Evolving Identity Development of Third and Fourth Generation Thai Sikh Adolescents

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Introduction

When people migrate, they usually bring with them valued possessions from their homeland. Some of these valued possessions may be in the form of beliefs, customs and ideologies that represent the very core of who they are. Moving to a new country does not mean they stop being themselves and assimilate wholly into the new land they now call home. For instance, the majority of Thai Sikhs still retain strong religious beliefs that underline the essence of who they are even though they live in a predominant Buddhist society, an example being their uncut hair, a requirement of their religion.

Researchers (Castles and Miller, 2003; Vertovec, 2000; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 1999; Faist, 1999) recognize the importance of transnational connections migrants retain with their homelands and how valuable these are to understanding the dynamics that take place as migrants settle into their new homes.

Many migrants tend to form strong social bonds that defy boundaries and allow them to network back and forth between the homeland and host society. What effects does this have on identity development of children born of immigrants? Sanders (2002) states "for the native generations, the question is whether their group's social networks, reinforced by transnational connections, will provide scarce social or economic resources and thereby encourage participation in the ethnic community." If in-group members are able to generate valuable resources then closed ethnic boundaries can protect these and its identity-preserving influences on the natives (Sanders, 2002). For example, Thai Sikhs have, until recently yet to a large extent still, been able to provide valuable job opportunities to its younger generations through the textile industry which has ensured the strength of the Thai Sikh enclave. Yet, is that all that is needed to hold the later generations inside the enclave? Although ethnic enclaves may provide valuable resources the loosening of boundaries and the dilution of identity may still happen due to the strong influences of the mainstream society. In some countries this may be more noticeable and happen at a fast rate than in others. For instance in

America, socio-cultural assimilation may start to be noticed quite readily by the second generation (Portes, 1999) where as in other middle income countries such as Thailand this may not be as noticeable until later generations. In the now more globalized world, the children of migrants not only have to negotiate their parents' homeland identities, but also the constantly changing local cultures in their host societies. Castles and Miller (2003), state "increasing global economic and cultural integration is leading to a simultaneous homogenization and fragmentation of culture". As children of migrant parents they explore other aspects of identity beyond their culture. Yet at the same time continue to define themselves according to the conventional markers of their ethnic and religious group. For instance a Korean American in a Time magazine article stated that she and others like her have a sense of "feeling like the hyphen in between."[1]

This article will attempt to shed light on these tensions of identity experienced by adolescents who navigate the past of their parents in their own lives of the present- which their changing host society in Thailand may unsettle and to some extent, challenge. This study explores third and fourth generation Thai Sikh boy and girl adolescents' religious beliefs and practices as these intersect with gendered norms that translate into social practices. Studies on the youth inordinately offer sharp insight into the interplay of migration, ethnicity, and gender since youth are usually engrained with beliefs and expectations of their parents at an early age, and are still in the process of accepting or rejecting these, as they work their way toward establishing a healthy self concept, and value system, that fits their needs of who they want to be.

This study is divided into three parts. Part one will discuss research process, part two will present the findings and part three will offer concluding remarks.

Methodology

Participants

Participants of this study were 24 Thai Sikh adolescent girls and boys aged 14 to 19. Eleven were boys and 13 were girls. These third and fourth generation Thai Sikhs attended the same international high school throughout grades from 9 to 12. All came from upper middle to high socio-economic backgrounds with the majority of them living in or around their main *gurudwara* (temple). The majority of their parents were involved in the textile industry.

Procedure

Permission was sought and granted from the administration of the school where the researcher worked as a school counselor. All Thai Sikh adolescents (35 in total) enrolled in the high school were contacted by the researcher in the hallways of the school. They were asked to take part in the study and to attend an informal session. Only 31 students attended the first information session where they were given more details about the study and a letter of consent to take home to their parents. Ethical consideration was extended to those who agreed to participate through assurance they could quit the study at any time, during the research, without consequences. They were also guaranteed confidentiality of their names and school in the write -up of the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants in the study to further protect their identity.

Only 26 out of the previous 31 students attended the second session. Twenty-four submitted their consent forms with the remaining two requesting more time to make a decision. Ultimately these two students declined to participate as did the five who had earlier been given consent forms and did not attend the second session. All seven students who declined to participate in the study cited time constraints, extracurricular activities, and heavy school work loads as their reasons. Two focus groups were separately formed; one for boys and one for girls. Each group met 11 times over a period of three months for a total of 22 sessions.

All focus group sessions were tape recorded with participants' permission. Participants were also contacted to validate transcribed materials. Individual interviews with all participants followed at the conclusion of the focus group sessions and took place over a two month period. Six Key Informants from the larger Thai Sikh community were contacted sporadically to validate information and to offer additional insight.

When doing qualitative research the key instruments are the researcher themselves (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) since they collect data and review recorded materials. Indeed, insight by the researcher is considered a very important instrument for analysis (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Education has been the cornerstone of this researcher's life over the last nineteen years. This experience, coupled with the researcher's educational background in counseling, allowed her to build rapport with the participants that proved to be so critical to the success of this research. Admittedly, certain constraints – the researcher's age, gender and job (she worked in the school

where the study took place) – might have impeded the willingness of participants to reveal certain aspects of their lives. To overcome these biases, the researcher spent considerable time with participants establishing rapport and trust.

An Interview Guide, this researcher's basic checklist, proved helpful efficiently structuring the interviews. The first part of the Interview Guide collected general information about the participants and their families. The second part, consisting entirely of open ended questions, explored in more detail participants' feelings, beliefs and behaviors that may have been too sensitive for them to share during the focus group sessions.

Another instrument, a Sex-Role Characteristics Handout (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill School Publishing Company, 1993)[2] was used to gain extra knowledge on participants' beliefs on gender roles.

Findings

Challenging religious masculine markers

Thai Sikhs gather in the Sikh temple, *gurudwara*, regularly which stands as an expression of Sikh presence and cultural identity in Thailand (Mani, 1993). Participants of this study stated that they are expected to attend Sunday services regularly and participate in all religious holiday celebrations. Yet, many parents appeared to be lax in enforcing regular Sunday attendance when elders were not around. When elderly grandparents lived in the house or were visiting then parents were stricter in enforcing their children's attendance in these services.

Certain religious requirements were placing pressure on adolescent boys. They were required not to cut or trim their beards and hair by their religion. The girls said that they also were expected to wear long hair and to dress in a way that does not show too much 'skin'. Several boy and girl participants in this study challenged these requirements. Parents accused them of bringing dishonor to the family by their actions. Boys especially were strongly reprimanded not to cut their hair and beards again.

The boys in the study, who cut or trimmed their beards in unacceptable ways, made references to clean shaven Thai men and also expressed a desire to look more

'fashionable and stylish' like other youth. Similarly, girls who cut their hair made reference to Thai friends and a desire to look more 'fashionable'. Those who did not challenge these rules said that they feared repercussions from the family and community, or simply followed the rules in order to keep their parents 'off their backs'.

The boys who cut or trimmed their beards in unacceptable ways cited mainstream influences and a form of a globalize ideology of being in 'fashion'. They defined 'fashionable' as what they see through the media and from other youth in Bangkok, a very culturally diverse city in Southeast Asia. Thais, for their part, tend to view too much hair on the face and body as undesirable. Thai men are mostly clean shaven and wear short hair. This is in direct contrast with Thai Sikhs whose full beards and long hair worn under turbans make them more noticeable. A subtle form of prejudice and discrimination from the mainstream society against Thai Sikh boys enhances their desire to 'fit in'. One key Informant said that Sikh men who seek jobs outside their ethnic enclave discover that their turbans and beards stand in their way of obtaining good jobs. For the Thai Sikh girls, they do not differ much from Thai women in relation to long hair. Yet Thai Sikh girls do like to wax their arms and legs if too much hair is showing. Ironically, this action is acceptable by their community but if they cut their head hair short then this creates a problem. Thai girls and Thai Sikh girls do differ however in dress. The Thai Sikh community prefers a more conservative style of dressing as opposed to that seen in the youth culture of Bangkok. Girls in this study challenged this barrier more openly since they wanted to dress more 'fashionable' like other teens their age. Parents and elders of the community accused them of showing too much 'skin' which was unacceptable. One girl participant used to carry another set of clothes in her backpack to change into once she left her home. Her father was very conservative and did not allow her to go out if she did not dress the way he wanted. In checking with a male key informant on the way parents expected their daughters to dress, he stated that parents were probably worried of the possible dangers that could befall their daughters should they dress scantily. Also a Sikh girl must be mindful of her reputation. Showing too much skin is not considered decent he stated. Guanipa-Ho and Guanipa (2005) make reference to the difficulty of ethnic adolescents in developing identities due to the adolescent caught between parents' ethnic beliefs and values and those of the mainstream society. Adolescents may end up with confounding ethnic identities. The problem arises when parents are unwilling to compromise their ethnic values and try to instill their beliefs in their children steering them away from the 'mainstream' or dominant cultural practices and lifestyles in their host society.

Gender and Ethnic Interplay

The adolescent girls under study felt that religious duties fell more heavily on them. The boys in this study did not agree with this assessment. The boys stated they did just as much as girls in this area. Yet girls recognized that their lives were more circumscribed as they are expected to learn how to cook, read the Holy Grath, and take care of the home and children. As Poorvi, a respondent stated,

> *I have to learn to read the Holy Book because if I go to the in-laws and*
> *I can't read then they might send me back and say*
> *"go study something before you come back".*

The girls emphasized that if their grandmothers lived in the same house with them then they were expected to practice religion more seriously. It appears to be the older generations are the ones enforcing their beliefs and values on the younger generation. The girls in this study strongly opposed their confinement to the domestic sphere. They also questioned the use of attaining high levels of education when they are only allowed to work in the family business for an allowance. Below is a girl-only group discussion that expresses the girls' discomfort.

Akuti: *Usually when you get married you help your husband in the business. You go to the business every day but you don't go anywhere else.* (Most agreed with her statement.)

Tusti: *You don't get a salary but you get a monthly allowance. You can get whatever you want but you don't get a salary (in reference to working with their husbands' business).*

Interviewer: *So how do you feel about this?*

Akuti: I *think it's unfair* (Others agree.)

Lona**:** *Usually the Indian woman is expected to stay at home and take care of the house and family. I don't think they should have to do that.* (All nodded in agreement.)

Interviewer: *So you don't want to work in your husband's business and you don't want to be a housewife—is that what you mean?*

Lona: *No. I want to work outside where I can have more freedom to do what I want.*

Girls voiced dissatisfaction with educational achievement being used only as a backup for an emergency such as a divorce. They expressed a desire to have the right to make a choice. Yet, majority of the girls agreed that if their husbands insisted that they work only in the family business or stay at home, they would probably give in - like their mothers did. Based on the Sex-Role Characteristic Handout and focus group sessions, both boy and girls' in this study carried traditional masculine and feminine ideologies. The girls labeled jobs on the domestic sphere such as looking after the children, cooking, cleaning, shopping for groceries as a woman's job and boys were given more of a leadership and decision making role. Boys also shared similar ideologies and naturally assumed they would be the financial providers and main decision makers in their homes.

Girls in this study seemed to be socialized toward an Indian model of womanhood. For instance, Grewal (2003) highlights the case of Indian women migrants in North America who resisted total assimilation by complying with a more inegalitarian and restructive model of Indian womanhood, than the one found in their homeland. This seems to be the case with Thai Sikh women also. Girl respondents made reference to young relatives who lived in India as having more freedom to go out at night and dress more fashionably than they can here in Bangkok. Here they felt their every move was being watched and reported back to the family. Thai Sikhs patrolling of their women by the larger community and the expectations of them as cultural carriers limits their freedom. The girls' expected demeanor strengthens their ethnic group's sense of community, drawing attention to the interplay of ethnicity and gender where girls are subjected to stricter social controls than boys.

Whereas the girls in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the way their lives seem to be directed, they also seemed rather resigned to it and compliant. Moore (2004) talks about a salient gender identity - unlike other social identities (like nationality or ethnicity) - that may have two opposing and ambiguous meanings; acceptance of patriarchal ways or acceptance of egalitarian and/or feminist notions where men and women have a right to equal status. Yet it is important for women to move away from traditional gender identities before they can develop a more liberal gender identity (Moore, 2004). How long it takes for Thai Sikh women to push toward a more liberal gender identity would be something to watch for in future studies. Kaur (2006) highlights the struggle all Sikh women must come up against when she quotes Alice Basarke (1996) as asking "how can women expect equality, when the Sikh community seems unable to distinguish between religious tenets and the culture

imposed by the majority community which engulfs them." A key informant put it in simple terms when she said that even though the Sikh religion has elevated women's status to an equal level as men's, this is in theory only.

Separation and Transnational Influences on the Thai Sikh Community

In the hopes to prevent their children from adopting dominant cultural practices of Thailand, the Thai Sikh community put much effort in instilling invisible barriers around their children. They like to educate their children in the formative years of their education in India. It is hoped this will help them to retain their 'Indianess' and prevent too much Thai influence on them (Mani, 1993). Usually girls are educated to the college level and boys to their secondary level. Boys then come back and help in the family business (Mani, 1993). This is changing now and will be discussed in the latter part of the paper.

Other forms of transnationalism that help Thai Sikhs to retain traditional ideologies are ancestral pilgrimages. Thai Sikhs like to take vacations to ancestral homes and famous temples. These pilgrimages instill a sense of 'belongingness' in the younger generations of who they are and where they originated. A continual flow of relatives back and forth between India and Thailand enhances this 'belongingness' and with remittances being sent to back to India for the extended families, showing how valuable connections to the homeland are.

A previous transnational activity of Thai Sikhs was to seek out spouses from India for the local Thai Sikh community (Mani, 1993). This present study shows there is a transition taking place and more spouses are chosen locally compared to past actions of choosing from India. The reasoning being that to seek a spouse from abroad means you can not afford a local Sikh spouse. Thai Sikhs encourage their children to marry their own 'kind': Sikh and similar socio-economic status. Even though the majority of participants (boys and girls) stated they could have a 'love' marriage, there was still much 'influence' from the family on the spouse chosen. The girls of this study talked of parents encouraging them to become engaged to a 'nice' Sikh boy. 'Nice' in reference to being economically established, coming from a good family background, traditional in beliefs and behaviors, and having a respectable reputation. Parents enhance the spouse selection process by espousing their daughters' wonderful qualities at social functions and encouraging their daughters to go and speak to the parents of boys they consider eligible bachelors. The boys of this study stated they knew what was expected

from them when choosing a spouse. They said their parents trusted them. Yet boy and girls in this study recognized their parents' approval of whom they finally chose would be the deciding factor as to whether they could marry the chosen person or not.

Thai Sikhs similar socio-economic status has helped them retain their 'Sikhness' (Mani, 1993). They are mostly in the middle to upper strata of mainstream society where they have developed a very economical spot especially in the area of textiles. Several Thai Sikhs have advanced out into real estate and electronics and have proved very successful. Thai-Sikhs are well integrated in the business sector of Thai society. However, on a personal level, they tend to separate themselves. Boys and girls stated their closest friends were Thai Indians like them. They felt they were better understood among their own group. Many of their social activities and functions are within the community and among their own such as birthday parties and marriage celebrations. The boys said when they went out at night to parties it was usually with other Thai Sikh boys. The *gurudwara* also holds many functions and activities that help to retain the core values of the Sikh community. Yet there are those who have broken away from the enclave. They have cut their hair and removed their turbans. Some have even changed their religion. For those who still consider Sikhism their religion but have 'adjusted' their religious markers, they are labeled 'breakaway Sikhs' by the more conservative Sikhs (Mani, 1993). They are not viewed in a positive light by the more fundamental Sikhs and are not considered 'true' Sikhs. They are thought of as 'showing off' and being disrespectful to their 'own'. This could help explain boy and girls 'fears' of the larger Thai Sikh community when they challenged the norms; fear of being labeled in a negative light.

Advantages to remaining 'inside' the enclave

The majority of boys in this study seem assured of financial and economic opportunities available for them in their enclave. This might explain why boy participants were not verbally contesting their lifestyle and future prospects as much as girl participants. They have much to gain by remaining in their community; financial stability, occupational prestige and power over the 'lower' sex. Kilmartin (2000) states that men who are able to live up to the demands of the masculine gender role have much to gain: financial status and privilege. In a strong patriarchal culture masculinity is shown through practices and representations of male providers (Kilmartin, 2000).

What happens though when the ethnic enclave does not have enough resources to go around to all of it's constitutes? For example, if the family is able to offer only one son a place in the family business or the financial resources to start his own business then what happens to the rest of the sons? They will have to look for jobs within the community or elsewhere. As members of the enclave look outside of its community for jobs and advancements will this encourage them to adopt stronger practices of the mainstream society? One key informant mentioned the textile business, a major source of income for Thai Sikhs, is starting to go in a slight decline so Thai Sikh boys are now starting to look outside the community for other jobs in mainstream society. Their identity markers (turbans and beards) are becoming a hindrance to them for these jobs. Could this be the final deciding factor for them to cut their beards and hair in order to hold on to their masculine gender identity as financial providers?

Thai Sikh boys recognized that to cut their hair and beards would place them outside their ethnic enclave. The boys of this study were very weary to go against their community even though they were 'testing the water' by trimming their beards in order to feel more a part of the youth culture surrounding them and the larger Thai society, they were also pulling back when their families complained too much because they felt they still had much to gain by remaining inside. In talking to two key Informants labeled as 'breakaways' removing their beards and cutting their hair did in some aspects place them outside the core group. When they first removed their identity markers these two key informants stated there was some trepidation on their part as to what would happen next. They knew it was unacceptable and they had been raised to accept uncut hair as a part of their identity. They stated it took much courage and a strong resilience to go against the rules of their society. Both cited different reasons for shaving and cutting their hair. One key informant did it for religious purposes; he decided to become a Christian. Another key informant cut his hair because he said he wanted to and it also helped him to participate easier in the larger Thai society. Both stated there were others who had cut their hair and beards and they tend to stick together and help each other so they did not feel really isolated. One key informant stated he still went to the Sikh temple and still identifies himself as a Sikh.

Both 'breakaway' key informants feel the larger Sikh community needs to expand its boundaries in order to keep the community together. They stated that the younger generation is being challenged by modernization and a desire to feel apart of the youth culture surrounding them. To try and enforce traditional ways onto the youth will only push them further away. The two 'breakaway' key informants stated they

understood the boy participants' weariness of the Thai Sikh community because Thai Sikhs tend to raise their children in a more conservative lifestyle, and they teach their children to value who they are. They also tell them they can not survive outside the Sikh community. They felt once the boys grew up and were able to establish themselves independently of the community then some would probable shave their beards, especially those who are trying now.

Disadvantages to remaining 'inside' the enclave

The girls of this study felt they had little to gain if they remained in the ethnic enclave as it stands. Leading a life of domesticity and sacrificing career opportunities left much to be desired. Yet they also recognized by remaining inside they could continue to enjoy the financial stability that they have become use to and they would also be able to find a 'good' husband who would be financially able to support them. The criteria for remaining inside would require maintaining a good reputation and leading a life acceptable to the larger Thai Sikh community. In talking to one key informant, she stated they are taught they can not survive outside the community so if a girl decides to move beyond the boundaries it would require much courage and daringness on her part. To go against the norms of the society would be seen in a negative light and would reflect badly on the girl's family. This might lead to the family isolating the girl from participation in family gatherings and other social activities. One girl participant reinforced this point by stating to go against the Sikh community would require a very uncaring attitude because of the gossip that would be spoken against that person. At the same time, the girls of the study made continual reference to Thai women being allowed to work outside the home and being able to establish businesses. They were able to use their college education for the betterment of their lives. They questioned why they also could not enjoy the same freedom without creating such a big issue within the community, seeing as they too are Thai and are living in Thailand not India. They felt they could reach a healthy balance between their home life and their careers and wished for a chance to prove their capabilities.

Breaking down barriers; slow integration

Thailand and India have an intertwined link dating back to the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods (1220-1767) as evidenced in the religion and manners of royalty (Mani, 1993). The first Punjabi to Thailand is said to have been a Sehajdari Sikh, who came in 1884. He brought his relatives with him to work in his business and they later

brought theirs until there were enough Sikhs in Bangkok by 1913 to build a *gurudwara.* Today it is estimated that there are over 50,000 Sikhs living in Thailand (Walia, 2004). There is some discrepancy on this number due to the later generations being counted as Thai. The immigrant Sikhs were associated with textile companies and even of today, the majority of Sikhs would be in some form of business in relation to this area. Though there is a group who have broke out into the real estate and the hotel business with a small portion in electronics. The majority of Thai Sikhs have upper middle to high socio-economic status which has contributed to their retaining the 'Sikh' identity. Yet, even though they actively participate in the larger economic sector of Thailand and their children now are given Thai citizenship, Thai-Sikhs have managed to minimize the influences of the mainstream society.

How long can they continue to maintain their unique identity would be interesting to explore as the later generations continue to be effected by the mainstream society and the globalized influences taking place in Thailand. As noted earlier, in some cultural contexts migrants may be able to retain their uniqueness longer than in others. In this present study there were small indicators that change is on its way and integration is starting to be more noticeable in the Thai Sikh community. Thai Sikh children are finishing out their secondary school years in Thailand now and more are attaining higher education in Thai Universities than was noted in the past. Nakavachara (1993) made an interesting statement after researching two Indian communities in Bangkok who were mostly Punjabi with a big portion of them Sikh. She said unless measures are taken to have Indian children pursue Thai education at higher levels then they will remain separated from the broader Thai society. Fourteen years later this is evident with many Thai Sikh students seeking out higher education in Thailand even though the education is in an international program. The majority of these international programs are mostly enrolled by Thai students and taught by western educated Thai professors. Also Thai Sikh boys are obtaining higher educations versus past behaviors of entering into the family business right after their secondary education. Nakavachara (1993) also mentioned that the Thai Sikhs physical traits may be an obstacle to social assimilation when compared to other minorities from Southeast or East Asia. As was found in this present study, some Sikhs have already adjusted their physical traits.

Another place where integration is starting to be more noticeable is in language usage. Thai Sikh youth are using more English and Thai in comparison to the mother tongue. It has come to the point now where the holy Book has been translated into Thai in order to reach the younger generation (Walia, 2004). Sanders (2002) states that there

are two characteristics that indicate the degree of ethnic boundaries and identity preservation of the immigrant community which are the retention of the sending society's language and exogamy. The Punjabi language is loosing its prominence among the younger generation. Even though boy participants recognized the value of Punjabi in the Sikh business community, the majority of participants stated they were weak in reading and writing and a few had trouble communicating in their mother tongue.

Conclusion

The larger Thai Sikh community, in recognizing the influences of mainstream society on their children's beliefs and behaviors, use various forms of transnationalism and subtle forms of coercion and manipulation to ensure their children follow their religious practices and beliefs. It is understandable because Sikhism is their core identity. The older generations carry a strong desire to retain the old ways of being and doing. For instance, the Khalsa (the order of the Pure) forbids the cutting of hair (Singh, 2003). However, the participants of this study, justified the trimming and cutting of their hair with the argument that this inauguration took place over three hundred years ago (1699) and so, should not apply in the modern era. Negotiations may be required for the adjustment or the reconstitution of religious beliefs and practices that can meet the needs of the younger generation in the new context. Herein lays the conflict, the migrant generation still wish to retain their old ways of being and doing carried over from their homeland, while there is a small but growing group of Thai Sikhs who have taken it upon their self to 'adjust' their belief system by cutting their hair and removing their turbans, eating prohibited meats, drinking and smoking but who still consider themselves Sikh (Mani, 1993). Although participants in this study were not exhibiting such extreme behavior, this could be due in part to their age and dependency on their families. Yet, parental understanding is needed or else this could lead them to feel that eventually 'breaking away' is the only answer.

This article, by highlighting the reasoning behind the desire of the third and fourth generation Thai Sikh to adjust their identity markers, is hoped to show the tensions of children growing up in multicultural and globalized contexts.

As Thai Sikh adolescents try to balance their parents' homeland identities, mainstream society and globalized youth sub cultures, it requires an openness and

willingness on their parents' part to allow them flexibility in moving back and forth between the various settings. Boys and girls in this study carried a subtle 'fear' of the larger community and the possible influences it could exert over their futures by stating that it could '*make you or break you*'. While complying, the boys and girls were also contesting against their community citing dominant cultural practices in the mainstream society and 'western' globalized influences as their reasoning. The girls of the study questioned gender inequalities and limited career opportunities that curtailed them to a life of domesticity. The boys of the study challenged religious sediment that said they could not cut their hair or trim their beards in a more 'fashionable' and less noticeable way. Both boys and girls expressed a desire to be a part of the youth culture today. As this generation of Thai Sikhs express a desire to lead a life that will provide them with freedom of expression and opportunities to achieve their goals and dreams, they are finding their actions are being curtailed by the larger earlier generational community. Will these adolescents eventually 'break away' or will they remain? Will the community continue to offer attractive incentives for them to remain inside or will it continue to play on their fears? Will the Thai Sikh ethnic enclave be 'forced' to adopt redefined ideologies in order to maintain its homogeneity? Has the time come for the Thai Sikh community to expand the elastic that surrounds their enclave and give the young people more 'maneuvering' space? The struggle between adaptation and continuity of the old world's beliefs and ideologies may continue to create frustration and tensions for these youth as they move through young adulthood. Past behaviors by the Thai Sikh community to dangle occupational prestige, economic stability, respect, acceptance and honor as rewards for staying in the ethnic enclave are slowly starting to disappear. Even though the boys in the study talk of the respect and future business prospects that come from remaining inside, several of them were also challenging traditional beliefs. The girl participants also talked about honor and reputation as reasons not to go against the community yet they also were challenging the community. Vertovec (2001, 15) states that there are behaviors and practices that can shape the identity making process of second and third generations. He states

Issues of religious and cultural reproduction naturally raise questions concerning the maintenance, modification or discarding of religious practices among the subsequent generations born and raised in post-migration settings. Everyday religious and cultural practices, religious nurture at home and religious education at school and participation at formal places of worship all shape the identities and activities of the so called second and third generations. Some conditioning factors affecting identity and activity among second and third generation youth which sets them apart from their immigrant parents

include: education in Western schools, and the inculcation of secular and civil society discursive practices; youth dissatisfaction with conservative community leaders and religious teachers who do not understand the position of post-migrant youth; growth of 'vernacular' religious traditions across Europe; compartmentalization of religion; and immersion in American/European popular youth culture.

Thai Sikhs are increasingly educating their children in international schools with many of them going on to obtain higher education in international programs of local Thai universities. Once upon a time Thai Sikh children attended religious Sikh and Hindu schools set up in Thailand for them. Though many of them are still receiving education in these schools, a big influx in international school settings is starting to be noticeable. Even though Thai Sikhs still like to send their children abroad to India in the formative years of their education, many are now coming back at an earlier age and enrolling in local international schools instead of their own religious schools. Exposure to different cultures and beliefs can influence their conditioning practices. Also being identified as Thai requires them to adhere to a form of 'Tainess'.

As Vertovec (2001) emphasized, dissatisfaction with conservative community leaders and religious teachers who seem not to understand the post-migrant youth influences the identity forming process of these youth. The boys and girls of this study continually questioned the beliefs and practices of their community. They expressed a desire for a more 'moderate' system of belief and practice. They were even finding it hard to read their holy Book unless it was translated into Thai or English. Thai Sikh adolescents were also aware of the subtle prejudges shown against them from mainstream society due to their physical characteristics. Thai Sikh boys' full beards and long hair worn under turbans definitely makes them more distinct in comparison to other ethnic groups in Thailand.

Parents and the larger Thai Sikh community can play a major role in helping their children deal with the meshing of Sikh ideologies with mainstream ones. Past tactics and patriarchal views by the Sikh community may 'push' the younger generation in a different direction instead of holding them steady. With globalization added its influences on youth today retaining traditional beliefs and values may prove challenging for any ethnic group. How to reach a healthy balance that will meet the needs of both sides may be the best way to go for the future generation of Thai Sikhs. This of course would require more of a hybridizational or multicultural identity that would allow youth to move between 'worlds' and feel confident and secure in whichever world they are in.

'Remodification' to their religious beliefs and practices may need to happen. Whatever evolves it appears the process will be a long drawn out one happening at a slower pace than what might happen in a more westernized country like America. This area would definitely be a very interesting one to explore as these youth grow up and try to secure a healthy self identity that meets their needs.

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Notes

1 The article appeared in Time Asia Magazine, year 2006. The cover was dedicated to children of Immigrants growing up in America. The specific article was called Between Two Worlds by Chu, J. and N. Mustafa on pages 40-50.

2 The Sex-Role Characteristics Handout is comprised of 50 characteristics and sums responses to each characteristic by placing an "F" for female or an "M" for male beside each characteristic to indicate if that characteristic is more typical of one gender than the other. Two statements follow the 50 characteristics and require written answers to the statements; Describe the ideal male and female and compare yourself to the ideal. What does the comparison say about your self-concept?

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