happen, right?’ A guy might come up and he might just shoot me for no reason, you know, he might stab me for no reason too, so I don’t feel as comfortable as I did before […] I think it’s not a safe community.

Even though he considers life here “scary,” and acknowledges that his parents “see what goes around and what’s wrong out here,” Davinder maintains that “they’re not afraid for me, because they know I know how to handle my own. Because I’ve learned to make the right decisions.”
He considers attending Getting By High School one of these decisions. In grade 8, Davinder was slated to enroll in another local high school that his brother was then attending. But based on his brother’s experiences and his counsel, Davinder instead opted to enroll at Getting By. His brother, after becoming heavily involved with drugs and dropping out of high school, ultimately joined Davinder at Getting By where he “got back on track” and graduated. His brother has gone on to study business and computer science at university. Until his brother got clean, however, Davinder was largely left to raise himself.

Since Davinder was in grade 4, his parents have worked every day, 11 am to 11pm, except for the day of his grandmother’s funeral in 2007. Davinder recalls that with his brother “using dope” and “in a slump,” “I just grew up on my own. I learned how to be a man real early.” But when his brother “decided to flip it,” Davinder’s life was similarly transformed. As he describes:

In Grade 8 and 9, I was uh, one of those little gangster kids who wanted to be cool. And, after my brother started actually taking care of me, I realized that it wasn’t the road for me and I started caring about what I wanted to do in the future […] I want to be successful, that’s it […] so after I made up my mind […] I started caring about education […]

His brother’s affection - his “caring” and his “love” were critical in helping Davinder to re-direct his development. Most importantly, Davinder credits his brother’s hugs: “[h]e gave me hugs. I think that’s what I needed all my life, right? A hug. That’s all I wanted, a hug.” The two brothers now share a deep bond. As for his parents, although he wishes that he could “talk with them more and just be more of a family,” Davinder says he finally appreciates what they have been doing for him. Just this year he came to the realization that “they’re doing it because that’s what they have to do to survive, whatever it takes to survive, that’s what you do.” His reverence
and admiration for them are obvious as he describes his father as a “genius” with an “amazing brain” and his mother as “tough,” “rugged” and “smart.” With this new understanding of his parents, he says that he now looks up to both of them. He does not, however, hold the girls at his school in such high esteem.

Before he overhauled his life and adjusted his priorities, Davinder dated a girl, following which he decided to never date again, at least not while he is still in high school. He says that he has been unable to “connect with any girl here” and that while, it “might sound bad,” he does not feel that “any girl here deserves [his] time.” While the “Caucasian girls are just so mean […] I don’t know why, why they don’t like us [brown boys],” he perceives the Indo-Canadian girls as “real nice” and “open to anyone.” Although he does feel that on occasion even the Indo-Canadian girls are a “little snobby,” thinking that the brown guys are just “slobs.” While dating is not his top priority, Davinder has made time for casual sexual encounters:

[...]Grade 8 through Grade 12, I’ve hooked up with people here and there, but I’ve never wanted a relationship because I just think they don’t deserve all the time I would actually put into it. And they wouldn’t understand me properly. I’m willing to open up to people who ask questions, right, and people are just afraid, and I, I honestly, I care about basketball and school more than anything, and so I just don’t want to waste my time and I don’t want distractions.

His weekday evenings are now reserved for lifting weights, playing basketball and doing homework and if there is time leftover, hanging out with friends.

Although his dedication and love of basketball have not wavered, he admits that in Grades 8 through 10, he “never” did his homework. During this period, although he “wasn’t engaged with any wrong activities,” he was always hanging out with older people, kids in several grades ahead of him. These friends “always took care” of him and treated him well but when he

98 Here, slob denotes promiscuity. For example, Davinder characterizes his brother as a “slob” because at one time he was dating three girls simultaneously.
was with them, he “just didn’t care about school,” it was not “in his zone.” While these older friends would often get into fights, Davinder was and continues to be against it and has developed a tough and unapproachable façade to deter potential problems:

I was always the guy no one wanted to talk to, no one wanted to get involved with. Because that’s how I was. I always had a mean look on my face, uh, just to make sure nothing happened, right? I’ve never got into any problems and still to this day people are intimidated by me, but people don’t know me well enough to make that judgment, but they will do, which is fine […] No one took chances in talking with me, so I never got into any problems at all.

Nowadays, Davinder has all types of friends, and they are “supportive and all care.” Like Rob, Davinder has been on the basketball team since Grade 8 and considers his teammates and coaches like family: “[i]f I need a home, I could go to them and ask them any time and they’ll take me in.” But the closeness engenders concern such that Davinder worries more about his friends than himself and he attributes this to his relative maturity:

I guess their attitude towards things is a lot more different than mine. Um, educationally, I don’t think they have their mind set, and I try to emphasize it all the time. I look out for them. But uh, I guess that’s the main thing. I really want them to succeed […] I just think there’s, like I said, I think I’m a level ahead of normal kids. And I know what I want, I see my goal. And I’m just going out there to get it now.

Davinder is different in this regard. Of the 15 boys I interviewed, he was the only one who had not only applied to but had been successfully accepted to more than one university. His more disciplined outlook towards schooling, however, does not preclude him from connecting with his friends. With them, Davinder indulges his desire “to be a kid forever” because “when you’re a kid you get everything you want, you’re always happy.” They play video and card games and watch movies and according to Davinder, “it brings out the best in us.” While he has tried smoking marijuana and does drink, he does not do either regularly and though some of his friends might, he is not concerned because “they’ve got a good head, and they drink for, I don’t know what kind of reasons, but I think they know what they’re doing.” Although the friends to
whom he is referring here are brown, he also has white friends.

Davinder is very aware of the brown-white divide at school and “hates it.” He would like the dynamic to be more like it is in Manitoba, where he could “engage with anyone without my friends looking at me going ‘What’s this guy doing?’.” He and one of his very good friends, who is white, try to bring students together by “doing little things in order to get it started, kick started” like sitting together in the cafeteria, but “it doesn’t seem to happen.” He has not asked anyone why ‘it’ does not happen; he doesn’t bother to ask, assuming, “I mean if you don’t want to do it, I’m not going to force you.” That said, he notices distinct differences in terms of how brown and white students behave. He explains that “[t]hey act way different. Um, not me, but, it’s just the way we [my emphasis] walk, talk, act, is a lot different from the way they walk, talk, act.” When I asked him if he could illustrate those differences with examples, he added that:

[O]n the weekend, they go out and they come back talking about how they played guitars when they were at a party. We talk about how much we drank, you know. It’s just a lot different. We’re more aggressive people, I think. We like to talk about, ‘Oh yeah, that girl, she was good looking,’ they want to talk about ‘Dude, that was an awesome back flip you did’ right? And it’s just a difference in language too, that’s what I’m trying to show you.

By highlighting these distinctions, Davinder is not intending to demean white behaviour, rather he says “I wish I could say ‘Yo, that was a nice kick flip man,’ but I don’t get to engage with them as much.” This desire is illustrative of Davinder’s overarching struggle for individuality.

Throughout my interview with him, he referred to himself and his friends – ‘we’ – as brown. Yet when we discussed selecting a label for the purposes of his self-identification, Davinder was resistant to the whole notion:

Honestly, I don’t know if I have a label because I’m so different, you know. Like, I could, if I’m able to interact with everyone, be friends with everyone, have an open mind to anything, do I deserve a label? I don’t think so. Because I’m so different. I’m my
own person.

He continues:

For me, if you [a white person] call me a brown kid, sure go ahead. I’m not going to get mad over it. Um, it’s my skin colour, okay. My skin colour doesn’t make a difference in who I am […]

I think we’re a harsh, we’re stereotyped in this, you know, in Surrey, huge. So, when they say ‘brown kids,’ that’s what they talk about. They talk about everything behind that, that may not even be true. Right? It may not even happen, you may not be a gang banger, you may not get into fights every weekend, you may care about school, you may care about your family, you may care about success. That’s not a brown kid. A brown kid is a person who does wrong.

According to him, many of his Indo-Canadian peers are living up to the negative expectations:

[A] lot of Indo-Canadian kids are delinquents now, for what reason, I do not know, but it seems like, in some, some part of their life they were lost and uh, they really, they rebel against people for almost no reason […] [T]hey want to gang bang, they want to go out, jump people, because you know what, their friends are going to throw them high fives. What’s a high five going to get you in life, right?

Davinder refuses to be reduced to a stereotype. In fact, he works to defy them, taking opportunities in the classroom to prove that he is “special.” For instance, while some people may call him a Surrey Jack because he has earrings, a goatee and likes to wear his pants “nice and low,” and teachers may expect him to “do bad” because of his wardrobe, Davinder earns their respect and makes them understand that “he wants to make a difference in his life and he really cares.” In light of his struggles, the absence of preconceptions appeals to him and he greets my suggestion that he might opt to call himself Canadian with enthusiasm:

Just Canadian? That’s great. Because Canada doesn’t even have an identity. It’s such a multicultural place. If people can just say ‘Hey, you’re Canadian,’ I’d be the happiest man in the world.

Kam, 18

Kam is bright, gregarious and buzzing with energy. He loves to talk; particularly about
his new job at a local supermarket and his aspiration to become a “real estate phenom.” In Grade 10 he started to develop a plan and “was sort of pushing towards it and last year [I] got more serious about it and this year I’ve been, like, starting to look around for like different types of places where I can work.” While he intends on attending college to study business, he says that the schooling is largely to placate his parents who want him to be a “chartered accountant kind of thing.” As Kam explains, “It’s an India thing. The parents always want you to, like, have a good, hard, like ‘clean job’ as they call it. Doctor, lawyer…I don’t want to be those things […] I don’t wanna sit in an office for the rest of my life and work there.” He envisions himself more like Donald Trump, working and going “all over the place” or like one of his older cousins, who “didn’t go to a single day of post secondary education and yet he owns the biggest housing company in Calgary.” He imagines that he will work his way up at a bank, “get promoted and start investing.” But for now, he is satisfied with his position at a grocery store.

In fact, he credits this job with changing his outlook and making him “feel more mature and disciplined.” He is also learning how to interact with different types of people. When he was younger, he remembers that he was shy, “scared of ordering stuff” at McDonald’s because he “didn’t want to talk to the people there.” But at his job:

[y]ou gotta talk to people, you gotta talk to them no matter what. Like we have something called ‘Smile and Greet within 10 feet’ […] if someone’s, like, looking puzzled, you ask them if they need help or anything. And just give them your opinion if you want to. So, I think since working there, I’ve become more, like, socially involved with people.

For Kam, being able to and wanting to socialize are important. He blames many of the fights that he has seen between Indo-Canadians with their reluctance to socialize with one another. Kam maintains that “[t]he people you met from when you were younger, they grow up to be isolated from everyone else” so that when they meet, they “can’t really get along” and ultimately
fight; and according to him, “nowadays you won’t see a one-on-one fight between someone, it will be like a group jumping one person, like beating the shit out of them.” Kam tries to avoid these sorts of people but sometimes “you see someone on the street and they’ll be like ‘Hey, I wanna fight you,’ like this is how people do it now.” To prevent confrontations such as these Kam does not “talk to people outside of the school;” he feels better associating with his “main group of friends” that he knows are “there” for him. This inability to safely interact with people “on the street,” is perhaps why Kam enjoys his work so much. By requiring him to engage with customers, Kam’s job awards him with opportunities and freedoms which are unavailable to him in the other spheres of his daily life. His willingness to “socialize” at the grocery store however, is not always reciprocated.

Out of a staff of 300, there are only four Indo-Canadians working at the store which often leaves Kam feeling “isolated.” He describes that:

I can feel the isolation from every one else there, even when, like the customer comes around, they won’t ask me for something. They’ll go ask someone else. If no one else is there, they’re going to ask me hopefully. […] And, it’s just the older employees, the older, like, white girls, kind of thing, like they’ll be ‘Oh, it’s a brown guy. I don’t want to talk to him.’ […] Like, if I ask someone for help, if it’s, like say a 19 year old girl, and if I ask ‘Hey, can I help you find something?’ they’ll look at you like ‘No’ and they’ll walk off. It’s stereotypical, I guess, like ‘Oh he’s a brown guy, he’s going to try picking me up’ or something like that.

Kam is familiar with the distance between white and brown people from his experiences at school where “it’s just stereotypical nowadays. You can’t really hang out with the other colour.”

In Grade 7, he recalls that his group of friends included “5 or 6 Indo-Canadian guys, a couple Japanese guys, and a few white guys” but they “split away” when they started high school. Now, Kam’s friends are primarily Indo-Canadian.

Together they like to go out, drink and have a “good time” and Kam especially likes to
dance to bhangra. But, because of his increasing focus on work and school, he feels himself “starting to pull away from that a bit more.” For instance, he bemoans the fact that “all everyone wants to do is drink” and refuses to drink “outside somewhere” typically at a local park. He is “really against” it and remarks that “if you’ve got nothing better to do than that [drinking in a park] then just sit at home,” and although he only tried smoking marijuana “a few times”, he has now stopped completely. He does however still enjoy going to a friend’s house to watch T.V., drink and “have some fun” but “that’s just one day a week. After that it’s focusing.” He summarizes that he doesn’t want to “party every day or work every day” but to “even it out a bit.” With this in mind, he has also cut out sports. Kam used to play soccer on the school’s team as well as outside of school but this year, while many of his friends are hitting the weight room after school, he’s heading to his job and doing his homework, taking the first steps in “building his future.” He feels that it is this dedication and ambition that sets him apart.

Out of his group of 10 close friends, he refers to himself as the “only smart one.” He continues that “some of them have the brains, but they won’t apply it.” In Kam’s opinion, they are “too lazy. They just wanna have fun I guess at this age. They think it’s the age to have fun. It wasn’t the age to plan your future.” He notes that while there are students who are “as smart as him” at the school, he doesn’t really talk to them because he doesn’t like their “attitude” - they like to “brag about it [their intelligence]” too much. Right now, Kam is able to make time for his friends but worries that after he graduates it will be harder if “all they’re going to be doing is partying.” He is especially worried about growing apart from his friends since many of them will be attending the same college in Surrey while he is taking the year off to hopefully work at a

99 Linda observes that in her Geography 12 class there is a group of Indo-Canadian boys that refer to themselves as “high achieving Indo-Canadians” yet Kam quite clearly does not want to be affiliated with such an identity.
Kam thinks it is wise to begin gaining experience in the business field as soon as possible. His father however questions his choice.

Kam delayed telling his parents of his decision for fear of his father’s reaction because his dad is “the kind of guy who’s really strict.” According to Kam there are two types of Indo-Canadian parents:

[t]here’s ones who want their kids to be mature, like grow up on their own, buy everything themselves, learn how to live the life they lived in India, cuz, like everything I do, my dad will relate it back to ‘Oh, I did this in India. I didn’t, whatever, drink till I was this age in India,’ that kind of thing. Even like little things, like shaving, he’ll be like, ‘I didn’t shave till I was 25.’ I’m like ‘you had a turban.’ […] And then there’s the kind of new Canadian parents that just give their kids everything. And those are the kids that go out and like, with the nice BMWs and Mercedes and like, they’ll go get drunk, whatever, that kind of thing.

His parents are of the former variety, “really Indianized, strict parents” which means that, as Kam’s comments suggest, he has had to struggle against many of his father’s conceptions of an Indian male. In terms of his post-secondary plans, Kam directly confronts his father’s preconceptions and vows to “prove him wrong.” Yet when it comes to a more personal matter, Kam elects to keep his opposition largely covert.

Kam has been dating an Indo-Canadian girl for several months but his parents do not know about her. If they found out, Kam suspects that they’d be upset. He has discussed dating with his parents and they consider it “wrong.” When he presses the issues, to determine the reasons for their disapproval, for instance, by asking his father, “‘Do you want me to be gay?,'” his dad effectively finishes the conversation by demanding “‘Don’t ask those kind of questions to me’” as he walks away. Kam does not understand his father’s perspective, rationalizing that “you’ve got to talk to girls in life.” His parents do want him to meet a girl and eventually get married but would prefer that it is done in a “secret kind of way […] not really arranged” but so
that they know the girl’s parents and can assure that she is from a “good family.” Even though he disagrees with some of his parents’ views, he considers his family close and says that obviously his parents are role models because of how they raised him. But since he started watching *The Apprentice*, Donald Trump has become his “number one.”

Kam admires his style, the “confident look on his face” and “how he talks.” Like Trump, Kam wants to be known and respected for his real estate acumen:

> [L]ike majorly the real estate guy. I wan to be known in the community. Like I want to have the business contacts, that like, have been there, like the veterans in the business field. I want to be like in contact with those kind of guys.

In referring to the “community,” Kam means the business community, “not the Indo community.” He eventually wants to own something that’s “known world-wide” “something really expensive like maybe a stadium or something.” He aspires to one day own a house in the British Properties in exclusive West Vancouver. He remembers visiting those houses in Grade 10 with his father on a “Take a Kid to Work Day.” His father had to drop something off at one of the houses and Kam overheard someone tell his father that “the amount of electricity that our house wastes in one day is like the combination of what normal houses waste in a month.” Kam was impressed because there are no houses like that in Surrey 100. More than the type of house, Kam would like to live in a suburban area where “you’re away from everything.” By “everything” he seems to be referring to crime, as he earlier comments that “nothing [no neighbourhood] really is the best part right now in Surrey, it’s all like crime everywhere.” In his neighbourhood, there are “always 3 or 4 cop cars” outside the elementary school every Friday.

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100 Home ownership seems particularly important to Kam given that until very recently he and his family were living in a basement apartment where there was “one bathroom, two bedrooms and four people.” He shared a bedroom with his father and attempted to study at the kitchen table while the family watched television.
Kam does not want to be known for “what the Indo-Canadian community is known [for] today, like with the stereotypical gang violence kind of people. All they know is violence, drugs, crime.” These types of people “don’t have anything planned for them in the future,” they “get trapped” and “tag along.” But Kam is future oriented. For now, with his friends, he is brown, but one day he hopes to be known as the “Indian” Donald Trump.

Ravinder, 17

Ravinder is pleasant and laid back. Our interview starts a little later than planned because he slept in. He hates “getting up in the morning” for school. He is wearing grey sweat pants, white runners and a bright yellow Liverpool football jersey. The jersey might be a souvenir from one of his recent trips to England where he spent the past two summers living with his uncle’s family preparing for and celebrating weddings. He has also gone to India with his family but like most of the brown boys, has “never had the chance” to leave Surrey “that much”. He and his friends have restricted drivers’ licenses and very few of them have their own cars but once that changes, he suspects they will head into Vancouver for “clubbing and stuff.” “Back in grade eight, grade nine, and grade ten,” Ravinder had “white” friends but he has since “lost touch” with them and now all of his friends are “brown” “because they’re always around you right?” His friends are “nice” and though some of them used to play basketball, now he “guesses” they do “nothing, sit at home.” When Ravinder gets together with them, they go out to movies, to eat or to the “occasional” party. “In the past,” Ravinder and his friends would go to parks to drink, “but not this year.” Now that he is in Grade 12, he maintains that he’s seeing things a bit differently.
Ravinder has struggled with his behavior during high school and he has been suspended twice. In Grade 8 he received a five day suspension for getting into a fight at school and again, just a few months ago at the beginning of his Grade 12 year, when he was caught with friends who were smoking weed. Ravinder is no longer friends with these boys, who after receiving several warnings were eventually “kicked out” of Getting By High School. One of the boys is now attending work and learn, “trying to finish” while Ravinder has “no idea” about “the other one.” His principals advised Ravinder “not to hang around with these friends” and he was allowed to stay on because as he explains, “I wanted to do good this year” so “I changed my ways.” Ravinder’s older brother, who is now 21 or 22, also attended Getting By High School and “used to always get in to trouble.” Ravinder’s brother and his friends “were fighters; they used to get mad.” Ravinder rationalizes though that “it was worse back then. It was worse for them than it is for us” because brown and white students did not really “get along.” Now it’s different; “there’s no, like, fights at school. Like everybody gets along.” Though Ravinder’s brother is now studying “somewhere in Burnaby” to become an electrician, it has been Ravinder’s older cousins who have counseled him to take school more seriously. According to Ravinder, his cousins “cut classes” and “didn’t do well in high school” and as a consequence, struggled in college. They eventually graduated from college but remind Ravinder to, “do good at school. Like, you know, don’t do what we did. Like it was harder for us to go to school because the stuff you did in high school is basically the same stuff you do in college but harder.” Ravinder’s parents have given him similar advice, albeit more bluntly. When he was last suspended, his parents were “mad” and while they did not discipline him, “they were just like, ‘you’re an idiot,’ you know, like, ‘either do good in school or you’re going to start working right now and like have a hard time like making money and stuff’” His father also instructed him to
“‘never do it again’\textsuperscript{101}” and cautioned him that he does not need to “go down the path of doing drugs and stuff.” I ask Ravinder if he knows anyone who has taken this path, and while he initially says “no not really,” he quickly corrects himself: “I probably did back…yeah I did. I knew some people but I just lost touch with them.”

Since his suspension, Ravinder has been working to improve his grades. On an average night he works out, goes home, eats, naps for “about an hour,” walks his dog, a pit bull named Sable, and then does his homework but “[m]ost of the time,” he explains, “I finish my homework in class so I don’t have that much to do at home.” Before heading to bed around midnight, he spends some time chatting with friends on MSN or playing videogames. He used to play hockey and basketball with his friends after school but “after [last] summer never got back around to it.”

He has dated “brown girls” from “different schools” in the neighbourhood but isn’t seeing anyone right now and has never discussed his girlfriends with his parents. He says his “mum used to ask” if he was dating but that he would “deny it.” He explains that “I never told them. Just didn’t feel like it. I just didn’t want them to know about that. It was like my little secret. I didn’t want to tell them.” He doesn’t talk about girls with his brother either. In fact, Ravinder has “no idea” if his brother is dating anyone because as he relates “I don’t talk to him that much about that kind of stuff. We talk about getting a new car and stuff like that.” They do, however, “hang out.” Ravinder drinks with his brother and “his buddies” when they come over to his family’s house and his parents are aware of this. As he describes: “I started drinking in front of my parents when I went to England at the wedding. So they know now [but] they do [still] care. I don’t drink much. Like my parents seeing me drink, I’d have like one or two beers in front of them.” It’s “okay” for Ravinder and his dad to have a couple of beers together.

\textsuperscript{101} Though Ravinder initially maintains that he was only a bystander to his friends smoking weed, this account suggests that he too was caught smoking.
But Ravinder’s father is “at work most of the time. Like seven to eight and sometimes nine because like he’s out in Burnaby dropping off doors” - even on weekends. His father owns a cabinetry business with his two brothers. Ravinder works with him sometimes on the weekends, and is pretty good at “making cabinets and stuff.” Even though his father “doesn’t mind” if Ravinder wanted to work with him, Ravinder tells me that “I don’t know why. I just wouldn’t want to work there like in the future.” In fact, he decided this year to become a cop, “like the RCMP, stuff like that,” and his parents are “happy” with that decision. After graduation, he plans on “relaxing first,” getting a job in September, working until January and then starting college. His parents are going to pay for his education so the extra money he earns will be just for him. His mother has started to “get mad” whenever he asks for “money and stuff [like] to go out to the movies, to go out to eat” and now “tells” him to “get a job.” Ravinder and his brother were supposed to work to help pay for the SUV his parents bought for them. Ravinder says that he and his brother promised “we’ll work, we’ll pay you, we’ll help you guys pay for the truck” but as he recalls while laughing, “that never happened.” Though Ravinder’s father has sometimes threatened to sell the truck because his sons “don’t listen” to him, Ravinder doesn’t think he ever will. In fact, there is nothing that Ravinder has ever wanted that he has not gotten from his parents. “My dad,” Ravinder reflects, “will give me what I want” but, as he illustrates, there is technique involved:

Well I don’t ask my parents, if I know like, say since Playstation 3 came out, it’s like 900 bucks right now. If I asked my parents for that, I know they’ll say no. So there’s no point in asking. So it’s the big things […] I’ll tell my brother first then convince my parents so I get it.

Ravinder looks up to his dad because he is “nice,” but then muses that he “looks up to everybody pretty much. People older than me.” For instance, his grandpa because of “all the hard work he’s gone through. He’s worked all his life in like, India, and then came here and he did the
same thing. He had about 10 blueberry farms before and he used to work on like each one.”

Though Ravinder visited the farms, he never worked on them. He also admires his older brother because “he’s a good person,” “smart” and “is good with everybody, gets along with my parents and family.” He elaborates that his brother is “just a nice guy. Like, once you meet him, you just know.” It sounds as if Ravinder’s personality may be a bit like that of his brother’s.

Ravinder thinks that his friends would describe him as “hilarious,” a “nice guy” and the guy “in the middle” who “gets along with everybody from like other schools.” According to Ravinder, not many students at Getting By High School get along with students from the other local schools. In fact, fights often erupt between “brown” students from different high schools over “basically nothing.” He gives the following example: “[o]n a park night, like we’ll go to a park and be drinking there and all of these kids will come there to beat up like …come to this spot, just to fight. And the cops will come and everybody…they all just started running. It happens quite a lot.” They are usually just fist fights but he hears that sometimes kids bring weapons.

Ravinder’s neighbourhood is “not good.” “By night time, like junkies are walking around” and just two weeks before our interview, Ravinder says that a house three doors down from his was “shot up” and that this sort of thing has happened near his house a few times. He does not know why these houses were shot at but suspects it’s “probably drug dealing gangster stuff.” This most recent event wasn’t written about in the newspaper. Ravinder thinks “they stopped printing stuff on that in the newspaper now because there’s still a lot of shootings that happen around here.” When he “was a kid,” Ravinder admits thinking that drug dealing “might be a cool thing,” explaining that “when you’re young and you watch movies, like the mafia movies, and like ‘oh he has drugs. He sells drugs.’ That’s so cool. I want to do that. Get rich quick and then just relax for the rest of your life.” Even though he now realizes that drug dealing
is “stupid,” “illegal,” “hard work” and “a waste of time,” he “probably” knows people that will end up taking the “get rich quick” path because “they’re just all about money right? It’s about getting money quick.” He thinks that for those types of people “it all depends on like the neighbourhood they grew up in and stuff. The school you go to. It all makes a difference.”

Ravinder “probably” knows some Jacks and thinks that some people may think he’s a Jack just because he’s from Surrey. In fact, his cousins, who live in another one of Vancouver’s outlying suburbs, sometimes tease that he’s “just a Surrey Jack” but it does not bother him. While he has “no idea where the term came from,” he dismisses it as “just a word to like try to put you down.” But as he says, “I’m brown.” For him, being brown also means being Sikh. He doesn’t know why but he doesn’t just say he’s Sikh, though he reflects that most of the “brown” kids at Getting By High School are also Sikh. His parents, however, are Indo-Canadian. He guesses then that he’s Indo-Canadian too which ultimately leads him to declare that “[the label] really doesn’t matter to me.”

Jon, 17

Jon is tall and lanky with a boyish face. He thinks Getting By High School is “a good school” “because it’s not like School A [another local school]” which “has like a lot more like Surrey Jacks and stuff.” He elaborates that:

School A has like a lot of guys that try, try to be like, you know, they just try to be like, like they try proving themselves to others by saying something like mean to someone else. Like if we’re sitting here and someone’s sitting here, he’ll say something to him just, just to like to feel bigger than the other person I guess.

Jacks, he says, have a “different way of dressing in like baggy pants and like spiky hair with like zero [shaved] here [he points to the side of his head] or something like that and like, hats I guess. Well, no hats but like, it’s just the way they walk and dress. The way they talk.” He has friends
who are Jacks but insists “I’m not like that” and that there are “not really” any Jacks at Getting By High School. School A has a “bad name” because of the Jacks whereas Getting By High School is “cleaner.”

Jon has a twin brother who is also a student at Getting By High School but Jon says “he’s smarter” than him and gets “all 90s.” His older sister is also “way smarter” than him; she is 18 and studying sciences at UBC. Jon’s twin is “really good at math” and had a 99% before he wrote the provincial exam. Jon and his twin share friends but also have their own groups so in Jon’s opinion “it’s almost as if we’re in different schools within the same school.” While Jon’s brother has been working “consistently” hard throughout high school, Jon has been “lazy,” and in terms of school work, “didn’t want to do anything really.” He and his brother played on a league soccer team until Grade 6 but otherwise, have not participated in formal athletics. Jon did try out for the school’s basketball team in Grade 8 and though he “made it to like the last thing,” he “didn’t show up for the last try out.” He can’t remember exactly why not. He does however, work out at the gym 5 times a week and has a part time job. For the past 7 months, he’s been working 5 days a week at a grocery store but recently cut back to only 3 shifts because it was getting “too repetitive stocking pop, chips and cookies.” Before that he worked for 2 months “making calls and trying to sell timeshares.” He ended up selling units to his parents and his aunts and uncles. In fact, next January they will be celebrating the New Year at his family’s timeshare in Miami.

But that trip is “like later,” this spring his family will probably “do another couple of day trip to like Kelowna and Penticton.” His family goes on a “lot of trips.” They go skiing once or twice a year. Last Christmas, they went up to Whistler. They have also gone to Mexico and travelled to India, Los Angeles, and Toronto. Jon tried surfing in Tofino [on Vancouver Island]
and while he’d like to try it again, this is not something he talks about with his friends, as he explains: “if I was in a group of my like Indo-Canadian friends and I was like ‘yeah I went surfing right? They would kind of laugh because it’s just not something brown people do.” He elaborates that though there are “brown” people who surf, after all “there are brown people in Tofino right? But out of my group of friends at Getting By High School they don’t because like their parents don’t really, aren’t the ones to like take them out and stuff.” With his family, Jon does “some stuff that like white people do, like ski and snowboard and surf” but he distinguishes that when he’s with his brown friends, “the stuff we do and stuff we talk about and where we go” is different than what the “white” kids do. Though Jon perceives no real differences between “white” and “brown” students at school, he surmises that “it’s different what we do on a weekend and what they do on a weekend.” He says that “a lot of them [white kids] like skateboarding” so that’s “probably what they do on the weekend” and “the white girls all play volleyball still.” The “white” kids are also allowed to have parties at their houses but “but an Indo-Canadian house is kind of like your parents are there and you can’t really invite that many people over.” He continues that “some of [the white kids] even drink with their parents. A couple of white guys say they’ll drink with their dads and stuff. And that’s like different.”

When I ask Jon if he drinks with his father, he laughs and says “no.” He “barely” drinks because he doesn’t really like it, but some of his friends do. One of his friends hosts parties when his parents are in India and Jon and his friends will “eat, play video games, watch t.v., and some people will drink.” But “none” of his friends do drugs even though there are kids at parties who do. In general, his friends are “laid back” and spend time at each other’s houses or going to movies or restaurants in Surrey. Jon is the only one with a car so he and his friends don’t go to Vancouver; they don’t want to take the bus and then the Skytrain. Jon and his twin share a 2007
Honda but he would like to upgrade to a “Mercedes soon.” He doesn’t “need it right now” but “probably later on.” His parents will buy the car and he’ll pay for the insurance. Jon adds, that his sister already has her own car so “[w]e’re getting another car anyways so that we have two between me and my brother.”

Jon admires his father because he has a “really good reputation” and is a “good person: honest, responsible and hard working.” When his father first immigrated to Canada he was working in a mill but after a few months, his dad “wanted to be his own boss.” Now he has two businesses. He owns the majority of shares in a taxicab company, “he started by buying one taxi and then he progressed to like seven and eight” and “he builds houses.” His mother “worked back in the day” but started staying home when Jon was in grade 5. His father also works from home, but Jon “thinks he keeps one [cab]” for a daytime shift on a Saturday. When I ask Jon if he’d ever want to take over his father’s businesses, he considers: “Yeah. Not his cabs I don’t. That’s a big company and a lot of money but the building homes is a lot more money.” To illustrate he tells me, “right now we’re building three houses right here [in Surrey]. Then another nine are being built somewhere else […] He [his father] makes like $80,000 per house.” Jon speculates, “I’m probably going to do that because there’s so much money in that.” In the shorter term, he is planning on getting a degree in accounting and then securing a job with his dad’s accountant.

Ultimately, say in 10 years time or so, Jon sees himself working “at like a bank and probably building houses on the side” and most likely living in Surrey. He doesn’t want to “move out of here;” he likes it “better in Surrey.” For instance, he wouldn’t want to live in downtown Vancouver because it’s “kind of crowded there” and he would not be able to purchase “as big of a property to build on.” He’ll also be married “probably” to an Indo-Canadian. He
offers that “my parents want that.” Though he isn’t dating anyone now, he has dated “nice Indo-Canadian girls” in the past. He did not share this information with his parents but he doesn’t think they would mind if they found out. He explains that “if your daughter’s going out with someone, it’s like, um, they want to know who it is, this and that, right? Where if it’s just a guy, it’s like whatever.” His sister has been “going out with this guy for four years” but his parents really like him. Jon says “he’s nice. His whole family’s nice” and “he’s rich.” The boyfriend worked at a video store for a couple of months but now organizes birthday parties for children at a local community centre but Jon boasts that “[the boyfriend’s] dad was in the paper with the Canucks’ owner and the owner of nightclubs and stuff in the business section. He’s one of the most successful people who landed here.”

When I ask Jon how his friends would describe him, he immediately responds “I’m brown” and then “mmmm I guess I’m outgoing. Yeah. Um…and I’m responsible.” He struggles, however, with the meaning of being “brown.” First he offers that “it’s skin colour,” then “it’s kind of like a category I guess” but then he decides “I don’t really know how to explain it.” When I ask if he’d prefer to be called “brown” over “Indo-Canadian”, he answers “I don’t mind. It’s all the same thing […] because they all mean the same thing.” But ultimately, he concludes that “it’s just different like, Indo-Canadian is more like polite I guess.” In terms of the violence that has affected the Indo-Canadian community, Jon feels that the media “has kind of exaggerated things. Yeah. Stuff does happen with Indo-Canadian people and people have been stabbed and this and that but, you know, it’s kind of like they exaggerate. Like, the media kind of like points out small things and makes a huge deal out of them.” When I ask him if this means he’s not worried about gang violence, he answers “I don’t. There’s not much I can do myself.”
That said, he knows people who get into “fights and stuff” but qualifies, “they wouldn’t go so far as to shoot someone but yeah, fights and stuff.”

**Concluding Remarks**

In addition to confronting the fundamental question faced by all youth, “Who Am I?” the children of immigrants must also ask “Who am I ethnically?” and “Who am I racially?” (Desai, Subramanian, 2003). Based on the theories advanced by critical men’s studies, the task of identity formation for young ethnic males must also be seen to include decisions concerning the kind of man that they want to be. In making this decision, young men work with the discursive material that has been made available to them. For the brown boys, this means adopting, adapting, or rejecting all or some of the characteristics and ways of being incorporated in the forms of masculinity to which they have been exposed: that of their white school peers, their fathers and close male relatives and the Surrey Jack. Although they are part of a majority at Getting By High School, in Vancouver society at large Punjabi males are still regarded as minorities. Beyond Surrey, Punjabi masculinities are subordinated by more powerful white versions. In articulating a brown male identity, however, young Punjabi males reject and malign the masculinity of their white peers in order to displace its hegemonic position at Getting By High School and Surrey more generally. By contrast, rather than eschewing the ideals of other competing Punjabi masculinities, the brown boys temper them, downgrading their machismo to create a less aggressive alternative. In so doing, the brown boys hope to travel beyond the Jacks in their cul-de-sac. The brown boys’ success, however, rests on the educational and occupational implications of being brown and the extent to which this positioning ideologically prepares young men for academic achievement. I turn to this issue now in Chapter 6 as I discuss the role
of Indo-Canadian families and the community in confronting the Jack subculture and engendering academic success.
Chapter 6

Confronting a Subculture: The Role of Family and Community

Segmented assimilation results from the different ways in which second generation youth contend with the various external challenges to their educational attainment and the family and community resources that they bring to these confrontations. The “typical” assimilation outcomes for the children of immigrants - downward assimilation, mostly upward assimilation and upward assimilation - thus arise from the complex interactions between external challenges, *family and community resources*, and patterns of acculturation (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.4). In Chapter 5, I demonstrated that the while the “Jack” presents a powerful ideological force at Getting By High School, the brown boys’ families, particularly their male relatives, also exert significant influence on identity construction, helping to lay the groundwork at home for the establishment of “brownness.” In this chapter, I continue my discussion of the influences of family and community on the construction of “brownness” by addressing the extent to which the resources of Punjabi families and the broader Indo-Canadian community are deployed to offset the Jack’s negative influence. In so doing, I argue that while Indian parents, siblings and extended families have helped to mitigate the Jack’s subcultural threat, they are unable to completely neutralize it by offering an alternative, academically and professionally oriented, identity for Punjabi young men.

The Role of Family in Confronting the “Jack”

The brown boys live in intact and caring households where very little is expected of them in terms of household duties or responsibilities. They are materially well provided for and none of the young men express any sense of feeling deprived. In fact, far from hardship, their parents
furnish them with the latest technology – ipods, video game machines and computers, the latest brand name clothes, and in a few cases, their own cars. When it comes to school, however, their parents have high expectations of their sons and have instructed them to want more, to be more, and to surpass their parents in terms of their education and occupational status. Yet having, for the most part, attended high school in India and lacking post secondary education, the brown boys’ parents are unable to arm their sons with the necessary road maps for educational and professional success in Canada. Unfamiliar with the cultural and educational terrain encountered by their sons, they have relied on their children to be their guides. For the most part, however, their sons have failed to offset their parents’ deficit by not educating them about such issues as the workings of the Canadian public school system and the requirements for college or university admission, and Indo-Canadian parents are not finding out for themselves, for instance, by becoming more involved in their sons’ school lives. This means that most parents are ill informed about the personal details of their sons’ everyday lives, and have, in some cases, very little idea about their sons’ interests, passions or future plans. Their parents’ unfamiliarity with the Canadian context in addition to their upbringing in traditional immigrant households has meant that although the brown boys aspire to be “successful,” they are not entirely sure of how to be “successful.”

Parental Expectations and Involvement

Amit considers himself a rarity: a young Indo-Canadian man working as a community service provider in the not-for-profit sector. In fact, he thinks he read somewhere that around 80% of community outreach workers in Surrey are women. He could be making more money working for the government and so credits his parents for supporting his career choice. Most Indo-Canadian parents, he insists, however, are not like his. To illustrate his point, Amit offers:
For example, there was a kid a while back that wanted to be an automobile mechanic. He loved cars. But you know, that’s just not something that’s…You don’t ever hear from an Indo-Canadian, ‘gee, I want to be a mechanic.’ It’s not something that’s accepted. It’s a job for a lower echelon type of thing (personal interview, June 2006).

Kam explains it as “an India thing. The parents always want you to, like have a good, hard, ‘clean job’ as they call it,” which typically means employment in a profession such as law or medicine. High educational and career expectations are not specific to Punjabi parents in Surrey but rather are shared with Punjabi Sikhs, and with other South Asian communities more generally, living in Toronto, various American cities and parts of Britain (Baptiste, 2005; Gibson, 1998; Gibson and Bhachu, 1988; Ghuman, 1994, 1999, 2003; Ogbu, 1995; Maira 2002; Desai and Subramanian, 2003; Singh and Singh Tatla, 2006; Shankar 2003). For the young men at Getting By High School, however, their parents’ expectations are often incongruent with their own aspirations (see also Maira, 2002). While Kam’s parents want him to become a doctor or a lawyer, he tells me “I don’t wanna be those things. I can’t do that kind of stuff.” Sam says that his parents would also like him to become a “doctor or something,” maintaining that “a lot of parents are like that. They always want you to become a lawyer or a doctor or something like that” but he just can’t see himself as a doctor, besides which, he doesn’t have the grades. Kris is planning on pursuing accounting but remarks that his parents “always like want me to be something else. Because like other brown parents, they were like ‘why don’t you be a lawyer or a doctor’ so they can talk to other brown parents about it and brag about it.” His parents only became “cool” with his decision after his older brother dropped out of pharmacy to study accounting. Harjeet agrees that there are “expectations for kids to be like a doctor or a lawyer, something like that” but that his parents “didn’t really push it on” him, perhaps because he decided as a young boy he wanted to become a lawyer; he surmises that his parents “were just happy that maybe they lucked out or something that their son already wanted to do it.” Ryan
maintains that even though his parents are “like all Indian parents want[ing] straight A’s and their kids to be doctors and stuff” and pushed him to get better grades, he just “never paid attention to them” and is instead hoping to study business at a local college. He thinks that his parents are now “okay with it” and are “happy that we’re [he and his brother] graduating because they’ve never done it.”

Some parents are less specific about the careers that they would like their sons to pursue. Sajjan maintains that his parents have no real expectations and that it is “his choice” while Sunny’s parents just want to see him go to college. Although Jon’s mother used to want him to become a teacher, since Jon made it clear that “going to school the rest of my life and then teaching at a school” is not appealing, his parents “want me to do something that you get a degree in and you’re always making like progress and stuff.” Rob’s and Mani’s fathers just want their sons to “be better” than them. Mani’s father does not want his son working in construction or “ending up doing labour work.” Similarly, even though Rob’s mother wants him to “work in a bank” or “behind a desk,” his dad, a truck driver, wants him to “get a good education because he didn’t and suffers for it.” Rob is still considering trades. Amit, a community outreach worker, insists parental expectations are founded on good intentions but that:

[a] lot of the parents of kids today, have, maybe sort of like, you know mill jobs or you know technical trade jobs. You know? Whereas they want their kids to be able to, you know, make like, the expression out here is to have the life that we didn’t have. So you know, they push their kids. They really do want better for their kids (personal interview, June 2006).

Similarly, Dhruvarajan (2003) observes that there is a “strong conviction” among Indo-Canadian parents in Winnipeg that “the only way they can protect their children is to make sure that they have good professions. The understanding is that professional qualifications will make them less vulnerable to prejudices and discriminations” (177).
Getting By High’s career facilitator, Sunil, believes that the “biggest problem” facing Indian and Chinese parents is their belief that:

[un]iversity or college is the only thing that’s going to save them [their children] from whatever dead end job there is [...] and the students therefore take their sciences and math even though they’re not capable of doing it under the hope or guise that they’re going to become doctors or dentists (personal interview, February 2007).

Other than encouraging them to acquire university credentials and pursue professional careers, Sunil maintains that young Indo-Canadians “don’t have any other guidance from their parents” (personal interview, February 2007). Mary, one of the school’s guidance counselors, adds that the situation for struggling Indo-Canadian students is particularly severe because “you’re supposed to honour the family, maintain the honour and maintaining face is so critically important in the culture that it is inappropriate to ask for help” (personal interview, May 2007).

She elaborates that “one of the biggest [problems] for the kids not doing well is not being able to express themselves” such that “it all just gets bottled up, pent up inside and has an effect on everything.” While boys contribute to 90% of the school’s disciplinary problems, unlike female students, they very rarely visit the guidance counselors of their own accord. When Julie, another counselor, does meet with boys, it’s usually to discuss their classes and grades at the behest of a teacher or the principal. She explains that unlike girls, boys tend to “hide” their emotions or express them as “anger instead of sadness.” Even in instances where Indo-Canadian boys are considering post-secondary education, they are often emotionally and psychologically “overwhelmed.” Matt, who has been visiting high schools as a motivational speaker, thinks that the situation is different for “white” students because their parents have “already been here. They know [their kids] can be a doctor, a lawyer, in public relations. You can do this, you can do that. Well with an East Indian kid, you know, he’s going home telling his parents ‘I’m going into marketing. Well what is that?” He continues that in “white” households, a boy can go home
and talk to his parents and “mum and dad say, ‘well I went to UBC, your brothers and sisters went there. These are the programmes you can take to get there,’” whereas an Indo-Canadian boy goes home and is left asking “‘who do I have to help me? How am I going to get there,’” and they are left feeling “really frightened” (personal interview, May 2006). Having no first-hand experience with the Canadian educational system, many Indo-Canadian parents are unaware of the range of educational and job opportunities available to their children and while they want their sons to focus on school “are unsure of how to get them to do that” (Sanjay, personal interview, May 2007).

Faculty and the counseling staff have attempted to compensate for parents’ lack of personal knowledge and experience by hosting various information sessions, many of which are conducted in Punjabi, on an “array of issues” including drug abuse, the internet and how to get involved at Getting By High School. Sunil recalls that they used to hold a graduation information night, a two hour event during which “we’d talk to parents. We’d teach the parents how their kids should study, what they should be doing to get prepared. And we used to have two or three hundred parents come in. And every year it got less and less to where it was 50 parents and then we just decided it wasn’t worth our time […]” (personal interview, February 2007). In general, Indo-Canadian parents are underrepresented at these sorts of events, with only 60 appearing at the school’s last “meet the teacher night” and with only one Indo-Canadian parent involved in helping to organize graduation activities (Sunil, personal interview, February 2007). Likewise, Principal Coor notes that only one member of the school’s 25-person parent advisory committee is South Asian. Both vice principals are disappointed with the lack of participation from Indo-Canadian parents, particularly the fathers, and would like to see many more of them involved. Vice Principal Sanjay is “frustrated” by the fact that “[w]e try to reach
out and try to get people involved but it’s just not working.” While administrators initially assumed that some of the parents were not participating in school life because of the language barrier since they attacked this problem by providing materials and conducting sessions in Punjabi, they believe that the “language issue is becoming less and less of a factor” (Sanjay, personal interview, May 2007) and that “a cultural thing” is at work (Mak, personal interview, May 2007).

Based on his research with South Asian students in Silicon Valley, California, Shankar (2008), maintains that despite their concerns for their children’s education, most middle class South Asian parents visit the school “only when summoned, which usually happens when their child is in academic or disciplinary trouble” and that:

[Although they [parents] discuss many things at their community gatherings, they rarely talk about the inner workings of schools. Little information circulates on this topic in middle class communities, and parents learn about school policies and procedures far more haphazardly. These parents rarely join school organizations such as PTA or question the school’s decision regarding their children’s placement. Faculty sometimes perceive this as disinterest (152).

Getting By High School’s administrators agree that in many instances, Indo-Canadian parents are content with deferring responsibility for their children’s education to the school. Sanjay maintains that many Indo-Canadian parents trust teachers as “the professionals” and do not “interfere” in their children’s schooling because, as Mak adds, that is how it is “traditionally” done in India and “that’s the system they were brought up in” (personal interviews, May 2007).

Ghuman (2003), who has studied South Asian students and parents in various western settings, agrees that parents typically do not “meddle” with their children’s schooling because:

[O]n the Indian subcontinent the custom and practice is that teachers know ‘best’ about education and should be allowed to get on with their job without interference from the parents. Parents go to school by invitation from the school authorities when their
children are making insufficient progress in their studies or behaving badly. Such an attitude is naturally carried over when they emigrate to other countries (82-83).

In a study of Punjabi Sikh high school students in California, Gibson (1988) similarly observes that:

\[
\text{only rarely did parents directly involve themselves in school affairs. They were reluctant to visit the schools or to attend school meetings, nor did they see any reason why they should do so. Parents in India, they explained, were only asked to go to school when a child had refused to obey those in authority. Their responsibility as parents was to see that this did not occur (128).}
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Informed by their own experiences, some parents are also operating under misconceptions about the school’s “powers” and expect the school to “take care of everything” from “making the decisions for my child about what courses they should take” to disciplining them in whatever way teachers “feel is necessary” (Mak, personal interview, May 2007). Bobbi, an Indo-Canadian math teacher, deals with parents who “come in with the mentality of what they witnessed in their schooling in India […] some of the parents say ‘you’re not strict enough’ and ‘if you want you can even slap them a couple of times,’ because that’s what they went through when they went to school” (personal interview, June 2007). Sunil recalls one boy who came to him “saying ‘my parents want me to go to university. What should I do?’” His parents did not “trust” him with the money required for the application so Sunil paid the fee and helped the student apply, but he never met the parents: “the parents will just say ‘oh just tell Mr. Singh to do it all for you. So I do it […] even if I met them on the street, they wouldn’t know who I was” (personal interview, February 2007). Parents who have adopted this mindset are “basically saying ‘here the kids are, educate them, and we’ll look after them at home’” (Mak, personal interview, May 2007). This strategy, which Gibson and Bhachu (1988) refer to as a non-interventionist approach to schooling is commonly adopted by British and American Sikh parents who, like those who settled in Surrey, are “of rural background, with little formal education and prior exposure to
Sanjay explains that “[f]or a lot of Indo-Canadian families there’s a focus on working and making money. So you know, if I, as the father work from 7 am in the morning until 8 o’clock at night, I’m doing my job as the father because I’m providing for my family” (personal interview, June 2007). Bobbi and Sunil concur that Indo-Canadian parents see their principal role as material providers and do not consider their time and presence as contributions to their children’s development. Amit reiterates that many parents “are busy in their own lives” and “their attitude is you know, ‘we give you a roof over your head, we give you food, you do whatever you want. What more do you want from us?’ ” (personal interview, June 2006). Dedicating most of their time to work, these parents are left with very little time to attend school functions, “so definitely working is getting in the way” (Bobbi, personal interview, June 2007). Bobbi often hears from parents “‘yeah, yeah, I’ll come out and the next time, I’m working. I’m working night shift, day shift, whatever’” (personal interview, June 2007). Teachers, counselors and administrators agree that lack of time is a major impediment to greater involvement from Indo-Canadian parents; they are quite often just “too busy working.” In many dual income households, this means that parents are left with very little time to “sit down and actually find out what’s going on in their kids’ lives” (Amit, personal interview, January 2006), resulting in a degree of “detachment” between young people and their parents (Mary, personal interview, May 2007).

### Communication, Relationships and Dynamics within Families

Nayar (2004) reports that the “problem with child rearing in the Sikh community is most prominently voiced as a ‘lack’ of communication” (94), and as the “main source of tension”
between second generation children and their parents (105). The youth in her sample bemoaned the fact that their parents do not relate to them as individuals and do not discuss their lives beyond the concrete issues of daily life. In her work with a community-based organization, Priya commonly hears from Indo-Canadian youth about such struggles. Like Nayar (2004), she suggests that many young people from the community feel as if they “can’t talk to their parents” or do not bother sharing information, assuming that their parents will just not understand. This problem is so pervasive that Priya’s organization offers parenting classes to Indo-Canadian parents where they learn, amongst other skills, how to communicate with their children. During these sessions, parents discuss different styles of communication, the difference between discipline and punishment, being assertive rather than aggressive, how to compromise and how to relate to their children through personal experience. Similarly, the young people Priya works with learn how to better express themselves to their parents while also being given opportunities to “speak their minds” and to “vent.” Based on his experiences speaking to groups of Indo-Canadian high school students, Matt observes that:

these [Indo-Canadian] kids do not have the communication lines open with their parents […] because their father has practiced not speaking to his father. That’s all he knows how to do. So now he’s practicing on his son. Right? It’s up to this generation – us – to change it. To start that dialogue with our kids, with our brothers and sisters now. An open dialogue of non-judgment, but look, I understand what you did and this is how we can make it better (personal interview, May 2006).

Amit views the lack of intra-family communication as indicative of “traditional” Indian parenting whereby “the parents say what needs to be done and the kids do it,” but offers that Indo-Canadian parents “should be more accessible” and that young people “should” be able to talk to both of their parents and go to them for help. Nayar (2004) agrees that the lack of communication within Punjabi families can be attributed to a “traditional authoritarian” approach to child rearing which is “punitive and restrictive” and involves “limited verbal exchange” (88)
but that it is also rooted in discordant modes of thinking. While their children have been trained to think conceptually and analytically, first generation parents tend to think less abstractly and more literally which presents significant barriers to effective and meaningful communication. Whatever its causes, Nayar (2004) argues that the communication difficulties within families mean that many Punjabi children are not being given the emotional attention that they require for healthy personal development; they are being raised to conform to their parents’ expectations rather than being encouraged to develop a self-orientation. Nayar’s contention is substantiated by Baptiste’s (2005) observation that “[i]n therapy, East Indian children, frequently complain that their educational and financial success in the US appear to be their parents’ primary concerns to the exclusion of their personal and/or emotional growth, development and/or happiness” (349-350). As it stands, many Indo-Canadian young people are not being given the opportunities to “talk about dreams and goals and what they want to do” with their parents (Mak, personal interview, May 2007).

Most of the brown boys profess to “get along well” with their parents and speak of their families with obvious affection and love, yet they seem reluctant to discuss the details of their family lives, often responding to my inquiries with one word answers. Notwithstanding this, several of them indicate that they do not spend much time with their parents, particularly their fathers. While Rob offers that he has a “pretty good relationship” with his parents, he does not see his father, a truck driver, as much as his mother, because his dad spends a lot of time on the road, driving between Canada and the U.S. Raj also feels “closer to his mom” and says that while his dad has come to watch a few of his basketball games, he is often working long hours, besides which, he does not “understand” or like sports. Tim “sometimes watches t.v. with his mum” but his “dad usually gets home from work and then sleeps.” He does, however, attend
temple with them on Sunday and considers them all “pretty close.” “It doesn’t really matter” to Kris that he does not see a lot of his father; his family has never really spent that much time together, even when he was younger. Even still, Kris feels “closer” to his mother than his dad because his father “tends to rat [him] out a lot” to his mother rather than talking to him directly. Mani would like to spend more time with his parents but his dad “always has work,” and “is always on the go.” Davinder also wishes that he saw more of his parents but they are rarely home, working long hours together at their restaurant. When Ravinder’s father gets home, he asks how his day was, if his homework is done and if he ate, before lying down on the couch for the evening and since his father works weekends, they do not go out much as a family. Jon goes away for weekends with his parents to local getaways like Tofino and Whistler but says that he is an anomaly amongst his brown friends, “because like their parents don’t really, aren’t the ones to like take them out and stuff.” Jon’s father is also unusual because he works from home. Harjeet considers that he is “actually” close to both parents; they eat dinner together every night. Yet despite this closeness, Harjeet does not tell his parents that he drinks. Like many of the brown boys, Harjeet withholds certain information from his parents.

Sam, for instance, does not tell his parents that he has a girlfriend because his mother would not “approve” or that he drinks because if they knew, they would “look at [him] different.” Rob “tells his parents everything,” except of course if he’s “high or drinking,” he qualifies while laughing. Tim does not mention his friends who drink because his parents would be overprotective and make him “stay away from them.” He does, however, share with them the “positive things that are going on” in his life with basketball, student council and school work. He says that his parents “want to know” even though “they don’t understand any of it.” By way of example, Tim explains that “if I tell them I need help with this, they’d just be like ‘oh you
need a tutor, you need a tutor, you need a tutor.’ And I’ll be like ‘no, I just don’t understand this one part. I’ll just ask a friend.’ Mani says that he has not told his parents about the girl he has been dating for the past three years because ‘I don’t really know what they would think. They…I’m just kinda scared to tell them.’ He has also not told them about what he plans on doing after graduation or that he would really like to open a car customizing business. Mani is not unique in this respect. Although only a few months from graduation, Raj has not told his parents that he has not applied to college or that he is planning on taking the following year off from school to work. Sunny admits that even though his parents are curious, he has not revealed his plans either and that if they ask him how school is, he volunteers little more than ‘it’s good.’

In keeping some information from their parents, the brown boys are much like their Sikhs peers in Britain (Hall, 2002), their South Asian counterparts in New York (Maira, 2002) and Toronto (Desai and Subramanian, 2003), and most other Canadian born teenagers for that matter. For Punjabi youth, however, keeping secrets and concealing aspects of their more “western” lives from their families is an integral strategy for maintaining “good ties” with their parents, giving them the impression that they are adhering to cultural norms and protecting the family’s honour outside of the home, even as they move between various socio-cultural contexts (Hall, 2002; Handa, 2002; Nayar, 2004). While concealing aspects of their lives from their parents may be a necessary coping mechanism for Punjabi youth, allowing them to negotiate the demands and expectations of their home culture with those of their peers, and in most instances, is relatively harmless,102 problems arise when parents either do not realize or do not accept that their children may not be telling them the whole story.

102 That said, some researchers find that the psychological toll of leading a ‘double life’ for some South Asian young women can be particularly severe, often resulting in depression and in some instances even suicide (Wadhawani, 1999; Handa, 2002).
As vice principal, Sanjay deals with the school’s disciplinary problems, mostly boys who are missing school, or who are attending classes under the influence or in possession of drugs. In managing these situations, Sanjay usually meets with the boy’s parents. Reflecting on these experiences, he remarks that:

[i]t’s surprising to me the number of parents who seem to be in a state of denial about what their kids do. I’ve had cases where we have a student in the office who’s been smoking pot. They’ve admitted it, they’ve had the pot on them. We think ‘case closed’, but the parent comes in and ‘Oh my son wouldn’t do that. He’s holding it for somebody’ or whatever excuse the parent buys (personal interview, June 2007).

On another occasion, Sanjay brought a boy’s parents into his office to explain why their son was being suspended:

[y]ou could see the parent would agree with you, and then the son would say something, you know, deny their role. And then the parent would turn on you. And you could actually see it happen in the meeting. And you knew exactly when the parent was going to turn on you, right? You saw the parent would believe the child [right] in front of you (personal interview, June 2007).

Mak, also a vice principal, has had similar experiences. He insists that the Indo-Canadian “culture” faces a big problem with “denial,” and that parents are reluctant to believe “that their child could do something wrong or could be suspended for, you know, smoking marijuana or whatever” (personal interview, June 2007). Sunil reiterates that Indo-Canadian parents often appear “shocked” when they are told that their child is behaving poorly at school. This point came home for Sunil, who regularly works as the school’s career facilitator, when he filled in as vice principal for a week. He recalls that while parents insist “‘we didn’t bring you up this way,’” he recalls:

[s]itting in on these meeting [with parents], it’s in my mind, it’s well, I know they both work because we’re having meetings in the morning or at night. It’s never during the day. So my reaction inside is well, you’re not bringing the kids up because you’re not home. So it’s the kids are learning things from other places but they’re always shocked
They can’t believe and they’ve obviously had no clue that this sort of behaviour is going on (personal interview, February 2007).

Parental denial is also a barrier when it comes to helping students with academic difficulties. For instance, Mary comments that it is often a struggle to get assistance for some of the Indo-Canadian students because their parents are unwilling to accept that their children have learning disabilities. Mary elaborates that “even if we have the psycho-ed report that has said that, you know, this is the learning disability,” she has heard from parents that “I’m not going to accept my kid going into LST [learner support teams]” or that “my kid needs to be in the basic program” or “No, they’re going to graduate, graduate and be a doctor, or a lawyer or an engineer’ kind of thing.” Mary concludes that as a result, “there’s a lot of pressure on some of these kids to perform academically way beyond what they can” or “being pushed, pushed, pushed to perform and not being in the appropriate programme where they can feel success.”

Bobbi observes that many of her students are taking her math 11 course for the second or even third time and while she concedes that “some kids just don’t get math,” her greater concern is the fact that:

learning disabilities aren’t as recognized in the Indian community. And so you find that the parents generally want to cover that up, or don’t really want to acknowledge it, even if you have teachers phoning home. They just think that it’s not even an issue. They [their children] have to get through this course. ‘What can I do to get this kid through this course?’ (personal interview, June 2007).

To demonstrate the severity of the problem, Bobbi recounts that:

I had one student, for instance, in my grade 10 class last semester who was probably about 17 or 18 years old. His parents refused to believe that he had a learning disability and he was failing math and he was not going to pass. And so they were getting their older daughter to do the homework for him. So his homework would be perfect, and his test would be horribly done, and so it was quite a struggle (personal interview, June 2007).
The educators at Getting By High School who have dealt with parents in denial about their son’s abilities and/or behaviour, attribute this response to the “whole shame factor in the South Asian community” (Sanjay, personal interview, June 2007). The parents want to deny the existence of anything that “would harm their family’s reputation” (Sanjay, personal interview, June 2007). Mak agrees that it is part of the “cultural thing that comes if people find out. ‘Our family is going to be shamed’ and stuff like that. That’s a tough thing that we deal with all the time with those [Indo-Canadian] kids” (personal interview, June 2007). Sunil is critical of the fact that for many Indo-Canadian parents, “the way you look on the outside is more important than the way you are on the inside” and that they are “more interested in the outward look than what’s going on, what’s really happening” with their children (personal interview, February 2007). Like their children’s decision to conceal information from them, the parent’s failure to confront their children’s problems stems from wanting to protect the family’s honour. Nayar (2004) maintains that “keeping problems hidden” is a “traditional practice” adopted by Sikh households “in order to preserve family honour” (73). While some parents appear in denial about their sons’ lives, others rely on ‘blind faith,’ choosing to believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that their sons ‘can do no wrong.’

**The Prince Syndrome**

Based on his extensive experiences working with “at risk” and “behaviourally challenged” students in the Surrey school district, Steve, the district’s multicultural liaison, believes that many young Indo-Canadian men are suffering from the “prince syndrome,” a sense of entitlement which makes it difficult for them to “exist within the confines of societal and/or educational rules.” He insists that at home, many young Indo-Canadian men are “absolutely allowed to run free,” there is a “lack of control and discipline” so that when it “comes time for
the parents to try and exert control, at any level, the youths are so far gone, doing whatever they
do, that parents have little or no control or influence over these young guys.” Although these
young men are “aware of the rules,” because many of them “don’t face boundaries and
consequences at home, it’s difficult for them to recognize them in a school setting.” In the eyes
of their parents, their sons “cannot do anything wrong” and they “rarely allow the young person
to take responsibility after committing an error.” This perspective is characteristic of a ‘no
control’ response or abandoning discipline approach to parenting which Kurian (1991) suggests
is adopted by some South Asian parents in Canada “either because they are too busy to care, or
they are too afraid to handle any conflict” (428). He continues that these parents “completely let
go of their children” and “like to pretend that everything is right with the children in spite of their
awareness of their [children’s] irresponsible behaviour” while also being “eager to please their

in traditional Punjab, infants and young children are extended considerable attention and
freedom […] Young children are indulged, but as they grow older they are subjected to
many restrictions and are expected to meet the responsibilities placed on them. It is the
general Indian practice to allow very young children to do what they want […] Controls
are imposed on the children as they become adolescents and young adults in order to
ensure that they contribute to the collectivity and behave according to cultural norms,
such as obeying the commands of elders and not mixing at all with the opposite sex (90).

While Nayar (2004) notes that first generation Punjabi parents continue to raise their children
according to “tradition,” she finds that, in the “modern mileu,” parental dharam (duty) to provide
for the “basic needs” of children sometimes translates into the lavishing of young Punjabis with
material goods including “good clothes, a big house and a luxury car” (93-94). In some
instances, parents fear that they will lose control over their sons and thus, spoil and indulge them
to ensure that the boys remain in the household, fulfill their own duties to the family, and acquire
izzat (honour) in the community (Nayar, 2004). This pampered upbringing has, albeit
inadvertently, “enabled” Indo-Canadian young men to be less motivated and less focused and to “not [be as] involved in their own development” as their female peers (Julie, personal interview, June 2007). In general, teenaged Indo-Canadian boys are allowed to “get by and have fun” (Sanjay, personal interview, May 2007).

In contrast, South Asian women are traditionally viewed as the “custodians of family values and culture” and as such, parents are much more “anxious about their daughters retaining traditional values and customs” (Desai and Subramanian, 2003). South Asian girls are viewed as being “especially capable of marring their family’s reputation” (Shankar, 2008, 170) and thus their social lives, in particular their relationships with boys, are often more strictly regulated and monitored by their parents. Desai and Subramanian (2003) contend that while there is “greater parental concern about daughters,” “[o]ften excessive adherence and insistence to ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ is a reflection of relations of power in Canada as opposed to something intrinsic in the culture of origin or its traditions” (143). In “imposing ‘excessive’ demands on their children,” South Asian parents are thus responding to cultural “delegitimization,” “the threat of losing one’s identity” and the overall “perceived threat of cultural eradication” (Desai and Subramanian, 2003, 143). Punjabi Sikh boys are however generally given more freedom than girls to make their own decisions regarding their social lives and educational and career choices103 (Gibson, 1988; Gibson and Bhachu, 1988; Maira, 2002; Nayar 2004; Singh and Singh Tatla, 2006; Shankar 2008). A consequence is that while young women are “directed” by their parents, boys:

[boys] don’t have that luxury. They have the luxury of doing whatever they want. So therefore they don’t have to think about the future because mom’s going to make them lunch every day. Mom’s going to wash our clothes. And so they’re being babied (Sunil, personal interview, February 2007).

103 For more on the position of women and traditional gendered codes of conduct and expectations in the South Asian diaspora refer to Hall, 2002; Handa, 2002; and Maira, 2002.
Mary also sees evidence of the prince syndrome in her counseling. Young men who feel very “entitled,” who “just have this feeling that they deserve and that they should have, just because ‘it’s me’ you know?,” but who are “not accepting responsibility that they got themselves to this point” and not “taking ownership for their behaviour because they haven’t had to do that.” From what she has heard from students and experienced as the wife of a Punjabi man, Mary insists that for many young Punjabi boys, there are “no expectations at home to do anything” and as a result, “they’re not taught that they need to work hard. They’re going from living at home and having their mom and their sisters take care of them to finding a wife who is going to take care of them.” Mary does not think that “a work ethic is being put into some of our young boys whereas older generations of immigrants, who have come from India, everybody had to work hard.” For instance, the young men in my sample are largely absolved of the household responsibilities imposed on the young women with whom I spoke. After school, the young women are required to help their mothers prepare dinner and the next day’s lunch, to babysit their younger siblings or to help around the house, while the young men work out or play sports before returning home to eat, watch t.v., nap, or “chill” with friends. Sunil and Bobbi describe many of the young Punjabi men they deal with at Getting By High School as “spoiled.” Steve agrees that they are so “pampered” by their parents that they do not appreciate the value of what they are being given: “material goods with little work put in by the young people themselves. I mean you see some of these guys driving around in, you know, $100,000 cars. They don’t understand the value of the vehicle because they didn’t work for it.” Steve continues, “dad’s been giving them whatever they need, so I don’t think they understand the work attached to all that money right?” Julie argues that accountability and responsibility have to be “trained” and “ingrained” at home before they can be “carried over” to school. She believes that “if he doesn’t
do chores, if he doesn’t help cook, if he doesn’t help clean,” then parents have “created a situation” where their son cannot appreciate that they “are working like dogs” to provide for him. Julie suggests that parents are “catering to their sons” so that they can “do well at school:” “All [they] want is for him to do well […] All they ask of them is to perform at school, but because of the way they’ve treated them” at home, “what we have [at school] is the apathy and the lack of expectation” not from the parents, “but from the boys.” In attempting to protect their sons from hardship, parents are unknowingly sabotaging their own expectations as many young men are not being instilled with a sense “that a good life is hard work and values” (Julie, personal interview, June 2007).

Although their fathers appear to make good livings and to comfortably provide for their families, the brown boys do not aspire to follow in their footsteps. Built on long hours and hard, often physical, work, their fathers’ “success” is not one that they are seeking to emulate. As Steve explains: “[d]ads aren’t cool though right? Nobody brags that their dad drives a cab twelve hours a day or drives a truck six days a week. [T]hey might brag about their dad’s wealth, but very little about their job or how they got that way.” For instance, Ryan admires his father because he’s a “nice guy” but mostly because “he came [to Canada] with five dollars and now has a half million dollar house and raised a family.” With only one exception, the brown boys communicated no interest in pursuing their fathers’ lines of work and very few of the boys consider their fathers their role models. Mohan, for instance, “would be happy if he turned out like his dad, just not job wise,” he admires, the school’s multicultural liaison, Steve. Similarly, although Kam “looks up to his parents,” he aspires to be like Donald Trump. Sunny quite simply wants to be a football player like Michael Vick in the NFL. Along with NBA basketball player, Kobi Bryant, Tim admires his older brother, who plays basketball at an out-of-province
university. Raj appreciates his father’s “hard work,” but regards basketball player Steve Nash, a
“Canadian in an American dominated league” as his role model. Sajjan admires a number of
Brazilian soccer players but also “looks up to someone like” one of his close friends who is
smart, has a 4.0 GPA, a “crazy work ethic” and has “already been accepted” to one of the local
universities. Mani thinks that “maybe one of his sisters” qualifies as his role model because
“She’s pretty well off,” and “has her own place, she has a nice car, [and] she has lot of
accessories.” Ravinder, Davinder, and Kris think highly of their older brothers, all of whom are
pursuing postsecondary educations. While Ravinder “likes his dad” because he is “nice” and
“he’ll give me what I want,” he admires his brother because “he’s smart.” Kris respects his older
brother because he “does anything he wants. He parties all the time. Like, he just does whatever
and he’s so smart. He goes out like every day and he parties and he gets like A’s and stuff. So
I’d love to do that.” These brown boys are benefitting from their brothers’ experiences and in
fact, Kris, like his older brother, would like to study accounting while Davinder and Tim want to
attend the same out-of-province universities as their brothers.

It is not surprising that older brothers exert such influence on the brown boys. With both
parents working, Indo-Canadian children are often left to “take care of themselves” (Amit,
Personal interview, June 2006) or are left in the care of older cousins, relatives or siblings
whereby “kids are parenting other kids” (Mary, personal interview, May 2007). However, not all
of the brown boys are able to follow the positive examples set by older siblings so that for many
of them, the route to educational success in Canada remains foggy and uncharted. Accordingly,
while the brown boys’ parents have impressed upon them the importance of education,
professional and economic success by way of educational achievement remains more mythical
than empirically proven. For instance, Rob reflects that “there’s like a lot of people who go to
school and work hard, but they don’t get anything out of it. They don’t even get good jobs or whatever.” Kam similarly wonders at the value of education given that his cousin “didn’t go to a single day of post secondary education and yet he owns the biggest housing company in Calgary.” The brown boys have yet to witness first-hand how education ‘works’ for men from their backgrounds and their neighbourhoods.

The Immigrant Community: The Importance of Networks and Norms

Though first conceptualized by Bourdieu (1977) and Loury (1977), the concept of social capital as operationalized by researchers in the sociology of education tends to follow from the work of Coleman (1988) (Kao and Rutherford, 2007). As described by Coleman (1988, 98):

>[s]ocial capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure.

Like other forms of capital, human, physical or financial, social capital is “productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman, 1988, 98). Crucially, however, social capital differs from these other varieties in that it “inheres in the structure of relations” (Coleman, 1988, 98); it “exists only as a result of our interactions with others” (Kao and Rutherford, 2007, 28). Though Coleman differentiates between social capital within the family and social capital outside the family, the latter, which consists of the cultural norms and values of the community in addition to the density and scope of social networks, has generated the bulk of scholarly attention in terms of understanding the lives of the new second generation.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001a) argue that dense tightly knit co-ethnic communities can exert positive influences on the lives of the children of immigrants in the United States by
providing economic opportunities, discouraging divorce and the disruption of households, and reinforcing parental controls, expectations and aspirations (2001a). By helping to monitor and regulate the wayward behaviour of young people, members of the co-ethnic community are also able to assist other immigrant parents in offsetting “the lure of the streets,” “creating a far more formidable barrier” against the powerful pull of oppositional youth subcultures (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a, 65). “In the case of norms imposed by parents on children,” Coleman (1988) emphasizes the importance of a particular social structure which he calls “intergenerational closure.” Intergenerational closure refers to the relations between the parents of children and their friends; quite simply, in a community where the parents’ friends are the parents of their children’s friends, there is a high degree of closure. The existence of intergenerational closure provides immigrant parents with a very useful form of social capital – the reinforcement of norms and expectations and the effective monitoring and sanctioning of their children’s behavior outside of the home. Zhou and Bankston (1994, 1998) have demonstrated the advantages of being embedded in such a “closed” community for Vietnamese American youth growing up in New Orleans:

Vietnamese adolescents were constantly reminded of their duty to show respect for their elders, to take care of younger siblings, to work hard, and to make decisions upon approval of parents not simply within a particular family but in the community where other families practiced similar values. In this ‘watchful and ever-vigilant’ community, young Vietnamese found little competition from other desiderata because the social world of their families was restricted to the closed and highly integrated circles of the ethnic group. Since what was considered good or bad was clearly specified and closely monitored by these networks, young people found it hard to ‘get away with much’ (Zhou, 1997, 82).

Similarly, in a study of Mexican-origin families living in low income and high crime communities, Germán, Gonzales and Dumka (2008) find that “familism values,” “a set of normative beliefs traditionally espoused by Latino populations that emphasize the centrality of
the family unit and stress the obligations and support that family members owe to both nuclear and extended kin” (17), serve to protect young adolescents from the negative influences of “deviant” peer cultures. In reflecting on his work with Zhou and the meaning of social capital for the children of immigrants, Bankston (2004, 177) makes the crucial point that social capital “cannot be purely a matter of the structure of relations among individuals, but must involve values, beliefs, and expectations that are maintained and transmitted within a group by social structures.” He argues that the “relatively high level of achievement among Vietnamese American students has been maintained in recent years by cultural values that are conducive to achievement and by bounded social networks that maintain these values” (Bankston, 2004, 177). Though a dense and tightly knit community network is essential for transmitting common values and norms, in order for this sort of structure to be an asset to immigrant youth, the content of those norms and values matter. While it is often assumed that immigrant networks transmit values and norms that encourage academic success, as Kao and Rutherford (2007, 48) remind us “dense social networks may also emphasize norms and values that impede school success or promote illegal activity or socially undesirable behavior.” Based on an examination of the effects of intergenerational closure and parental school involvement on the educational achievements of Asian, Hispanic, Black and White eighth graders, Kao and Rutherford (2007, 47) find that “social capital does not offer the same prospects to all students” and that “for some racial and immigrant groups, certain types of social capital appear to matter more, whereas others matter less.” They propose that the differential effects of social capital based on race and immigrant status may be attributable to the norms and values being transmitted by parental networks – an issue not addressed in their survey. In conclusion, they thus reiterate the call to
researchers first issued by Furstenberg and Kaplan (2003) to not only address the quantity of social capital available to students but to also explore its quality (Kao and Rutherford, 2007, 48).

The theory of segmented assimilation assumes that an oppositional subculture threatens youth from outside immigrant ethnic communities. The “Jack” however has emerged from within Surrey’s Punjabi community as a subcultural response to the community’s socio-economic circumstances and conditions. Though isolated, dense and tightly knit, rather than insulating its young men in an ethnic cocoon to shield them from the perils of the Jack’s way of life, Surrey’s Punjabi community transmits to its youth ideals and values which have indirectly sanctioned and (re)-produced the Jack subculture.

Isolation

Having been raised by Punjabi immigrants in Surrey, the brown boys are given very few opportunities to interact with or learn about Vancouver’s other ethnocultural groups or to experience the diverse ‘walks of life’ that exist beyond Surrey. While some of the boys have a few “white” friends or socialize with “white” boys while playing on out-of-school sports teams, their closest friends and immediate social networks are comprised primarily of other “brown” teenagers. The brown boys have also had very few occasions to travel outside of Surrey, to see other parts of the world, the country, the province or even other local municipalities. Their parents do not often take them on overnight or weekend trips and because of their restricted driver’s licenses, the boys’ activities and experiences are normally limited to within Surrey and the neighbouring municipalities of North and South Delta. Speaking to the severity of her Indo-Canadian students’ isolation, Principal Coor remarks that “a lot of our kids […] haven’t even been to Stanley Park [in downtown Vancouver]!” (personal interview, June 2007). When they
have travelled outside of B.C. or Canada, it has been with their families, usually when they were younger for the purposes of visiting relatives. For instance, Sam has been to California, Seattle, Toronto and India; Ryan has gone to California, Calgary, Toronto and India; and Sunny has visited Toronto, Edmonton and India - all of them for family visits. Mohan, Raj and Kris have only made trips to India as children. Sajjan once went to Calgary to see family but otherwise has only travelled within B.C for soccer tournaments and though Mani used to regularly visit his grandmother in Calgary, he does not get outside of Surrey much, other than the occasional shopping trip, or visit with his cousin, in downtown Vancouver. Although Ravinder has been to India once and spent his past two summers in England preparing for and attending family weddings, his life is largely restricted to Surrey. Some of the boys were lucky enough to go to Hawaii with Getting By High School’s senior basketball team but only Jon has really been given the chance to travel for pleasure, skiing in Whistler and surfing in Tofino, B.C., spending time in Miami at his family’s timeshare, and vacationing in Mexico and Los Angeles. Apart from their occasional family travels, the lives of young brown boys are contained to Surrey and as Dave, a retired Indo-Canadian high school teacher, criticizes, this means that most of them are failing to learn about other cultures, are “continually reinforcing their own behaviours […] and ideas, and “don’t know what’s on the other side of the fence” (personal interview, May 2006).

Dave and other community members reflect that having grown up in an earlier era of immigration and in different parts of Vancouver they did not deal with the type of ethnocultural isolation that today’s second generation Indo-Canadians are encountering in Surrey. Having moved from India as a young child, Jas, an RCMP officer now in his thirties, supposes that he has “some things from the East Indian culture and some things from the, uh, you know, western culture, cuz I grew up in Victoria [and] there was only one East Indian family in our school”
(personal interview, August 2006). He suggests that it “was a different situation” back then because his “buddies were white, you know, Caucasian kids, and we never, they never saw me as East Indian and I never saw them as white” (personal interview, August 2006). Matt, a motivational speaker, considers himself “very fortunate” to have been raised in a community with “a lot of white kids around” and feels that, as a consequence, he “grew up differently than someone having all Indian kids around them” (personal interview, May 2006). Today, however, in certain neighbourhoods in Surrey, “you can go anywhere” and “not have to speak English” (Mary, Personal interview, June 2007); in many ways, “it’s like they never left India (Dan, personal interview, June 2007). Mary’s husband, like other second generation Punjabi parents, feels that some schools in Surrey are “becoming too brown” and “he doesn’t like that idea” because “he grew up in East Van and he had a whole mix of friends […] His best friend is Hungarian,” another good friend is Finnish and “he just doesn’t think it’s good to just stick to that one culture” (personal interview, June 2007). Vice Principal Sanjay also did not grow up in Surrey and so wants to raise his family somewhere “more diverse than a lot of neighbourhoods in Surrey.” Amit, a community outreach worker, posits that the Indo-Canadian community has “kind of segregated itself almost. Not just the youth community, but the wider community” (personal interview, June 2006). He is in his early thirties and was raised in one of Vancouver’s outermost suburbs where he says “it was a lot different” because it was “predominantly, you know, European type background community. So I kind of, you know, it was easy for me to embrace other cultures” whereas “in a city like Surrey you’re hanging out with kids that are very similar to you and you’re kind of like not given the opportunities or kind of hesitant to interact outside” (personal interview, June 2006).
Some of the brown boys do express discomfort and wariness at the prospect of expanding their lives beyond their own neighbourhoods. For instance, Sam is unequivocal in telling me that “he’d feel uncomfortable in Vancouver because it’s not his area and he doesn’t know what’s going on there” whereas Raj, Sajjan and Tim offer that they are simply more comfortable in Surrey because life there is what they know. Although he has travelled very rarely, Kris says that he likes to “stay in the same place and be around the same people.” He went to Kamloops, B.C. once and found it “weird” to spend time in “white” neighbourhoods “because like around my neighbourhood it’s usually just like brown people. A brown neighbourhood.” He also found it “weird” attending summer school in North Surrey because “a lot of Chinese people go there. Like a lot.” The experience was “really, really weird” because he “wasn’t even known there at all,” “no one” even knew his name, “until the final two weeks” of the class when he met “a couple of people. And they were brown.” So, he reflects, while chuckling to himself, “it took me a couple of weeks to find some brown people to talk to.” Overall, most of the brown boys seem “happy within the confines of their little worlds” and seem unaware of the advantages of being exposed to “something outside of Surrey” but, Steve muses, that if they were, “they would begin to grasp and understand what a small, small place this is” (personal interview, May 2006). Sunil agrees that “there are a lot of [Indo-Canadian] kids who don’t see, like, beyond Surrey” and “don’t realize that there is stuff going on outside of their community” (Sunil, personal interview, February 2007). Julie agrees that many Indo-Canadian students do not seem to appreciate that “when you’re in this building [Getting By High School], this isn’t what the rest of the Lower Mainland looks like. When you go to other parts of Surrey, it doesn’t look like this” and that how they behave and act at this school may not be accepted in other parts of
Vancouver\textsuperscript{104} (personal interview, June 2007). Sanjay tells me that he “worries” “about people who spend their whole lives here and do not really venture very far out of this neighbourhood” because he doesn’t think they can “reach their potential.” He insists that it is “important for kids” to be exposed to “life outside this community” because it is “very different,” and can show them “they can achieve things” (personal interview, June 2007). As it stands, however, when the brown boys look beyond their households and extended families for examples of ‘successful’ men, they are limited to those within the surrounding Punjabi community.

**Role Models: Moneyed Men\textsuperscript{105}**

Gibson and Bhachu (1988) find that Punjabi Sikh parents in both their American and British study locations assume that formal education is the “primary avenue to upward mobility” (257) and that even if they themselves possess little formal education, they “nearly always” have direct contact with, or at least access to, highly educated individuals through their family’s kin and social networks or through the local gurdwara (Sikh temple). In both settings, parents “held up” educated Sikhs as role models for their children who were “constantly told stories” of people who had “overcome adversity” and “substantial obstacles” “to become highly respected doctors and lawyers” (250). As one young Sikh told the researchers in Britain, young people are told about Sikhs “who have been able to beat the system and the whites at their own game” (Gibson and Bhachu, 1988, 250). While many community members and educators emphasize the importance of “positive role models,” there is also a consensus that there is a dearth of educated

\textsuperscript{104}Julie suggests that even though they constitute a majority, many of the Indo-Canadians at Getting By High School possess a “minority mentality.” To illustrate what she means by this, she explains that Indo-Canadian students will “make fun of an Asian person’s name,” not aware of the fact that in “another building” South Asian “names are funny” (personal interview, June 2007).

\textsuperscript{105}I have borrowed the term “moneyed men” from Maira (2002, 162).
and successful individuals who are accessible or even visible to young people within Surrey’s Indo-Canadian community. Amit feels that there are Indo-Canadian men in the community to admire but that many of them are older, in their forties and fifties, and suspects that young men in their early and late teens may find it difficult to relate to them because of this “generation gap” (personal interview, May 2006). Matt, however, thinks that “we don’t have any role models;” there is “no one” for young men to look up to in the Indo-Canadian community. By way of explanation he asks, “Who was there? Bindy Johal106? Right?” He adds that “[f]or some reason there’s a severe case of insecurity among East Indian men in my community.” In speaking to the “lack of role models,” Dave recalls that the Surrey school district tried to ameliorate this problem with a “massive hiring” of Indo-Canadian male teachers but that the strategy failed because according to him “East Indian male teachers never come out and participate in the stuff that we’re [South Asian Teachers’ Association] doing in workshops and stuff. It’s all young women.” But the major problem he insists is that “the middle people, the East Indians that are middle class, that are educated, have left the community. They don’t want to have anything to do with the community any more” (personal interview, May 2006)107. Dan, who is in charge of school safety, notes that while many of the young men at Getting By High School wear “gangster t-shirts and all this kind of stuff,” he proposes that rather than being attracted to the gangster ethos per se, young men simply like “power” and “they like things that are powerful. So you know, if so and so looks like a powerful individual, they’ll align themselves with that, whether it’s a sports figure or powerful on the court” (personal interview, May 2007). Sanjay observes that “a lot of the young males, Indo-Canadians guys, seem to aspire

106 Bindy Johal was a high profile Indo-Canadian gangster who was shot to death in a Vancouver nightclub in 1998 at the age of 27. 
107 Dave’s comments here support a key aspect of Wilson’s (1987) underclass thesis which emphasizes the structural causes of poverty.
to [be] athletes, professional athletes” because “unfortunately they don’t see a lot of role models at their level around them in their community” and he assumes that “a big part of it is the attraction to the material things, the cars, the money and the houses” that athletes are reported to possess. Although Sunil was told by a colleague that he is “very important as a role model” at Getting By High School, he says that even though “I knew what he meant that I could be right? I mean I’m not going through the motions as a typical brown guy or whatever […] I don’t see them as looking at me as a role model.” According to him, the male students view him:

as just a teacher. ‘He drives a crappy car’ […] that’s how they always identify me. Based on my crappy little Mazda […] And you know I live in a little house and I married a white girl and so they don’t see that as important for them. I mean, there was a teacher last year who drove a BMW. That’s who they respected. That’s who they look up to or looked up to. Mr. B drives a beemer […] that’s more what they were impressed with. Whether or not he’d done anything in his life wasn’t important. It was what he drove or what image he presented (Sunil, personal interview, February 2007).

Sanjay suggests that such reverence for material affluence “goes back to the home life,” that “somewhere along the line, they’ve [young men] learned that that’s what’s important. A lot of students have learned that what’s important is what you have and not who you are.” He adds that “[i]f you see your parents spending all of their time working, trying to get money” then you will deem material wealth as “what’s important.” Some members of the community suggest that the emphasis on the acquisition of wealth is not a problem restricted to individual families but rather that it is endemic to the broader Punjabi community where wealth translates into social respect.

The Importance of “Looking Good”

Bobbi traces the “all about the material” perspective that is so pervasive in Indo-Canadian families back to the community “where you know, the more someone has the better they’re looked upon” (personal interview, June 2007). Similarly, Amit comments that status
acquired through wealth is “still pretty big in the South Asian community” (Personal interview, May 2006). Dave advises that the “community’s focus” on “power and prestige” can be seen in the popularity of “monster homes.” According to him:

Prior to the 1970s there was nobody [within the Indo-Canadian community] that had a new home. No one had a new house. It was just an older home that you could barely afford. And that was it. The people that come now, the first thing they want is a humongous house […] And that’s their focus. Got to have the big house because everybody else has a big house (personal interview, June 2006).

Sunil also raises the issue of “monster homes,” remarking that:

one of the things in Surrey and Vancouver when a lot of Indian people started moving here and getting real estate, they’d just build a bigger house than the person next door. And they drive the car. I mean they will spend all their time and money getting the car that looks better. So there is that – we’re better than you (personal interview, February 2007).

In Sunil’s opinion, because “Indian culture is very much about ‘look at us’,” giving the impression of greater wealth is just as, if not more, important than genuinely possessing it.

Priya, a community worker and university graduate, asserts that it is the community’s reverence of material success that leads many young Indo-Canadian men to dismiss post secondary education in favour of blue collar employment. The “push” to be “very, very successful” with the “fancy cars” and “fancy houses” has many young men asking themselves “how am I going to get this money and how am I going to get it fast?” As she sees it, the answer for most of them is straightforward:

who’s going to sit through four or five years at school and tests and essays when you can just work and make mad money? Be a truck driver and how many grands are you getting, right? […] I mean, my sister works in a bank and she tells me truck drivers will come in with ten grand cheques and that’s after two weeks or something (Priya, personal interview, June 2006).

Gibson and Bhachu (1988) explain that “Sikhs greatly admire those who demonstrate money-making abilities, leadership skills and service to others. One with such attributes can become a
respected and powerful figure within the Sikh community regardless of educational achievements” (252). They find that young Sikh men in Britain who do not excel at school are able to “redeem themselves by becoming successful in some trade or business” (252). Similarly, Shankar (2008) finds that young South Asians are earning the respect of their parents and the community, not through “traditional academic means” but by using their community networks to work their way up to potentially lucrative positions in Silicon Valleys’ high technology industries. These strategies for alternative upward mobility are validated in their respective communities because they satisfy the expectation of South Asian men as moneyed (Maira, 2002).

Maira (2002) understands the material pressures and expectations placed on young South Asian men as an issue of the family’s izzat or reputation within the community. While popular and academic discussion of izzat often focus on South Asian women, particularly as it relates to the regulation of their sexuality, Maira (2002) argues that the community’s understanding and application of the notion also serves to control the activities and lives of South Asian young men. Nayar (2004) furthers that although izzat is a pan-Indian value, it is “particularly esteemed” and “powerful” among warrior castes such as Punjabi Sikhs (48). In her study of Punjabi Sikhs in California, Gibson notes that “Punjabis worry in particular about their daughters’ reputations […]parents expressed a heavy responsibility to keep their daughters’, and thus the family’s, name untarnished,” emphasizing to her that “[a]ll our respect is in their hands” (210), while Gibson and Bhachu (1988) observe that Punjabi young men in both California and Britain face “a strong pressure to become successful financially” (248). Similarly, Maira (2002) suggests that in New York, young South Asian men are not only expected to assume the traditional breadwinner role but to “prove one’s masculinity by amassing financial capital” and to “realize”
their parents’ “immigrant dream of upward class mobility” by expanding on the family’s financial foundation (162-163). Young South Asian men are expected to live according to the “traditional preferences of the parents in order to bring honour to the family” (Nayar, 2004, 100) which in many instances means pursuing higher education and certain careers for reasons of higher income and status. Nayar argues, however, that in Vancouver’s Punjabi community, the traditional understanding of izzat has been “redefined” such that many young men are “facing considerable pressure to acquire material goods for status” (176). She also reports that there is a consensus among her second generation respondents that “izzat is not working in Canada and that it is hurting the community and the family” (74).

Izzat has traditionally served as an effective mechanism for social control to ensure that young people conform to customary norms of behaviour and “keep transgressions to a minimum” (Shankar, 2008, 177; Gibson, 1988, Chapter 7) While children do not want to disappoint or upset their parents, Shankar (2008) insists that “the fear of becoming the subject of gossip that would ostracize them and their families from their communities” is what encourages them to abide by, or at least give the appearance of abiding by, the community’s value systems and standards in terms of codes of dress, dating and premarital sex (177). While some members of Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community are critical of the concern and worry awarded to “what other people are going to think” and “saving names and saving reputations” (Priya, personal interview, June 2006), the Punjabi community’s emphasis on upholding the family’s reputation in Vancouver provides a powerful incentive for young people to stay enrolled in high school. Amit considers that if a young Punjabi fails to graduate from high school, “they’ll always be the kid that dropped out. You know?” He continues that when people from the community refer to “the kid, they won’t describe him as he’s six foot, you now, 200 pounds or
whatever. They’ll say ‘oh, that’s the kid that didn’t make it through high school’ (Amit, personal interview, June 2006). Arun, who interviewed gang involved young men for his undergraduate thesis, suggests that some young Indo-Canadian men even attend university “just for image” and to “stop the pressure” from the community. He says that:

a lot of them [young Indo-Canadian] men go [to University] but they […] don’t bother to learn. They’ll just take maybe a course here and there, just to say kind of they’re going to school to provide that image of a good kid […] because everybody else is watching, you know, ‘what are people going to say if our son does nothing and he just stays at home and does nothing?’ That will look bad for the family (Arun, personal interview, May 2006).

The emphasis on the family’s image and the equation of material affluence with respect, however, also means that some members of the community are failing to look behind outward appearances to question or evaluate the source of the “success;” “[i]t’s not really about how you get the money, it’s that you have the money and you’re able to show it off” (Amit, personal interview, May 2006). It is in part because of these conditions that the “Jack” mentality has managed to take root and flourish.

Though education is generally valued within Surrey’s Punjabi community and its young people are encouraged to do well in high school and go on to receive post secondary credentials, for certain young men who are unable or unmotivated to attend college or university, the gang or criminal lifestyle is appealing in that it represents an alternative mobility strategy and a means for earning the community’s respect. A 21 year old “criminal mastermind” boasted to Mani Amar, a documentarian that his “sole” goal in life is “not to work” and that being a gangster has brought him everything he wanted: “girls, money and power.” Arun, who spent time observing and interviewing several Indo-Canadian gang members similarly reports that while some of the young men in his sample had the opportunity to go to college or university, they “gravitated to
the lifestyle” because it is an “easy” way to meet the community’s expectations: “image, respect and reputation.” Jas, an RCMP officer, supports that “crime is easy. It’s an easy thing to do. Like, Jesus, getting good grades and going to school is tough.” Arun also observes that gang members do not view themselves as “gangsters,” instead “they actually will consider themselves more like businessmen or self-made entrepreneurs.” By “projecting” themselves in this way, Arun argues that they are attempting to further live up to the “ideals that the community wants:” “you know, ‘I make money like my own way. I beat the system. I’m smarter than the system.” Although many members of the community are aware that some of their young men are criminally involved, the reality remains largely unacknowledged; they are content to maintain the façade for the sake of a family’s reputation. Sunil offers an example which is typical of the sorts of anecdotes used by the local media and my interview respondents to illustrate adult complicity in youth crime:

There was a student, not from our school, maybe he was. He was killed in a drug related shoot out at a 7-11 a couple of years back and he was driving a brand new Jaguar and his dad…He’d given his dad a Mercedes. And the father in the news said, ‘oh I never knew anything was wrong. Well he [the boy] worked at a gas station. I mean, that was his job.

Many members of the Indo-Canadian community interpret their community’s collective silence as a sanctioning of the gangster lifestyle and its affiliated youth subcultures.

**Attitudes towards Conflict and Violence**

To make sense of the gang culture which has emerged in his community, Arun further urges “don’t even look at the gangs first of all” but rather “at how the community acts before that […] nearly every family will have kind of, ah, for lack of a better word, a ‘beef’ with each other. There’ll be a lack of communication so they’ll be conflicts within families.” He calls attention to the dynamics at wedding receptions where he says “you’ll always find a fight or something.
There’s some form of violence. That’s so common.” He continues by recalling “then you had the temple, the whole table and chairs incidents\(^{108}\) that kind of showed just how, you know, it’s a community in conflict with each other.” He argues that conflict and violence existed in the community well before the gangs appeared and that “obviously those [actions] are done by adults in the community so I mean there’s going to have a trickle down effect into how the gang members and even how, non gang members interact. Even just how normal South Asians relate to one another” (personal interview, May 2006). Priya, a graduate of SFU and a community worker, concurs that “there’s a lot of internal fighting within the culture […] you’ve got like two different sides of the temple, you’ve got your fundamentalists and you’ve got your moderates and what have they done? They’ve just divided a community” (personal interview, June 2006).

Like Arun and Priya, Matt, a motivational speaker, is critical of the message that his community is sending to its youth: “in the media we’re fighting over tables and chairs. So the party that doesn’t win? They go and open their own temple. Now they fight and like, that’s part of our community. It’s just falling apart like that.” He “finds that Indo-Canadian kids are more aggressive” and attributes this disposition to fact that “we’re still perpetuating old cycles that should have been broken” and speculates that “there’s something that’s starting at home with these kids that is making them the way they are, that’s making them aggressive.” In the report, *The Community Response to South Asian Youth Violence*, The Group of 10 also highlights the

\(^{108}\) Here Arun makes reference to a series of disputes which erupted between gurdwaras in Vancouver and Surrey during the late 1990s. After being deposed from management of the Surrey-Delta gurdwara in January 1998, the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISFY) questioned the use of tables and chairs in the community dining halls (langar) of the local temples. Responding to the query, on April 20 1998, the Sikh religious governing body in Amritsar, India, passed an edict against the use of tables and chairs. Conflict erupted following the Surrey-Delta gurdwara’s opposition to and failure to accept this decision. The issue of tables and chairs was heavily covered by local mainstream media (see Basran and Bolaria, 2003, 168-175) and served to highlight existing tensions between Sikh moderates, who defied the edict, and fundamentalists, who supported it (Nayar, 2004).
importance of community conflict as “contributing in some way to the choice of youth to adopt a
criminal lifestyle and to use violence as a means of resolving disputes” (2005, 8). The group not
only regards the Indo-Canadian community’s “maintenance of a ‘village mentality’ from historic
roots […] when violence was an accepted way of resolving disputes between families and
communities” as a significant “historic and current contextual factor” but isolates “the
fragmented nature of the south Asian community” and “the learned belief that violence is an
acceptable, culturally-sanctioned, means of resolving disputes” as meaningful “family, school
and community life” influences informing the emergence of gang violence (2005, 8-9). The
report suggests that beliefs regarding the acceptability of violence are learned by young Indo-
Canadians from “role models at home and in the community who engage in physical violence as
a means of dealing with family, cultural and religious disputes” and are often rooted in
“misunderstandings of the role of violence in the history and beliefs of Sikhism (i.e. considered a
last resort means of fighting for justice and fairness, and not a valid means of achieving power,
financial success or status)” (Group of 10, 2005, 9).

Mani, a Sikh documentarian, who interviewed several gang members for his film A
Warrior’s Religion, is critical of the way in which violence has been “accepted and perpetuated”
in his “culture.” As a young man he would “get slapped at home” if he failed to meet certain
parental expectations, in particular that he “fight” to defend the honour of his sister and brother.
He explains that his mother instructed him to “never a start a fight but if someone starts one with
you, you finish it!” Mani describes himself as the family’s “enforcer” and displays the
misshapen knuckles of his right hand – the evidence of “over 100 fights.” Vice Principal Sanjay
maintains that “a lot of Indo-Canadian, well, not a lot, but some Indo-Canadian families have a
different form of discipline at home. I mean, you know, to slap a child or to be physical with
kids is not unknown” (personal interview, June 2007). Some Indo-Canadian parents have
given Bobbi permission to “slap” their children when they misbehave in her class; other members of
the local Indo-Canadian community characterize Indian parents as “strict” or their style of
parenting as “traditional.” Based on 30 years of clinical practice, Baptiste (2005) generalizes
that due to the “different rules of parenting” in the U.S cultural context, “[m]any East Indian
parents complain of feeling restrained in their authority to discipline their children
‘appropriately’ and consistent with the usual and acceptable modes of disciplining children in
their respective native country” where “many East Indian parents used disciplinary practices that,
by US standards, are considered harsh and even abusive” (354-355). Though there is a paucity
of research conducted on the child rearing and parenting approaches of South Asian immigrant
parents in Canada, Maiter and George (2003) maintain that based on such studies conducted with
other ethnic groups, there is much evidence to suggest that “the parenting style of South Asian
Canadians may also be culturally and contextually unique” (415). Following their focus group
interviews with three groups of South Asian immigrant mothers, Maiter and George conclude
that the mothers’ parenting style is “different from that of the mainstream” (424) and while they
do not evaluate the mothers’ attitudes towards the use of physical discipline, they do find that the
mothers in their sample demonstrate a collectivist cultural orientation in their approach to
parenting by “emphasizing the importance of religion and culture; of group values, such as
respect for elders and their authority; and of transmitting a sense of belonging to a cultural
group” (425). In addition, although very little work has been conducted in the area of cross
cultural family disciplinary practices including differential definitions of appropriate discipline,
abuse and child maltreatment (Maiter et al. 2004), in a recent study of family violence in Tamil
and Punjabi immigrant communities in Toronto, Tyyskä (2009) concludes that “Punjabi and Tamil child abuse survivors reported that physical discipline is considered normal in their families and communities […] Substance abuse was also identified as a cause by some Punjabi and Tamil child victims” and that “[n]otably, all of the Punjabi child abuse survivors were male” (24). In terms of spousal abuse, Tyysk (2009) finds that “[a]ll but one of the Punjabi women [survivors of domestic abuse] reported that the abuse had escalated after immigration and that the violence had to do with the low status of women in their ethnic community” and that though the women’s narratives indicate that “many of the reasons for family violence in the Punjabi and Tamil communities are similar to those identified in the literature for the North American mainstream,” they also “strongly suggest that there are culturally based patriarchal norms and practices that underlie wife abuse in general, and that some of these may be heightened by the stress of immigration and associated mental health and substance abuse problems” (24).

Though it is widely acknowledged that psychological, sexual and physical abuse cut across ethnic, racial, class and national boundaries, affecting women from ‘all walks of life,’ there is now a growing body of literature which suggests that rates of violence and tolerance of violent behavior towards women are “not uniform across countries or cultures” (Bhanot and Senn, 2007, 25). Das Gupta explains that as “activists and academics have come to recognize the pervasiveness and commonalities in domestic violence across societies, they have also started to acknowledge the subtle differences” so that “[e]ven though these forms of abuse may be common to all, it is expected that the content would differ according to the culture and the history of a community” (2000, 173). In support of this argument, Mehrotra (1999) reminds us that domestic abuse, like all forms of violence, is socially constructed and thus a community’s
definition of and response to violence is socio-culturally and temporally contingent. With respect to South Asian communities in the U.S., Das Gupta (2000) contends that though:

immigration provides many opportunities, it has not prompted South Asians to repudiate traditional gender asymmetries. Moreover, in their attempts to preserve culture and heritage, the community has actively endeavoured to recreate and establish traditional gender relations, which inherently privilege men. This power imbalance between the genders make the immigrant community ripe grounds for women abuse” (176).

Though there is very little research on the specificities of domestic violence within particular South Asian communities within North America109, Krishnan et al.’s (1998) focus group discussions with groups of South Asian women in New York and Chicago, support the view that “violence experienced by South Asian women was defined by a variety of unique cultural, familial, and community factors and norms,” highlighting that “issues of patriarchy, gender roles and expectations, constricting family and community norms, attitudes and traditions about spousal violence, lack of decision-making power and economic independence are still important […] and have aggravated the problem of domestic violence further (157-158). Nayak et al.’s (2003) examination of the attitudes of undergraduate students from India, Japan, Kuwait and the United States “demonstrate that both gender and nationality are important influences on an individual’s attitudes toward violence against women” (339). The researchers report that “[c]onsistent with previous research, men [from all nations] in this study were more likely than women to endorse beliefs regarding both rape and spousal violence that blame the victim” and that national differences were likely attributable to variations in underlying beliefs concerning

109 Activists and scholars suggest that this lack of research, at least within the U.S. context, is related to the unwillingness of South Asian communities to acknowledge the reality of domestic abuse amongst its members for fear of marring the community’s image as a “model minority” and losing its relatively privileged status within the U.S.’s ethnic racial hierarchy ((Das Gupta, 1998 and 2000; Abraham, 2000).
gender norms and “social ideologies about male domination over women” such that “more negative beliefs [about victims] appear to be consistent with more restrictive norms for women in India, Japan, Kuwait than in the United States” (339). Bhanot and Senn’s (2007) examination of the relationship between gender role attitudes and attitudes towards violence against women in a sample of male undergraduate students of South Asian descent at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, indicate that “[a] higher level of acculturation to a less patriarchal culture (Canada) was associated with attitudes that were less supportive of wife beating” and “more egalitarian gender role attitudes were also associated with less justification of wife assault and fewer beliefs that women gained from beatings” (29). The researchers speculate that more acculturated South Asian men are likely to have more contact and friendships with non-South Asian males and their female peers, leading them to “re-evaluate and change their beliefs about gender roles” (30). That said, “the mean ratings on the measures of attitudes towards wife beatings for this relatively acculturated sample of South Asian males approached that of North American abusers” (Nayak et al., 2007, 30-31) (my emphasis). Though this body of literature is limited, it does provide evidence to suggest that being raised in South Asian immigrant households and communities may have consequences for how young men understand violence. Of particular concern in Surrey’s Punjabi community, however, is not only whether young men’s conceptions of violence are at odds with those of the mainstream community but of how young men are incorporating those understandings into their enactments of masculinity and ethnicity. In this regard, the “issue of violence, in the domestic arena and elsewhere, has to be understood

110 For instance, researchers gauged respondents’ attitudes according to their responses to such statements as: “A woman’s nagging is a major cause of violence in the home;” “Some women deserve to be beaten” and “many battered women do things that cause their husbands to hit them” (Nayak et al., 2003, 337).
in terms of power relationships between various masculinities and femininities (Purkayastha, 2000, 208). Following from the work of Connell (1995), Purkayastha reminds us that:

because the hegemonic masculinity is not fixed, the dominant position is protected through a range of violent acts, ranging from control to assault. Such violence affects both women and men so that there exist relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men and ‘their’ women […] The distinction between all those who are in positions of dominance and those who are supposed to be subordinate are maintained through various types of control, coercion, and physical violence (207-208).

Purkayastha thus argues:

South Asian notions (or selected interpretations) of masculinity and femininity are set within the mainstream U.S. society’s way of structuring similar social practices. Rules about who has the right to control or coerce or even attack others is understood and enacted by individuals according to the relation between the hierarchical rules of the community and that of the mainstream (208).

While each form of masculinity has its own repertoires for establishing control, the Surrey Jack, like other subordinated masculinities, is more likely to resort to physical violence in the absence of access to institutional power and privilege (see Connell, 1995). The Jack’s use of physical violence, while inconsistent with middle class enactments of white masculinity in Vancouver, is not necessarily at odds with some traditional versions of Punjabi masculinity, leading some members of Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community to wonder if by allowing such standards of Punjabi masculinity to endure, they are inadvertently engendering a broader culture of violence.
Concluding Remarks

The theory of segmented assimilation predicts that dense tightly knit co-ethnic networks and relations of the kind observed in Surrey’s Punjabi community can play a positive role in the lives of its young people, by providing economic opportunities, discouraging divorce and the disruption of households, and by reinforcing parental controls, expectations and aspirations (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001a). Derived in an American context, this theory assumes, however, that the subcultural forces threatening to de-rail youth from academic achievement operate from outside immigrant ethnic communities. The “Jack” has emerged from within Surrey’s Punjabi community. As such, rather than working alongside parents to combat its influence on its young people, the community at large is perpetuating ideals which indirectly engender the Jack’s way of life. In the worst case scenario, struggling and directionless young men are lured away from postsecondary education, viewing the life as a “wannabe” gangster as an alternative strategy for upward mobility. For the brown boys, who are morally guided and financially supported by loving parents, the community’s isolation, privileging of material wealth and outward appearances, and attitudes towards the use of physical violence mean that they are unable to learn from their community how to succeed by working at and succeeding at school. While the brown boys know that they do not want to be “Jacks,” they also know that they do not want to be like their father, but having had no exposure to other role models, to other examples of success, the brown boys are for the most part floundering, articulating goals and plans but with no real sense of how they will achieve them. Their identity as “brown” young men has helped them to negotiate and straddle the boundaries between the Jacks, the “white” guys and their Punjabi fathers, by extension, their academic and educational ethos draws on elements of each of these
other identities, resulting in a culture of mediocrity and laziness. In the following chapter, I elaborate on this connection as I discuss the educational consequences of the “brown” identity.
Chapter 7

The Educational Consequences of Being “Brown”

As Getting By High School’s career facilitator, Sunil is responsible for “all career programmes for Grades 8 through 12,” providing students with post secondary information and preparing them for life after high school. He finds that many of the Indo-Canadian young men he counsels “don’t really know where they’re going to fit in the world after [high school]; they lack focus and goals and are plagued by “uncertainty.” To illustrate, he tells me: “We ask grade twelves, ‘what are you doing next year?’ and ‘What are you going to be when you’re older?’ and they often respond that they do not know”. When I asked the brown boys about their futures and their plans following their high school graduations, they all had ideas to share with me; in most cases these were vague plans which, for all but two of the young men, began with applying to a local college. For the brown boys, college is the ‘easy’ choice: they want to pursue post secondary education but their options are severely constrained by their mediocre academic performances. The brown boys trace their lacklustre grades back to their “laziness.” They have ‘cruised’ through their classes, exerting the least amount of effort and achieving low to middling grades, until their final year(s) when they attempt to improve their grades for post secondary applications. Unfortunately, their ‘last ditch’ efforts are largely unable to offset the effects of their earlier and lingering lassitude. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how identifying as “brown” has positioned these boys poorly for educational success as the identity engenders a “lazy” approach to academics - an expression of the brown boys’ broader apathy towards education and the future and their complacency with respect to their underachievement.
The Brown Boys’ Grades

One of the first issues I addressed during my interviews with the boys was their opinion of their classes and how they were performing in them. Their responses were at first generic as they judged their classes and their grades to be “not bad,” “alright” or “okay.” With some additional questioning, the boys offered more details, reporting that in the fall semester of their Grade 12 year they had scored mostly ‘Cs’ and ‘Bs’ and some ‘As,’ most notably in physical education and other non-academic classes. For instance, Raj received only a C+ in math and a B in English but an A in physical education while Tim’s G.P.A of 2.6 was the result of a C- in chemistry, B in English and an A in phys ed. Though his grades are generally in the low 60s, Mani earned an A in physical education and also in marketing. Ryan, who characterizes himself as an “average C+ student,” earned Cs in English and math, but like Mani, managed As in marketing and phys ed and Jon earned his best grade in woodworking. Sunny considers his grades “good” as in “like average” and did well in his “favourite subject,” phys ed but received only 58% in math. Kris similarly thinks his grades are “good:” “besides, for, like the science class they’re like Bs and As” and though Sajjan admits to receiving a C in biology, he reports that he is “smart” and usually gets “As and Bs.” While Sam failed chemistry and math in previous years, this year he figures his average is around a C/C+. Mohan simply offers that he is “doing pretty good” this year, earning mostly Bs and securing himself a spot on the honour roll. This year Ravinder is also “like honour roll,” a distinction that he shares with Rob, who has a “straight B average or somewhere like that,” with Harjeet who has an “A/B average,” with Davinder who is an “A or B student” and with Kam who has a 3.7 G.P.A. While Kam has consistently earned high grades, maintaining his ‘A’ average throughout high school and Rob and Sajjan have been on the honour roll since Grade eight and Grade 9 respectively, for most of the brown boys, the honour roll is an
unfamiliar position. The brown boys are not failing, nor are they receiving straight As, not even Kam. Rather, they are academically average and, for most, their Grade 12 grades are the pinnacle of their mediocre high school performances.

Though Mani’s grades are still below those of his honour roll peers, even he recounts that his marks this year are an improvement over those of previous years. He tells me that “before they [his grades] used to be a little bit more bad but now [in Grade 12] they got better. Before they’d be under 60.” Ryan does not specify what his grades were before this year, but he does observe that his academic performance in Grades 8 through 10 was not as strong as it is at present. Though Sam’s average is a C/C+ this year, he too is vague about his earlier academic performance, referring to his grades as “decent” as in “not failures or anything.” Davinder recounts that though he is now on the honour roll, when he was younger his grades “weren’t good;” they only “started improving” in Grade 10. Kris’s grades have also improved over time, from Cs in Grade 9 to this year’s Bs and As and though Jon’s grades were “a little bit above 60 in Grades 8 through 10,” he has boosted his grades over the past two years. Sunny has had a similar experience: “Before like, I used to, I never used to get good grades. And then later on, like Grade 10 I started improving.” Though “happy” with the Bs he’s earning this year, Mohan notes that he has not always done this well in school: “I did bad [Cs and C-s] and then last year I did good and then this year I’m continuing that.” Harjeet “usually has an A/B average” but he “messed up back in Grade 11,” and ended up failing two courses. This year he “took really easy courses” to get his average back on track for college applications. Ravinder’s honour roll standing is also an improvement over last year’s situation when his average was a C/C+. Though some of the boys have earned better grades than others and/or have managed to improve their
grades in their senior year by a more drastic margin, the brown boys have approached their studies in a similar fashion in that most have not tried to excel in their academic endeavours.

**Ethnic Identities and Educational Achievement**

Although there is a lack of in-depth research on the educational experiences and performances of particular ethnocultural youth groups in Canada\textsuperscript{111}, American ethnographic studies underscore the essential role of ethnic identity in the educational achievements of second generation youth, variously highlighting the ways in which ethnic and racial identity choices inform students’ educational beliefs and expectations, their dis/engagement at school and their occupational aspirations. Of particular significance here is the research conducted by Gibson (1988) on second generation Punjabi Sikhs in an agricultural community in Central Valley, California. Based on a study of 42 Punjabi families and 42 non-Hispanic white families with grade 12 children attending the area’s only comprehensive high school, Gibson (1988) reports that the predominant pattern of adaptation for Punjabi Sikhs in California is one of selective acculturation/assimilation or what she terms, “accommodation without assimilation.” Gibson explains that while some U.S born minority youth view school achievement in conflict with their respective ethnic identities, Punjabi youth adopt a strategy which is premised upon the belief that they can do well in school by learning the required cultural skills and language, while retaining the defining elements of their cultural heritage. Punjabi parents encourage their children “to become skilled in the ways of the dominant group,” to adopt the ‘good’ American ways but to

\textsuperscript{111} For exceptions see studies of Black Canadian youth of African and Caribbean parentage attending Ontario secondary schools (Solomon, 1992; Brathwaite and James, 1996; Dei et al. 1997) and more recent research undertaken by Potvin (1999, 2007) on second generation Haitian youth in Quebec.
“resist complete assimilation” (Gibson, 1988, 24). While students from the “white” majority “take aspects of their schooling less seriously” and “accord greater importance […] to extracurricular activities, work experience, and an active social life,” Punjabi students are taught by their parents to “apply themselves to their studies, to avoid trouble with their classmates, and to heed their teachers’ advice” (Gibson, 1998, 28). Teachers told Gibson (1988, 132) that they “liked Punjabi students, for they worked hard, valued education, and followed the rules;” they particularly valued how Punjabi students used peer pressure to bring “deviant students back into line” (131). “In interview after interview,” Gibson (1988) not only heard how Punjabi students were repeatedly told by their parents to “obey your teachers. Do your schoolwork. Stay out of trouble. You’re there to learn and not to fight. Keep trying harder. Keep pushing yourself. Do you homework. After you’ve done that you can watch TV,” but that the students “heeded this advice” (1988, 132). Though Gibson (1988, 139) notes the ways in which “values where changing” for this population of Sikhs living in California, she concludes that the “Punjabi young people remained firmly and squarely anchored in their Punjabi Sikh identity” and “like their parents, they reacted negatively to the conformist pressures of the majority group.” Being a Punjabi Sikh helps these youth to succeed at school: they are more likely than their peers to graduate early, their average grade point average (2.59) exceeds that of non-Punjabi students (2.47), and the Punjabi students raised in the United States are as likely as majority-group students to be placed in advanced math courses. Based on her review of five international case studies Gibson (1997) acknowledges, however, that immigrant children raised in other settings are not always as fortunate, concluding that:

[…] minority students do better in school when they feel strongly anchored in the identities of their families, communities, and peers and when they feel supported in pursuing a strategy of selective or additive acculturation […] and that conversely, those at
greatest risk of failure in school are those who ‘feel disenfranchised from their culture and experience racial conflict’ (Gibson, 1997, 446, citing Dehyle, 1995, 419).

In seeking to understand the lives of the less fortunate members of the second generation, some scholars have attributed poor academic performances and other anti-academic behaviours to the presence of oppositional identities. These studies typically argue that “youths are not doing well in school because they have adopted an adversarial stance that equates schooling with losing their identity as minorities and ‘acting White’” (Lopez, 2003, 47). Two of the most widely cited works to make this argument are Matute-Bianchi’s (1986) study of Mexican-descent students in a California high school and Waters’ study (1999) of Caribbean teenagers in New York City. Matute-Bianchi (1986) identifies five types of ethnic identities amongst Mexican-descent students: recent-Mexican-immigrants, Mexican-oriented, Mexican-American, the Chicano group and the Cholo group. While students from the first three groups are successful academically, Chicanos can be distinguished from other students by their “level of alienation from the school;” “they may try to do well in school and often express a desire to do well in school, but they behave in ways that promote failure: frequent absences, disruptive behavior, failure to bring books and material to class, failure to do homework” (Matute-Bianchi, 1986, 239-240). Chicano students, who represented almost 50% of Mexican-descent students in the high school, also referred to themselves as ‘homegirls’ and ‘homeboys’ and would often deride their academically successful peers as ‘Wannabees,’ as in ‘wants to be white’ (Matute-Bianchi, 1986, 239-240). Though the smallest of the five sub-groups, the Cholos are “the most distinguishable” and are often perceived by their student peers as “gang oriented or gang sympathizers” and along with the Chicanos, were “held in low esteem” by other Mexican-descent students (Matute-Bianchi, 1986, 240). Chicanos and Cholos are academically unsuccessful because they “resist […] the behaviour and normative patterns required for
scholastic achievement” which they “associate[d] with being white or gringo or quaddie or ‘rich honkie’” (Matute-Bianchi, 1986, 254). From the perspective of these students, “it is not possible or legitimate to participate in both the culture of the dominant group, that is, the school culture, and in the Chicano culture” and as a result, “school policies and practices are viewed as forces to be resisted, subverted, undermined, challenged, and opposed” (Matute-Bianchi, 1986, 255).

Similarly, in her study of children of black West Indian immigrants in New York, Waters (1996, 1999) finds that in many cases “becoming American” for second generation youth can mean positioning themselves for educational failure. Where youth grow up is essential in this process. She observes that West Indian youth living in low income households in inner city neighbourhoods are more likely to adopt an ‘oppositional identity’ as black Americans, while their middle class peers who attend integrated schools in multicultural neighbourhoods are more likely to assume an ethnic identity (Jamaican, Trinidadian and so forth). 31 percent of her interview respondents defined themselves ethnically while 42 percent viewed themselves as black Americans: “they speak black English with their peers, they listen to rap music, and they accept the peer culture of their black American friends” (Waters, 1999, 296). The substance of the black American identity, particularly for young men, is centred on racial solidarity and opposition.

Black American identified youth were more likely than their West Indian peers to report experiences with racism, to consider school a symbol of “white culture and white requirements”

\[112\] Waters (1996, 1999) isolates a third type of identity whereby youth identify non-racially as immigrants. She understands this as a form of transnational identity, signifying an attachment to their family’s homeland.

\[113\] Waters (1996, 1999) finds that, while young women often assume the American label as an assertion of freedom in the face of their parents’ strict restrictions and control, for young men, the identity is formulated as a protective response against “virulent” “overt” and “encompassing” racism, violence, exclusion and police harassment.
and performing well at school as a form of “acting white” (Waters, 1999, 288). These youth are very aware of generalized negative perceptions of ‘blacks’ in America and in many cases, accept the stereotypes which inhere to the ‘black’ label as part of their identity. Waters observes that many of the youth identifying as black American lived and were schooled in racially segregated neighbourhoods in the inner city, and apart from their school teachers, had virtually no contact with ‘whites.’ Waters (1999) concludes that American-identified youth are “in fact assimilating into the American black subculture” in their neighbourhoods, the consequence of which is at least partial adoption of its ‘oppositional’ stance towards “academic achievement, the idea of America, the idea of opportunity, and the wider society,” (307) putting them at odds with their parents’ generation:

[The lives of these youngsters basically lead them to reject the immigrant dream of their parents of individual mobility and to accept their peers’ analysis of the United States as a place with blocked social mobility where they will not be able to move very far. This has the effect of leveling the aspirations of the teens downward (307).]

Although the brown boys have much in common with Matute-Bianchi’s (1986, 253) “Chicanos114, “who do the minimum to get by at school,” and Water’s “Black” West Indians, their anti-academic attitudes and behaviours have not been crafted as strategic forms of opposition or resistance. While the brown boys do often perceive themselves in opposition to their “white” peers at Getting By High School, they do not define their school or education more generally as “white” or as instruments of ethnic and/or racial oppression. On the contrary, the brown boys profess to see and appreciate the value of education but have merely been too “lazy” to capitalize on their opportunities.

114 In fact, the parallels between Matute-Bianchi’s description of the Chicanos and the Cholos and my profiles of the brown boys and the Jacks are striking.
“Willful Laziness”

Kam, the only brown boy to maintain an ‘A’ average throughout high school, distinguishes himself as a “hardworking student, devoted to what he does, always on time, taking notes” and thinks that his teachers appreciate that he is “actually into the work” because as he observes, while some of his friends “have the brains” they are “too lazy” to apply them. In fact, this is precisely Bobbi’s complaint. She teaches Grade 8, 9 and 11 math and relays that “what frustrates me the most is kids who are smart and who can do it, but just won’t put in the effort. They’re generally male Indo-Canadians.” Vice Principal Mak isolates the “lack of motivation to be academically successful” as the biggest problem facing students at Getting By High School. Dealing with unmotivated students is “hard,” he says, but ultimately “it’s a choice [the students] make,” though Mak does not “think they see the long term impacts of those choices.” Mak’s administrative partner, Sanjay also “sees motivation as an issue, especially among boys.” He says that “in this school, we see a large number of them [Indo-Canadian boys] that aren’t that motivated to do well in school.” Sunil’s friend, also a teacher at Getting By High School, is more blunt, often grumbling that “brown kids are so freaking lazy.” According to Sunil, this laziness is the reason why “Indian kids tend to do worse [academically] than the white students:” “the kids who don’t do well are consistently late to class. They all have study blocks but they spend their study blocks in the cafeteria, you know, playing cards. Those kids will never come to homework club even though they’re the kids that we’re targeting.” The brown boys readily admit to “slacking” “chilling” and just being “lazy” and understand that their underachievement throughout much of high school is an immediate consequence of their failure to complete and/or to submit homework assignments on time and their poor study habits. As a consequence, the
brown boys maintain that they have been trying to improve their averages over the past year or
two by being more studious, yet this extra effort usually amounts to little more than attempting
the bare minimum rather than genuinely trying to excel.

Raj for instance says that he does not “do good on tests” and that this is largely the result
of the way he studies. Rather than reviewing his material “every day just a little,” Raj leaves his
studying until the day of the test: “on the last day I try and cram it or something. Like, two
hours before or something. When I get to the test I don’t really remember.” Mani’s grades
improved this year because he tried more, he “stayed on track and like didn’t hand anything in
late.” In other years, however, he explains that “I tended to hand something in late and then on
my next assignment I’d do the same thing, so I kind of got into the habit.” When I asked him
why he handed in assignments late, he offers that “It was mostly I was just lazy […] Um I’d be
out doing things like playing basketball with friends more than staying home and studying.”

Ryan is sure that he could have “done better” if he had exerted more effort but admits that “like
for a few years I didn’t push myself, like Grades 8, 9 and 10. Just like, played for the basketball
team…” If he could go back in time and improve his grades, he says “I would just study harder.
Spend more time studying because I never used to study, do my homework or look at the stuff.”
Whereas in the past Kris, like Ryan, “never used to do homework,” “was slacking off like a lot”
and “always chilling” with his friends, he now makes a point of finishing his homework before
going out to “chill or do whatever.” Kris’s grades have improved as a result of this change,
leading him to maintain that doing well in school is a matter of “discipline.” Similarly, though
Sunny “never used to like do homework” he now studies “an hour like every day” and he credits
his new “routine” with his higher grades. Ravinder began to “see things differently in Grade 12”
and started attending his classes, doing homework and studying for tests, all of which he says he
never did in the past. Sam recognizes, while chuckling quietly, that “with more studying” he “could have done better” but like the other brown boys, he “got a little lazy” and still tends to “get lazy sometimes” preferring to watch television instead of studying. Tim initially blames his grades on the fact that his teachers “can’t really teach properly,” complaining that “like, I’m here every single day but yet my grades aren’t still up. Right?” but then immediately concedes that this may also be because he is “not putting in the effort” that “like it’s just [his] fault.” Later, he shares that he spends an hour each night studying but then laughs as he qualifies, “well not every night. Like whenever there’s like a quiz or something.” Even those brown boys who have earned above average grades and who are on the honour roll maintain that they have not tried very hard in their studies.

When I asked these higher achieving brown boys about how much time they spent on homework, Sajjan told me that he did “not really” do a lot of homework. When I asked him if this was because the homework was easy, he said “I don’t know. I just finish it” and when I asked him if he was trying as hard as he could in school, he responded with an emphatic “nooooo.” Though Josh is satisfied with his academic performance, like Sajjan, he has not worked at his full capacity, explaining that:

I could have tried a lot harder in school. Sometimes I feel like class is too easy or whatever. And like, I just like, I don’t know, slack off or something. In terms of homework, he says, “I usually get it done quickly. Like sometimes I’ll either rush through it or I’ll have it done in class or whatever or if I can I will outsmart the teacher. Like she’ll say the answers and I’ll write them down right away in the beginning of class sometimes.

He is “surprised” that he’s done so well given that he “just slacks” and attributes his relative success to luck, that he just “seems to get it:” “like once I hear it, I get it.” Apart from last year’s upset, when he failed two courses, Harjeet is usually on the honour roll. He laughs at the fact
that he has earned ‘As’ and ‘Bs’ without ever trying. He spends “like fifteen minutes” on
homework a day “and not even that sometimes” often he just “crams quickly before a test.”
Even Davinder, the only brown boy to be off to university next year, did not try during the early
years of high school, spending the majority of his time playing basketball and hanging out with
older kids. The brown boys recognize that they could and should have put more effort into their
studies and are quite aware that their lack of effort is most likely the reason behind their average
grades and yet, despite this knowledge, most of the brown boys still do not work at full capacity
or strive for greater academic success. They knowingly and deliberately do not try as hard as
they can or as Lopez (2003) observes of the second generation Caribbean men in her study, they
engage in “willful laziness.”

This laziness stands in stark contrast to the way in which the brown boys approach their
athletic pursuits. In this non-academic realm, the boys are hardworking, driven and disciplined.
Over the past six years, Sunny has spent the majority of his spare time playing and practicing
football for school and league teams and would like to play in college and maybe even
professionally. Sajjan is similarly dedicated to soccer and describes it as a “big part” of his
entire family’s life. Sajjan works out with weights for an hour or so and plays soccer or trains
for another couple of hours before he heads home at the end of the school day. He also serves as
a volunteer coach for a local under 6 girls’ team two mornings a week. Harjeet is also passionate
about soccer and plays at least 5 times a week with his school team and his league team and until
a recent injury also practiced and competed in karate.

For several of the other brown boys, basketball is the sport of choice. Their coach, Peter,
teaches his players that “family comes first, school comes second, basketball comes third,” and
insists to them that “it has to be in that order or you don’t play.” Yet for several of the brown
boys, basketball has become not only the most engaging aspect of their high school experiences but the major priority in their lives. Raj impresses the importance of basketball quite simply, describing it as the only sport that he’s “really good at” and the only thing that he’s “really interested in.” Basketball is a “big element” in Tim’s life and the major reason why he likes attending school at Getting By High School. While other local high schools only permit their basketball team to train during the season, here they are allowed to practice as a team all year and “develop every single day.” Davinder avers, “I honestly care about basketball and school more than anything” and yet, while his interest in school sets him apart from the other brown boys, as with many of his peers, basketball still comes first. The brown boys won the provincial championship in Grade 9, and in the opinion of their coach, this success has taught them “what it takes to get to the next level” so that when he instructs the brown boys that, “[y]ou’re not spending enough time in the gym shooting. You’re not strong enough. You’re not fast enough. You’re not spending enough time [,]” he says that they understand and practice harder. It is because of this understanding, of what success in basketball requires, that Ryan recently stopped playing after his 5 years on the team and why Sam, who just sustained serious injuries, doubts whether he can get back into his former shape to resume his position on the team. In fact, though Kam has always played soccer, it is in appreciation of the work required for basketball that he did not continue with the team after Grade 8; he did not think he could be “100 percent towards basketball.”

While the brown boys demonstrate that they can be enthusiastic and motivated to achieve athletically, they do not apply the same winning logic or strategies to their school work or to other intellectual or artistic pursuits. Once the brown boys have worked out, played their games and finished practicing, they switch off. Apart from their involvement in sports, the brown boys
are disengaged from their school and their communities. Tim serves on student council but he is the only brown boy to mention being a part of any form of extracurricular club, either in or outside of school. For instance, though all of the brown boys enjoy listening to various types of music, none of them play an instrument or participate in dance, singing or music lessons. Rather the administrators observe that at Getting By High School, it is the “white” students who display interest in the arts and take part in drama and band. In addition, though many of the brown boys can speak Punjabi, none of them mention attending formal language classes. They appear to engage in no extracurricular activities, either as a member of a group or as an individual, which are focused on intellectual stimulation and/or academic advancement such as chess, math, debating, or even reading. In fact, the brown boys do not like reading. Though Sajjan reads sports magazines, Kam reads his parents’ daily newspaper and Harjeet enjoys the occasional “scary” novel, the brown boys try to avoid reading, especially during their leisure time. Mohan goes so far as to say he “hates reading” because teachers have made him do it but even Davinder, who is university bound, says that he “can’t sit down and read a book,” as he deems it to be “too stationary” and not engaging enough. Rather than dedicating their free time to improving their grades or to acquiring additional skills, the brown boys prefer to engage in more relaxing pursuits such as chatting with friends on-line, playing video games, watching television or movies, hanging out with their friends and girlfriends, napping and just “chilling.”

Notwithstanding their athletic commitments, the brown boys do have time to direct to academic pursuits.

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115 In contrast, much popular and academic attention has been given to the issues of “hyper parenting” and the “overscheduling” of middle class children (Rosenfeld and Wise, 2000) or to what Lareau (2003) has termed their “concerted cultivation” whereby the spare time of children is highly regulated and structure as they are enrolled by their parents in a seemingly endless array of extracurricular activities. Similarly, Zhou and Kim (2006) attribute the overachievement of Korean and Chinese young people to their enrolment in afterschool “cram schools,” which offer supplementary education and language programmes to immigrant children.
or intellectual pursuits but as Sunil notes, “they’re just not being productive” with this time and the educators at Getting By High School continue to wonder why.

In addition to coaching, Peter teaches science and physical education. He asks his students why they don’t study all the time. Their responses he says are largely “a ton of excuses not to study” such as “doing something else” or “the hockey game was on.” He has concluded that:

[s]ome years you get kids that get it. And some years you get kids that don’t get it. I mean you can talk to them and talk to them and talk to them about, ‘okay, you’re not studying enough […] if you don’t know how to study, ask. You know, if you have questions ask.’ But that’s like asking too much from some of these kids. ‘Cause they just don’t get it or they just don’t want to [get it].

Steve, Surrey school district’s multicultural liaison, suspects that the high risk Indo-Canadian boys with whom he works probably do not spend much time on their studies because they “spend more time engaging in at-risk activities than they do taking education seriously.” He also encounters many young Indo-Canadian men who “believe they’ll take over their father’s businesses in trucking, construction, whatever it is. So they believe that there are built-in jobs waiting for them when they graduate high school, so there isn’t really a strong need for them [to work at school].” Vice Principal Mak also traces the boys’ laziness back to their “family influences,” reasoning that some Indo-Canadian young men “are very happy just coming to school and passing because they know they’ve got a job with the family business set up, ready to go.” Vice Principal Sanjay similarly maintains that “a lot of students here seem to think that they can follow in the footsteps of their parents and the businesses there.” If the brown boys are hoping to inherit family businesses or money, they did not share this information with me. Even so, it is unlikely that the brown boys could rely on such a strategy given that only a few of their fathers own companies; most of the boys’ fathers are employed in blue collar positions.
Alternatively, Lopez (2003, 42-44) finds that the young Dominican, West Indian and Haitian men in her sample “were often underchallenged in their classes” and were “simply bored.” She concludes that “their willful laziness” is a “response to the dumb downed classes” and the “low-curriculum tracks” to which the young men are relegated. She also proposes that:

[y]oung men from racially stigmatized groups may place more emphasis on being good at sports and games because curriculum tracking and poor preparation in local high schools have left them with many doubts about their academic potential (Lopez, 2003, 48).

While some of the higher achieving brown boys mention that they have found some of their classes “easy,” boredom at school and a lack of intellectual stimulation are not themes that were regularly articulated by the brown boys nor were doubts about their academic abilities. Quite the contrary, many of the brown boys appear confident, even arrogant about their abilities. Though they have adopted a similar approach to their high school studies as Lopez’s young Caribbean men, the brown boys’ academic lassitude is not similarly motivated. The brown boys’ laziness is an extension of a more general sense of apathy directed towards education and their futures and a complacent attitude with respect to their educational achievements.

**Apathy and Complacency**

The brown boys have not tried to succeed academically because it has held no interest for them. They have spent most of their days in high school simply not caring about their academic performances and until their senior years, most of the brown boys have not appreciated the importance of trying. Jon tells a typical story:

Before like Grade 8 to 10, I was just like, whatever. I didn’t even try in school. But then Grade 11 and 12 I started trying […] to bring my marks above 80 percent. And they were just like a little bit above 60 percent in Grade 8 to 10.

Heather: So what was going on in those grades that you didn’t really do work?
Jon: Like, I guess I was just lazy. I just didn’t want to do anything really.

Heather: What did you do with your spare time?

Jon: Did some stuff at home. I don’t know.

Heather: If you could go back to Grade 9 or 10, would you do anything differently? Would you study harder?

Jon: No. Probably the same because I know those marks don’t really count.

Before this year, Ravinder skipped classes and did not study or complete his homework because he “just didn’t feel like it.” He explains that the idea of putting effort into his school work, “just never came to me, never occurred.” He elaborates that: “I just didn’t care. I don’t know [why]. I just didn’t really care. Like school didn’t really matter to me back then.” Though his education is now one of his major priorities, Davinder recalls having similar feelings about school in Grades 8 and 9 when he says that:

I played basketball, but never did homework; hung out with older kids […] I just didn’t care about school. That was the one thing. I did not care about school. I knew I wanted to be successful in life but school just wasn’t in my zone at all.

However, in Grade 10, once his older brother stopped using drugs and began caring for him at home, Davinder realized that being “one of those little gangster kids” was not “the road” for him. He recounts that: “after I made up my mind that I wanted to be successful and great, I started caring about education and right when I decided that I wanted to really interact with school and really be a part of it and learn - I changed.” Most of the brown boys, however, have not experienced this sort of shift in consciousness whereby they have come to appreciate the value of scholarly diligence and of education more generally.
While several of the brown boys purport to have undergone transformations such as Davinder’s or to have regrets about their academic performances, and to be more academically motivated as a result, these assertions come across as half-hearted, insipid and empty. Despite Mani’s “wish” to have performed “better” in high school, when asked what, if anything, he would change about himself he answers: “Be smarter in the things I’ve done like saving money,” not as it turns out, studying any harder. Kris’ claim to have taken to heart the advice of his older brothers to “get disciplined” and to “focus more on academics” is belied by his description of his daily afternoon and weekend routines which find him “chilling,” watching t.v. and doing “some homework” before “calling up a buddy to just hang out and play a video game” until they are able to go out; on a typical weekend he will often “just sit at home and watch t.v.” Nevertheless he imagines next year to be different because he’s “planning to be more serious” in college yet he still chuckles, as he muses, “I hope that works out.” When I ask what would prevent him from taking college seriously, he responds:

I don’t know. You have more freedom I guess when you’re in college. And hopefully I’ll have my own car and it’s different when you’re driving your parents’ car than when you have your own car. So hopefully I don’t go out as often and party.

Mohan explains that his new found diligence is related to the fact that he is now in Grade 12: “I don’t know. It’s because you’re getting older. You’ve got to take more responsibility.” Ravinder similarly expresses that he’s “changed his ways” and is paying greater attention to his studies because “I don’t know. It’s just, it’s Grade 12. It’s like when you go to Grade 12 things like change. Like, you see everything differently […] like, having high grades will put me in front of other students when I apply for college and stuff.” Their behaviour however is inconsistent with their claims to greater seriousness. Mohan was sent home from school immediately following our interview for returning to school after lunch break “smelling like
weed” and Ravinder was suspended for five days in the fall of this year for smoking weed and cutting classes. Harjeet seems similarly conflicted. Despite his regrets that he did not “put more effort into [his studies],” and his realization that rather than “putting in effort in only when it counts,” he should have “decided to try” and “put effort in all the time,” he has not modified his approach. Since being accepted to a college, he’s “like whatever. I’ll just go to college and then start trying there.” When I ask what he will do differently to make sure that he stays focused in college, he explains:

Well I don’t think it’s staying focused. I know I could stay focused. It’s just that when it counts, I know I’m going to be 100% there and ready for it. Instead of right now where like nothing counts for me because I’ve already got accepted. So it doesn’t really matter what happens now. So like, only try when it counts.

Sajjan ascribes to a similar philosophy; he would try “if he needed to” but so far he has “known all the stuff already” so has not needed to work any harder. Ryan does think he would have benefited from being “more focused on school” because it “gets you places, like you can go to UBC if you’re focused and stuff and get good grades.” His explanation, however, does not seem motivated by true conviction, rather he sounds as if he’s paraphrasing a line from one of his parents’ lectures, perhaps one of the ones that he claims he “never paid attention to.” As such, though several of the brown boys maintain that they have come to value hard work, these contentions are largely hollow, contravened by other parts of their narratives.

Although most of the brown boys insist that they could have studied harder or wish they had put in more effort, many of them are still pleased with their achievements – even though their results are not strong enough to compete for university admissions. Sam, for instance, maintains that a “C, C plus is good,” while Sunny judges his “average” grades as “good.” Kris is “happy” with how he has performed, even though his grades are too low for UBC and Harjeet
still reports that his grades are “good” despite the fact that he failed two courses. The brown boys are not striving for academic excellence; in fact, according to Sunil, “67% is what they are striving for. Like a C+.” Linda has observed that in her humanities classes there are boys who are “happy to be you know sliding along” – “not preparing for tests, you know and then they think it’s a big joke. ‘Oh I didn’t even study’ […] ‘Oh, I got 55%! That’s fine. I’m cool. I’m fine.’” As a guidance counselor Julie has also encountered this attitude where “cruisin’ is good, you know, the least amount of energy, the least amount of effort…don’t want to work.” Bobbi teaches students in her math class who tell her that they did not complete their homework because “‘they don’t really need to. I’m fine.’” As she explains, “they’re just fine with a minimum grade. They don’t really have that motivation to get an A or B because they don’t have that motivation to go into post-secondary.” Vice Principal Sanjay concludes that many of the Indo-Canadian boys just seem “happy to get by,” and that relative to the “white” students “there might be a little bit more focus on just getting by and having fun” than “being driven to do well.” For the most part, the brown boys prefer to put in the least amount of effort possible, even if this means receiving lower grades.

The brown boys’ disinterest in academic achievement is exacerbated by their lack of interest in academic classes or subject matter. As Davinder became engaged with school, he developed interests in classes other than physical education. When I inquire about his favourite class, he gushes:

I love biology. The study of human life is awesome. History’s great. I just, learning about this stuff is crazy. How back in the day it was so different. So biology, history and I love any physical activity, so you know, physical education has been awesome.

His “brown” peers, however, have failed to cultivate any interests beyond athletics such that academic subjects and classes hold very little appeal for them. Apart from physical education,
very few of the brown boys claim to like any of their classes and in these instances, their interest is based less on the subject matter than it is on the difficulty of the class and/or who else is in it. Kris, for instance, divulges that he’s “really into accounting and math” but tells me, “I just find it easy. I don’t know what I like about it, it just comes to me.” Ravinder also purports to be “good at” and to “enjoy like math and stuff like that,” while Sam says that he enjoyed English because “it was pretty fun doing group activities.” While Rob likes the practical aspects of the business co-op class and Jon likes the fact that they have had no homework, Sajjan likes his business co-op class because all of his friends are in it and business related material is “fun.” The brown boys’ disinterest in academics at the high school level is unsurprisingly translating into careless plans for their post secondary futures.

While Davinder’s decision to study physiotherapy at university is motivated by his interests in biology and athletics, to “know everything about the body [and] how to recover,” most of the brown boys have no scholarly interests and as such are largely indifferent about where they apply for their postsecondary educations and have only a vague sense of what they would like to study. As Raj considers college, he is realizing that his singular focus on basketball has left him directionless:

Raj: Well, obviously I want to go on but I don’t really know what I want to do. So I think I’m going to take first semester off and then work, and then probably go to [a local technical college].

Heather: Okay, why there?

Raj: It’s like they have a lot of trade courses, and like, business and….

Heather: Are you interested in a trade?
Raj: Yeah.

Heather: Oh yeah. What kind of trade?

Raj: I’m not sure, like, about the trades or something, like, I’m not really sure what I want to do still…

Heather: Would you like to continue playing basketball?

Raj: I would but like, if I do play, it would be somewhere, like quality. And the way I see it, playing like, five years here, it’s not really going to get you [anywhere], so like, I should just stop and focus on school, and like become something.

Heather: Are you worried about what’s going to happen next year?

Raj: Well, yeah, obviously I do think about it, like that I really don’t know what I want to do, cuz when you’re young, I just wanted to be an athlete right? But then when you get older you start to realize, it might not happen. But right now, I’m just - I don’t know what I’m going to do.

Though Raj understands that basketball most likely represents a ‘dead end,’ the sport continues to influence him, as he expresses more concern over the quality of the institution where he might hypothetically play basketball than he is with where he is applying to study. Sunny is also finding it hard to let go of his athletic dreams. He is planning on applying soon to a local college for a business course and thinks about “maybe opening up a business” or being an accountant, yet playing professional football is still what he would really like to do. Tim thinks that he “needs university for a good job” in “either business or social work,” though, in part because his grades have restricted his options, is undiscriminating about which school he ends up attending:

Heather: What university would you like to go to?

Tim: Any university?
Heather: Any of them that take you?

Tim: Yeah.

Tim: [...] I’ll probably try to go to [university in Manitoba].

Heather: Why in Manitoba?

Tim: Because UBC is asking for like 89% average [on] the provincials. And like, university in Manitoba, they’re asking for like 70%.

Heather: So do you think you can get an 89?

Tim: Well it’s too hard now.

Heather: Why?

Tim: Because I have a 59% in chemistry. Even if I get 100% [for the remainder of the course], I still won’t get 89% overall.

[...]

Heather: Do you think it’s realistic for you to get straight As?

Tim: I guess so but like, it’s pretty hard though at the same time. So I guess I’m trying to just go for Bs right now. Just to get into like university in Manitoba. Like, the big thing for [my parents] is that I can get into university and I can continue my education. So that’s the main thing. [My parents] are like, we’re never going to care how you get there as long as you get there.

Sajjan was “going to go to SFU [Simon Fraser University]” but since one of his teachers explained that “you can still get the same education in colleges,” he is considering “just going to a college or something.” At the time of our interview, he had applied to College A, “because it’s close to home.” At the time of our interview, however, he was not sure if he had been accepted though he had received “a lot of letters” from them. He was fairly certain that they still needed to see his final transcript before it was “official.” Though Rob is firm that he wants to get an
education, he still lacks direction. Next year, he is most likely “gonna take the first semester off and just like work or something” and then apply to a technical college for a trade of some sort. Ravinder also plans on working until next January and then hopefully starting at College A like Sam and Sajjan. He has still to apply but is considering “the law field. Like the RCMP. Stuff like that.” Mohan is also considering becoming either a sheriff or a policeman. He thinks he’ll start by studying criminology at a local college but then transfer to university. He does not want to go immediately to university because “a lot of people have done it, but they find it so hard.” Harjeet “should have gone to SFU straight but now is going to College A for a year and then transferring over.” Though he has wanted to become a lawyer since kindergarten after watching the film *A Few Good Men*, he “didn’t try properly” last year and is now settling for college.

Sunil, the school’s career facilitator, estimates that around 25% of Getting By High School’s graduating class applies to college, another quarter apply to university and the remaining 50% enter a “holding pattern” after they graduate. The students left in the holding pattern often attempt to upgrade their high school grades, often in night school and typically find work in local retail stores. The students who apply to university, Sunil describes as the “keeners,” “the ones who come in once a week to talk to me.” Last academic year, 50 of the 280 graduating students proceeded immediately to university; 16 were accepted to UBC, 11 of them with entrance scholarships. He says that he knows “exactly who” the parents of this group of high achieving students are because they have “been involved” with their children’s educational lives since they were in Grade 8. Sunil continues that community junior colleges seem to be the route for a lot of kids and College A is a particularly popular destination, so popular in fact that Sunil describes it as an extension of Getting By High School “just at a higher level.” Mary, in the guidance department, suggests that this is exactly College A’s appeal: “it’s close, it’s safe
[and] they may know a lot of people going there.” The “danger” according to Sunil, however, is that the students go off to college but “still don’t do their work.” He maintains that “the problem is that College A will accept a mediocre kid,” so that “we [Getting By High School] have a lot of kids bombing out of College A or kids at College A after four years not any closer to a diploma let alone a degree.” Sunil suggests that if College A “started having strong admission averages maybe you’d see kids striving for higher grades if they knew they couldn’t get into College A any more” and fewer academically weak students “saying ‘oh, well go to College A and then decide […]”

In terms of their proposed programmes of study at college, Mary, a guidance counselor, observes that:

in the last few years a lot of [Indo-Canadian students] are doing criminology […] a lot [her emphasis] of kids from Getting By High School […] you know, they talk about wanting to work at a border or work in corrections or parole or things like this, or maybe getting into policing […] Or, say business. They just go into business. You know, you’re not seeing so many of the kids […] thinking ‘Oh, I’d like to get an Arts degree,’ and, you know, ‘I’m interested in English.’ A lot of them are going into criminology at College A or College B, or ‘I’m going into business.

Mary suspects that many Indo-Canadian students lean towards these fields of study because they are “much more career focused,” “not an abstract” “scary kind of thing” like liberal arts and as such, are more in line with their parental expectations. According to Mary, for many Indo-Canadian parents and their children, education is “not the purpose” of attending post-secondary institutions, “it’s the career that rolls out at the end” which matters most. Not surprisingly, particularly given that I interviewed students enrolled in Getting By High School’s business class, many of the brown boys indicated that they planned to study business and/or accounting in college. These young men are not so much interested in specific careers in business such as
financial advising, banking and so forth, as they are in the prospect of owning their own enterprises and being their own bosses. Ryan communicates this interest explicitly:

Heather: For how long have you wanted to do business?

Ryan: Since Grade 10.

Heather: Why?

Ryan: Just, I want to own something, like, have my own company and stuff.

Heather: Do you have any idea of what kind of company?

Ryan: Like hopefully a nightclub or like a bar and grill.

Ryan is planning on taking the first semester to work and attending College A for business entrepreneurship in January. Mani would also like to open his own business: a car customizing shop. He got the idea from his older sister; she considered “getting into it” and is always getting her cars customized with new rims, new stereos and new engines. But Mani “still has to look into schools,” and is not really sure of the courses he would need but figures that he would have “to do like a mechanic’s course and maybe a business course.” He knows “a lot of things [about cars] but not like that much detail,” though he hopes to pick more up by hanging out at a shop run by a couple of family friends. Sam has also applied to College A. Though initially he tells me that “Uh…I’m not quite sure what I’m going to do yet. So I’m just going to go to college and take general studies. I’ll just like take two courses and think about what I’m going to do,” he later is adamant that he is “going to do business.” When I ask him about the appeal of studying business, he replies: “I just want to open my own thing up,” more specifically, Sam wants to open his own limousine company or “something like that” because “you get ties with like clubs
and like famous people.” He boasts: “I’ve thought of everything already” and “I can make it happen.” When I ask him why he is so sure, he is firm: “I just can. Because I had a dream.” Though Tim is still considering social work because he likes “helping out younger kids”, he is attracted to business because he likes the idea of “making your own business and trying to make it like up there, like Donald Trump type of thing” and his cousin is also studying marketing so they could “team up or something.” Kam also relishes the idea of being “how Donald Trump is:” “all over the place” and “known in the community.” Before studying for a financial management diploma at a local technical college, he wants to “gain experience in the business field” by working at a bank. His dad wants him to become “just a chartered accountant” and is not happy that he’s “wasting a year” working but Kam does not want to “sit in an office for the rest of his life” and although his grades are good, he views schooling as something to “make his parents happy.” Kam feels that it is more important to establish business contacts by working in “a field where you know you’re doing business with people. Like in a bank you’re dealing with transactions every day, so that kind of thing […] and then start investing.” He might consider an accounting degree “if it comes down to that.”

Jon, Sajjan and Kris all plan on pursuing accounting. Kris is applying to College A and a technical college because he is certain he “won’t make it straight to UBC” because of his low science grade. Some of his friends tried to persuade him to join them in taking a year off but Kris is sure that “if I took the year off I’m not going to want to go back.” Though last year he wanted to become a physiotherapist, Sajjan is now “going into business to become an accountant.” He doesn’t know why only that “it seems fun. Because when I do it [accounting in business class] it just seems fun.” If Jon is accepted to College A he will “probably go there for like some accounting courses.” I ask him if he became interested in accounting in the business
class but he tells me “No. I don’t know. Just because I have a lot of cousins that are like CAs and CGAs right?” He also figures that he could get a job with his father’s accountant because they do so much business together. Based on their explanations it is difficult to determine whether or not these young men genuinely aspire to be accountants or if their plans have been recently contrived in order to placate a prying interviewer, their worried parents or questioning teachers; perhaps it is part of their standard script which is delivered to all authority figures.

At the time of our interviews, the brown boys were a few months away from graduating high school and yet, most had conducted little to no research on their post-secondary options and offerings and many of them had only recently or not yet applied to colleges, even though they hoped to be enrolled some time in the following year. In addition, though several of the brown boys, for instance, Kris, Harjeet, Sajjan and Tim, had considered attending universities, they had only recently come to accept that their grades are simply too low for university admission. The brown boys, though willfully lazy, have been unwilling to consider the consequences of their apathy and have postponed thinking about the next stage of their lives until the last possible moment. As Sunil observes, many of the Indo-Canadian young men he counsels at Getting By High School are not considering “the big picture.” Unlike the white students he has taught who “seem to know that they’re going to have to work to get somewhere,” the “brown kids, especially the boys, aren’t worried about the future” and this affects the attitudes that they bring to school and their motivation levels. Based on his experiences teaching and counseling Sunil maintains that:

It is always the girls that are more motivated. And a lot of the white girls are even more motivated than that. They know exactly what they need to do to get the job done. And the Indian kids, especially the boys, just seem to not worry. ‘Oh yeah, that’s fine. Whatever’ And you know, just, they aren’t worried about the future […]
[The Indian boys] don’t have an idea at all. I mean they haven’t applied to colleges, a lot of kids. And they haven’t made that step and they’re just thinking that it will work out for them.

By way of example, Sunil shares:

[w]e have two boys that want to be nurses. Well, they haven’t passed their biology or chemistry, either one of the courses so […] I’ve let them know that you can’t be a nurse. ‘Well what are we going to do?’ I don’t know […] Unfortunately your grades aren’t high enough for you to get into a trades program. You know you’re going to have to figure it out and it’s that not thinking about it until it’s too late seems to be the general attitude.

Mary reiterates that because many of the boys have been reluctant to consider the consequences of their laziness, they “get a rude awakening when they apply for university and realize that they’re not at that level” and so “a lot apply to college and go there not really knowing what they want to do.” While Julie, also a guidance counselor, was initially “shocked” by the “lack of drive and lack of desire and apathy” she encountered when she first started at Getting By High School, she now sees a divide between those students from Indian families that are “educated and motivated and pushing school, and aiming for UBC” and “the other folks who are not aiming for anything,” not working towards “going somewhere and doing something.” Linda, the school’s Head of Humanities, also finds that many of her Indo-Canadian Grade 12 students appear not to have given much thought to their lives after high school and suggests that they seem less “mature” than their white peers in this regard. Kam, agrees that many of his brown friends “think it’s the age to have fun” and not the “age to plan your future” and thinks that he’s the “only one to actually realize that,” that it is time to start “building a future.”

Despite their uncertainty and lack of direction, several of the brown boys express no anxiety about the future. For instance, even though Sunny has not decided what college he wants to attend or what he will study, and still hopes to be playing football somewhere in the United States in 10 years time, he tells me that he has no worries or concerns. While Jon acknowledges
that college “will probably be hard and stuff,” he’s still “not too worried” about it. Davinder is not worried about his own future, reasoning that “I know what I want, I see my goal and I’m just going out there to get it now,” but is anxious for his friends who are “not focused on school” and don’t “have their minds set.” Similarly, Kam is not worried about how he will do in school or making it as a business man, but fears that he will lose touch with his friends. He explains: “I know that after I graduate it’s going to be hard because I’m going to be focusing on work kind of thing, and they’re going to be partying […] I just don’t know what it’s going to be like after. Cuz every morning before I come to school, I see everyone, hang out with everyone. And that’s not going to happen after I graduate.” Others express some concerns but seem unable to act on them. For instance, though Mani confides: “Well like I haven’t looked into school yet so I’m worried about that, kind of. And I don’t really know what, what kind of courses I need. So there’s that […]” When I ask him if he has sought out guidance, he tells me “Um, I haven’t yet. I’m planning on though maybe seeing a counselor.” Kris admits that he’s worried about “after high school and how hard it’s going to be like to show up and like actually do all the work” and while he’s “planning to be more serious,” he views his success in this regard as a matter of fate or serendipity rather than his own efforts, as he immediately qualifies, “I hope [my emphasis] that works out.” Though Rob would like to see himself “successful” in 10 to 15 years time, he “really doesn’t know” what form that success will take though; he “guesses” that it means being “like financially secure” and “maybe having a wife or family or something.” He is still uncertain about “where I’m gonna end up” and feels like he doesn’t know what he will do in terms of “school and stuff” but reassures himself that “a lot of people are like that right?” Rob, like several of his brown peers is putting off worrying about his future for several more months by deferring their college applications and taking time off to “just chill” or work. While Ravinder
has also decided to defer college enrollment, and by extension, thinking about his future, he has trouble even conceptualizing ‘the future:’

Heather: Are you worried about next year?

Ravinder: No.

Heather: Do you think it will go okay?

Ravinder: Well I’m not sure about that.

Heather: But you’re not worried?

Ravinder: No. Not yet.

Heather: When do you think you’ll start getting worried?

Ravinder: When I start going to school.

Heather: Okay. So in January?

Ravinder: Yeah.

Heather: Do you think you’re going to be ready?

Ravinder: Yeah. I’ll have to be.

[…]

Heather: Where do you see yourself in 10 to 15 years?

Ravinder: To tell you the truth, I see myself nowhere. Like, I can’t even picture 10 years from now. Like that’s pretty far.
In contrast, it is precisely because Sam worries about his future that he tries not to think about it; like Kris, he prefers to leave this matter to destiny:

Heather: Do you have any worries or concerns right now? Like are you worried about next year?

Sam: No.

Heather: No?

Sam: I don’t know. I don’t like thinking ahead that much.

Heather: Why not?

Sam: Not too much. I don’t know. Just stress.

Heather: It stresses you?

Sam: I don’t know. I don’t like stressing over anything.

Heather: Okay. And you think that thinking about the future will stress you?

Sam: Yeah.

Heather: Why?

Sam: I just don’t want to think ahead.

Heather: Have you always been like that?

Sam: Well I started feeling…After I watched that movie, The Secret.

Heather: Okay. What’s that about?
Sam: Just about feelings and everything. Like how the universe works and I don’t know. I believe in the law of attraction and how your feelings and stuff in the universe come back. If you think negative, negative things will happen […] Think positive, positive things will happen.

A couple of weeks before our interview, Sam was assaulted and sustained serious injuries. He reflects that, prior to his accident, he told friends that, “something’s going to happen to me, man. Because I used to have, I remember I had a couple of dreams. I died in my dreams. Or something bad happened to me. I always felt that something was going to happen to me.” Since he was attacked he has had no such dreams, leading him to conclude that “I guess it’s over with now. Right? I don’t think there’s any more.”

Concluding Remarks

The brown boys have neither failed out of high school nor have they excelled; with a few exceptions, their grades are low to average. These mediocre performances are the direct result of the brown boy’s willfully lazy approach to academics. Being brown has meant the adoption of an anti-academic ethos such that playing sports, ‘chilling’ and socializing have taken priority over, and have often come at the expense of, attending classes, completing assignments and studying for tests. Yet, the brown boys are largely satisfied with their (lack of) educational achievements, are disinterested in academic pursuits and are for the most part not worried for their futures. Most of them are happy to have just gotten by. If their plans for the following year come to fruition, most will have enrolled in a local college and one will have headed to university in Manitoba. With such mediocre high school results, local college is the only route for many of these young men, all of whom stated that they wanted to pursue post secondary educations. While it remains to be seen what these young men will achieve after high school graduation, Sunil fears that “they’re digging themselves a grave if they don’t get out of this
mediocrity and they don’t go beyond and don’t get out of this rut.” Moving beyond mediocrity requires that the brown boys stop getting by and start trying yet this may require them to re-negotiate the meaning of brownness or to craft a new identity – one which supports academic and mainstream success.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

Based on the educational data obtained from B.C.’s Ministry of Education it is apparent that Punjabi students enrolled in Greater Vancouver’s public secondary schools are no more at risk of dropping out or failing out of high school than their native English, Chinese or Other language speaking peers. In fact, almost all of the young Punjabi men and women in my sample acquired a high school diploma or school leaving certificate within 6 years of beginning high school. While this finding is positive when considered in relation to other Canadian studies which have reported high drop out rates for ESL and immigrant students, and given that high school completion is an obvious prerequisite for future educational success, the optimism which this finding suggests is tempered by the Punjabi students’ grade point averages. Relative to their peers in Greater Vancouver, a larger proportion of Punjabi students are graduating with grade point averages in the C range, the lower end of the grading continuum, and are failing to meet provincial expectations in the core areas of numeracy, reading comprehension and writing. While this finding applies to Punjabi students of both genders, it is especially true for Punjabi young men whose grades though passable are far from remarkable. This general trend was validated by the experiences of the young men I interviewed at Getting By High School who, with few exceptions, had achieved poor to average grades and were graduating with mediocre grade point averages.

These young men recognize and readily admit that their uninspired academic performances are the result of a high school career spent “cruising” through their classes and being “lazy” rather than studying and doing their homework. While most of them expressed a
basic belief in the value of education as a means for upward mobility, their appreciation did not translate into academic diligence or discipline. Most of these young men elected to be academically disengaged and inattentive; though they had the time to dedicate to their schooling, they preferred to spend it pursuing non-academic interests, most notably sports. They were quite willing to invest hours into team practices, competitions and “working out” but were unwilling to invest the commensurate amount of time, effort or discipline into their school work. At the time of our interviews, mere months before their high school graduation ceremony, many of the brown boys were experiencing the consequences of their “willful laziness,” as they realized that their grades were too low for admission into local universities and that by not trying they had limited their postsecondary opportunities to a short list of local colleges. Nonetheless, for the most part, the brown boys did not regret having taken such an undisciplined approach to their high school educations nor were they dissatisfied with their grades, reflective of their overall apathetic and complacent outlook towards education and their futures.

While scholars have traced the educational failure of some members of America’s new second generation to their assimilation into native underclass populations and their attendant adoption of oppositional identities, for the young men I interviewed, being “brown” is not about racial opposition. While the brown boys perceive themselves as being different from, and in some instances opposed to their “white” peers, they do not characterize Getting By High School as a “white” institution nor do they understand education as a tool of “white” oppression. Unlike the racialized youth examined in other studies (Matute Biachi, 1986; Waters, 1994, 1996), by failing to try, the brown boys are not seeking to resist a broader institutionalized system of racism and/or discrimination; rather, their lack of school effort and their anti-academic behaviours, such as failing to complete homework or study for exams, are symptomatic of their
underlying apathy - the fact that school, and academics more generally, hold very little interest for them.

The brown boys have failed to develop pursuits or passions beyond athletics. With few exceptions, they communicated no intellectual interest in their course work or school subjects; in cases where the boys did express fondness for a class it was often for non-academic reasons: their friends were also in it, the material was “easy” or the teacher was “nice.” In addition, apart from their commitments to their sports teams, most of the brown boys were uninvolved in the life of their school or their community; they did not participate in any other clubs, committees, or groups nor did they pursue any individual interests for instance in music, dance or theater. As a result, while these young men seemed intent on attending college, their plans for their postsecondary educations were not directed by academic or intellectual interests and thus amounted to little more than vague musings. For instance, while several of the young men hoped to be attending college in a matter of months, they had not yet applied to any postsecondary institutions nor had they decided what they wanted to study. Most of the brown boys, however, were unfazed by this uncertainty and lack of direction; were not anxious or concerned about what their futures might hold, and were seemingly content to have done the bare minimum, despite the fact that this strategy has deprived them of choices for their postsecondary educations. This is certainly not the future that the brown boys’ parents hoped for their sons, who imagined them on their way to university and careers in law and medicine, nor is their sons’ lackadaisical approach to education consistent with their own immigrant work ethic. According to the brown boys, their parents are concerned and loving; have provided them with comfortable and stable suburban upbringings; and have wanted them to succeed academically; and yet, despite these familial advantages, the brown boys have floundered. Life in Surrey – being raised
by Punjabi immigrant parents alongside the children of other Punjabi parents, and attending school where the majority of students are also Punjabi – has given rise to a unique set of experiences and perceptions which, despite their parents’ best intentions, have made it difficult for the brown boys to succeed academically.

Over the past two decades, a gang subculture has emerged from within Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community. While over 100 young Indo-Canadian men have been killed as a result of their criminal involvement, many others have suffered indirectly from their exposure to this subculture’s pernicious activity. The brown boys have come into contact with the Indo-Canadian gang culture through their social networks, through their daily experiences and by way of local news reports. These encounters have been significant for their development, informing them about who they could be but also about how others, the ‘white’ mainstream, expect them to be. The media’s reports have proven especially powerful in this regard, as several of the brown boys expressed feeling stereotyped by newspaper and television stories which they feel narrowly portray Indo-Canadian men as violent gangsters. In arriving at a sense of who they are as “brown,” the young men in my sample struggled against the image of the stereotypical Indo-Canadian man, known to the students at Getting By High School as the Surrey Jack.

While the students I spoke with assured me that there were no Jacks at Getting By High School, only “semis” and “wannabes,” the Jack has nonetheless had a profound effect on the brown boys. They castigated the Jacks for their flashiness and excessively macho swagger, their womanizing, their alcohol and drug (ab)use, and their proclivity for violence, while others went farther, blaming the Jack for the media’s prejudiced portrayal of young Indo-Canadian men. In contrast, it seemed very important to the young men I interviewed that I know that they were not like the Jacks, that they were different. They sought to cast themselves as the Jack’s straight
laced antithesis and to this end variously emphasized how they are not promiscuous, do not drink heavily, do not abuse drugs and do not look for fights. Although they may be ‘worlds apart’ in their imaginations, in practice the “brown” and Jack identities are far more fluid, overlapping and slippery. While the brown boys were quick to malign the Jack’s use of violence as frivolous and unjustified, most of them admitted to being involved in fights, which by their own accounts, were often induced by alcohol and were typically baseless, in some instances so trivial that the boys had trouble even recalling why a particular fight had erupted. Similarly, though critical of the Jack’s abuse of alcohol and drugs, several of the brown boys admit to having smoked marijuana, in some cases as recently as a few months before our interview, and to drinking alcohol. Despite their declared contempt for the Jack, their behaviour is far more ambivalent. Rather than posing a radical challenge to his extreme form of masculinity, the young Punjabi men at Getting By High School have merely re-worked the identity, diluting it to create a less aggressive “brown” alternative. Constructing “brown” in this way has helped these young men to establish some distance between themselves and the Jacks, which, for the most part, has helped to keep them out of serious trouble and relatively ‘on track’ to graduate from high school with their peers. However, they have been unable to entirely renounce his ethos in favour of ideals which foster scholarly diligence and academic excellence. It is in this respect that the broader Indo-Canadian community and the brown boys’ families are implicated.

While the brown boys’ parents have wanted ‘the best’ for their sons, having, for the most part, attended high school in India and lacking post secondary educations, they have been unable to serve as career role models or to provide them with personal instruction on how to be successful in Canadian schools. While they have entrusted the education of their sons to the professional educators at Getting By High School, they have trusted their sons to keep them
apprised of their educational achievements, failures and struggles. The brown boys, however, have been selective in what they tell their parents, editing out those aspects of their educational and social lives which they feel could cause conflict or upset within their families. It is therefore likely that many of the brown boys’ parents do not have an accurate sense of how their sons are performing in school or of the risks and dangers posed to them by the other young men in their community. By treating their sons as “princes” at home, the brown boys’ parents have further undermined their own high educational expectations for their sons by failing to teach them the value of hard work. As a consequence, while many of the young men appreciate the material accomplishments of their immigrant fathers, they do not want to work like their fathers, putting in long hours performing physical labour or in blue collar positions. Instead, many of the brown boys imagine themselves running their own businesses and ‘being their own bosses. By seeking careers as entrepreneurs, the brown boys are attempting to distinguish themselves from their immigrant fathers – part of a broader effort to unsettle their fathers’ ‘traditional’ notions of masculinity.

Several of the men I interviewed suggested that though heavy drinking and alcoholism are prevalent amongst Punjabi men in Surrey, they are subjects which are not openly discussed by families or within the community. The brown boys confirmed the gendered and problematic nature of alcohol (ab)use; while most of the young men had never, or only rarely, seen their mothers imbibe – perhaps the occasional glass of wine with dinner – most of their fathers not only drank regularly at home but drank (often too) heavily at family and community gatherings. Several of the young men referred to their fathers and to other older male relatives as alcoholics and thought that their father’s alcohol abuse caused problems in their households. Given their encounters with the community’s masculine drinking culture, several of the brown boys have
opted to abstain entirely from drinking while most others try to curb their consumption to avoid becoming like the men of their fathers’ and earlier generations whose ideas of manhood were born out of life in rural Punjabi villages. In this way, the “brown” identity is more than a response to the Jack’s protest masculinity, it is the product of negotiations with the alternative versions of masculinity presented not just by their fathers but also by their “white” school peers.

In Greater Vancouver, Punjabis are a (visible) minority population and Punjabi masculinities, along with those of other non-white ethnic groups, assume subordinate and/or marginal positions relative to the white hegemonic form. At Getting By High School, however, the ethno-cultural order is reversed. In this place, Punjabi students are part of a sizeable South Asian majority which affords young men with the opportunity to challenge the region’s prevailing gender hierarchy and to upset the hegemony of “white” men. The “brown” identity is an expression of this confrontation and of the dominant position held by Punjabi young men at Getting By High School, where being “brown” means being more popular, more athletic and more physically attractive than the “white” boys. Unfortunately, in striving to outdo their “white” peers in the school’s social and athletic realms, the brown boys have been less attentive to their studies and have received poor grades as a result. While being “brown” does not translate into academic success for this group of young men, this is not because they have rejected education as a matter of racial opposition but rather because they have lacked access to the discursive material from which to build an academically oriented identity. In manufacturing an identity, the brown boys are drawing from a pool of already available masculinities, patching together ideals from the unique configuration of cultural resources that has been proffered to them, which, in their experiences has been severely limited.
Historically, Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community responded to racist government policies and an unwelcoming “native” society by isolating itself socially and geographically and although these contextual circumstances have changed considerably, Surrey’s Punjabi community remains ethnically insular. Growing up within such a community has provided the brown boys with very little exposure to social worlds beyond those of their own ethnic community. While their lack of familiarity with and understanding of “white” Vancouver has led many of them to mistake the local media’s portrayals of Indo-Canadian gangsters for mainstream opinion, provoking them as “brown” young men to distance themselves further from “white” culture. This distancing has in turn worked to frustrate the development of an academically oriented identity as the brown boys have rejected the studious practices of their “white” peers in favour of athletics and “chilling out” with friends.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that although in principle education is generally valued within Surrey’s Punjabi community and its young people are encouraged to do well in high school and to pursue post secondary degrees, the brown boys have had few relationships with educated, professional Punjabi men from Surrey. In looking beyond their own families for examples of ‘successful’ young men, they have been limited to those men who have moved upward, not by way of a formal education or the acquisition of professional qualifications, but most notably, by becoming gang involved. Though Surrey’s Punjabi community does not endorse or support criminal behaviour, by pursuing a career as a gangster, young Punjabi men are able to attain the outward trappings of success – the material wealth and possessions – which by bringing them the community’s respect serve to preserve their family’s reputation amongst fellow Punjabis. Similarly, while violence is by no means exclusive to Indo-Canadian families and/or communities, the use of violence to resolve community and domestic disputes, in
particular, to restore a family’s honour, does not conflict with some enduring notions of ‘traditional’ rural Punjabi masculinity, causing some members of Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community to question their own role in engendering a broader culture of violence. Rather than working in conjunction with immigrant parents to shield their sons from the gangster’s influence, the community at large is perpetuating ideals which encourage aspects of the Jack’s aggressive ethos. As such, while the young men in this study have managed to carve themselves an intermediary position between the “white” boys and the Jacks, in the absence of other types of successful Punjabi men, without access to additional gender scripts, they have been unable to go farther, towards fashioning an identity which while distinguishing them from their fathers, the Jacks and the “white” boys would also position them for academic success.

My findings regarding the development of the “brown” identity lend strong support for the theoretical notion of multiple and differing masculinities in that “brown” is but one form of masculinity existing in relation to those enacted by the Jacks, the “white” boys and first generation Punjabi men. Connell’s analytical categories (1995, 2005) proved extremely valuable in helping to isolate these various forms and for clarifying the distinctions and relationships between them. The dynamics operating between these competing masculinities also highlight the important interplay of gender with other social structures, in this case race and ethnicity, and of how this further complicates the process of becoming a man for ethnic and/or racialized young men. Most importantly, my analysis builds well on the contribution made by geographers to masculinity studies in that it provides additional evidence of the place based nature of youthful masculinities (McDowell, 2003; Van Hoven and Hörschelmann, 2005; Nayak, 2003, 2006; and Hopkins, 2007). “Brown” is a Surrey based identity. It emerged because of the specific circumstances faced by young Punjabi men living and attending high school in a predominantly
South Asian neighbourhood in the Greater Vancouver Region. Its development reflects the particular interactions between age, race, ethnicity and masculinity in this particular place and at a specific time in the lives of these young men and its meaning cannot be understood apart from its context.

**The Practical Implications of Being “Brown”**

Given that “brown” is temporally and geographically contingent – articulated in this case by young men in their final days of high school as they reflect on their experiences of race and gender at Getting By High School - it remains to be seen whether these young men will continue to see themselves as “brown” as they move beyond the walls of their school and into adult spaces; it is quite possible that “brown” will lose relevance and that new subject position(s) will emerge as these young men explore other aspects of their identities including their sexualities and socioeconomic status, and as they (hopefully) discover new social and cultural worlds. Notwithstanding the likelihood that the brown boys’ identities will evolve as they mature into adulthood, identifying as “brown” in high school has already affected the brown boys’ educational and economic prospects.

The Canadian labour market has become more knowledge-intensive, with the fastest growth occurring in sectors requiring post-secondary educations. Between 1981 and 2001, while total employment increased by 49% nationally, growth was experienced unevenly across sectors, rising by 84% in high-knowledge industries and much more moderately in medium (52%) and low-knowledge (32%) industries (Morissette, Ostrovsky and Picot, 2004). Consistent with

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116 Here, high-knowledge industries include for instance scientific and professional equipment; computer and related services; architecture, engineering, scientific and related services; and pharmaceutical and medicine products. Medium-knowledge industries include such activities as
this trend, between 2005 and 2015, close to 70% of Canada’s new employment opportunities are predicted to be in management positions or other occupations requiring post-secondary qualifications (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). The Canadian labour market has responded to the market’s demand and more Canadians are acquiring post-secondary credentials (LaPointe et al., 2006). Between 1990 and 2005, the number of individuals possessing a university degree has increased by 4.4% per year and the number of college graduates increased at a rate of 3.2% per year – exceeding the rate of growth of the overall national labour force (1.3%) (LaPointe et al., 2006). In contrast, the number of individuals with only a high school education has risen by only 0.7% per year, while the number of those Canadians without a high school diploma has been declining at a rate of 3% per year (LaPointe et al., 2006). In addition, the most recent census “confirmed that higher education is a gateway to higher earnings, as did all previous censuses” (Statistics Canada, 2006). For instance, median earnings for young men between the ages of 25 and 34 with a bachelor’s degree in 2005 were 19% greater than those for young men with college diplomas and 41% higher than those for young men with only a high school education (Statistics Canada, 2006). In sum, the brown boys have graduated from high school during a time when “the value of a high school diploma has fallen like a stone” (Skelton, 2005). As such, although some of the brown boys have surpassed the educational attainments of their parents simply by graduating from high school, it is unlikely that they will be able to surpass their fathers or to compete with their peers in terms of future income and earnings without acquiring some form of post-secondary qualification. At the time of this research, all but one of the 15 brown boys was planning on attending college. Assuming that the brown boys stay management consulting services; wholesale trade; finance insurance and real estate; and accounting and bookkeeping services while the low-knowledge classification includes such industries as fishing and trapping; furniture and fixture; agriculture; and retail trade (Morissette, Ostrovsky and Picot, 2004, 9).
on track to graduate from college, their diplomas may be enough to put them on par with their parents but it is unlikely that they will be able to economically best their peers graduating from university. By just ‘getting by’ in high school, the brown boys, are thus positioned to move “horizontally” relative to their parents’ economic status while also being at risk of moving downward in comparison to their mainstream peers (Zhou and Sao Xiong, 2005).

This conclusion and the findings which support it are troubling and have the potential to be politically unsettling. For this reason, it may be tempting or convenient to detach the brown boys’ academic experiences from the broader context in which they were derived and in the process, downplay the importance and defining nature of structural circumstances and/or generalize my findings to other contexts to argue, for instance, that all young Punjabi men are “lazy” and academically apathetic. I appreciate the danger in both of these possibilities and, just as I was at the outset of my research, I am anxious about how my research findings might be misinterpreted or manipulated to reinforce the stigmatization of Punjabi men. I cannot however control the secondary use of my research findings or conclusions and as such, I have had to weigh my ethical responsibilities as a researcher. Though the findings I present here may put Surrey’s Punjabi community and its young men at risk of greater stigmatization and racialization, they represent my struggles in providing the most faithful account of the brown boys’ lives and experiences as I was able to produce. As such, if these findings are disturbing, it is because what these young men encounter in their daily lives – violence, alcoholism and cultural isolation – and their academic response to their circumstances – “laziness,” apathy and complacency – are profoundly disturbing. While sharing these findings are inherently risky, to not convey these findings however may lead to a more dangerous outcome – that without some form of political
intervention these young men will be ‘written off’ as members of a “lost generation” of Indo-
Canadian youth (Salim, Oct. 27, 2005).

**Theoretical Implications: Is this a Story of Segmented Assimilation?**

The theory of segmented assimilation predicts that “while the process of assimilation may take
multiple paths, sometimes with different turns,” “[m]ost notably, today’s children of immigrants
are “likely to assimilate upwardly, downwardly or horizontally into an American society that is
highly segmented by class and race, and to do so in different ways (Zhou and Sao Xiong, 2005,
1123).  Into what segment an immigrant or ethnic group ultimately assimilates is determined by
the interactions between family and community characteristics and resources and the larger
context of immigrant reception and modes of incorporation which “create distinctive social
environments and cultural patterns of adaptation for the group and give rise to opportunities or
constraints for the individual, independent of individual socio-economic and demographic
characteristics” (Zhou and Sao Xiong, 2005, 1123). Though outcomes are multiple and varied,
they are not random:

>[d]ivergence is not chaotic but follows, by and large, predictable channels: resources –
intellectual, material, and social – build on each other and lead to ever greater advantages
within and across generations; lack of skills, poverty, and a hostile context of reception
also accumulate into frequently insurmountable difficulties (Portes et al., 2005, 1032).
Whether or not immigrant groups move upward in the second generation depends on how the children of immigrants tackle the three major obstacles standing in the way of their educational and occupational success: persistent racial discrimination, native oppositional subcultures and a bifurcated labour market. As illustrated in Figure 8.1., downward assimilation occurs when members of the second and third generations are unable to draw on sufficient family and co-ethnic community resources to surmount these obstacles, leaving them with “educational credentials and occupational opportunities no better than their parents” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001a, 283). Results from this study confirm the basic logic undergirding the theory of segmented assimilation, that immigrant incorporation is “a cumulative process where immigrant backgrounds and contexts of reception influence early [adaptation] outcomes that in turn, condition subsequent ones” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001a, 69). They support the notion that not all members of the new second generation are slated for economic and social advancement, that downward mobility exists as a very real prospect for some of the children of contemporary immigrants. They also underscore the powerful influence of structural factors on the life chances...
of second generation youth, in this instance, demonstrating in particular how historical modes of incorporation have lasting effects on the character of an immigrant community, determining outcomes well beyond the first generation. However, while the outcomes and processes observed in Surrey, B.C. are consistent with the theory of segmented assimilation as originally proposed by Portes and Rumbaut (2001a), the conditions under which they occur are not adequately explained. In demonstrating how differences in national context matter to segmented assimilation, my study alludes to more fundamental problems with the theory’s formulation, in particular with regards to its conceptualization of the circumstances under which members of the second generation acquire and manufacture identities that lead to downward assimilation as well as the character of those identities.

The theory of segmented assimilation was designed to reflect the “realities of American society as it is today, on the ground” for the children of post-1965 immigrants (Portes et al., 2005, 1032). Downward assimilation is thus conceived of as a possible outcome for the children of immigrants who are brought up alongside domestic minorities in American inner city environments where they are subjected to “the multiple problems of poor schools, street crime, the lure of drugs, and the option offered by youth gangs, all opposed to parental aspirations for educational achievement and occupational advancement” (Portes et al., 2005, 1009). As a consequence of this exposure, second generation youth are theorized to subscribe to the oppositional ethnic identities adopted by their native minority peers and to mimic their anti-academic behaviours and attitudes, leading them to educational failure and to futures confined to the bottom ranks of society. The theory of segmented assimilation assumes that the subcultural forces threatening to de-rail second generation youth from academic achievement originate from outside immigrant ethnic communities, most notably from impoverished inner-city Black
populations that have “developed cultures and economic strategies to deal with decades and centuries of deprivation and discrimination” (Boyd, 2000, 144). While domestic minorities are conceptualized as singularly malevolent and hostile, immigrant ethnic communities are in contrast viewed as potentially protective and defensive in that sufficiently “strong” immigrant communities (Portes et al., 2005, 1011), those which are dense and well connected, are expected to be able to repel the dangers posed by domestic minority communities to safeguard against second generation decline. The rise of the Jack in Surrey, B.C., however, defies this prediction to complicate our understanding of the role(s) played by immigrant communities in segmented assimilation.

Though emerging from different historical circumstances and operating over a different geography than the black urban American underclass, Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian gang subculture has been similarly capable of luring young men away from the mainstream path to upward mobility by engendering the development of ethnic identities which are not oriented towards academic achievement. Conditions particular to the history of the settlement, reception and adaptation of Punjabi immigrants in British Columbia have given birth to an underclass subculture, which feeds off of the ethnic community’s traditional ideals and reproduces itself through its dense social networks. The features which enable immigrant communities to exert a positive influence on the development of second generation youth by reinforcing parental norms, controls and expectations, in this instance are detrimental, allowing for the (re)production of a subcultural identity. While this finding suggests the need for a more complex theorization of the role of immigrant communities to account for both destructive and constructive effects on second generation identities, it also highlights the importance of examining, not only the scope and density of social networks but also the norms and values held by immigrant communities. The
Jack’s example demonstrates that the nature of an ethnic community’s influence, though contingent upon the structure of networks as argued convincingly by Portes and his colleagues, is in large part determined by the quality of social capital, that is, the ideals being propagated by way of dense and tightly knit networks. The fact that negative ideological forces are generated by the larger Indo-Canadian community means that the brown boys cannot escape the Jack’s lure by clinging to their ethnic values and networks. In search of success, they have carved their own route in a way not prescribed by the theory of segmented assimilation.

While positing that ethnic-racial identity choices inform educational outcomes, the theory of segmented assimilation does not problematize the process of ethnic identity construction to consider such aspects as the mutual gendering and racialization of members of the second generation. The construction of ethnic and racial identities is instead presented as a fairly straightforward process whereby youth choose to maintain their parental culture or to become American by adopting a native - middle class or subcultural - identity. While Kasinitz et. al. (2008) find “examples of all these scenarios,” their research suggests an “additional possibility,” that members of the second generation have:

[t]he ability to select the best traits from their immigrant parents and their native born peers […] [t]hey know they must choose between immigrant and natives ways of doing things. Sometimes they choose one, sometimes the other, and sometimes they try to combine the best of both worlds. They also sometimes create something wholly new (20-21).

Although the researchers recognize that second generation youth may not “always choose wisely or well” (21), they assume an optimistic tone, arguing that this “in between-ness” can yield “real” and “distinct second generation advantages” (20). Kasinitz et al.’s (2008) conclusion, while troublesome in that it rests on a rather uncritical “hyp[ing] of hybridity” (Mitchell,
is significant in that it highlights how the theory of segmented assimilation has failed to cope with the real life messiness of identity construction of second generation youth in New York City. While allowing for the possibility of hybrid ethnic and racial identities improves upon the theory of segmented assimilation, my findings suggest that the theory needs to be pushed farther if it is to consider seriously the influence of ethnic and racial identities on educational and other adaptation outcomes.

“Brown” is multiply determined along racial, ethnic and gender lines. In becoming “brown,” the young men in my sample not only questioned their race and ethnicity but they also wrestled with the issue of their manhood and the type of men that they wanted to be. In treating race, gender and ethnicity as fixed analytical variables, however, the theory of segmented assimilation cannot account for this “intersectionality,” the ways in which these young men are simultaneously racialized and gendered. I was able to address this limitation by turning to the theorizing of critical men’s studies but, as it is presently formulated, segmented assimilation theory leaves questions pertaining to the ways in which ethnicity intersects with other axes of identity including gender but also religion, class and sexuality unexamined. These intersections, however, are important, not only empirically but because they affect how second generation youth relate to their immigrant and mainstream cultures and thus have implications for educational outcomes. Introducing “intersectionality” into the theory of segmented assimilation allows us to think more broadly about the meaning of race and ethnicity to second generation youth, but it also demands that we think differently about “immigrant” cultures and communities.

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117 I argue here that we must be careful not to “extol uncritically the value of hybridity without carefully understanding its complexity and contradictions” for as Ang reminds us, “hybrid in-betweeness” is not necessarily a “comfortable position” but rather it is a state of tension, ambivalence and vulnerability (2001, 194).
The theory of segmented assimilation complicated our understanding of the process of immigrant adaptation by introducing the notion of a segmented - racially, ethnically and economically stratified - mainstream society. In contrast, immigrant communities are often treated as homogeneous, uniform and unified. However, just as there are many versions of mainstream society so too are there many versions of and divisions within an immigrant culture or community. There is no monolithic Punjabi culture in Surrey, B.C. but many Punjabi cultures. In deciding who they are, the young men in my sample did not choose between the way of their parents and the ways of the mainstream; they selected from the Punjabi culture of their peers, their parents, and members of the community, combining them to create an identity which is neither mainstream nor immigrant. The brown boys’ experiences with identity construction illustrate the multi-faceted nature of their immigrant community and demonstrate how taking into account this heterogeneity can lead to the discovery of pathways to mobility not predicted by the theory of segmented assimilation as it is presently articulated.

While the theory of segmented assimilation is useful in this context, serving to identify the basic processes undergirding the mediocre educational achievements of the brown boys, the theory is far weaker when it comes to explaining the development and meaning of the “brown” identity. Relying too much on America’s singular racial history, the theory does not account for the assorted roles played by immigrant communities in the development of second generation lives nor does it accommodate for the complex nature of youth identities. As a consequence, though the theory is based upon the notion of multiple and differing pathways to adaptation, it determines relatively few. If it is to move beyond the particularities of the American context and its singular racial history to provide a more general account of the processes of immigrant incorporation and the experiences of second generation youth living in other multi-ethnic settings
then it is most likely that the theory of segmented assimilation will need to be expanded, adapted and refined. The extent to which the American theory can stand up to rigorous refinements or whether such efforts will give way to a new more encompassing theory, however, are questions requiring much greater theoretical and empirical attention.
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Steffenhagen, Janet. 2003, November 23. Focus on youth, not politics, leaders told: Indo-Canadian community said to be ‘in crisis.’ The Vancouver Sun. Retrieved from ProQuest.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Description of Second Generation Punjabi Young Men Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Father’s Education &amp; Employment</th>
<th>Mother’s Education &amp; Employment</th>
<th>Career Aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tim, 17</td>
<td>Winnipeg, MB</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>High School (India)</td>
<td>Business or Social work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cab driver</td>
<td>Some College (Canada)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cook at Golf and Tennis Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohan, 17</td>
<td>India (moved at 5 yrs old)</td>
<td>Only Punjabi</td>
<td>High School (India)</td>
<td>Law enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lumber mill</td>
<td>High School (India)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factory/Mill work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon, 17</td>
<td>Brampton, ON</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>High School (India)</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stays at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob, 18</td>
<td>Surrey, BC</td>
<td>Mostly English</td>
<td>High School (India)</td>
<td>Trades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Truck driver</td>
<td>College (Canada)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dental Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sajjan, 17</td>
<td>Richmond, BC</td>
<td>Mostly Punjabi</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factory Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mani, 17</td>
<td>Vancouver, BC</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Owner of a car customizing company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Owns a construction company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has always been a housewife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, 17</td>
<td>Richmond, BC</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Own a nightclub or bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Works in butcher shop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Former Housekeeper/been at home for past 5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny, 17</td>
<td>Surrey, BC</td>
<td>Mostly English</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>Business Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Security guard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

118 Question marks indicate that the relevant information was not available either because the interviewee was uncertain of his parents’ educational history or because the interviewer neglected to inquire about parental educational histories.
## Description of Second Generation Punjabi Young Men Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Father’s Education &amp; Employment</th>
<th>Mother’s Education &amp; Employment</th>
<th>Career Aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kam, 18</td>
<td>Calgary, AB</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>1 yr of College (India)</td>
<td>Did not complete High School</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Courier</td>
<td>Hotel Housekeeper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davinder, 17</td>
<td>Winnipeg, MB</td>
<td>Mostly English</td>
<td>Some University</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Physiotherapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-owns and runs fast-food restaurant with his wife</td>
<td>Co-owns and runs fast-food restaurant with her husband</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj, 17</td>
<td>Surrey, BC</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>Maintenance at a nursery</td>
<td>Did not complete High School</td>
<td>Trades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Works at a recycling depot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harjeet, 18</td>
<td>Surrey, BC</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>College (Canada)</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Construction worker</td>
<td>Counselor for female victims of domestic abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kris, 18</td>
<td>Surrey, BC</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drugstore employee</td>
<td>Supervisor at large retail store</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravinder, 17</td>
<td>Surrey, BC</td>
<td>Punjabi &amp; English</td>
<td>Co-owner of cabinet making company</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>Law enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam, 17</td>
<td>India (moved at 2 yrs old)</td>
<td>Mostly Punjabi</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Own &amp; operate a limousine chauffer company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>