PRESENCES AND PERSPECTIVES:
INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT
IN THE LIVES OF THREE INDO-CANADIAN WOMEN

by

PAROMITA NAIDU

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1993

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(School of Human Kinetics)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 1998

© Paromita Naidu, 1998
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **Human Kinetics**

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date **Aug. 30 / 98**
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the role of physical activity in the lives of three Indian women living in Canada, specifically in the Lower Mainland, and to examine some of the more prominent issues they are facing in today's physical activity context by giving voice to their experiences and stories. This is a vital area to investigate because of the tendency to universalize and stereotype Indo-Canadian women without properly understanding their cultural backgrounds and the content and context of their physical activity experiences.

I wish to understand what has motivated Indo-Canadian women to get involved with and continue with physical activity pursuits; and to what degree have social support structures (family, school, community, peers) influenced their decisions. Women in this particular age bracket (25-35) will hopefully be able to articulate not only their sporting experiences, but also their opportunities, constraints, dissatisfactions and accomplishments as they relate to physical activity.

Social support structures such as family, community and school, physicality and the body, leadership and mentoring and self-promotion and marketing are some of the more prominent themes. The methodology chosen to extract the data is that of life story interviews. A series of in-depth interviews conducted with each of the individual participants reveals their own unique, complex and selective life and physical activity experiences.

Each woman seemed to view, and construct the issue of participation in physical activity as a personal responsibility for community development. For example, one woman struggled to create and find support for an all-Indian dragon boat team and define a space for Indian women, while another desired to promote alternatives and encourage women to dance
and maintain culture at a community level. The third participant's goals included increasing the participation rates of younger Indian women, by providing positive leadership.

The participants are teaching Indian women and girls to un-learn an exclusion of self. Solutions proposed and implemented by them included: female-only environments, minimal or no-cost sessions, training and employing South Asians, daycare, accommodation of religious calendar, transportation, education in community and family, choice of attire, use of ethnic language, and redefinition of common images.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Table of Contents iv

Chapter One/ Introduction

Towards New Perspectives 1
Study Parameters 12
The Need to Summon Voices 14
Positioning Myself and Issues of Subjectivity 17
Organization of Thesis 20
Terminology 22

Chapter Two/ Theoretical Perspective and Literature Review

Initiating a Literature Search 23
Cultural Identity, History and Family 25
South Asian Feminist Perspectives 33
Life Story Methodology and Interviews 42
Race, Gender, Sport and Physical Activity 50

Chapter Three/ Methodology

Searching for a Methodology 62
Discovering Life Writing 64
The Importance of Perspectives 67
The Process and Decisions of Life Writing 71
Making Contact and Selection of Participants 76
Journal Writing and Self-Reflection 84

Chapter Four/ Interviews and Themes

Outlining the Interviews 86
Harjit 87
Anjali 96
Meena 106
Themes 117
Social Support Structures 117
Family 120
Indian Environments and Community 124
Role as Educator and Leader 130
Self-Promotion and Marketing 134
### Chapter Four (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physicality</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter Five/ Analysis and Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-Presenting Sport and Physical Activity</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Sport and Physical Activity</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies and Solutions</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradoxes and Dilemmas</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for Answers/ The Familial and Cultural Context</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power at Play/ Negotiating Our Agendas</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presences and Absences</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Epilogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bibliography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request for Ethical Review</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Contact Form (Front-End Script)</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

(TITLE)

Towards New Perspectives

Sport and physical activity is an area that continues to require further exploration and analysis. This is partly because mainstream ideas about sports are concerned with the physical body, and partly because sports were in the past, popularly believed to be an autonomous phenomenon—intrinsically innocent and liberating; something not connected to the social world of race, class and gender. Not surprisingly, some of the early theorizing about sports was essentially uncritical and had a positivist orientation (Hargreaves, 1994). It was assumed that sports are a feature of a common cultural heritage, embracing a central value system shared by all members of society. Present-day researchers are part of a movement to understand the relationship between sports and other cultural formations, but many of the theories are still marginalizing women’s experiences and are not transcending traditional assumptions such as those that attribute low participation rates to ethnicity or proficiency to gender. So, for example, in spite of the fact that more women are participating in more sports and physical activity than ever before, and in spite of a significant number of feminist interventions into sports theory (i.e. authors that have addressed notions of gender and examined sexism in a sporting context), much more attention is still given to the role of sports in the lives of men than of women. As well, there is insufficient information about the various women who are involved in sports and their experiences.

As a physically active Indian woman living in Canada, I continually search for the stories and experiences of women like myself who are participating in sport and physical
activity but are positioned at the crossroads of gender, class and ethnicity. Currently, there is very little literature on sport and physical activity that reflects these experiences and the deeper processes and issues involved in being an active Indo-Canadian woman in today's sport and physical activity arenas. Too often what research is available is questionable, for it smacks of ethnocentrism, attributing concerns such as low participation rates to patriarchal and restrictive practices within the Indo-Canadian community and ignoring or minimizing other real and systemic barriers. Such explanations only serve to divert attention away from a critical analysis of the institutional structures of sport and society. “In order to justify the status quo, conventional modes of thought tend to mystify and/or reify social reality by attributing causal priority for “failure” to factors within the victims themselves” (Dei 1996, p.35).

There is a real need to examine Indian women's sporting experiences within the context of systemic racism. Racist practices can be present in early elementary school experiences, for example in the relationship between physical education teachers and students. Disregard for religious beliefs, practices and holidays, PE attire, communal showers, swimming and certain forms of extra-curricular participation have been areas outlined by researchers and ethnic leaders as being problematic for many ethnic students. However, teachers have commonly focused on the ethnic group having 'a problem' with standard operating procedures and not on concerns of racism and a biased physical education curriculum (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993). Studies of physical education classes reveal how teachers can help reproduce the existing structures and inequalities in sport and society. PE classes are one of the many environments where pressure is placed upon minority females to assimilate into the dominant Western culture. Sometimes, the attempts to assimilate may lead to students'
alienation and a loss of identity (i.e. the anglicization of one’s name; the rejection of one’s first language or language spoken at home; the contempt for one’s parents because of accent, religion and/or culture...” (Dei 1996, p.92). Avtar Brah (1992) sees such demands as the result of systemic racism resulting from the colonial experience. “There is enormous social, political and economic privilege and power that has been amassed by certain people in society as a result of the historical processes of European enslavement, colonization, (mis)representations and (mis)capturing of knowledge about the human condition of indigenous, non-Western peoples” (Dei 1996, p.29).

Fortunately, in the broader Euro-American contexts there is a wide body of research that documents these practices and shows significant differences in the schooling experiences of minority youth, especially Black and Asian youth (see Carby 1982b; Oliver 1986; Amos and Parmar 1987; Comer 1988; Fine 1991; Garibaldi 1992; Jacob and Jordon 1993; Ernst and Statzner 1994; Alladin 1995). To varying degrees this growing body of data shows that the structural processes of schooling and education provide unequal opportunities and create differential outcomes for students according to race, ethnicity and gender and class. The data speaks to the racial, cultural and gender “othering” of students by educators and white peers. This may be occurring because dominant discourses about students in wider society have tended to define the meanings and stereotypes that many educators apply to those youth in their schools (Dei, 1996).

“There is concern about what has come to be defined as valid knowledge and how such knowledge, and the power that comes with it, is used to negate and devalue the experiences of subordinated groups” (Dei, 1996, p.30). It ought to be asked why the norms, values, ideas,
perspectives and traditions of one social group should be adopted as standard by the institutions of society. It is crucial that the first step in critiquing these standards begins with the de-marginalization of certain voices in society and specifically the legitimization of the knowledge and experience of subordinated groups (Dei, 1996).

In our culture, sport is often presented as autonomous of these power relations and viewed as an area that is free from racism. However sport organizations have long histories of exclusion and oppression, and they have been developed and created to privilege the interests and needs of white, middle-class, heterosexual men (Dewar, 1993). The need to exclude certain groups is often based on the perception that these groups are inferior and weaker and will exercise the same exclusionary practices if they were to assume positions of power (Jiwani, 1993). Being integrated into sport under these conditions means being assimilated into a system in which one has to deny or down play the existence of any “differences” in the name of developing “human” values, which in reality are the values of those in power (white, middle-class, heterosexual men) displayed as early as PE classes in elementary school (Dewar, 1993). According to Dewar (1993, p.231) “the price of admission [into the current sport system], is the acceptance of the status quo in exchange for opportunity to participate within the system.” This system has also misrepresented the abilities and interests of many minority women including Indo-Canadian women who are viewed as weak, passive, and uninterested in sports (Lovell, 1991). Attitudes about ‘natural ability’ tend to mask alternative cultural explanations for differences between women from different ethnic backgrounds (Hargreaves, 1994). So for those who are not white, middle-class, heterosexual, or male, entering the sport system means there is an enormous price to pay. And when Indian women are recruited into sport they are
given clear messages that integration means putting up with the system. But who are these women? And how are they dealing with the existing structures and practices of sport? The answers lie in the experiences and stories of Indo-Canadian women that reflect diverse cultural meanings and values.

The need not only to have a stock of stories about physical activity experiences, but to discover, hear and understand some of the issues that are fundamental to physical activity for Indo-Canadian women is very real. As shown, the current sports systems and school physical education practices do not necessarily produce a straightforward system of domination, but they nonetheless continue to make participation an ongoing struggle for many minority women including Indian women living in Canada. But once again, where are these stories that describe an Indo-Canadian woman’s experiences within sport and physical activity?

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the role of physical activity in the lives of three Indian women living in Canada, specifically in the Lower Mainland, and to examine some of the more prominent issues they are facing in today’s physical activity context by giving voice to their experiences and stories. This is a vital area to investigate because of the tendency to universalize and stereotype Indo-Canadian women without properly understanding their cultural backgrounds and the content and context of their physical activity experiences. I have outlined what I believe to be several key areas of exploration. Social support structures (e.g. teachers, community, peers, family etc.) and their influence on participation are important to examine if we are to understand two critical phenomenon: firstly, that Indian women can be marginalized with regards to sport and physical activity without proper support structures in place in schools and the family, and secondly that this margin can become the site of resistance
and empowerment. As I have chosen to focus on the latter, the topic of role models and leadership has emerged as a useful area of exploration. Alongside these key areas, physicality and notions of the body (intrinsically different for women of all cultures) are discussed by the participants. Physicality and notions of the body are prominent concerns when discussing the role of sport and physical activity as they can be associated with empowerment and resistance as well as the fact that they are interrelated with cultural and familial beliefs and can directly influence participation and enjoyment.

An exploration of the above topics, such as physicality, leadership, family and schooling, as well as the various satisfactions or dissatisfactions and empowerment or constraints these women have felt within the mainstream sporting culture, speaks to and reveals stereotypes and popular misrepresentations. Stereotypes are one-dimensional, generalized half-truths about entire populations. They can affect the enjoyment and participation of sport and physical activity by containing these groups within rigid frameworks and level the differences within. Stereotypes and other forms of exclusions are powerful agents within sporting systems that act as barriers towards Indo-Canadian women and serve to dehumanize them (Jiwani, 1993) and must be critically examined in a sport and physical activity context.

Unfortunately, much of what is written about Indo-Canadian women implies that they are both homogeneous and inferior; and far too often characterized as weak and passive. The broad sweeping generalizations about Indian women and sport include assumptions about the severe constraints of aspects of ‘traditional’ Indian cultures upon their physicality, and the ‘controlling’ attitude of the Indian male. It is assumed by many that all Indian women have similar religious and cultural backgrounds and are victims of arranged marriages and
patriarchy. Some of the studies conducted thus far have focused on the assumed low participation rates of Indian women in physical activity. Carrington, Chivers and William (1987), for example have attributed gender differences in the leisure behaviour of South Asians entirely to ethnicity, failing to analyze the impact of institutionalized sexism and racism; or to address adequately social and institutional responses to South Asian women and girls. As Julie Stephens writes (1994), notions of patriarchy and underprivilege apparently oppress most Indian women, and it is this reductionist discourse and the systematization of the oppression of Third world women that is exercised in much of the recent writings on South Asian women as well as sport and recreational programming that assumes Indian women are incapable or uninterested. And it is these social representations that construct the experiences of Indo-Canadian women in sport and physical activity.

According to Agnew (1990), the prevailing stereotype of South Asian women is that they are docile, subservient and traditional. These images are perpetuated in physical activity contexts where weakness and frailty become linked with the stereotypes of docility and subservience giving rise to misperceptions about ability and interest. For example, if a sporting activity is scheduled for after school, many Indian parents are concerned about their daughters coming home by themselves, or heightened development of social relations with boys (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993). This either gets neglected or gets translated into a familial or cultural problem where Indian girls can be viewed to be too docile and subservient to stand up to a repressive family or community and therefore not interested enough in sport (ibid.). However if one looks more closely at Indian cultures, many strands in Sikhism for example, promote strength, courage and confidence among women. As well, according to Singh (1997) the
fundamental belief in Sikhism that men and women are spiritual equals, is a strong force that is unquestioned and accepted by both man and women. In fact, it is partly due to the acceptance of women’s ability to achieve in all fields in many Indian religions and cultures, that South Asian women here in Canada, are still participating and excelling in sports as well as a variety of other physical activities. Because Indian women have been historically denied active agency as subjects of their own histories, they have been effectively silenced in Western society and its institutions.

Bannerji (1992) has noted that few visual media images exist of South Asian women in Canada. As a result the social and physical activity environments are suffused with stereotypes, “all emphasizing passivity, docility, silence, illiteracy, uncleanliness, smell of curry, and fertility. These are some of the common sense things that the dominant culture ‘knows’ about us...They provide the content of our racist experiences and function as expectations and injunctions at the same time” (Bannerji, 1992, p.144). It is the dominant culture that informs physical activity policies and procedures which can no longer be viewed as autonomous and independent.

According to Jiwani (1992), the circulation of images of South Asian women as tradition-bound, submissive, weak, and victimized affirms the image of the West as an advanced and progressive entity. At the same time, they underlie a paternalistic variant of colonial relations. Such sentiments have historically been used to legitimize British intervention in Indian affairs, particularly as it concerns the status of women. The colonial mindset has reproduced itself in Canada. This is reflected in the sporting practices and policies.
where, minority voices and experiences are left unaccounted for and end up being locked in a
system of representation that defines them as other, child-like, primitive and emotional.

Speaking to these distorted representations, and powerfully challenging them in a
physical activity context can re-situate racism as an integral part of the social construction of
sport and physical activity in Canada. Hearing the stories of women who break stereotypes,
reject misconceptions, question power structures, and debate “fixed” identities, is one manner
in which to begin to address the closed character of cultural values and norms and eventually
shift the way they are viewed in Canada.

Bissoondath (1994) insists that Canada’s multicultural approach promotes a more
pronounced Indian ethnicity, leading to the strengthening rather than the weakening of
contemporary stereotypes that define the Indian woman as being highly traditional and
submissive. Within these representations, she is frequently portrayed as a potential victim with
the threat of an arranged marriage ever-present (Vertinsky, Batth and Naidu, 1996). Yet these
media images give a very distorted image of the tradition of arranged marriages (which are
common in many cultures), and hide a wide range of positive relationships that exist between
an Asian girl and her parents (Osler, 1989). These relationships and their influence on the
participation of young women in sport and physical activity is a critical factor and is examined
in connection with the stereotypes that have developed in mainstream society.

As racism can be seen to be based on ignorance and an acceptance of comfort with
stereotype, more studies like this one are needed in order to provide some alternative stories
that ‘break the mold’. Therefore in this study, I also highlight some of the physical activity
achievements and accomplishments of the participants to show how women can feel valued
and acknowledged in their pursuits. As well as giving them a space to place themselves as the central figures this can also validate their achievements. This is an important aspect of my study and is a direct reflection of my attempt to let the participants feel empowered by inserting themselves ‘in the spaces’ as they challenge the stereotypical image of “traditional” Indian women in Canada.

As an Indo-Canadian woman myself, issues around misrepresentation and stereotyping have been a prominent part of my own sport experiences. They have also been brought up in the many conversations I have had with other physically active Indian women who have voiced their own perspectives on the role of physical activity in their lives. These issues are deeply complex but a useful first step for the women in this study is to begin to articulate their perspectives and extend the dialogue about sport and the Indian women, which has tended to be essentializing and incomplete.

From my own personal observations and experiences, many Indian women living in Canada today are participating actively in a variety of sport and recreational activities. Not only are they becoming more visible in mainstream sports, but within the Indo-Canadian community they are forming their own teams and programs; organizing and participating in their own tournaments; and creating their own versions of sporting activities that have traditionally been defined as Western. As well, many women are re-appropriating various activities within their own cultures, such as traditional games and dance, and the values and meanings attached to them.

Despite this, we know very little about the unique social histories and experiences of Indo-Canadian women (Scranton, 1992; Lovell, 1991; Smith, 1992) especially in the areas of
sport, recreation and physical activity. Gender equity advocates for sport, still fail to address adequately the fact that girls and women do not constitute a homogeneous group with similar motivations and barriers to their participation. Universalizing the subordination of all girls and women regardless of other structural relations such as ethnic and class relations, is highly problematic since differences according to race and ethnicity are believed to have a tremendous influence on the physical activity patterns of girls and young women (Scranton, 1992). These differences will emerge as women voice their specific sporting experiences as Indian women living in Canada.

Many would assume the experiences of Indo-Canadian women to be similar in terms of racism, oppression, and patriarchy but this is also a universalizing notion and warrants further investigation, particularly in relation to the current academic literature on sport, gender and ethnicity, and policies and practices in recreation centers and other sports facilities. Voicing these experiences is one way to overcome these notions.

According to Bradford and Sartwell (1997, p.191, 192) “there are no unraced gendered persons, nor ungendered raced persons”, therefore racing and gendering are social and political processes of consigning bodies to social categories and thus “rendering them into political, economic, sexual and residential positions.” These structures have the effect of radically simplifying identities and placing norms upon an individual. The authors assert that we deploy expectations about the ways a “female, dark-skinned body can speak” and that deployment conditions the way we can receive voices from that body. Most importantly, the context of expectations in our culture, such as the expectations of what sort of voice is likely to emerge from what sort of body, conditions how South Asian women get heard.
"I remember when I was growing up, we’d go to the park because my dad would be playing soccer or something. He valued fitness, he valued sports. And his dream was that we’d become Olympic athletes...didn’t happen, but he did always encourage us in sports!"

(“Sanj” in Naidu, 1995)

An analysis of such experiences that speak to the encouragement, value of sport and physical activity in many Indian homes, may also help to challenge the existing stereotypes in popular and academic literature and policies regarding physical activity and Indo-Canadian women.

Study Parameters

In my attempt to critically examine the physical activity experiences of Indo-Canadian women, I conduct a series of life story interviews with three adult Indian women (between the ages of twenty-five and thirty) living in the Lower Mainland, focusing on specific experiences as they occur over a period of time (beginning as early as elementary school). Researchers now understand that the experiences, ideas, values and thoughts about physical activity begin early in life (e.g. school experiences and family and peer socialization) and can influence current involvement.

In the research done on Indian women, the views of middle-class adult women living in Western countries are difficult to locate and do not generally address issues in sport and physical activity. This segment of the population has traditionally been left out of physical activity and race research as the “ideal” participant in many studies has tended to be the school-aged pupil or the male athlete (Dewar, 1993). I wish to understand what has motivated Indo-Canadian women to get involved with and continue with physical activity pursuits; and to what degree have social support structures (family, school, community, peers) influenced their
decisions. Women in this age bracket will hopefully be able to articulate not only their sporting experiences, but also their opportunities, constraints, dissatisfactions and accomplishments as they relate to physical activity.

Another important criteria for this study is that the participants have lived here for the majority of their lives and have consequently been educated in Canada. Race, gender and class inequalities are produced through the current Canadian education system and hence reflected in physical education classes. Research has shown that Indo-Canadian students feel they are caught between the school values and community values (Carrol and Hollinshead, 1993). It is the influence of these experiences on subsequent sport and physical activity experiences that I have chosen to explore. The experiences, needs and concerns of newly immigrated Indian women are altogether different and distinct from those women having lived in the Lower Mainland who have participated in a Canadian context, and are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Conducting life story interviews is one way to “give voice” to Indo-Canadian women’s concerns about the Canadian sporting context, their individual social contexts, their thoughts and attitudes towards physical activity and the consequent choices they have made in order to retain sport and physical activity in their lives. Discussing these topics are helpful in comprehending the issues and impact of the Canadian sport and physical activity context in the lives of Indo-Canadian women. Through life story interviews, focused accounts reflecting the life and social context that shape and guide the decisions and concerns of women in relation to physical activity can emerge. Rather than an entire chronological history, I have chosen to focus on critical incidents selected by the three individual participants as they relate to the key areas of investigation outlined earlier. As the data in life story interviewing is quite extensive
and involved it can nonetheless allow the researcher to confer some deeper meaning to their experiences of sport and physical activity.

The Need To Summon Voices

Ordinarily, when we use the term ‘having a voice’ we do not mean actually having a physical voice, being able to make linguistic noises, but rather having power to make one’s voice heard. If someone ‘does not have a voice’ in some decision, for example, this doesn’t mean that they can’t say anything; it means that whatever they say will make no difference, will not be considered, will have no power. I will have no voice in some decision if I do not know it is being made, or cannot get into a place where I can speak up. And even if I do get into a place where I can confront someone who is making some decision, I may not speak a language recognizable to them or their language of decision-making may be a mystery to me. However messy the situation, the immediate need is simply to recognize everyone as an authority about their own experience. Every recognizable voice is a construct of histories of constraint and empowerment (Bradford and Sartwell, 1997). The point is not to find out in advance what kinds of voices are the right ones, but to listen very carefully to how people speak and what they are trying say. My goal is to document a few of the narratives of Indo-Canadian women as they speak authoritatively about their own sport and physical activity experiences within a discussion initiated by my own explorations.

Indian civilization is thousands of years old, and within it women have, to their credit, countless achievements. Indian women within Canada, having been exposed to the bounties of this civilization through family and community experiences, can bring their own insights into
areas such as sport and physical activity. Their insights could contribute to a knowledge base that would inform physical activity programs, policies and practices for Indian women. The accomplishments and achievements, satisfactions and dissatisfactions, as well as cultural, familial and educational experiences are just some of the factors that are necessary to obtain a picture of the role of physical activity and sport in their lives. Each factor can be discussed at length, however, this can only take place if the more prominent areas of exploration (articulated both by myself and the participants) are discussed by the women themselves, a priority of this thesis.

As Anita Sheth and Amita Handa (1993, p.47) write: “while we have been exposed to the historical subordination of India/n women by India/n men and to the subordination of all India/ns in general by the white British, we have not found points of entry... to talk about ourselves, our exclusions, our struggles.” Where are the voices that draw on the particular histories of oppression, domination and resistance in a sport and physical activity context? According to the authors, as Indian women, it is critical to feel the need to account and take responsibility for what has been implied and continues to be implied about our location in society: that of silence and invisibility. And the first step in this process is to summon and present voices.

An absence, then, as much as a presence, is a good point for a beginning. And when any situation is replete with both- where a pervasive absence signifies an absent presence, and a fleeting presence itself signals to a hidden imperative of invisibility, then that is precisely where work of inquiry must begin. We begin with what we have- our invisibility.

(Bannerji, 1993)
As Bannerji points out, the concept of voice is a complex yet critical component of understanding and addressing the issues such as the sport and physical activity patterns and opportunities of Indo-Canadian women. And since their voices have so far been silent in this particular arena, I wish to address this and try to understand why this gap exists as well as discuss why some of the literature that is written about Indo-Canadians is stereotyped and insufficient. The idea of hearing various experiences, and acknowledging different viewpoints is vital to the expansion of knowledge within the institution of sport and recreation. It is a politically active tool that serves a multitude of purposes. It begins with the goal of understanding an individual and builds from there. Hearing the voices of those that are often overlooked by mainstream educators and policy-makers, assumes added significance as “a powerful instrument for the rediscovery of womanhood” (Etter-Lewis, 1991).

Feminist writing and research has attempted to address the notion of voice as women have traditionally been silenced in mainstream society, but in the move to emancipate the oppressed, feminism in Canada has essentialized difference. The majority of voices we hear in regards to physical activity experiences, are those of white, middle-class women due to the fact that constructed social and cultural relations still permeate feminist writing. Dewar (1993, p.234) asserts that feminist theorizing about oppression in sport seem to have had little or no impact on actual sporting practices. She claims this is because feminists have developed their theorizing in ways that have privileged the standpoints of “white, middle-class, Christian-raised, non-disabled, heterosexual women.” That is why I wish to explore the problematic of feminist rhetoric being applied to women of different ethnicities. All women do not share the same (physical activity) experiences and issues and those of Indian women are very real and
varied. The metonymic imprisonment of Indian women where certain themes and ideologies begin to represent the entire culture, is an important concern for me as a researcher. These cultural symbols can become hegemonic, if they are seen to reflect certain academic as well as popular theories and discourse. I will show how this is reductionist and essentializes all Indian women, whose life experiences are products of a particular time, place and specific set of social circumstances.

Finally, by hearing the voices of those that are on the fringes of material written about women, I will shift attention to the issue of agency or the means by which some Indo-Canadian women are employing alternative strategies to support their particular needs so that they might enjoy their physicality and participate in sporting activities of their choice while remaining sensitive to the richness of their cultural heritage(s).

Positioning Myself and Issues of Subjectivity

Being an active Indo-Canadian woman, this study will be strongly influenced by my own subjectivity, as I am positioned as both the object and the subject of my inquiries. I will not attempt to present myself as a disengaged or neutral analyst as I will be ultimately examining my own definitions of culture, physical activity and constructed "truths" (perhaps about Indianness, or feminist minority research etc.). While an insider to the ethnic community I am exploring, I am, at the same time, an outsider. That is, I am an Indian woman, but I am not Punjabi (the ethnic majority here in the Lower Mainland). Being a Bengali woman puts me on the fringes of this particular community group, but at the same time allows for a degree of fluidity within it. Along with the fact that I am Bengali, it is also vital to state my position as a
researcher. This combination of positions places me at a juncture where I must be sensitive not only to academic norms, but to the community of the individuals I work with. But advantages of having an Indian heritage include easier access to participants, being able to establish a rapport or connection to the women and better understanding of certain cultural issues.

Through self-reflexive writing, the concept of insider research is explored in greater detail as layers of interpretation are inevitably created in the telling, listening, analysis and writing of the research. Focusing on difference and race and their effects on physical activity practices demands that my position as an insider-outsider researcher be announced and remain clear throughout this research. Making my own identity clear is the first step in producing, validating and disseminating "militant, resisting images of ourselves" (Bannerji, 1993, p.185). Negotiating my status as both an insider to the community at large, and a researcher reveals the fluid nature of multiple identities that many women of color have to adopt, especially those that are in the world of academia. While conducting this type of research, I am at one point, an insider, and the outsider at others. Some have labeled this an identity "crisis" of sorts, however this is not necessarily conflicting or problematic for many.

According to Narayan (1993, p.673), "a person may have strands of identification available, strands that may be tugged into the open or stuffed out of sight." However she advocates that researchers, regardless of their ethnicity, must depict themselves as minimally bicultural in terms of belonging to the world of scholarship and the world of everyday life. In a similar vein, Fine (1994) asserts that a "hyphen" both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of "Others." She feels that qualitative researchers who work this hyphen must do so within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with
what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why for whom, and with what consequence.

That is why acknowledging my own position and circumstances that identify and fluctuate in my life is critical. I realize that I belong to several communities simultaneously, and which facet of my subjectivity I choose to accept as a defining identity can change, depending on the context. By adopting a narrative voice these issues can be revealed, in the sense that my own thoughts and experiences through journal notes and personal reflections can illuminate dilemmas, conflicts, assumptions and questions. As well by conducting life story interviews, fixed "truths" about identity, sport and physical activity can also be re-framed by the participants themselves.

I would definitely agree with Hoffman (1995) who has admitted that the preferred Canadian strategy for bringing about change for girls and women in sport and physical activity, which has primarily focused upon the actual activity, is no longer adequate. In a multiracial society "we have to extend our horizons well beyond the domain of sport and take into consideration the social and economic status of women, the perceptions of the female body, the issue of women's health and the issue of control over women's bodies." However, I would propose to extend this argument one-step further...Until we have an end to the "unimaginable absence and silencing...on the part of non-white women themselves" (Bannerji, 1993), there can be no serious counters to existing stereotypes and distorted representations and no creation of a critical space to learn about the diversity of Indo-Canadian women and their current physical activity experiences, issues, and desires.
In my many conversations with Indo-Canadian friends, the most poignant have been with the women who have felt frustrated, marginalized and misunderstood by the current Canadian sport and physical activity context and ultimately, by society at large. Attempts to reclaim, understand, appreciate and advocate one's Indianness, have been developing by South Asian women all over the world...a process quite conflicting and complex. My inquiry into the particular area of sport and physical activity may offer some effective means of discovering new ways of viewing South Asian women living in Canada, rooted in the sporting experiences of the women themselves; experiences that are not isolated events and contribute to a deeper meaning for many. As women are not disconnected from a particular social context, I discover the connection between their physical activity stories and experiences and the meanings conferred.

Organization of Thesis

My exploration into the area of physical activity and the role it plays in the lives of Indo-Canadian women has begun with a discussion of the relevant notions of voice; as well as a contextual look at the absence of minority voices in physical activity and sport literature, policies and programs; and finally the problem of stereotyping and racist practices in Canada. I have outlined several key areas of exploration that speak to the above concerns. Discussing the influence of social support structures, such as the family, school and peers, leadership, notions of the body and physicality, as well as the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the mainstream sport cultures and the sporting accomplishments of the participants in this study, will contribute
to a knowledge base that informs us about Indo-Canadian women and the physical activity experiences.

In chapter two, I document the available literature that addresses aspects of the physical activity experiences of selected Indo-Canadian women that live in the Lower Mainland. The physical activity context for Indian women in Canada is directly connected to and cannot be separated from concepts of history, culture and identity, which can be examined using a South Asian feminist model or 'lens', in which the notions of voice, race, class and gender and representation as they apply to Indian women figure prominently. By focusing on four main bodies of literature, cultural identity, South Asian feminist writings, life story literature and sport and physical activity literature, I am able to better understand and interpret the issues that will be discussed by the participants.

In chapter three, I describe the methodology that best serves the issue of voice in my life story interviews, and provide details of the process of participant selection, interviewing, data organization and analysis. Chapter four addresses the data obtained during the individual interviews, and provides a contextualized portrait of the participants. Relevant issues such as: social support structures, satisfactions and dissatisfactions, physicality and others discussed by the women, are analyzed in chapter five. Along with self-reflexive analysis, chapter five also links back my findings to the current literature in order to extend our understandings of the role of physical activity in the lives of Indo-Canadian women. This study concludes with an epilogue offering suggestions for further studies.
Terminology

In this thesis, my attempt to listen and interpret the multi-layered representations of what it is to be a physically active Indian woman, begins with my own use of language. Therefore I have chosen to use several terms interchangeably. Indo-Canadian, East Indian, Indian, India/n, and South Asian, are several markers of identity that have been used by women of Indian heritage now living in Canada; at different times, for different purposes. As my identity and those of many other women like myself, are flexible, fluid and evolutionary, the terms I use will reflect those processes. At times the words can be associated with a stance of self-expression and political agency, wanting or denying a fixed identity, an individual’s choice of self-expression, or a reflection of history, and culture. However articulated, I have chosen not to change any terms of representation stated by an author or participant as they speak from their own positions of authority.
Initiating A Literature Search

As I began my literature search, my research ideas seemed to be evolving and transforming from a broader interest in identifying and discussing barriers facing Indo-Canadian women, to eventually giving them a voice, and then finally to include examples of active women by way of life story interviews... my attempt to support and perhaps motivate and encourage other Indo-Canadian women to continue to participate in all types of physical activity.

The data researchers collect depends upon the way investigators view the world. Personal philosophies and theoretical perspectives dictate perceptual categories and the kinds of questions posed (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). Feminist researchers have tended to assume shared knowledge of definitions and explanatory theories, however even key concepts like cultural transmission are interpreted differently by different researchers (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). So although theories help to inform our understanding of the data we collect, they can also be confining to a degree. For example, South Asian feminist theory is a combination of feminist theory and race theory, discussing notions of class, sexuality, voice and identity as they pertain specifically to South Asian women. However, my study is focusing on Indo-Canadian women and their physical activity issues and experiences, that has not yet been addressed by South Asian feminist theorists. However, this particular theoretical framework has helped to educate and enlighten me about some of the issues introduced and discussed by
the participants themselves. And because the focus was centered on the women's voices, having a particular theoretical perspective in this case, grounded my findings in the existing units of analysis of other South Asian researchers but was not necessarily the lens through which the data was received or viewed.

Throughout the process of searching for a body of relevant literature to draw from, I came to the realization that the voices of physically active women, and more specifically the issues pertaining to Indo-Canadian women (a growing segment of Canada's population) have been neglected. That is why, I drew from different bodies of literature to create a knowledge base that would help address and situate the data that emerged from the interviews.

I begin this chapter with an historical overview of Punjabi settlers in B.C. in which the experiences of men dominate. Although literature speaking specifically about the varied and complex histories of Indo-Canadian women (starting with the first waves of immigration) is sorely needed, the cultural identity literature helped me understand to a degree how Indo-Canadian women have constructed their identities in this country by examining the history and culture of Indo-Canadian men here in the Lower Mainland. After establishing a cultural and historical picture, I then move on to review South Asian feminist perspectives which help to inform me about the variety of issues that authors are discussing, including voice and stereotypes. Because I have chosen to conduct a series of life story interviews through which I explore the physical activity experiences of Indo-Canadian women, a review of the literature on methodological approaches to life writing can help me approach and uncover the rich data revealed through the interviews. Finally this chapter concludes with a review of some of the
vast amounts of sport and physical activity literature that specifically addresses issues of gender and race.

Cultural Identity, History and Family

South Asians in Canada, especially in the Lower Mainland, have become a highly recognizable ethnic presence; their ethnicity is further strengthened by the fact that they retain and maintain much of their culture and centuries-old traditions, as well as the obvious appearance of turbans, saris and other traditional garb, new temples of worship and an infrastructure of South Asian services and businesses. A somewhat ‘pronounced’ South Asian ethnicity, in some communities has led to contemporary stereotypes that, for example, define the South Asian woman as being highly traditional and submissive, and the victim of a highly patriarchal system.

In Canada, relations between Indians and the dominant white Anglo majority, which are similar in some respects to relations between other visible minority groups, have created and shaped many of the myths and stereotypes that have affected the participation of Indo-Canadians (especially women) in sport. Khan feels that previous racist encounters in other countries such as India based on colonial experiences, may have played an essential part in the relations between the two groups as they interact in Canada.

Surj Rattan (1997) highlights comments by Indo-Canadian politicians, business people, reporters and academics, as they discuss hardships and uphill battles their people have had to endure.
As one Indo-Canadian politician explains: "You don't know where you're going until you know where you came from" (Dhaliwal, 1997). This sentiment seems to be a common link between the members of the Indo-Canadian community who are seen and see themselves as successful in whatever field despite barriers of racism and sexism. In my own experiences, I have seen many Indo-Canadians give credit to early settlers and a culture that has preserved its traditions within a white majority that were historically hostile. Khan argues that the ethnocentric vision of the greatness of the British empire relegated Indians to a subordinate position and justified racist treatment that has lasted until today in Canada. The institutional and societal barriers that have affected Indian women in Canada are also revealed in the historical mind-set of colonial hegemony that is still prevalent in school and sport models. Current issues, policies, and discriminations in all institutions are directly rooted and steeped in the history and development of Canada as a nation built by immigrants.

Singh (1997) describes the social context and history of Canada at the time of the first wave of Sikh immigrants from India. He notes the social injustices performed, and the racism and fear Anglo-Canadians had towards all Asians, which resulted in the formation of the Asiatic Exclusion League in B.C. This league's main objective was to expel all Asians, and prevent them from landing, and was indirectly supported by the governments of Britain and Indian to keep Canada white. Another author writes, "From the moment Sikhs first landed in B.C., they faced the hostility of both civic authorities and the Euro-Canadian labor force. The mayor and council of Vancouver attempted to forestall their entry into the city by setting up a police cordon to keep them in the dock area until they could be boarded onto trains bound for the interior" primarily to work as cheap labor in the logging camps (Singh, 1997). The Sikhs
living in B.C. were isolated primarily by their pattern of life, language, and the severe racist attitudes of the mainstream population. Because of this there was a huge reluctance to integrate with host population or to simply initiate contact. They remained in the company of their own countrymen in bunkhouses or rented lodgings doing hard manual labor in mines and mills. It was an adult male population (only nine women immigrated to B.C. from India between 1904 and 1920); their isolation would have been lessened had their families been allowed to join them. (Singh, 1997). This was not totally by choice, but partially by coercion, enforced by racist and sexist immigration policies. For example, Das Gupta (1994) points out that even though those in power in Canada at the time needed the labor, their desire was satisfied very selectively.

In some lodging houses, as many as 10 men shared the same room for cooking, eating and sleeping. They endured this kind of crowding in order to save as much money as possible to support families in Punjab. Whether in bunkhouses or lodging houses, Sikh immigrants stayed together as a democratic and self-supporting social unit. The early South Asian communities became “bachelor societies”, although many of the men were married and had left their wives and children back in India (Das Gupta 1994). Open immigration policies were restricted to northern and western European immigrants, preferably male. Race and gender ideologies justified the domination and exclusion of people of color, particularly women. She notes that in those early years, the banning of wives and children of South Asian immigrants from reunion with their menfolk provoked the most intense anger and fuel for political organizing in B.C.’s South Asian community. The men realized that without women and children, their community would remain temporary, lacking in stability and stripped of political
and social rights in Canada (Das Gupta, 1994). In this there was a realization of the reproductive rights and maintenance role of women in society. In Marxist analysis, Das Gupta (1994, p.61) writes, "the essence of gender ideology as it exist today [is based in the realization that] women with their child-bearing and child-rearing functions are essential for the generation and daily regeneration of labor power." It was not until 1919 that South Asian women and young children could enter Canada, after an agreement was reached following repeated pressure by British colonial officials (Das Gupta, 1994).

After a detailed review of the immigration policies of Canada in the following years and their effects on South Asian women, Das Gupta (1994) surmises that the South Asian family structure in Canada has been severely distorted by the direct intervention of the state through its immigration policies.

When the women started coming to Canada in small numbers to join their husbands, they lived mainly within the home. There was no direct contact with non-Indians, therefore there was little need to learn English. The lack of contact with larger society as well as the absence of real extended families and friends produced considerable social isolation (Das Gupta, 1994). Children growing up in this environment faced a dual culture. The author further explains that children were expected to retain their Indian customs and beliefs partly because of the concern of the majority of South Asian community to reproduce as well as preserve their cultures. This ideology has continued today as Westernization is seen as a threat to gender relations at home (i.e. westernized women are often portrayed as promiscuous). Becoming ‘westernized’ is seen as a signal of sexual availability to men outside the family (Das Gupta, 1994). She argues that research shows that most South Asian women experience mixed
emotions when it comes to choosing between traditional South Asian versus dominant Canadian values and practices. And the author claims one of the reasons for this ambivalence in women is the fact that the South Asian family becomes a source of strength despite its many oppressive features. It provides a support group in which members can share and deal with experiences of failure and discrimination.

Nodwell (1994) discusses commitment to cultural roots, from a different perspective by focusing on Indo-Canadian youth. As a white academic, Nodwell’s study (1994) reiterates the idea that Indo-Canadian youth are becoming key builders in the ongoing construction of the ‘Indian community’ (the infrastructure e.g. businesses, educational and religious institutions, independent media and political sources), ‘Indian culture’ (the practices and beliefs), and ‘Indian identity’ (where we stand as a community, as Canadians) in Vancouver. She explores the various identity theories (situational ethnicity and symbolic ethnicity) and shows how they are not appropriate in the South Asian context, i.e. they are based on misleading assumptions. Firstly, she suggests that too often individual personalities and circumstances are not taken into account, resulting in a perspective of complete cultural determinism. The author feels “it assumes that cultural values are fixed and static and that there is no possibility of adaptation, flexibility or accommodation between one set of values and another” (Nodwell, 1994, p.95). And secondly, the theories don’t take into account the experience of maintaining encompassing and overlapping identities and the very real commitment to addressing the dilemmas of dual cultural heritages. She shows how people generally dichotomize the ethnic situation (East/West, tradition/modernity etc.), but reality is quite different and isn’t necessarily an either/or situation. Issues of flexibility and accommodation of cultural values, while still
maintaining identity, commonly arise for many South Asians living in Canada. Nodwell (1994, p.103) believes that a full understanding of Indian youth, in Vancouver, “must account for the persistence of certain values, and for the social and emotional links, which fly in the face of outward appearances of complete conformity or acculturation to majority Canadians.”

Dhruvarajan (1996), examines the Indo-Canadian community and discusses family structure, lifestyles, beliefs and patterns of behaviour. Her observations help to explain cultural and familial beliefs and behaviour that can influence the physical activity patterns and choices for many women. For example, in spite of some recent improvements as far as racism (institutional and societal), the author reports that the historical legacy of colonialism is still taking its toll. Many members of the community still report experiences of prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, the school system, and the neighborhood. The author cites research that shows that many mainstream Canadians still prefer to maintain greater social distance from this group than from other ethnic groups- most of them do not wish to have them as marital partners, friends and neighbors, co-workers, or even acquaintances (Dhruvarajan, 1996). As well, Indian women are viewed as docile, subservient and reserved and these stereotypes interfere with their integration into mainstream society (Naidoo 1980; Agnew 1990; Ralston 1988).

Both Das Gupta (1994) and Dhruvarajan (1996) feel that the Indian family serves as a refuge from these types of racist misrepresentations, but is also the locus for strong gender and ethnic socialization. In these families, a preference for boys is based on religious, social and economic grounds. Sons carry the family name and inherit the parental property, and are duty-bound to care for their parents in their old age (Dhruvarajan, 1996). From an early age boys and
girls are taught that they are different. The whereabouts and behaviour of girls especially after they reach puberty are closely monitored. However, according to Dhruvarajan (1996), although denying freedom of movement to young women is considered appropriate, so is giving them more say in educational and occupational choices as well as choice of marital partners. But these types of decisions are still expected to be family decisions, in which daughters are expected to think about family interests and behave within the patriarchal normative framework (Dhruvarajan, 1996). Values like commitment to family goals, cooperation and emphasis on duties rather than rights are constantly promoted, and such values develop responsible citizenship among group members and contribute towards stable family life. In these types of families, children are supported and encouraged to achieve and excel. The Indian family ethic, which can be binding on all members, “helps create a strong economic, social and emotional support system to all the community members in a sometimes hostile and generally unfriendly Canadian social environment” (Dhruvarajan, 1996, p. 324). Nevertheless, familistic values are interpreted and put into effect within a patriarchal structural and ideological context. Although she speaks about Hindu families, she does apply her findings to the Indo-Canadian population at large.

As a member of the Indo-Canadian community in Winnipeg, Dhruvarajan (1996) positions herself clearly as an insider. Regarding the issue of insider research, i.e. being a member of the community you are studying, Narayan (1993), talks about the tendency to clump all “natives” as the same “native”, and how the voices of Indian women are not necessarily heard by insiders either. For example, “native” men may not be able to articulate the experiences of “native” women, as neither group is homogeneous. The author insists we focus
our attention on the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts. Do they simply become a generalized “Other” who serve our professional interests, or are they accepted as people with voices, views and dilemmas?

She feels scholars, even “native” are “minimally bicultural”, in that they belong to two worlds- the world of scholarship and the world of everyday life. As a “native” researcher herself, she documents the questions and tensions of conducting research in India as a half-American, half-Indian woman. She explains how different identities became highlighted at different times. Narayan (1993, p.674) felt her role at times became that of a “cultural broker with the dubious power to extend First World prestige to Third World realities” and at others she was “lumped with academics who made it their business to document and theorize about other people’s lives.” She asserts that South Asian researchers studying their own communities are assumed by many academic communities to be insiders who will forward authentic points of view regardless of their own complex backgrounds (Narayan, 1993).

In conclusion, after reviewing some of the material available speaking to cultural identity, it has become even more clear to me how important it is to have a stock of stories that document a variety of experiences of Indo-Canadian women and can contribute to a fuller picture. Just a few of the missing pieces range from the histories of the first women pioneers arriving from India, to more family descriptions and accounts. The literature also needs to incorporate the physical activity and sporting experiences of Indo-Canadian women. It can be surmised from the literature and personal accounts that due to a legacy of racist experiences, familial beliefs and demands, and a degree of community isolation, that some Indo-Canadian women (especially first generation immigrants), have rarely had the opportunity to participate
in recreation centers, gyms and school-based activities, etc. However, as an Indian woman I know through personal and family accounts and those of friends, that Indo-Canadian women are physically active in a variety of manners. Lively dancing is part of every celebration including engagements, weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, and certain cultural holidays. As well, walking is a daily ritual for a great number of Indo-Canadian women. We must also acknowledge the physical demands of manual labor including the maintenance of extended family households, gardening and farming. Yet these experiences are rarely accounted for. Hearing South Asian experiences may help to inform us as to why experiences like this are not accounted for as well as how Indo-Canadian women are viewed in contemporary Canadian society. These perspectives can also help us to understand the importance of and the need for diversity of voices and experiences.

South Asian Feminist Perspectives

So how do South Asian feminist researchers attempt to locate and understand the processes by which South Asian communities and South Asian women in particular are identified, characterized, studied and often excluded in areas such as sport and physical activity by mainstream western society? What is the role of physical activity and sport in the lives of Indian women living in Canada and how do their experiences in sport and physical activity and in the education system, empower or disempower them? What kinds of choices do they make to become involved with, stay involved with or withdraw from sport? To begin to answer these types of questions, South Asian women who are writing about and within their own communities must approach the topics from a particular perspective that takes into account
different voices and then deconstructs the particular frameworks, constructs and concerns that Indian women live with daily. A number of South Asian feminist writers have addressed topics such as race, class and gender as they pertain to South Asian women living in Canada, as well as the misrepresentation and victimization of Indo-Canadian women, pro-activism, the need for inclusion in mainstream feminism and the notion of voice.

The experiences of Indian women who do have an interest in sport and appreciate the instrumental values of sport for maintaining physical and mental fitness, acquiring specific skills and the encouragement of discipline are rarely heard in the Indian community or recognized as valid by mainstream society. Adopting a South Asian feminist perspective means that I must view this phenomenon as an example of how the views of those in power become the yardstick for measuring other members of a society. This helped to a degree, however, what I ultimately ended up doing was to use the perspectives to inform rather than clarify the topics raised and explained by the participants themselves. Indian women must begin to recount their experiences, and the power groups must begin to listen and take them into account.

Dhruvarajan (1991) stresses that women of color must make sure that their own particular issues of concern are addressed. As members of an ethnic group, she believes that Asian women and their experiences rank among the lowest in Canadian society, as well as the fact that their experiences are clearly absent from mainstream feminist writings. The author feels that it is necessary for women of color to forge alliances with white women, but that it might not be feasible as feminist analysis does not give insight into the experiences of women of color (although more literature is being produced by authors like the latter). She claims that the feminist movement for gender equality has a chance for success only when there is
solidarity among all women; and this can develop for women of color only when racism becomes part of the feminist agenda. She traces the origin of racism back to the colonization of various parts of the world by Europeans. “The worldwide effects of colonization have been the pauperization of people of non-European origin, who started to flee their own countries in search of better opportunities” (Dhruvarajan, 1993). In describing the South Asian community, Dhruvarajan (1993) explains that this particular group has been subjected to the policy of racism in the context of immigration and participation in Canadian life. For example, they were given the right to vote in 1948 only after India became independent of colonial rule in 1947 and after the UN resolution against racism in 1948 (Bolaria and Li, 1988).

Dhruvarajan (1991) feels that South Asian women and other women of color are victims of sexism, as are all women in patriarchal societies, of which Canada is one. As a result, the impact of racist policies and practices has had serious consequences for the position of women in their own ethnic groups. In South Asian groups, official sexist policies “buttress the position of control [however limited] already enjoyed by the men.” (Dhruvarajan, 1993). However, the author argues that women of color find it difficult to identify themselves with the women’s movement at this time, since the feminist analysis and agenda in general, reflect white middle class women’s interests (Anderson 1983; Bannerji 1987; Renzetti and Curran 1989). The socialist feminist agenda does not give insight into the experiences of women of color since it is culture blind; and the critique of the family which dominates radical feminist concerns does not have resonance among them as coping with the hostile racist society has been possible through the supports provided by the family (Dhruvarajan, 1993). This does not mean that the women are unaware of sexism prevalent in ethnic families. However many South
Asian women for example, see no point in putting down their own men when they are as powerless within mainstream society as themselves (ibid.). According to Agnew (1993) these tendencies get misconstrued and South Asian women get stereotyped as “traditional” and “oppressed” women who must be liberated by the participation in “enlightened” cultures. She feels such images are part of the systemic barriers faced by South Asian women in Canada. “The barriers of race, class and gender are oppressive but the consciousness they generate is empowering” (Agnew, 1993).

Agnew (1993) agrees with the premise that the women’s movement has created a general consciousness of oppression based on gender and that a unified feminist environment would benefit many South Asian women. However she contests the point that South Asian women have little to gain from current feminist agendas. She feels Black feminist criticism has enabled South Asian and immigrant women to engage in the process of naming the sources of their oppression and understanding its systemic nature. They have organized themselves and through community-based struggles are seeking greater access to the economic and social resources of Canadian society. She feels South Asian women have become politically active, especially in community-based struggles, and that the definition of what constitutes political activity has been broadened by the feminist assertion that “the personal is political” (Agnew, 1993).

In a deeper examination of the topic of agency, Bannerji (1991) advocates fighting against the prevailing stereotypes of Indian women in Canada by producing new images controlled by Indian women themselves. She explains that visual images are social constructs and suggests that South Asian women in Canada have no identity except the one conferred
upon them by the Canadian state, one that incorporates themes of passivity, docility, silence, and femininity. Although these images have a commanding effect on Indian women's identity and others' perceptions, it is nonetheless the underlying oppressive ideologies, not necessarily the images themselves, that are the most damaging. Bannerji (1991, p.146) asks the critical question: "How have we arrived at such a state of exploitation and non-entity?" She answers this question by claiming that white settler economies like Canada simply perpetuated a long history of colonialism and imperialism that continues to justify an ideology of racism. This combined with the neo-colonial nature of South Asian countries, ensures South Asian women a place on the lowest level in the scale of exploitation in Canada. As a result of this relegated position in society, stereotypes of South Asian women operate directly and indirectly to maintain the oppression suffered by Indian women. According to Bannerji (1991, p.147), these stereotypes (passivity, uncleanliness, docility, silence, illiteracy, etc.) "are created in the process of ruling and help to maintain that rule by signaling to keep us in an assigned place."

Jiwani (1992), also concerned with the common images and stereotypes of Indian women, especially as they are represented in western film, literature and other cultural productions, feels an underlying paternalistic variant of colonial relations has locked Indian women in a system of representation that defines them as tradition-bound, submissive, weak and victimized. She agrees with Bannerji in that the imaging of South Asian women is a direct result of hierarchical relations of power that get reduced to and viewed in terms of binary oppositions (e.g. first world/third world, strong/weak, ordered/disordered, modern/primitive etc.). She emphasizes the importance of examining such representations as they are used to
communicate a given group’s “place” in larger society, to describe it, and ‘socialize’ it into behaving in ways that conform to the dictates of larger society (Bannerji 1986, Parmar 1984).

But can South Asian feminist writers themselves fall into the same traps? Razack (1996) debates the ethics of minority stories in mainstream feminism. She ponders the questions of many minority writers of how to present stories that exist on the fringes of what is viewed as “knowledge” in a sensitive manner. She also discusses some of the traps minority women writers can fall into such as dichotomizing the issues and oppressing others. “The strategies of empowerment, dialogue and voice do not in fact work as neatly as they are supposed to because there is no unity among the oppressed” (Razack, 1996, p. 109). Therefore minority women writers must also strive to recognize the multiple nature of subjectivity and the complex ways in which meaning is constructed. Her central piece of advice is three-fold: firstly that minority writers should critically examine what they share and what they don’t share; secondly that they must work from the basis that they all have only partial knowledge and that they come from different subject positions; and thirdly, “no one is off the hook since [they] can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else” (Razack, 1996, p.110).

Sheth and Handa (1996) discuss the complex nature of a South Asian feminist voice. They attempt to deconstruct the various categories and social constructions that are placed on India/n women by acknowledging their own positions as India/n graduate students at the intersection of race, class and gender. They begin by explaining that they have not encountered their experiences of “living India/n” in text books, classroom discussions, lectures, conversations etc. and that their absence had become quite conspicuous. They agree with
Agnew, in that their “coming to consciousness” about their racial oppression has been largely delivered by Black feminist activists. However as ‘brown’ feminists, they must draw upon their own particular experiences as India/ns as well as their own histories of oppression, domination and resistance. Sheth and Handa (1996, p.47) acknowledge the contributions of other India/n feminists for having exposed the subordination of India/n women by India/n men and the subordination of all India/ns by the white British, but have not found much writing on “the particular prejudices and privileges that we as India/ns in general and Indian/s from a particular class have in relation to the spectrum of non-white people. They explain that the uneasiness of writing about the sensitive points comes from wanting to resist the “white referent point”, while knowing full well that the language they use and the systems they live in daily still bind them to it.

The authors discuss various processes that take place between India/ns as they mediate between each other and mainstream society. The process of “whitening the other” is a way of shifting the focus away from our own identities, “away from the pain of insecurity and confusion to a focus on the ‘other’” (Sheth and Handa, 1996, p.58). This particular process operates as a frame of exclusion “pulling at the contradictions in each other to fabricate and construct the ‘other’ as un-India/n, not India/n enough, thus solidifying, fixing and feeling comfortable with our own India/n identity as the more real one” (ibid.). They also deconstructed the impact of internal (community) racism and external (mainstream) racism through their own lived experiences. Sheth and Handa (1996, p.78, 79) write, “Since the Euro-American practice of racial categorization through skin color still acts as one of the prime racial markers through which everyday racism exerts its power of domination, the whiter one
is, the more racial privilege one has.” And “in participating in the system by the mere fact of living in it, non-white people internalize and act upon categorization based on the color of skin, thereby executing, and consequently reproducing the social relations of racism among themselves that are primarily designed by the dominant whites to exclude all of them.” In initiating these debates, the authors are not only positioning themselves and the many ways India/ns continue to participate in divisive practices, they are also discussing the need for political solidarity between all women. This can only happen, according to the authors (1996, p.49), if white feminists constantly position themselves “in relation to” and “not within” these experiences. They must recognize their positions of whiteness and how they fall outside the experiences of India/n women “but not outside the power dynamic of her relation to the history of racial domination relevant to the experiences of India/n women.”

Stephens (1994, p.93) attempts to address this issue in her examination of the juncture at which she feels “feminism collides and colludes with the discourse of Orientalism.” A distinguishing feature of contemporary feminism is that it claims to record the direct experiences of ‘real’ women (Stephens, 1994). This then gets translated into descriptions of Indian women that are problematic. That is, “there is a problem of the unmediated association between representation and reality that surfaces when non-Western women are the object of feminism’s gaze.” Stephens (1994, p.107) feels the feminist conditions for ‘proper subjects’ include the non-elite, and women who are the poorest and suffering the most. “Elite women [are seen as] somehow less ‘authentic’ Indian women, less ‘subjects in their own right’ than tribals, peasants or women from urban slums.” The same kind of conceptualization can be realized in the writings of Indian women in Canada, where the experiences of elite Indo-
Canadian women are rarely heard. This 'prestige' and hierarchy of experience has not been challenged in feminist writings and this process should begin with South Asian writers.

Stephens (1994, p.102) in a development of Jiwani's (1992) argument of binaries, feels a new kind of opposition has developed in Western feminism that is based on the premise that the West/Westernization acts as a restriction. "The frequency with which the apology 'as a Western feminist...' is mentioned in contemporary discussion has importance as an anti-imperialist strategy." In other words, "the opposition between 'the Indian woman' as chaste spirituality or maternal sensuality and the unchaste, cold, sexual consumerism of 'the Western woman' is the same spiritual/material, East/West dichotomy generated by the Orientalist" (Stephens, 1994, p.103, 107). Yet, "while 'difference' and the distinction between the 'West' and the 'non-West' is emphasized as a way of signifying the anti-imperialist intentions of feminism, the idea of an 'international sisterhood' remains intact." In a review of several articles and books on Indian women written by various authors, Stephens (1994, p.108-109) concludes that "hailing the prospect of a 'universal sisterhood' seems to be the end product of much feminist research into Third World women." And that "the concept of a 'universal sisterhood' or 'women's liberation on a truly international scale' is based on an essentialist notion of womanness beyond history, nation and class." Stephens points out the importance of hearing the voices of many different perspectives as one of the solutions to these dilemmas of feminist research on Indian women. She clearly states (1994, p.120) that Indian women can no longer be viewed as a homogeneous entity that corresponds to a "descending scale of 'realness' from the worst to the least oppressed."
Hence, documenting the views of several South Asian feminist writers is valuable in revealing the construction of Indian women in Canadian society and how the power relations of this country are inextricably tied to and control these images and the generation of stereotypes. It is also useful to understand how destructive the forces can be in limiting and confining the opportunities of Indian women living in Canada. However in terms of empowerment, the writers have also examined the need for presenting new images of Indian women that confront and contest the dominant ones. This is achieved by hearing the stories and voices of many different types of Indian women. The literature has also pointed to the fact that this is not an easy task for South Asian feminist writers who face many dilemmas in producing this type of work, such as racist and classist views within the Indian community itself, “heroizing”, and presenting “real” Indian stories and “authentic” Indian women. The latter dilemma concerns my own reasons for doing this particular research. Although the literature provided an abundance of material about the stereotypes associated with Indian women regarding their bodies, strength, motivation, capabilities and restrictions, the literature inadequately addressed the role of physical activity and sport in the lives of Indo-Canadian women.

Life Story Methodology and Interviews

South Asian feminist writers have insisted that new representations, new realities, and new experiences be depicted in the writings on South Asian women that incorporate their complex identities, ambiguities and histories. To elicit voice in this manner, new techniques in feminist writing allow for new voices to be heard and position the author in the context of the narrative being produced. The life story methodology is particularly effective technique,
however it must be carried out in an honest, responsible, and sensitive manner that explores the numerous issues and steps involved (discussed in detail in chapter three).

I have chosen to conduct life story interviews, the means by which life stories are uncovered. In order to do so, the process of the broader methodology as well as the ethical issues must be considered in order to understand the multiplicity of influences involved. To begin to comprehend the issues involved in an Indo-Canadian woman’s physical activity experiences, it is necessary to understand each person in a holistic sense, as someone who has had a past, a present and aspirations for the future. We understand through the cultural identity literature and the South Asian feminist literature that family issues, social structures, role models, access and motivation are all aspects that can influence participation. Contextualizing their experiences in this manner, is the most sensitive manner in which to give voice to the issues involved.

Stivers (1993) assesses the usefulness and role of personal narrative in social science. She argues that many social scientists remain determined to pursue research along natural science lines, and those determined to do otherwise are still likely to be charged with bias or lack of rigor. Therefore any assessment of personal narrative must acknowledge its contingency on assumptions about the nature of social reality and what counts as knowledge. Stivers (1993, p.410) makes five important propositions: 1) That there is no such thing as removing the observer from the knowledge acquisition process; 2) There is no such thing as “unbiased” knowledge; 3) It is impossible to draw a line between a “fact” and an “interpretation”;
4) Individual, contextual accounts are “real knowledge” in as weighty a sense as the knowledge claims of positivism; 5) These awareness do mean that there is no such thing as a universal “Truth.”

With regards to feminist writing and the personal narrative, the author (1993, p.411) feels “having rejected women’s historical status as the object of the male subject’s defining gaze, feminism demands that those who have been objectified now be able to define themselves, to tell their own stories.” She further explains that “this perspective implies a much closer commonality between social science research into relatively large-scale social realities like organizations, cultures, and polities and the exploration of individual identity that takes place under the rubric of personal narrative.” As the Personal Narratives Group (1989, p.3-15) notes: “the personal narrative, whether it reveals an acceptance of or a challenge to the given rules, also documents on the individual level the very process of reproduction or undermining of those rules.”

Anderson and Jack (1993), concur that the personal narrative produced through oral history interviews, provides the opportunity for generating new insights about women’s experiences and also allows the narrator to tell her own story in her own terms. They have observed how women’s experiences are often muted, particularly in any situation where women’s interests are at variance with those of men. They begin their discussion of interviewing techniques by proposing that we as researchers learn to “shed our agendas” by listening to the levels on which the narrator responds. To do so, they suggest we must listen critically to our interviews, to our responses as well as our questions. The next vital step is listening for meaning (i.e. a woman’s self-commentary and reflections are not a private
subjective act). The authors (1993) conclude with a word of warning to the researcher about the moral dimension of interviewing that involves honoring integrity and privacy. In a similar vein, Etter-Lewis (1991), professes the importance of oral narratives as a unique and provocative means of gathering information central to understanding women’s lives and viewpoints. She adds a further dimension to the argument by asserting that when oral narratives are applied to women of color, they assume an added significance as a powerful instrument for the rediscovery of womanhood so often overlooked and neglected. She discusses the oral narrative as a vital and valid feminist methodology. Traditionally, according to Etter-Lewis (1991), what is found in research about women is the “mythical male norm” or the “white female norm” and as a result, views of the self that differ from these norms are judged to be deviant or deficient. That is why she feels oral narratives must be recognized as a valid form of feminist methodology and viewed as a means of inclusion.

By incorporating life stories as a valid and vital methodology in all types of social science research, Sparkes and Templin (1992), explain that engaging in this methodology provides important insights into the nature of race, physical activity and gender. Life stories can also facilitate development, growth and critical self-reflection for the participant herself as well as the researcher. Life stories anchor the subject in larger social, historical, political and economic contexts that have a great influence on individual life. According to the authors, another major strength of life story is its ability to explore the subjective reality of individuals in a way that respects their uniqueness and allows them to speak for themselves.

In another article, Sparkes (1993) insists that as researchers we must be constantly aware of the intimate relationship between the product and the process of writing. He feels
researchers committed to giving voice to the participants should produce 'jointly told tales'-
which pushes to the forefront the power relationships inherent in the research process. The
choice of these strategies like life stories, are important because of their ability to dismantle
and deconstruct our conceptions of subjectivity, identity and truth also deconstructed by Stivers
(1993). As no textual staging can ever be innocent, Sparkes (1993) explains that the voices
which are included in the text, and how they are given weight and interpreted, are not just
textual strategies but are political concerns that have moral consequences. He asserts that how
we as researchers choose to write about others has profound implications. The ultimate goal
should not just how “readable” the text is but also for how the people the text portrays are
“read” and understood.

Middleton (1993), explores relationships between individuals’ educational life
histories, their historical and material contexts, and the broader patterns of power relations. She
addresses two important issues: the accuracy and consistency of the stories people tell, and the
nature of the researcher’s interpretation of these stories. She feels that the central concern is
not the events in a life story, but the interpretations women make of them and the importance
of these interpretations. Gubrium and Holstein (1995) deal specifically with the interpretation
and representation of lives in their analysis of life stories. They consider biographical work to
be a distinctive kind of reality-constructing activity that is fluid and flexible, but at the same
time oriented to practicality and consequential meanings. Individual experience, descriptive
contingencies like local cultures, shifting patterns of progression through life and the
deprivitization of the life course (i.e. now reshaped in diverse public contexts) all contribute to
the malleability of the life course (ibid.). The authors feel a new more integrated approach to
interpreting lives and attention to the interpretive practice itself, are critical aspects of life writing. The authors strongly argue that individuals are contextually situated, and recognition and expansion of these interpretive sites is crucial.

The authors (ibid., p.220) do not suggest that biographical work is so flexible it has become a matter of “free play”, rather they assert that “while the idea of biographical work (life writing) accords much greater malleability to the life course than do traditional understandings, the ‘artfulness’ of interpretation is socially organized and is articulated in relation to descriptive contingencies...which are located at the intersection of multiple organizational, professional and cultural structures and interests.”

Researchers doing research within their own communities face these issues along with issues of objectivity, partiality and multiple audiences (Harper, 1994). Positioning oneself can counter accusations of insider research producing only a partial picture of reality (ibid.). As a Lebanese woman conducting life history research with other Lebanese women, Harper (1994) describes the relationship between the speaker and listener that can only be dealt with by having a reflexive awareness of power relations between research participants. “Research does not occur in a vacuum, but in a social, cultural and historical environment” (Harper, 1994, p.23). She then discusses the role of the storytellers in greater detail as life stories are the product of two interpretations. She goes on to reveal the ethical dilemmas of doing this type of research as well as her own status as a member of the Lebanese community she was investigating. For example, “the collaborative nature of life history projects raises complex questions of voice and power” (ibid.) such as those raised by Smith (1993). She feels researchers should always question “who speaks in the text and whose story is being told, who
maintains control over the narrative and by implication over the purposes to which the story is put.” Smith (1993, p.289) elaborates on dilemmas and concerns involved in each step of life writing. One of the first is the selection of a participant: “In a world full of subjects— we may indeed ask why a modern biographer fixes his attention on certain faces and turns his back on others.” In a partial answer of her own question Smith (ibid.) writes: “the biographer’s personality— motives, fears, unconscious conflicts and yearnings—reaches out to responsive, if not similar, territory in the person to be subject.” Fine (1994), examines the hyphen at which the researcher and participant merge identities. Exploring how qualitative researchers work this hyphen, she asks researchers to probe how we are in relations with the contexts we study and with our informants; as well as other vital questions like, whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequences? In Smith’s view, life writing is an active constructionist activity, from the picking of a participant, to the seeking out of data sources, to the selection of themes and issues, and to the final image or portrait that is drawn. Fine (1994) explains that many qualitative researchers seek to shelter their narrative voices in the text as if they were transparent and do not recognize ‘the hyphen’. And that many “researchers/writers self-consciously carry no voice, body, race, class, or gender and no interests into their texts” (Fine, 1994, p.74). In becoming self-conscious of work at the hyphen, researchers “can see a history of qualitative research that has been deeply colonial, surveilling, and exotic” (ibid., p.75). The risk for qualitative researchers has been and continues to be “imperial translation.” The politics of translation, according to the author, depends upon the realization that we all have genders,
races, classes, sexualities, and dis-abilities. Researchers have to be “negotiating how, when, and why to situate and privilege whose voices” (ibid., p.80).

What the life story literature shows is that stories are central in linking experiential inquiry and life experience. Also, life stories create a space where there is conversation among participants, researchers and audience, all with different life experiences. However, only by attending to the conditions which create narratives and knowledge, the forms that guide them and the relationships that produce them are we able to understand what is communicated in a personal narrative. Freeman (1989, p.430-431) has noted that a life story is “a rearrangement of the raw data of a narrator’s original account...consciously staged and directed- both by the investigator and the narrator,” therefore, analyzing a life story through interviewing is also a complex process. One should be ready to challenge the existing frameworks and schemas. We see now, that it is just as critical to examine the process and construction of the story, as it is to document the experiences. For example, sport and physical activity are cultural activities that construct meaning, and these “truths” need to dismantled and deconstructed which I am attempting to do by documenting the experiences of a particular population. However, I realize that it is just as important to point out that the experiences are a product of a particular time, place and set of circumstances, and that layers of interpretation will be created in the telling, listening, analysis and writing of those experiences. Most life stories now focus on the translation of oral narrative to text, on narrative text as literature, on the construction of self through narration, and on cross-cultural dialogue (Harper, 1994).

The nature, purpose, function and form of life writing have evolved over the years but what seems clear is that finding voice among the disenfranchised, the powerless, or those with
alternative visions is clearly a benefit of this methodology. With my focus being on giving
dvoice to physical activity experiences and issues, these are nonetheless some of the key aspects
that have convinced me that an interview constructed on a life story model is the most
appropriate methodology by which to obtain the data. Having discussed the steps and decisions
involved in conducting this methodology, it is most definitely an “active constructionist
activity,” from the first step of choosing a participant, to selecting data pools, to the choice of
theme(s), and finally the entire story that is captured. Hearing the stories and experiences of
Indian women living in Canada, and the role of physical activity and sport in their lives is a
way of maintaining the dynamism of knowledge creation since there is never one story to tell
about any situation.

Race, Gender, Sport and Physical Activity

Listening to the voices and documenting the experiences of Indo-Canadian women in
sport and physical activity is vital to understanding the role of physical activity and sport in
their lives. Also, these experiences are important to explore as just as many Indo-Canadian
women have excelled and been empowered by some of their physical activity and sporting
experiences, as those who have been constrained and frustrated. New stories can serve to
dismantle the popular stereotypes that contribute to all of the experiences described above.
Dismissing athleticism and sporting ability as a natural outcome of one’s race or gender is
ultimately obscuring and only inhibits understanding of the frequently complex processes
underlying institutions like sport. Racist work like Carrington, Chivers and William (1987),
Walkling and Brannigan (1986) and Lewis (1979), reaffirm the common stereotypes of
weakness, lack of stamina and ability in South Asian women, for it cannot be denied that resorting to vague theories of human nature and innate propensities is a convenient form of explanation. For example 'race', is often invoked as an explanation of social behaviour- "It's only natural!" There is nothing natural or inevitable about the low numbers of Indo-Canadian women in professional sports, on college athletic scholarships, or in mainstream fitness centers. (Although some Indo-Canadian do participate in these environments and do have athletic scholarships they represent a minority within the community). The concept of race itself seems to contain some element of a biological reality quite separate from social relations. However, on closer examination, we can see there is far from universal agreement on this issue.

Many authors like Sammons (1994) are now questioning the attribution of physical ability to particular 'races' of people. He presents the varying views on race and questions the term's validity as a category of human difference. He discusses the issue of genetics and asks if the success of Black athletes is the result of chromosomes specific to their race. As Jiwani (1993) points out, "according to biologists there are no separate races. The racialization of groups has its origins in the Greco-Roman period, but assumed drastically negative dimensions during the period of colonial expansion" (Jiwani, 1993). She claims human beings are not born with racist attitudes; they are socialized into them. Nonetheless, "race is very real in its consequences" (Sammons, 1994). And as Dei (1996, p.41) explains, "race matters in human lives and social interactions." The facts of economic history and the realities of contemporary society clearly demonstrate there is an ideological meaning to race, but labeling race as a strictly theoretical concept could discredit the claims of those who have been victims of racist practices (Dei, 1996). That is why many authors have indicated that the concept of race and the
social practices of racism should be studied at both theoretical and experiential levels (Dei 1996, Miles 1989, Banks 1994, Giroux 1992).

Sammons (1994) explains the term race is a confusing and dangerous one because people think they know it when they see it. He has borrowed a breakdown of the anatomy of race by Jacques Barzun, in which the development of stereotypes and misconceptions is described in three stages. The first stage begins when certain traits are observed in one or more people (with varying degrees of accuracy). From that an archetype or model is built from these qualities which finally results in a stereotype/superstition/or idea about the person that isn’t necessarily factual. The author feels it is not wrong to assume that behind every myth and stereotype there is an underlying truth. What should be explored is how and why they are used to exclude certain groups from systems such as sport. Issues of classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism and ageism are integral in the process of exclusion and the steering of certain groups from particular sports (ibid.). Along this same line, Lovell (1991) argues that racial stereotyping facilitates the integration of Black women in British sporting cultures, but at the same time works against the integration of South Asian women. She feels that race, sex, class and culture operate together to create a set of circumstances that dictate the freedoms and constraints of an institution like sport, but no group of women is affected by the conditions in the same way. For example, Afro-Caribbean women are considered to be aggressive and dominating, characteristics supposedly suited to sports, whereas Indian women are often characterized as weak and passive, so that teachers typically assume that they will not be interested in sports. Lovell (1991) asserts that these characterizations are a direct result of the deep cultural roots of racism in British and American societies that has been a continual and
major influence on the participation of ethnic women in sport. In an analysis of this phenomenon, Jiwani (1993) explains that in Canada, the visibility of particular cultures focuses on either their negative or positive stereotypes that are anchored in the perceptions and point of view of the ‘ordinary’ Canadian. These cultures are then perceived as being different, either ‘backward and oppressive’, or ‘exotic and mysterious’. These cultures are often typified as frozen relics from the past.

It is just as critical to see how these misrepresentations are often reflected in official policies like “multiculturalism” and sport programming in schools. As a direct result of universalizing practices, Bissoondath (1994) suggests that cultural differences and stereotyping are heightened by current Canadian multicultural policies that emphasize “difference” as pluralism. Physical activity and sport are viewed through this “multicultural lens” that claims inclusivity and sensitivity to cultural differences. However, according to Bissoondath (1994, pp.102, 111, 190): “(This allows) ethnic communities to exist as officially preserved, promoted and enhanced entities...(turning them at times into) museums of exoticism...I’d like to think that our multiculturalism mosaic will nudge us into greater openness, but multiculturalism as we know it indulges in stereotype, depends on it for a dash of color and the flash of dance.” This type of ideology implemented in many PE classes, has resulted in the incorporation of superficial changes such as the “traditional” dances of various ethnic cultures. But these implementations do not address the real issues of implicit racist attitudes and practices of educators that generally stem from ignorance of cultural contexts and conditions, which cannot be fully understood or represented by a regional dance. Although the design of this particular study is focused on voice, it is difficult to isolate these issues from the experiences of many
Indian women living in Canada who have felt the insensitivity to culture from educators in their PE classes.

For most women this type of racism deters them from participating in sport, but Lovell (1991) argues that racism often leads Black women into sports in the first place. The increase of all-Black or predominantly Black female sports clubs in Britain illustrates the attempts of Black women to escape from the racism that occurs in mainstream sports (Hargreaves 1994, Lovell 1991). Messner and Sabo (1990) having also addressed the rise in gendered and ethnically segregated sporting environments, feel that women’s movement into sport represents a genuine quest by women for equality, control of their own bodies and self-definition. They assert the creation of autonomous athletic spheres in which women can play and compete on their own terms is another way that male hegemony and racist practices are being challenged.

Dewar (1993) addresses oppressive practices in women’s sport and focuses on the importance of challenging and changing the racist structures and practices that exist in collegiate sports. She claims that much of the work in the sociology of sport is and continues to be Eurocentric where sexism is defined as a primary form of oppression (Dewar, 1993). Susan Birrell (1989, p.213) writes: “We have yet to launch any sort of sophisticated analysis of racial relations in sport. To date our focus on race has been, in reality, a focus of Black male athletes.” This simplistic view of race in sport equates race and diversity with the African-male experience, and also obscures that way racism is connected with other forms of oppression (Dewar, 1993). The author feels the issues of gaining access to sport is not enough. It is critical to understand the conditions under which access is achieved as well as the consequences of gaining access to existing sporting structures. Arguments for equal opportunity in sports as the
ultimate solution to racist practices, insist on the necessity of treating everyone the same way. This in reality, often means treating all people as if they were white middle-class, heterosexual, and male (Dewar, 1993). Thus being integrated into sport under these conditions means being assimilated into a system in which one has to deny or downplay the existence of any differences in the name of developing ‘human’ values which are in reality the values of those in power (white, middle-class heterosexual men) (ibid.). “Playing under these conditions can mean that we are contributing to our own oppression. Yet alternatives that involve challenging the system may mean that one risks being denied an opportunity to play at all and risks all the rewards that go along with this” (Dewar, 1993, p.231).

The desire to try and challenge oppression in sport must not only incorporate the current research on race and sport but also feminist theorizing about oppression in sport, which according to Dewar (1993, p.233) “seem to have had little or no impact on actual sporting practices.” It has been argued that because of the experiences of minority women as “others” in the sporting world and because of experiences from the margins (hooks, 1984), they are at a unique position in which they can name, challenge and interrupt the oppressive structures and forces that shape their lives (Collins 1990, Haraway 1988, Harding 1986).

Smith (1991) agrees with the premise that women of color in academe are in a unique position as ‘outsiders-within’ to experience and analyze the social conditions of sporting experiences for those at the intersections of race and gender. She emphasizes the fact that the experiences of ethnic minority women have been excluded from traditional feminist theory, and that the literature devoted to the topic of gender and sport has ignored the issue of race. She suggests that race and gender can no longer be studied simply as variables, but must be
understood as power relationships. Focusing on Black athletes, Smith (1991) stresses the importance of voice and empowerment of minority women, in many different areas.

In another article, Smith (1992) addresses research on the unique social experiences and histories of women of color, which ultimately highlights a tradition of silence and invisibility in society and sport. She asserts that women with diverse ethnic backgrounds must communicate what it is like to live within their own cultural context and mainstream society and to participate in sport at the intersections of race, gender and class.

Smith (1992) suggests that women of color have been silenced by being suppressed, excluded, and misrepresented at every level of social interaction, and have been placed at the margins by the dominant culture in society and sport. “The legacy of societal discrimination and absence from powerful positions has served as a backdrop to set the stage for the invisibility, silence, and parallel underrepresentation of women of color in sport leadership and scholarship positions...and little scholarship or research on multiethnic women in sport has been published” (Smith, 1992, p.230). Elitism, privilege and power are some of the variables according to Birrell (1990) that have rendered women of color invisible in theory and literature. Birrell proposes that one strategy that women of color can employ is in the production of critical autobiography in which the woman is both the subject of the text and the theorizer of the experience. Linked to this, she asserts that women of color must address the absence of sport from their writings. “One can count on one hand the number of published analyses that specifically focus on women athletes of color...Some unpublished descriptive work on Black women athletes is available...even less is available concerning Native American women...Asian women, and Chicanas” (Birrell, 1990, p.186). She also feels it is critical to examine how
ideologies of gender and race get reproduced in certain communities by way of sport and physical activity.

So how have these ideologies affected Indian women with regards to sport and physical activity? Hargreaves (1994) feels there is a problem of characterizing Asian and other ethnic minority women as belonging to a homogeneous group. As well, there is the notion that there is only “one” Indian culture, which is repressive and weak and that it is in direct binary opposition to the West which is seen as strong-willed and fair. Therefore, according to the author, there has been the tendency to look at the ‘problems of being Asian’ rather than the problems of gender and relations between gender and ethnicity. Brah and Minhas (1985) point out that researchers on Asian girls “rarely start from a structural perspective.” Instead, “the twin notions of ‘cultural clash’ and ‘inter-generational conflict’ construct the Asian family as the source of the problem. Young Asian girls are assumed to be leading stressful lives full of identity crises. Yet, as their own research shows, Brah and Minhas (1985, p.16-17) report that Asian girls tended to have strong mutually supportive relationships with their parents, and in many families, were actively encouraged to pursue education.

This model of cultural deficit has targeted South Asian women as having low participation rates and negative attitudes in sport. Hargreaves (1994) argues against the common stereotypes of ‘restrictive’ South Asian religions. She is quick to point out that jumping to the conclusion that certain religions are oppressive is Westernized and racist thinking. “The problem of non-participation is fundamentally linked to the westernized standards of sports providers, organizations and facilities. South Asian women often feel out of place and intimidated in sports venues-facilities do not meet their cultural standards, they are
often ignored, not made to feel welcome, have a language problem and a lack of knowledge about what to do” (Raval, 1994, p.259). Raval (1989, p.239) argues that analyses of the relationship between Asians and sports in Britain tend to explain low participation rates among women without taking sufficient note of “the crucial issues of racism (at both structural and personal levels) and white patriarchy.” Asian women themselves, when asked about their low participation rates, point to examples of institutional racism as the main problem “not only overt racist abuse, but examples of discrimination that are built into the structures of sport” (Hargreaves 1994, p.259).

According to Hargreaves, many Asian women from varied backgrounds could benefit from more sensitive sport programming that addresses the specific needs of Asian women. For example, providing information in various languages, ensuring a female-only environment, low price or no-cost sessions, training and employing Asian role models, arranging classes that accommodate religious commitments, providing transportation home and doing outreach work in the ethnic communities could all contribute to a much higher participation rate and increased enjoyment of activity and sport. However, if there is to be any major increase in the participation of Asian women, the author insists racial stereotyping and racial harassment must be eliminated and varied forms of sexism must be opposed. For example, Brah and Minhas (1985) discuss specific stereotypes of Asian girls that routinely surface in sport and educational research. Asian girls are once again assumed to be passive, weak and shy yet whenever these characteristics are observed researchers do not ask about the risks for Asian girls of challenging the stereotypes. As Brah and Minhas (1985) document, when Asian girls challenge the school authorities, thereby departing from the expected behaviour for their group, they are dealt with
more severely than their counterparts. The authors observed Asian girls who reacted against the stereotypes of language problems or cultural misfits by deliberately speaking their native tongues and misinforming teachers about their cultural practices. Similarly when Asian students are criticized by the school for associating with each other, it does not occur to school authorities, or to researchers, that this can represent an effort to organize and protect each other from racial and sexual harassment (Brah and Minhas, 1985).

It appears that the inevitable relationship between gender and race is bound to have repercussions at the general policy and practical levels of sporting systems, which cannot be ignored. As Bayliss (1989), Brah and Minhas (1985), Caroll and Hollinshead (1993), Hargreaves (1994), Birrell (1990) and others have noted, the emphasis has always been on the ethnic groups having a ‘problem’ and not on the concerns of racism, sexism, policy, practice and curriculum. For many Indian girls, taking part in games and physical activities in Phys.Ed classes for example, has led to conflicts between pupils and parents, pupils and teachers and amongst the peer group itself (Caroll and Hollinshead, 1993). Problems for the South Asian girls were identified with stereotyping, revealing PE attire, mandatory communal showers, lack of concern for religious holidays, and the scheduling of afterschool activities. Concerns such as these highlight how racism can unconsciously ensue in PE and sport.

The silence of most school curricula, especially physical education curricula, about “Indian/ness” allows for, and even encourages the perpetuation of popular disempowering stereotypes. For instance, in British Columbia, a claim to a formal committment to multiculturalism by the Royal Commission on Education, did not include or recommend culturally sensitive programs (B.C. Royal Commission, 1988). Canadian observations of
physical education programs suggest that the values of male-oriented Western team sports and an emphasis on strength, power, competition and contact are still deeply ingrained in the school tradition and the psyche of those that implement curricula (Humbert, 1995; Vertinsky, 1992). Such curricula function to deny role models to Indo-Canadian girls as well as white female students. Leadership and role models are important tools in empowering young women, opening doors, and helping them to better understand the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different cultures, classes, religions, abilities and sexualities.

Other examples of the exclusion of Indo-Canadian women involve sports media and sports organizations. According to Hargreaves (1994), the majority of sports media professionals are white, middle-class men who reproduce prejudices upon which patriarchal structures and sexist and racist ideologies are based. She also feels unequal power relations are also prevalent in the staffing patterns of commercial, public and voluntary sports agencies. Without Indian women in influential and decision-making positions in sports media and sports organizations, the diversity of interests, accomplishments, needs and desires cannot be accurately documented or implemented. What viewers and staff will get is a view of sports which is culturally encoded. These are other vital areas in need of critical examination but are beyond the scope of this particular thesis. They do however link to the problematic of recreation and community centers that idealize youthfulness and physical perfection and where notions of the body are defined in Western parameters (Hargreaves, 1994). Intimidating atmospheres, “sports talk”, focus on aerobics and fitness classes, sexism, alienation from the dominant values and practices of these environments are just few of the examples cited that
highlight the neglect and ignorance of the differential needs and desires of Indian women and other minority females who want to participate in physical activity and sport.

What the research has ultimately shown is not only the “need to examine actual practices in the working situation rather than the general policy statements and take cognizance of the views of the recipients of those policies, the women and girls themselves” (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993, p.164) but to hear the stories and experiences of women who have succeeded in these environments and emerged empowered. Physically active Indo-Canadian women are not exceptions to the rule, however their stories of achievement and satisfaction (both physically and mentally) are not recognized. Also some of the activities they do participate in and enjoy such as dance, walking, housework and farming are not always seen as valid forms of physical activity. “If we are to understand gender and racial relations in sport, particularly as they relate to women of color...we need to increase our awareness of issues in the lives of women of color as they themselves articulate these issues (Birrell, 1990, p.195). Doing this will provide alternative visions of Indo-Canadian women that ultimately defy the stereotypes.
Searching for a Methodology

As I began my exploration of various qualitative research methodologies, I knew in the back of mind that I was searching for a methodology that would incorporate the participants own voices and thoughts. I narrowed the field to surveys, focus groups, ethnography and life writing. In survey research, the main source of information is the respondents themselves, in which the questionnaire is the main data collection instrument. Although surveys can involve informal brief interviews, I discovered they are primarily used for descriptive results and evaluative studies. That is, surveys are constructed to determine the quality of people's lives. I was interested in this but also wanted to hear about the specific sporting experiences of Indian women and "how" and "why" they made their choices. I found the survey format too limiting, as there is very little room for spontaneity and flexibility. Focus groups are better suited for a more in-depth discussion of issues, however I felt using this as a primary tool was also limiting in terms of individual responses. In a group dynamic there can be many different power relations controlling the discussion. For example, certain participants may dominate the discussion and topics, whereas others may not feel comfortable divulging personal information amongst a group of people. Although the researcher can guide the discussion, the focus group technique doesn't always allow for a solid relationship to build between each participant and the researcher. It is, however, a good technique to "wrap-up" a research project, as follow-up questions and issues can be discussed provided the participants are comfortable. The
ethnographic research methodology appealed to me for a variety of reasons. It seemed to be an all-encompassing technique that submerged the researcher in the field and comity of her participants. The technique involves conducting interviews and observations, journal-writing and spending a substantial length of time in a particular community. The latter reasons however interesting, were at the same time drawbacks for my particular project. Although the techniques were more reflective of the type of methodology I wanted to use, I did not want to conduct an entire ethnographic study. I wanted to look at particular themes and issues regarding the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of Indo-Canadian women. After learning about ethnography, I realized that interviewing was an excellent way to collect data as the issue of voice was central to my project.

Conducting an action research project was also of great interest to me, due to the collaborative nature of the methodology. As I would be identifying the problems and discovering some of the alternative answers via the experiences of the participants, the next logical step would be to implement some of the solutions on a practical level. The philosophy aligned itself wonderfully with my ultimate research goals and motivations. The action research process involves the participants in generating new forms of action and knowledge while the researcher becomes embedded in the realizations of the participants rather than cultures of academe. However, my underlying belief remained firm: that the first step be to amass and document the stories and experiences, and hear the voices of active Indo-Canadian women.
Discovering Life Writing

When I learned about life writing research in a graduate course on qualitative research methods, I felt that the genre was a powerful tool for bringing viewpoints to the surface...especially those of women. Throughout my life, I had habitually been exposed to a single center or voice in literature that was seen as autonomous. However, I had constantly questioned the validity of one center or self as the model for all life experiences. I was not represented in many texts, and others (not like myself) seemed to have become self-appointed cultural interpreters for my community. Therefore in a conscious decision, I wanted to further explore the avenues provided by life writing techniques, that begin with understanding an individual and build from there towards understanding the general characteristics of the relationship between individual and culture (Harper, 1994).

Life histories have been defined as oral histories that have been collected in a particular way incorporating dimensions that have been separated out in other methodologies such as the sociological, the ethnographic and the historical (Casey 1993). As I reviewed the literature further, it became clear that oral histories and the more focused life story approach were tools that were sensitive enough to tackle the multiplicity of cultural meanings entangled in person’s life experiences. Life story narratives according to Casey (1993), focus on the ways in which the participant’s own modes of interpretation have been influenced by personal relationships and lived experiences. However, rather than being constrained by either one, I have chosen to adapt the tools and focus on the oral narrative that would be produced by conducting oral life story interviews. Oral life story interviews are a basic tool in a researcher’s effort to incorporate previously overlooked lives, activities and feelings into our understanding of the past and
present (Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner 1987). The principal value of an oral narrative obtained through this type of interviewing, is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations and theories, "with selectivities and silences, which are intrinsic to its representation of reality" (ibid., p.13). In other words, a person can tell the researcher how they felt about what they did and can interpret the personal meaning and value of particular activities. Oral life story interviews "can also tell us how a woman felt about what she did and can interpret the personal meaning and value of particular activities" (Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner, 1987). In simpler terms, these interviews provide a picture of how a woman understands herself within her world, where and how she places value, and what particular meanings she attaches to her actions and locations in the world (ibid.).

Oral interviews allow us to hear, if we will, the particular meanings of a language that both men and women use but which each translates differently. For women, the ability to value their own thought and experience is hindered by self-doubt and hesitation when private experience seems at adds with cultural myths and values concerning how a woman is "supposed" to think, [act] and feel. (ibid., p.102)

My research topic about the role of physical activity in the lives of Indo-Canadian women was very specific and I therefore needed to be able to link an individual's personal experiences and their interpretations to some of my more pertinent questions and perspectives. The technique of life story interviewing thereby lent to some form of synthesis in interpretation that was not necessarily as expansive as the formal methodology but nonetheless illuminated certain topics and issues.
Everyone can benefit from learning about the experiences of women from various strata of society. Since Indo-Canadian women are members of two oppressed groups, that of Indo-Canadians and that of women, it meant that my treatment of their viewpoints in my methodological approach would have to be distinct and deliberate in its goals. The impact of hearing about their physical activity experiences, through life story interviews enabled me to ensure that the women had a voice and an audience.

Feminism must work to constitute itself as the most inclusive possible knowledge community and its knowledge as a perpetual unfolding or developmental process, one in which personal narrative should play an important role. (Stivers, 1993)

This thesis may also have empowered the women involved, when they were seen to be a powerful source of knowledge regarding the cultural implications of physical activity, and when they were looked upon as people who were essential in making some sense out of the intricate and complex phenomenon that they knew best. And most importantly, this was the first step in a process that could result in improvement in Western sport and physical activity models, improvement that really touches the lives of Indo-Canadian women who are participating or who want to participate. This is a process that begins with and depends upon the understanding of the subjective worlds of these women and their physical activity interests, experiences and ideas. We know now that the telling of life stories and experiences also gives us clues to the present as well as hints of the future (Ayers, 1980).

This chapter begins with an introduction to the benefits and implications of the life story methodology, from which I derived my techniques and a more detailed analysis of why I chose this particular qualitative technique. I then explore the theory and practice of life writing
in general, by describing a few of the more critical stages and procedures I undertook in my own research. I then move on to a detailed discussion of the actual the fieldwork involved, how I established contact with my participants and ultimately how I gathered and organized my data. The chapter concludes with an examination of the analytical tools and ethical issues involved in this particular type of methodology and research.

The Importance of Perspectives

Life writing, according to Gubrium and Holstein (1995, p.209) is defined as, “a distinctive kind of reality-constructing activity that deals specifically with the interpretation and representation of lives in relation to the passage of time... From this perspective, social interactions, including conversation and other forms of communication, do not merely convey meaning, but in a sense talk reality into being.” In this study, the life story methodology centered primarily around life story interviews, coupled with some observations of the environments of the participants. My reasoning for this was that I wished to uncover the issues embedded in a particular subject-matter or aspect of the participant’s life. According to Etter-Lewis (1991), by conducting life story interviews, women’s lived lives, their real and varied experiences and their unique situations and pathways are accounted for.

Choosing to use life story interviews to collect my data was not a simple or straightforward process. The life story interview is the means by which life stories are derived. Life story interviews focus on many or a few of the experiences and insights of an individual during his/her lifetime. The author/researcher usually chooses a particular theme or slant from which to select the experiences, that are then narrated by the individual participant. This type
of interviewing can specifically address and uncover the issues involved in physical activity experiences beginning early in life.

In order to create a sufficient and reasonably in-depth context of the role and influence of physical activity in these women's lives, the many influences in a person's life such as the individual environments, history, practices, beliefs and lifestyle that relate to physical activity experiences must be taken into account. The people depicted in this thesis do not exist in isolation therefore issues of strength, comfort and safety, the influence of a social support structure and patterns of interactions among Indian women, cannot be separated from the ideas, values, experiences and expectations that begin early in life. These life lessons and experiences are a product of a particular time, place and specific set of social and cultural circumstances that logically seem best interpreted and articulated by the individual herself. Therefore by conducting three interviews with each individual woman, a narrative (i.e. a subjective story entailing layers of interpretation) was produced that provided some insight into the complexity and richness of the issues that were uncovered.

The life story methodology that I adapted, has been seen as: “an extraordinarily sensitive source of information for testing hypotheses about the dynamics and processes of social organization” (Watson and Watson-Franke, 1985). What is important to remember is that my intent was not so much to describe the entire chronological history of these women, nor to test hypotheses, but to somehow confer certain meanings to various past experiences which would contribute to the meaning of the present (Harper, 1994). This was achieved by using the methodology as a general framework instead of creating full-length, traditional life stories. And just as critical, was the notion that by using a life story archetype, the narratives were guided by
my questions but also structured by the participants themselves, in the sense that allowed for each woman to express her uniqueness and interactions with the researcher (Anderson and Jack, 1991). I wanted to bridge the gap between an existing dichotomy that separated those who analyze experiences and those that have them, as my interest in uncovering the issues in physical activity as well as the analysis, was a product of my own personal positioning in the Indo-Canadian community and society at large.

Hearing the participant’s own unique and selective version of her life experiences grounds my claim that all types of knowledge acquisition are valid. Personal accounts and narratives blend the subjective with the system-wide. For example, since the language in which people tell about themselves, even to themselves alone, is communal, there is nothing completely idiosyncratic about a single personality. Rather, as makers of meaning, human beings share a fundamental uniqueness in relationship to all others; one that validates the use of an individual story to illuminate larger historical, and socio-cultural phenomenon.

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) compares her life story work in studying highschool students to the work of a portrait artist: “Portraits capture essence: the spirit, tempo and movement of the young girl; the history and family of the grown woman... portraits make the subject feel “seen” in a way they have never felt before, fully attended to. Denzin (1989) argues that life stories are shaped by larger ideological forces, and it is these forces that need to be understood.

Doing this type of research for and about ethnic women is crucial because as Sidonie Smith (1993) writes: “The life stories of many people whose history differs from that of the universal human subject (in effect the white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual human) because of
race, class, gender and sexual identifications; go unwritten; ...or if unwritten- misread or unread.” As a ‘marked’ researcher in academia, meaningful improvement depends on these stories being presented. Camilla Stivers (1993) writes: “If in post-positivist social science there is no knowledge without an interpretive community, no account without prior accounts, no science without a stock of stories, then personal narratives symbolize the liberation of feminist social science from a (sometimes unconscious) reliance on the form of knowledge that cancels out experience. We must be brave enough to see ‘marked’ researchers as “generators of new descriptions, rather than as beings one hopes to describe accurately.”

The concepts and metaphors in a life story interview can run in many different directions. They can give us both a glimpse of ourselves and a reflection of the overall human spirit. The stories produced, can shed light on history, and motivate and inspire by example. The individual agency afforded by this methodology will hopefully open further doors for continued exploration and ultimately, the possibility of understanding beyond any one individual story. In this sense, the stories become not an end in themselves, but helpful elements in the pursuit of other ends.

Sacks (1989) feels examining issues in equity, power, social structure, agency, self-definition, and their interrelations, can be enhanced by the writing of all kinds of personal narratives, of all kinds of lives, of all kinds of women. Images, models and insights for change exist in the life stories, and critical reflection upon them as inner perspectives, emotions, conceptualizations, all coalesce into larger images and patterns in peoples lives.
Revealing the data in these interviews depends upon understanding the general guidelines and processes involved in life writing as a broader and more comprehensive methodology.

The Process and Decisions of Life Writing

Because of the multiple forms, lengths, focuses and perspectives of life writing, the importance of insight and creativity cannot be underscored and lies with the writer in the studying, constructing and depicting of lives or part of lives (Smith 1994). In this sense, every text that is created is a self-statement, a bit of autobiography, a statement that carries an individual signature. Therefore, the decisions life writers make are “constituted by ambiguity, and that is part of the excitement and the agony of doing biography” (Smith 1994, p.289). However, certain techniques such as the theme, participant selection procedures, collection of empirical data, and establishing participant contexts, can focus the writer and help the process of life writing to become to a unique and complex methodology.

The first task is of this methodology is one of the most difficult decisions facing the writer. The slant, perspective or theme that is needed to guide the development of the life to be written, needs to be established. The slant of this thesis was narrowed to uncover the issues surrounding Indo-Canadian women in a physical activity context. I was able to establish the slant early on in the research process based on insights from my own preliminary knowledge (i.e. different conversations with active Indian women), the interest in uncovering the issues concerning them in the sport and physical activity contexts of Canada, and the literature that I reviewed. However, different themes and focuses can emerge as the research progresses. It is
possible to reconcile this by keeping track of the main purpose of this study, but also allowing for the participants in the research to discuss issues they find relevant or pressing, or simply emerging from the conversation. It is also important to point out that interview questions and themes can steer a participant’s questions down a certain path. Bearing this in mind, the researcher should be flexible enough to accommodate the participant’s relevant digressions. It is important to note however, that determining what is relevant is completely subjective. Therefore, mapping out decisions such as which issues need to be brought forth considering the lack of previous material from which to draw from; which seem to be discussed in more detail by the participants themselves; and the willingness of the participants themselves in revealing particular aspects is a critical part of accountable research.

The next task is the selection of a person to write about. According to Smith (1994), the writer solves this problem simply enough, although questions arise immediately as to why an individual would think his or her life is worth telling. Smith (1994, p.289) advises the writer to think carefully and analytically, “to perceive intuitively an anomaly, or to be serendipitous.” Realistically, the biographer’s personality, motives, fears, unconscious conflicts, and yearnings, reaches out to responsive, if not similar, territory in the person to be subject. What is critical I suppose, is the ability to recognize and acknowledge these issues, as they directly affect the selection of participants.

As I stated earlier, this project was a direct reflection of my position as an Indo-Canadian female, coupled with my interest to uncover the issues, and diverse contexts of other physically active women like myself. I was interested in documenting the stories of participants that are participating in various areas of physical activity: mainstream as well as community
activities. Depicting women in different areas of physical activity and sport will reveal a broad range of issues, strategies, and ideas that will contribute to a larger data base of knowledge regarding Indo-Canadian women and physical activity, as well as show their diverse aspirations and interests.

It was a conscious choice to limit my study to three participants, as I felt data emerging from the stories of three individual women would be quite involved and complex. Another participant criteria was age, which I chose to be between twenty-five and thirty-five years old. My reasoning for this was that I felt the women would be making decisions to participate in activity because they want to be there and not because it is part of school curriculum. I also felt that the experiences of adult Indo-Canadian women, especially of this particular age bracket, are absent from academic literature unless they are being included in discussions about Indo-Canadians as a whole, subsuming issues of gender and generation; or as visible minority women subsuming issues particular to their ethnicity and the particular social and cultural circumstances of their physical activity experiences. Also at this age, the likelihood of sharing particular immigrant and educational experiences would be higher. Linked to this, another criteria I was looking for was that the women were not newly immigrated to Canada, as the issues would be quite different from those of women who have grown up here.

After establishing general participant criterion, the next task is to gather as much existing information as possible about my participants, and the issues involved. In this particular case, the influence of social support structures and physicality and notions of the body were some of the key issues to be investigated. Smith (1994) points out, archival activity gives an overview of the life, however it only begins the construction of a life and carries its
own theoretical implications. For the most part, many life writers have not had the luxury of formal archives to draw from, and one either finds data in the most unlikely places, or has to build a data file, as one possible step in the life writing process. This aspect is also linked to the length of different forms of life writing, which can vary dramatically as well. A series of in-depth interviews can produce briefer more focused biographies, whereas having an in-depth archival base can help produce longer, more detailed and drawn-out stories. I chose to examine a particular aspect of the women’s lives (physical activity and sporting experiences), therefore my focus is on the life story interviews instead of trying to create an archive. As mentioned earlier, the literature that directly addresses my research topic was sparse, therefore I sought out literature that touched on various aspects of the topic (sport and physical activity, identity and culture, and feminist perspectives). Realizing that a specific empirical data base regarding my topic would have to be created only reaffirmed my motivation for doing the research and that simply documenting their physical activity experiences, thoughts and ideas, along with my own analysis, would be the first step in creating one.

Another difficult yet notable task in the life writing methodology appears to be the problem of getting to know the essence of one’s subject. On the one hand, “essences” are debated these days because it is contested if one can actually capture the sum and substance of another human being. More than likely the subject will present an official, definitive, authorized version of his/her life, so on the other hand, it is the writer’s task to unmask all the subtleties of the “life myth.” In Smith’s (1994) view, the biographer has to bring all of his/her own personality, understandings, and experience to the job of creating a view of the individual(s) under study, which can be problematic for traditional social science. Self-
reflexive writing practices were of immense help in this particular area by documenting the research processes and dilemmas thereby allowing me to remain aware of the biases and constructions that occurred. Keeping an ongoing journal also helped make my positioning explicit (as I was a member of the Indo-Canadian community I was researching, but not of the specific Punjabi community of my participants).

Life writing has been claimed by several of the disciplines such as history, literature, the social sciences, and education as well as feminist and minority perspectives. In the latter perspectives, the life writing includes variations in lifestyles, (of those that have been ignored, felt powerless, or left out), their satisfactions, accomplishments and achievements, as well as their dissatisfactions. In this thesis these concepts will be addressed in regards to the participant's physical activity experiences. Accompanying this is an array of concepts, themes and ideologies that attempt to broaden the meaning of the experiences recounted. The influence of life-writing from minority and feminist perspectives seems critical when one realizes that, “the human experience is gendered...and that race and class as categories, follow quickly upon similar assumptions” (Smith, 1994, p.299).

In the book, “Interpreting Women’s Lives” (1989, p.14), it is stated that the “truths” that emerge from women’s stories address the “multiplicity of ways in which a woman’s life story reveals and reflects important features of her conscious experience and social landscape, creating from both, her essential reality.”
Making Contact and Selection of Participants

The main tool of life story interviewing was comprised of a combination of structured (in order to address the particular research issues I was concerned with) and unstructured interview techniques (so as to allow for any issues and themes that the participant herself wanted to voice). The secondary tool I used in my research was that of preliminary observations, to help me create a context of the individual participant’s social environment. I also used some observational data to help select a participant from one particular sporting environment. Subtle information that is revealed only through this technique is sometimes difficult to catch but can carry a wealth of information (Bernard, 1994). Although I would have liked to conduct more detailed observations of the three physical activity environments as they participated, it was only possible at the time to arrange an opportunity for one setting as the other two participants could not afford the time. After collecting the data from the first set of observations, I chose to focus primarily on the interviews and documented details about the interview environments instead, to situate the interview context and give the reader a glimpse of the women.

I began my data collection by attending a practice of an ‘all-Indian’ dragon boat team, a paddling sport developed and thriving in Asia with international competitions here in the Lower Mainland. This was the first practice of the ‘97 season (which ran from March till late October). I was informed about this team by a member who was a personal acquaintance. In my observations of this first site from which I would potentially select a participant, I initially thought I would be taking on a ‘Peripheral Membership Role’. In this role, according to Adler and Adler (1994), I would be observing and interacting closely enough with members to
establish my subjects’ identities without actually participating in the activities of the group. However, in the case of the dragon boat team, after attending one meeting as an observer, I was then asked to join the team, which I did without hesitation, as everyone was aware and comfortable with my role as researcher. Being a full participant-observer my role was clearly overt, however I forged close and meaningful bonds with the members and the sport itself. The nature of my observation was unfocussed and general in the beginning as I tried to grasp the nature of the sport itself, the practice environment, and how the members interacted with one another. Then as I became more familiar and interested in the environment and had grasped the key social groups and processes in operation, I shifted to more focused observations where I directed my attention to a more select group of people. These were women that I thought would be prime candidates for my research: Punjabi, in their late twenties, active, and interested in the research. After several practices where I conducted the less directed observations, I then began “selected observations” (Adler and Adler 1994). I approached the team captain, a woman in her late twenties, of Punjabi heritage, active, and definitely interested in the research topic. At the same time, I was conducting these observations, I was also networking with other Indian women in other areas of physical activity and dance. I also contacted approximately 15 recreation and community centers located in Vancouver, Surrey, White Rock and Delta.

By the time I was participating as a full member of the Dragon Boat team, I began narrowing down community centers due to the fact that most did not have special programs for Indian or immigrant women, or hadn’t noticed if there were Indian women participating. As well, during this process I had called an Indian dance school, hoping to find an interested student. After waiting several days, I negotiated a phone call with the owner, a Punjabi woman
in her late twenties who was still very active in dance. I introduced myself, described my research, and she immediately suggested herself. Although observations of the participant in the activity were simply not feasible in this particular venue because of her busy schedule, they proved to be of prime importance with the Dragon Boat team.

My next stage of inquiry was perhaps the most critical. Oral life story interviews provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women’s experiences of themselves in their worlds (Anderson and Jack, 1991). Most importantly, these interviews provided the opportunity to tell their stories in their terms, and from their perspectives.

Two weeks into my inquiries at community and recreation centers, one community center programmer, suggested I talk to another programmer who happened to be an athletic Punjabi woman in her late twenties. I talked with her and she showed interest in participating but was also too busy (and a little hesitant) for me to come and observe her in her physical activity environment. I had now found three participants: one woman who participated in a Western sport in an all-Indian environment; another who participated in Western sports in Western environments; and a woman who participated in an Indian activity in an all-Indian environment. The next task was to schedule interview sessions where the issues and experiences of physical activity could be discussed.

After two initial phone calls to two of the participants, and conducting observations in the dragon boat environment to help find another, follow up phone calls were conducted where formal introductions were made (I talked about my interests and motivation for doing this research), the research was discussed in more detail, interest was re-established and participant feasibility was assessed. From there the first preliminary interviews were set up. Each
individual woman participated in a total of three interview sessions, ranging from very informal to in-depth interviews.

At the initial interviews/meetings (conducted quite informally at coffee shops), the research and the participant's role was discussed again, quite a bit of personal information was exchanged, some of the issues were touched on by the participants, informed consent was obtained and the next more detailed and in-depth interview sessions were set up. These initial interviews lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Only two of the interviews were tape-recorded, as the third was conducted inside a business establishment where the data was recorded by hand-written notes. Although these particular interviews did not help establish the social environments, they were nonetheless an important stage for establishing a degree of rapport and comfort with the participants. Because the goal of interviewing is understanding, it becomes paramount for the researcher to establish rapport (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

The next stage of interviewing was more focused on specific research topics. Consisting of two in-depth interviews lasting two to three hours in length, the individual women were afforded a venue in which to voice their experiences, thoughts, successes, concerns and motivations of being physically active. The interviews were conducted in the specific contexts and environments of each individual woman (e.g. her home, and/or place of work). This was done primarily so the participant would be in a familiar and comfortable environment, and also so I could provide for my audience a more detailed "snapshot" of the individual's lived social context.

The interviews also revealed, through the choices they made, how these women had acted to either re-structure or preserve, or re-invent the various social contexts in order to
maintain physical activity in their lives. These experiences which are a vital tool in developing new frameworks for various alternative sport and recreation models in their particular activities, were based on their own lives and formulations. My task was to listen carefully and draw these ideas out.

My interviewing techniques were a combination of informal (in the case if the preliminary interviews), structured and unstructured interviewing techniques (Bernard, 1994), aided with the use of a tape-recorder and field-notes. Informal interviewing was used initially to not only develop a relationship and rapport with the individual but to become familiar with each particular situation and its ramifications. This type of interviewing helps to uncover new topics of interest that might have been overlooked and encourages the participants to voice what they find important and relevant (Bernard, 1994). In the case of the three women, some of the more critical aspects of their physical activity experiences such as social support structures, financial constraints, personal motivation, and early educational experiences were emphasized by all three.

Unstructured interviewing is definitely not as informal and is based on some sort of plan, but is also characterized by a minimum of control over the individual’s responses. The idea is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace. However, for my particular study posing specific questions that were geared towards my research interests in physical activity led to a degree of structure. Many of the questions I posed controlled the pace and direction of the interview. To uncover family influence in shaping their experiences, I asked questions such as: “What was your family like?” “How did your parents feel about your participation in PE?” To reveal other issues connected to past
experiences that help mold life stories, focusing on physical activity, I asked: “What were your early experiences of PE?”, “What other things did you do?”, “Were your teachers understanding about your issues of being an Indian girl?” “Did you have any role models or mentors.” I wanted to understand why community-based and gender-based activities have had such high participation rates, therefore I posed questions like: “What is it about an Indian atmosphere that appeals to you?”, “How does it make you feel being on a team where the majority is women?”, “What is a supportive environment?” “What do you think helps builds supportive environments?”, “Do you know more women like yourself?.” Present conditions and experiences, as well as aspirations for the future round-out a life story, therefore I included questions like; “Do you see yourself as having choices?”, “How do you feel about being active now?”, “How does the Indian community feel about you and others?”, “Will you always be physically active.”

The unstructured portion of the interviews were conducted primarily to stimulate the participant to produce more information in conjunction with the structured questions. Along with various open-ended questions I used many different probes in the unstructured portion of the interviews such as the silent probe which consists of just remaining quiet and waiting for an informant to continue (Bernard, 1994). I also used the “uh-huh” probe which according to Bernard (1994) encourages an informant to continue with a narrative by just making the affirmative noise. Directive probes are another unstructured interview component and are an effective means of creating longer and more continuous responses. Bernard describes them as long questions that are based on something the participant just finished saying or on something the participant said an hour ago or a week ago. For example in an interview with Harjit, I
elicited a topic by asking her a structured question about her participation in PE growing up. She answered with description of her PE participation in elementary school and her love of athletics but finished her answer there. I followed up with a directive probe (unstructured) and asked the question, “So you were pretty much an athlete throughout your early schooling and you kept up with it throughout highschool?” Thus obtaining more feedback and information from Harjit.

In light of these questions my focus, nevertheless, was on the interaction and process of the interviews rather than asking the “right” questions. It is far too easy in interviewing, whether unconsciously or consciously to not only steer the respondent into saying what we want to hear, but also get fixated on a particular theme or issue. It is the interactive nature of the interview that allows us to notice what questions the subject formulates about her own life, to go behind conventional expected answers to her personal construction of her own experiences (Anderson and Jack, 1991). As well, with the telling of each story, the women may become more conscious writers of their own scripts and readers of their own lives. The life story process often leads to a clearer awareness of aspects of their own practices (Ayers, 1980). This wakening may give other women in other places and times, clearer access to choice and greater freedom in doing what they want to do.

After conducting all the interviews, I then began the process of transcribing each one into a word processing file. A slow and painful process, it nonetheless reveals all the rich data and nuances of the conversations and cannot be avoided. Only after the lengthy transcription process, can analysis begin. I chose not to use any specific computer programs in my data analysis (other than Microsoft word) because I did not have an extremely large data set to draw
from. I especially wanted to plug in the data into my own subjective themes and categories because of the possibility of uncovering new information as I worked through it. After sitting down in front of the transcripts, I arduously grouped and regrouped similar issues discussed by the women and then offered my own analysis and interpretation of each separate topic.

One essential element of life story writing is the ethical obligation of the writer to respect a participant’s right to remain anonymous. Though some research participants may request recognition in the document, most prefer to maintain their privacy. This can have a significant impact on a life story, for if the narrator is concerned about protecting the identity of others who play a part in the story, or has concerns about certain aspects being revealed, then she or he may edit the story during its initial telling, or request major changes in the text. Also as the researcher, I have the responsibility of excluding information in the text that the participant might deem too personal or painful or is not comfortable sharing with a larger audience. "The rights of privacy... (may have to) take precedence over the claims of science for well-documented data" (Langness & Frank, 1981, p.124).

Researchers doing research within their own communities face these dilemmas as issues of partiality and objectivity are raised. Since the investigator cannot maintain objectivity through distance, feminist and minority research is sometimes considered suspect and accused of presenting only a partial picture of social reality. Such accusations are countered, both philosophically and practically, by the use of reflexivity. This has recently been reconceptualized as positioning, a feminist practice which acknowledges the situatedness and partiality of all claims to knowledge (Marcus, 1994).
Journal Writing And Self-Reflection

Being an Indo-Canadian woman myself, this project was strongly influenced by my own subjectivism and interest. For this reason I kept an ongoing journal that documented my personal feelings and questions, as I pursued the study. It was undeniably, an exploration of my own self-reflection and discovery. Coming to this realization, I asked myself if I was acting imperialistically in turning the experiences of these women into my own text? - which was ultimately a product of my own interpretations and analyses.

After much internal debate, I returned to my initial thoughts about the project. A person’s self-reflection is not just a private, subjective act. The categories and concepts we use for reflecting upon and evaluating ourselves come from a cultural context; one that has historically demeaned and controlled Indian women’s activities. Thus my exploration of the language and the meanings the women used in the interviews, to articulate their own experiences helped to uncover some of the deeper issues in their life contexts, as well as my own.

No textual staging can ever be innocent (Sparkes, 1995). Writing a journal helped me understand that how we as researchers write about others has profound implications, not just on how the text is formulated but also for how the people in the text are “read” and understood. Therefore I, as a positioned author, was clearly implicated in the construction of this text. I made a conscious effort to give up authority over the people I was researching but realized during the process, that I could not give up authorship of the narrative.

Researchers need to develop a reflexive self-awareness regarding the rhetorical and stylistic conventions of the tales they tell in order to bring the tales within the author’s explicit methodological understandings.

(Sparkes, 1995)
Being critically self-reflective is an essential component of life writing, and locates the
author and the central figure(s), in a particular context, which is vital to a meaningful
understanding of the lives being depicted. Through journal and personal notes, one is afforded
the opportunity to see that language is a quintessential force that creates a particular view of
reality. According to Sparkes (1995), the choice(s) of whose voices are included in the text, and
how they are given weight and interpreted, along with questions of priority and juxtaposition,
are not just textual strategies but are political concerns that have moral consequences.
Therefore, an author needs to be written into, and not out of a text. Documenting the steps and
procedures of my research was a vital component of this methodology.
INTERVIEWS AND THEMES

(CHAPTER FOUR)

Outlining the Interviews

The present chapter consists of excerpts from a series of life-story interviews conducted with three Indo-Canadian women living in the Lower Mainland, “Harjit”, “Anjali” and “Meena.” Interested in sport and physical activity, I used a voice-centered methodology, that of life story interviews, to extract various themes such as social support structures (family, school, community), Indian environments, physicality, role as educator and leader, self-promotion and marketing, and physicality. It is important to note that choosing the particular themes described in this chapter was a process that was influenced by myself as well as the women I interviewed. As different women will hear a narrative differently, I approached the interviews and developed research questions based on preliminary areas of interest while maintaining a degree of flexibility. The questions elicited different responses and explanations in each participant and corresponding digressions, but it was precisely these differences that led me to several important interpretations that are necessary if we are to take our understanding forward.

The women I interviewed are socially positioned at the margins of the public sphere in Canada. However, it was these particular perspectives that I was searching for. Empowerment, recognition, and rejection of conventions along with awareness and critique of attitudes and standards of behaviour can all be revealed from the margins. Seeing and hearing evidence of strengths gained and lost are signs of resistance and identity. The model of life story interviews allowed for the individual attention and sustained listening to the three narratives that emerged when discussing the role of physical activity and sport in the lives of Indo-Canadian women.
I was a ball of nerves as I drove into the parking lot of the recreation center. This was to be the first formal interview I would be conducting. I had met Harjit once before in an informal manner at a local school cafeteria where I introduced myself and my research ideas and interests and got to know her a little before formally interviewing her. I was already walking into the interview with feelings of gratitude towards Harjit for agreeing to be my first participant. It had been a long and frustrating road to get here. Desperately wanting to interview an Indo-Canadian woman participating in and familiar with a Western sports environment, I of course, was having major difficulty in finding her. What was more frustrating was the fact that I knew she existed, contrary to the beliefs of many of the community center managers. Luckily, I came across a helpful manager of a particularly large recreation facility, who suggested one of her supervisor/coordinators. Along with being Indian, she was described as a very active, creative and well-liked young woman. After meeting her briefly during the first appointment, she came across as being very personable, outgoing and showed interest in the focus of my study. At that point she agreed to be interviewed at her work which happened to be a recreation center where she was a co-coordinator.

I walked into the busy, noisy and chlorine-infused lobby of the recreation center looking around for Harjit, who in my mind would be “running around with a clipboard and a whistle.” Not seeing her, I walked to the far back of the lobby where a raised platform housed an enormous round desk behind which several employees were scattered and looking busy. As I waited for Harjit to respond to her page, I noticed how recreation centers are the hub of so
much activity. In one corner, swimming lessons were anxiously watched by several parents, young teenagers of various skin colors lingered by the telephones in another some with basketballs in their hands, and well-muscled white men ‘preened’ (alright... posed) in front of mirrors then proceeded very slowly down a set of stairs (to where the weight room was, I presumed). Various others mingled and talked throughout the huge lobby, oblivious to the fast dance music pumped through the sound system and voices of excited children.

In my peripheral vision, I noticed a young Indian woman in nylon sweats and a white T-shirt come up the set of stairs to my right and presumed it was Harjit. I turned to face her and smiled a faint smile that grew larger as I recognized her. She walked directly over to me extended her hand and said, “Hi Mita! Sorry about that.” Barely waiting for me to respond, I quickly greeted her and she directed me to follow her down the stairs to her office. Her confident first exchange, and previous conversations, made me suddenly wonder what kind of experiences she would have had in sport and school. I seemed to somehow make the assumption that the experiences would have influenced such a positive attitude.

As Indo-Canadian women we bear the burden of being minorities within a minority. This predicament has placed on us the responsibility of survival and the challenge of success. Responsibility...using one’s ability to respond to a given situation, seemed to reflect Harjit’s personal ethos. In many ways, and for many people, we must respond to our conditions of life in order to change them. Unfortunately, surviving only amounts to a repetition of the same histories over and over again, but taking up the challenge to re-invent these stories opens up a window to succeed. Harjit’s story reflected that desire of not subordinating oneself to the grips
of Western society where negative histories and visions of people are so easily created, a desire shared collectively by so many Indian women.

Education is all about maintaining culture. And that culture has always reflected those who are in power, white middle-class men. Therefore some like Harjit have chosen not to aim their efforts at the destruction of sexist, racist and patriarchal forces but to learn how to live and work within the given boundaries. She had fiercely created a positive history for herself, knowing the challenges she had and will continue to face, but she never forgot that the story she leaves behind is being carefully read by those that follow her.

Instead of discussing her family history and influences, Harjit (age twenty-eight) decided to begin her story with her proudest accomplishments: two university degrees by the age of twenty-five; one in Human Kinetics, the other in education. Choosing to be an elementary school teacher was no accident. As a young girl, Harjit always felt alone because of her intense interest and love of sport and physical activity. In elementary school, PE class was always her favorite and her participation in extra-curricular activities like basketball, volleyball and track and field was to be counted on...

"And then in highschool, in grade 8 and 9 my school was so far away so...it would get dark and stuff and I wouldn't always have a ride back home. So in those grades I didn't participate, but in grade 10 I did, when I got a bit older, and then in grade 11 and 12 was complete sports! In those two years I got a lot of awards for PE as well. I got the fitness award because I used to teach aerobics and stuff for all the kids in my school. And I got the outstanding female sportsmanship award..."

Always participating Harjit nevertheless felt the lack of support from teachers...
"They weren't any more supportive or sensitive because they were oblivious to any setbacks you might have had coming from home. So if you did have any, they were oblivious to it. So they weren't supportive. If anything, in grade eight, I remember there was a lack of support!...Like for basketball practice, say if it ended at 5:00 or 6:00; if I had to leave early because my dad had to come pick me up or whatever, they weren't supportive of the fact that I may have to leave early because of another circumstance, not because it was my doing. And I just didn't like that. And I didn't like the teacher!"

As well as a lack of understanding from her parents...

"Initially, they didn't want me to lose focus of my goals of education. They didn't want me to be sidetracked with sports. They didn't know the true benefits of sport. You could say that about a lot of people, not just Indo-Canadians. A lot of cultures don't know. I mean a lot of people come in here all the time, and they don't know the true benefits of sport. You have to be taught it! And they were never taught it, until they were somewhat taught by us! And that's when they realized!"

Support from peers was low as well...

"I honestly think it's that they don't feel good about themselves, and part of that comes from teachers, a bit of that comes from parents. It's got to do with self-esteem.... Their priorities also shift. Peer pressure that kind of thing...."

However despite these barriers, according to Harjit, her physical activity experiences were relatively positive because of her own inner self-confidence, motivation and determination to remain an athlete and always have physical activity in her life.
"My experiences were pretty positive but that's just an attitude that comes with it as well! You always have to prove yourself, it doesn't matter who it's against, you ALWAYS have to prove yourself to them before they accept you're capable!... I think I truly enjoyed exercise! I really enjoyed sports! There's a love for sports altogether. There's a love for exercise, a love for physical activity. No matter what, even if I wasn't in sports, even if I couldn't have gone to a game or something, I would go run laps!... It was just a NEED for physical activity.... For me it was a natural high!"

Even till today, Harjit recounted, her experiences have been fulfilling, despite the sorely lacking support system that if in place, would encourage more women to participate. Sexism and harassment on the playing field are rampant in all cultures however, because of the unfamiliarity and racist attitudes displayed in a lot of Western sports environments, many women are too intimidated to participate in these particular venues and are not encouraged by the family. Harjit noticed this phenomenon time and time again and it seemed to really influence her perspective on physical activity and sport. According to Harjit it took and continues to take, a lot of strength to face these obstacles and make physical activity a priority, and it is this value she teaches her own students, especially the young Indian women, by being a role model and discussing the issues.

"I lead the basketball program here, and in basketball whenever there's a spot, and it's all guys... I'm the ONLY girl that plays! I can't play very long because of my bad back, but I still play, and I try to encourage the other girls, because there are no other girls! They just get so scared of these guys, especially some of the guys who are really mouthy... you can get really intimidated by them!... The main thing is a support system. Guys always have guys to hang out
within sports. Females don’t have females to hang out with in sports. [-do you know more Indian women like yourself?] Yeah, well that’s why two of them are my friends right. SOLELY because of that! ...[-and how did that make you feel, as opposed to playing with white women?] There was a big difference! Because you know any issue that ever comes up...if you ever say, “Listen I can’t come out because of this...”, she’s gonna understand! She’s gonna know exactly where I’m coming from. Whereas my white friends would be like, “What?” They try to understand, but unless you’ve been there you can’t really understand!”

Communicating these issues of support and the struggles she had to endure to participate, along with actively engaging her parents in dialogue about the benefits of activity, really paved the way for Harjit’s younger sister who even with rheumatoid arthritis is highly involved in swimming, working out and other sports. Doing as much as she can, her parents are now fully supportive and encouraging, not to mention partaking in a lot of activity themselves, including walking, senior swimming etc. Harjit seemed especially proud of these two accomplishments as she noticed a dramatic shift in family dynamics because of it. She has seen the Indian community as a whole, becoming less inhibited and fearful of women’s participation in sport primarily because of education as well as seeing more and more women participating in community and temple activities and teams.

“People are becoming more aware. They’re becoming more open-minded about sport, I think. That’s why you’ve got all these women in sport in temple organizations. It’s changing in that sense....For most women, a big part is other responsibilities. What comes first? Helping your parents who haven’t been here that long from India? Or you going off and being ‘selfish’ and doing your sports? What’s the priority? Are you gonna help around the house where help
is needed? Or are you gonna go 'waste time' doing sports? You have to realize what's going on in their minds! ...For myself, when I look back, if you don't have much, putting food on the table is the main priority! And sports isn't! Which is understandable!... But what most families are more willing to support are the temple teams. You know it's associated with the temple therefore it must be good! They know what the games are. They know where it is."

The unknown, the unfamiliar, the potential danger and possible sexual harassment, are some of the issues that Indian women must deal with, within their own communities in order to participate in Western sports environments (which may not be entirely different for women of other ethnicities). Economic issues, racism, lack of understanding and accommodating cultural values, and language are some of the other factors faced by Indian women once in mainstream sports environments. While describing these barriers to me, Harjit always seemed to come back to her own personal tool of self-confidence and desire that somehow not only kept up her spirits but gave her strength to overcome the odds, her own personal form of resistance.

"Part of the reason why I think I was so involved in sports was that I had the confidence in myself! That was one of the biggest things! I believed I could do whatever it is that I wanted. To this day! And that just doesn't come in sports, that's overall! So, if you're confident in one aspect of your life, it's gonna reflect in the others! See, some people gain confidence through sports, and it reflects in other areas; some people gain it in other ways and then it reflects through sports, at some point. Underlying it, is to believe in yourself. You can go places! The reason I think I did, was that no matter what my parents said, honestly, I didn't care because I was gonna be independent and do what I wanted anyways. And most people say, "Yeah, its just not worth the hassle, its not worth arguing with my family." I was like,
"NO! This is what I gotta do! That's what I'm gonna do! And if you don't like it...well too bad!" It didn't come overnight either.

What was it about Harjit that allowed her to approach these issues from a different angle? That is, what kept her motivated excited and inspired to participate in sport and physical activity? Personality had obviously, a lot to do with it, dedication to exercise and sport, a value system where she believed she could achieve anything were also crucial components of Harjit’s story, however the essence that tied it all together can be referred to as her identity.

Identity consists of exercising one's individuality. Harjit’s implicit understanding that women like herself have traditionally been excluded in the area of physical activity and sport, and her belief that being physically educated is as just as important as what society deems critical and core subjects; seemed to crystallize in her, a very definite sense of self-hood. On the surface her connection to her community didn’t seem as clear or defined in the interviews, however it shaped Harjit and her identity in a very tacit way. Her great attachment, love, respect and duty to her family, her courage to be successful despite the odds, her understanding of responsibility, her desire to be a role model and give back to her community were all reflective of this, in her perspective.

But why explore Harjit’s identity at all? Because in doing so, one seems to escape from the traditionally Western preoccupation with perceptual and conceptual tidiness. The horror of possible plurality and individuality can be erased by the thought that everything is definable, predictable and easily categorized. To prove this wrong would essentially shake-up and break-down the institutions that are based on this premise, i.e. sport and recreation, education, and traditional notions of femininity especially of South Asian women. Harjit and countless
other women exist outside these traditional parameters, even though she in some ways conforms to a Western sports culture by choosing the sports she does and encouraging traditional sports standards of competition and aggressive play.

On the one hand, Harjit’s identity was not shaped by a traumatic, victimized, racialized and troubled youth. Harjit described her childhood as a happy one. On the other hand, Harjit’s conceptual frameworks, and strengths were influenced by sexist, racist and classist barriers. It would be presumptuous of me to assume it is this simple, and that I can fully understand this story, but as I interpreted this particular story, it seemed to me, that to paint a picture with a “feel-sorry” kind of feel, would have been inaccurate. I am too aware of the danger that those who would be eager and happy to find fault with the West and the oppression it places on minorities, will relish yet another opportunity to see some of it exposed and the victims martyred. Harjit’s story reminds us that the “sins” of this society are not the most interesting and most pressing thing to talk about!

Throughout the interview, Harjit was interrupted by young men, asking questions and filing an array of complaints. Trying to deal with each incident using an equitable approach, her frustration was nonetheless apparent. Although she didn’t verbalize these feelings, and I didn’t ask, I was curious about the frustration. Was it that she felt irritated by the barrage of comments, did she feel that the situations were too minor to be addressed by her, or perhaps she felt the guys were incompetent? It could have been any one of the above or something completely different, but whenever she returned to the interview, she seemed to become centered again and eager to discuss the issues. At the end of our talk, she was interrupted again, this time the complaint was from a young woman who popped her head in the office and asked
why the guys weren’t getting off the basketball court as the women’s time slot had already started. Harjit looked at me, mumbled something about personally banning those guys from the gym, and rushed off.

Anjali

I had met Anjali at dragon boat practice and had gone to coffee with her but that was it. We conducted our first formal interview at our fifth meeting. Initially when speaking on the telephone, in a mad blast of inquiries and directions, she had invited me to participate on her dragon boat team. She had also indicated that from there, we could set up an interview. Being curious about her and this sport (that I frankly was unfamiliar with), I agreed to attend a practice. After my third practice we met for coffee two nights later, and conducted a very informal meeting/interview session where I introduced myself and the research once again and established a comfortable rapport with her by talking casually about ourselves, and some ideas and topics we would pursue in the more in-depth interview.

The practices were demanding no grueling, and the women phenomenal. I found myself getting more and more attached to the team and the sport. The sheer physicality, the adrenaline rush, the encouragement of the other women and men, were just a few of the draws. This was the first ever Indo-Canadian dragon boat team in the world. Anjali being the manager and organizer of the co-ed team as well as a lead paddler, immediately displayed her knowledge, commitment and love of the sport.

The following excerpt described through observations, documents the activity and the social organization of the first dragon boat practice of the 1997 season. After reviewing these
observations and others, I was able learn more about Anjali's personality, the sport itself and my feelings about it.

JOURNAL ENTRY EXCERPT- 1st Dragon Boat Practice...
-its a cold, rainy and dark spring evening. I'm wondering if I wore enough.
-arriving on the dock, I see throngs of paddlers (I recognize them by their paddles and waterproof gear) organizing themselves in groups/teams

-my companion (another paddler on the team who first told me about Anjali) and I, choose to walk over to a young Indian woman and ask her if she's with team Mehfil, and responds "Yes!"
-more people join our group: young men, older women, some people I recognize.

-my friend greets the returning paddlers from the year before as I stand back and observe
-close comfortable situation (physical contact i.e. hugs, hand holding etc.)

-Anjali rushes in late. Nervous and excited, immediately takes control of the situation.
-because the coach hasn't arrived, she announces that she will lead practice.
-she quickly begins to give instructions e.g. tells everyone to be quiet as we proceed to the loading up area.

-she clearly establishes a familiarity with the paddlers she knows (asks about personal lives, physical contact etc.)

during the practice instructions and drills are shouted to us by Anjali seated in the first seat (team members immediately respond)
-drills include exercises focused on back rotation, timing sequences, reaching forward

-makes a joking comment about being "man-less." Other teammates laugh.
Anjali has an incredibly precise, clean and powerful stroke (recognizable even with my lack of experience)

-end of practice: I hurt... I’m wet... I’m cold ... but feel exhilarated!

-she rushes over to me and asks how I liked it

I respond positively and she seems relieved and encouraged (e.g. “Oh I’m so happy you liked it!”, “I hope to see you at the next one!”, “Wasn’t that an amazing work-out?”)

After the first informal meeting, I took the initiative and asked to set up a lengthier interview session with her where we could begin to discuss some issues. She expressed interest, however indicated that she was far too busy at the moment. The interview finally got scheduled three weeks later.

I drove up to the house and walked directly to the front door and rang the bell. An older Indian woman answered and I politely asked for Anjali. She looked at me quizzically for a moment and then motioned for me to walk around to the side of the house. It then occurred to me that she was living in a separate suite and I sheepishly apologized and walked around to the side door.

The door flung wide open and Anjali stood there with a wide grin. She motioned for me to come in and as I removed my shoes she then immediately introduced me to her roommate who was seated on the floor watching t.v.. The house smelt of food and the living room/kitchen/dining area was dimly lit. She offered me some tea and I accepted some chamomile. We sat down at the tiny two-person dining table and she suggested we talk here. As I proceeded to set up my tape-recorder, she showed me pictures of last year’s team that were
strewn on the table. Pointing everyone out, the topic of paddling was raised. Again inquiring about my enjoyment of the sport and reviewing the last few practices, she suddenly jumped up and said, “Let’s go into the bedroom and talk...It’ll be really hard to do this here”, giving a side glance at her roommate. We proceeded to a small but neatly organized room consisting only of a large bed, two tall bookshelves opposite to each other and a small nightstand. She flopped down at the head of the bed and I perched myself on the far edge, one leg hanging down.

We began the conversation discussing relationships. She divulged the Indian community was sorely lacking in “decent guys” and then inquired about my partner. I told her a fragmented version of how we met as she looked at me with concern and interest. After a few moments, she then herself asked if we were taping and steered the interview back to its original path. I made a mental note that I would have to erase the first few minutes of the tape...just in case.

Anjali was born in rural Saskatchewan and then moved to Vernon B.C., where she spent the greater part of her youth. Being half-German and half-Indian, the natural analysis would be to say that she grew up in a bi-cultural home. This is not the case. Anjali grew up in an Indian home. While telling me that her mom was German and her dad was Indian, she at the same time, described her older sister and two brothers as being the only “Indian” kids in Vernon at the time. This is not to say that she didn’t recognize a sense of difference within her own family, however values, morals, customs expectations and habits were predominantly set by the father; and often done without much explanation. It was assumed she was Indian, the way her father acted was Indian, but what did it all mean?
. ..why can't you wear nailpolish, or why can't you do this and why can't you do that?

And I would think, my parents won't let me. And it was awful! I felt like I was a nerd or something, because I couldn't do everything my friends could do. I could never sleep over at my friends houses. They would have sleep-over birthday parties, pajama parties and I could go but my mom would pick me up at 9 o' clock or something. [- would it have made a difference if those kids were brown?] If they were Indian, it probably would have been fine. And if they were Indian, we would at least know what our parents were thinking. We'd at least know this is why our parents are doing what they're doing...it's because we're Indian and this is the way they've been brought up. But to be a single isolated event...

Because of this ambivalence between a formation of identity and the confusion over a lack of a solid reference point such as language, community, religion, Anjali took a proactive stance and left Vernon after highschool, moving to Vancouver to pursue a degree and seek out her community and heritage. After obtaining a degree in business she continued to search for an area in which she could both interact with and discover her community and hopefully give back, with her own unique brand of optimism, energy and passion. She finally found her niche working for an new and innovative Indian magazine that serves the community in a variety of ways like sponsoring the first all-Indian dragon boat team.

"I went on to do a couple of certificates in mortgage brokering and investments. But didn't think either was for me because I didn't feel I was adding value to people's lives. So I tried a number of different things and that's when I settled in with the magazine and realized this is really where my life is!...in the Indian community! This is where I want to be!"
Moving out on her own, and into a community provided for Anjali, a catalyst to explore various areas of her being and identity. She began to re-define herself and perhaps more importantly, began to challenge herself, mentally, physically, intellectually and spiritually.

For various reasons, to be explored later, Anjali was never that physically active or that drawn to sport and physical activity as a young girl. But once in Vancouver, there was a strong connection to various activities traditionally defined as “male-dominated sports.”

"...the sports I really enjoy and love are anything aggressive and physically taxing on the body! I love a lot of running, I think that’s completely physical. I love floor hockey which (when played with the right team), can be very physical and aggressive....I’ve always loved baseball, and obviously paddling, ‘cause I’m really good at it!"

The benefits of sport and activity were realized by Anjali in the truest sense of the definition. Being a minority woman in Canada, however and living within a male-dominated community, an intense desire to prove herself also grew within her.

"Academically, I’ve got my degree in business. I’m no mental giant but I’ve always been more comfortable doing aggressive sports. It’s almost as if I have something to prove! I don’t know why. My friend and I went roller-blading yesterday, we did the Seymour Demonstration Forest, and there’s this one section called the “s-curves.” It’s very steep hills down and very steep hills up. We did the whole 11 kilometers, and when you double back, it’s 22 kilometers. Again, it’s like I’ve got something to prove and I want people to know I can do that! Or doing the Grouse Grind, our best times was 1 hour 8 minutes. “We can do that! Just ‘cause we’re girls doesn’t mean we’re weak! Or frail! Or little china dolls! My friend and I did the sea-wall and then the Grouse Grind. I don’t know why but I just love telling guys that!"
Because I know a lot of guys who even go, “Wow! You’re going to run in the Sun Run?” - It’s like, “Please! It’s 10k. BIG DEAL!”

Through this process of growth, change and challenges, Anjali decided to take a personal development course where she learned the tools of self-reflexivity and to discover what her own personal goals as a young Indo-Canadian women were to encompass.

I became more aware of myself, and what it is that’s important to me and what I want to work on. What kind of thing I want to change. And through the magazine, I was able to work on a lot of those things. One of them was changing the stereotypes of women. Adding value to people’s lives by doing volunteer work. To unite the different communities, because we’re all Indian! Regardless of whether you’re a Hindu, or Sikh, or Muslim or whatever! We talked about how some people differentiate, “Oh yeah my Jat Sikh friend..” It’s like, “Well, that doesn’t matter to me!” So these are some of the things I was able to do as a result of the personal development courses, and doing some searching within.”

Anjali’s strong and fiery spirit merged with a dogged determinism that some have called stubbornness and at times rebelliousness. She decided to take on the challenge of dismantling community and mainstream stereotypes in a variety of ways but especially through sport and physical activity. Finding her identity in the Indian community her curiosity and commitment seem boundless, but the journey was not without its difficulties. At one point when discussing her tattoo, Anjali became very animated and passionate about community misconceptions and her determination to succeed at her goals.

“Yeah I have a tattoo! Big deal! Do you know what I mean? It’s a source of strength for me. Just ‘cause I know I was very passionate about paddling and very into it, and very excited
to be on that platform. So that’s why I got it! And then at the same time if a lot of Indian people knew about this, or if my parents knew they’d wig out! they’d flip! Most Indians would. They think that, “Oh my god! She’s such a bad girl!” It’s almost for those reasons that I’ve got to get out there and push the envelope!...All I am is Anjali. And all I want to do is make a difference! And I know I can do that through sport! I’m on a Vancouver Sun Run team as well. The first-ever Indian Sun Run team. And as a result of putting ourselves out there like that, a couple of other groups have come forward.”

As we progressed throughout the interview I began to assess this person sitting in front of me. During a short break in the conversation when she answered a phone call I realized that she had an amazingly idealized image of what she envisioned for society. She created the world’s first all-Indian dragon boat team in the hopes of joining communities together. Some could say she was simply espousing the “multicultural” doctrine, (consciously or not) that had been so promoted in the late 70’s and 80’s , especially in our communities. Others would say that her interest in the promotion of Indo-Canadians in sport was reflective of personal responsibility and pro-activism.

“I’ve been dragon boating for six years...I put together the Mehfil team because I really felt that because I’ve paddled for so many years, I’d been to every festival and I really felt that there was a lack of Indian people, Indian representation in the festival. And I was looking through some of their material and it said that their mandate was to promote multiculturalism and appreciation for different ethnicities through visual and performing and culinary arts. And I thought that is a load of crap! There’s no Indians. You couldn’t make a team from the 120 teams in Vancouver of all Indians, which is only 20 people! What I thought is that it’s time...I
talked to Rana (the publisher) and said, "Rana, we really must do this! It's an event of 150 000 people. And it's a way to create energy within the community, energy for the magazine, energy within the mainstream community, and to educate people that we're not just taxi drivers!"

What did come clear from the discussion we had was that Anjali was determined to re-define traditional sex roles, or at least make them more inclusive of the diversity of strengths and interests of Indian women, in both the Indian community and mainstream society.

"Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean that I can't stroke on this dragon boat team, create this dragon boat team or play aggressive floor hockey! I was goalie one night, and boy, I was so proud afterwards that my knees and elbows were black and blue. And I got smacked around by that ball so many times but I gave it everything I had. ... I had the opportunity that night to educate some Indian men on the fact that I can be goalie just as easily."

Being an Indian woman participating in several all-Indian teams and environments, has provided Anjali a unique forum to promote education and Western sport from an Indian perspective. Being a natural-born salesperson, she recognized that talent, and used it to her advantage. She decided that an all-Indian team had more than a few benefits and seemed to light up when talking about some of them. On an emotional level, the teams (especially the dragon boat team where the majority are women) provided for Anjali a sense of security, commonality, and support, but for her they were much more...

"Some people have said, "I think its not consistent with the multicultural views, because what you're doing is racist and segregated." And I just said, "Well, our job is to help PROMOTE the Indian community and EDUCATE and SELL and MARKET the Indian community more effectively." I believe we can do that more effectively as an Indian group!"
...It's a visual thing as well! If we were not Indian, then people wouldn't really know who we are and what our efforts are all about. I think it's really important that we visually be there as the united front! From the sponsorship point of view, it's a good thing because we get a lot of press. You wouldn't believe how many people went, "Oh yeah, you guys are the Indian team! You guys did well last year didn't you?" I can't tell you the number of people that came up and said that! We did EVERYTHING we could to make sure that people knew that there's an Indian team out there and we want to participate. Most people are visual. They'll see something and they're not hearing, or feeling the feelings, but they'll SEE! And they'll see all brown people, and the more they see that- the more normal it becomes! And the less of a ...

Both drained and encouraged, we finished up the interview two and a half hours later with a series of informal definitions. Anjali had been more than open and candid about her childhood, her experiences and her hopes for the future. Possessing an unusual frankness and self-reflexivity she revealed herself as a woman of determination, strength and a tireless commitment to opening doors and minds. From each experience she drew the positive and seemed to learn the lesson that was often hidden underneath.

[-Indo-Canadian?]

"Indo-Canadian to me is a gift I've been given. And I don't take it lightly!"

[-strength?]

"A lot of things run through my mind. I think of physical strength and mental strength...."
Mental strength. The over-abundance of mental strength that we must have as Indo-Canadians. My issue is probably more with being Indo-Canadian than with being an Indo-Canadian woman.”

[-community?]

These are all words I use everyday! When I think of community, I think of the Indo-Canadian community. And how rich, exciting and wonderful. Maybe I have these illusions about what it’s like... Just a real richness and peace of mind that I get by being a member of this community.”

[-dragon boat?]

“To me its part of my being and part of my life. I went through a very frustrating time and as I finished that, I opened the chapter that had a heavy dragon boat influence. It influenced every element of my life. And now with the Indian team, I’ve been able to integrate my Indian-ness and my dragon boat. And I’m really good at it!"

Meena

Traditional notions of physical activity and sport in the West tend not to include forms of dance and other creative arts that involve movement, strength and bodily endurance. Dance is commonly viewed as emotional, non-athletic, and effeminate and not a ‘mainstream’ form of physical activity. Possessing such “female” characteristics in a patriarchal society such as Canada or India, dance has been relegated an inferior status in the world of physical activity.

Dance in India encompasses a wide variety of styles, motivations and cultures, ranging from folk dancing to classical traditions. The themes and motivations are also as varied
including religion, stories and mythology, seasons, rites of passage such as marriage, health and political information, etc.

Meena being a Sikh from Punjab, was already familiar with the traditional folk-dancing from that region. Based on rites of passage and the harvest, this form of dancing called bhangra is very culturally-infused in the Punjabi population in the Lower Mainland. Being a form of celebration and social bonding, this art-form is visible, popular and a shared community activity. Bhangra itself is known for it’s lively music, an exuberant and passionate technique and colorful choreography and costume. The form itself is gendered. Traditionally, the livelier steps and stunts would be performed by the men, and the women would perform a faster version called gidda which incorporates women’s issues in its songs. Here in the Lower mainland in recent years, both men and women have learned the male version of bhangra and are performing side by side.

Having a talent and interest for dance, Meena sought out another famous form of dance, called Bharata Natyam, a classical tradition of India. Being a student of Bharata Natyam myself, the context and history of the dance are well-known to me. This dance form originated 400-500 years ago, its earliest forms being written down in an ancient text called the Natya Shastra. Pious Hindu women would dedicate themselves to a particular temple and deity and perform the dance as ritual. For various reasons, such as royal interest and patronage, the activity soon became associated with courtesans and women of ill-repute. Hundreds of years later, the dance took on a revival as a classical art form with a rigid and precise technique, involving Hindu religious themes, intricate rhythms and footwork, and complex hand gestures. The music from South India is classically-based.
Viewing the forms from a different angle, both incorporate an intense use of the body. Immense endurance is required for dances pieces up to 30 minutes at a time. The postures and poses for both forms require flexibility and strength. And the ability to make it look effortless needless to say, requires hours and hours of practice and dedication, commonly described as blood, sweat and tears!

With this dance context in mind, Meena’s story can unfold...

I arrived at the dance school at 12:30 sharp. The building was new and brightly colored. I saw a figure in the front window and hoped it was Meena. As I walked to the front door, I noticed a shuttle-bus with the dance school’s name in bright colours painted on the side. I wondered if this was used to pick-up women that had no transportation. I made a mental note to ask about it.

She had scheduled this interview on a Sunday and had opened the school for us to meet. She greeted me at the front door in an earthy-green salwar-kameez, indicating to me she had come from a religious event. Her tiny frame seemed almost swallowed up in the yards of silk. We proceeded into the front office and as she motioned for me to sit down in the only chair there, she began by explaining that she had been at a kanpat (a family-sponsored prayer service) all morning. I assured her the interview wouldn’t be more than an hour and a half, and she quickly said it would be no problem. In the two prior phone conversations and the previous informal meeting at the same office, Meena had projected herself as being very confident, interested in my research and well-established as a community-based business woman running two Indian dance schools. The school itself was large and had three spacious dance studios and a front lobby with more trophies and banners. I had quickly toured the premises at the last
meeting during which I had briefly discussed my research interests, her own interests and simply chatted casually about dance.

I had initially called her in hopes of getting a referral for a participant in my research, however I was quite pleased and surprised when in the midst of telling me her school's list of achievements, she offered herself as a candidate to be interviewed. When I had expressed my interest in interviewing her, she quickly began to ask me which other women from the community would be featured. Due to issues of confidentiality, I could not oblige her. Meeting her face-to-face twice now, her well-spoken, friendly and sure-minded nature was now firmly established. However, her choice of questions regarding the other women left an interesting statement in my mind concerning an underlying sense of competition and self-promotion.

We quickly eased into the interview, with the afternoon sun pouring into the room. She sat behind an immense cherry desk and leaned back in her chair as she began by revealing an implicit story of struggle and hardship. This sense of history seemed almost imprinted in her own vision of her life and the lives of others brought here, as young children by their parents from the villages of the Punjab.

"I was born in India, but came to Canada with my mom. My dad was already here. I came when I was only nine months old, so I don't have no memories of India, as far as growing up. I've been back quite a bit. So it was a struggle I guess for the first few years. We know that from some of the pioneers that have come around twenty-five years ago, its been difficult! And I grew up in Vancouver. My family's still out here. And basically, I've been highly actively involved in anything cultural and anything through the temples. Anything that would get me
involved in activities that would include you to be in the Vaisakhi parade, ...or the competitions for poetry, ...Punjabi school. Trying to be involved in any which way!"

Growing up with an early understanding of community, even though the actual numbers were low at that time, seemed to guide Meena into religious-based activities from a very young age. Her family sensing the temple was the strongest link to life as they had once known it, encouraged Meena and her siblings whole-heartedly to participate.

"God, I don't think we were in school yet. We learned to play the harmonium, tablas, everything. I've two sisters and one brother, I'm the second oldest. And we were a team. Mostly the girls. The three of us, we'd go to religious functions, one would play the harmonium, one would sing, and one would play the tabla. It was just always that way. Or if we went to a wedding, a social event, we'd have routines already laid out. I had mom clapping and pushing us through this. This was from very young! I started learning dance professionally, at the age of three. So it's been a big part of my life!"

Being in her mid-twenties and successfully running a thriving business based on her life's passion, Meena immediately struck me as the type of person who knew from an early age what she wanted out of life, and what it was going to take to get her there. She started out learning Bharata Natyam from the age of 3, however didn't receive much emotional support or encouragement from her parents who were not familiar with Hinduism and its classical arts. According to Meena, they would have much preferred her to learn bhangra or something reflective of the Punjabi culture, nonetheless the classes were paid for. But being a determined toddler...!
“They asked, “Couldn’t you do some bhangra or something?” But it wasn’t offered! It wasn’t there! And for me it was just an avenue to be involved. Anywhere that I could be a part...even though I was four or five I knew what I wanted to do! So I pushed my way into doing all these things. I think I was seven or eight, I was doing Amitabh Bachaan impersonations. And I got an offer to do a tour across Canada with one of the international shows. They wanted some child artist to do some things. I did the show here, but my parents were saying, “No you can’t go across Canada!”

Portraying one of her role models, an Indian film actor who would sing and dance to entertain his audiences world-wide, Meena seemed to emulate a deep desire to link her interests in dance, music, theatre and performance with her Indianness. Coming to points of tension where parental concerns for safety, money and time and perhaps reputation were paramount, Meena rose above the hurdles, saw them as challenges and where sheer determinism didn’t work, she sought alternative answers that satisfied everyone while not compromising her own dreams. A prime example was the situation and family conflict that gave rise to the founding of the dance school, Meena’s pride and joy...

Meena leaned in towards me as she sighed and began to explain the choices she had made as a young women on the brink of teenage stardom. Meena was offered a role in a Punjabi movie at the age of 13. She did some choreography and proceeded to land the second to lead role, her first big break! The movie itself was released internationally and the emotion from the success and impact it had on her was more than obvious as Meena talked. She received accolades for her performance and didn’t fail to mention to me that she had received a number of calls from reporters in London asking for interviews. This event seemed to be a
catalyst for Meena’s parents and they promptly ended Meena’s film career, not by force but by instilling the fear of failure in this country. Cultural notions of survival in the West for Indo-Canadian families are immense, and Meena’s parents were not oblivious to the fact that there were no successful Punjabi women appearing at the local Cineplex. What did get emphasized was what I call, an “Indo-Westernized” value, of formal education, where professional diplomas and degrees equaled financial, personal and above all family success.

“Because you’re looking at Indian families and Indian parents, they did not want me to pursue a career in the arts. So that was a really big thing. “You have to be a doctor or lawyer—you have to be a professional! You’re not going to make it anywhere if you go into acting, singing or dancing!” That was something engrained in all of us! “You have to go to university!” So, my background is in accounting. I’m almost done my CGA, before I got married three years ago. But I’m at the same level I was three years ago! Unfortunately, when we got married, we had a mortgage etc., and that’s where the dance school came out of. I thought this is something I would love to do! My parents will be happy, I can contribute with the mortgage, and its something I love! What happened?! It just BOOMED!”

Incorporating her dreams and talents into a business that supplied an area in which there was high demand was just one of the benefits. Until Meena’s school, Indian dance was taught on a more elite level, where folk traditions were not highly valued and enrollment was limited due to accessibility of teachers and high fees. Meena’s creation filled that gap perfectly. After family concerns and conflicts were recognized and addressed, including those of the reputation and the perception of women who danced for a living, the moral and sexual implications were no longer an issue.
“And then opening up the dance school...this is something that I didn’t think they (especially my dad) would support.” [-why?] Just a gut feeling! Just thinking, is this something he would be proud of? I talked to him before. Even though my husband and I knew what we were gonna do! I had to take the time out and say, “Dad, you know, what do you think? I don’t want you to think I’m a koteh-wali, a nichin-wali. ‘Cause that’s the type of thing people think! When they think that you’re a dancer...It’s not a dancer-for-hire!” Anyway, after talking to my dad, he was really supportive. Saying, “No, you’re doing something great for the community!” And he knows this wasn’t something available to me....Also the school does not participate where there’s alcohol. So that’s a big part too!”

What struck me from this was that Meena’s goal was not to challenge or question the basic and inherent social structure of the Punjabi community, nor the legitimacy of its traditions, what she did succeed in doing was addressing a void and recognizing the deeper issues and significance of gendered physical activity. Her talent for taking this opportunity and making it a money-making venture cannot be over-looked as well.

Being in an all-Indian environment seemed to be very fulfilling for Meena as well as for the students of the school who range in age from 2 years to 70 years old.

“Through the dance school, we’ve been able to establish that this Indian dance is something that’s different! It’s something you can respect! And it so popular now! It’s unbelievable how many people out there just want to dance!! And I get blown away!!...We have classes once a week, and I’ve got older ladies in seniors classes. And for some of these people, this one day a week, is the biggest day of the week!! [-why?] I think that it’s something they’re
doing for themselves. It's something they enjoy. It's in an Indian atmosphere. This is something that hits home!

Meena's innovative marketing skills also produced a unique activity called "bhangra-aerobics." An adaptation of a western sports model, this activity incorporated Indian dance steps, music and language which appealed to another segment of the Indian population, young to middle-aged women trying to keep "in shape" but too intimidated by an all-Western environment.

"We have an aerobics program...Bhangra-aerobics! And these ladies come twice a week. You should hear them! They're yelling, they're screaming at the top of their lungs, in Hindi, Punjabi, English...everything! And you would never guess that a mother of three is up there doing all this! And the high they receive in that one hour, when they walk in and when they out...they seem to be totally different people. They seem to be so close to you because they've had the chance to sweat and get it all out!!"

Being quite aware of the barriers facing Indo-Canadian women today, Meena described the most prevalent and common fears of Indian parents that end up in either segregationary attitudes or complete disapproval of activities outside the community. She described the fear of children being influenced by the wrong people, the fear of not knowing what kind of environment the child will be in, the issue of late after-school activities viewed as unsafe, the fear that grades will suffer and the real financial burden school-based activities such as sports can be on some families. Meena explained the real financial struggle her family went through, with both parents working six days a week to support the family; conditions not too conducive
for support of unfamiliar school activities! She also described the difference between Indians living in India, and those that have settled in Canada...

"[have you been to India? do you notice a difference?] I find the women out there, are a lot more broad-minded and open!...In every aspect.[-how do you explain that?]Simple! these people that came here so many years ago, they're lost in time!...they think its still twenty years ago! And they don't realize India's changed and they have to move with society. They're Canadian now! They have to adapt[[-what does that mean: 'Canadian'?]I think what I mean is, adapting to the society you're living in. So, the society here, how they think and react would make them Canadian.[-and you find the people who came here a while ago are not doing that?] They're not doing that but they have good motives! They don't want to lose their ties! They don't want to lose their roots! But at the same time they're losing the communication with their children. Their losing some respect from their families.

Meena often reflected a multicultural vision in her thinking, one of assimilation and adaptation while still maintaining culture and roots. Her membership in not just Punjabi associations (leagues) but Fijian, Gujrati and Bengali associations was a prime example.

Meena's success in life reflected a strong will, an ability to find creative solutions to address conflicting value systems, a determination to pursue her dreams and the simple fact that she gave herself these choices! She gave credit for her success to a growing communication with her family, a need to express herself physically and artistically, a supportive husband, her Indian role models, and her love and respect for her culture.
Meena concluded the interview with this statement, "I've been enriched with both the Canadian and Indian cultures. And I can't help but feel proud of being Indian and living in Canada! I've stuck to my guns and I'm doing what I want to do."
Themes

Women’s stories have had a long history of being generalized, simplified and patterned to fit a particular mold. This has lead to the exclusion of those stories that do not fit the mold. Or the re-telling of those stories in a way that allows them to fit the mold. In this lies my research purpose. By presenting stories that exist on the fringes of the ‘norm’ i.e. stories that have not yet been accounted for or seen as valid, satisfactions as well as dissatisfactions, empowerment and constraint can be discussed and addressed. This is necessary if we are to examine the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of women who are not represented and often misrepresented. The themes that emerged in this section deal with topics raised by myself as well as areas raised and articulated by the women themselves. Initially I had some hesitation in drawing out themes and categories, however I discovered it was, in fact, possible to illustrate the diversity in each area without compromising the women’s words. The themes didn’t end up categorizing the data but in actuality, revealing it.

Social Support Structures

In this section, I have chosen to briefly introduce social support structures as they applied to the participants in this study because of the importance given to them throughout the interviews. Each participant touched on their experiences in school, family and the Indo-Canadian community as they discussed their experiences in sport and physical activity. The women’s own voices have been brought into a deeper discussion of each theme in the following pages.
All three women seemed to feel that the education system in general, was not supportive to Indian women, especially those pursuing athletics and other activities. Although two of the women had reasonably positive sporting experiences in school, they nevertheless felt that accommodations for cultural differences, parental concerns, religious activities, and scheduling difficulties were rarely made, and less frequently addressed by educators. These exact issues have arisen for many other South Asian girls in PE, for example the case study conducted by Carroll and Hollinshead (1993), described identical issues in their study of an English PE program in which there was a large South Asian population. Their study (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993) showed concerns over PE attire (linked to cultural notions of the body and modesty) were not recognized, the practice of mandatory communal showering disregarded cultural differences, there was no accommodation for religious holidays, and the scheduling of after-school activities was also extremely problematic for South Asian girls who had considerable restrictions placed on them from home.

The literature has told us that white male power and privilege has become the dominating ideology in society and as a result, institutionalized white power has dominated the education system (Dei, 1996). Consequently, PE teachers for example, would be “reluctant to admit and believe that racist practices do occur and that sport and PE can be a divisive force” (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993). The literature has also recognized that “students do not go to school as ‘disembodied’ generic youths...therefore it is important for educators to understand how students’ racial, class, gender, disabilities and sexual identities affect and are affected by the schooling processes” (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993, p.31).
The concerns discussed by Carroll and Hollinshead (1993), were similar to those described by the participants in this study and were particularly prominent at the time when the three women were in school because of the actual lack of numbers of other Indian children in the Lower Mainland. The school system today in places like South Vancouver, Surrey and Delta, have a high population of Indian children who can therefore form support systems more easily. According to Dei (1996, p.33), “the issue of how students link their identity and their schooling is important to understanding the causes of student disengagement from school...the power of self and group definitions allows some students to recognize their individual and group ancestry and cultural heritage as powerful sources of knowledge which can provide a basis from which to challenge their historic marginality in the school system. In such a situation, the margin becomes a site of resistance to the powerful political, economic, cultural and educational forces of Euro-Canadian hegemony.” The current development of this notion has profoundly changed the actions of many Indo-Canadian youth and women, who have articulated this emancipatory discourse and formed community-based sports teams and leagues. The demand, interest and trust in community-based activities and initiatives were explained by the women as being inter-linked with issues of support from community members, other women, and the local religious institutions.

Support...to keep from falling...to give strength to...to enable to last or continue. These important concepts cannot be emphasized enough. As these women and others like them, support each other (however indirectly), their families in turn must and do, support their daughters, but can only do so if the communities they live in support the families, of which one
crucial factor includes the support by centers of power which have created the institutions of sport, recreation, and education in this country.

Family

This theme was first raised by myself with the open-ended question, “Tell me about yourself.” Each woman then proceeded to raise the theme themselves at many given points during the interviews. I suppose this was because any search for some defining feature that establishes a person and maintains her continuity through time and space, especially in Indian families (of a variety of backgrounds), seems to result in notion of family. My point is that identity is inextricably developed and shaped by family, along with gender, race, class and culture. But instead of looking to the latter as the origins of identity, I have been shown by the women themselves that the critical socialization and foundations of behavior, values and thought-processes, and a sense of self are the direct result of family discourses and ideologies.

Each woman began her story (based on my prompt) addressing the very real and poignant issues of struggle and hardship they and their families endured as new immigrants in Canada. The isolation of these families from a larger community base and support, some twenty to thirty years ago, was quite pronounced and difficult, as was the economic hardship which afflicted most of the newly arrived Punjabi settlers, who at that time, were predominantly village and farm laborers. Financial and emotional support for “extra” activities like sports, dance and other forms of physical activity were not abundant as parents were more interested in putting food on the table.
"They just couldn't take the time out. They were both working two jobs each. And there was no way that they could leave and come take me to the different lessons I wanted to be in!...We were going through a real financial struggle. They were working very hard. I sometimes didn't see my mom for like five days" (Meena).

Yeah, when you don't have much, putting food on the table is the main priority! And sports and stuff isn't. Which is understandable...There wasn't much money for uniforms and things like that!" (Harjit)

The focus on these sporting activities may have been discouraged by the parents, but the push to excel at a traditional education was not. As described earlier, success in school equaled success in society for the families described here.

"At a young age, my parents really didn't realize the true benefits of sports. In elementary school, they completely didn't know. Highschool, it was like, "Make sure you study first! And grades are most important blah, blah, blah." (Harjit)

What is important to note here is that this seems to be especially pronounced for immigrant parents who seem to have an implicit understanding that their children are measured in mainstream society by a harsher and longer yardstick than Euro-Canadian children. As well, the status and acknowledgment achieved in Indian families, from other Indian families, when the child reflects stereotypical ideals (e.g. 'straight A’ student while still adhering carefully to cultural norms), is immense. Many South Asian parents in Canada “consider the dominant Canadian cultural values morally corrupt, characterized by unbridled individualism...and androgynous tendencies in gender relations” (Dhruvarajan, 1996). Therefore respect is thought to be achieved if the young girl focuses on education, and according to economic status
becomes a professional (doctor or lawyers preferred), marries a successful Indian man by a
certain age, and quickly maintains the perfect life by producing children. "The maintenance of
family prestige is considered to be every family members responsibility...as family interests are
believed to take precedence over individual interests" (Dhruvarajan, 1996, p. 305).

None of my participants fit in this idealized model, and the struggle within their own
families to redefine measures of success were very real experiences for each woman. This is
not to say that they didn’t try to prove to their families that they could do it. Meena married a
“good man” by a certain age, but didn’t want children right away, and was in no rush to
complete her degree. Harjit had two degrees from university, but was in no rush to marry.
Anjali also obtained a degree, but didn’t see marriage in her immediate future. In the following
interview excerpts, Anjali and Meena discuss their parents’ beliefs about education:

"He had very high expectations for his children. My dad was not terribly educated, nor
my mother. And they wanted us to have all these things and to be lawyers and doctors and all
these things but didn’t really know how to bring us to that point." (Anjali)

For my parents, the biggest thing was grades! As long as you kept the good marks and
you could prove that you could handle both at the same time. That was their biggest thing.
Sports wasn’t as big of a problem as acting and singing though. (Meena)

Family expectations are high in Indian homes, where the group is viewed as a whole or
collective. The following quotes describe the women’s own feelings about their own individual
identities, which can often conflict with familial expectations. Each description is reflective of
their own personalities, ties, desires and forms of resistance despite familial pressures to
conform. For Meena continuing to have dance in her life was a priority.
"I’m highly involved in stage competition. And I haven’t slowed down yet! But sometimes you hear it...especially from the in-laws. “Oh slow down! Have a family. You’re getting old now!” My husband just hit thirty and I’m twenty-seven. You feel it, but we still are VERY active! And I think my drive and passion for dance has pushed this even more!” (Meena)

For Anjali, notions of ’needing to be married’ reflected traditional and/or familial beliefs, however, her criteria for a partner (emphasis on male), seemed to be highly personal and perhaps a little controversial.

“One of the things that has not been so great is when you search within yourself, you become more aware of what’s important to you in a relationship. And a lot of the things I’m looking for, I don’t think I’m gonna find in a typical Indian man! ...I think what I want, doesn’t exist in the Indian community which makes it a bit frustrating for me, not to mention my family. Or if it does, all those guys are taken! As a result, I’m 31 next month and single!” (Anjali)

Harjit’s dedication to athletics didn’t get swayed by her parent’s objections. She didn’t seem bitter about the struggle and felt sticking to her guns about her sport and physical activity goals and interests, eventually paid off.

. .”..No matter, what my parents said, honestly I didn’t care because I was going to be independent and do what I wanted anyways. And most people say, “It’s not worth the hassle, it’s not worth arguing with my family.” I was like, “NO! Sports is something I gotta do. And if you don’t like it, well too bad!” It didn’t come overnight either. At 15, 16, I couldn’t tell my parents, “Oh yeah, I’m going to the gym at nine o’clock.” But now they wouldn’t think twice! Over time!” (Harjit)
The learning process through the emotional, mental and physical development of the three women, has been experienced by the families as well. Parents have grown alongside their children, and have eventually opened up and understood their daughters, resulting in a supportive and nurturing family environment described by two of the women in the following quotes.

"My mom is VERY supportive now! It took a while and lots of talks, and me basically just pursuing my dreams. Its something they have to be comfortable with as well, you know? But she's very proud! I think I've accomplished a lot." (Anjali)

"Opening up the dance school...this is something that I didn't think they (especially my dad) would support....Is this something he would be proud of? I talked to him before hand, even though my husband and I knew this is what we were gonna do. I had to take the time out and say, "Dad, what do you think?" ...After talking to my dad, he was really supportive....I think the biggest thing is communication within our families! It's nothing else!" (Meena)

Indian Environments and Community

Race and culture create a common identity amongst women, but this can also be confining when interests and desires conflict with the practices and beliefs of the community. This theme was raised by my own questioning but expounded upon by the three women. The theme began an exploration of the marginalization as well as the power embedded in Indo-Canadian community coalitions that foster women-only environments and all-Indian teams, as described by the three women.
Mainstream Phys.Ed classes, its teachers, competitive sports teams, gyms, sport leagues and tournaments, etc., have done little to listen, incorporate and include the needs, concerns, wishes, language and skills of Indo-Canadian women. This has been examined and described in the literature as well as highlighted by the participants in this study. The Indian community is starting to address the physical activity needs of women by providing alternative spaces and activities. Although these initiatives are primarily brought into practice by women, little, or nothing at all, is known about the women in the Indo-Canadian community who are struggling and working against these oppressions and their successes.

This issue evoked a great deal of emotion from all three women, as they talked about their experiences with passion, pride, anger and frustration. In the following quote, Harjit describes why many Indo-Canadian parents hesitate to send their children to non-community based activities.

"As for school activities, most parents are like, "Well, I'm not sure where you are going, I'm not sure when the tournament is, I don't even know who's going to be there with you, and all of these other factors! Whereas activities held by the temples, you know who's kid is who's, and you know everybody so they don't have a problem with that. To me, they encourage it more with the temples because, it's to do with THE TEMPLE! It's to do with the ideologies of what the temple is about, and what SCHOOL is about! School is about hanging out with different people you don't know, boys you don't know. Whereas the temple is about religion, and the COMMUNITY!...and you know who everybody is!" (Harjit).
Anjali describes her own feelings of safety and security in community-based activities and Meena discusses other positive features such as comfort with language, knowledge about the activity, the people involved, the environment, and the re-establishment of community ties.

"Being in all-Indian environments and on all-Indian teams, is just comfortable for me! It's a comfortable and SAFE place for me. I'm with our own people, and I feel there's real support there, even though some guys will still kinda laugh at you and don't think you can do it....Right now we have a majority of women on our team. I like it because of the ENERGY we create! We have incredible women on our team! A lot of them are really strong! Most of the people I spend my time with are paddlers on our team, because I really found out how bonded you become, and that we have a lot of the same interests and goals. We're all interested in making a change!" (Anjali)

"When everybody's Indian, you're getting closer to your culture! Language. Unfortunately, these days, we find that even elders and even someone in their thirties, speak a lot more English than Hindi or Punjabi. So all of a sudden, you're kinda forced to be thrown in there, with people that are all speaking, or can speak the same language....We create groups between 10-14 people in each group, and we find that they become BEST friends! ...Right now when I look at some of my nieces, cousins and stuff, I know that my uncles and aunts don't allow them to join SCHOOL events. Because again, grades is an issue. And then there's the thinking that they will be influenced by the wrong people. And also, not knowing what their child is doing, 'cause its OUTSIDE of school time, and they have to stay late after school....Indian dance is simple a NECESSITY in everyone's life! Especially an East Indian
female. To enjoy your culture, to get a better grip on your culture...and most importantly-

PASS IT ON!” (Meena)

Organizing community-based activities in this manner, therefore seems to be addressing a demand in the community itself... a demand usually motivated by a need to have a separate voice, to include those who normally wouldn’t be, to re-present the stereotypes, safety issues, provide an atmosphere for kinship and culture, and often a place where women can feel comfortable participating. They are also motivated by a desire to become a force to be reckoned with! Meena’s dance school seems to have fulfilled most of these needs.

“We’ve been open for 2 and 1/2 years now, and we’re the biggest school in North America!...of something of this sort. I’m one of the main instructors here. We have twelve people on staff. It’s quite busy, we have over 650 students! I’m highly involved in competition, stage competition! And the school competes internationally year-round. You can see all our trophies and awards. We just came in first in an international competition in L.A. We teach our students (those that want to), how to dance PROFESSIONALLY and we always do so well! (Meena)

When describing the dragon boat team, Anjali talked with pride, a sense of accomplishment and desire to succeed as an all-Indian paddling team...perhaps with something to prove.

“I know this team can do it! Sometimes it will be painful...it’ll be burning and burning, but it’s like, “NO! We’re gonna do this! Everyone feels the same way- we want people to know that we’re really strong paddlers, and we can complete on this!” It’s like, “NO! We’re not even gonna miss one stroke because we all want people to know we can do this! We came in fifth in
last year's festival, and this year we'll do even better. Everyone is so strong, mentally and physically and because of that we're giving seasoned paddlers a run for their money! For example after practice, some guy will say, "Oh Anjali, that was a killer work-out!" And you know what? All the women have the SAME work-out! And that means our women are strong too! (Anjali)

Along with the many benefits of racially and culturally segregated activities, the negative aspects were also highlighted by the women, as they did not always address segregation with glowing comments. The discussion at times seemed to speak of an assimilative ideal or vision, as well as sexism within the Indian community and racism from the mainstream.

"I've played sports on non-Indian teams, and often it seemed like there was much more equality on the team or in the boat. The guys didn't think the girls couldn't do it! Or, "Yeah they're there, but they're not really contributing!" I don't see that in our boat, because the guys that we have on our team are really quite progressive. It's great that we've been able to give them somewhat of an education. Last year we paddled with 12 women and 8 men. "You guys are on this team and YOU'RE the minority this time!" But it can get kinda strange at times, because when non-Indians see our all-Indian team they've said stuff like, "Oh this is great. It's NICE to be able to come out and learn about different cultures. And oh- you guys have great food!" And it can get quite irritating! (Anjali)

Anjali seemed to have a greater hope in changing the backwards beliefs of Indian men through positive community experiences with both genders. Meena, however, cautioned against not critiquing the standards of the Indo-Canadian community.
"You'll find some Indians who encourage cultural stuff for the wrong reasons. These are the people that came here so many years ago, but they're lost in time!...They think that it's still 20 years ago! And they don't realize that India has changed and they have to move with society. They're Canadian now! They have to adapt!...I think what I mean is adapting to the society you're living in. So, the society here, how they think and react would make them Canadian. But they have good motives too! "Cause they don't want too lose their ties! They don't want to lose their roots! And they think temple games and tournaments are better for that." (Meena)

Harjit also cautioned against 'turning a blind eye' to the activities in the community. She seemed to feel that people ignore the negative side of cultural activities, without really describing it fully herself. She continued to describe the mind-set of parents who promote participation within the community.

"These activities are SAFE! Safety in the sense that their kid doesn't go wrong. They see the West as really corrupting, but at the same time they're blind to how their own kind corrupt the system just as much, if not more! Like, they don't realize that; they blame it on others. But I could tell them a few truths about what's really going on." (Harjit)

Despite the dilemmas of misinterpretation by those who live as white, middle-class members of society, and the possible self-inflicted ghettoization of the participants, the ethno-specific activities provided by the community can be traced to the dissatisfaction with mainstream organizations. The role of these ethnic community organizations not only solidifies a sense of community, but also empowers the men and especially the women participating. I say women because it has been indicated to me by the women in this study as well as
encounters with other active Indian women, that women are the primary users of the Indian community services that focus on recreation and physical activity. As discussed earlier this may be due to various factors that work simultaneously, several of which include issues such as safety, language, common values and beliefs, economics, as well as a meaningful community experience.

The Indian community experience encourages women who would normally not participate in mainstream activity, for example school-based activities, not to erase themselves and to participate in decision-making about their bodies, and overall physical, mental and emotional well-being. Meena, Anjali and Harjit asserted the growing importance of these activities in making physical activity an essential component of everyone's life.

Role as Educator and Leader

Tied into the ethno-specific activities is the issue of education and leadership. This theme was raised by the women themselves as all three women had taken on these roles in various forms. Harjit included the role of educator in her life by formally obtaining a degree in education. She continued to fine-tune her leadership skills through her current occupation as a recreation-coordinator of a mainstream community center. Meena chose education as her vocation by becoming an instructor of Indian dance, and displayed leadership skills by opening her own successful business that served the community. Anjali through organizing an Indian dragon-boat team with first-time paddlers, helped to coordinate various multicultural activities for the festival and taking initiatives at her own job (a local Indian magazine) and had also displayed these characteristics. All three women seemed to be convinced that pro-activism was
the key and they each created a personal definition of what the behavior should embody. One felt that a personal sense of self-motivation and confidence along with solid role models were the keys to success. While another felt that being educated and a passion for what one does were the founding principles. The third 'self-definition' of pro-active leadership was based on culture and solid community roots as well as drive to not give up and motivation.

"One of my big things is education, so I don't know if that filtered through in this at all but when I talk about the Indian community and my connections; education is the key! And I want our team's name to be Mehfil Magazine's Komagatu Maru! Because people will say, "What's that?" And we can say, "You know just 80 years ago, we weren't allowed to be here!"...And I want everyone to know that when people ask us about it, that there's a way that we're gonna explain it and let people know what happened. And that we're unhappy about it, and that it was really wrong! We couldn't even vote till 1947 in this country. And we could own land and have businesses for 100's of people, we could be born here, and still not be able to vote! And that's a crime in my books. I think we have a duty to put things in perspective and this is one of the things that I think helps! I just got shivers again...I get them so often because I get so passionate about this!" (Anjali)

Meena described the drive and passion through which she was able to realize her goals. Molding younger women and teaching them to take charge of their dreams and still maintain their cultural ties seemed to attest to her own self-proclaimed role as educator and leader.

"I've managed to pull all this off by being stubborn!! With my husband too! He's not a dancer, he was a shy person. Even though he's a social worker, and he's been actively involved in our community, I had to lay it out on the table- this is what I want to do! Are you
supportive or not? And he was! And now he has a stake in it! Yeah and with my parents too, I do feel they are proud of me. I've stuck to my guns and I'm doing what I want to do! I've left my accounting career, and I'm doing this full-time to fulfill ALL my needs and the needs of women in my community: physically, emotionally, culturally...in every which way! I did ballet, I did jazz, I've done theatre musicals; but it is Indian dance that is absorbing for us. When I meet people from 20 years ago, they always say, “We knew you’d be doing something like this!” It's a neat feeling knowing that I influence young minds and spirits in this way, culture is so important!” (Meena)

For Harjit, it seemed being a leader was not a role she took lightly. A sense of personal responsibility and hope in the younger generations of women were reflected in her discussion of role models.

“I really honestly think that for Indian women, they need Indian role models!! Because I know that when I go into a school, or when I go teach, I know the difference it makes. And if you look 'Westernized' and you look progressive, and you seem pretty hip with things...they idolize you. It's not just Indian women either, there's other girls too, but I guess I just notice it more in Indian girls because I can see where they're coming from! Because I was once there! It's just having that role model. And it's surprising because I can tell when kids look up to me! When East Indian girls look up to me! And you might not know them, but you can guess what they're thinking. And the other underlying reason is a love for sport and a belief in ability. A lot of women that come into my programs don't feel comfortable at all. You really have to encourage them, and be supportive for them, so they develop the confidence to come again!” (Harjit)
We must re-define the role of educator and education to include women like, Meena, Harjit and Anjali who are working in their various fields, and their agendas, which are not always given the credit they deserve. The Canadian educational and sporting systems have for the most part reflected a basic and fundamentally oppressive setting for many minority youth. “Privileges afforded certain groups at the exclusion of others have defined the limits of girls, women and minorities in sport...Disregard for Title IX and gender equity, the unequal distribution of power within professional sport, the lack of minorities in administrative positions in sport, the pervasiveness of homophobia, and protectors of the curriculum who do not permit multicultural themes to emerge or to be addressed are only a few examples of oppression in these settings” (DeSensi, 1995). Gay (1994) argues that teachers can play an important role in helping adolescents of color move through the process and arrive at a less conflictual sense of identity and that adolescents should not be left to their own devices to resolve the conflicts they may encounter. Educators and leaders like Meena, Harjit and Anjali, by attending consciously and deliberately to the ethnicity of their students and fellow participants are in their own ways taking up this challenge.

It is important to support, and include a transmission of culture and social knowledge; self-development at the level of personal awareness, and knowledge and identity.

Yet despite these much needed contributions, there is a growing unease among Canadians with, recognizing and accepting “education” taught by these women in these particular manners. Diversity, is increasingly seen as a double-edged sword. Its promotion can “enhance” and “embellish” our quality of life; it can also unravel the bonds that hold us together as Canadians. The Indo-Canadian community provides a competing vision of society
whose priorities still lie strongly with community and cultural ties, and whose needs and concerns are mostly being met by Indo-Canadians themselves.

Self-Promotion and Marketing

As leaders and educators, the women also highlighted another interesting issue; that of actively promoting self, selfhood, culture, women and physical activity. One could ask, why is this necessary, however the desire to be heard, seen and recognized seems to be a critical component of at least two of the women’s sense of empowerment. Representation can, in its most narrow sense, refer to the creation of a convincing illusion of reality. The women are convinced that by re-capturing and re-working the common representations of inactive, passive, uninterested, repressed and weak Indian women, they can successfully replace the stereotypes with images of their own. They also recognize that this needs to take place in both their own communities and mainstream society.

To ‘re-present’ in its most widest sense, can mean ‘to stand for’, ‘announce’, and ‘symbolize’. Those with a privileged gaze have traditionally made the images we absorb. The men have been the ‘seers’ while women have remained the ‘seen’. Minority women have been relegated a strange status. On the one hand, they remain invisible, while on the other, when they are viewed they are represented as highly exotic, victimized, animal-like, or sexually available... objectified second-class citizens at the very least.

Just as most images in masculine visual ideology are created to empower men- that is to see themselves as endlessly important, women like Meena, Harjit and Anjali are developing ways of making women prime viewers, by, for instance providing Indo-Canadian women with
powerful images of the female. It is this project, to nurture and explore the female gaze, to construct images creating a democracy of looking and being looked upon, and to create an iconography which makes known experiences of Indian women, which dominant male ideologies have hidden away.

In order to convey these messages, women of color must work even harder. According to Jiwani (1989), visible minority members are constructed in a particular mold, or made invisible. In television for example, rarely is there a balanced representation of visible minority women that focuses on their ethnicity and race. If depicted in t.v., minority womens' roles reflect their subject status, often portrayed as nannies, housekeepers, cooks etc., or harlots, sacrificing wives etc. (Jiwani, 1989). However, more often than not there is a prevalent invisibility (Bannerji, 1993). “The basis for this pronounced invisibility is grounded in the history of non-white/white power relations...the color of the subject races has been time and time again, in scientific and cultural terms, associated with their inherent inferiority” (Jiwani 1989, p.1). Stating that there is freedom of representation, is a middle-class illusion, and the dismantling of this begins with turning OBJECT into SUBJECT.

Meena described her experiences in having to promote Punjabi culture to her own people, as the community support wasn’t as strong in earlier years. She explains the role of community as a shelter from racist behaviour experienced in the mainstream, and how certain people of that community can often internalize feelings of shame without positive encouragement from other members.

"Another drive for me to teach my culture through dance and to get more people involved, was that when I grew up, our own people didn't like our culture. People I went to
school with. And I think that's because people didn't have the support or the exposure of Indian culture. Like now its great! I think the change has a lot to do with the fact that the mainstream has become a lot more educated. So we aren't scared or embarrassed.... Twenty or thirty years ago, everything was new and so mocked, and young people especially, didn't see anything positive about being Indian. So people were embarrassed and kept it to themselves. For instance my mom's name is Surinder but I know her work people call her Sandy. You go back to that... "Why did you have to do that when your name was Surinder?" They couldn't pronounce it, and then you felt really little. Now if you don't know anything about your culture...they ask! If a ten year old or eleven year old doesn't know by now...what village you are from, what side of the river you are from...And this is partly because there's people in our community who tell the world being Indian is great. It's so important these days! Because even though it seems easier to love yourself and the culture you're part of, the battle isn't over just yet." (Meena)

Anjali felt that having prominent members of the Indo-Canadian community on her paddling team marketed and legitimized the sport within the local community as well as the mainstream.

"When someone like Baltej Dhillon, the first turbaned RCMP officer, who has worked so hard in getting himself to wear a turban in the RCMP, comes up to me and says, "Oh Tina, I really miss paddling and I really love it! It's such a good workout!" And I just think: WOW! That just makes my heart sing, that you get that kind of recognition! And I hope that in some point in the future, its not gonna be, that we as women will get so excited by these little victories, because we'll be past a lot of this! I feel a bit of victory that Wally Oppal is on our team as well. And I'm just like, "Hot diggity! I was able to get a Supreme Court Judge. Almost
a 60 year old man to paddle on our team!” And that was very exciting to know that he...I guess in a way we’ve been fortunate because the men that we’ve had around us have been quite supportive of our efforts, and obviously wouldn’t be around if they weren’t. And Wally isn’t the kind of guy we need to give the lesson to. The kind of guys that we need to teach these things to are not the people on our team. But through that, and seeing the pictures in our magazine of all these men and women. And some are wearing turbans and some aren’t. Some of the women have very long hair, uncut and some have short hair. It’s a neat mixture. The men that need these lessons see that! And they see pictures of what our boat looks like and can visualize how physical it is; and we can move a bit closer to our goals! That’s very exciting to me! And having people like Wally, and the incredible women on the team, adds support and credibility (it’s unfortunate that it’s this way) but people like that really add credibility and make your team legitimate. Everything in life is sales and marketing! And how are you gonna market your team? How are you gonna get people interested? How are you gonna get people to see and appreciate the work you are doing? And how are you gonna encourage other women to come out? You really have to look at these things! I try to do that! (Anjali)

By providing these strong images both internally by encouraging and supporting community members, and externally by presenting these images to mainstream society the women are refusing to ally themselves with the traditionally exploitative methods which either objectify or more often than not, render invisibility. Meena, Anjali and Harjit are in a way, trying to paint new portraits of Indo-Canadian women, beginning by looking in the mirror at their own images. It is important to state that no producers of images can be aware of all the meanings inherent in the images they produce. All kinds of subconscious and unconscious
processes are at work, however, these women are displaying a critical way of seeing how women are valued in Western society. By finding ways to resist these pressures to view women in their dominant images, they are valuing the differences, strengths and independence of all the women in their lives, as well as those they might never meet.

Physicality

Sport and physical activity have traditionally been in a context where rigid definitions of femininity and masculinity have been reinforced. Athleticism, strength and desire to be physical have been clearly defined as male attributes and for a woman to possess them “masculinizes” her (which clearly implies an absence of heterosexual appeal). This stereotyping is reinforced in the media, schools, by teachers, coaches and families, and can as a result be internalized by many young women.

There is a strong tradition supporting the myth of “female frailty”, and in order to dismantle this tradition, we must first understand the stories of three Indian women who commonly share a desire to be active, a passion for physical activity; who value strength, aggressive play and competition; and have a vested interest and commitment to remain involved, pass on their skills and be role models.

This theme was an area I was interested in discussing with the women, but in each case was approached head-on by each participant before I could ask any specific questions. It seemed to be an area where the women wanted to clearly dispel any myths about weakness and passivity.
"Sometimes when you're paddling, you push yourself so hard you almost vomit! I want people to know that I'm really strong and can complete on this. Physically I don't have a problem pushing myself to any length!...But again, it's this need to push the envelope and to make a point and a statement. Being physical and strong is so important to me. And that's why I think if I can create an environment where other women and men like myself can accomplish this, then I'm one step closer to breaking the stereotypes that say, "Oh Indian people aren't athletic or competitive... I volunteer my time on Friday nights at the Ross Street Temple, keeping score for kids floor hockey between the ages of 12 and 15. There were only three girls that would come out consistently. And we got designated score-keepers. Obviously, we're not playing because it's a youth thing, but why did we, (the girls), get stuck with the clerical duties of the night?! No one asked me to ref! And then it came to the end of the season, and it was a staff team, and I said, "I want to play!" And my nephew was 15 and he was on the team. And he was going, "You're not gonna play?!" I had to let them know, (the girls too) that I could play floor hockey. It frightens me when 10 year old kids go, "Oh my god! Girls playing!" And I'm going, "Yeah! You got a problem with that?" Here I am 30 years old and some 10 year old kid is lipping me off, telling me I can't play floor hockey! Well I'm gonna prove them wrong! I WILL play and I'll be GOOD!" (Anjali)

Meena described that dispelling any myth about inability requires conviction and determination as society does not make it easy for Indian women due to stereotypes and negative images. She asserts that younger women must make conscious decisions to pursue physical as she did.

"In elementary and highschool, I was in every single sport! I was captain of teams-anything! Physically, if it had to do with running around and getting up and doing it- I was in
Anything I could do! That really hasn't changed much in my adult life. I really haven't stopped. From a very young age I remember, in grade 5, 6 and 7, soccer was the biggest thing. I was captain of the soccer team. We'd go to the finals. Swimming, I was up till my lifeguard.

In all sports I've been quite active. I've had to quit some of them, only because I've chosen to focus on dance, which is physically and mentally exhausting. I still try to get to the gym, to keep my strength up. You gotta remember, that I've given myself these choices, to remain physically active, and all that. But society does this thing, where you gotta be a certain way, you gotta wear certain things, and do certain things. My students are learning that's there's options, you have to give yourself these choices! And for me it's so important that they understand that they must be involved in any type of physical activity that they enjoy! And to take a regular routine out in your life. Maybe, they'll stick with dance. " (Meena)

Harjit's experiences with not giving up and sticking to sport and physical activity has been a life-long decision. She feels being physically active and strong and competing against men, run hand-in hand with self-confidence. Support is once again raised as a factor influencing participation and being physically active.

"If you have the self-confidence to play and practice and go out and play with your friends and develop a sense of confidence, then when you get to the next stage, which is to play it's so much easier. For the most part I can kick a lot of guys' butts out on the court! But I've developed a level of confidence that a lot of women lack. My priorities have always included sports. I've tried to teach this to my students as well as my family. And now my parents are into walking and things because they realize how exercise can really benefit you. So they're walking and I almost bought a treadmill for them this week. Because when its really bad
weather outside. I try and be a role model because I understand what they’re thinking. If you get out of tune with any specific sport, and you go back ten years later, you’re not going to be as good at it. I haven’t gone swimming in a while, so the minute I get back in the pool I’m not gonna be able to swim like the rest of them. If I’m all of a sudden thrown in a club, with people who practice, how’s that gonna make me feel? Am I gonna want to come out again? But if there were other fish in the pool like me, I’d maybe come out. But if I’m the only one and there’s a 100 people next to me swimming super fast, and I don’t feel confident about the way I look in a bathing suit anyways...Its the exact same scenario, on the volleyball court, the soccer field... For me being physically active is a life-long decision, I need to be involved in sport and training and girls have to make this decision early.” (Harjit)

Summary

The themes discussed in the preceding sections point to several factors influencing the participation and enjoyment of physical activity in the lives of the three women in this study. Family, school, the Indian community, and lack of role models emerged as prominent themes in the lives of the women, shaping their physical activity and sporting experiences. For example, they each individually struggled within their different families and community to pursue physical activity and sport, but nonetheless felt it was worth it. Schooling experiences varied quite a bit as two women had quite positive experiences, and the third did not. All three however, did not dismiss the need for understanding and supportive teachers. Also, growing up in a generation when the connection with an Indian peer group was not as strong as it is today, they pointed to the importance of support from community.
The self-portrayals were quite unique and individualized, however, Indian environments along with the themes of leadership, self-promotion and physicality had various connections. All three discussed the importance of community-based activities with regards to safety, comfort, language-familiarity, etc., while giving a somewhat critical analysis. Each also felt the need for more positive female role models within the community. All three women seemed to describe themselves as having taken a pro-active stance with regards to leadership, and in their own individual ways were teaching and promoting the benefits of physical activity and sport to other members of their communities (two of the women starting with their own families). The theme of physicality also shared some commonalities, as the three women viewed themselves as strong, capable, physical, and thoroughly enjoying their individual activities. Although not discussed in much depth, the women constantly alluded to the fact that it was challenging for Indian women to pursue physical activity and sport in their lives, as they each continually pointed to the need for self-motivation, confidence, desire and support.
Re-Presenting Sport and Physical Activity

In my analysis of the issues and themes that Meena, Anjali and Harjit have elucidated, I have made a conscious decision to insert at certain points, my own personal journal entries that were written during the entire research process. They will reveal the questions, dilemmas and self-positioning that is necessary in order to dismantle what we know to be "objective research." I made an attempt to evaluate (at least partially) some of the actions and power relations in the research process by documenting my thoughts and concerns. My journal writings helped me to understand that by situating myself as subject simultaneously touched by life experience (as well as academic concerns), I can acknowledge the multilayered nature of my identity as well as those of the participants.

I begin this chapter by exploring how the three women individually approached sport and physical activity, their motivations and strategies of empowerment thereby addressing my original research purpose (i.e. investigating the role of physical activity in their lives). Linked to this, I show how these women have worked to debunk some of the more prevalent stereotypes existing in the present Canadian sporting context.

Initially, questions regarding the context in which each woman participated in their particular field arose for me as the researcher, therefore I have chosen to reflect on the role of family in greater detail. For each woman in this study, the family was the locus of much discussion and thought. Staying true to their physical activity needs did not diminish the impact
of family and culture on the lives of the three women. The connections and relationships with family members had powerful effects on Meena, Anjali and Harjit. Various aspects of familial and cultural dynamics formed an unambiguous and powerful template for relationships outside the home that cannot be undervalued.

In many Indian homes, “all members of the family are expected to cooperate with each other to serve the interests of the whole...and calculating individual costs and benefits is considered improper and unproductive” (Dhruvarajan, 1996, p.305). Individual decisions are likely to be made with the family’s best interests at heart, often subsuming those that can be viewed as “rebelling”, “thoughtless”, “selfish”, or “too Western”, i.e. individualistic and threatening to gender relations within the home, (Das Gupta, 1994). In India it is customary for elderly people to expect deference form younger people (Dhruvarajan, 1996). This notion combined with the emphasis on cultural and kinship ties (characterized by patriarchal value orientations) demands that Indian women conform to a certain degree to these behaviour patterns of which the intent is to instill familistic values rather than individual ones ((ibid.). Indian women who have grown up in Canada, but are still the daughters of “Indian parents”, like the three women in this project, have the responsibility of taking care of their families and/or fulfilling expectations, while still fostering a brand of individualism and values unique to the West. This switching of roles can be problematic for some second generation women who are finding it difficult to accept the double standard in gender relations routinely practiced by their parents and an ethnic community that clearly privileges men (Dhruvarajan, 1996). For South Asian women (daughters) there can be conflict over freedom of movement and autonomy in making decisions that can be especially difficult due to highly pronounced gender
socialization and familial expectations. However, for some there is a distinction being made between outward behaviors and a coherent sense of identity. Most of them do not consider the dominant societal values as corrupting or immoral, but rather as another way of viewing the world (ibid.). Nodwell (1994) describes the outward adaptation of young South Asian women in Vancouver to various environments as distinct from the self knowledge of who they are. “In Canada they know how to live as ‘Indians’ at home, and as ‘Canadians’ at school, at work and with peers...their search is not too find a way to be both Indian and Canadian, their search is to find the strength, knowledge and pride to be Canadians as Indians” (Nodwell, 1994, p.97).

With this context in mind, a more detailed look at each woman’s individual family situation is provided in the following pages.

Working through certain ethical dilemmas is a critical component of life story research (qualitative research in general) and will also be tackled in this chapter. The notion of voice and the narratives that are produced from life story interviews will be discussed in relation to feminist writing. Concerns of inclusion using a South Asian feminist model and the importance of hearing stories like these will also be discussed.

The Role of Sport and Physical Activity

Before engaging in these dialogues, I knew Indian women were active and engaging in physical activity, but was unsure of the dimensions and extent of sport and physical activity in their lives and the significance of the issues involved. I also did not know if it was possible to find active Indian women who were interested in participating in my research but were also
taking a proactive stance that might help persuade or convince other Indian women to participate or continue participating.

Each woman seemed to view, and construct the issue of participation in physical activity as a personal responsibility for community development. That is, individually in their own ways and by their own means, they felt it necessary to take a pro-active stance and implement change. A few of the examples include Anjali’s struggle to create and find support for an all-Indian dragon boat team and define a space for Indian women and sport, Meena’s desire to promote alternatives and encourage women to dance and maintain culture at a community level, and Harjit’s goals of increasing the participation rates of young Indian women in mainstream sport and physical activity, while breaking down the common stereotypes.

Through their inspirational behaviour they are teaching Indian women and other women traditionally excluded from the institution of sport and physical activity to un-learn an exclusion of self. Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995) interviewed racially diverse adolescent girls about what relationships were important to them. They did not mention teachers, but they persisted in voicing a desire for a connection with teachers. One girl in the study stated that minority students want teachers to “teach things that are real meaningful” (Taylor, Gilligan, Sullivan, 1995, p.190). This was concluded to mean that there was a strong desire for teachers to be “more curious about girls, more attentive to their voices and questions, better able to listen to and hear the range of their voices and more open to learning from the girls” (ibid., p.191).
The participants this particular study are teaching women and girls to see themselves as encouraged, strong, included, capable, and valued, whether this means finding and creating new and better alternatives and areas where they can participate, or whether it be in a new activity, in their own tournaments and teams, or own cultural activities. The three women I talked with have successfully, by their own definitions, resisted the politics of victimization through an inclusion of self. An inclusion of self is a critical model to promote if Indian women are to be successful in a society with institutions such as sport and physical activity, where they are devalued, not listened to, not familiar with or not encouraged. We unfortunately live in a society where speaking our own languages, eating our own food, incorporating our own ideas of education and other such frameworks, are viewed as acts of resistance...acts of non-conformity. Immigrant demands and frustrations become “cultural” demands and frustrations and they are then dismissed as ignorant of their own motivations. Despite this, Meena, Anjali and Harjit have achieved relative autonomy in their pursuit of physical activity but not without having to adopt and model their goals on the values of male sports where aggressive competition, sexism, commercialization and political nationalism are endemic (Hargreaves, 1994).

To an extent, Anjali and Harjit have decided and possibly internalized the idea that, intense competition, aggressive play and leveling the playing field, are some of the characteristics and goals they wish to achieve. However, their own particular contexts have added another layer to their interpretation of sport...that of race/culture and the resulting barriers.
According to literature on sport, gender and race, the enduring problem of racism in sport continues to diminish the possibilities available to women of color (Cahn, 1994). And women of color are still encountering barriers at the level of participation, leadership and in the media. Cahn (1994) argues that young women of color have benefited along with white women from the significant increase in opportunities to play in school and community-based sports. However, either because they are discouraged from trying other activities or lack the resources to compete in more exclusive sports, minority athletes tend to be disproportionately represented in only a few sports.

Hargreaves (1994) writes, “whereas the successes of white women in sports are assumed to be the result of dedicated training and self-sacrifice...the visibility of elite Black sportswomen is assumed to be because they are genetically pre-disposed to be superior athletes. She has documented that Black women tend to predominate in track, and team games such as basketball and volleyball as well as weight training and South Asian women are believed to enjoy badminton and “keep-fit” activities (aerobics). These differences and preferences reflect diverse attitudes of femininity, but more importantly they reflect racial stereotyping. That is, Black women are believed to be aggressive and dominating (characteristics suited for certain sports), whereas South Asian women are often characterized as weak and passive. However, “the interaction of ethnicity and class makes it impossible to assess which predominates in the way they militate against women’s participation...The successes of a few Black sportswomen in a limited range of sports, misleadingly imply that sports provide equality of opportunity for all women” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.257).
Meena, Anjali and Harjit didn’t need statistics to point this out to them as each is in touch with the internal issues and dynamics of their own Indo-Canadian community, as well as having faced overt and subtle forms of discrimination. Therefore all three, along with their separate issues, have also focused on inclusion, then increased participation, as well as encouragement and promotion. It is clear that the systemic barriers faced by Indo-Canadian women and other minority women are very real. However, the women’s insistence that the situation can change is perhaps a survival technique that enables them to continue forward. In other words, the belief that they could achieve what they wanted in sport and physical activity based on attitude shifts (personal, community and society at large) was held by all three; but really seemed to ignore (or at least not be concerned with) the institutional determinants that would ultimately restrict their movement on a more profound level. Stevenson and Ellsworth (1993, p.270) have reported that “without the working class’ as well as ethnic communities having a clear oppositional identity, the culture of individualism, which already dominates the social fabric of white North America, becomes a powerful influence...and since individualism means that everyone has an equal chance to succeed irrespective of their personal or family circumstances, failure can only be attributed to deficiencies in the individual.” Thus many women having grown up in dual cultures like Anjali and Harjit seem to embrace the “culture of individualism” (apparent in some of their views on sport and physical activity), and may be more likely to ascribe the blame for difficulties in sport to the individual person (Stevenson and Ellsworth, 1993).

However, racism and sexism are acknowledged to restrict the movement of minority women into positions of power in mainstream sports organizations. According to Dewar (1993,
p.230), "sports have long histories of exclusion and oppression, and have been developed and created to privilege the interests and needs of white, middle-class heterosexual men." As male domination continues to be a foundational principle of the social organization of sports, the power structures of most sports are heavily weighted in favor of a mainstream model that reflects these very specific values and beliefs (white, middle-class, western, heterosexual men) (Hargreaves, 1994). The literature also suggests that the increase of all-Indian, or predominantly Indian female-only sports clubs and teams can be a mechanism for cultural control which compensates for the low numbers of ethnic minority women in positions of power in mainstream sports organizations (Hargreaves, 1994). Whether it is a conscious or unconscious attempt to level the playing field on a more comprehensive level, the women in this study were more concerned with grassroots initiatives...i.e. what they could accomplish in their everyday realities.

Meena’s approach and personal physical activity model deviated from Anjali’s and Harjit’s. Her main issues were not primarily the penetration of traditionally sexist and racist sports arenas, but providing an alternative to them, where the women did not have to play the same game, by the same rules. That is, she wished to create an environment where Indian women would not have to succumb to the current sporting values, beliefs and practices of white, middle-class men. What did emerge from each story, were the questions of freedom and constraint and the conditions under which, and the extent to which, they were able to control their own activities.
Strategies and Solutions

In British Columbia, while there are many women who are capable of participating in sport and physical activity, various factors often militate against this. Cheap rates, accessibility, transportation, proximity to residential areas, safety issues such as plentiful lighting, especially around the access routes and parking lots, changing areas which provide for flexible use (family changing/private), classes arranged at convenient times, pleasant social spaces and a friendly environment, child-care, and women-only classes and spaces, would all assist most women to become more active (Hargreaves 1994). Although implementing these measures would alleviate many of the barriers preventing many women from participation, Indo-Canadian women often face other barriers. Language, comfort and familiarity with the environment as well as the sport, racist attitudes, a lack of diverse and/or cultural activities, problematic sporting attire, and lack of accommodation for religious and cultural activities, are just some of the larger issues these women encounter on a daily basis.

These barriers directly relate to the “importance of treating race as a relationship of power, rather than continuing to treat it as a variable” (Birrell 1989:186). If it is not treated as such, the result can mean that discrimination goes unchallenged. A deaf ear is turned towards people who make sexist and racist remarks, and nothing is done to change the practices of clubs and centers as well as PE classes, that (often unintentionally) discriminate against certain groups so that they remain marginalized, alienated and powerless. As Harjit described, the women she consistently viewed in the weight room were white women, even though there are many Indian women like herself who are capable and interested in weight training and
athletics. She also recalled the lack of accommodation for her cultural beliefs and practices in PE classes and extra-curricular sports. Anjali's experiences of feeling alienated and left out of sports as a young girl also reflected racist practices. Having to frequently endure racist and sexist comments in her pursuit of athletics clearly demonstrates the oppressive nature of sports. Messner (1992) argues that sport is a key component of our current gender order and that sport's major impact appears to support the status quo of hegemonic masculinity which is ultimately based on a white, western referent point.

As a solution to this, Meena, Anjali and Harjit have developed specific strategies to critique the negative manifestations of sport (as they see it) as it has been shaped by sexism and racism (as I have seen it). The solutions provided by the three, have also resulted in increased enjoyment as well as participation for Indian women. By discussing their own experiences in women only environments and Indian-only environments, they proposed several solutions. A return to traditional activities was suggested where comfort with the activity, people, language and dress was helpful for many women. As well, community-based leagues and teams where environments were monitored, often separated by sex, and role models were Indian women were also explained as strategies for increased participation.

Throughout their schooling, each woman also chose at some point to educate and familiarize not only other Indian women, but also their own families with the various sports and their environments. This strategy demystifies the activity and pacifies many of the concerns about safety, and new and possibly threatening outside influences. This behaviour also debunks the common misconception that cultural values are fixed and static and that there is no possibility of adaptation, flexibility or accommodation between one set of values and another.
(Nodwell, 1994). Brah (1992) and Rezai-Rashti (1995) in studying the women of South Asian origin in England, assert that Asian parents tend to be portrayed as “authoritarian”, “conservative”, and supposedly “opposed to the liberating influences of school.” Yet there is as much variation among Asian parents on issues concerning the education of their children as can be expected in any other group of parents. Many Indian parents are receptive to learning about the “outside” interests and lives of their children, but do not necessarily always receive the opportunity.

Further research has documented that “educators seem bent on racializing gender issues pertaining to minority students” (Rezai-Rashti, 1995, p.90). Problems that are perceived by school personnel as being related to a student’s “home culture” in fact have little to do with specific cultural practices. “They may well be the types of problems encountered by any typical adolescent” (ibid., p.91). As well according to the author, minority female students can be very skillful at “pitting their parents against the educational system.” And rather than bothering to ask parents to come to school, much less offering to visit the parents, the individuals in authority accept the student’s claims of conflict as a matter of fact (Rezai-Rashti, 1995). This was not necessarily the case for the three women in this study, however there was definitely the realization and optimism that their parents upon receiving information about the various sports and activities they were involved in during their schooling years, would be less hesitant and fearful.

Another strategy has been identified and framed by the women’s own descriptions. Each of the three participants rejected the negative and limiting images of themselves imposed on them early in life as well as presently, and have achieved a level of personal empowerment
through self-motivation and desire to be active and strong. As a result, other women like themselves (in the case of the dragon boat team), younger (in the case of Harjit’s PE classes) and older (in the case of Meena’s dance classes) are encouraged and supported and taught to redefine what it means to be both female and Indian in Canadian society and sport. Research has shown that these types of behaviors are seen to be forms of overt political resistance which has been defined to include the “rejection of racial, ethnic, class, and sexual stereotypes...but the primary danger in this kind of resistance lies in the reactions it may elicit from other people or from social systems that are threatened by such protest” (Taylor, Gilligan, Sullivan 1995).

On a more practical level, baby-sitting facilities, choice of attire, the creation of new activities, and transportation were all viable solutions that have been implemented directly in Meena’s dance school. The results reflected a great increase in participation.

These achievements stand out because of the fact that there have been few organized plans in women’s sports which look beyond the struggle for greater equality with men, and relate the gender dimension to wider social and political issues as a part of the everyday experience of participation. The success of these women in pushing boundaries and setting alternative standards for running sports and physical activities for women, especially Indian women, demonstrates an unusual sensitivity to redefining some of the mainstream values and practices of women’s sports. Smith (1992) insists that the experiences of all multicultural women in Western society are not identical, there are multiple perspectives and different social realities and that is why only by breaking the silence and beginning discourse and critical analyses at the intersections of gender, race and class can contradictions and misrepresentations be exposed. However as Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995, p.27) explain, there are
psychological and political costs to resistance: “that these actions often result in psychological
distress or land girls in trouble with authorities- or both- points not to deficiencies in girls but
to the need for social and cultural changes that would support healthy development in girls and
women.” I am not claiming that the three women in this study landed in any specific trouble
with authorities, but I am willing to suggest that they were at some point aware of the risks of
resilience to individuals in authority positions.

Research Paradoxes and Dilemmas

Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork... “gnaw at our core, challenging our integrity, our
work, and at times, the raison d’être of our projects” (Wolf, 1996, p.1). Smith (1979) has
argued that feminist research must “begin where we are” (Smith in Anderson, Armitage, Jack
and Wittner, 1987, p.97), with real, concrete people and their actual lives if it is to do more
than reaffirm the dominant ideologies about women and their place in the world. Smith
suggests examining how these ideological forces structure institutions and shape everyday life
which is a difficult process involving considerable skill. The bits of evidence we collect from
oral stories (subjectively reconstructed) contain within them formidable problems of

As the ideas and goals of the women were revealed through their own visions, a critical
dilemma arose. The strategies of empowerment, dialogue and voice do not in fact work as
neatly as they are supposed to because there is no unity among the oppressed, and because
various histories are not left behind when we critically reflect. I soon realized the risk in
producing stories that are intended to serve as an opposition to patriarchal discourse. This is
due to the tendency to fall into the trap of dichotomizing oppressor and oppressed and a failure to recognize the multiple nature of subjectivity. As Anzaldua (1987, p.78), warns: “The counterstance refutes the dominant culture’s views and beliefs, and for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority -outer as well as inner- it’s a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed.” These issues presented themselves as the critical lenses through which I would have to view the stories that were being produced. According to Wolf (1996, p.1), feminist dilemmas in research revolve around power, often “displaying contradictory, difficult and irreconcilable positions for the researcher.” The power dimensions can be examined from three angles:

1) power differences stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched (race, class, life chances etc.); 2) power exerted during the research process (unequal exchange etc.); and 3) power exerted during the post-research process (writing and representing). Confronting and understanding these multiple sources of contradiction constitutes an important step “in approaching projects with a political awareness and consciousness that will not be devastated when dilemmas arise” (Wolf, 1996, p.4). Ellsworth (1989) argues that the fundamental pedagogical practice in feminist research is that we critically examine what we share as well as what we don’t share. She feels we must work from the basis that we all have only partial knowledge, that we come from different subject positions. And most important of all, no one is off the hook since we can all claim to stand as
oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else. These suggestions, which I do practice, did not save me from the ethical dilemmas that arose during my interviews with the three women...

Journal Entry: At one point, I consciously made an effort to steer her back to her own personal accounts. I realized quickly I was manipulating the text. In a sense I believe I was thinking about the research. How do I engage others to read these stories? I as an Indian woman have learned, been encouraged, been provoked and been involved by these stories. I know my specific context makes this significant, but how do I at least ensure that the issues are revealed and presented to a wider audience who has never heard them (in this particular manner/context) before? It is now obvious that as the author I am present throughout this paper and have guided, selected and shaped the stories. My disappearance at certain points in the text needs to be seen as a textual strategy, a conscious decision to focus attention upon ****'s words. I want to draw the reader into the story line and evoke a response. Essentially, I want readers to feel/hear ****'s issues, in some manner and begin to locate themselves in the dynamics of the process...as I have. Are we as minority women...strong minority women, forced to do this in our texts?

During each interview, points of tension and conflict arose when various experiences of the women were too painful and/or personal to be recorded or documented. I realized these points to be critical pieces of the puzzle of each woman’s life especially as they related to physical activity experiences, but was specifically asked by the participants to omit them from the formal research. For example, concrete racist encounters in sports, school and everyday life were described in great detail by two participants, but in each case they were told to me “off
the record" or not included on request. Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995) have explained this practice as reflective of the researcher and the research participants' class and cultural location. “Girls who by virtue of their class position, their cultural status, or their educational privilege have been led to believe that people [like myself] are interested in who they are what they have to say, worry about jeopardizing these relationships by revealing what seem like unacceptable parts of themselves” (Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan, 1995, p.3).

The women as well as myself, felt it important to highlight the achievements, dreams and struggles they had endured to be physically active and successful; yet because of this desire a somewhat skewed portrait was being painted. As minority researchers, we do shy away from critical reflection of the practices of those on the “good” side. Minh-ha (1989, p.28) asks, “how do you inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind? Without indulging in a marketable romanticism or in a naive whining about your condition?”

In life storytelling, if silence is not an option, we must take on the task of calling into question knowledge and of being both the teller and the listener, struggling for ways to take this out of the realm of abstraction and into political action (Razack, 1993). Spivak (1990, p.57) writes, “What we do toward the texts of the oppressed is very much dependent upon where we are.” If we must critically reflect on how we hear, how we speak, and about the choices we make about which voice to use; we must ask questions such as, “Just what did she inherit from her ancestors?” and “What were the factors affecting her comprehension of those events?”

Directly related to this was a more visible dilemma. My insider/outsider status and positionality posed several problems for me, arising at various points in the research process.
Journal Entry...Being an Indo-Canadian woman allows me an insight quite different from a non-white woman, or even an Indo-Canadian male for that matter. Being a Bengali woman allows me an insight that is different from the Punjabi women I am talking to. My social class might be the same as my participants but the combination of my own history, Bengali upbringing (i.e. an emphasis on higher education for enlightenment, the fine arts etc.), has made this process all the more intriguing. At times I am finding more differences than commonalities with regards to some of the parental expectations and attitudes (the marriage thing). My mom wanted me to establish my career and have a few degrees under my belt before I even thought about marriage. But at other points, I have so much in common with the women as they relate their experiences growing up as the only Indian kid in class, or their desire and motivation and love for sports, teacher insensitivity, peer group problems etc. For some strange reason this has invoked feelings of defensiveness and protectiveness towards the participants in my project who will be Indian women. Protecting myself perhaps?

According to feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1987; Smith, 1974; Harding, 1991) one’s positionality as a woman is crucial in gaining knowledge and understanding about other women. Smith (1987) believes that the only way one can know a socially constructed world is to know it from within. The contribution of women researchers is their “embodied subjectivity” -their own knowledge and experiences are crucial for creating knowledge and for determining how fully they understand a phenomenon. However according to others, this “epistemology of insiderness” (Reinharz, 1992, p.260) and somewhat essentialist view overlooks questions of difference (Wolf, 1996; Epstein, Jayaratne and Stewart, 1990). “As awareness of class, racial and ethnic diversity has increased, the discussion has broadened to “standpoints”, since there is
clearly no single standpoint for women of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds” (Wolf, 1996, p.13). My own journal notes have shown how common and shared positions due to race, class, gender, interests or nationality do not always, or do not necessarily lead to common understandings (Wolf, 1996; Tedlock, 1991; Bolles, 1985; Kumar, 1992).

Journal Entry...My position as an academic is penetrating my thoughts and opinions. I am having a hard time with **** and her lack of concern of systemic barriers in sport. Could it be that my privilege as a Master’s student and unconscious assumption that we as Indian women understand oppression because we share it, are influencing me? I think I am expecting **** and **** to speak more freely about discrimination with me because I am Indian (although not Punjabi). Leaving responsibility for success/access and failure in sport up to the individual seems unfair and harsh because of all the very real barriers that exist...I just can’t relate to this...how do I not let this affect them?

According to Wolf (1996) many more insider researchers than outsiders mentioned problems they experienced during research due to their positionality. My position was both insider and outsider due to my different Indian cultural background, my class position was somewhat different (in that my early childhood years with my mother’s first husband were more than comfortable), and my lived personal beliefs and lived experiences (e.g., being a single child and living many years in a single-parent home) were not necessarily similar to any of the women I interviewed, in addition to spending to having spent years in a university. These factors, along with sexual orientation and duration of contact, may “outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status” (Narayan, 1993, p.672). Assumptions about understandings that arise from having some kind of mutual self-identification as
members of an oppressed group overlook the issue of the researcher’s personality, openness, willingness to listen, and ability to empathize (Wolf, 1996). “Assuming that such personality traits arise naturally or are naturally present in the context where identity is shared suggests a kind of essentialism similar to the one concerning women making better fieldworkers by nature of their feminine traits...it also brings us back to critiques of earlier feminist works- do we need to identify with all our subjects and their beliefs? What if we don't like them, or vice versa?” (Wolf, 1996, p.17). For Pesquera (in Scott and Shah, 1993, p.97) and Spivak (1988) to begin to search for the answers, we must raise questions about whose empowerment is being discussed. Feminists are now critically asking, “who are we to change or raise the consciousness of others?” (Mies in Wolf, 1996, p.26). The challenge remains to “write a text that does not position the researcher on center stage while marginalizing those being researched...this challenge becomes a greater dilemma for those writing about people on the margin, attempting to bring their stories and lives to the center” (ibid., p.35).

Searching For Answers/ The Familial and Cultural Context

Growing up Anjali perceived herself as an outsider even though she had lived in Canada all her life. This was linked to notions of shame- racial and personal. Feeling somewhat “Indian” in her household but not having a solid context from which to draw from, as well as early educational experiences of inferiority, really dislocated her. As well, the presence of a dominating father and a mother who was not a strong force in her life, controlled the understanding of being a bi-racial child, a critical piece of her puzzle. Her description of her early childhood experiences screamed of a desire to slip into corners, remain silent, anonymous
and invisible. Perhaps these were protective mechanisms of survival for her in an all-white environment. She would consciously not participate in sports in school, for fear of failure and attention. Her coming out as a strong athletic Indian woman in her later years, and ignoring her European ancestry seemed instrumental in resisting the racism in all the aspects of her life, from the playing field to her personal relationships. By this I mean, Anjali seemed to be retracing steps and grasping onto culture and heritage, trying to attain some kind of closure that would allow her to go on, healed if never quite whole. And holding on to the Indian part would be easier to negotiate because of the implication in many minority communities that to be white or white-defined is to be less authentic, less real; and to be this is simply to be less.

To persuade you that your past and cultural heritage are doomed to eventual extinction...inauthenticity is condemned as a loss of origins and a whitening (or faking) of non-western values. (Trinh Minh-ha, 1989,89)

In Anjali's case, it would seem that being less Indian, had less “racial currency” with her father, because between them, association with whiteness was identified negatively: the more white beliefs and attitudes she had as a child, for example wanting to sleep-over at friend's houses or join an after-school sports team, the more she was admonished and restricted. By defining herself as powerful and tenacious from an athletic perspective in her adult years, she was at the same time attacking the misconceptions about her Indian heritage that she had internalized for so long.

Along with internalizing racist discourse which results in feelings of inferiority that are profound and inescapable and the shame, powerlessness and guilt of not understanding or accepting a bi-racial identity, Anjali felt a strong need and desire to grasp onto anything Indian.
According to the literature on Indo-Canadian families and youth, it is a common experience that many Indo-Canadians 're-discover' their heritage as they reach mid to late teens and early twenties. At this stage they may make the choice to learn more about Indian culture and revitalize their own links to it (Nodwell 1994, Dhruvarajan 1996). Nevertheless, conflicting values and a lack of truly understanding the roots and causes of cultural issues still seem evident in Anjali’s current thoughts and ideas about being Indo-Canadian.

The normative structure for members of the Indo-Canadian community is characterized by the dominance of patriarchal and familistic value orientations (Dhruvarajan, 1996). In general, many women and men of the first generation have learned to accept as legitimate the norms and behavioral patterns deriving from these value orientations. There is general agreement that the husband/father is head of the household and should receive deference from all members of the family. He is considered the breadwinner and the one who confers status on the family. The family is identified by his name. The wife is considered homemaker, nurturer and caregiver. Because of this strong belief that men and women are naturally different and suited for different functions, their roles are complementary: both are considered indispensable for the smooth functioning of the family (Dhruvarajan, 1996). This does not however, mean that these values are adopted and accepted by everyone. “Among the women of the second generation there are rumblings of discontent...it is difficult to say how widespread they are but at least some second-generation women are finding it difficult to accept the double standard in gender relations routinely practiced by their parents and an ethnic community that clearly privileges men” (Dhruvarajan, 1996, p.313).
Anajali grew up in a household where the belief was held that her brothers were more highly valued than her and her sister (the oldest child). In the Indo-Canadian community, and many other ethnic groups, sons are preferred over daughters and couples will usually keep trying for a boy if the first-born is a daughter as in the case of Anjali’s family (Corea, 1979). Preference for boys is usually based on religious, social and economic grounds. In India, because of the patriarchal extended-family system, a daughter becomes part of her husband’s family and ceases to be a member of her natal family (Dhruvarajan, 1996). It is the sons that carry the family name. According to traditional practices it is only the son that inherits the parental property. Even though the laws have changed to give daughters a share in parental property, past practices have remained common and the influence of the older generations perpetuates a conservative stance (Dhruvarajan, 1989; 1990).

Along with the economic issues, the socialization of sex-appropriate behaviour is also perpetuated within many Indo-Canadian households and begins in childhood. Anjali recalled that different toys were bought for the girls and boys in the family. Subtle suggestions were made that she and her sister must not be too loud, and indulge in rough play, where her brothers were never chastised for being aggressive and noisy. In her teen years she was instructed to come home after school, and not allowed to go anywhere without parental permission and knowledge affecting her sporting choices, whereas her brothers were allowed more freedom. Under these sexist circumstances, boys do develop a sense of superiority, while girls feels helpless and constrained, especially when confronted with physical activity and sporting choices. Therefore when Anjali was old enough to question these beliefs, she chose to leave her family and began to discover her own position in society. Deciding to no longer cooperate with
her family and serve the interests of the whole, her move was more than likely viewed as improper and unproductive, calculating individual costs and benefits before the family’s. She did however maintain family relations and obligations by constant contact through phone calls and visits. It is considered very important to maintain kinship ties even when there is no strong emotional affinity (Dhruvarajan, 1996). These same principles hold within the Canadian context as well.

In Meena’s case, her parents overtly tried to impress upon their children their belief in the superiority of their cultural values. Her household was constructed in such a way that India was emphasized and preserved (e.g. religious beliefs, social practices, objects etc.) As a result the children accepted the patriarchal beliefs and social practices, even though Meena herself wanted more control and autonomy in making decisions about her career in dance and choice of spouse. In many Indo-Canadian families, denying freedom of movement to young women and monitoring their behaviour closely are considered appropriate, but then so is giving them more say in educational and occupational choices as well as choice of marital partners (Dhruvarajan, 1996).

Meena’s sense of competition and her unstated desire for success and status (as well as her desire and love of physical activity) motivated her choices in business and the community touching on middle-class privilege, but these could also be attributed to her parent-youth relationship. Most Indo-Canadian families who immigrate to Canada as adults want to improve their economic position and encourage their children to achieve. They undergo considerable hardship to make sure their children get a head start in the country they live in. And because of this, parents expect their children to take full advantage of economic opportunities while at the
same time retaining their Punjabi culture. Meena had to convince her parents that this was exactly what she was doing by going into the dance business, as a career in physical activity and the arts did not have the status or prestige they had envisioned for Meena. The choice of marital partners, career and education are expected to be family decisions and when they are not, there can be conflict. The most pronounced conflict usually occurs between the daughter and father as patriarchal and familistic values interact. For Meena, her father was the last and most difficult bastion to overcome in her desire to follow her dreams and goals. Daughters are not only expected to think about family interests, but also to behave within the patriarchal normative framework (Dhruvarajan, 1996). Some children are successful in negotiating and striking a mutually satisfying compromise with their parents as Meena did, however others are not so lucky, or lack the personal skills in negotiation that play a large part in such success.

However Meena’s economic privilege was conferred, she had the luxury of ‘acting’ (being proactive) rather that simply ‘reacting’ to the situation; without thought to some of the particular consequences faced by many minority women who are not in the same economic position. Nonetheless, her relative power and privilege was not devoid of the complexities and contradictions of race, history, class, gender and identity. Although Meena’s family had no money when they first arrived in British Columbia, they (as many immigrant families do) “followed their money” (Yee, 1996, p.22) and eventually Meena was able to choose not to buy into the system totally. That is, she didn’t need to get stuck in a job or career that gave the necessary economic security to fulfill responsibility to the family. She was able to choose to pursue her dreams in the dance field. Her sense of family responsibility became applied to the larger family of community: in this case it was a direct result and reflection of privilege.
Harjit's unspoken acceptance of white mainstream standards of sport and physical activity seemed to be reflected in her vision of the future as well the experiences of her past. In a few of Harjit's accounts of the racism she underwent as young Indian girl growing up in Canada, (the direct experiences not presented in this study), she described a real mind/body split. On the one hand she became acutely aware of her body and skin color, but on the other, she tried to deny her sometimes harsh reality through emotional distancing. While her household maintained Indian standards in the way of food, dress, language, value systems and beliefs, Harjit chose to adopt western fashion standards (clothes and hair), food and various other mannerisms, that blended her in with the mainstream, especially the school environment. A fear of being discovered as different was ever-present for Harjit. Assimilative tendencies were high for her during her schooling years, where success on a social scale was measured by the degree of conformity ethnic children could bear to undertake.

Journal Entry... *The silencing and marginalization I experienced did not come from my own community but from the dominant culture where I learned to function within the system and blindly accept the hegemony. More importantly, my own experiences and values were not valued which ultimately suppressed the desire to question. It was not until my later years of my undergraduate studies in university that I came to understand the issues of my Indianness as well as my femaleness. The main promoter of my new searchings and explorations was my mother who constantly took issue with the prevailing discourses and ideas that were spoken as the “truth.” She would throw ideas and issues at me that I unfortunately dismissed at an early age, but now am having to deal with on an academic level.*
Ultimately, no one was fooled into ignoring Harjit’s skin color and the differences of being Indo-Canadian. For example, she still had to constantly prove herself in athletics. Teachers and peers assumed she was incapable, weak and helpless and part of a community that was restrictive. The emotional distancing (pretending not to care or hear, and choosing not to speak up) became a protective mechanism of survival in an all-white school. Her disassociation with being Indian in school and sporting contexts operated as a strategy in resisting the racism around her.

Despite these early experiences, Harjit somehow retained the belief that any woman could succeed in sport and physical activity based on a desire and motivation to participate, despite pointing out several of the very real barriers faced by Indo-Canadian women. But this belief operates from a site of power and pretends ignorance or indifference to racism. It has grown out of middle-class privilege and her own ability to successfully assimilate and thereby have the opportunity to excel in athletics as well as growing up in Western society that has fostered the “culture of individualism” (as described earlier by Stevenson and Ellsworth, 1993). In her internalization of her oppression, and her belief that the individual is responsible for success or failure, Harjit has to a degree failed to acknowledge the complexities of racism in physical activity contexts and has displayed an inability to confront her own racism by over-simplifying the situation of others.

All three women in their life story interviews, failed to acknowledge one vital component of their realities. The topic of sexuality was never directly addressed by them, except when Meena described having to break-down the stereotype of a koteh-wali (or morally loose dancing girl) that her father had associated with her choice of career. However, if one
examines the issue more closely, all three were defined and located by members of the Indo-Canadian community in terms of sexuality. That is, their commitment and participation in activities such as sport and dance, which did not fall into "traditional" forms of sex-appropriate behaviour did not intimate a traditionally orthodox context of heterosexuality (i.e. what was morally acceptable to the Indian community), and according to the dominant views of the community placed them in a white, sexually-active, loose, heterosexual category. Core beliefs in the more conservative Indian cultures (those from the North, less educated), dictate that women are essentially defined through the man. Therefore life is difficult for those in the community that do not fit into the dominant mode of thinking (e.g. homosexuals, singles, lone-parent families etc.) (Dhruvarajan, 1996). The belief in the natural differences between men and women is used to legitimize this type of heterosexism, in the sense that women's roles and positions in the home are clearly defined by motherhood and dedication to husband and the well-being of his kin. As well, the stigma and fear of the ritual polluting of women's bodies (i.e. defilement through sexual intercourse) can be an issue for Indo-Canadian women who participate in sport environments where safety and susceptibility to sexual harassment are concerns by more conservative generations who have not been educated about the environment and activity. Meena overcame this stigma and legitimized herself by marrying, but Harjit and Anjali (being single Indian women in their late twenties) constantly deal with questions and assumptions about their "questionable" moral standards and their future marital prospects.

As well, NOT talking about sexuality has been addressed by researchers as just as important an issue as discussing it. Fine (1988) points out that girls' sexual desire is frequently missing from discourse about sexuality and sex education in schools, and this can directly
affect the language or lack of language and the notion of a lack of a safe place to speak about sexuality in later years. Studies have shown how the thinking of second-generation immigrant daughters differs from that of their mothers and about the conflict they experience as a result especially within the conventions of femininity in many ethnic cultures (Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan, 1995). However, the three women in this particular study seem to have adopted the conventions of femininity and womanhood in both the dominant culture and their own, which seem to act in synergy. As Ballard argues, “In reality, young Asians are not faced with an either/or situation. They have difficult dilemmas to resolve and in resolving them they work towards their own synthesis of Asian and British [or in the present case Canadian] values” (Ballard 1979, p.128). At the same time they also have a well-articulated critique of the double standard in their families, standards of sexual as well as gender role behaviour.

Power at Play/ Negotiating Our Agendas

The issues I have raised about Indo-Canadian culture, heterosexism and privileging are sensitive and risky. They are sensitive because I am opening up a level of discussion that might be unsafe during this moment in history in view of the current trend to focus on the negative aspects of the Punjabi community here in the Lower Mainland. They are risky because I am not sure how people will appropriate and use this information.

Journal Entry... coming to this point has led me to another dilemma- the power of this knowledge! Is the progress we make through knowledge-making always beneficial and good? Who is ultimately controlling this knowledge? And for what purposes? Many researchers have not been aware of these dangers and I hope not to fall into the same traps.
There is a sense of uneasiness that we feel when we choose to be silent for fear of providing material to white groups... We have learned to be suspicious of even “progressive” white people who choose to interpret the anti-essentialist line as an end in itself, as a way of reproducing the invisibility of differences... We have also learned to be suspicious of white folks who put forth the “reverse discrimination” charge as a way of holding on to the center. Our uneasiness comes from wanting to resist the white referent point, while knowing full well that the language we use and the systems we live in daily still bind us to it.

(Sheth and Handa, 1996, p.48)

Nevertheless, as stated earlier it is a vital component if this research is to be a critical look at the physical activity context and experiences of Indo-Canadian women. The internal contradictions that divide us as Indo-Canadians, as women, as individuals are important to specify because that is what allows us to separate and analyze essentiality from diversity. That is, not allowing generalizations and stereotyping to speak for and about every Indo-Canadian woman’s experience. There are certain issues that Indo-Canadian women share in terms of sport and physical activity but the specificity of these issues is what breaks it down into actual lived experiences.

Shattering stereotypical images of Indian women has been a challenge for South Asian writers. If this re-presentation and re-viewing is to occur, it requires not only acknowledging and being accountable for the protective layers by which we hide our own privilege and community issues, but also active participation on the part of the reader. The listening (to be discussed in detail later) and framing of the text is critical, however, it is first necessary to consider the images themselves. It could be said the there is a demand for stereotypical and dualistic images of Indian women by a western, white mainstream. They are marketable and are rewarded by film and other media adaptations. It is the stories of the victimized and
controlled Indian women that seem to offer the most. According to Jiwani (1989) the western media often portray non-western cultures as being unliberated and oppressive. “This image bears on the way people of color are perceived in Canadian society” (Jiwani, 1989, p.3) and thus reflected in the media. The imagery of “violence, disorder, backwardness and mysticism” underlies the dominant discourse of Indian women in western mainstream media. The images themselves are based on standards that are embedded in the dominant cultural tradition (Jiwani, 1992). According to Bannerji (1993, p.144), “the research shows that there is a remarkable paucity of their [South Asian women] images in the Canadian media (a situation not unlike that of Native women...[however] the few images of South Asian women that do exist are primarily non-sexual, passive, docile and feminine.” Bannerji (1993, p.147) asserts that these few images are best understood as “images of the mind” or stereotypes, which end up forming “the common-sense of Canadian society and work as a device for social regulation of South Asian women”.

Journal Entry... I see how studying “difference” can be problematic. Will I be drawing unnecessary attention to the misconceptions and stereotypes that I will be deconstructing? And will I be promoting a divisive model? I suppose that in that both ignoring it and focusing on difference one risks recreating it, but it does however seem necessary to confront and discuss the ways in which misunderstandings of ‘ethnic’ or ‘racialized’ differences are used to distort and limit the physical and sporting aspirations of Indo-Canadian girls and women.

Working through this I also realized that by examining the lives and physical activity experiences of middle-class working Indian women living in Canada we are contributing to the diversity of voices that women writers of color are trying to put forth. Literature suggests that
women of color have been silenced by being suppressed, excluded and misrepresented at every level of social interaction and have been placed at the margins of by the dominant culture in society and in sport (Smith, 1992; Douglass, 1988; Gates, 1990). Smith (1992) further asserts that the legacy of societal discrimination and absence of powerful and prestigious positions has served as a backdrop to set the stage for the invisibility, silence and parallel underrepresentation of women of color in sport leadership and scholarship positions.

“Culturally diverse women represent only 5% or less of all coaching, teaching, and sports administrations positions (Alexander, 1978; Janis, 1985; Murphy, 1980; Smith, 1991), and little scholarship or research on multiethnic women in sport has been published” (in Smith, 1992, p.230).

One can count on one hand the number of published analyses that specifically focus on women athletes of color... Some unpublished descriptive work on Black women athletes is available... and we may find race as a variable in some of our research traditions... but no profound analyses have yet been begun. Even less material is available concerning Native American women... Asian American women, Chicanas, and members of other Hispanic groups. (Birrel, 1990, p.186)

Journal Entry... The demographics of society are changing significantly. For those of us who currently live, work and participate in multicultural settings, this is not news! But there are others who have experienced monocultural settings in communities, schools and the workplace and may be unaware of their feelings towards cultural diversity...

The aforementioned mentioned facts contribute to the many reasons that we must document the physical activity experiences of Indian women. Understanding differences will assist in developing an appreciation for diversity. However, “understanding cultural differences
is a developmental goal, and initiatives towards diversity need to be considered along these lines" (DeSensi, 1995; p.36). One of the first steps includes more knowledge. An opportunity to understand various groups of individuals must be provided, and by incorporating the experiences of women of diverse ethnic backgrounds this can be realized.

Wolf (1996, p.3) writes, “there is now a great deal of research about women by women, but there is not much academic feminist research “with” and “for” women. What this work has provided is a forum for the voices, experiences, questions and answers of three Indian women who have the commitment and motivation to be strong, physically active individuals and inspire others. What is amazing was the willingness, cooperation and ease with which they participated. They did not let their internal gut hesitation with mainstream academe, its creators and its audiences, hinder their effort at reaching those who are at least willing to listen. For instance, two of the women had to be convinced that an academic paper should be written for people that “wouldn’t understand the situation like ‘upaney’ (one of us), and why this is so important to me”(Meena). Instead they suggested that I share my research in what they viewed to be more practical and meaningful forums for the issues, such as local Indian magazines and papers.

Journal Entry... *Hearing the women talk in this way, with these attitudes, my own growing frustration, with having to “teach” white men and women about ME and my particular position and politics on race, class, gender and identity, seems comparable. Being so active in educating those who don’t seem to want to do the work, and “assuming” the role of knower and expert on my community is understandably, quite exhausting. People are constantly asking me about my cultural practices, my religious beliefs, is my family conservative or better yet, do*
they really restrict me... do I speak my language, why are Indo-Canadians always fighting, and what is being done to lessen the oppression of Indian women? Looking to me as an "expert" on "Indians" is a dangerous assumption. First it assumes one person can speak for the experiences of others, and secondly it assumes there is a definable "Indian" experience, (not to mention all the racist and sexist stereotypes that accompany the assumptions). This kind of questioning really speaks from a place of privilege and power.

I really cannot blame ***** and ****** for feeling hesitant and more comfortable sharing their stories with Indian readers...

Sharing a similar perspective, Sheth and Handa (1996) write:

...When working within a white academy, we find that we encounter various situations when we are unwittingly forced by white feminists to constantly justify our feminist politics when addressing white racism. They do not realize that the authority they exercise in questioning and evaluating stems not so much from a more advanced feminist analysis that they think they might possess, but rather from a eurocentric, privileged space of whiteness which might have little to do with feminist politics. (p.50)

Narayan (1993) feels the focus on producing insider or native perspectives and hearing "authentic" cultural stories, should be shifted to quality of relations with the people researchers seek to represent in their texts. She feels that many personal and intellectual dilemmas are invoked by the assumption that a "native" researcher can represent "an unproblematic and authentic insider's perspective" (Narayan, 1993, p.672).

Who is this generic subject, "the native"? To use a clump term is to assume that all natives are the same native, mutually substitutable in presenting the same (male) point of view. Yet even received [research] wisdom tells us that in the simplest societies, gender and age provide factors for social differentiation... (p.676)
It is important to point out the differences in attitude and perspective between the mainstream and ethnic communities regarding South Asian women. Exposure to both communities has really shaped the physical activity experiences for the three women. Meena, Anjali and Harjit are not strangers to this kind of questioning, assumptions and skepticism, however the dynamics are quite different within the Punjabi community. Indians have questioned the new gender roles, but not the validity of their experiences. In many Indian cultures, the conceptions of the gender role relationships that are considered proper are reflected in the way the division of labor is structured in families and in the patterns of decision-making in everyday life. There is clear-cut sex-typing of the division of labor which is considered normal and natural yet reflects familistic and patriarchal ideologies (Dhruvarajan, 1996). The sport and physical activity experiences of women fall outside the rigid duties and expectations that contribute towards a stable family life. However, given the value systems that many Indo-Canadian families operate under, the family ethic, which is binding on all members, can help create a supportive economic, social and emotional environment.

The Indian community has questioned the public nature of the three womens' endeavors, but not the importance of sharing those experiences. Concerns about the physical vulnerability, protection and modesty of women are high in Indo-Canadian families. In many Indian cultures, the body is conceived of as private and precious. Thus it is seen as in danger of becoming compromised in environments where Western sporting practices dominate. Habits like wearing shorts or other body-revealing sportswear in public and exercising in mixed
company are sometimes seen as contrary to the ideals of femininity that emphasize modesty (Vertinsky, Batth and Naidu, 1996).

However, because of the perception of traditional spheres of activity, the members of the Indo-Canadian community have on occasion, questioned the identity of the three women as “real” Indian women.

Journal Entry... I have been privy to various comments by both Indian and non-Indian people asking, if the women participating in my research, because of their involvement in sport and physical activity, were “very Indian or not”, or that they must not be very “traditional.”

Meena, Harjit and Anjali also recounted experiences throughout their lives of being told that were not “very Indian” by community members. The assumption of a “traditional” Indian woman or an “authentic” Indian experience has profound implications. Firstly, it implies a typical or universal archetype that is based on a white referent point. According to Sheth and Handa (1996), this process of ‘whitening’ the other manages to shift the focus away from our (Indian) own identities, away from the pain of insecurity and confusion to a focus on the other. As they recall their own racialism about who is a real India/n, they write: “To accomplish this validation of India/nness, from within the category of India/n, each of us began concentrating on what is un-India/n (i.e. what is white and Euro-American)” (Sheth and Handa, 1996, p.58).

For Meena, being a dancer led her family to stereotype her as a morally and sexually loose woman, who received payment to dance for people. This defiled the ideal “typical” Indian female image characterized by chaste, modest and pure behaviour. In Anjali and Harjit’s case, the aggressive athletics, power, and strength did not uphold the “traditional” Indian ideals of modesty and femininity and became associated with westernized beliefs and practices.
So how do we as Indo-Canadian women begin to write without negating each other's experience? How do we create a space for our different identities that are informed by different histories and locations that get redefined and reformulated throughout our lives? And how can this be done in an academic and feminist setting where binaries like the East versus West, public versus private, nature versus culture, body versus mind are still relegating Indian women as the subordinate opposite?

Presences and Absences

Writing is always a creative act and is often a self-conscious means of self-representation. Yet women writers work within a literary and academic tradition which has tended to depict women as passive objects rather than as the active creators or subjects of their own stories. Perhaps it is for this reason that writers like Bannerji (1993), Sheth and Handa (1993), are so careful to position themselves in relation to their work. Bannerji (1993), Jiwani (1992) and other Indian women writers in particular, use writing as a liberating tool, a political act, a subversive strategy, as well as an art form and platform, or means of expressing self. This is being done not only to address and have a voice in mainstream literature but in feminist literature as well. By positioning themselves in the narratives they create, these authors challenged the myth that there is a "typical" Indian woman with "traditional experiences."

Appadurai (1988), in his critique of the concept of a "traditional native", argues that "proper" natives are somehow assumed to represent their selves and their history without any distortion or residue. And that by placing an emphasis on the role of the native, they become
geographically bound and immobile, yet somehow paradoxically available to the mobile outsider. Researchers who have placed themselves in a position to observe the “traditions” or the “nativeness” of Indian women really exempt themselves from being authentic and instead, represent themselves in terms of complexity, diversity and ambiguity (Narayan, 1993). This is in direct contrast to the authentic Indian woman. Realities are constantly fluctuating for Indian women and it is the essentialising of this that renders them lifeless, speechless, unchanging and static. Indian women are thus deprived of language, speech, of individuality and individualism.

Bannerji (1993) asserts that South Asian women must be able to produce, to be in a position to disseminate and validate militant, resisting images of ourselves. And as a part of this process we must also resist the attempt by the “anthropologists of the ruling class” to discover and incorporate us. She feels the images that have been perpetuated in the minds of Westerners work as a device for the social regulation of South Asian women. Therefore, how can I as an Indian woman, make my textual representations of other Indian women challenge the existing Western hegemony? And how will I make these texts into modes of resistance?

The answers lie rooted once again, in re-presentation as well as audience. There is great significance in hearing the experiences of women who have been perceived of as “ordinary” or “average”, in that “a word in the mouth of a particular individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces” (Bakhtin in Casey, 1993, p.27). The average Third World woman must no longer be read as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc., and then viewed in contrast to the self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own lives and bodies, and the freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty, 1984). As well, the concept of a universal
sisterhood must be investigated and deconstructed. The assumptions that all women, despite their class or race differences, are bound to each other by their common interests as women, is a dangerous one. According to this, a woman has more in common with another woman of a different race and class, than a man of the same race and class, therefore subordinating other issues to the issue of patriarchy (Murphy and Livingstone, 1985). As Minh-Ha (1989) explains, the pitting of anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles against one another allows some vocal fighters to dismiss blatantly the existence of either racism and sexism within their lines of action, as if oppression only comes in separate monolithic forms. It is crucial that writers begin to recognize that Indianness does not simply make the experience of women’s subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of their experiences, as demonstrated by Meena, Anjali and Harjit.

Stereotyping, in feminist literature, is a major strategy of colonial discourse. According to Bannerji, how South Asian women are seen or not seen in Canada can only be accurately determined from the terms of their entry into this country. Farm work and factory work were the labor mandates therefore “since we have already been allocated a space in the lowest level basement of Canadian society, it is entirely appropriate that we are visually and socially invisible...the visual absence does not mean an absence of images; but the images that do exist are best understood as images of the mind called stereotypes” (Bannerji, 1993, p.179). This discursive practice stylistically entrenches the notion of Other as mysterious, unchanging and ultimately inferior. One forgets that India has its own politics of literature, art, living...that evolves and changes with the times. The women of India become empty, extraneous symbols of exotica, giving rise to the concept of culture as a static entity that has nothing to do with
history, society, language and most importantly power. The motif of the “exotic” - that sense of adventure, travel, and ethnological curiosity about the natives- runs like a thread about Third World women and narratives on India in particular. The “exotic” I define as that element of curiosity and strangeness that both repels and attracts, creating ambivalence in representation. Linked directly to this is the assumption that representing the experiences of upper and middle-class Indian women is somehow less ‘authentic than the tribals, peasants or women from the urban slums (Stephens, 1994) who are seen to struggle, toil and preserve. Themes commonly discussed revolve around oppression, exploitation and violence.

I think one of the problems is that white people have a fixed image of Asian women. They would listen to what one girl has to say about her family and assume that all women are the same. (“Nazrah” in Osler, 1989)

Some material on third world women by Western writers seems to be a response to the growing criticism of women of color whose voices have been silenced and then spoken for; and who find it difficult to identify themselves with the women’s movement...since the feminist analysis and feminist agenda reflect white middle-class women’s interests (Dhruvarajan, 1991). However, current feminist studies, written under a ‘Western gaze’ aiming to present a ‘a vital and living portrait’ of Indian women supplanting older stereotypes, have surprisingly turned a blind eye to their own image-making. For example the opposition between the ‘Indian woman’ as chaste spirituality or maternal sensuality and the unchaste, cold sexual consumerism of the ‘Western woman’ is the same spiritual/material, East/West dichotomy generated by the Orientalist (Stephens, 1994), described earlier.
Yet another strategy to answering some of the questions I pose might require a paradigm shift. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) argues we should refocus from the issue of “who should speak” to “who will listen.” She feels that speaking for oneself as a Third World person is a crucially important position, however, the real demand is that when speaking from that position, one should be listened to seriously, not with benevolent imperialism; and an attempt should be made to remain aware of the layers of interpretation that occur in the listening, reading and interpreting of a text.

When the cardcarrying listeners, the hegemonic people, the dominant people, talk about listening to someone ‘speaking as’ something or the other, I think there one encounters a problem. When they want hear an Indian speaking as an Indian, a Third World woman speaking as a Third World woman, they cover over the fact of ignorance that that they are allowed to possess, into a kind of homogenization. (Spivak, 1986)

New ethnic identities presented by physically active Indian women like Meena, Harjit and Anjali depend upon re-defining and re-assessing “tradition”, “culture” and “womanhood.” However difference like representation, is also a slippery, and therefore contested concept. For Indian women the issue is further complicated as we are on a journey to re-define ourselves.

As no rights are ever secured, vigilance is a necessary component in examining areas such as sport and physical activity. Empowerment in this domain depends upon hearing the voices of Indo-Canadian women, articulating and examining the issues, and re-evaluating the current context by challenging the existing stereotypes. Meena, Anjali and Harjit displayed a certain level of courage and recklessness in their attempt to shift the paradigms. However if we are to take a theoretical look at this, they are really celebrating the fluidity of their identities,
comprehending their worlds as strong, active, vulnerable and complex Indo-Canadian women.

The very act of speaking, though possibly operating from a position of privilege, is needed to contribute to an understanding of these issues.
Looking Forward

As this thesis was only the first step in articulating some of the major issues concerning some Indo-Canadian women who are participating in physical activity, there is still room for much more exploration and research.

Focusing on physical activity experiences, I opted not to record the entire life histories of the participants involved which would have been well beyond the scope of this thesis. This type of investigation is needed however, to provide a stock of stories that will reflect the varied histories of Indo-Canadian women and reveal the heterogeneity of their experiences and identities.

Due to the limits of this study and the particular focus on socio-cultural issues of sport and physical activity, as well as voice, I was not able to delve deeply into some of the systemic and institutional factors that can restrict the participation of minority women and girls in their pursuit of physical activity. This would be a vital area to investigate as Lenskyj (1994, p.23) and many others have pointed out that sporting systems continue to “strongly reflect and reinforce white, masculinist, heterosexist hegemony [and that] discrimination on the basis of social class, race, gender, sexual orientation and ability persists.”

My study was also limited to a particular age bracket and religion (Sikh) and culture (Punjabi). However a similar framework would reveal much different and valuable data if reproduced for different age groups (perhaps older women), and Indo-Canadian women of different religious backgrounds. As well if the study was conducted by a researcher of another
culture or ethnicity or perhaps the same (as I am Bengali not Punjabi), the results would again be qualitatively different but no less important or valid.

The complex issue of sexuality and physical activity as it relates to notions of femininity, the body, and socially prescribed roles is another component to investigate specifically within a South Asian context. Although data in this area was not fully drawn out by the participants in my research, these notions are nonetheless implicit in the Indo-Canadian community and must be explored in greater detail in further studies.

Investigating the religious doctrine and tenets of various South Asian religions and their connections or influence on perceptions of physical activity and the body is another area of investigation that is an essential component of knowledge construction about South Asian identities. Unfortunately, this too was beyond the scope of this particular project but could ultimately challenge common misperceptions and notions of oppressive Indian religions.

A more collaborative study in which participants could work directly with the researcher in the analysis and possibly contribute towards an action research project would also be a useful addition. Due to time constraints, participant availability and the ethical dilemmas of co-analyzing life story data, this was not an option. However I would recommend that a another study or action research project be jointly constructed with Indo-Canadian women examining issues of physical activity, that could ultimately create and implement more solutions similar to those already provided by and implemented by the women in this thesis.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


I will take a life story approach using ethnographic techniques. I will initiate the process by conducting a series of observations in a recreation center, an ethnic community sports program, and a dance school.

After observing three classes of women participating in their respective activities, I will then select three to four women according to my specified subject criteria and, then conduct three in-depth interviews with them individually, with their informed consent. I will then analyze the data.

### Description of Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>17. How many subjects will be used?</strong></td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18. Who is being recruited, and what are the criteria for their selection?</strong></td>
<td>- 3-4 Indo-Canadian women - at least 15-20 years of residence - Hindu background - in Canada - 30 to 40 years of age - actively participating in phys. activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>19. What subjects will be excluded from participation?</strong></td>
<td>- newly immigrated women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recruitment

1. initial phone calls to various community centers to find and select appropriate programs.
2. request to community boards to observe classes and permission of teachers.
3. personal introductions ie., talk to group, select according to criteria, ask for volunteers.

### Control Group

N/A
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. WHERE WILL THE PROJECT BE CONDUCTED? (ROOM OR AREA)</td>
<td>To be determined (possibly residences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. WHO WILL ACTUALLY CONDUCT THE STUDY AND WHAT ARE THEIR QUALIFICATIONS?</td>
<td>Mita Naidu. Qualifications include, 24 credits of course work at graduate level, 12 credits of research methodology in various ethnographic skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. WILL THE GROUP OF SUBJECTS HAVE ANY PROBLEMS GIVING INFORMED CONSENT ON THEIR OWN BEHALF? CONSIDER PHYSICAL OR MENTAL CONDITION, AGE, LANGUAGE, AND OTHER BARRIERS.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. IF THE SUBJECTS ARE NOT COMPETENT TO GIVE FULLY INFORMED CONSENT, WHO WILL CONSENT ON THEIR BEHALF?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH? DO YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL OPINIONS ON THIS ISSUE?</td>
<td>The benefits include research in an area that has rarely been discussed before, giving voice to the participants; providing data that may contribute to improved policies and procedures in phys. activity areas; investigating popular racist and sexist stereotypes and myths about Indian women; providing a framework for further research regarding ethnicity and women in physical activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. WHAT DISCOMFORT OR INCAPACITY ARE THE SUBJECTS LIKELY TO ENDURE AS A RESULT OF THE EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES?</td>
<td>I don't see or anticipate any.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. IF MONETARY COMPENSATION IS TO BE OFFERED TO THE SUBJECTS, PROVIDE DETAILS OF AMOUNTS AND PAYMENT SCHEDULES.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. HOW MUCH TIME WILL A SUBJECT HAVE TO DEDICATE TO THE PROJECT?</td>
<td>4 x 1 hour interviews per participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. HOW MUCH TIME WILL A MEMBER OF THE CONTROL GROUP, IF ANY, HAVE TO DEDICATE TO THE PROJECT?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
31. WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THE DATA?

Myself, the participants (regarding their own individual transcripts), and committee members.

32. HOW WILL THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE DATA BE MAINTAINED?

Full anonymity will be guaranteed in regard to transcripts and thesis.

33. WHAT ARE THE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE USE OF THE RAW DATA BEYOND THAT DESCRIBED IN THIS PROTOCOL? HOW AND WHEN WILL THE DATA BE DESTROYED?

After completion of thesis, data files will be destroyed.

34. WILL ANY DATA WHICH IDENTIFIES INDIVIDUALS BE AVAILABLE TO PERSONS OR AGENCIES OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY?

No.

35. ARE THERE ANY PLANS FOR FEEDBACK TO THE SUBJECT?

Yes, regarding individual transcripts, and reading of the final thesis.

36. WILL YOUR PROJECT USE:

- [X] INTERVIEWS (SUBMIT A SAMPLE OF QUESTIONS);
- [X] OBSERVATIONS (SUBMIT A BRIEF DESCRIPTION);
- TESTS (SUBMIT A BRIEF DESCRIPTION).
### Informed Consent

#### 38 Who will consent?

- **Subject**: X

  Parent or guardian. (Written parental consent is always required for research in the schools and an opportunity must be presented either verbally or in writing to the students to refuse to participate or withdraw. A copy of what is written or said to the students should be provided for review by the committee.)

  AGENCY OFFICIAL(S): X (recreation and community centers)

#### 39 In the case of projects carried out at other institutions, the committee requires written proof that agency consent has been received. Please specify below:

- Research carried out in a hospital - approval of hospital research or ethics committee.
- Research carried out in a school - approval of school board and/or principal. Exact requirements depend on individual school boards; check with faculty of education committee members for details.
- Research carried out in a provincial health agency - approval of deputy minister.
- Other: specify: Will receive telephone consent of centers listed above.

### Questionnaires (Completed by Subjects)

#### 40 Questionnaires should contain an introductory paragraph or covering letter which includes the following information. Please check each item in the following list before submission of this form to insure that the instruction contains all necessary items:

- UBC letterhead.
- Title of project.
- Identification of the investigators, including a telephone number.
- A brief summary that indicates the purpose of the project.
- The benefits to be derived.
- A full description of the procedures to be carried out in which the subjects are involved.
- A statement of the subject's right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without jeopardizing further treatment, medical care or class standing as applicable. Note: This statement must also appear on explanatory letters involving questionnaires.
- The amount of time required of the subject must be stated.
- The statement that if the questionnaire is completed it will be assumed that consent has been given. This is sufficient if the research is limited to questionnaires; any other procedures or interviews require a consent form signed by the subject.
- An explanation of how to return the questionnaire.
- Assurance that the identity of the subject will be kept confidential and a description of how this will be accomplished. E.g. "Don't put your name on the questionnaire."
- For surveys circulated by mail submit a copy of the explanatory letter as well as a copy of the questionnaire.
**TELEPHONE CONTACT FORM**

If your study involves telephone contact, complete items 1 to 4. If not, you are at the end of the form.

1. Telephonic contact makes it impossible for a signed record of consent to be kept. Indicate why you believe that such contact is necessary to achieve your research objectives:

   Initial contact must be made to find and select community and recreation centers that have programs in which Indo-Canadian women are participating and then to receive permission to observe the women participating.

2. Include a copy of the proposed 'front end' script of your telephone interview. Please check each item on the following list before submission of request for review to ensure that the front end covers as much as possible of the normal consent procedures:

   - Identification of fieldwork agency, if applicable
   - Identification of researcher
   - Basic purpose of project
   - Nature of questions to be asked, especially if sensitive questions are to be asked
   - Guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality
   - Indication of right of refusal to answer any question
   - An offer to answer any questions before proceeding. (See below, item 3)
   - A specific inquiry about willingness to proceed

3. Indicate how interviewers will be trained to answer respondents' questions. Investigators should prepare and submit 'scripted replies', which may cover, but are not necessarily limited to:

   - (A) Means by which respondent was selected
   - (B) An indication of the estimated time to be required for the interview
   - (C) The means by which guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality will be achieved
   - (D) An offer to provide the name and telephone number of a person who can verify the authenticity of the research project. This person shall not be the research administration officer or any person in the office of research services and administration. (Note: Investigators should be prepared, should potential respondents request it, to provide the name of a person outside the research group, as required by section 9 of the SSHRC guidelines)

4. Sensitive subject matter: Respondents should be forewarned of such questions. It is not always practical to do so as part of the interview's front end. Warnings can be placed later in the interview and can take a naturalistic form as long as their content specifically refers to the sensitive matter. Indicate how you propose to deal with sensitive items, if any, in your interview.

   N/A
#2. 'Front-end' Script of Telephone Contact:

My name is Mita Naidu and I am a graduate student doing my M.A. in Human Kinetics, at U.B.C. I am calling regarding my thesis project that involves locating and talking to Indo-Canadian women that are participating in various areas of physical activity. Does your center provide any programs for Indo-Canadian women, or are there women participating in a particular activity at your center?

{if yes...}

I would like to come and observe the class, (or program), (or activity), and perhaps talk to some of the participants about taking part in my project. Full anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed, and the women may refuse to participate or answer any questions at any point.

Are you willing to give me permission?

{if yes...}

Do you have any questions?...