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碩士論文

移民狂想曲：

鐘芭·拉希莉作品中的多樣化身份屬性

Immigration Rhapsodies:

Multiple Identities in

Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction

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摘要

本論文以「多樣化身份屬性」(multiple identities)來探討移民的身份認同，以便突顯民族族群中成員的各自身份。離散中的人民，雖然同屬於一個民族族群，卻會因為不同的主體性(subjectivity)導致他們的行為和反應有極大的差異。儘管Hall對身份的觀點(identity)、Bhabha的混雜性(hybridity)、Crenshaw的多元交織性(intersectionality)、及Lowe的異質(heterogeneity)與多元性(multiplicity)等理論，都能解釋身份問題的某些層面，但若將以上學者對身份的論述統合起來，則更能形成一個較多元且廣泛的身份論點。

本論文分為四章，第一章包括研究動機、研究目的、及南亞女性作家鐘芭·拉希莉(Jhumpa Lahiri)的身世背景；第二章是關於南亞離散身份的文獻回顧，並經由上述學者的理論建構出「多樣化身份屬性」；第三章探討拉希莉作品中的「多樣化身份屬性」與性別角色；最後一章為總結、研究限制、和未來研究運用等。研究結果顯示賦於民族族群固定的身份定義是不恰當的，為了強調民族族群中的個別差異，「多樣化身份屬性」是個值得在離散文學中探究的議題。

關鍵詞：多樣化身份屬性、身份、混雜性、多元交織、異質、多元性、離散主義、南亞裔、性別角色、鐘芭·拉希莉、《同名之人》、《醫生的翻譯員》、《陌生的土地》

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ABSTRACT

This thesis suggests the use of the concept of “multiple identities” to describe the different identities that exist among members within an ethnic group. Diasporic individuals belonging to the same ethnic group (e.g. South Asian) may behave and respond to the world in strikingly different ways due to the various subjectivities they possess. Hall’s identity, Bhabha’s hybridity, Crenshaw’s intersectionality, and Lowe’s heterogeneity and multiplicity each encompass a specific facet of identity that I believe to be important to the construct of a complete diasporic ethnic identity. I bring together these perspectives on identity to create a more versatile method of imagining ethnic identity.

This thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first is an introduction to author Jhumpa Lahiri, research motives, and a summarized statement concerning my main argument. The second will be a literary review of South Asian diasporic identity and the theories utilized within this thesis, in addition to a more detailed look into the concept of “multiple identities.” The third chapter will be a discussion on multiple identities and the formation of South Asian gender roles using examples from Lahiri’s works. Lastly, the concluding chapter will contain statements made concerning my previous investigations in addition to research limitations and possible future research applications. Overall, my findings back up my goal to prove that fixed definitions for a specific ethnic group are a myth and we need to highlight the differences within ethnic groups across generations. I hope to prove the concept of “multiple identities” as a theory worthy of note in diasporic literature.

Keywords: multiple identities, identity, hybridity, intersectionality, heterogeneity, multiplicity, diaspora, South Asian, gender roles, Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, *Interpreter of Maladies*, *Unaccustomed Earth*

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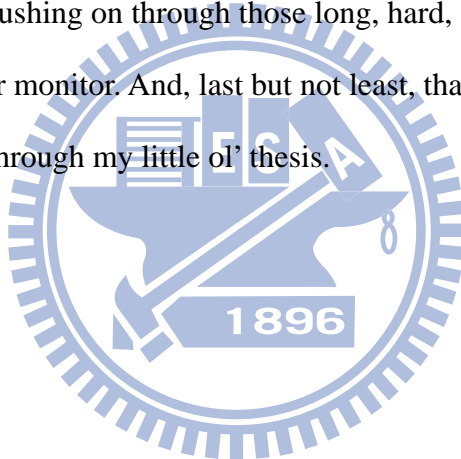


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Immigration Rhapsodies: Multiple Identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction

Chapter One

Introduction

Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne¹

Thus begins Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, quoting Nathaniel Hawthorne in an epigraph that both succinctly summarizes the central theme of the collection of short stories and identifies the source of its title. Hawthorne penned his works at a time when American authors wished to differentiate themselves from those of the European tradition by producing a distinctly American literary tradition to represent the country's relatively brief history. Likewise, Lahiri's contributions to contemporary American literature follow in Hawthorne's footsteps, and her texts help build a distinct profile for the comparatively new sub-genre of South Asian diasporic literature, offering works that reveal the experiences of those in the Indian diaspora from an insider's point of view. As Lahiri divulged in an interview, "No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile in whichever country I travel to. That's why I was always tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile" (Jawaid). All three of her creations—the novel *The Namesake* and two short-story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*—are cases in point,

¹ Quoted from Hawthorne's "The Custom-House."

expounding the same theme: the cultural displacement of immigrants and their children's struggles to grow up in two worlds simultaneously. South Asians in the diaspora, influenced by the environment and society into which they have transplanted themselves, must construct new concepts of identity. Some scholarly work has already been done on British South Asian identity using literature and cinema from the area,² and this has inspired me to further investigate the South Asian identity through American artistic creations.

I choose to use Jhumpa Lahiri's works as examples of the South Asian diaspora owing to the connection I feel with her characters and stories. Although Lahiri generally writes from the perspective of South Asians, I could not help but notice striking similarities between the situations she pens in her books and the dilemmas I had to face as a second-generation Asian American in the US. I was born to Taiwanese-American parents in Dallas, Texas, and lived there for fifteen years until my entire family moved back to Taiwan. What really struck a chord with me was her knack of portraying different generations effortlessly, being able to switch back and forth between first- and second-generation perspectives with ease. It is refreshing for me to read a piece of literature that takes place in a recognizable environment and touches on familiar subject matter. I feel a connection with so many characters and understand the dilemmas many of her characters face because I have experienced them before.

I have a personal investment on Lahiri's characters and storylines because they are believable since she draws resources from her own experiences and that of those around her. Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London to a Bengali immigrant family in

² Yasmin Hussain's *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity* is a valuable resource for anyone interested in learning more about the plight and common concerns of South Asian women in the British context. Hussain does a great job drawing examples from British South Asian literature and cinema and relating them to factual social phenomena.

1967.³ When she was two years old, the Lahiris immigrated to the United States and settled down in South Kingston, Rhode Island. There, her father took up a job as a librarian while her mother taught Bengali at a nearby university. Several times during her childhood, she was brought for long stays to her parents' birthplace, Calcutta, and "remain[ed] for six weeks to nearly half a year" (Flynn). Because she spoke Bengali to her parents at home, she did not feel like a typical tourist during those visits, but she was aware that the locals did not view her to be one of them either. Although she has spent the majority of her lifetime in the United States, Lahiri "still [finds it] very hard to think of [her]self as an American" (Shankar), "never [feeling] fully at home [in America]" nor in India either (Patel).⁴ This cultural disorientation is the central and recurrent theme in her stories, which draw from the experiences of those around her as well as her own. Lahiri has admitted in an interview that she is "indebted to [her] travels to India for several of the stories" (Aguiar), and the basis of many of her characters are people she met or knew: "[t]he characters are semi-real—most are composites—but the situations are invented" (Patel).⁵

Lahiri began writing at an early age, penning stories with her fellow classmates during recess in kindergarten and writing for the school paper during middle and high school. She continued her creative writing through her undergraduate years at Barnard

³ Details concerning Lahiri's upbringing and writing career with unspecified sources are derived from *Asian American Short Story Writers: The A-to-Z Guide to American Literature*, and *The Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature since 1945*.

⁴ The quotes taken from the two interviews with Patel and Shankar were conducted in 1999. Lahiri got married in 2001 and gave birth to a son in 2003. In a later interview done in 2003, Lahiri admits that "[m]ore and more [she] feel[s] comfortable in [America]" and states that she feels that she "belongs" (Minzesheimer). Perhaps it is the establishment of a family of her own that finally bestowed her with a sense of belonging to America.

⁵ In the same interview conducted by Vibhuti Patel, Lahiri discloses, "Mr. Pirzada is a man who actually came to our home but I was four then, not 10. I had seen photos of him in the family album but knew only that he was a Muslim. I had no details. Our relationship is imagined. Mrs. Sen is based on my mother who babysat in our home. I saw her one way but imagined that an American child may see her differently, reacting with curiosity, fascination, or fear to the things I took for granted." She has also admitted in other talks that Gogol from *The Namesake* came from the name of a cousin's friend (Minzesheimer), and the character of Bibi Haldar was based on a young woman who lived in the same building as her aunt and uncle (Aguiar).

College but was never confident of her work, admitting that she felt she was better cut out for an academic career rather than a creative writing one at the time (Shankar). After graduation, she applied to several graduate schools but was rejected by all of them; Lahiri opted to take a short break from sending applications and took up a research assistant job at a non-profit organization where she discovered how convenient it was to write on a personal computer, staying late and coming in early to write (Shankar). The samples she penned got her into the creative writing graduate program at Boston University, and after completing her PhD, she decided to make writing her official career (Shankar). In 1999, she published her first short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, and the *New Yorker* named her one of twenty best American fiction writers under 40. She was awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Interpreter of Maladies*, which would go on to sell 600,000 copies (Minzesheimer) and was translated into more than thirty languages (Minus). Lahiri published her first full-length novel *The Namesake* in 2003, and a subsequent film adaptation directed by Mira Nair was released in March 2007. Five years later, on April 1, 2008, *Unaccustomed Earth* was released and debuted at the Number 1 spot on *The New York Times* best seller list, which is a rare accomplishment especially for a short-story collection. In February 2010, Lahiri was appointed as one of five members of the Committee on the Arts and Humanities by President Barack Obama.

It is worthy of note that Lahiri has won many awards that were previously out of reach of authors of her genre and subject matter. As stated earlier, her Number 1 debut on *The New York Times* with a short-story collection was an extraordinary feat, and she was the first Indian/Asian to win the Pulitzer Prize and the seventh to do so with a short-story collection. Why are Lahiri's works so popular with the general public, and why did the Pulitzer board choose to award the Prize to Lahiri? Interestingly enough, another nominated finalist for the 2000 Pulitzer was Ha Jin, a Chinese-born author

who immigrated to the United States in 1989 when he was in his thirties. Although both authors were in the running for the prize, the Pulitzer guidelines state that the Prize for Fiction should “preferably [deal] with American life,” and Ha Jin’s nominated novel *Waiting* falls short of this requirement.⁶ Of the nine stories included in Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*, six take place in America and another is set in India but concerns South Asians; her later work, *Unaccustomed Earth*, takes place entirely on American soil and revolves around first-, second-, and third-generation South Asians.

I believe locating her stories in the US is one reason for her popularity with American readers (who are predominantly Anglo-American). By placing her ethnic characters in situations and surroundings that are faintly familiar, Lahiri draws in audiences by piquing their interest and offering them opportunities to reflect on how they would react given the same situations. She also includes bits and pieces of South Asian life and culture in her stories, which attracts not only Caucasian Americans who are interested in knowing more about other ethnic lifestyles, but also Asian Americans who can easily relate with her characters’ thoughts or actions. Lavina Dhingra Shankar has pinpointed Lahiri’s success to her choice to include exotic elements within her works whilst keeping them not too foreign, so that the works stand out, but still remain easily accessible to audiences outside the ethnic group. Her choice to write semi-autobiographically is another decisive factor for her eminence. As Shirley G. L. Lim points out, the greater part of literature penned by Asian American and South Asian writers are autobiographical, especially the works of second-generation authors (292). The majority of Asian American and South Asian literature is

⁶ *Waiting* takes place in China and is about a doctor, Lin Kong, who has waited for twenty years to divorce the wife he has never loved so that he could marry his girlfriend, but he encounters several hardships along the way, most of which arise from conflicts between tradition and the pursuit of one’s own desires.

autobiographical in some way, and this might be because works with a biographical tone tend to appeal more to the American public.⁷

Jhumpa Lahiri has enjoyed a generally agreeable relationship with book critics. Numerous critics, like Hilary Johnson and Susan Chacko, have lauded her for her plain, unadorned writing style. Michiko Kakutani spoke well of her “eloquent” and “assured” prose, traits uncommon in literary debuts. Ronny Noor comments on her “keen eye for observation and an admirable gift for details.” David Kipen, Katherine Guckenberger, and Charles Taylor have all praised Lahiri for the ease with which she changes perspectives and her ability to “erase boundaries between character and audience” (Taylor), and Guckenberger also notes how Lahiri offers American readers a more “subtle” yet “informative” experience, “filling cultural gaps” rather than “spoon-[feeding]” audiences. Several critics such as David Mattin have also offered positive comments regarding her realistic depictions of relationships, particularly between parents and their children.

Although more frequently lauded for her words than not, Lahiri has had her fair share of criticism which mostly focus on her writing style and her “inaccurate” depiction of South Asia and the people there. For instance, Lev Grossman criticized Lahiri’s habit of “ending on a freeze-frame, leaving her characters suspended in a moment of ambiguity and ambivalence,” which according to Grossman is more suited to her short stories rather than her novel *The Namesake*. Barbara Kantrowitz made note that although *Interpreter of Maladies* enjoyed success in India, “The few negative reviews... came from Indians who didn’t like the way she portrayed their culture.” Critics in India went so far as to question if she was a “true Indian” and if she was qualified to write about India, which “pushed all [her] buttons”

⁷ Many scholars have heavily criticized ethnic authors for writing in an autobiographical fashion, such as Frank Chin, who objected, “the only form of literature written by Chinese Americans that major publishers will publish... is the autobiography, an exclusively Christian form” (8).

(Minzesheimer).

Lahiri writes about the experiences of the first and subsequent generations of immigrants, but she places her characters in normal, everyday environments and situations. Her stories draw in her readers because they focus on the uniqueness of everyday life, and readers can relate to her characters because the challenges they face are prevalent in societies all over the globe. Yet, looking beyond these commonplace stories, one realizes that Lahiri's tales focus on the struggles of first-, second-, and third-generation South Asians who are trying to place themselves within American society. The topic of the immigrant experience is not new literary subject matter, but Lahiri stands out because she focuses on the psychological conflicts of the post-1965 immigrants, who are highly-educated professionals, and their offspring. Owing to this background, her characters are relatively affluent, hence they are not concerned for physical survival but instead for the preservation and construction of their identity within a new host culture. "For people who come from India to make a new life [in America], there is a real threat of losing one's identity," Lahiri says. "But for the subsequent generation born here, it's another type of loss—one where your identity is not taken for granted and you have to build one yourself" (Solan). Individuals in the diaspora come to reinvent their ethnic identities by combining the cultures of the homeland and the host society, and the related theories and processes will be explained in detail in the following chapter.

The wide range of characters showcased in Lahiri's stories provide me with a variety of models to examine how South Asians act and react when situated in the American environment and thus create multiple identities for themselves. I will use the characters within Lahiri's novels to prove that multiple identities can be used within discussions on South Asian literature. This thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first, which you are currently reading, is a brief introduction to the

topics that will be touched upon within this thesis, including background information on author Jhumpa Lahiri, research motives, and a summarized statement concerning my main argument. The second will be a literary review of South Asian diasporic identity and the theories utilized within this thesis, in addition to a more detailed look into the concept of “multiple identities.” The third chapter will be a discussion on multiple identities and the formation of South Asian gender roles using examples from Lahiri’s works. Coming to America from a drastically diverse lifestyle in India, first-generation South Asians must face an inevitable future of change and transformation upon settling down in America. Being confronted with the more liberal culture of America or growing up under the influence of both Indian and American teachings will greatly affect how these South Asian characters behave in terms of their gender roles. I intend to examine how adopting multiple identities will further complicate the gender roles amongst members of the South Asian group. In this thesis project, I will not be discussing any subsequent generations after the second generation because they are born in the host country so the conditions they encounter are relatively identical to those of the second. In addition, Vladimir Nahirny and Joshua Fishermen have pointed out that “[t]he erosion of ethnicity and ethnic identity experienced by most (but not all) American ethnic groups takes place in the course of three generations ... Ethnic heritage, including the ethnic mother tongue, usually ceases to play any viable role in the life of the third generation” (266). Lastly, the concluding chapter will contain statements made concerning my previous investigations in addition to research limitations and possible future research applications. Overall, my findings will back up my goal to prove that fixed definitions are a myth and we need to highlight the differences within ethnic groups across generations. Finally, I hope to prove the concept of “multiple identities” as a theory worthy of note in diasporic literature. In addition to South Asians, members of any

diaspora or of any ethnicity can possibly also be described using multiple identities.



Chapter Two

Theorizing “Multiple Identities”

This chapter will provide the reader with an understanding of the fundamental theories and ideas necessary to comprehend the construct of the South Asian diasporic identity. In addition, the logic used to arrive at the conception of the new construct of “multiple identities” is also clarified and elaborated upon. Furthermore, the main argument of this thesis will be developed and expanded, stating the motives for and the purpose of this investigation.

Diaspora and Identity in a South Asian/American Context

Cultural hybridity and diaspora are two interwoven concepts, as those belonging to the diaspora find themselves caught between two or more cultural identities. Diaspora is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel” or “Jews living outside Israel.” In the era of globalization and transnationalism, it has now also come to be used to describe “the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland” and “people who have spread or been dispersed from their homeland.” Steven Vertovec writes of four current definitions of the concept of “diaspora”: diaspora as a social category, as a type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural production, and as a problem. The first is to view diaspora as a social category, in which Vertovec invokes the experience of the Jews as an example. As Yasmin Hussain summarizes,

This concept of diaspora often focused on a forced displacement and therefore was centred on negative experiences in terms of alienation, loss and victimisation. Whilst their ancestral dispossession is an overwhelmingly negative concept, the idea of the Jewish diaspora describes a community

whose socio-economic, cultural, familial and political networks cross boundaries of states, and preserve a common shared identity. Although transformed by the influences of surrounding cultures; for many the dream of return to the 'homeland' provided a fundamental principle of identity. (5)

We can also think of diaspora as a type of consciousness, or the belief that one holds roots in a "homeland" country while simultaneously being in another place, which is a feeling that one can share with others who hail from the same country. Therefore, this type of diaspora can include anyone who preserves this way of thinking, regardless of to which generation they belong. The third definition of diaspora is to see it as a mode of cultural production. According to Hussain, "[c]ultural identity is fluid, produced and reproduced so that it often results in 'hybrid' forms of expression" (6). Examples cited in the British South Asian context are bhangra music and curry houses, two products of interaction between two cultures. This form of diaspora views the diasporic and the host groups as belonging to the other. The last kind of diaspora is to view it as a problem, when diasporic communities are viewed by members of the host society as problems or security risks. Diasporic people bring with them the culture and traditions of their homeland, and natives may fear contamination of their society. As Yasmin Hussain has succinctly summarized, individuals with connections to other countries exhibiting "hybrid cultural forms and multiple identities are viewed as diluting or undermining the traditional norms of the indigenous population" (6). Vertovec's four definitions are all real forms existing in the present, and the subtle distinctions in their descriptions are indicative of the complex transnational network that is the diaspora.

The Asian diaspora is still a relatively new immigrant group. Whereas European migrants were allowed to immigrate continually to North America throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was not until U.S. immigration laws underwent

a significant revision in 1965 that Asian immigration skyrocketed. The majority of these post-1965 immigrants were professionals who chose to immigrate to the United States in search of a better quality of life or “economic improvement” (Brown 61). These Asians tended to settle directly within middle-class neighborhoods with small numbers of racial minorities (Purkayastha xii). Of course, there were still those who came seeking posts in the labor trade; however, it is important to remember that the bulk of post-1965 immigrants settled down in middle-class neighborhoods, because this would be a large factor in the shaping of their offspring’s personalities.⁸ South Asian immigrants, which include individuals from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, also began large-scale immigration in the same year. Statistics given by the U.S. Census Bureau show that the South Asian population grew from roughly 1,679,000 in 2000 to 2,570,000 in 2007, demonstrating a 53% growth rate, which is the highest out of all the Asian American communities. They are now the third largest Asian American ethnic group after Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans, standing for 16.4 percent of the Asian American community (U.S. Census Bureau 8). The bulk of the post-1965 South Asian diaspora are “‘Third World’ intellectuals” (Lie 305), highly-educated immigrants from well-off families who freely chose to uproot their families and begin new lives in North America. The majority of the immigrant population find well-paying jobs in top-notch corporations or organizations: “Well over half of Indian males were professionals of some kind or working at an administrative or managerial level, with particularly high concentrations in engineering and medicine... Towards the end of the 20th century... [t]he explosion of

⁸ Bandana Purkayastha has highlighted that there is a difference between the immigrants that arrived after 1965 and those that arrived after the mid-1980s. The earlier immigrants (those that arrived from 1965 to 1985) were “apt to be highly educated and most often moved directly to suburban America” and their children “grew up among mostly middle-class, white Americans”; in contrast, the later group was “governed by a very different set of immigration laws and citizenship criteria... are more likely to have lower levels of education and show greater concentration in blue-collar jobs” and their children are “more likely to have grown up in areas where there are larger numbers of racial minorities” (xii).

the IT industry led to the influx of thousands of young IT experts from India,” Judith Brown points out (56). Naturally, as these immigrants settle down and establish their own households in North American soil, their children and they begin to have their doubts about their identities. They are no longer Indians, nor do they belong entirely to America, so how do they define themselves in terms of identity?

This is where the concept of cultural hybridity becomes useful, but before we plunge headfirst into discussion about hybridity, first we need to understand the Western conception of identity. The word “identity” is derived from the Latin for ‘same,’ *idem*, appearing in the late 16th century to describe the “quality of being identical.” The *OED* defines the word as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is,” or “the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.” This description makes it seem as if identity is a permanently established notion, but postcolonial scholarship maintains the opposite. Stuart Hall has written that identity is a binary concept, “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (225). He first describes identity as being, which entails thinking of oneself as belonging to a singular, collective culture, offering a sense of unity; people may think of themselves as belonging to a specific past, one that they all share, thinking in terms of similarities. Hall believes this type of identity to be indispensable, but he finds the second kind, identity as becoming, as more applicable to real-world postcolonial situations and contexts. This second form acknowledges that, in addition to similarities, all ethnic groups must also undergo different experiences that amount to “‘what we really are’; or rather—since history has intervened—‘what we have become’” (225). Identity is, therefore, constantly in the process of shifting and transforming itself, defined not only by the past but also the present and future as well. This is even more evident in diaspora literature, which is defined by multiple definitions of identities, or cultural hybridity. Lahiri herself has stated that “it bothered [her] when growing up, the

feeling that there was no single place to which [she] fully belonged” (Shankar).

“Acculturation” is a psychological term formulated to describe the cultural exchange that occurs when large groups of individuals belonging to different cultures come into continuous direct contact. The original cultural patterns of either or both groups may be altered, but the groups still remain distinct. John Berry and his colleagues have proposed a model of acculturation strategies which divides the phenomenon into four categories: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. The assimilation strategy occurs when an individual from the non-dominant group chooses not to preserve their cultural identity and actively pursues contact with the dominant host culture. The opposite approach is the separation strategy, when the individual places more value in the preservation of their original culture and avoids contact with the dominant group. The integration strategy is when the individual aims to maintain connections with both the ethnic and the dominant groups in their daily life. Last is the marginalization strategy, which occurs when individuals “lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society” (Berry, “Aboriginal” 9). Of the four possible strategies, the most favorable for immigrants is integration because it seems to be more consistent in awarding positive outcomes (Berry and Sam 318). There is an issue, however, with the position of acculturation, as it automatically assumes that the cultures in discussion are in a bi-polarized relationship consisting of a dominant authority and a weaker grouping, when in reality the connection between the two groups may not be limited to thus; Homi K. Bhabha’s stance on hybridity is a prime example of a shifting of the dominant/weak roles.

The word hybridity has been defined as a primarily negative term, rooted in biology, the Latin roots of which can be traced back to “the progency of a tame sow and a wild boar” (Young 6). In the nineteenth century, interest in hybridity

skyrocketed jointly with the western obsession with racism. During this time period, hybridity equaled miscegenation, which was an action often prohibited by law; disputes brewed over the degeneration of the purity of the Caucasian race by engaging in sexual relations with other colored races. However, in the contemporary sense of the word, it has come to mean a form of intercultural mixing. According to Susan S. Friedman, the core meaning of the term can shift among three distinct forms of cultural mixing: fusion of differences, intermingling of differences, and mixing of the always already syncretic (84). The first can be defined as a mixing of two or more separate phenomena resulting in an entirely new creation. The second refers to a mixing process that allows for the differences to become altered by each other but still preserve some measure of their original likeness. The third asserts that hybridity is constantly in process and that everything is essentially hybrid to begin with.

Friedman offers a helpful explanation of the variances between the three types of hybridity using language as an example:

Within the terms of hybridity as fusion, the blending of many distinct languages results in the formation of a new language like English (made up of Saxon, French, Latin, Greek, etc.) or Yiddish (German, Hebrew, Slavic mixture). Within the framework of hybridity as intermingling, different parts of distinct languages (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, syntax) combine to produce a creole language in which the original languages remain recognizable, as in Spanglish, Tex-Mex, or Hawaiian and Jamaican pidgin. The third approach would stress that any given language is always in the process of hybridic formation through borrowings and adaptations of linguistic traditions with which it comes in contact—whether or not speakers are aware of or resistant to such syncretism. (84-85)

There are also three ways to deal with the relationship between hybridity and power,

continues Friedman. The first considers hybridity as a primarily oppressive process, in which a dominant group forces a less powerful group to engage in deculturation, assimilation, or co-optation (89). The second approach is a deconstructive extreme of the first, in which hybridity transfers authority to the non-dominant. This approach is the stance Salman Rushdie and Homi K. Bhabha hold on hybridity. Bhabha first brings up hybridity within “Signs Taken for Wonders” as a wholly post-colonial concept. Hybridity is the shifting of power within colonial texts so that we can see colonialism as more than just the domination of one group over another. Through hybridity, we can come to understand how the colonized may have resisted being controlled, and how the colonizers may have experienced anxieties despite their dominant position. In other words, colonial hybridity can alter the authority of power, but it is not a straightforward process of simply reversing the roles of the two groups, either. It may be a liberating and anti-authoritarian process, but it is not to be celebrated whole-heartedly, according to Bhabha, because it is rather a long and difficult process that is not without suffering or pain. The third version views hybridity as a combination of the above two perspectives without an emphasis on an Other; instead, it is more prone to be used to analyze interaction among heterogeneous others, focusing on the shared space between two groups.

To better understand the concept of multiple identities, we first need to go back to the topic of identity. In sociology, identity is defined as “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (Burke 3). Identity theory asserts that the individual and society (also referred to as “social structure”) are associated with each other, as the individual lives within the context of society, and the actions of the individual in turn affect the social structure. In everyday language, identity is commonly used to refer to “personal

identity” and “social identity,” two distinctly defined notions that are interrelated. Personal identity is often considered the mediator of social identities, making sense of them. As Carla Kaplan has stated, “Whereas our social identities shift throughout the day, what allows us to move coherently from one to another is often imagined to be our personal identity, or ‘who we are’—our constant” (123). In the conventional sense of the term, personal identity carries a certain value and serves as the determiner of our taste and lifestyle. This identity is our own, “an immutable essence unchanged by physical development or external circumstances” (Kaplan 123). However, this definition has been challenged by social theory, postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, and feminist theory.

Contrary to the concept of *a* solitary personal identity (our “personality”), social identity is “a constellation of different and often competing identifications” (Kaplan 124). The struggle amongst social identities can best be exemplified through W. E. B. Du Bois’s theory of “double consciousness”—“one ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro” (364). There are several forms of social identity, which include gender, ethnicity, and nationality, the examples listed by Kay Deaux (1060).⁹ Many consider their ethnicity at the core of their self-definition which makes it an important social identity. Ethnicity can include anything in terms of culture, language, and country of origin. Nationality may have close links to ethnic identity, but it often acts as another distinct way of identifying oneself. Deaux has concisely clarified the difference between the two:

In Finland, for example, being ethnically Finnish and being a citizen of Finland are highly overlapping bases of identification. In contrast, in the

⁹ In keeping with the subject of this thesis, I will only be reviewing the definitions of ethnic and national identities as described by Deaux. Readers interested in learning more about other forms of identity may refer to pages 1060 to 1062 in Kay Deaux’s entry for “social identity” in the *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender*.

United States one can have an identity as an American and at the same time hold an identity (often hyphenated) as an African American, an Asian American, a Latino, or a West Indian. (1061)

As illustrated above, national identities are flexible and subjectively defined. It is up to the individual to choose whether or not to have an ethnic identity at all, and, if so, what identity they claim. However, more and more people are coming to understand that they need not choose between one of two exclusive identities; rather, they may “maintain dual identification or may use the two sources of identity as the basis for a new emergent form of social identification, for example, as a biracial person” (Deaux 1061). This phenomenon is commonly termed as holding multiple identities.¹⁰ In 1890, William James, an identity theory scholar, was the first to recognize the possibility of people to have “multiple selves,” or “multiple identities” in the terminology of contemporary identity theory, due to the numerous positions we occupy within society. When speaking of multiple identities, the most general definition that comes to mind is when an individual has separate identities as a woman, a mother, a wife, and so on. Generally speaking, we think of multiple identities in terms of distinct groupings, and this is also true in some theoretical traditions of psychology and sociology, like role theory and symbolic interaction (Deaux 1062). In contrast, the field of personality psychology has focused on forming theories that deal with the integration of multiple identities into a single identity. Identity theory also utilizes two similar approaches to explain multiple identities. The first is to place the identities within the social structure: identities are said to be tied to and thus created

¹⁰ Despite using the same phrase “multiple identities,” my definition of the term differs from that used within identity theory. The term as used in identity theory has roots in sociology, so its main focus is on how various identities within an individual come to be, how one identity manages to come to the forefront. It is used as a method of predicting how individuals will behave in particular situations. However, my version of multiple identities concentrates on how these identities interact with each other to form one’s identity. Those interested in learning more about the sociological version of multiple identities can refer to Peter Burke and Jan Stets’ *Identity Theory*.

from one's social structural positions. This framework attributes the construction of identities within a single person to take place outside the mind, within the constraints of social structure, which I believe to be similar to theories that group multiple identities into clusters. The second is to view identities through the perceptual control system. This is when an individual has two or more "active" identities switched on at once; regardless of the number of active identities s/he has, they are all contained within her/himself, meaning that there can only be a single output. Therefore, the individual has to make the necessary adjustments according to the current situation in order to satisfy all of her/his multiple identities. This is an internal framework, and I think it is a viewpoint consistent with the integration of multiple identities into a single identity. However, both approaches have their issues: the challenge with upholding distinct identities is figuring out how and when these identities relate to one another, and the trouble with the second model is figuring out how integration is achieved and whether a single identity, being a composite of several identities, can be useful in predicting behavior and reactions (Deaux 1062). Much academic literature concerning diaspora recognizes diasporic identity to be an amalgamation of both previously mentioned models: scholars are aware that members of the diaspora exhibit distinct, individual identities at different times, and they are also aware that these identities may result in the creation of a unique identity that combines traits of all the other identities. Yet, is there a way for us to imagine social identities as simultaneously plural and singular?

A third way to look at this problem is through intersectionality. Intersectionality, a term introduced by feminist sociologist Kimberle Crenshaw, is used to describe the circumstances that come into being when one holds two or more social identities. Since this theory originates from feminist philosophy, most discussion on intersectionality is focused on examining the consequences of overlapping race and

gender identities (e.g. being a Black female does not entail the same experience as being a Black male or White female). Gender may not carry the same meaning across ethnic groups, and, likewise, ethnicity for men and women may be completely different experiences. Nonetheless, it is impossible to clearly separate experience related to race and that related to gender. In its initial form, the theory was only applied to the analysis of gender oppression within society, specifically in the case of the female gender. Rather than viewing these forms of oppression as separate and distinct instances (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia) or as being influenced by a single system of society (e.g. race, gender, class, ethnicity), intersectionality suggests that oppression in any form is interrelated and bound together by these socially and culturally constructed categories.

Lisa Lowe later developed a similar concept that is more appropriate for her (and ours, as well) discussion on Asian American identity, hybrid identities. As mentioned, she points out the tendency of discussions on Asian American culture to view the subject matter in terms of generational conflicts or filial relations, which oversimplifies the Asian American culture. As a result, the diversities of class, gender, and nation among the Asian American community are masked and ignored. Furthermore, reading the cultural politics of ethnic groups as a clash between generations turns a social issue into a domestic conflict between family members. Lowe suggests contextualizing the “vertical” generational model of culture with a “horizontal” version of culture. What she means by a horizontal reading is that instead of considering culture as something simply passed down from generation to generation, we can also analyze how culture exists among members of the same generation. This concept can be extended to include different communities, different classes, different ethnic groups, and so on. Thus, culture is formulated through these horizontal workings as well as through vertical transmissions between generations in

unchanging forms. Instead of conceiving of ethnic identity as an absolute construct, we can try to view ethnic identity as being shaped by cultural practices, which is constantly in flux and varies according to history and material differences. Continuing on the same vein of thought, she brings up the debate between essentialist and pluralist discussions of the formation of racial groups and culture. The essentialist notion declares identity as being comprised of a fixed set of traits. The pluralist view, on the other hand, rules out fixed notions of identity in favor of “differences, intersections, and incommensurabilities” (136). Lowe suggests a compromise between the two: we can recognize that individuals have hybrid identities with many intersecting (although often conflicting) subjectivities, and we can also work with the dominant (if inaccurate) representation of separate racial groups so that people of different groups can identify with certain common oppressions and work together to counter them. We all have hybrid identities, says Lowe, none of which should be subsumed under the others, and all of which are constantly evolving. There are times when we rely on one identity more than another, such as when we group together on gender lines to oppose domestic violence. But we must not forget that none of these identities are stable or unitary.

Within her discussion, Lowe evokes the use of three terms—heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity—to describe the differences in the processes that form the identities of ethnic groups. Her intent in promoting these expressions is to offer a broader image of ethnic groups beyond the dominant stereotypical image. Heterogeneity is used to describe the variances that exist within a bounded category, e.g. members of the same ethnic group may come from different nations or economic and social backgrounds, and may be male or female, to name a few. Hybridity is, in short, cultural intermixing on account of histories of oppression or colonial rule; for example, the racial and linguistic fusions found in the Philippines and among the

Filipinos in the U.S. can be traced back to their history of Spanish colonialism, U.S. colonization, and U.S. neocolonialism (138). Finally, multiplicity is the notion that each person has multiple subjectivities, like race, gender, ethnicity, etc. The combination of all these facets within an individual forms unique, hybrid identities.

Multiple Identities of South Asian Immigrants

In this thesis I suggest the use of the concept of “multiple identities” to describe the different identities that exist among members within an ethnic group. I offer this proposition because I feel that there are marked differences amongst individuals that may not be completely addressed by the concept of unitary identity alone.

Conventional discussions of diasporic identity are limited to acknowledging that those in the diaspora may recognize the existence of at least two or more identities within themselves, e.g. in the case of South Asians, they are simultaneously Asian and American, while their Asian identity can be broken further down into an even more specific subset. However, individuals belonging to the same ethnic group (e.g. South Asian) may behave and respond to the world in strikingly different ways due to the various subjectivities they possess. A first-generation South Asian woman will not act the same as a second-generation man. Furthermore, conventional representations of the Asian American identity are inclined to reducing Asian American culture to a clash between generations within the private home sphere, as highlighted by Lisa Lowe. However, culture is not just something static passed “vertically” from one generation to the next, as Lowe has pointed out, but is also shared “horizontally” among communities (136), even crossing boundaries of gender, race, and national origin. The fusion of the aforementioned traits is what constitute my theory of “multiple identities.”

Hall’s identity, Bhabha’s hybridity, Crenshaw’s intersectionality, and Lowe’s

heterogeneity and multiplicity each encompass a specific facet of identity that I believe to be important to the construct of a complete diasporic ethnic identity. Hall's identity is the basic foundation for my concept of identity. I borrow from his view that identity is both a pluralist and essentialist construction, that it is a simultaneous process of being and becoming. I want to employ Bhabha's version of hybridity as a basis for my own definition of hybridity. As previously described, his form of hybridity belongs to the second, deconstructive view, which I believe is the most applicable for my research considering my subject material. I wish to stress the deconstructive aspect of cultural hybridity. Therefore, I choose to utilize the second, or otherwise Bhabha's, model of hybridity to formulate my own version of hybridity, multiple identities, to assess the diasporic characters in Lahiri's repertoire. Bhabha's hybridity deconstructs the preexisting notion of a dominant-oppressed duality; the group that is normally viewed as the dominant side (e.g. the colonizer) is dethroned from its seat of power by a reading of the narrative of the oppressed group (e.g. the colonized). The balance of power between the two groups is evened out. Hybridity within multiple identities, then, is the viewing of the cultures of the host and home identities to be equally weighted at the outset.¹¹ For example, Asian and American identities are both present within South Asians, and these identities are constantly in the process of affecting one another, but essentially neither is "stronger" than the other. It is only through the introduction of subjectivities that a certain side becomes more apparent and marked.

With regards to subjectivities, I use Crenshaw and Lowe's work as the foundation for my critical framework to formulate my concept of multiple identities. The theories I chose to integrate within my own "multiple identities" are Crenshaw's

¹¹ Although I only make the distinction here between identities consisting of cultures from two locations, I intend for "multiple identities" to be applicable to an individual with any number of identities, which is discussed on the following page.

intersectionality and Lowe's heterogeneity and multiplicity. Multiplicity can be seen as an (unintended, perhaps?) offshoot of intersectionality, since, in addition to the gender/ethnicity overlap, multiplicity encompasses all the other subjectivities available to the common person. Multiplicity can also be extended to cover the category of generation, which is an important construct within multiple identities. Heterogeneity, then, calls attention to the differences within an enclosed group, which echoes my desire to highlight the discrepancies about that exist within the South Asian or any other specific ethnic group. I bring together these three perspectives on identity to create a more versatile method of imagining ethnic identity.

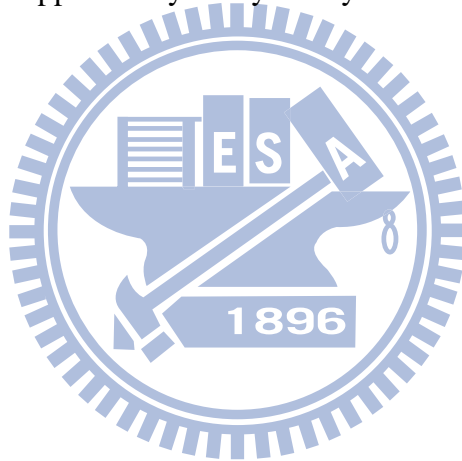
I suggest the term "multiple identities" as a way to visualize how members from the same ethnic group but belonging to different subjectivities behave and react, in an attempt to challenge the relatively flat representations painted by stereotypes and general definitions of any ethnic group. I chose to use "multiple identities" because it can effectively reflect the situation of the diasporic ethnic group. And I use the plural form of identity to highlight the presence of more than one identity existing within the diasporic individual. By doing so, I do not mean to obliterate the theory of identity but instead to add a more personalized perspective to its universal outlook. Rather than categorizing ethnic groups by their racial backgrounds alone, we can also deal with the issue of generational differences, taking into consideration each groups' historical experiences and contexts, as well as the gender factor. The term "multiple identities" is to be used to describe subjects with two or more identities. The identities they take up are considered to be distinctive but also mutually interdependent on each other, meaning that the identities can be analyzed by themselves but, even so, will also be unintentionally influenced by other identities and constantly in flux; this is consistent with Hall's pluralist/essentialist establishment of identity, Bhabha's insistence that hybridity is more a process than an event, Crenshaw's belief in an interrelated

network of forms of oppression, and Lowe's idea of a hybrid identity. The separate identities within multiple identities may not always be in agreement with each other, which may lead to a dilemma within the individual to choose which identity is better suited for the occasion. More than one identity may be in use at once, but there will always be a particular identity that will take the forefront. The more one develops her/his multiple identities, the more that individual defies fixed definitions and stereotypes.

Minorities within the ethnic group will have more issues with developing their grasp of multiple identities to full potential. Regardless of the reasons for immigrating to America, the first-generation patriarch is more often than not more well-prepared for the move, e.g. he has had previous linguistic training or has a driver's license. On the contrary, minorities within the immigrant groups may not be as lucky—the wives may experience more difficulty in trying to integrate with American society, therefore they are more likely to retreat to the comfort of their own houses. Therefore, compared to those that must go to work outside of the home, these women will not have as many opportunities to develop their multiple identities to aid them in swift navigation within the host culture. In other words, the more exposure one has to the host society, the more choices one has. These first-generation wives may develop a relatively lesser number of identities than their husbands and children, but their identities will be more pronounced and straightforward than those of their husbands and offspring, because they have a smaller number of subjectivities within their repertoire.

As a result of integration, South Asians find themselves adopting multiple ethnic identities—Asian, American, or South Asian. As previously mentioned, individuals belonging to certain ethnic groups exhibit various subjectivities that greatly influence their identity formation as well as their behavior. For instance, there is a significant

distinction evident in the behavior of the first generation in the private and public spheres, and these discrepancies become more observable when compared with the behavior of the second generation, who also exhibit behavioral patterns particular to their own generation. It is possible to lump all of these characteristics under Asian American or South Asian identity, but doing so would make it hard to draw attention to the existing differences amongst generations. To analyze this inconsistency among members of the same ethnic group when taking into consideration their different subjectivities, such as gender, generation, or ethnic background, I propose the use of “multiple identities.” In the next chapter, I relate multiple identities to gender roles in the attempt to validate the applicability of my theory.



Chapter Three

Gender Roles and Multiple Identities in Lahiri's Fiction

Following the theorization of “multiple identities” in the previous chapter, this section will focus on employing the theory to discuss diasporic identity to test its all-around range in terms of subjectivities. An identity is not a construct composed of one single component, nor is it a “taping-together” of separate elements; it is comprised of specific subjectivities that are particular to an individual which effect how their separate identities interact and merge with one another.

In this chapter, I apply multiple identities to the South Asian ethnic group, specifically to the characters within Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction. I chose to use Lahiri because the majority of discussions and critiques of her stories focus on intergenerational conflict or feminist readings, but I have yet to see an analysis that combines the two. My multiple identities can not only combine the two but also include gender roles. Another reason I chose Lahiri is because of her simple, clean prose, which makes it much easier to focus on the story and character development; I need not spend too much time on deciphering her text.

I chose the characters I did from Lahiri's stories because they all display the most complex instances of multiple identities for their gender and generation; they display both conventional and nonconventional identities which are influenced by their subjectivities. Mrs. Sen is the only first-generation housewife shown engaging in friendly interaction with Caucasian people and the only first-generation woman to try to learn how to drive, but she still continues to cook elaborate meals for her husband every day. Ruma's father is the only first-generation patriarch to lose all his connections with India and who subsequently changes from a conventional, distant father figure to a more laid-back, self-indulging person. Sudha is the only

second-generation woman who is shown to be need to become the parent figure to not just her family but her younger brother as well, but she also learns to let go of her responsibilities outside of the house. Gogol is the only second-generation man who comes to accept his duality as both South Asian and American, rather than distancing himself from his family as all the others do. These characters help to prove that, although they adhere to a fixed, conventional definition, they also defy definition because they exhibit behavior that runs against the norm because of their specific multiple identities.

Let us begin by imaging a typical post-1965 South Asian or Asian American immigrant household. We are likely to picture a nuclear family composed of a father, a mother, and their children. The father had a very good education back in India and came to America either to pursue further education or to look for a well-paying job. His professional expertise will ultimately land him a high-level job in the engineering or medical fields. His wife, whom he was arranged to marry, follows him to the United States from India, and she spends the majority of her time preparing meals and looking after the children. Their children, being born in America, will simultaneously absorb traits belonging to both cultures, choosing to soak up the traits from both ends. Because of their American upbringing, they will be more independent and liberal-minded, accepting many practices common to the U.S. and shunning the customs their parents uphold. They will breeze through college with impressive grades and grow up to be engineers or doctors like their fathers. They will not know much concerning their ethnic background nor will they speak much in their native tongue. They will only be allowed to marry other Indians. Female children will be taught how to cook Indian dishes and do household chores. Once they establish families of their own, the second-generation women will be pressured to give up their jobs in order to give their full attention to taking care of their family. Men, on the

other hand, will be pressured to become successful in their field of expertise, either through the attainment of recognition (in form of monetary grants, patents, and the like) or by rising in the ranks, although achieving both would be ideal.

The above is just a rough portrait of the mainstream stereotype of the standard South Asian or Asian American family. Gender plays a larger part in the construction of identity in Asian families because tradition limits the female to the household domain. In India, despite the increase of global influence a large amount of citizens still adhere to traditional customs and concepts. Their cultural identity, however, is very likely to experience some sort of transformation upon being introduced to another culture. I wish to argue that the multiple identities of immigrants and their offspring make it difficult if not impossible to list out a definite set of traits for individuals belonging to any generation or gender. In the case of Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, the South Asian immigrants often move from Calcutta to America, which is a relatively more liberal country. This may or may not influence their behavior and way of thinking, because not all immigrants will choose to change, and this will result in some discrepancy amongst individuals belonging to the same ethnic group. Moving to, living in, and growing up within America will only complicate the gender roles acknowledged and practiced by South Asians, because there will be a greater number of combinations and choices to made. The traditional stereotypical definitions of the first and second generations will no longer be enough to encompass the vast scope of characteristics present within the immigrants' multiple identities. I will utilize examples of female and male characters of the first and second generations within Lahiri's stories from *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, and *Unaccustomed Earth* to exemplify how these individuals are spread across the traditional-untraditional spectrum.

I divide my discussion into groups by gender and generation because I wish to

view Lahiri's characters through the horizontal perspective advocated by Lowe to position and analyze these characters from outside the familial structure, although I will also analyze characters in a vertical context as well. I justify my choice for dividing my discussions using generational scheme because I do not invoke the "vertical" perspective as a transmission of an unchanging culture from one generation to another; I do not focus on how the first generation passes on their culture to the second generation or how the second generation receives culture from their elders. Rather, I see generational status as a way to represent subjectivity.

Because it would take up too much space to offer separate in-depth analyses for all four characters, I will instead address what details concerning each character are rationalized with which theory. This way, we can understand which theories are capable of describing which behavior/identities, and thus we can also understand why the multiple identities approach is applicable. Hall's identity, which focuses on a singular/plural construct of identity, can be used to describe the bipolar positioning of the first and second generations, in that people of the first generation tend more toward an essentialist view of identity—they think of themselves as possessing (or being possessed of) a singular, unified past—whereas the second generation leans more toward a pluralist view of identity—the different South Asian and American cultures are what constitute their identities. In the case of Bhabha's hybridity, which is used to describe the balance of power and how cultures mix, hybridity can be used to describe the mixing of the characters' South Asian and American identities. They demonstrate hybridity as a mixing of the always already syncretic: they all are a combination of South Asian and American identities, and they are always in flux and ever changing. There is no absolute split existing between what is South Asian and what is American, as both influence each other. Crenshaw's intersectionality, which focuses on the intersections of gender and racial issues, can be used to describe how

Mrs. Sen's and Sudha's experiences as South Asian women differ from that of the men. Heterogeneity, from Lowe, is used to describe differences within border groups. This can be used to describe who is considered conventional or unconventional within, for example, the second-generation women. Lastly, multiplicity is used to describe the various subjectivities each individual has. Mrs. Sen is a first-generation South Asian woman. Ruma's father is a first-generation South Asian man.

However, each approach has its shortcomings. Identity is only a way of imagining the construct of identities, and therefore is not useful in uncovering how separate identities and subjectivities interact with each other. Hybridity is based on a large scale of ethnic identities, but in addition to ethnic identities we also need to pay attention to how subjectivities affect identity formation. Intersectionality is focused on only gender and ethnicity; all other subjectivities such as generation are overlooked. Heterogeneity and multiplicity all bring attention to the differences within groups but it misses the possible differences that could be constructed by overlapping differences or subjectivities. This is why I propose the use of multiple identities, a combination of the above, to provide a more inclusive imagining of the formation of ethnic identities.

The characters I have chosen to examine within the following sections all demonstrate behaviors that are both conventional and unconventional according to South Asian tradition, and are therefore demonstrating multiple identities. Likewise, all the characters are influenced by their distinctive subjectivities (e.g. gender, generational status) into making different choices regarding their identity formation, despite the similar backgrounds shared amongst those of the same generation (e.g. first-generation men and women are both raised in India but display vastly different identities). Mrs. Sen, a first-generation housewife from "Mrs. Sen's," still adheres to tradition but also ventures out of her house, even learning how to drive, actions that are not normally observed within other first-generation South Asian women. Ruma's

father from “Unaccustomed Earth” simultaneously retains both South Asian and American identities, a combination which results in surprising outcomes in his behavior. Sudha, a second-generation woman from “Only Goodness,” demonstrates both South Asian and American identities which, although separated by domestic and public spheres, still influence and change each other. Second-generation male Gogol from *The Namesake* struggles with coming to terms with his dual identities as both South Asian and American. I have chosen these examples to illustrate how complicated multiple identities are when South Asian identity comes into contact with American identity. Defining South Asians by only their ethnic group is not detailed enough, as offering a particular set of characteristics would not work to define individual South Asians and would only overlook their individualities.

Driving “Lessons”

A large portion of Lahiri’s works focus on the lives of South Asian women within the host society, which may stem from her own personal experience but may also be a way for her to bring attention to the traditionally silenced women within the South Asian diaspora. Although there is a sizeable amount of writing dedicated to first-generation women within Lahiri’s texts, it is harder to find instances in which these women willingly step out of the safety of their homes or even go against tradition. They mostly withdraw themselves from the host society, which makes it harder for them to fully develop their multiple identities because of their deliberate seclusion from the host culture. As I have previously mentioned, only individuals who engage in interaction with other cultures will develop complex instances of multiple identities; those who do not seek interaction, like the majority of first-generation women, while they may still formulate multiple identities, but these identities tend to be less complex due to the lack of roles absorbed through contact with the host

culture.

To begin our discussion, however, we need to first comprehend what constitutes the traditional image of first-generation South Asian women. The traditional image of what a female of the first generation should presumably emulate can be pieced together through the descriptions of first-generation female characters within Lahiri's tales. The majority of these women come to America accompanying their husbands (as opposed to immigrating alone), so they are automatically placed within the domestic sphere as housewives. These women are expected to assume the everyday responsibilities familiar to the common housewife: keeping the house tidy and in order, taking care of and educating the children, and cooking meals. Despite living a continent and an ocean away from their in-laws, these mothers still "never cut corners" and ran their households "as if to satisfy a mother-in-law's fastidious eye" (*UE* 22).¹² In addition to maintaining the cleanliness of their homes, the bulk of their time is spent preparing elaborate meals for family and/or guests. In the case of Mrs. Sen from "Mrs. Sen's," for instance, Lahiri dedicates in detail how she spends an hour each afternoon chopping vegetables and preparing ingredients, filling up countless colanders and bowls, for "merely dinner for herself and Mr. Sen" (*IM* 117).¹³ She is even willing to go out of her way just to procure ingredients for her meals; for instance, she is eager to take the bus and later on even drive to the fish market to pick up fresh mackerel. The amount of time spent in preparation and cooking for their guests shows just how much Indians pride themselves in entertaining their guests well, and this attribute is not lost on those who have immigrated to the United States.

First-generation women are also responsible for educating children about their homeland. The mother figures within Lahiri's stories pass on their culinary knowledge

¹² Further mentions of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* within citations will be shortened to *UE*.

¹³ Further mentions of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* within citations will be shortened to *IM*.

and experience to their daughters, which is a method of transmitting culture onto the next generation (a practice Lahiri attests to herself in the auto-biographical article “The Long Way Home: Bengal by way of Julia Child”). Another way in which these women pass on their tradition is through teaching their children their native tongue. However, not all children are so easily taught, and some may refuse to act in response, choosing otherwise to reply only in English—a cruel but very real reminder for mothers that they are trying to raise American children to be Indian. Yet, these women still generally adhere to Indian standards of raising their children which more often than not becomes a source of embarrassment for their offspring. A few experiences are shared by the first-person narrator Hema in “Once in a Lifetime,” the first story in the second part of *Unaccustomed Earth*. On special occasions, Hema would be dressed against her will in a traditional outfit, such as the one sent by her grandmother from Calcutta, which she disliked for the inseam of the wide pants was stamped with a large purple seal. When she was thirteen years old, Hema was still wearing flower-printed undershirts while all the other girls in school already wore bras. Upon being approached by a saleswoman pointing out training models, Hema’s mother expressed her disapproval: “Oh, no, she’s far too young” (*UE* 239). The most notable case that appears within the story concerns Hema wanting to sleep alone and her mother refuses to grant her wish because it is an “American practice.” Hema recalls her struggle with her mother:

My mother considered the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice and therefore did not encourage it, even when we had the space. She told me that she had slept in the same bed as her parents until the day she was married and that this was perfectly normal. But I knew that it was not normal, not what my friends at school did, and that they would ridicule me if they knew. The summer before I started middle school, I insisted on

sleeping alone. In the beginning my mother kept checking on me during the night, as if I were still an infant who might suddenly stop breathing, asking if I was scared and reminding me that she was just on the other side of the wall. (*UE* 229)

Typical American children are told to sleep in their own rooms as soon as possible, in order to pave the road for and facilitate their eventual independence, regardless of gender. In terms of South Asian tradition, however, as Hema's mother attests, children are to sleep in the same bed as their parents until they are married off. Though Hema's mother views sleeping alone as a "cruel American practice," it is likely that an American from mainstream society would think the same of her insistence on letting Hema sleep beside her and her husband.

These women are also very protective of their children's safety, credibly so because they themselves are just getting acquainted to their new surroundings; without prior knowledge or experience to base their opinions on, it is only normal for them to be less trusting of the unfamiliar environment.¹⁴ Take for instance Chitra in "Year's End," who constantly feels like her children will be harmed by the American environment, and as a result refuses to let them go outside without her supervision—even objects within the family property are subject to her distrust, such as the pool in the backyard and the staircase in their house without handrails.

A further shared characteristic of the first-generation women is their frugality. Hema's mother "inherits" bags of boy's clothes from Kaushik's mom¹⁵ when the latter moves back to India and places them away, even bringing them along when they

¹⁴ In an interview with Sandip Roy-Chowdhury, Lahiri agrees with the interviewer that "immigrants, no matter how long they live here [in America], never quite feel safe."

¹⁵ Hema and Kaushik's mothers are both first-generation South Asian women from "Once in a Lifetime." Hema's mother behaves in a manner typical to first-generation wives, as previously discussed. On the contrary, Kaushik's mother behaves in an Americanized manner and is therefore a rare specimen, since most first-generation women adhere to the traditional standards of South Asian conduct.

moved a few years later, and when Hema objected to wearing the “ugly” clothes, her mother “refused to replace them” (*UE* 226). Later, upon hearing that Kaushik’s mother had flown first-class back to the United States, Hema’s mother scoffs at her self-indulgence, stressing that “[t]welve people could have flown for the price of that one first-class ticket” (*UE* 236). Hema’s family is used to shopping in Sears, a supermarket-like department store that is known for carrying a variety of merchandise at economical prices, and her mother is used to ordering cosmetics from Avon; Kaushik’s family, who are much more profligate in their purchasing habits, shop at Jordan Marsh, a more high-end department store.

There are several critical differences which may severely dampen the desire of first-generation housewives to leave the relative security of their home. These women are incapable of living on their own because they are so occupied with the upkeep of their families within the South Asian community; if you removed them from either their family or uprooted them from the local South Asian immigrant community, they would be at a loss of what to do. They are afraid of isolation because they are already experiencing “the isolation of living in an American suburb,” which is “more solitude than [most] could bear” (*UE* 29). These women are used to living in environments where you need only to “raise your voice a bit, or express grief of joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements” (*IM* 116). Conversely, in America, these women grow “afraid because [they] cannot see neighbors” (*IM* 270) and find themselves regularly left at home alone, isolated from the outside world.

Moreover, before the 1990s women in India did not think it proper to drive,¹⁶

¹⁶ One reason for this is that before the 1990s, in the eyes of the average Indian, driving was still an essentially male-dominated domain, so to see a woman behind the wheel was “quite a discovery”; most travelled using public transportation or hired chauffeurs (“Women”). Additionally, some women may have problems putting aside their pride to drive by themselves, a job that has been customarily undertaken by men from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

meaning that most of these immigrant women lack any means of getting around, apart from walking around on their two feet or taking public transportation. When Chitra in “Year’s End” is asked if she would want to learn how to drive, she replies negatively, “not as if she were incapable, but as if driving were beneath her” (*UE* 270). This refusal to learn to drive and, subsequently, to integrate into American society, further isolates them within the confines of their domestic domain.

The most obvious discrepancy lies in their physical appearance and clothing, which mark them as visibly different from the local Americans, further diminishing their desire to leave the house. Eliot, the white American boy Mrs. Sen is babysitting, mistakes her vermilion-shaded part for a cut on her scalp or a bug-bite. Ruma from “Unaccustomed Earth” remarks how her mother sticks out “in her brightly colored saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi, her jewels” (*UE* 11). Their husbands can choose to exchange their tailored shirts and pants for ready-made clothing readily found in American stores, but the saris and sandals unique to the first-generation woman’s style of dressing cannot be replaced so easily (*Namesake* 65). This may be another reason why first-generation women are less willing to venture out of the house.

First-generation women are only able to develop multiple identities if they step outside of the house and mingle with the locals. An example of a woman who dares to venture forth into “unaccustomed earth” is Mrs. Sen. She corresponds as an example of a first-generation South Asian woman with multiple identities because she simultaneously possesses several identities at once, since she is of South Asian descent but also an immigrant to America. Other subjectivities which influence her include her first-generation status, her female gender, and her domestic role as a wife. Within her story she repeatedly oscillates between her identities as a South Asian woman and a woman in America with South Asian origins. She differs from the norm because she is willing to interact with native inhabitants and, in her frustration to

procure fresh fish for her cooking, she is prepared to try her hand at driving.

Ultimately, it is her fear of isolation that prompts her to seek out a companion in Eliot and to leave the household, a concern that most traditional first-generation women share but do not actively attempt to change. Mrs. Sen's story begins when she takes up a job babysitting Eliot, an eleven year-old American boy. The two get along rather nicely, perhaps because both share feelings of loneliness—Eliot lives with his mother, who rarely offers him the affection ordinarily granted children, in a secluded beach house, and Mrs. Sen finds her new environment too lonely for her liking compared to the familiar, clamorous, extended family structure common in India—yet find comfort within the foreign yet friendly Eliot. Both can be considered inexperienced, Eliot in the sense that he is only a child, and Mrs. Sen in the sense that she knows relatively little about America. Mrs. Sen, capable of undertaking the role of a grown, married woman within Indian society, reverts to the state of a child upon immigration to the United States: she knows less about the country than an eleven year-old boy and she is incapable of moving around freely on her own, trapped within the confines of her own home. As both of them are children in their own sense, they cannot leave the household without the supervision of an adult; the irony lies in the fact that although Mrs. Sen is older in age, the true adult between the two is Eliot, who displays a maturity and self-reliance past his years in addition to knowing comparatively more about the U.S. than Mrs. Sen. Within the story, Mrs. Sen herself observes and admires Eliot for his wisdom beyond his years (*IM* 123).

At the beginning of the story, Eliot's mother is looking for a babysitter for her son: "Eliot is eleven. He can feed and entertain himself; I just want an adult in the house, in case of an emergency'" (*IM* 111). However, Mrs. Sen, the woman who she has contacted for the job, does not know how to drive. The juxtaposition of the two statements "I just want an adult in the house" and "But Mrs. Sen did not know how to

drive” seem to suggest that Mrs. Sen does not qualify as an adult precisely because of her inability to drive (*IM* 111). Within American society, learning to drive is an indication of maturity and adulthood. Despite the fact that Mrs. Sen is around thirty years old, her immobility marks her as still a child in the eyes of many Americans. Once in America, she lacks even basic knowledge about the country and its traditions, and she is deprived of a full-time chauffeur as she used to be, and can only able to call on her husband when he is not busy at his office to drive her around. She is consequently confined to her home.

In a sense Mrs. Sen is portrayed as an adult who was capable of functioning within South Asian society but is now forced to relapse into a lifestyle not unlike that of a child’s when placed within the host society.¹⁷ Mrs. Sen is restricted to the same moving space as Eliot is, and they are both stuck inside the house unless they choose to ride public transportation or enlist the help of an adult to drive them around. Being no more mobile than a minor, Mrs. Sen has to rely upon her husband for a number of tasks, particularly those concerning transportation, just like a child would look up to their own parents or another adult to drive them to different locations.¹⁸

In India, Mrs. Sen can no doubt manage to move around freely on her own accord. She has her own chauffeur to drive her around, she knows how to navigate herself amongst the streets and alleyways she grew up in, and she understands the local culture and traditions. The Indian concept of a grown, traditional woman does not include the ability to drive; in fact, many women view learning how to drive a car

¹⁷ Also worthy of mention is Mrs. Sen’s lack of common knowledge concerning America, which also likens her to a child that has yet to learn about a particular society.

¹⁸ Although not explicitly mentioned within this story, it can be observed in other stories such as “Unaccustomed Earth” that the overdependence of the first-generation wives on their husbands could give rise to excessive stress for the latter, as we have seen in the way Ruma’s father runs away from the heavy responsibility of assuming the role of the main patriarch; he turns down Ruma’s offer for him to move in with her family because he knows she needs a man in the house to share her responsibilities and he feels too old to have others depend on him. He is relieved to be rid of the responsibility of supporting an entire family, either emotionally or physically.

to be beneath them, like Chitra in “Year’s End” has stated. Mrs. Sen may have a similar opinion of driving since she had her own chauffeur in India, but nevertheless she forces herself to learn so that she can go to the fish market on her own instead of having to ask her husband to take her. She is also more willing to take steps to adjust to life within American society because her husband promises things will get better once she receives her license.

Mrs. Sen’s willingness to try to learn how to drive is a move in the right direction, since it is the only way she can attain mobility and thus grow in status from child to grown adult. Unfortunately, she is unprepared to offer the serious attitude and full attention necessary to be able to get onto the street and drive without a hitch. Mrs. Sen takes driving too seriously and not seriously enough all at once. She approaches driving with the attention span and willpower of an elementary school student. And she is “continually distracted,” prone to suddenly stopping the car when she comes across any sort of disturbance, be it a news blurb on the radio or a bird in the middle of the street (*IM 120*). Either she spends a ridiculous amount of time backing out of the parking space or she leans all the way forward to pin down the brake when confronted with the main road lined with cars hurtling past (*IM 120*). What she does not do in excess, she does to an inadequate degree. Mrs. Sen, in her half-hearted approach to driving, shows that she does not view it as a genuinely important action that can shape her adjustment to American society as a successful or disastrous process, but she rather thinks it to be only an optional achievement. If she thought otherwise, she would be more determined and pay more attention to learning how to drive, rather than being constantly distracted by the environment.

On her first escapade driving to the fish market by herself, Mrs. Sen gets into an accident and subsequently withdraws herself from taking any part in the host society, retreating back to the isolated seclusion of their house. If Mrs. Sen were able to obtain

a driver's license, she would have been freed entirely from the domestic prison that trouble most first-generation women (as opposed to those women who are too scared to go out on their own, e.g. Chitra, or those that are limited to areas within walking distance, e.g. Usha's mother from "Hell-Heaven"). Mrs. Sen's conflicting multiple identities are the reason for her inability to fully integrate into the host society. In traditional Indian societies, women are raised to be passive and dependent on others for their needs outside of the domestic sphere; they are not conditioned to exhibit behavior that could cause lethal consequences with the exception of wielding a sharp kitchen knife. Mrs. Sen may be brave enough to try driving, but, because of her subjectivities as a first-generation South Asian woman, she is not prepared to take full responsibilities for her actions outside of the house. When she crashes her car, she thrusts all responsibility on her husband, only offering the phrase "Mr. Sen teaches mathematics at the university" when asked for the details of the accident (*IM* 134). This could stem from the conventional image of the patriarch as the main figure of the standard South Asian household; men are to deal with matters from the outer sphere and women are to deal with the domestic sphere. Despite Mrs. Sen's desire to "make things better" by integrating American elements and learning how to drive, her innate, passive, South Asian identity undermines her efforts, inducing her to choose to retreat back to the domestic sphere rather than continue forth after encountering setbacks.

Regrettably we are unable to observe a fully developed account of multiple identities within Lahiri's stock of first-generation women, because hybridity does not seem to be a plausible option for them; it is an either-or situation for these women, because they are either engineered to adhere entirely to tradition or they disregard ethnic customs completely. Only the bolder women are more likely to challenge tradition, because the majority of first-generation women are afraid of their husbands abandoning them; they will only dare to venture into untraditional territory if they

have the express permission of their husbands to do so (such as Mrs. Sen's driving) or if they hold others' opinions of them in disregard. First-generation women are worse off than their daughters because a good number of them come to America in their husbands' footsteps involuntarily, if only out of wifely duty. Consequently, they are less prepared physically and mentally for the move, so they have no choice but to depend upon their husbands for survival in unfamiliar surroundings. Therefore, only a relatively small amount of women choose to take the path less travelled.

The Unconventional Patriarch

In this section we will analyze the character of Ruma's father from *Unaccustomed Earth's* titular story, a first-generation South Asian man who defies the stereotype and openly embraces American values. He counts as a valid example of multiple identities because of his concurrent identities as a South Asian male who has immigrated to America. His subjectivities include his first-generation status, his male gender, and his social roles as a husband, father, and grandfather. He alternates between his South Asian and American identities within the text, although his South Asian identity largely corresponds to his past self and his American identity with his present character.

This protagonist is without a given name, which may be a practice used by Lahiri to emphasize the universality of his story, much like the example of the nameless protagonist in "The Third and Final Continent." Rather than using Ruma's father's story as a general account for all first-generation men, however, I think Lahiri leaves him nameless to highlight the relative ease with which these men fit into American society as opposed to their wives. Women in India are more oppressed and given fewer options in terms of their roles in society. Men, on the other hand, are less limited in their choices. Ruma's father's resemblance to the Americans in both

physical and mental facets is Lahiri's way of emphasizing the first-generation male's liberty to exercise his freedom of choice. Also, leaving him nameless and only offering a physical description of his clothes and appearance renders him even less Indian-like, as Ruma notes: "With his gray hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere" (*UE* 11).

After marrying and giving birth to a son, Ruma moves to Seattle, and her father has come to visit in their new home. After Ruma's mother died of surgical complications a year before the story begins, her father began travelling in Europe. Rather than mourning the loss of his wife, he seems decidedly at peace: "this was his life now, the ability to do as he pleased, the responsibility of his life absent" (*UE* 8). Losing his wife can therefore be likened to "freeing" himself of any ties with India (*UE* 7), something that does not happen regularly within the first generation.¹⁹ Liberated of his burdensome responsibilities as a father and husband, he begins to display American habits and ideals that would be unthinkable to the more conventional members of the first generation (which finds an ideal personification within the story as Ruma's deceased mother). Ruma, recalling how her father had behaved on past visits, only remembered him "claim[ing] an armchair in the living room, quietly combing through the *Times*, . . . behaving as if he were waiting for the time to pass," the polar opposite of her "helpful" mother, "taking over the kitchen, singing songs to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine" (*UE* 6). As illustrated above, taking care of children and

¹⁹ Rather, most first-generation South Asians are afraid of their children's ties to India being severed after they (the first generation) die. The narrator in "The Third and Final Continent" reveals this fear when he speaks of his wife and he "driv[ing] to Cambridge to visit [their son], or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die" (*IM* 197). Lahiri reveals in her piece "To Heaven Without Dying" that she authored this part into the story as a way of displacing her own anxiety of her fear of her parents' death. She has not yet experienced the death of either of her parents and yet she knows that once they die they will take with them a part of her life that no-one else will be able to replace, because of their similar immigrant experiences.

various jobs around the house are typically designated as the concerns of women within South Asian households. However, the loss of his kinfolk brings about several changes in the father's lifestyle and mentality. Losing his wife means that he has to pick up the chores his wife used to do, such as cooking, doing the laundry, or helping to take care of his grandson. He is forced to incorporate the feminine roles of mother and wife into his roles as father and husband. Ruma is surprised to find in this latest visit her father actively interacting with Akash and helping out with the chores around the house. This change in gender roles grants him the opportunity to finally connect with his daughter, whom "he'd felt condemned by, on his wife's behalf" (*UE* 40). By engaging in activities usually reserved for women within South Asian households, Ruma's father lessens the distance between his daughter and himself.

Another variation from tradition is her father badgering Ruma about whether she plans on returning to the workplace despite knowing that in addition to Akash she is pregnant with another baby. Traditional parents would have been "supportive and proud" of her decision to resign from her "fifty-hour [week]" "six [figure]" job at a New York law firm to become a full-time mother, as Ruma's own mom would have been (*UE* 36). But Ruma's father holds a more liberal stance on the subject, encouraging her to seek reemployment so that she can be self-reliant: "Self-reliance is important, Ruma ... Life is full of surprises. Today, you can depend on Adam, on Adam's job. Tomorrow, who knows" (*UE* 38). He is endorsing the concept of self-reliance that stems from the American concept of individuality, a notion that lies in direct contrast with the Indian belief that women should stay at home and be dependent on men to support the family. Within American society, children are usually expected to become independent as soon as they are capable, which means getting a job to support oneself economically and living outside of their parents' house; self-reliance, then, becomes a factor in determining whether or not an

individual is considered successful by the general standard. In India and other Asian countries, however, children customarily live in the same house as their parents and rely on them economically until they marry, a practice particularly common with daughters. Daughters are not expected to take up jobs to support the family, are traditionally encouraged to stay in the house, to take care of the children and to cook and clean. Therefore, Ruma's father, being a first-generation South Asian man, would most likely have been taught growing up that the role of married women should consist of taking care of her children, cooking, and tidying up the house. Thus, it comes as a surprise for Ruma that, instead of supporting her for quitting her job, her father is more concerned with her mental and financial stability (*UE 38*), elements essential for surviving soundly and on one's own.

Yet another disparity is centered around a major issue that runs throughout the course of the story: Ruma's dilemma of whether she should ask her father to come live with them in Seattle: "in India, there would have been no question of his not moving in with her," but "[h]er father had never mentioned the possibility" (*UE 6*). When she finally decides to offer the invitation to her father, however, he turns it down with the excuse that although his daughter needed him, "it was not what he wanted" (*UE 53*) and that "he enjoyed solitude" (*UE 28*). The choice to place his own personal desires over that of his daughter reflects a change in his identity as most Indian parents would have favored moving in with their children, since it is the generally accepted practice in India. Furthermore, amongst the roles he possesses, his role as a father should be the most prominent, since the family is the most important element in almost all of the first-generation males' lives. This radical change most likely has roots in the death of his wife, who figures as the only permanent link he has left with India (his parents are deceased, relatives non-existent). Upon her death, Ruma's father is simultaneously freed of any connection to India and, in the process,

cut free of the need to keep up appearances. Meaning, without any other native Bengalis around to judge him according to his behavior, he is free to do as he pleases, much like the more liberal Americans. He recalls that before his wife's death, he was constantly striving to make his wife happy, always pressured to do things only his wife enjoyed or desired: the yearly trips to India, which "his wife had lived for," were full of anxiety, sadness, and shame for him (*UE* 8); and he feels that "his wife had been overly demanding, unwilling to appreciate the life he'd worked hard to provide" (*UE* 40).

Unlike when he still had to carry the burden of a family on his shoulders, he is now free to choose what he wants to do since he is freed of wedlock and his children have grown into independent entities. Continuing in this vein, he has met a Bengali woman, Mrs. Bagchi, on his trips to Europe, and he is hesitant to tell his daughter about his new acquaintance. Although the two initially bonded on account of being the only Bengalis within the tour group, feelings grew between them over time, and they have progressed to sharing a room on their trips abroad. He falls for Mrs. Bagchi because "she expected so little" (*UE* 9), which is the exact opposite of his wife, as we previously mentioned. Happy to be freed from marital burden, he appreciates Mrs. Bagchi's resolve to never re-marry or share her house with another man, "conditions which made the prospect more appealing" (*UE* 9); being with her will never weigh him down with any amount of responsibility. Ruma's father is not, however, looking for a physical relationship, citing "the consequence of being married all those years, the habit of companionship" as the motive for his actions (*UE* 30). Nonetheless, it is a logical deduction to state that Ruma's father is engaged in an emotional affair with Mrs. Bagchi, even though Lahiri never refers to their relationship as such. They only plan to meet on their trips abroad and out of their families' sights. Upon returning home, they go back to their daily lives and routine, keeping contact through the

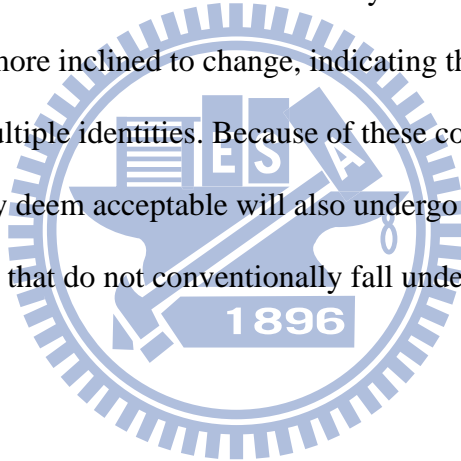
occasional e-mails or post cards mailed in secret.

Nevertheless, he worries about Ruma finding out about Mrs. Bagchi because of the unconscious link he has made between Ruma and his wife. He repeatedly draws parallels between the two, first mentioning Ruma's "haunting" and uncanny physical likeness to her mother (*UE* 27), which makes him unable to bear looking at her directly, then expressing his disbelief that Ruma's current life is reminiscent of "the early years of his marriage, the years for which his wife had never forgiven him" (*UE* 40).²⁰ Since he essentially sees his daughter and his wife as a single entity, he does not intend to make his affair known to Ruma. When she was still alive, Ruma and his wife were allies, so to Ruma's father any negative sentiments felt by Ruma's mother, such as resentment or disappointment, would have been passed down to Ruma through her mother's complaints. So it comes as no wonder that Ruma's father cannot open up to his daughter about Mrs. Bagchi because he believes confessing would only result in a negative response from Ruma. Despite it being acceptable for widowers to remarry within Indian society, Ruma's father believes that his wife continues to live on within his daughter, which explains his guilt and the difficulty he has in admitting his affair.

Immigrating to the United States offers the first generation different alternatives and gives them the choice to choose how to live their lifestyle or to do as they wish. They are offered a different set of gender roles that are deemed acceptable within the host society, which, if incorporated within their primary values, can result in a complex identity. They are no longer forced to conform as strictly to tradition as they would do in India, since there is no pressure from relatives or friends. However, it is necessary to mention that Ruma's father is a unique case because most

²⁰ Ruma's mother had expressed an enduring hatred for the loneliness brought about by their move to America: "The isolation of living in an American suburb, something about which his wife complained and about which he felt responsible, had been more solitude than she could bear" (*UE* 29).

first-generation South Asians will still retain ties with other immigrants despite losing their spouses, meaning that these men will usually remain fairly faithful to tradition. Ruma's father finds greater ease in adopting and practicing American customs because of the complete severing of his ties to India; he even goes so far to move to a new house to escape from his old life, to distance himself from his Bengali friends (UE 30). He is an extreme example of how assuming multiple identities can affect one's perspective on gender roles, transforming from a traditional South Asian husband-father figure to a more complicated synthesis of both South Asian and American elements. On the whole, compared to their wives, first-generation men have an easier time adapting to life in America because they are less restricted in their behavior, making them more inclined to change, indicating that they will exhibit more complex examples of multiple identities. Because of these compound multiple identities, the values they deem acceptable will also undergo changes, resulting in a propensity to adopt roles that do not conventionally fall under the male gender category.



Cultural Navigators

Conventional images of second-generation women are either depicted as belonging to one or another of bipolar opposites: either the women adhere more to an Indian definition of a daughter or they lean more toward an American model. However, although these portraits may seem like they are placed on two opposing ends of a spectrum, many second-generation women tend to combine both images within one body, gradually transforming from one to another or switching between them as they see fit, which is not unlike the hybridized identities we covered in the first chapter and the extended concept of multiple identities, a process that we will discuss in further detail within our discussion below. There is an indistinct boundary

present between conventional and unconventional, and most girls end up inadvertently crossing the border a number of times during the course of a day or a lifetime. The second-generation women are thus a less stable group, which places them in a separate class from the other categories.

Sudha from “Only Goodness” will be our focus for this section. Sudha corresponds as an example of multiple identities because she is the American-born daughter of two South Asian parents. Her subjectivities include her second-generation status, her female gender, and her domestic roles as a daughter, older sister, mother, and wife. As previously mentioned, multiple identities within second-generation women will be even more complicated and flexible due to their initial upbringing within a traditional South Asian household situated within American society. Within the household, they will need to demonstrate adherence to the more traditional South Asian image of a good daughter or sibling, whereas outside of the house, out of the view of their parents and other elder South Asians, they will be more liberated to act in a more American fashion to fit in within the host society. These women are cultural navigators, displaying identities that are on the whole split between the domestic and public spheres. However, this split is not a clean divide between the two spheres, as identities from either end may interfere with those from the opposite side. In other words, although a second-generation woman may act in a generally more American manner outside the house, there are still times when her South Asian identity may intervene or contradict portions of her “public” image, and vice-versa. We will utilize instances of this happening within Sudha to further describe and clarify the process in action.

Sudha is the elder of two children in her family, a responsible older sister who diligently undertakes the responsibilities expected of her. Within the domestic domain, she is first and foremost a sister and daughter. When her younger brother Rahul is

born, Sudha makes it her responsibility to ensure that he would go through the full experience of what being an American child of mainstream society should be like, because she “had slipped through the cracks” (*UE* 136), being born earlier in a time when their parents did not have excess money or time to spend on her. She “sought out all the right toys for him,” asked her parents for suitable books, “told her parents to set up sprinklers on the lawn,” “convinced her father to put a swing set in the yard” (*UE* 136), always counseling her parents on the “correct” way to raise Rahul as a child of America. Her early participation with her brother’s upbringing, then, gradually has some bearing on the role she is expected to fill in in regards to her brother—ultimately, her parents rely too much on her advice concerning the proper way to raise Rahul and they end up habitually asking Sudha to lecture and reprimand him for his inappropriate behavior when they are too apprehensive to do so themselves.²¹ She is transformed from just Rahul’s sister to Rahul’s caretaker, taking over her parents’ roles. This can be partially attributed to the fact that her parents, having settled down and raising children in a foreign country, may not be familiar with situations like these because they might not be commonplace affairs within traditional Indian society. On the other hand, Sudha, having been born and raised in America, can receive larger amounts of information or knowledge from her everyday surroundings, such as school or the workplace, where she is likely to interact with native Americans. Consequently, because of her familiarity with American society, Sudha’s parents also count on her to do a lot for them:

²¹ Initially, Rahul is, like Sudha, a source of his parents’ pride, exceedingly exceptional regardless of his looks or his educational achievements. His family is proud to see him accepted to Cornell, but little do they know that upon his detachment from the family, things begin to go awry. He begins to nurse a craving for alcohol that seems to grow exponentially over the course of the narrative, spiraling into a full-blown addiction to alcohol. His grades plummet and he drops out. Eventually he takes up a management job at a Laundromat in town, a post that greatly embarrasses his parents, before suddenly eloping with his much-older girlfriend. The once-flaunted ideal son figure becomes the anti-role model within their Bengali community and the bane of the family. A more detailed look into his motives for change is offered within the following section.

[Her parents] relied on their children, on Sudha especially. It was she who had to explain to their father that he had to gather up the leaves in bags, not just drag them with his rake to the woods opposite the house. She, with her perfect English, who called the repair department at Lechmere to have their appliances serviced. (*UE* 138)

Her cultural and linguistic familiarity with the host culture fosters her parents' inclination to cast her as more than just a daughter. She is, like the character Romi from "Unaccustomed Earth," cast into the roles of "her father's oldest son" and "her mother's secondary spouse" (*UE* 36), undertaking several responsibilities that most South Asian first-generation parents would have trouble dealing with, but which most second-generation offspring could navigate with ease. During her visits, she "[gives] herself fully to her parents, watching Wimbledon with her father on television, helping her mother cook and order new blinds for the bedrooms" (*UE* 139). This complex fusion of roles as a daughter, sister, parent, caretaker, oldest son, and secondary spouse is a result of Sudha's upbringing as a second-generation South Asian American.

Outside of the house, Sudha does not abstain from engaging in inappropriate behavior, but she differs from her brother in that she continues to act according to her parents' wishes and expectations in front of them:

Sudha had waited until college to disobey her parents. Before then she had lived according to their expectations, her person scholarly, her social life limited to other demure girls in her class, if only to ensure that one day she would be set free.²² Out of sight in Philadelphia she studied diligently,

²² On a somewhat off-topic yet still related note, it is interesting that many daughters act obedient in front of their parents while adopting a secondary and perhaps not so docile character out of sight of their parents. So, is this the only way that these girls can "ensure one day that [they] will be set free"? Sons, on the other hand, like Rahul, do not seem as pressured to act in accordance with tradition, and are more free to behave as they wish—or at least, this seems the norm in Lahiri's stories. Sudha

double-majoring in economics and math, but on weekends she learned to let loose. (*UE* 129)

Having finally won the trust of her parents by scrupulously suppressing her own desires, she is granted a break from the more demanding roles projected upon her by her family, finally able to engage on a search for her “real” self. During this phase of exploration, she still maintains a good scholarly persona to assure her physical freedom, which in turn allows her to seek out sexual encounters and activities her parents would frown on if they knew. Despite cultivating a second, less obedient personality, Sudha discovers that she still prefers her more obedient self to her mischievous half upon learning what her limits were and coming to understand that anything in excess did not appeal to her. In spite of letting loose outside of the supervision of her parents, she continues to make her parents proud by “contributing to the grand circle of accomplishments Bengalis were making across the country,” making her way up to the position of a project manager in a London organization that promoted micro loans in poor countries (*UE* 151). Although she demonstrates her liberties on occasion, she still makes sure to keep up a good image within the South Asian community, e.g. how her parents, relatives, or close friends see her. Sudha may let her hair down and act more American, she still acts in a more traditional South Asian manner when she returns to her family. Although Sudha demonstrates both South Asian and American behavior patterns, her character is still primarily acting within values deemed acceptable by South Asian tradition. She has not taken up a specific identity belonging to either side but rather positions herself somewhere in between the two groups. We can observe in the example of Sudha that the line that

accounts her brother’s relative freedom a result of him “being a boy and being younger, and her parents being more at ease with the way things worked in America” (*UE* 137). However, might this be a blind spot of Lahiri’s that she is not sufficiently prepared to write about, being a second-generation South Asian female? Perhaps we may find another perspective of the situation in the writings of South Asian male authors.

divides second-generation women into “more Indian” or “more American” is actually very fine and prone to shifting abruptly. Second-generation women exhibit manners that correspond with both sides of the spectrum which is why it is hard to precisely pin down which side they belong to.

A possible reason for why this specific type of hybrid identity appears in second-generation women is because, firstly, traditional Asian societies are more demanding of women and keep them under more restrictions. The main source for this type of treatment stems from prevalent belief in male chauvinism within traditional Asian societies. Men are granted greater liberties and are permitted to pursue their desires. Women, on the other hand, are kept confined within domestic boundaries and firmly taught that a woman is only successful if she can adhere to tradition. In spite of these restrictions, second-generation South Asian women have the advantage of growing up in an American environment, so when they leave the house they can observe another country’s gender role standards at work and can choose to view these roles as a source of reference or integrate them into their own identities as they see fit. This is why two different sets of gender roles can be observed within a singular second-generation South Asian woman.

These second-generation women are more privileged than their mothers because they are offered a chance to embrace two cultures as their own, rather than being brought up with one cultural standard and being abruptly thrust into another completely foreign society. Therefore, their choices are broader than those offered to their mothers, most of which choose to retreat within the domestic sphere or stay limited to circles of only Bengali friends. Yet the one unchanging fact concerning these women is that there is no single definition in existence that could wholly summarize the assortment of second-generation female identities.

The Namesake

Similar to their female counterparts, second-generation South Asian men are cultural navigators as well, shifting between their American and South Asian identities as they move from the domestic sphere to the public sphere. Men, however, are more liberated than women, or at least this is the case within Lahiri's works. Therefore, in some aspects, men enjoy more freedom to choose their eventual careers and futures: the greater number of Lahiri's second-generation South Asian women hold careers in law or education, positions generally revered and deemed successful by traditional South Asians, whereas the men have more artistically based or less successful professions, such as being an architect, working on a film crew, or managing a small town Laundromat. The men, although free to choose what they want, often end up in positions less favorable than those achieved by the women counterparts. Gogol, the main protagonist of Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, is a good example. He corresponds as an example of multiple identities because he is born in America as a second-generation South Asian to his parents, Ashima and Ashoke, two Bengali immigrants from Calcutta. His subjectivities include his second-generation status, his male gender, and his social roles as a son, older brother, stand-in father figure after his father's death, husband, and ex-husband. Like previously mentioned, second-generation men also exhibit a split between the identities they exhibit at home and in public. They will be influenced by their initial upbringing within a traditional South Asian household situated within American society, however, they will not be as pressured to adhere to tradition as their female counterparts. This may stem from either the prevailing traditional concept of male chauvinism common to Asian societies or the fact that first-generation South Asian parents do not find it necessary to rein in their sons because they assume they will take the right path in due time (e.g. graduate from college with a medical, law, or engineering degree and land high-level

jobs within these fields). Upon discovering independence from their parents with learning how to drive and going off to college, these men realize that they can act according to American standards out of their parents' sight, and they consequently break loose from their families in order to fully exercise their newly-found freedom. Since they are not as behaviorally restricted within the household as women are, men are more prone to bringing their American halves into the domestic sphere, as opposed to women having to keep a fairly clean split between what is acceptable within or outside the domestic sphere. In Lahiri's stories, they usually gravitate more towards an Americanized identity, which in turn can affect their concepts of gender roles. Second-generation women are more likely to accept their ethnic ancestry, whereas men seem to shun or reject it, choosing to act more American rather than to retain their ethnic tradition. However, as in the case of Gogol, there are instances where second-generation men may encounter an upsetting event that jolts them into realizing that they, too, can choose to recognize and accept their South Asian heritage. Instead of rejecting their South Asian background, they can choose to incorporate it with their American upbringing as well.

The Namesake mainly revolves around Gogol's abhorrence of his given name, Gogol. It is initially given to him only as a pet name, a name that only his family members and close friends will use to address him by; he will be given another name, a "good name," for use in public. On his first day at kindergarten, however, despite his father's insistence on registering him as "Nikhil Ganguli," Gogol opposes the name-change when his father leaves, and henceforth he is known as Gogol. Even though he is adamant in his early years about not changing his name to Nikhil, in his teenage years he grows weary of the name Gogol, which seems to him a cruel joke played upon him by his parents, to name him after the surname of a famous author. As Gogol, the name he links to his South Asian heritage and his family, he becomes

disconnected from the American mainstream society: “Gogol does not date anyone in high school. ... He does not attend dances or parties. He and his group of [three] friends ... prefer to listen to records together” (*Namesake* 93). He constantly feels like he is constrained by the name “Gogol,” because it marks him as different: people constantly ask him how to pronounce it, what it means “in Indian” (*Namesake* 76). He also attempts to change his name: “At times he wishes he could disguise it, shorten it somehow... [b]ut Gogol, already short and catchy, resists mutation” (*Namesake* 76). The name Gogol distresses Gogol because it stands for everything that makes him distinct from Americans or the other second-generation South Asians, with names like Nikhil or Jayadev that can be shortened to Nick or Jay. This name forces him to abide to the traditional roles instilled in him by his parents, who urge him to join the math team, maintain an A average, and do not find it weird that their son has not started dating in high school nor has he gone to prom. Gogol himself cannot imagine him introducing himself as Gogol under potentially romantic circumstances (*UE* 76). So, in this sense, “Gogol” confines him to the roles that are alien to American standards.

He discovers at a university party that his other chosen name, Nikhil, bestows him with a new sense of freedom, and he boldly kisses a girl he meets for the first time: “[I]t hadn’t been Gogol who’d kissed Kim... Gogol had nothing to do with it” (*Namesake* 96). The name “Nikhil” is emancipating, empowering, so much so that he rushes to get an official name change before he goes off to college. As Nikhil, he can now freely approach women and easily “ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas” (*Namesake* 105). Gogol associates his identity as Nikhil as his Americanized identity, a name that does not set him apart from the crowd. He chooses to major in architecture, starts smoking, sneaks into clubs with fake IDs, and loses his virginity. To him, the names are two halves which share the same appearance, “indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different,” like Siamese twins

(*Namesake* 105). However, Gogol still believes that “Gogol” is his main identity, evidenced when he expresses fear in being “discovered,” as if “Nikhil” is a disguise he has to don rather than being just a name, a word. Therefore, to reinforce his identity as Nikhil, Gogol gradually distances himself from his home at Pemberton Road, where there the only people who still call him “Gogol” exist. By dissociating himself from his South Asian roots, Gogol finds that it gets increasingly easier for him to be accepted as someone more than just “Indian”: as Nikhil, he is even said to be capable of passing as Italian. Initially, he is delighted when his American girlfriend Maxine and her family comment on how different he is from his family and the other stereotypical images of South Asians. He revels in living under the same roof as an American family, eating the same food, taking part in and growing used to their everyday routine. During this period, he completely ignores his responsibilities as the eldest son in a South Asian family and turns his back on his mother and father, who routinely call his apartment only to get his answering machine. He prefers to spend his vacations with Maxine’s family in their spacious, elegant home, emulating their laid-back, indifferent attitude towards getting forward in life and the rest of the world. Taking part in the Ratchliffs’ lives allows Gogol to experience being “truly” American because, as he is caught up within their way of living, he is able to forget his ethnic background and the burdens his family has assigned him.

However, when his father dies, Maxine only offers the slightest bit of condolence for his loss, then tries to convince him to “get away from all this” (*Namesake* 182). “[T]his” could refer to the depressed tone spread amongst the surviving Gangulis, but it can also refer to the dull, cramped confines of the Ganguli house, surroundings that may be unpleasant or restricting to Maxine, who is used to a large, spacious, luminous environment. It could also refer to his ethnic background, which is a part of Gogol’s life that Maxine has never actively chosen to take a part in, which can be traced back

to Gogol's reluctance to introduce her to his family and past (of which he is greatly ashamed) and Maxine's comfort and ease with her own lifestyle. Her apathy towards Gogol's loss prompts him to realize her disinterest with those directly unrelated to her, a trait that runs opposite to the conduct of the South Asian community, who care for each other regardless of whether or not they have been previously associated. In general, South Asian communities are tied together not in terms of blood but rather seek out connections through their country of origin. Despite lacking prior associations, South Asians will reach out and lend a hand to any other South Asian or anyone somewhat related to their people, either through marriage or friendship. It upsets Gogol to see that Maxine and her family are only concerned with Gogol and not his family, although it is his entire family that has lost their patriarch; she tries to take him away from his family in Cambridge, to the effect that distancing him from his family will grant him the ability to grow indifferent about his loss. In contrast to Maxine, the other South Asian friends and acquaintances flood the house, filling the space left behind by their father with their incessant questions and presence, not trying to take them away from their home but rather helping them to deal with and to get used to their loss. By comparison, Maxine and her family are too caught up living their own lives that they forget about the world and reality, disillusioned by their inattentiveness to the rest of the world. As opposed to such an isolated, exclusive life, he decides to return to the relatively boisterous community of South Asians, where any person's business is everyone's business, and where he is known to everyone as Gogol rather than Nikhil.

Gogol reverts back to a more conventional South Asian son, returning to his mother's side on weekends, calling her every day. He also adopts his father's role in helping his mother mow the lawn, entertain guests, and drives her around town. He is arranged to be married to Moushumi, a second-generation South Asian introduced to

him by his mother. However, the marriage ends bitterly as Moushumi admits an affair with another man; Gogol's mother, Ashima, expresses her guilt for being so adamant in introducing the two to each other, for being partly responsible for her son's status as a divorced man at thirty-two. She thinks it fortunate that they belong to the second generation rather than her own, because they do not "[consider] it their duty to stay married ... That pressure has given way ... to American common sense" (*Namesake* 276). She celebrates the successful union of her daughter Sonia and Ben, her half-Jewish half-Chinese future son-in-law, whom Sonia met on her own, who she believes will bring happiness to her daughter. Ashima is conveying to the reader that adhering to tradition may not be the best direction to take, that perhaps being more accepting of other cultures and acting more American is the way to happiness and contentment.

Gogol, in distancing himself too far from his origins, has learned from his mistakes and also seems to believe in maintaining an identity that lies somewhere in between South Asian and American, taking pleasure in being part of a tightly bound community and family while also maintaining a solitary bachelor life out of his mother's sights. He comes to the conclusion that Nikhil and Gogol are two parts of the same person, that they are not placed in contrast to each other nor is one a disguise for the other. However, he also realizes that Nikhil is his external personality, the one that will "live on, publicly celebrated," and Gogol is "purposely hidden, legally diminished, now all but lost" (*Namesake* 290). Despite declaring Gogol to be "all but lost," in an earlier monologue he cites the name Gogol and the subsequent experiences he has as Gogol to be everything that forms, shapes, and determines who he is in the present (*Namesake* 287). His identity as Gogol, then, is not lost but rather lives on in his memories, is the portion of him that identifies as entirely South Asian and that surfaces only in front of his mother or sister, an identity that is subsumed

within his whole identity. His choice to use his Nikhil identity as his public entity does not mean he wishes to exhibit a simply Americanized identity. He uses the name “Nikhil” because it is his legalized name and it also highlights his identity as a second-generation South Asian in the U.S. Gogol is a Russian name, a name derived from the surname of Gogol’s father’s favorite writer. Despite its Russian roots, “Gogol” stands for Gogol’s South Asian identity because it signifies the consequences that brought about his existence. Gogol is named “Gogol” not only because of his father’s preference for the author, but also because it symbolizes the turning point of his father’s life: the crippling train wreck that paralyzed him for a year, his subsequent desire to leave India, to start anew and to experience life in another society. Gogol does share a similar background to Nikolai Gogol in that they both moved around much in their youth and lose their fathers at an early age. But how he came to “become” his namesake is what is really important for the reading of *The Namesake*. As in the story “The Overcoat,” how Akakay Akakievich Bashmachkin came to be named that name is not as imperative as what he *does* as Akakay—an impoverished clerk and copyist who is constantly ridiculed for the dilapidated condition of his overcoat, Akakay saves up enough money to buy an impressive, new overcoat. However, after only wearing it out once to attend a party held in his overcoat’s honor, he is robbed of his coat and, after an unfruitful hunt, he dies delirious of a fever. Gogol, then, is also misled by the belief that a more Americanized name can offer him a better future, which is proven in the long run to be a false impression. He believes that being Nikhil can obscure his ethnic background and automatically raise his status, just like the way how Akakay believes his overcoat can elevate his rank within the social hierarchy. Both come to realize, however, that the introduction of a new external article or label is not nearly enough to alter what they already are. Nikhil is his acquired identity, his “overcoat,” whereas Gogol is his innate identity.

Second-generation South Asian men display a similar division to the split observed in their female counterparts between their public and private identities, although it can be said that men are not as restricted as women in keeping their public, more liberal identities out of the household. This may be because of their relative lack of behavioral limitations, e.g. they are not expected to familiarize themselves with South Asian tradition and culture nor are they expected to transfer this information on to the next generation, unlike women. Rather, men are expected to marry a decent woman (preferably South Asian) and to obtain a high-level professional job within the engineering or medical sciences. However, second-generation men may feel like they are under too much pressure from the first-generation to succeed or to achieve the goals they have set forth so the men rebel against their parents. These men are more likely to choose to run away and distance themselves from their family; this may be because they are still under the influence of South Asian tradition which asserts patriarchy. Therefore, these men, being averse to direct, face-to-face confrontations with their fathers, choose to leave their home as a more passive form of rebellion. An interesting difference detected between second-generation men and women is that oftentimes women adhere to tradition to ensure they will be set free in the future, whereas men, given relatively more freedom to choose as they wish, defy traditional South Asian culture as a result of their own individual desires.

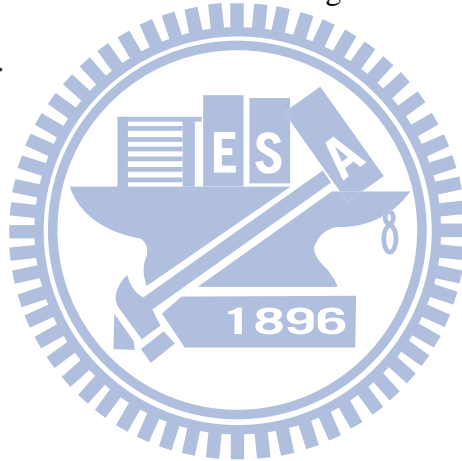
Conclusion

From the above discussions on the effects of multiple identities on gender roles, it is evident that the belief in a preset archetype existing for members of each gender from either generation is obsolete and outdated. First-generation women, being more prone to separating themselves from American society by largely staying within the confines of their house, will show less variance in multiple identities. Only those

women who dare to cross the threshold, to step out of the house and to interact with Americans, who number in the few, will have a chance at developing their multiple identities. Mrs. Sen encounters a traumatic car crash that most likely symbolizes the inevitable culture shock and conflict she must encounter when adapting to a new environment, and is, unfortunately, too unprepared to deal with the shock. She retreats to the bedroom of her house and may possibly never dare set foot out of her house alone again. In her case, she will not be able to form a complete version of multiple identities because of her lack of interaction with American culture. She will retain mostly South Asian elements. First-generation men are more prone to developing positive instances of multiple identities that work within American society. Ruma's father comes to accept several American concepts, integrating them within his own traditionally South Asian identity. Second-generation women, display comparatively more complex constructions of multiple identities, which is most likely due to their bi-cultural upbringing. Their identities can range from anywhere to extremely South Asian to extremely American, and these identities can alter significantly with their positioning either within or outside the domestic sphere. Most women tend to display more Indian qualities inside the house, but once in the public sphere they act more American. Nevertheless there is not a distinct split between their South Asian or American identities and either may affect the other in either public or private settings. Sudha displays a mature, responsible nature inside the house, taking care of her family members as a good traditional daughter should, but she also learns to let herself loose of traditional restrictions when she is outside. Second-generation men are more liberated than their female counterparts, and do not display such a strong disparity between their public and private identities. Gogol spends the majority of his life trying to distance himself from his South Asian identity and heritage, but through the loss of his father, he finally comes to terms with the fact that trying to be someone

other than “Gogol” will get him nowhere. He learns to accept his history as both a South Asian and an American, and learns to allow the two to co-exist together within himself.

Multiple identities allows for the South Asian individual to combine characteristics from either the host or native culture into the construction of their own persona, creating new hybrid results that challenge and modify the stereotypical images of first- and second-generation South Asians. Overall, I believe that my findings in this chapter back up my goal to prove that fixed definitions are a myth. We need to focus on how we should go about revising our preexisting notions of South Asians from a predetermined set of traits for each generation and gender to a wide spectrum of possibilities.



Chapter Four

Conclusion

The concept of multiple identities is proposed within this thesis as a new approach to be used in examining ethnic groups to emphasize the differing subjectivities present within communities of the same ethnicity. The stereotypes commonly used to define these ethnic groups only paint fixed images, reducing their attributes into a single, preset list. Due to the different subjectivities present within each individual belonging to the ethnic group, it is more reasonable to view these immigrants and their offspring not as people who can all be grouped under a fixed definition but rather as individuals belonging to different subjectivities, e.g. genders, generations, backgrounds, etc. We wish to debunk the myth of a fixed definition for a particular ethnic group and instead highlight the disparities amongst the separate members within the group.

Discussion on the effects of multiple identities on gender roles in Chapter Three offer support for the separate profiling of individual South Asians. Although all of the characters can be grouped underneath the South Asian ethnic label, their distinct subjectivities call for a more thorough method of examining their identities. This is where the ideology of multiple identities comes into play. By thinking of South Asians in light of multiple identities, details like their gender or generational status, which may affect the formation of their identities, become relevant and crucial information when discussing identities. First-generation women are the least likely to form mature multiple identities because of their isolation within the domestic sphere. They will mostly continue to adhere to the traditions of their homeland and avoid interaction with locals. First-generation men fare relatively better, as they are better prepared for the culture shock and are more willing to interact with Americans. Second-generation

women are the most complex models of multiple identities because of their feminine gender and second-generation status. As females, they are conditioned to pick up information about the homeland culture and to adhere to South Asian tradition. Outside of the household, they may rebel, but once they return to the domestic sphere they revert back to their more conventional identity. Second-generation males are comparatively more liberated, and, therefore, they are less restricted in how they act under their parents' supervision. Having multiple identities may result in a confusion of gender roles; individuals may find themselves caught between the American and South Asian standards for one role. For example, Ruma's father from "Unaccustomed Earth" is caught between agreeing to stay with her so that he can offer help around the house (South Asian father), but his solitude-seeking self tells him he has completed his responsibilities with regard to raising Ruma and that she is old enough to take care of herself (American father).

Unfortunately, time limitations narrowed the scope of the study to only discussion on multiple identities and gender roles within the South Asian diasporic context. I believe that, however, there are many more possible applications for the concept, running from investigating the other subjectivities of South Asians with multiple identities (for instance, linking multiple identities with sexuality) to applying the theory to another ethnic group. Because it is not a race-based concept, it can be used interracially to formulate how any ethnic group comes to conceive of their own version of identity.

In conclusion, the multiple identities concept is a method that can be used to understand how ethnic identities are formulated after repeated interaction with the host society. The combination of Hall's identity, Bhabha's hybridity, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and Lowe's multiplicity and heterogeneity result in a more comprehensive perspective on diasporic identity. The formation of multiple identities

is an on-going process that takes into account the different subjectivities each individual within an ethnic group may have. By advocating the application of multiple identities to diasporic individuals, I hope to debunk the myth of a fixed definition for diasporic people and to draw attention to the peculiarities that exist among members of separate ethnic groups.



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