SILENT VOICES: “SOUTH ASIAN” MOTHERS AND TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

A decolonizing institutional ethnography of mothering work

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Abstract

In the province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education uses its regulatory texts to govern transition related activities for students preparing for high school. Deadlines set out by schools and school boards arise from the transition policies and procedures of the Ministry of Education. During the Grade 8 year, administrators, teachers and parents of high school bound students do the transition work required to support the goals and deadlines laid out in these texts.

Through in-depth interviews in participants' heritage languages, textual analysis, and personal reflections, I have conducted a decolonizing institutional ethnography of mothering work conducted by "South Asian" mothers.

I have explored in-depth the question: How does the institution, a large school board in the Greater Toronto Area, within the province of Ontario, use one important regulatory text, the regional course directory or RCD, to coordinate the work of "South Asian" mothers as they prepare for their children's transition to high school?

Dedication

To Disha and Ashray who did the mothering work so that I could accomplish phase 1 of my academic dreams and Rani for her unconditional love.

To Teeamma who taught me to respect all stories and to all my foremothers who tell their stories through my opportunities.

To Dr. Dorothy Smith for her scholarship across decades that continues to inform my praxis and for the CWSE workshop in June 2013 that was the turning point of my understanding of Institutional Ethnography.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Shattering the Silence

In the province of Ontario, compulsory public education is structured into a kindergarten to Grade 12 or the K-12 model.[1] Generally speaking, Ontario students receive elementary education from kindergarten to Grade 8. High school extends from Grades 9 to 12. In some Ontario school boards, students attend elementary school from kindergarten to Grade 5. Then they move to middle school for Grades 6 to 8 and from there, to high school for Grades 9 to 12. In both the K to 8 and the (K to 5) + (6 to 8) models, students graduate from Grade 8 in June of that school year. They begin their high school education in September of Grade 9, the first of four years of compulsory secondary education in Ontario.[2] The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) is an important document that reaches across all spaces to ensure accessibility for all citizens.[3]

The Greater Toronto Area, or the GTA, is the most populated part of the province of Ontario as well as its most diverse. In Ontario, the public education system caters to students from kindergarten to Grade 12 as indicated on the website of the Ministry of Education or MOE. Policies, procedures, curriculum documents, expert panel reports as well as assessment and evaluation frameworks regulate the schooling of children from kindergarten to Grade 12.[4]

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1 According to the website of the Ontario Ministry of Education, hereafter known as the MOE, Ontario's schools are administered by district schools boards and are divided as follows: 31 English Public, 29 English Catholic, 4 French Public and 8 French Catholic. While there are 10 School Authorities that are comprised of 4 geographically isolated board and 6 hospital based school authorities, there is one Provincial Schools Authority, the MOE. According to the MOE's website, as of 2012-2013, during the period of commencement of my research, there were 3978 elementary and 913 secondary schools in Ontario (www.edu.gov.on.ca, November 2014).

2 http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/graduate.html, 2014. Graduation requirements are discussed in detail on this webpage of the MOE.

3 This website contains in-depth information about the AODA: http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11

4 These documents are available to the public in the form of digital or print texts on the MOE's website (www.edu.gov.on.ca, November 2014).

In the school board where my research is set, the kindergarten to Grade 8 years are typically situated in elementary schools. Upon graduating from Grade 8, students move to high school. Post-secondary learning begins after Grade 12 and can lead to university, college or the workplace. These pathways,[5] as they are referred to in Ontario's education parlance, are decided on the basis of the courses that students select through the four years of high school as well as on their ability to earn credits by passing each of these courses. For students in Grade 8 across Ontario, the first step of the post-secondary journey begins in the winter of that school year when they select courses for their Grade 9 classes that start in September.

Transition to high school is a time to make decisions, select courses for the next year and plan for the academic future. My research is set specifically in the duration of Grade 8, the last year of the decade of elementary education. It examines the transition process from Grade 8 to Grade 9 in a publicly funded English language school board within the GTA in the province of Ontario. My inquiry is rooted in my professional location as a Grade 7/8 teacher in an elementary school in this province. I am curious about the work that "South Asian" [6] mothers do to support the schools that their children currently attend or will attend, in the following year. Through this research paper, I shall bring to light the ways in which the work processes of South Asian mothers are coordinated by the MOE as they perform the various tasks required for the transition of their children from Grade 8 to Grade 9.

Across all elementary schools in Ontario, the course selection process for transition to high school takes place between January and February of the Grade 8 year. It is important to note

5 http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/CreatingPathwaysSuccess.pdf is a document from the MOE that provides information and strategies for administrators, teachers and other stake holders on how to support transition for student success.

6 My use of the term the term "South Asian" is based on Agnew's understanding that asserts: "the identity of "South Asian" women in Canada is partly a social construction by hegemonic practices and processes. She posits that, "South Asian" women are categorized as a group on the basis of physical appearance, (especially skin-colour), with the cultural differences among them disregarded" (Agnew, 1998, pp.118-119).

that the seemingly simple processes involved in selecting courses for Grade 9 have far reaching effects through the four years of high school. They also influence post-secondary pathways in ways that are usually invisible to onlookers. In recent years, these far reaching effects of course selections for Grade 9 have explicitly come to my notice due to my engagement in transition work for my children, above and beyond my professional role as a Grade 7/8 teacher. A report released by the educational advocacy group, People for Education (2013) asserts that the decisions that are made by Grade 8 students every winter in Ontario when choosing courses between pathways - applied (college bound)* and academic (university bound) - for their core subjects for Grade 9 are crucial as they “will have a long term impact” (p.1). As I have been a Grade 7/8 teacher for a decade, I have a professional vantage point from which to view the work processes required for Grade 8 students’ preparation for high school.

Transition Matters: Background of the Research

Cross panel transition teams

In this school board, the five to six elementary schools in the neighborhood of a high school are known as its feeder schools. Each high school with its feeder schools constitutes a network or family of schools. The elementary teachers directly involved in transition work, particularly Grade 8 teachers, are referred to as the elementary panel. The high school staff is referred to as the secondary panel. Therefore any textual or face to face interaction between these two groups of educators and administrators is referred to as a cross panel meeting within this school network. Cross panel meetings are chaired by one elementary and one secondary staff member and usually occur once a month. Regular emails keep the team connected in the time period between any two meetings. In addition, administrators and regional transition

coordinators email Grade 8 teachers directly with information related to transition that include new directives by the MOE for that school year.

In this high school network, cross panel teams coordinate transition activities according to a timetable that is laid out at the end of the previous academic year. The cross panel co-chairs finalize this calendar and it is shared with all panel members at the last meeting in June to decide the transition deadlines for the incoming Grade 8 students. Appendix A highlights the annual calendar of activities and responsibilities outlined by the transition team of this high school network.

Both elementary and secondary schools take parental engagement for granted throughout the transition process. Staff members, at both the elementary and secondary level, expect that parents will facilely navigate websites, gather information and engage in dinner table discussions with their children before deciding their Grade 9 courses. It is therefore expected that with parental support, all students will pick appropriate learning pathways for high school.

The MOE through its high school and elementary schools, appears to assume that homes of all students have unhindered access to a computer and the Internet. A certain baseline competence in digital literacy along with specific expertise to comprehend complicated course codes and educational terminology is also taken for granted. It is therefore expected that correctly completed and signed course selection forms will be submitted by families of Grade 8 students as per the high school’s deadline. Appendix D shows the course codes for mathematics for that pathway in high school.

The annual transition calendar and due dates for each activity are electronically shared and form a part of the online schedules for all cross panel members. In addition to the staff calendar for cross panel transition activities, this high school also creates and implements a

contact calendar for Grade 8 parents and students of its feeder schools. Through both these calendars, it coordinates the process of transition to high school.[7]

As outlined in the brochures and websites of the MOE, it is the combination of a successful high school graduation and subsequent entry into gainful, post-secondary pathways that leads to future employability.[8] Sustainable employability appears to be one of the key objectives of high school education. From MOE policies related to this matter, it appears that it is the goal of high schools to help students select courses that match their academic ability in order to ensure that they graduate from high school and enter one of the three paths: workplace, college or university. High schools focus on this goal by guiding students into tracks or pathways that will support their academic success and thereby reduce dropout rates during the high school years.

Factors such as family background, socio-economic status and race are also becoming a part of some middle class conversations around course selection in the education advocacy community of Ontario as seen from the website of People for Education (2015). In Ontario, the formal grouping of students by presumed academic destination – streaming – was abolished in 1999 with the introduction of new Ontario Secondary School curriculum. Numerous academic studies have found that streaming students or grouping students by ability is likely to reproduce and even exacerbate patterns of disadvantage based on family backgrounds, including socio-economic status and race. (People for Education, 2014, p.1)

7 When I applied to the school board to conduct this research, the approval committee reminded me that all high schools do not meet their families or students as often as my network does. I wonder why this is so, and have kept that niggling question at the center of my critical thinking framework when I examine South Asian mothers' transition work for the purpose of my study.

8 One such example is highlighted in the website of Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as indicated in this website http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/

Special Education and ESL[9] teachers in the elementary and high school panel collaborate independently with one another to coordinate transition related activities for students with special needs or those who need ESL support as mandated in the specific policies governing these matters. These scheduled activities occur between November and April of the Grade 8 academic year. The roles and responsibilities of parents, teachers, and support staff in relation to high school transition, are clearly demarcated by the MOE.[10]

The MOE refers to Grades 7 to 9 as the Transition Years.[11] In the school board where my research is set, transition related work processes become more pronounced and focused in the Grade 8 year than ever before. Several interrelated and time bound activities that are required for high school preparation begin in the first week of November of the Grade 8 year of a cohort of high school bound students. The transition process then progresses steadily until February. During this period, there is regular and planned contact between teachers from the high school and Grade 8 students, their teachers and parents.

The guidance department of the high school assigns Grade 8 teachers the work of coordinating the processes of course selection, submission and confirmation according to the deadlines outlined in Appendix A. They are also asked to remind errant students to return their forms and submit print copies of course selection drafts for review. In order to ensure the timely completion of all these tasks, Grade 8 teachers have to make phone calls to parents if there are delays. Deadlines are extended with some cautions. Finally, students submit course request drafts online into a website that provides this service to the school board. Grade 8 teachers then collect

9 ESL is the textual designation given to students or individuals who do not speak or use North American certified levels of English in speaking, reading and writing.

10 The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholder in education are outlined in detail on this website of the MOE www.edu.gov.on.ca/morestudentsuccess/transition.html

11 http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/morestudentsuccess/transition.html shows the different program available for students and families to support transition to Grade 9.

registration packages, review them for completion, check off names against their class attendance list and deliver these packages to the high school.

At the behest of the high school, Grade 8 teachers manually check each student’s Grade 9 course selection form and indicate their approval or reservations about the courses selected by that student. If a Grade 8 teacher does not agree with the academic courses selected by a student, the high school asks them to indicate their professional dissent on the printed copy of the draft. This draft is then attached to the student’s registration form to be scrutinized by the high school’s guidance department. In such cases, the high school recommends that Grade 8 teachers contact parents of those students, review the course selection process with them and recommend the applied or college bound stream. During my decade of transition work in this high school network, I do not recollect an upgrade suggested this way, wherein a student may have chosen applied courses and has been asked to choose university bound courses instead.

Due to my professional involvement in the transition process, I participate in the activities outlined in Appendix A. Over a period of ten years, I have supported students with transition planning even if they are not in my classes. I sometimes speak to parents in other classes upon the request of colleagues and provide translation support in their heritage languages for a better contextual understanding of pathways through high school.

All transition related directives of the MOE are communicated to high school networks regularly through meetings coordinated by the school board’s regional transition team. At these meetings, transition consultants from the school board, disseminate standardized information from the MOE to cross panel teams of various high schools. In my role as a transition years’ teacher, I attend regional transition meetings with many high school networks at least once or twice a year. Therefore, I know that the transition calendars developed by each high school that

coordinate the work of Grade 8 parents and teachers in its network, are guided by the transition policies, procedures and deadlines of the MOE. Special Education Resource Teachers or SERTs such as myself, get additional information related to high school transition, from Student Services administrators who specifically support students with special needs. These administrators and transition consultants from the school board also send out regular emails to SERTS to inform us of MOE directives specifically related to the transition of exceptional students.

The lock step scheduling of transition related activities takes into account timetabling and staffing deadlines as well as the hiring and transfer processes for high schools. I know this because high school colleagues invariably remind Grade 8 teachers of the importance of timely course selection and proper placement of students into specific course pathways. A predicted number of students in applied courses or the college bound pathway and academic or the university bound pathway allows the high school to allocate their departmental staffing for various subjects. Therefore the timely submission of courses for Grade 9 appears to be of paramount importance to the high school as it impacts their internal organization in terms of staffing, hiring as well as resource allocation.

The activities and work of Grade 8 teachers at each feeder school align with the transition deadlines laid out by the high school. For example, if course selections for Grade 8 students have to be digitally logged into the school board’s system by February 28th of a particular year, they have to be received at the high school a few days earlier, say, by the 18th. Grade 8 teachers and students are reminded by their high school to submit *their* course requests electronically into the course selection system around February 14th of a grade 8 year, a few days before the high school is expected to submit *their* school wide requests. These staggered deadlines that the high

school builds into transition calendars for Grade 8 teachers and families appear to account for any tardiness on the part of the feeder school teams, due to delays in receiving forms from families of Grade 8 students.

In order to support transition to high school through the course selection process, parents of Grade 8 students are expected to invest considerable time and effort to perform the multiple tasks and activities that dot the transition terrain. They are required to acquaint themselves with course pathways, course codes and various terminologies of transition as well as learn the difference between possible course combinations. They are also required to fill registration forms correctly for admission to the high school so that their child can get checked off the Grade 8 teachers’ class list. If they make errors in filling these forms, they have to locate them on the school board’s website, download and fill them correctly. They have to find relevant information about the various courses and pathways if they wish. They have to make appointments with their child’s teachers or the Special Education Resource Teacher if they have specific questions related to course selection. They have to do all this in addition to the day to day business of living their lives, going to work, and providing for their families.

Activities that take time and effort are classified as work by Griffith and Smith (2005). Parents of Grade 8 students do transition work in order to support the goals and deadlines of high schools and the school board. These goals ultimately align with the directives set out by the MOE. Work that is done by parents, as a requirement to support the work of schools is referred to as “supplementary educational work” for schooling (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p.116). Thus it appears that parents of students in Grade 8 do a lot of supplementary educational work to support the transition goals of the high school in accordance with the transition policies of the MOE in Ontario.

In my role as a Grade 7/8 teacher, I routinely monitor course selection deadlines, remind students to fill registration forms and ensure that they are signed in all the correct places. I am also called upon to fill forms for students if this support is needed by the family. I schedule and attend meetings with parents who have additional questions regarding high school transition. At these meetings, I provide my professional recommendation about the best possible course combinations after speaking with the student regarding *their* preference and confidence with the Grade 9 course work. I cross reference my in-class assessment data with the previous year’s report cards to help the parent and student make informed choices. I refer to the school board’s website to download registration forms if the family has misplaced them or has filled them incorrectly. I do this in addition to the day to day work of planning, preparing and delivering in-class instruction, performing ongoing assessments, as well as providing for my family. Thus, Grade 8 teachers as well as parents of Grade 8 students, independently engage in large amounts of supplementary educational work to help the high school of their network. Due to my professional experience, I assert that these seemingly independent activities are interrelated. My inquiry is focused on these coordinated interconnections. Therefore, in this research paper, I have explored in depth, the following question:

How does the institution, a large school board in the GTA, coordinate the work of parents, particularly South Asian mothers, as they prepare for their children’s transition to high school?

Mothers and transition

Apart from being a Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) responsible for transition work in one publicly funded school board in Ontario, I am also the mother of a Grade 12 student in another. For the purpose of my research as well as in everyday life, I acknowledge the duality of my role as a mother and a teacher in the province of Ontario. In 2002, when I arrived in this province as a newly landed immigrant, I navigated the elementary school system with my children and volunteered in their schools. Since 2004, after completing my Bachelor of Education degree from York University, Toronto, I have been a Grade 7/8 teacher in Ontario. The title 'OCT' or Ontario Certified Teacher[12] is attached to my name as an indication of professional credibility in the province. Throughout this decade, I have worked closely with Grade 7 and 8 students to support their families with high school transition. Since 2002, I have observed my confidence and competence in transition work improve considerably due to being immersed in this field. Yet, there were many intricacies that were not a part of my consciousness until 2008. It is only when my daughter was preparing to graduate from Grade 8, did I begin to fully understand the complexity of the transition process from a mother's perspective: I was able to navigate the permutations and combinations with greater ease as compared to my co-parent who is not an educator. Although both of us were parents of a Grade 8 student, I, as a professional participant in the transition process, was able to understand it implicitly whereas he needed our daughter to explain everything to him in great detail. For the purpose of my research I return to that experience of transition work as a mother, from which I observe the work coordination of South Asian mothers in this school board who engaged in this intricate process. I have also focused intentionally on knowledge claims that are grounded in my professional

12 All Ontario certified teachers with a current membership are sent their annual licence and card that designates them OCT or Ontario Certified Teacher.

vantage point as a transition years' teacher in Ontario, as well as my "historically-constructed relations of gender, class, race/ethnicity…" (Griffith, 1998, p.368).

I have based my research on the scholarship of two Canadian sociologists, Dr. Alison Griffith and Dr. Dorothy Smith who have examined mothers' work that is done in relation to the institutional order of schools. They assert that schools require specific activities to be performed in homes at specific times that are pre-determined by regulatory texts used by the institution. They argue that this organization of work is primarily coordinated by mothers or women in families. Therefore they refer to "mothering" as work (1991, p. 81; 2005, p. 8). As a specific aspect of mothers' lives, Griffith and Smith (1991) argue that mothering is often perceived in society as if it is just "an intimate relationship in which the well-being of a child is dependent on his or her biological mother" (p.81). Mothering, they explicate, is rarely considered to be real work nor is mothering generally seen in the context of the social organization that shapes our experiences around it.

For the purpose of my research, I also consider mothering to be an invaluable contributor that supports the work of schools. I therefore assert that mothering is not merely a grammatically altered avatar of the word 'mother'. It is much more. I argue that South Asian mothers of Grade 8 students are required by the high school, to do mothering work for their children's transition to Grade 9. I also assert that they do this mothering work in educational settings that do not take into account the everyday realities of their individual lives.

In the middle classes, assert Griffith and Smith (2005), the availability of "women's unpaid work contributes to the ways in which the public school system comes to operate as an engine of inequality" (p.10). They remind us that the more time women have outside of their paid work to devote to their children's educational support, the better are the outcomes

experienced by their children. From this argument, it appears that those mothers who have more time away from paid work to devote to their children's education, are able to use their mothering work in ways that ensure that their children achieve greater academic success in publicly funded education. Such advantages gained due to an abundance of mothering work that are easily available to some students are not available to all and reify the existence of what Lareau (2011) calls "unequal childhoods" (p. 362).

Public education in North America while "not instituted as a path of equality, has been deeply shaped by that ideal", argue Griffith and Smith (2005, p. 9). They further explicate that underlying these ideals is "an institutional reality that was warped by the inequities of class, race and gender" and reframe social class as well as family and academic achievement by examining the emergence of a new section of the middle classes, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (p.10). They situate this section of the middle classes in relation to the emergence of new ways of organizing society. They assert that "both men and women of the middle classes were at work in taking advantage of the new possibilities emerging in North America at the end of the 19th century" (p.29). Griffith and Smith (2005) explicate that "the very institutions through which their own class position and that of their children were secured were also, to a significant degree, of their own making" (p.29). Griffith and Smith refer to this form of organization as "*ruling relations*" (p.10, emphasis in original). Smith (1987, 1991) argues that regulatory texts used by an institution are infused with the ruling relations of that institution and ubiquitously coordinate the lives of the players in various social spheres.

Mothering Discourse and T-discourse

Griffith and Smith (2005) posit that mothering is a set of actual work processes and activities that take up time and energy, and are coordinated with ruling relations such as those of the labour market and the education system. The mothering discourse in relation to school is therefore, "the organization of relations among people participating in a conversation mediated by written and printed materials" pertaining to that specific field (p.34). Smith (1993) argues that the mothering discourse is textually mediated and calls it a "T-discourse" (p.51). She also extends the notion of T-discourse beyond just being a textually mediated conversation between a variety of institutional texts to "include how actual people take them up, the practices and courses of actions ordered by them, how they coordinate the activities of one with those of another or others" (p.51). Smith also explicates that "people enter into practices ordered by the texts of the T-discourse and are active participants in its relations" and that "we enter into and participate in such relations in ordinary and unthinking ways" (p.51) She illustrates this argument by stating that "describing someone as mentally ill catches a local moment into the discursive relations organized by psychiatry" (p.51). Hereafter, I shall use Smith's (1993) position on T-discourses and refer to her example from the field of psychiatry as it translates into transition work. I therefore suggest that when students are described as 'at-risk, ESL, Special Ed., Level 2 or Level 3', that moment also exists in the local space of the discursive relations organized in the field of education within Ontario. This framework of T-discourse is put forth by the MOE through its regulatory texts such as report cards, achievement charts, curriculum documents and transition policies with which it coordinates transition to and through high school.

Texts and Transition

As a transition years’ teacher for a decade, I know that school boards in Ontario use a variety of institutional texts to regulate course selection for Grade 9 and through the high school years. This school board has used its website as well as a course selection directory called the Regional Course Directory, hereafter known as the RCD, to convey transition and pathways information to parents, families and students. For the purpose of my research, the regulatory text being analyzed is this RCD that coordinates the work of South Asian mothers involved in transition work.

Since 2014, the school board stopped using a print copy of the RCD and instead, began using just its website for this purpose, into which the course directory is now embedded as a hyperlink, thereby making it a regulatory electronic text. As all transition conversations between cross panel members revolve around pathways, they rely on the implicit knowledge that Grade 8 teachers and their high school colleagues have about the linkages between the various course combinations. Therefore the RCD, in which these linkages are embedded, becomes an implicit reference text for transition discussions. I was curious about the ways in which the RCD, both in its earlier printed avatar, and in its recent electronic format, informs and coordinates the mothering work for transition to high school. Therefore, in my research, I examined the RCD and its coordinating capability as a critical text that the MOE uses to regulate high school transition. The importance of embedding this text in my inquiry is explained in greater detail in chapter 2 where I discuss the conceptual framework of my research.

How My Research Found Me

My interest in mothering work for transition to high school began when I started puzzling over conversations that I have had with the South Asian mothers of my students. As a Special Education Resource Teacher or SERT, I typically work with a small group of students through the school year. Due to specific learning needs manifested by my students, additional factors such as cognitive abilities, processing speed, task focus and social skills invariably come up for consideration during transition discussions. The MOE, through its T-discourse refers to these learning needs as exceptionalities and with further stratification in its managerial language, labels them as Learning Disability, Mild Intellectual Disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder. [13]

When a child with learning exceptionalities comes under the umbrella of Special Education, transition immediately becomes a much more complex process for mothers and families than it does with students in mainstream Grade 8 classes. The mothers of my students bring forth their concerns about high school much earlier than mothers of students in regular programs, some even as early as Grade 6 or right at the start of Grade 7. During the first week of school in 2011, soon after starting my Master's program, I met V's mother.

> Iska kya hoga high school mein jaake? Dheere dheerey padhtaa hai. Mein padhaati hoon usko, lekin usko homework karney main badi der lagti hai. Aagey jaake main kya karoongi?
>
> Loose translation: What will happen to him in high school? He reads very slowly. I teach him but it takes him a long time to do his homework. What will I do in the years ahead?[14]

13 https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/specedpartce.pdf explains the various processes involved in the identification, placement and educational support of exceptional students in the province of Ontario.

14 Personal communication with a South Asian mother of a Grade 8 student in September 2011.

This conversation had taken place in September 2011, on the very day of my course, Families and Schools at York University. That evening, our class was engaged in deciding our areas of interest for the final paper of that course. I could not dislodge that conversation with V's mother from my consciousness. As I narrated this incident to my course director, Dr. Alison Griffith, she asked, "Do you want to perhaps tell the stories of mothers? That is what you are doing right now".[15] It was that simple. My research had found me.

Mothering work and transition to high school

In the niche of institutional ethnography, I found the word "standpoint" (Griffith & Smith, 2005, pp. 3, 4, 9; Smith, 2005, pp. 9, 10). Smith (2005) posits that this word has been "lifted out of the vernacular" (p. 9). I knew what it meant in the ordinary context. Sociologically, I was about to discover labyrinths of meaning. The notion of women's standpoint according to Smith (1987, 2005) or the notion that there is special authority in the standpoint of women, has been challenged by feminist theorists. Smith (2005) explicates that this is so because the very notion of "women's standpoint" (p.8) fails to consider or take into account diversities of race and class or the "various forms and modulation of gender" (p. 8).

The institutional order of schools, argues Griffith (1984) requires specific activities to be performed in the home, "a work organization usually managed and coordinated by mothers" (as cited in Griffith & Smith, 1991, p.81). For the purpose of this research as well as due to my personal and professional standpoint, I take up "mothering as a personal and emotional experience but also as work" (Griffith & Smith, 1991, p. 81). I base my argument on their scholarly position that mothering "is rarely investigated in terms of the work organization it produces or of the social organization which underpins and gives shape to our experience of it"

15 In-class communication with Dr. A.I.Griffith during the course, Families and Schools, December 2011.

(p.81). For the purpose of my inquiry about transition to Grade 9, when I "begin to address mothering as a work process, it comes into view as a set of activities oriented to the child and to the institutional relations in which the family is embedded, for example, the compulsory mass education system" (p.81).

Through my research, I planned to bring into view the set of activities that are invisibly assigned to South Asian mothers by the MOE to support its high schools with the transition process. The specific standpoint of feminist sociology embedded in the acknowledgement of mothering as work, thereby becomes a relevant position from which to observe the transition related tasks that South Asian mothers undertake when they support high schools in the winter of their children's Grade 8 year.

Educational governance, explicate Nichols and Griffith (2009), is a "textually mediated relation that is accomplished in the coordinated actions of people as they go about their everyday work" (p.241). Based on this view and following the scholarship of Griffith and Smith (1991, 2005) and Smith (1987, 1993), I posit that the educational governance of the MOE gives rise to textually mediated mothering work. Thereby the everyday work processes and lives of South Asian mothers are coordinated by the MOE's textual directives that, for the purpose of my research, emerge in the form of the RCD of the school board. In this text are embedded the prerequisites for each course of study from Grades 9 to 12. Based on the scholarly literature discussed above, I assert that during the course selection process in the Grade 8 year, the RCD coordinates the work of South Asian mothers through the T-discourse framework that it shares with other transition texts of the MOE.

South Asian Mothers and the Transition Process

In the social and textual context of Ontario, I am referred to as a South Asian woman and mother. I was therefore curious about the mothering work of South Asian mothers in my school and other schools in the network as we were all labelled alike. I knew from my professional vantage point, that in the winter of their children's Grade 8 year, South Asian mothers engaged in mothering work to support high schools with transition to Grade 9. Although I had an idea that they did *something* that moved my work forward and in turn supported the work of my colleagues in the secondary panel, I was unaware of what exactly this mothering work looked like.

Every year, in January, the high school staff visit their elementary schools and share details about the course selection process on the school board's website. Until 2014 they used to hand out print copies of the RCD. I know from my professional experience that as soon as the website details are shared, teachers in cross panel teams expect that each family and South Asian mother will engage with these texts in some way. However, Smith (2001) explicates that a single text can be taken up by individuals in multiple settings in diverse ways. I was curious to know if each South Asian mother took up the standardized RCD in identical ways or in ways that were quite individualized.

Through my lived experience, I know that course selection conversations happen between students and their families. Therefore these activities of engaging with the course selection website or the online RCD happen locally in each setting of text activation, say, the home of each South Asian mother. In this way, the mothering work done in students' homes, is textually coordinated by the RCD with another setting, the classrooms of Grade 8 teachers. In these classrooms, unbeknownst to South Asian mothers, each and every Grade 8 teacher, including

myself, is required by the high school, to ensure compliance to submission deadlines. We are also required to monitor and influence the selection of learning pathways for a range of subjects based on our professional opinion about each and every student’s academic ability. In another setting such as the office of the high school, guidance counsellors monitor the due dates for receiving completed registration forms and online course submissions from their feeder schools. They send reminders to Grade 8 teachers via email or phone the secretaries at each elementary school within the network as those dates approach or pass. The secretaries then remind the Grade 8 teachers to adhere to the high school’s deadline and the teachers remind students or phone parents directly. The interconnections between the various work sites become overtly activated at this time and they all originate from the control centre that is the high school.

For the purpose of my research, I focused my gaze on the institution, the MOE, and its relations of ruling (Smith, 1987). I planned to bring to light the mothering work (Griffith & Smith, 1991, 2005) done by South Asian mothers for transition to high school, that is coordinated and directed by the RCD in which the course codes and pathways are embedded. Before and during my research, I was curious about the following questions:

- What information did South Asian mothers have about transition to high school with which they began their mothering work?

- Where did they get their information from: the website of the MOE, the school board’s website and RCD or somewhere else?

- What did they do if they needed more information to help them with course selections for their children?

- Did they experience any challenges or barriers as they performed the tasks needed for course selection and transition planning?

- How did they navigate these barriers and what was the outcome?

- How did South Asian mothers in this publicly funded school board understand and use the school board's website and RCD that was shared by their high school?

The overarching question that guided my work was: "What is the work being done by South Asian mothers for their children's transition to high school that is tacitly expected yet rarely mentioned in publicly funded education within the province of Ontario?" To address this question, I interviewed seven South Asian mothers whose responses are first person accounts of their mothering work for transition. The scribed responses of their conversations and my analysis of this data bring to light the textual mediation of their everyday work processes by the MOE.

In chapter 2 of this research paper, I discuss the conceptual framework of a decolonizing institutional ethnography. I also explain the background of my research and why it was important for me, as an Ontario Certified Teacher, to study the high school transition process with respect to the work coordination of South Asian mothers. I examine the duality in my everyday life when my transition work as a racialized South Asian teacher in an elementary school, is juxtaposed with the mothering work of South Asian mothers in this school network. In this chapter, I also bring to light some tensions that I have experienced as an Ontario Certified Teacher and an employee of a publicly funded school board in the GTA. In this chapter, I shall explain the notion of the problematic in detail.

In chapter 3, I discuss in detail, the methodology and methods for data collection that I have used during my research. I also bring to light the merits of institutional ethnography as a

research practice which, when seen from a feminist perspective, begins in the standpoint of racialized women as we live our everyday lives in "settler societies" within the GTA (Razack, 2007, p.75). I highlight the importance of in-depth interviewing in the various heritage languages of the research participants as an intentional decolonizing method to support an institutional ethnographic research project. I assert that South Asian women are invariably marginalized in the context of transition in educational settings due to the presence of T-discourse and relations of ruling. I wish to draw the attention of all stakeholders in Ontario's education to this marginalization, fifteen years into the 21st century.

By doing so, I highlight both the imperative need to decolonize research methodologies and my decision to conduct participant interviews in their mother tongues rather than only in English. I thereby emphasize the importance of opening up a space for dialogue with and between racialized South Asian mothers in this network of schools as they do not automatically benefit from the feminist practices and advocacy journeys of white, heterosexual, middle class women in Ontario, whose views and voices are predominantly reflected in social media and other digital spaces.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews in the heritage languages of participants. Some interviews were conducted in English where the South Asian mothers chose to accommodate my linguistic deficit if I did not speak their mother tongue. In this chapter, I have also included the gist of transcribed interviews as loose translations of the participants' responses. Although the interviews have been phonetically transcribed using the English alphabet, I have intentionally chosen to privilege the sounds and nuances of the conversations. This is a continuation of my commitment to decolonize my research at every stage. It is also a way in which the academy and the school board can experience the issues faced

by some South Asian mothers when they engage with complex institutional texts: they can read the words but meaning making is sometimes out of reach. In this way, I want to assert that merely being able to read the words phonetically does not lead to deep understanding of content and intent. While analysing data, I have acknowledged and respected the diverse experiences that enrich the epistemology of each participant.

Chapter 5 brings to light the limitations of the study as well as the recommendations that arise from the research project. In this chapter, I shall share the conclusions of this major research paper and outline some areas of interest that I plan to pursue through my doctoral research.

Chapter 2

The Conceptual Framework: Decolonizing Institutional Ethnography

During my graduate program from 2011 to 2014, I learned that a conceptual framework is the theoretical context in which I would situate my research interest and from which I would examine my data. From discussions with my professors, I understood that it is the overarching umbrella of inquiry to which I would tether my findings and analyses. As my research interest was to find out what South Asian mothers did as mothering work for their children’s transition to high school, I chose institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. Due to my professional location as a transition years’ teacher, I was aware of the institution towering over my students, their parents, my colleagues and me. Everything we did in our everyday lives was directed, coordinated and regulated by the MOE through its educational governance and T-discourses: report cards talked to IEPs, teachers talked to report cards and IEPs, at-risk profiles talked to the guidance department. These textual conversations went on and on. Therefore it seemed logical that the MOE would have a part to play in the coordination of mothering work for transition. I wanted to find out what it did and how.

Institutional Ethnography

Institutional Ethnography or IE is the name that is used for a research approach that investigates the social by focusing on “textually mediated social organizations” (Smith, 1990, as cited in Devault, 2006, p.294). Institutional ethnography, explicates Smith (1987, 2001) was proposed originally as a methodological approach of writing a sociology for women. This research approach, according to Smith (2001), uses the “notion of texts to refer to words, images, or sounds that are set into a material form of some kind from which they can be read, seen, heard, watched and so on". She argues that the material forms of texts are characterized by the fact that “the given

form of words, images and sounds can be replicated" which is their "magical character" (p.66). Smith (2001) also discusses the critical aspect of text activation that occurs when people take them up or interact with them. She suggests that "exploring how texts mediate, regulate and authorize people's activities expands the scope of the ethnographic method beyond the limits of observation" (p.160). I posit that the school board's website and the RCD embedded in it, both meet these criteria set out by Smith in that they contain words and images, are standardized and replicable in multiple settings yet are taken up in diverse ways. Both these texts, the school board's website and the RCD, can be seen and read in specific local and observable settings such as the homes of South Asian mothers and classrooms of Grade 8 teachers, in very diverse ways.

I rely on Smith's (2001) argument that texts and documents "make possible the appearance of the same set of words, numbers or images in multiple local sites, however differently they may be read or taken up (p.160). For the purpose of my research, based on my professional experience, I posit that the settings in which each individual stakeholder takes up the text, the RCD, and the manner in which they do so are unique and diverse, although the text itself, is uniform and standardized.

I therefore suggest that the RCD of the school board is an instrument of educational governance of the MOE as it contains important information for high school that leads into the post-secondary pathways of workplace, college or university in alignment with the MOE's transition policies. This RCD, embedded in the school board's website invisibly directs the transition of students from Grade 8 to Grade 9 and through the four years of high school in the province of Ontario.

Textually mediated organization of work

Work processes of individuals, posits Smith (2001), are coordinated through the texts of the institution. This coordination is also referred to as "textual mediation" by Griffith (2005, p.104) and takes place through policy documents, procedures, websites, registration forms, student numbers and complex course codes used by the high school based on the directives of the MOE such as those highlighted in Appendix D of this paper. Through my professional observation of work coordination, I argue that transition related work processes of teachers, as front line professionals and South Asian mothers of Grade 8 students, are being textually coordinated by high schools in accordance with the transition policies and procedures of the MOE in the province of Ontario.

The importance of embedding the text in the inquiry

It is not enough "to use the texts as sources of information about organizations", asserts Smith (2001, p.160). She suggests that they are to be seen as they "enter into people's local practices of writing, drawing, reading, looking and so on" and emphasizes that they must "be examined as they coordinate people's lives" (p.160). Smith (2006) explicates the importance of embedding the text in the method of inquiry by asserting that "incorporating texts into ethnographic practice is essential to institutional ethnography" as it enables the inquiry to "reach beyond the locally observable and discoverable into the translocal social relations … that permeate and control the local" (p.65). For the purpose of my research, the settings in which the texts are replicated and taken up are the homes of South Asian mothers and Grade 8 teachers' classrooms where mothers either ponder over course choices or meet with teachers to get help with their decision making.

Smith (2006) posits that when institutional texts are intentionally introduced at specific places within the "work-text-work" relationship, the process of work coordination of the subjects within a social organization come to be known as textually mediated organisation of work (p.89). Mapping the actual sequences of work and texts, explicates Turner (2006), "extends ethnography from people's experience and accounts of their experience into the work processes of institutions and institutional action" (p.139). By embedding the RCD in my inquiry, I have examined how the MOE uses one of its key regulatory texts to coordinate the work of South Asian mothers during the transition process for high school. Such a social organization of independent yet interconnected work processes that is coordinated entirely by texts is guided by a concept that Smith refers to as "ruling relations" (2005, p. 10).

Relations of Ruling

Relations of ruling, or ruling relations, explicates Smith (1987) came out of her exploration of "a sociology from the standpoint of women" and "brings into view the intersection of the institutions organizing and regulating society with their gender subtext and their basis in a gender division of labour" (p.3). In order to "avoid potential misunderstanding", Smith (1987) states first, what she *does not mean* by "standpoint". She asserts that "a sociology for women should not be mistaken for an ideological position" (p.106). She also explicates that "standpoint" as deployed by her "cannot be equated to women's perspective or worldview". She emphasizes that it is a "method that, at the outset of the inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday lives" (p.107). As South Asian mothers of this school network are not included in any transition meetings or conversations within the cross panel team, I assert that they are far away from the centre of educational governance within the school board and therefore the MOE. I posit that

they are marginalized and made absent in high school transition talks until it is time for them to do their mothering work for course selection. The institution merely continues to use its regulatory institutional texts, such as the RCD to permeate their everyday lives. Therefore, at the very outset of my inquiry, I followed Smith's (1987) notion of women's standpoint: I sought to create a space for South Asian mothers, the absent subjects in transition, and invited them to speak of their absent experiences from the actualities of their everyday lives. By taking into account the lived realities of South Asian mothers engaged with transition for high school, I decided to "begin and develop inquiry in the very same world we live in, where we are in our bodies" (Smith, 2005, p.2).

Decolonizing Institutional Ethnography

For a colonized woman who has been acutely aware of that reality, I took an unusually long time to find the academic language to write this section of my paper. I think it was so because I was living inside the very colonial relations that had anglicized me, and did not know how to describe the process itself. It was like asking a fish to describe what water looks like and feels while swimming around in it throughout its life. Once I consciously took up the thought of decolonizing, I sifted through literature that spoke to my lived experiences. I recalled the historical accounts narrated by my parents and grandparents about the colonial relations that had influenced their lives in India. Once I had acknowledged that the trajectory of that pervasive contact had irreversibly changed the landscape of my birthplace and had also been instrumental in bringing me to Ontario, I was able to step back from myself and observe how deeply ingrained this legacy has been in my life. At this time, I shall discuss the notion of space as a social product proposed by Razack (2007), Smith's (1993) argument about SNAF or the Standard North American Family, Hall's (2007) explanation of discourse of the west and the power vested

in it as well as Agnew's (2007) position around language and South Asian identity as it is perceived in Canadian society and by South Asian women themselves. I also refer to Foucault's (1984, as cited in Razack, 2007) position of regulatory power. I do this in order to decolonize my institutional ethnographic research project set in the province of Ontario.

The South Asian Neighborhood

While discussing the purpose of my research, it is imperative that I articulate the rationale for focusing my attention on a select group of individuals in a specific geographical location in Ontario - South Asian mothers in a particular pocket of the GTA. This specific space in the Greater Toronto Area is informally known as the South Asian corridor. My teenaged students have often, with wry jest, referred to their neighborhoods as Brown Town. The children in these schools may well understand hockey and watch every game, but the neighborhood rinks that spring up on ponds or in parks every winter, just a few blocks north of their South Asian community are unknown to them. I notice the absence of bodies like mine in these public spaces when I drive by on my way to a library or the art gallery – these spaces do exist in the city but are out of reach for racialized students in this part of the GTA. Affluent middle class individuals in society within the GTA seem to have a limited awareness about the entrenched existence of invisible social borders between this racialized space of South Asian families and more affluent areas of the surrounding neighborhoods in this city.

There is a lot of casual conversation in social circles about where to buy costume jewelry, silk saris, and South Asian food items such as samosas, chutney or mangoes in May. At this time, I draw on Razack's (2007) discussion of space as a social product where she posits that "to question how spaces come to be, and to trace what they produce as well as what produces them,

is to unsettle familiar everyday notions” (pp. 76, 77). She also explicates that urban spaces appear to evolve naturally and illustrates some common misconceptions in the understandings embedded in society. She states that it is often believed that Chinatowns in a city emerged when “Chinese people migrated in sufficient numbers to North America and decided to live together” (p.76). She thereby suggests that when such a belief exists in mindsets that slums and wealthy suburbs seem to have just sprung up in a neighborhood and that their inhabitants seem to naturally belong to them the racialization of urban spaces comes to life.

> When a slum or a housing project has a disproportionate number of Black or Aboriginal people, it is thought to be simply because such people lack the education and training to obtain the jobs, and thus the income, that would enable them to live in a wealthy suburb.(Razack, 2007, p. 76)

During my decade of working in the field of education, I have not witnessed much overt recognition within the cross panel team of this school network that factors such as the proximity to reliable public transit or access to a larger volume of survival jobs could have had any part to play in the development of this South Asian neighborhood. Therefore when this pocket of the GTA is examined through such a misconception, it is perceived that a South Asian neighborhood has just magically manifested itself in this part of the GTA. Such an understanding that South Asian families live in this area merely because they seem to have immigrated here in large numbers and have somehow decided to live together, creates a discursive social understanding whereby "place becomes race" (Razack, 2007, p. 76).

Alongside this skewed understanding, I have placed the concept of SNAF or the Standard North American Family ideological code discussed in depth by Smith (1993). By introducing

SNAF in the way in which South Asian families, mothers and students are gazed at within the institution I am able to see somewhat the reasons why they are racialized in socially dominant spaces in Ontario and within the GTA. Smith (1993) explains her notion of SNAF or the Standard North American Family as "an ideological code in this sense" (p.52) and aligns the term ideological code to a genetic code.

> I am using the term *ideological code* as an analogy to *genetic code*. Genetic codes are orderings of the chemical constituents of DNA molecules that transmit genetic information to cells, reproducing in the cells the original genetic ordering. By analogy, an ideological code is a schema that replicates its organization in multiple and various sites. (Smith, 1993, p. 51, emphasis in original)

Her standpoint is that the relationship between the organization of a model family or the Standard North American Family is considered as the prototype of the "North American middle class" (1993, p.50). According to Smith (1993), SNAF creates a conception of a family as a "legally married couple sharing a household" (p.52) where the adult male is engaged in paid employment and whose earnings provide the economic sustenance for that family. The adult female, in the SNAF code, may also be earning an income but her main responsibility is "in the care of husband, household and children". Smith (1993) asserts that that this "universalizing of the schema locates it function as ideological code" that, akin to a genetic code, is replicable in multiple sites (p.52). Female headed households are seen as deviant through the SNAF lens. I argue that when South Asian families and mothers are viewed by institutions infected with the SNAF code, their home life, social interactions and engagement with the school are found wanting because they do not fit the parameters of a Standard North American Family.

According to Smith (1993), SNAF has to do with the intactness of a family and who heads it: the male or the female family member. She explicates that “a theory of male domination in the family economy is imported into the analysis without being enunciated” and that SNAF “selects women as protagonists of the decline of the intact and the increase of the nonintact, female-headed family” (p.58). I suggest that with respect to South Asian mothers, there are also other unspoken factors that get discursively applied: if they are working, then they aren’t SNAF approved, as they are unable to do as much mothering work to support their children as SNAF approved mothers. If their husbands do not live with the family, either due to marital discord, economic reasons or if their immigration papers haven’t been processed yet, then these social units are seen as nonintact and female-headed, therefore they are considered deviant. If the mothers speak English haltingly, they are somehow held responsible for their children’s academic struggles with vocabulary development. If they are unable to take their children skiing then they are said to deprive their children from acquiring Canadian experience. Based on my anecdotal and lived experience of how SNAF is taken up in South Asian communities, I assert that the pervasive “these mothers, our mothers, these students, our students” discourse originates from this complex hub of T-discourse mediated institutional understanding. Based on my lived experience within some educational settings in the province of Ontario and from being immersed in the T-discourse, I assert that South Asian-ness is constantly compared against the ideological criteria of SNAF and is found wanting.

The Discourse of the West

To explain the power of conversations around how people and places are viewed, Hall (2007) explains the term - discourse - that in societal parlance may stand for a sermon or a speech. He explicates that “discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (p.56). He further argues that “when statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed” (p.56).

Hall (2007) also traces the origins of discourse to the time period in which “Europe began to describe and represent the difference between itself and the ‘others’ it encountered in the course of its expansions” (p. 56). For the purpose of my study and to make sense of how the racialized presence of South Asian mothers is perceived in the GTA, I follow this understanding that discourse is therefore a “particular way of representing the West, the Rest and the relations between them” (p.56). So also, based on my lived experience, I assert that in this cross panel team of the school board that South Asian communities, students and mothers are discursively corralled into "the Rest" simply by virtue that their visibly racialized bodies are not traced to European roots. Their presence in Ontario and in the GTA, however, is the result of their colonized legacies. Members of the cross panel team can become so immersed in the relations of ruling through their professional privilege, that they can identify themselves as being of the West and distinct from the rest. Even if they share the same diasporic space as the South Asian mothers, these privileged professionals can stand apart from the South Asian identity. They are “already-there”, while the mothers are “upward-striving” (Brantlinger, 2003, p.71).

The South Asian Identity

Identity, posits Agnew (2007), is socially constructed and changes with time, place and context. She argues that the process of “moving from one country to another and learning to get along in new society changes the self-perception of immigrant women” (p.318) She also asserts that “self-perception of the women is at odds with the way white Canadians know and understand them” (p.318). Agnew further argues that ethnic groups have “conventionally been constructed in ways that homogenize their experiences and erase the many distinctions, such as those of social class and gender, within them” (p.318). Agnew argues that while there are commonalities of experiences such as the common thread of colonial legacy in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as the indentured laborers’ stories from Trinidad, Guyana, Mauritius, Surinam, and islands of the Caribbean region, there are also vast differences and diversities that come out of these different identities. Agnew’s (2007) arguments about social identity and the self –perception of immigrant women with shared diasporic and geographic roots also applies to South Asian mothers in this pocket of the GTA. Based on her position, I assert that in this way, the South Asian mothers in South Asian neighborhoods are rendered invisible when social spaces portray them as a brown blur of a monochromatic tapestry. Therefore I argue that conversations within cross panel transition meetings that use language such as "our mothers, our families, our schools, our students", are dysconsiously invoking an amalgamation of race, space, discourse and identity (King, 1991). Dysconsciousness, explicates King, “is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the order of things as given” (p.73). As these dysconscious conversations happen in settings from which they are inherently excluded, South Asian mothers appear to have no idea about how their presence in schools is being racialized in the minds and conversations of educators. They just continue to do their mothering work for the children they raise.

I also carefully consider Foucault's (1984) position around the production of subjects in space that examines how "space was fundamental in any exercise of power" (p.252, as cited in Razack, 2007, p.79). Thus I argue that the racialization of this particular pocket of the GTA as a neighborhood predominantly inhabited by South Asian families is a way by which these families and students within them can be regulated during transition, through the institutional power vested in the cross panel teams by the MOE's policies and procedures.

Since my research was intended as a decolonizing institutional ethnography, it engaged with some critical questions raised by Tuhiwai-Smith (2012).

- Whose interests does the research serve?
- Who will benefit from the findings?

Decolonizing methodologies, explicates Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), is concerned not so much with the actual technique of selecting a method but relates much more with the context in which the research problems are conceptualized and designed. This research mindset is also deeply concerned with the impact of the research on and for the participants and their communities.

The process of consciously decolonizing research methodologies has become the life force of my praxis, which is explained as a combination of theory, action and reflection[16]. Research, argues, Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), can be understood as a "set of ideas, practices, and privileges that were embedded in imperial expansionism and colonization and institutionalized in academic disciplines, schools, curricula, universities and power" (pp. x, xi). Therefore, she asserts, that the intellectual project of decolonizing has to determine ways in which a colonizing world can be navigated. It requires, says Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), "a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration and that is open to possibilities". She also argues that while

16 (http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/concepts-used-by-paulo-freire, accessed June 2015)

decolonizing methodologies is not a method of political revolution, it does "provoke some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in social transformation" (p. xii).

I used the methodology known as institutional ethnography (DeVault, 2004; Griffith & Smith, 1991, 2005; Smith, 1987, 1993, 2005, 2006) to examine the mothering work of South Asian mothers. Decolonizing this methodology meant that I had to break free from the colonial frames of reference that have traditionally guided academic research for a long time. As a decolonizing institutional ethnographer, I assert that my research project and the findings that came out of it, bring to light new ways to think about research by engaging actively with the voices and perspectives of the research participants. Through my inquiry, the research participants would share their experiences as data (Campbell, 2006) and add to my knowledge as an Ontario Certified Teacher. Through this research, they would be able to share their thoughts with the school board and perhaps the MOE about the level of engagement that they bring to their children's high school transition processes.

From the decolonizing framework arose two questions on which I had to reflect before I embarked on my research.

Question:	**Reflection:**
What was the context in which the research problem - of South Asian women's mothering work for transition to high school - was conceptualized and designed?	I believe that South Asian mothers are competent to engage in transition related work. I also believe that they come to the work of transition with a sound understanding of the long term implications of course selections for Grade 9. I view them as capable participants and not deficient in their understanding of the importance of parental engagement in the transition process.
What did my research have to offer the South Asian mothers in this racialized space within the GTA?	My research participants would examine the knowledge that they had created and gain access to the big picture of transition beyond the information of the RCD and the pathways embedded therein. Upon completion of my research project, the explicit

	sharing of my findings would enable them to assist their children and community members to make informed decisions regarding high school course selections. It would also enable them to trust their own critical questioning skills when courses were recommended for their children and would allow them to develop and harness their agency to secure successful educational outcomes for their children.

My decolonizing institutional ethnography invited South Asian mothers to "talk back and talk up to research as an institution of knowledge that is embedded in a global system of imperialism and power" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. ix).[17] So far they and their children had been examined by the institution. They would now be able to look back at the institution and be aware of the relations of ruling embedded within. I was confident that when South Asian mothers spoke in their heritage languages to create a body of knowledge about the mothering work that they did to support high schools in the transition process, the decolonizing institutional ethnography would begin to breathe freely.

My Footsteps on Traditional Lands

I acquired the capacity of decolonizing research by learning from the scholarship of Haig-Brown (2007) who asserts that "North Americans of immigrant ancestry, whether they have come to this continent more recently or were born here, have been allowed to become citizens with little knowledge of an issue foundational to the new nations imposed upon the land" (p.168). Herein, she critically examines the phrase "the founding nations" that focuses only on England and France, often bypassing the First Nations of Canada. She explicates that "in keeping

17 The Building Blocks for Education Summit, held in 2010 in Ontario, had brought together experts and education policy leaders from around the world. This international summit featured speakers from six countries who shared their best practices and ideas as well as examined ways to help solve the "challenges facing students from Ontario and around the world" http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/bb4e/

with this presentation of this history, schools have generally failed to develop appropriate cultural space for Aboriginal students” (p.168). In my decade of teaching in Ontario, I have seen that there hasn’t been any explicit instruction about the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples in classrooms to develop this understanding of non-FNMI students or society at large. Wherever taught, FNMI topics are very time bound and taught in a past tense with a certain exoticism attached to the traditional practices, lifestyles and livelihoods. New Canadians, whether they belong to settler or recent immigrant routes, do not consciously engage with current events that affect the lives of FNMI peoples unless allies teach against the current and infuse their pedagogy with this critical consciousness. I know this from my experience as an educator in the GTA.

Decolonization, assert Tuck and Yang (2012), “is a distinct project from other civil and human rights based social justice projects” (p.1). My research seeks to “bring attention to how settler colonialism has shaped schooling and educational research … and other settler colonial nation-states”. I engaged with the task of “examining how the invisibilized dynamics of settler colonialism mark the organization, governance, curricula and assessment of compulsory learning” (p.2). This explication when applied to my research context, speaks to the organization of schooling into the elementary and secondary panels, the manner in which prerequisite courses through the years of high school build upon what is chosen and learned in previous years, the way in which standards referenced assessments are intricately linked to report cards and standardized testing, within the province of Ontario. This foundational pattern of institutional order aligns with notions of relations of ruling and T-discourses explicated by Smith (1987, 1993) that speak of the ways in which the institution invisibly and pervasively regulates the lives of people across various settings.

Lastly, I acknowledge Razack's (2007) explanation that "a white settler society is one established by Europeans on non-European soil. Its origins lie in the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by the conquering Europeans" (p.74). She also argues that "as it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy" (p.74). I have thereby arrived at an understanding that had eluded me in the years before my graduate studies program, that Canada and the province of Ontario are both formulated and governed on the principles of establishment of a settler society.

To decolonize the methodology of institutional ethnography, I focused on the relations of ruling embedded in English, the language of literacy in Ontario (Van de Kleut, 2011) and colonial power (Agnew, 2007). I therefore sought to create a safe space for marginalized voices. In order to accomplish this task, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews with participants and invited them to speak in their heritage languages if they so wished. This decision offered them the opportunity to speak fluently and freely about the mothering work that they did in order to support high schools in transition planning for their children.

The Problematic

The Problematic according to Smith

While I have referred to the notion of problematic in earlier pages, it is here that I can fully discuss its meaning in the context of my research. Smith (1987) explicates that "the everyday world is not fully understandable within its own scope" (p.92). She asserts that the social relations that organize the everyday world are not fully apparent in it. This phenomenon, she argues, is the "social organization of the sociological problematic in the actual work and practices of real individuals" (Smith, 1987, p. 92). For the purpose of my study, I have applied Smith's (1987) definition of the problematic to argue that South Asian mothers engaged in

transition work for their children are largely unaware of the social relations within schools, both elementary and secondary, that organize their everyday lives and worlds because these relations are not fully apparent within their lives. They participate in it without being aware of its existence.

For the purpose of my research, I apply the following analogy to illustrate the way in which South Asian mothers are immersed in the problematic without even being aware of its existence, except for when they are drawn into it.

> The everyday world, the world where people are located as they live, located bodily and in that organization of their known world as one that begins from their own location in it, is generated in its varieties by an organization of social relations that originate 'elsewhere'. It is like a dance in which the subject participates or in which she is placed. The 'shapes' taken by the dance and the part she plays in it bring into being the dance as an actual organization of social relations through time. Whether she chooses to play a part or not, or the particular movements she elects in relation to the dance, its emerging and developing forms are those that give shape to what she does. The dance however, extends beyond the boundaries of her sight. She cannot from where she is recover its form or assess its character or movement. She picks it up as it moves its patterns into her scope of action, and she must be moved by or move with them. (Smith, 1987, p.92)

Smith (1987) clarifies that the term "problematic" is not to be confused with the notion of problem (p.91). She asserts that the concept of the problematic is one that helps us understand the "property of the everyday world as a focus for sociological work" (p.91). She further argues that "constituting the social organization and determinations of the everyday world as a problematic is a method of guiding and focusing inquiry" (p.91). I use this definition of the

concept of the problematic in relation to transition work done by South Asian mothers, to draw attention “to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles”(p.91). Smith (1987) also asserts that these puzzles and questions are present in a latent state in the actualities of the experienced world, in this case that of South Asian mothers engaged in transition related work in this network of schools. The questions and issues around transition related mothering work are the very means of developing the problematic as an inquiry. Therefore my chosen method of guiding and focusing the inquiry revolves around examining the work coordination of South Asian mothers. This method of inquiry brings to light the social organization of the MOE, its school boards, and its high schools, each with its network of elementary schools is. Like Smith (1987), I too, have shifted the term – problematic - “out of its ordinary place within a scientific or philosophical discourse” (p.91). I have treated it as a “property of an actuality lived and practiced” (p.91). I also argue that the problematic is inherently present “in the everyday world as it is given to any of us to live” (p.91). I assert that the everyday world of education especially in the transition work of South Asian mothers is “neither transparent not obvious” and that its “inner determinations are not discoverable within it” (p. 91). I argue that in transition related mothering work, “the conditions of our action and experience are organized by relations and processes outside them and beyond our power of control” (p.92). So it is with teachers, families, students and administrators who are engaged in the transition process.

As my research progressed, I became aware that my participants, as stakeholders in the education of their children, though sometimes puzzled by the regulatory practices of transition, were largely unaware of the underlying connections and networks between the elementary school, the high school and the MOE that coordinate their work organization: they were

immersed in the problematic yet typically unaware of it. Institutional ethnography enabled me to consider the possibility of bringing within the reach of the primary participants, some ways in which they can advocate for themselves. Using this conceptual framework, I am in a position to speak of the stories of South Asian mothers in an ethically appropriate manner. I can also invite them to speak for themselves in their own voices and from their own unique standpoints (Griffith & Smith, 1991, 2005; Smith, 2005).

Background of the Problematic

Transition, as it happens in this school board, is not unusual or unique. All school boards in Ontario implement the transition policies of the MOE in similar ways and coordinate course selections for Grade 9 as a first step to high school. Every school board across Ontario has a similar regulatory institutional text that guides course selection that is available either in print or in a digital form. Each course directory is based on the MOE's course descriptions and prerequisites document (2011). In this school board, these texts use the alphanumeric course codes listed in their own regulatory document, the RCD, and coordinate the work of Grade 8 teachers and South Asian parents locally within each school board. The MOE's publication, Course Descriptions and Prerequisites (2011) [18] highlights individual subjects through course codes, and indicates subject specific pathways for a variety of subjects including English, math and science for Grades 9 to 12.

Smith (2006) explicates that "higher-order texts regulate and standardize texts that enter directly into the organization of work in multiple local settings" (p.79) through "intertextual hierarchy" (p.79). Based on my professional experience as a transition years' teacher, I assert

18 The course descriptions and prerequisites are clearly laid out in this Meta text of the MOE available on its website. https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/descript/descri9e.pdf

that the MOE's course descriptions and prerequisites document *is* the Meta regulatory text on which the RCD of this school board is based. It is therefore that higher order text that regulates and standardizes the RCD of this school board and various course directories of the other school boards in the province of Ontario. These course directories in turn enter into the organization of work of the various individuals placed in multiple settings in every elementary school in Ontario. They relentlessly regulate the work of high school guidance counsellors and student success teachers, Grade 8 students, and their parents, in preparation for course selection and thereafter, through high school. Appendix D illustrates the coded language contained in these documents in greater detail.

The evolution of the RCD: From booklet to hyperlink

Until its last year in print, that was 2013, the RCD of this school board was available as a booklet as well as in digital form. Not many teachers looked at the RCD in cross panel meetings. Few referred to the print copies. When high schools spoke of applied and academic courses and pathways, Grade 8 teachers listened. Maybe everyone knew implicitly what each course code and linkage meant or they were too shy to ask. In the first week of January, high school guidance counsellors used to distribute the RCD along with high school registration forms to Grade 8 students at each elementary school in their network. The print copy of the course directory was a magazine-sized booklet of around eighty pages. It contained information about the key features of Ontario Secondary Schools, Grade 9-12 programs and diploma requirements. The first few pages were devoted to general information about course credits, compulsory courses, course substitutions, and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, a mandatory graduation requirement in this province. Information about community involvement, student success, alternative ways of earning credits as well as the credit requirement for Ontario Secondary

School Certificate awarded to students with special needs upon successful completion of high school, was also included in the course directory.

The RCD explained a variety of options: the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program known as OYAP, workplace preparation courses, the Specialist High Skills Major known as SHSM, and the International Baccalaureate or IB programs. First Nations, Metis and Inuit education information was also highlighted with relevant links to the MOE’s website. There was an entire page devoted to all the course codes where the complex alphanumeric aspect of each was explained in detail. A table contained the codes for Grades 9 to 12 in two separate columns. The MOE’s website was mentioned on the main page that contained all the course codes. The last few pages were comprised of grids that showed the various schools within the school board and the specific courses that they offered.

Since 2014, the print copy of the RCD was no longer available. This text is now available online, under one of the many informative and colourful tabs attached to the website of this school board. All the information that was previously available in the magazine sized booklet has become available digitally on the school board’s website. It is all there, but hidden from view unless the reader knows what they are looking for and where to go in order to find it.

Encountering the problematic

South Asian mothers often talk to me in the school hallway, irrespective of whether I teach their child or not. They usually speak to me in the heritage languages that we share. Even when I do not speak a particular one, say, Tamil, they speak with me anyway. They accommodate my linguistic gap by peppering their conversation with English words such as “sunglasses, lost, teacher, find, talk to, I wait” and complete the rest of their discussion in Tamil. If they speak to me in Punjabi, I respond in Hindi and we mostly understand one another. The

linkages of the Indian sub-continent, in spite of Partition[19] and other political mishaps are sound and strong in my everyday world.

Mothers of students in Grade 8 have specific questions about course selections and concerns about the implications of that process on post-secondary outcomes. If they telephone me, I explain to them what the different streams mean: 'academic, applied, locally developed and intensive support'. These names for high school pathways or streams of study, are cryptic terms that reveal nothing about students' future prospects to anyone who lacks this specific vocabulary. In order to understand what these pathways imply, one requires a competent fluency in the field of high school education and expertise in the managerial language (Smith, 2005) of transition.

Wherever possible, I support South Asian mothers by verbally translating the transition related information into Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati and Marathi. If any of my students have special learning needs that require a more specific program with intensive support, I usually engage the help of teachers from the community support department within the board, who are linguistically proficient in Tamil, Punjabi or Cantonese, as I do not speak these languages. Even if the South Asian mothers are fluent English speakers, I sometimes have to deconstruct the intricate course code vocabulary and embedded transition implications to real life contexts. Therefore I have come to an understanding that the barriers faced by South Asian mothers while taking up the RCD, is not related to their English comprehension. Based on the number of times I have had to deconstruct this information for fluent English speaking South Asian mothers as well as for my

19 Partition refers to the British-mediated division of the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan. In 1947, under the supervision of Lord Mountbatten, the last British Viceroy of colonized India, the country as it was then, was carved up into two countries: Pakistan and India. East Pakistan was carved out of the province of Bengal and West Pakistan from Punjab. This led to mass exodus of people across the newly created border, severe dislocation and loss of communities, lives and property (Collins & LaPierre, 1975; Loomba, 2005). In 1971, East Pakistan asserted nationhood as Bangladesh.

co-parent who has a university degree in chemistry and a master’s degree in business management, I assert that it is precisely the use of expert educational language embedded in the RCD that prevents them for understanding important information about their children’s high school course selection. Transition talk is coded in another language altogether. Therefore, conversational or even expert English fluency doesn’t necessarily ensure comprehension.

Working within the problematic

Around midday at our school, mothers wait patiently for their children to come to the front foyer and pick up their lunch bags. Even if they have worked a night shift, many mothers ensure that their children have a hot, home cooked lunch every day. Some mothers work as lunch assistants and supervise students at recess. Others come to the office, to ask for interviews with teachers, to complain about a school matter such as pizza not received that week, a class picture order that has been misplaced or some other query.

All interactions with the South Asian mothers in my school or around the community produce some response in me. Their questions or hesitation to speak brings to light the difference between their location and mine. I sit in silence to process the discomfort sometimes. There is a reflection of their anxieties into my life. I am always observant of the fact that they look like me due to our racialized kinship, yet their entry points into their children’s school life are very different from mine. I remember that I was like that once, when I first came to Canada. With a firm belief in all that I had been told and had perhaps read in some spare time, I believed that the education system in Ontario was one of the best in the world. I also believed that Canada was the perfect solution to my migratory meanderings. I had been guided here by texts. I had come to stay and make a life.

As the education system is identically regulated in all its school boards by the MOE, on the surface, it appears as if all students in Ontario have access to the same learning environments and inputs. In spite of policy and procedure documents, curriculum frameworks, research data and professional development monographs, the lived realities of people's experiences are not always identical or equitable. My student, V, whose mother had brought me closer to my research, had said to me once that if I had been his mother, it wouldn't matter that he was different from his classmates. "School is so hard. But if you were my mother, Ms. Karnad-Jani, I would become a police officer" he had said. [20] I had had trouble sleeping that night. In my everyday life as a South Asian mother I am mindful that my son has distinct advantages in course selection or just getting through his learning not only due to my socio economic status but primarily due to the fact that as an Ontario Certified Teacher with professional privilege, I can help him expertly navigate his learning pathways. This is not always the case with my students. Therefore the problematic within which I live and work alongside South Asian mothers brings to mind the unequal mothering advantages we have that translate into the unequal education outcomes experienced by our children.

In the initial days of my graduate studies program and in my tutorials with the librarian at York University, I had found very little information directly related to mothering work in so called main stream texts. It is the course work that I did with Dr. Alison Griffith (1991, 1998, 2005) that led me deeper into the field of institutional ethnography through her scholarship and that of her research partner in mothering work and institutional ethnography, Dr. Dorothy Smith (1987, 1991, 1996, 2005, 2006). In my classes with Dr. Haig-Brown (2007, 2012) I learned how to decolonize

20 This is the gist of a conversation with a Grade 8 student in 2012.

my research. Thus the conceptual framework of my research came to rest on two strong pillars of research: institutional ethnography and decolonising methodologies.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Research Design

As a researcher engaged in social change, my discussion of methodology is based on the conscious intent of decolonizing the inquiry process. Through a decolonizing institutional ethnography, I have attempted to bring to light the coordination of work processes of South Asian mothers engaged in transition by the MOE of Ontario through its textually mediated discourses or T-discourses (Griffith and Smith, 2005; Smith, 1993).

Methodology, assert Kirby and McKenna (1989) is the "gathering of data and making sense of it in an orderly way, as well as a study of methods" (p.63). They also posit that "methodology, theory and ideology are intertwined" (p.63) and the way in which researchers conduct research "is inextricably linked" with how they see the world. (p.63). I understand methodology to be the process by which the researcher consciously chooses as well as uses methods and tools to conduct her research.

I began developing my methodology and selection of methods by clarifying my purpose of selecting this particular group of participants. For a decade, I had seen South Asian mothers doing their mothering work in the hallways of the school and in the community. Although I had helped some South Asian mothers of my former students understand and navigate the process of transition for a decade, I did not know what their mothering work looked like.

My rationale for wanting to speak with South Asian mothers was as follows:

- Since coming to this land, I have been labelled as South Asian. Therefore, I felt a racialized kinship with the women I saw every day in my school and around my communities.

- I also discovered that while I was working within the problematic, I was unconsciously observing their mothering work and comparing it with what I had done as a South Asian mother when I had engaged in mothering work for transition.
- I was curious about what it meant to be a South Asian mother within the context of education in Ontario given what I was learning about SNAF and T-discourses.
- I wanted to learn about how South Asian mothers were being supported in this school network.
- I was curious about the ways in which the mothering discourse and T-discourses within this school network of the GTA interacted with the mothering work of these South Asian mothers.

Therefore, in order to study the mothering work of South Asian mothers in this school network, I wanted to examine *"who did what, with whom, when, and where"*[21] for transition. I was curious about the ways in which they took up the RCD, the coordinating text that lay dormant in the school board's website only to awaken in the winter of their children's Grade 8 year. I had had a lot of practice with framing questions using the method of in-depth interviewing as part of my course work at York University. I now wanted to ask South Asian mothers in this school network several questions about their mothering work during the crucial period of transition to high school.

- What do/did you do to support your child's transition to high school?

21 Dr. Griffith had explained institutional ethnography and the process of examining work coordination to me in this very easy-to-understand manner in her office at York University as I was preparing to write my proposal in March 2013. I submitted it for approval in September 2013 and started my research that December.

- When, where and with whom do/did you support your children in their high school transition?
- Why do/did you do this work to prepare your child for high school?

In my research reality, I have come to acknowledge my standpoint as a professionally trained, academically driven, anglicized, heterosexual, non-denominational, Indian, Mumbai born, metropolitan, suburban GTA settled, middle class, single woman and mother. This standpoint is my unique social fingerprint and does not take into account the standpoints of other woman who are also labelled as South Asian within the GTA. It does not represent, or appropriate the Jaffna stories, the Sri Lankan Civil War experience, the refugee narratives from Sindh, the Scarborough stories, or the Canadian born hijabi experience to name just a few. I realise that even within what I have listed as standpoints, are broad categories. I understand that no individual is a product of a single experience. My standpoint as a mother and teacher working in a school board in the GTA is therefore just my standpoint. I cannot and do not speak for anyone else.

Decolonizing With a South Asian Focus

In December 2013, I conducted a decolonizing institutional ethnography in order to learn about the textual coordination of transition related work of South Asian mothers. I noticed that scholarship in the areas of decolonization and the decolonizing of research has been invariably linked to imperialism and colonialism, mainly from the Indigenous standpoint. Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize that "decolonization is not a metaphor" They argue that it is a "distinct project from other civil and human rights based social justice projects" (p.1). The term 'research' asserts Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), "when seen from the vantage point of the colonized… is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (p.1).

Upon scrutinizing my decade of work experience in the public education system in the GTA, I have begun to comprehend the position held by Tuck and Yang (2012) who explicate “how settler perspectives and worldviews get to count as knowledge and research and how these perspectives - repackaged as data and findings - are activated in order to rationalize and maintain unfair social structures” (2012, p.2) in the education system of Ontario. This explanation brings to light the ways in which the cross panel team accesses Grade 8 students’ assessment data from previous years to count as knowledge of their current and future capabilities. It also explains how the cross panel team members decide which course pathways are best for which students and the ways in which the high school uses the expertise of Grade 8 teachers to herd students to those pathways through their professional recommendations. As my inquiry is a decolonizing institutional ethnography from the standpoint of South Asian mothers’ marginalized in the processes of transition, one of the goals of this enterprise is to challenge the monopoly that certain groups - English speakers, middle class educational advocacy groups, elite researchers such as academics and educators involved in transition work - have established on the production of information that counts as knowledge.

In my inquiry, I wished to take up the lens of ruling relations as they apply to South Asian mothers and examine the T-discourses related to their mothering work when engaged in transition. I planned to conduct in-depth interviews with five to ten South Asian mothers in this school network. From my lived experience of serving communities that were neatly packed into the South Asian box, and from the chats I had had with families and mothers, I knew how comfortable the conversations usually were when we communicated in the languages that connected us. I know well, the shared laughter at an anecdote or that walking-away-with-a - wave, even after a quick chat, with the taste of Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati or Marathi lingering on my

lips. How stilted it would be, if in spite of honouring this reality of our linguistic commonalities, I chose to conduct my interviews in English. I therefore decided to conduct my in-depth interviews in the heritage language of participants and thereby continue decolonising my methodology.

Unpacking the labelled box

The notion of a South Asian neighborhood discussed in chapter 2 is part of a racialized reality in many urban pockets of the GTA. Therefore, many schools within the various school boards classify students and mothers as South Asian. The mothers may identify themselves as Tamil, Pakistani, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Sinhalese, Indian, or Bangladeshi. But the institution sees them and names them as South Asian. The term, South Asia, says Agnew (1998), collapses a number of sovereign nations that were formerly a part of the British Raj including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka into one group of people. In my poems and blogposts, I refer to this racialized social grouping as “The Little Brown Box” (Karnad-Jani, 2008). The name comes from the mental image that I see every time I experience or notice racialization.

My Indian-ness comes to me far away from home

It comes to be when people speak to me

LOUDLY so I understand. (p.46)

In this neat little monochromatic labeled box are tossed all the South Asian mothers, their individual identities and unique narratives. In this box, the institution packs people they see as South Asian – students, mothers, families - based on who it thinks they are. Thus, the institution, whether nation or province, school board or school, loses sight of the rich reality that the people it labels as South Asian are actually comprised of many ethnically diverse and distinct

populations. Their personal histories and their collective stories are thereby steadily subducted [22] under the convenient categorisation employed by the institution in all its settings. The diversities and similarities of birth, historical ties, migratory routes as well as cultural and epistemological knowledges embedded in the lives of South Asian mothers are thereby rendered invisible due to the monochromatic label of South Asia.

I know that the labelled box exists. I have often been packed in it as have the South Asian women with whom I inhabit this social space within Ontario. Friends, also racialized South Asian women, tell of being spoken to in an unusually loud volume when they aren't dressed in their 'Canadian clothes'. They speak of being overlooked at the bank while the teller speaks directly to their child to convey a message to them. My daughter, a university student, wryly tells of invariably being asked which South Asian restaurant in Montreal she would recommend for out of town visitors. I also know that The Little Brown Box exists from the racializing conversations I have overheard not only in this school board, but in a variety of social settings around the GTA including the academy and my volunteering assignments.

My personal and professional experience come from my standpoint (Smith, 2005) and strengthens my argument about the existence of The Little Brown Box in which South Asian mothers are packed. From this researcher standpoint as a racialized, marginalized woman, I invited my research participants to tell their stories.

Their stories in their own languages

By deciding to conduct interviews in the heritage languages of my research participants, I intended to decolonize the methodology whereby the colonial histories, cultural roots and migratory routes of the participants as South Asian mothers would be honoured. I wanted to

22 Subduction is a geological process due to which one edge of a tectonic plate is forced under the edge of another.

invite them to speak from their standpoint in the languages in which they felt most comfortable. They would speak and I would listen.

The transition work needed for high school preparation in the winter of the Grade 8 year requires students to rely greatly on their parents' support. However, in addition to the usual teenage individuation and distance from parents, I have observed within and through the context of my work that the ties that exist between parents and children tend to loosen further especially when the parent is not educated in Ontario or in Canada. I have observed over the years that students and their parents often explain that they were educated back home, and therefore did not know about education in Ontario or did not know enough.

'Back home' is the term used by many South Asian individuals - men, women and children - to suggest the old country or roots left behind. It is interesting that even those children who have never visited the motherland of their parents' or grandparents' birth use this term quite regularly and facilely. Speakers insert this word even into heritage language conversations quite easily and listeners implicitly understand. Thus as Anderson (2006) states, back home is an imagined community. I, on the other hand, consider that back home is a real place that lives in the hearts of people of the South Asian diaspora and builds kinships in a foreign land. I did not use this word prior to coming to Canada but I do now. This awareness of back home has come into my everyday life through my observations during my thirteen years of living in the province of Ontario.

In this time period, I have also noticed and observed that students spoke on behalf of or for parents when parents speak with, what is perceived as, a limited fluency in English as compared to themselves or school staff. I realized following the work of Wynn (2002) that my life and schooling this far "had not prepared me … to understand the depth and breadth of language

oppression. No one had taught me that the [English] language that I had grown up loving was used to bludgeon others into submission and feelings of inferiority" (p.206). I was curious about the extent to which the submission and feelings of inferiority affected the mothering work of South Asian mothers.

Researcher Position

Since September 2011, when my research found me and I decided to create a space for the stories of South Asian mothers, I have consciously considered researcher position to be an important factor of my inquiry. I identify myself as Indian by birth and Canadian by choice. I was born and raised in Mumbai and Goa, in western India. I came to this land "now called Toronto, Ontario, Canada" (Haig-Brown, 2009, p.4) on 16th January 2002 as a landed immigrant dependent on my co-parent, who was the principal applicant, and the father of my children. Keen to pursue my passion for education and take my place in the work force in a meaningful way, I volunteered at my children's schools and later worked at a tutoring centre between February 2002 and November 2003. I ordered my transcripts from the University of Mumbai with the help of my siblings as I had to provide institutionally certified proof of my undergraduate degree to the universities in Ontario. I applied to the Bachelor of Education program at the Faculty of Education, York University in October 2002. I was interviewed on International Women's Day, March 8th, 2003, and was accepted to the program in April of that year. I graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree specializing in Math, Science and Technology in June 2004. I signed my contract with a school board within the GTA in May 2004 and from September, started teaching a Grade 7 class at a school in a South Asian neighborhood. I was no longer a newcomer. I was on my way to becoming an "already there" teacher and mother (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 71). I had become a member of the MOE as one of its front line professionals. Although

I was a Grade 7 teacher and no one had yet spoken to me about high school pathways, I began to engage in transition work due to my community support initiatives.

The Pervasive Presence of Patriarchy

My earliest life experiences were immersed in patriarchy though I did not know it then. I just remember that they confused me greatly. My mother was an educator and the primary caregiver in the lives of her four children. Although she used to spend countless hours doing mothering work to ensure our social and academic wellbeing, it was my father who signed my report cards. Although Amma was the giver of life and my first teacher, both academically and spiritually, I do not have a single report card with her signature across the bottom. Her absence from the written, institutional texts of my education is absolute.

Amma had to ask Pappa’s permission for everything that needed to be done because he expected to be consulted on every matter. As I grew up and began finding my voice as a young woman, I started challenging this social organization in my home. Pappa’s love that I had experienced throughout my early years steadily turned into a very controlling, and abusive presence in my life. That I was capable of any independent thought appeared to shake the very foundations of something primal in my father. I was perplexed by that, as he was the one who had instilled in me the independence that I live by to this day. He had taught me to think on my feet and to stand up for the courage of my convictions. Yet, when I spoke up with him, it was not tolerated. I began to realize that I was raised to speak up, just not when it affected his control. I was raised to be strong but not when it made him feel diminished. I was raised to think independently until I began to question his oppression. Things used to get ugly when I stood up for my siblings, my mother, or for myself and there are scars. The pervasiveness of patriarchy

had my Pappa in its clutches - I see that now. I shall never know how that relationship would have turned out in the long run, as Pappa died in 1987 at the age of 52 when I was 21.

At that time, I was called upon by my birth order and the fact that I was raised to be strong, to take up the role of provider. Amma embraced her role of head of the family after two decades of being strictly regulated by her husband. She then seamlessly and tacitly gave the mantle of ‘man of the house’ to my brother, then 15, as he was the first born son. As he grew up he assumed unequivocal charge for investments at the stock market and decided what level of control was to be exercised on Amma’s decisions, the youngest twin siblings and me. That is all he had seen from our father and that is what he followed. At this time, my mothering work intensified as I was the breadwinner and also responsible for regulating routines, homework times and any form of civil interactions within the family though my brother, empowered by Amma’s reticence to engage with any decisions had full control of everything else. The duality of being the provider yet being squashed into a subaltern position by my Amma’s titular role that continued to foster my brother’s domination was something against which I rebelled with relentless futility. I am told that in a patriarchal mindset in the Hindu social organization of the family, women, with their entire being, are transferred like objects, from the care of ‘*pitah’ (father), to their ‘patee’ (husband or literally translated as owner) and finally to their ‘putra’ (the son)*. I realize now, that Amma had been subjugated and Pappa and my brother, privileged by the pervasive presence of patriarchy.

I continued to do paid work through the early years of my marriage in 1993 and the birth of my daughter in 1994. I worked until 1996 when I chose to leave my job as a corporate executive and be a full time mother to my two year old daughter. I had decided to manage our lives on the single income of my co-parent in order to escape the societally sanctioned

oppression of his parents and sisters, within their one room tenement in a crowded and dirty back street in Mumbai, and raise my two-year-old daughter in an airy apartment in the distant suburbs. In 1998, I followed my husband along with our 4 year old daughter and seven month old son to Viet Nam on an international posting. Through the two decades of my marriage, I was largely left to my own devices to do my mothering work and raise my children. It appeared therefore that the years of turmoil in my birth family had prepared me for my current role of being a lone mother (Standing, 1999).

The changes in my life path as in the lives of women who move with their families and children in search of livelihood, away from war, or for various other reasons is referred to as the “episodic nature of the lives of women” (Smith, 1987, p.96). Therefore, my episodic migrations and experience with patriarchy, a colonised past, and mothering work as a lone mother (Standing, 1999) guide my research and scholarly work.

To this day, within the cross panel network of the school board, I have noticed that patriarchy prevails in some shape or form in many homes, especially those in which the mothers do not speak the socially dominating language. English, when spoken with an accent, or as a dialect, perhaps even with the halting stance with tongues that bear the fragrant cadence of many other languages, creates invisible and sometimes insurmountable barriers to communication especially in the SNAF infused realm of schools. I have seen in my work setting and in the social world that some South Asian mothers tend to silence themselves steadily when faced with English as the dominating language of communication. These observations from my professional life, are supported in literature (Delpit, 2002; McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Merali, 2008). Some of the South Asian mothers in this racialized neighborhood smile and nod as the men with English fluencies identical to theirs, barrel into the conversation and take charge of it. Some men speak of their

wives dismissively as if they are absent and refer to them in the third person. Some South Asian women who do not speak at meetings, whisper to their children sometimes or smile at the teacher. I assert that this self-segregation seen in this school network, is actually a reflection of the invisible exclusion in educational institutions where there is no explicit space for multilingual fluencies and there is an embedded social deficit attached to those who do not speak English. Such marginalization of women is not just a South Asian problem. Smith (1987) asserts that "as women, we have been living in an intellectual, cultural and political world, from whose making, we have been almost entirely excluded and in which we had been recognised as no more than marginalized voices"(p.1). Unless we actively claim our space in the conversation, it is not automatically given to us. I do not imply that this need for women to claim their space absolves the institution of its responsibility of creating spaces in which women can feel comfortable enough to speak and shine.

Marginalization appears to be a default position that affects women of all shades and ages, around the world. Therefore, opening up a space for conversation with South Asian mothers even before beginning my inquiry was a crucial criterion in my decolonizing institutional ethnography. This was the standpoint space and it had to be a safe space.

My Colonized Self in India, Hindustan or Bharat

What I shall discuss now, presents a reality that is very different from that highlighted in my earlier discussion about patriarchy. I acknowledge the tensions caused by this binary expectation of 'be quiet, be strong' that I have dealt with in my birth family as well as throughout my marriage.

As the first-born daughter of a high school teacher and a banker, I had been raised with the belief that I could be whatever I set my mind to become. In spite of wavering family fortunes in

my teens and twenties, I was taught to work hard and steadily gained advantages from educational opportunities that provided me with the tools required to think critically and challenge the status quo in an existing world order. Surrounded by the effects of colonization all my life as well as having witnessed the dehumanizing diktats of the caste system scattered within the overarching controls of patriarchy, I grew up challenging the core differences between my station in life and that of children who played barefoot in the streets outside my home.

As a teenager, I questioned, challenged and resisted the subjugation of women in cultural settings, at weddings and in social spaces like public transport. I questioned the deaths of women who were burned for dowry as there was quite an epidemic of that horrific abuse in the eighties. I also puzzled over the reasons that my mother had given up a flourishing career in education to raise a family of four children on a single income and in near-penury. Later, as a wife, and a young mother, I resisted the draconian measures, daily taunts and deliberate exclusions meted out by in-laws who systematically harassed me. One of their tactics of linguistic and cultural erasure was to stop me from speaking to my baby daughter in my mother tongue. Although I was a professionally qualified corporate executive, my academic qualifications, professional status and humanity held little worth in the patriarchal hierarchy of my marital family. My husband, who enjoyed the status of a coveted son born after two sisters was quite incapable of standing up to and speaking up for the equitable treatment of our daughter or me. From all these excruciating experiences, I learned many valuable life lessons.

During my childhood, my parents’ decisions in choosing a school for me had depended greatly on their own colonized experiences. In spite of a deep respect for our heritage language, Konkani, and the national language, Hindi, they had enrolled me in English medium schools throughout my school years. Just any English medium school would not do. I was enrolled in a

convent school that was run by a Catholic mission that must have been set up in India long ago. Non-mission schools were and are to this day perceived to be ones that provide a sub-par and vernacular English fluency to their students. The fact that my Amma was a high school English teacher also ensured that my fluency in written and spoken English was strengthened regularly. This English language competency opened doors easily - into jobs, into the academy for my B.Ed. program, to a teaching contract with a publicly funded school board in the GTA and, in 2011, into the graduate studies program at York University. I have benefitted immensely from the remnants of the Raj[23].

The gains that I have made in my life in the short span of thirteen professionally fulfilling and financially secure years in Canada are, in hindsight, not typical of all South Asian newcomers. I am acutely aware that all women, and in particular, all South Asian women, do not necessarily enjoy the privileges that I do, whether at work, or in the hallways of schools that their children attend. The chasm between other South Asian women and me is therefore the starting point of my work.

Decolonizing myself

In qualitative methods, the researcher is the instrument, posits Patton (2002). He also argues that the credibility of the qualitative method depends greatly on the "skill, competence and rigor of the person doing fieldwork" (p.14). Therefore, my cultural competence, research skills, academic ethics and diligence are integral factors that contribute to the validity of my research.

[23] The Raj is a Hindi word that stands for the rule of the British Empire over the Indian subcontinent.

Although colonization has, over centuries of subjugation, sought to set these stories in the contextual frames of Western-European ways of knowing, appropriation of Indigenous knowledges remains a concern for critical theorists and activists around the world (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). During my research with South Asian mothers, I was conscious not to appropriate their words and make them my own. The decision of not speaking for my research participants came from my unwavering commitment to invite each participant to speak in her voice to tell her own story.

I had to decolonize myself as well as my methodology on an ongoing basis, by being mindful of my deep entrenchment in the institution through my role as a teacher and an anglicized product of colonization. I began decolonizing myself by honouring the knowledges of the South Asian mothers with whom I wished to speak. I also acknowledged their ways of knowing, and the worth of their oral histories by inviting them to speak freely in their own voices and in their own languages.

My Mothering Experience in Ontario

Woven through stories of South Asian mothers, I have traced the trajectory of my own mothering work over my thirteen years in Canada. I notice that I have metamorphosed from being an awestruck vessel into which educational jargon was ceaselessly poured, to the decolonizing institutional ethnographer that I have become. I am no longer blinded by the egalitarian claims of Ontario's education system lauded long and loud in the brochures and websites of the Canadian immigration machinery that had attracted my co-parent here. I was a mere follower then. I was 'a dependent applicant, a trailing spouse' as homemaker wives are known in expat circles that I had brushed past in my travels. I bore labels that were embedded in

texts and discourses. I know that now. I was unaware of the problematic then, although I was already immersed in it.

I remember that warm feeling in my chest when I had walked into the foyer of my daughter’s first elementary school in the GTA in January, 2002. Sunlight was streaming down and we were bundled up in coats under which both her father and I were dressed in our smartest suits. I had carried with me, her past report cards, our passports and a bank statement that proclaimed our new address in the basement of a nearby house: we were renting it from friends of my co-parent’s cousins. I had a three year old on one hip. An eager seven year old skipped excitedly beside me. I stood there, in that doorway for a while and looked up. I saw a large banner hanging from the ceiling that invited “Welcome, you are home”.

I smile now when I realise that I did not even know the word ‘aww’ then. I was just not Canadian enough. I must have uttered something surely, or I must just have smiled. I don’t remember now. As I crossed the threshold into the sunny front foyer, my daughter’s little hand tucked firmly in mine, I was aware that this was a fresh start, both exciting and scary. I had lived and worked in Mumbai, Ho Chi Minh City, Dhaka and Singapore. I had travelled to Hong Kong, Bangkok and London. I had raised my siblings, given birth, and I wrote poems. None of that mattered here, as I was a brand new landed immigrant that day. I would have to learn everything anew. I did not know how uphill that journey would be. I wonder now, had I known that then, would I have stayed? Or would I have gone back to where I had come from? I shall never know as I had just kept walking forward from that moment. My life in Ontario unfolded behind me. I think of that morning, often, especially when I go to vote at that very school. I want to warn my old self from thirteen years ago:

> Watch out for the forms you receive. Watch out enough to ask what this means, and that. Don't trust blindly. Don't just sign what you read because you think you understand the words. Ask what lies behind the words. There is always something there.

Every time I see a new family come to my school to register their children, I remember that long-ago me. I know they are new here, when I see that some of them wear smart suits and carry past report cards in neat folders just like I had done. That's what you do back home. You show up, all spit and polish, as first impressions matter.

I know now, that in Ontario, the education system has the transition pathways to and through high school laid out clearly in its regulatory texts. Each family is supposed to find their own way through this maze. I did not know that in January 2002. In 2015, many South Asian mothers doing transition work do not know it either. Nobody told me anything then. Nobody tells them anything now. This is Ontario, "Yours to discover".[24]

Through trial and error, I have gradually become an astute and well-informed parent. I have also picked up a teaching degree along the way and became an educator. As my academic qualifications advanced me along a continuum of learning deep into the realm of advocacy for my children and my students, I taught myself to navigate the labyrinths of the educational system as a mother and a teacher. I learned to read between the lines and decipher euphemisms in report cards. As my children grew up, I found that I needed to know more and more about the intricacies of schooling and my mothering work adapted accordingly. I am now aware that I was being coordinated by institutional texts ever since that day when I first set foot in the province of Ontario.

24 www.Ontariotravel.net is the tourism website of Ontario.

Methodology from the Margins

As discussed in chapter 1, the transition planning process trickles down from the MOE, trails through the high school and into Grade 8 classrooms from where it is handed to South Asian mothers primarily as a list of tasks. Although the RCD of the school board relentlessly coordinates the mothering work of South Asian mothers to help the high school with the transition process, they aren’t anywhere near its centre. They are not invited to the cross panel meetings, nor do they sit at the tables where their children’s futures are debated and decided. Based on my professional experience as a transition years’ teacher in this cross panel network I assert that South Asian mothers are marginalized throughout the transition planning process in this network of schools.

As a feminist researcher, I took into account that my standpoint is mine alone and that I cannot, in my enthusiasm, attribute it to others. Smith (2005) posits that the “notion of women’s experience” (p.8) fails to account for diversities of class, race and the various modulations of gender. She explicates that the claims of “white, middle-class, heterosexual women” (p.8) that dominated the 1960s and 1970s were soon challenged by “working-class women and lesbians, then by African-North American, Hispanic and Native women” (p.8). Thus, Smith (2005) explicates that the “implicit presence of class, sexuality, and colonialism began to be exposed” (p.8). Smith (2005) also states that those women whose experiences were not North American, also challenged the assumptions of these white, middle-class heterosexual women. Based on my professional experience that has witnessed the absence of South Asian mothers in the transition process except to do the mothering work, I assert that they too, fall into an unrepresented category of women and continue to be marginalized in the education dialogue within the cross panel transition team of this high school.

According to Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), "the metaphor of the margin has been very powerful in the social sciences and humanities for understanding social inequality, oppression, disadvantage and power" (p.204). According to Kirby and McKenna (1989), "the methodology of research from the margins is based on the commitment to advancing knowledge grounded in the experience of living in the margins" (p.64). As a researcher engaged in social change, I "do not want to contribute further to the public silencing on the margins" (p.64). Instead, I want to co-create research with participants "in a way that creates opportunities to reclaim and re-name that experience" (p.64). Following the scholarship of Kirby and McKenna (1989), I wanted to engage with a method that would enable my research participants to "identify and examine how living on the margins affects their lives, their opportunities, the way they think and act"(p.64). In this way, I could begin to bring to light that which Kirby and McKenna (1989) argue are the "social relations which daily help to construct that experience" of being marginalized South Asian mothers in the minds of those in positions of power in this school board (p.64). Therefore my choice of methods were carefully selected so that they would engage those who were at the margins and as suggested by Kirby and McKenna (1989) "focus on describing reality from the perspective of those who have traditionally been excluded as producers of research" (p.64).

Participants as Co-creators of Knowledge

A critical ethnography, explicates Creswell (2013) is one that examines "issues of power, empowerment, inequality, inequity, dominance, repression, hegemony and victimization" (p.94). As a decolonizing institutional ethnographer, I was examining the mothering work of South Asian women engaged in transition and how the MOE coordinated this work through its regulatory text, the course directory. When seen from the discursive lenses prevalent in the cross panel team, the school board, and the MOE, the South Asian mothers who chose to participate in

my research, appeared to share a common culture because they can trace their ancestral roots to a particular geo-political region known as South Asia (Agnew, 1998). I had invited them to participate in the research on account of being members of elementary school communities discursively labelled as a South Asian neighborhood. Thus, something of a common culture could be attributed to them due to their colonized histories or current locational ties when seen from an ethnographic standpoint. The research data, in the form of their interview responses, would show whether they and their mothering work were indeed alike or not.

From a feminist research standpoint set within institutional ethnography, Smith (2006) posits that "people, as individuals, arrive at any moment with their own distinctive histories, perspectives, capacities, interests, concerns and whatever else they may bring as a potentiality to act in a given setting" (p.65). Guided by this understanding as well as with a respectful response to the multiple worldviews that can coexist in the life of each individual, I began to unpack the labelled box.

The Insider-Outsider Space

The reflexive nature of a social inquiry according to Griffith (1998) "is our most difficult methodological issue". She argues that "understanding social difference and our role in its production requires a recognition of the ways in which we, as researchers, are both insiders and outsiders to the stories we explore" (p.362). I wanted to engage in decolonizing research by speaking to the insider/outsider debate for several reasons.

- Whether I identify myself as a South Asian woman or not, I am still labelled as one in the social organization of the network of schools, in the GTA, and within the province of Ontario. I know this from being packed in The Little Brown Box in my everyday life within the social.

- I was mindful that researcher credibility could be diluted by an unspoken skepticism that I am an outsider to the South Asian mothers' experience on account of being unlike them. My middle class educational advocacy model as an already-there mother (Brantlinger, 2003) who is also an Ontario Certified Teacher would attest to that.
- Some South Asian mothers in my school had already told me how proud they were of me as I was professionally successful in my adopted country and stood beside Canadians as an equal (footnote 28).
- I was also aware that my research data could be dismissed as a biased insider view where I am labelled as just another South Asian woman using an academic platform to speak of something that she has perhaps imagined from being too analytical of everyday life. I knew this due to similar insinuations being thrown at me in shared spaces during times of professional discussions around issues of racialization or social injustice.

The Insider/Outsider debate, according to Griffith (1998) "circles around the researcher's relation to those she studies" (p.362). As I am always navigating multiple identities of researcher and subject, mother and teacher, a South Asian woman and an anglicized Canadian, the "personal, perspective-dependent nature of observations can be understood as both a strength and a weakness" (Patton 2002, p.329). The strength of such a multifaceted, hyphenated position is that it permits me, as the researcher to have "first-hand experience and understanding" of the research question. The weakness, Patton (2002) posits, is inherent in the fact that "personal involvement introduces selective perception" (p.329). According to him, this ability to reflect on the engagement both as an insider and outsider is the critical aspect that "crowns fieldwork with

reflexivity and makes the observer the observed - even if only by himself" (pp.229, 230). I therefore acknowledge that this insider-outsider viewpoint is both the strength and a drawback of my position as a South Asian woman, mother, educator and decolonizing institutional ethnographer in Ontario.

A mindful observation of my ongoing engagement with the inquiry, participants and the data was crucial to ensure the credibility of my work. I follow Griffith's (1998) position that "if we conceive of research as a relation that occurs over time, we can begin to see the researcher move back and forth across different boundaries" (p.368). I therefore use the words, insider and outsider, as a hyphenated whole because it is in that space that I engage with my praxis.

There are other implications and risks for researchers who work with the insider perspective, cautions Tuhiwai-Smith (2012). One of them is "the potential for bias, lack of distance and lack of objectivity" (p.206). Another risk is related to the tendency to underplay the requirement of integrity and rigor in practice of the research. From within the insider frame, a researcher may, posits Tuhiwai-Smith, "conflate the researcher role with an advocacy role" (p.206). This is something I carefully and consciously steered clear of throughout my research. The Insider/Outsider debate has been explicated further.

> Whether derived through qualitative or quantitative methods, sociological research is of the world it seeks to describe. We, as researchers, cannot be outside society and thus activities such as "science," or "objectivity" are striated with procedures for minimizing or celebrating the presence of the researcher in the research product. Our recognition of the situated character of scientific knowledge is the context in which questions about the researchers' relation to the group s/he studies have arisen. (Griffith, 1998, p. 361)

The difference between Insiders and Outsiders can also be examined by considering a variety of markers.

> Where the researcher enters the research site as an Insider – someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched – that tacit knowledge informs her research producing a different knowledge than that available to the Outsider – a researcher who does not have an intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to their entry into the group. (Griffith, 1998, p.362)

I examine any unspoken limitations that may be attributed to the credibility of my research intent, process, data and analysis due to the insider-outsider critique by inviting my readers to consider an important question.

> Does the biography of the researcher – their race, class, gender, sexual identity and history – privilege or disqualify their knowledge claims? Are knowledge claims based in biography simply another version of "identity politics" or do researchers with an intimate, often tacit knowledge of a group construct accounts that are more authentic or trustworthy? (Griffith, 1998, pp.361, 362)

I assert that I have followed my ethical responsibility to the fullest and thereby continue to work within the Inside-Outside space.

Participant selection

I had expected to select participants with the help of community organizations and teachers who engaged in outreach work within the school board. I had also spoken to one or two South Asian mothers whose children had long since graduated high school. However, as word got around that I was conducting interviews about transition to high school, many South Asian mothers started contacting me to say that they had a friend here and a cousin there whose child

was preparing for high school or had just started grade 9. Some even connected me to their friends in other municipalities of the GTA. Due to the scope and timelines of this research, I was not able to interview all of them. I was inspired by the strength of the South Asian mothers’ network.

Given the sometimes discursive impression in the cross panel team within this school board that South Asian mothers are disengaged or uninformed, it is very important to note that they were instrumental in locating, contacting and connecting other South Asian women who they felt had a rich experience to share with the institution. My participant recruitment thus moved from being a “random purposeful sampling strategy” directed by me, the primary researcher, to rapidly becoming a “snowball or chain sampling strategy” merely by word of mouth of a few South Asian mothers (Creswell, 2013, p.158). Within two weeks of receiving my research approval from the school board and the university, I had heard from 10- 15 mothers who were eager and willing to share their narratives with me. This ability of the South Asian mothers in this school network to mobilize within such a short time, contradicts any discursive misconceptions about them as being isolated, subaltern, silent and disconnected with education. As seen from the alacrity with which so many South Asian mothers reached out to my research efforts, it appears that once they realised that there was an avenue to speak about their experiences and that they had considerable time to speak, they were ready to meet me.

Some even offered to do phone interviews. As I had not factored in that method of contact into my research proposal, I declined these offers from an ethical standpoint after explaining the rationale to the mothers. Some asked to stay in touch as they wanted to know about the outcome of the research and wanted to participate in any inquiry that I would undertake in the future. This connection is a very important one.

One mother, a dentist who was preparing for a qualifying exam for accreditation to practice in Ontario, conducted an informed consent discussion over the phone and after her exams were over, spent some time going over the consent form in a face to face setting. She was eager to speak with me about her experiences around the transition years in spite of her heavy load of course work and mothering duties. I am honoured that these women trusted me with their stories and took the time to speak with me. Based on the response that I received, it appears that there was indeed a need for this research with South Asian mothers within the GTA.

In order to decolonize my research method, break down barriers to communication, reach over the divide of colonization, patriarchy and institutional status, to invite the voices of research participants to co-create knowledges, I chose to conduct my interviews in the very languages in which my research participants were most comfortable speaking. I therefore posit that the deficit in engagement exists within the institution and is demonstrated through the absence of safe spaces in which South Asian women can speak from their standpoints. There is no deficit in their abilities to do so.

Methods

In December 2013, I interviewed seven South Asian mothers of Grade 8 or Grade 9 students who attended public school in a one large school board within the GTA. These mothers were either preparing for high school transition in September 2014 or had children who had just started high school in September 2013.

In order to understand the ways in which the MOE uses textually mediated or T-discourses to coordinate work processes of South Asian mothers, I also conducted a document analysis of the RCD as a pivotal entry point into my research. As I situated myself in the insider-outsider space as a South Asian mother and an Ontario Certified Teacher working for the MOE, I

have shared my personal reflections to bring to light my critical reflexive process throughout my research.

Triangulation of data

In the method of inquiry known as institutional ethnography as explicated by Campbell (2006), a researcher "goes about exploring and understanding her own and someone else's everyday/everynight life in a methodical way" (p.91). Although institutional ethnography, much like other forms of ethnography, "relies on interviews, observation and documents as data" (p.92). It does so by treating these data "not as the topic or object of interest" but as entry points into the "social relations of the setting" (p.92). As I wanted to examine the mothering work of South Asian women, I based my work on Campbell's (2006) position and began with "actual people actively involved in a social process, speaking from their experience" (p.95).

Within institutional ethnography, a researcher can use a range of data collection methods to explore the experiences that provide the starting point and help identify the problematic. Institutional ethnography is a process that methodologically depends on interviews, observations and document review to produce relevant data, asserts Walby (2012). Triangulation as explicated by Litchman (2013) "is a method used by researchers to collect data from a variety of sources" (p.22). She also posits that the triangulation creates a better chance of giving researchers a clear picture of the data as well as reduces the incidence of bias.

In order to understand the mothering work of South Asian mothers, I combined the method of in-depth interviewing with my personal reflection as a South Asian mother and a transition years' teacher. By doing so, I mindfully navigate the insider-outside space that I occupy. While applying the principles of institutional ethnography, I also conducted a document

analysis of the RCD, the institutional text used to regulate transition to examine the T-discourses that guide transition and coordinate mothering work.

According to Litchman (2013), ethnography or ethnographic research is a type of qualitative research that emerges from anthropology and "focuses on the study of culture of groups" (p. 322). While explaining cross-cultural interviewing from the standpoint of traditional ethnographies, Rubin and Rubin (2013) clarify that, "culture refers to a set of values, beliefs and ways of interpreting the world shared by a group of individuals" (p.180). These scholars further assert that the term 'culture' is often used to denote individuals who live within a specific geographical area. In this large school board within the GTA, particularly when seen through a geo-political view grounded in a Western European and therefore North American standpoint, South Asian mothers are perceived as belonging to one culture (Agnew, 2007). They are known as 'our mothers' in the dysconscious and discursive conversations within cross panel discussions. They are assumed to belong to one group, and are seen as well as treated as a monochromatic mass of women, all packed conveniently into The Little Brown Box. Therefore, I suggest that an inquiry conducted with South Asian mothers is an ethnography due to a commonality of culture that is attributed to them within the social spaces that they occupy.

The choice of a data collection method, argue Kirby and McKenna (1989), is not just a research tool. It is also a political process. They suggest that the methods suitable for conducting research from the margins "must be grounded in a political awareness of a need for change" (p.63). The imperative of recognizing the standpoints of women is very important to my research methodology and I recommend a need for change in the transition planning conducted within this network of schools without any participation of South Asian mothers.

> Beginning from the standpoint of women implies beginning at a point prior to the moment that organizes the detached scientific consciousness. It means therefore beginning in the world that both the sociologist and those she observes and questions inhabit on the same basis. Taking the standpoint of women means recognizing that as inquirers we are thereby brought into determinate relations with those whose experience we intend to express. The concepts and frameworks, our methods of inquiry, of writing texts, and so forth are integral aspects of that relation. (Smith, 1987, p.111)

My research was designed with an intention to provide a platform from which South Asian mothers could contribute to a primary qualitative database of research responses made up of their own experiences. They would therefore become co-creators of knowledges (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). By listening to the oral accounts about their mothering, and by acknowledging their unique and individual epistemologies, I wanted to find ways in which the institution could listen as well. I hoped that through the stories told by South Asian mothers from their own standpoint, school board staff would hear, acknowledge and begin to understand somewhat, how the very lives of individuals are coordinated and regulated by the RCD and the well-intentioned, intricately interconnected transition initiatives of the MOE in Ontario through its T-discourses. When the ethnography is eventually shared with the academy and the network of schools, as well as with other scholars interested in this learning, I hope that the voices, stories and standpoints of South Asian mothers will be honoured.

Interviews

Interviews, posit, Kirby and McKenna (1989) are "a special form of interaction between people, the purpose of which is to elicit information by asking questions" (p.66). In all the ancient and Indigenous cultures of the world, oral traditions have been used to pass on valuable knowledges from one generation to another, report Kovach (2009) and Tuhiwai-Smith (2012). While speaking of traditional ways of sharing knowledges and stories, these scholars have emphasised the importance of sharing circles, and oral traditions in the voices of the very people who have experienced the journey and who have the stories. With reference to research with Indigenous communities in Canada, Haig-Brown (2012), cautions against appropriation of stories and oral histories by researchers who do not come from a place of deep respect for the people with whom they seek to conduct research. These reminders from decolonizing scholars and researchers added to my metacognitive awareness as I moved through decolonizing the research process.

When interviews are used within an institutional ethnography, they become part of an approach "designed for the investigation of organisational and institutional processes" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.15). Herein, institutional ethnographers use participant responses as a window into their experiences and to reveal the relations of ruling within the institution that shape the local experiences of the participants themselves (Smith, 1996a, as cited in DeVault & McCoy, 2006). The institution, in Smith's argument, doesn't refer to a specific type of organization. It stands for the vast network of coordinated and intersecting work processes that take place in multiple locations. In transition work, these intersections, as discussed in earlier chapters, take place between transition years' consultants, student success team at high schools, Grade 8 teachers at elementary schools, translators, community workers and South Asian

mothers. Through interviews, an institutional ethnographer is able to explore particular corners within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). I wanted to explore a specific corner in the GTA inhabited by South Asian mothers. I also wanted to make visible through the interview participants' responses, connections of their mothering work with other sites such as Grade 8 classrooms, homes of South Asian mothers of Grade 8 students in the elementary network of a high school where transition work is carried out.

Through in-depth interviews, posit Rubin and Rubin (2012), "researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest" (p.3). Through such interviews, they explicate that researchers can explore in detail "the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own" (p.3). As a feminist researcher, I invited South Asian women to share their knowledges and epistemologies from their own standpoints (Smith, 2005). Through their responses, I was able to learn about their everyday/everynight lives from their standpoint and in their own voices (Griffith, 1998; Smith, 1987).

Document Analysis

According to Smith (2006), the act of incorporating texts into the inquiry process is an essential aspect of institutional ethnography. It allows the researcher "to reach beyond the local, observable and discoverable" realities of day to day work and examine the "translocal social relations and organizations that permeate and control the local" (p.65). Introducing the RCD into the institutional ethnography allowed my research method to go beyond the day-to-day observable aspects of the mothering work of South Asian women. Document analysis also gave me the opportunity to observe the ways in which the mothering work for transition done by

South Asian mothers is viewed through T- discourses in the cross panel transition team of this high school in the GTA. Thus, document analysis formed the backbone of my decolonizing institutional ethnography, as it allowed me to examine the regulatory texts responsible for the mediating processes that coordinate and organize the everyday lives of South Asian mothers engaged in transition work.

Personal Reflections

Participant observation, posits Walby (2012), is also an integral part of an institutional ethnography. In my research journey, I have chosen to situate myself as a participant as I too, am a racialized South Asian mother of a Grade 12 student in a high school within the GTA. Although I did not consider myself to be of an elevated status as compared to my other research participants, my professional location in the institution places me on an invisible institutionally sanctioned pedestal. Even as I consider myself to be a co-creator of knowledge with my research participants, I am aware that my mothering experiences, since becoming an educator in Ontario are very different from those of my early days of involvement in my children's schooling. I also assert that my research intent is non-exploitative. As an interviewer, I consider myself to be more than a mere instrument of data collection. During the course of the interviews, I interacted with my research participants and also recorded my "own commentary" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p.66). I chose to sift through my "conceptual baggage" which is the "record of the experience and reflections of the researcher that relate to the focus of the research" (p.66). McKenna and Kirby (1989) also explicate that as the research is indeed done by someone, "it is essential that this someone is identified in some way and accounted for" (p. 49). They also recommend that one way to ensure such an identification of the researcher's presence within the research is to record both the research and the reflections as the researcher moves through the process. Their

assertion supports Smith's (2005) position that "the speaking or writing experience, the experiential dialogue, happens all the time" (p. 135). So it did with me. My conceptual baggage emerged out of journal entries about the topic as well as my reflections. I navigated my "bifurcated consciousness" and insider-outsider position throughout my research (Smith, 1987, p. 6). I also bought multi-coloured pens at dollar stores as if the rainbow writings would make these reflections less of a strain. I scribbled a lot and it sometimes helped.

My greatest regret as a feminist researcher is that I did not get a chance to take even a single course with Roxana Ng (1991). I am thankful for her scholarship especially from the perspectives of "teaching against the grain" as a "minority teacher" (p.99) that has made me mindful about a fundamental aspect of my presence in the institution and the academy as a racialized woman. I have learned that a researcher's presence within her research is a critical aspect of feminist inquiry. Therefore, like Ng (1991), I have "tried to do away with the false notion that the knower/writer can be objective, that she can occupy a position which transcends all viewpoints" (p.103). I have also tried to maintain my authentic presence as that of the "knower/writer as an active subject in the text" and have grappled with my "multiple locations and contradictions" (p.103). Ng (1991) argues that by "confronting these contradictions and dilemmas, … all of us may come to grips with what haunts us and propels us to work toward a better world" (p.103). I hereby assert that I am unapologetically present in my research.

I live these contradictions and dilemmas every day. I want the Grade 8 students to be successful in high school Yet, I experience distress when I see them propelled into pathways based on what is a mere snapshot of their capabilities and academic potential. I wanted to interview the South Asian mothers and listen to their stories. I also experienced a visceral urge to step into their space and show them how to fix this problem or that one. I see why the institution

wants to nudge students into streamed settings before the onset of standardised tests in Grades 9 and 10, as their successful outcomes celebrate Ontario's image in education (Fullan, 2013). Yet, I also want to ask someone, anyone "Why are you showing our South Asian students just one door? How do you know what lies ahead? How can you predict right now what they will grow into?"

I want to stand up and speak out every time I hear racializing language and discursive labels. Sometimes, I just want to curl up in a corner and wake up in a more inclusive and respectful institutional space. On some days, even my paycheque feels tainted with tears of frustration that I silently shed at my complicity in this complex conundrum. Therefore, I have included personal reflections as the third method in my research. It is this critical, reflexive, dialogic process that allows me to juxtapose my insider-outsider positionality with my research interest. I want the institution and the academy, my colleagues, students and South Asian mothers to see my dilemma in this everyday problematic. I want them to know that I speak up because I care deeply about my students and the ways in which their educational pathways are coordinated. I am not just one more "argumentative Indian" (Sen, 2006, p.3).

At this stage in my career, I occupy a vantage point within the institution and have unhindered access to transition related information within. I have also been placed in a privileged position of being able to speak and write about my problematic. I often respond to my discomfort at the disparity between the South Asian mothers in my school and myself through poetry. Thanks to my easy access to technology, I often type a poem on my smart phone which I then email to myself. These actions help calm my churning thoughts and help me survive the everyday problematic.

Whenever I have been silent in the face of racist language or racializing comments about the communities in which I live and work, I feel a sharp nudge from my conscience. At such times, it seems like the voices of silent South Asian mothers are calling me to action.

Speak, Akka, Speak

The east sky, this day
Of shining light
Invites me to walk with all those who are silenced
Speak, Akka, Speak, they whisper
In my heart spaces and remind me that
My voice has their words woven into each cry
And the room fills up as they enter one by one
I feel their pain and weep,
I take care not to smudge my eyeliner, taught well by my daughter
And I speak of them
Speak, Akka, Speak
We are here with you, they whisper
Let them doubt you
Let them tell their clever tales
Let them ask you how you know
Don’t crumble, Akka
Don’t rest now
Speak, Akka, Speak

Our hearts know

As does yours

You were there, Akka

You've heard them

You've pushed back the words

And you have stood strong

Don't give up now Akka

Speak, Akka, speak

Maybe the unseen scars on our children’s souls,

will get lighter someday and with that,

we too can heal

Don't stop, Akka

Just speak

Speak, Akka, Speak

You have the words that they understand

But our skin speaks, before we open our mouths even,

Yeah?

We have come far from our homes, long-lost on the promise of freedom

Speak, Akka, Speak

We cannot lose our children, Akka

That's all we have, Speak, Akka[25], Speak

[25] *Akka= Older sister in Tamil, Kannada and Konkani, which is my mother tongue.

"Why do you speak?"

You ask often with your watchful eyes, "Oh Mighty One"

Is this reason enough?

(Karnad-Jani, 2013).

When I write my way through the tensions and contradictions of being caught in the problematic, I feel renewed. I find my mind is clearer than before. Through the literature that I have accessed in my course work, I am able to find solace in the wisdom of scholars who have devoted their lives to finding a way of speaking from the margins. I dig deep within myself, furiously sometimes with bare hands, to find my buried courage, every scattered, tattered scrap of it. I dust it lovingly and patch it up with heartstrings that sing with hope. I stand tall. I breathe deeply. I begin again. There is work to be done.

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality Measures

Ethical considerations when "applied to the particular characteristics of ethnography, give them a distinctive accent" posit Hammersley and Atkinson, (2007, p.209). I am mindful of my privilege as an anglicized product of colonization as well as a professionally qualified woman well on my way into higher education in the academy. I am also deeply cognizant of the power imbalance between the South Asian mothers whom I interviewed and myself that arises due to the institutional position into which I am placed as an Ontario Certified Teacher. This disparity reiterates the historical feminist standpoint brought forth by hooks (1994) that "our desire for an honorable sisterhood, one that would emerge from the willingness of all women to face our histories, was often ignored" (p. 103). I have remembered therefore to speak *with* participants and speak *of* them but not speak *for* them. In so doing, I was able to stay away from what Moustakas (1995, as cited in Patton, 2002) calls "Being With" that requires "being present as

one’s own person in relation to another person, bringing one’s own knowledge and experience to the relationship” (p.8). Patton (2002) discusses this aspect of relationship development from the insider perspective as one wherein the researcher not only listens and hears the feelings of participants, but also offers his or her own perceptions and views.

In speaking of research considerations, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) place ethical issues under five categories all of which I have adhered to diligently.

- **Informed consent:** I have conducted informed consent for my research with all seven participants. Due to the legal obligation to disclose any incidents of child abuse, I indicated this aspect at the outset to all participants so that they were able to make an informed choice whether to participate or not. They were also reassured of the following points verbally prior to beginning each interview.
- **Privacy:** I have not mentioned the names of participants, students, teachers, schools or school board in anyway.
- **Harm:** I have not intended nor inflicted harm on participants or their children.
- **Exploitation**: The intention of my interview is non-exploitative as I do not benefit from the research findings. A decolonizing aspect of the methodology involved verbally translating the research purpose, questionnaire and informed consent forms into heritage languages spoken by the mothers who participated in the in-depth interviews. By doing so I attempted to reduce any ambiguity or misunderstanding in the minds of the participants about the purpose as well as the actual questions, prior to and during the research process.

- **Consequences for future research**: Based on the research data, I can support my community by continuing this decolonizing work to honour the MOE’s vision of providing an excellent education to all groups of people.

While conducting informed consent discussions, I made my participants aware that apart from when required by law,

- Conditions of anonymity promised to the participants will be respected at all times.
- The identity of the mothers, children or schools, currently attended or planned for, will not be discussed or divulged.
- Participants will have the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms or initials so that they feel comfortable with the interview process. They have allowed me to use a random letter along with the title, Mrs.
- The researcher will not divulge names or references to any school board personnel. The responses in the in-depth interview, in conversation or in writing, will not be traced back to the participants or their children.
- The participant is under no obligation to continue with the interview and can opt out at any time without fear of academic or social repercussions whatsoever against their children or themselves.
- There are no ulterior motives for conducting the research different from the one stated at the outset, before conducting in-depth interviews.
- I completed the ethics tutorial and have been awarded a certificate. Throughout my research and afterwards as well, I have respected my research approval conditions diligently.

Data Collection

Data collection from the margins

People on the margins, explicate Kirby and McKenna (1989) experience social worlds in a very different way than do those whose lives create that world order and the status quo. These scholars also assert that all people on the margins do not share a common perspective. Therefore while conducting my research about mothering work of South Asian mothers, I had to be careful not to assume that all cross panel members of the high school network or everyone within the educational community, experience the world of transition in the same way as do the South Asian mothers who participated in my research. I did not think that any of the research participants had identical experiences, perspectives and ways of taking up the institutional text, the RCD.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) also emphasize that "people on the margins *do* have in common", the way in which "ruling relations organize their exclusion" and deprive them of the means with which they can participate in constructing the forms of thought that are sufficient to express their experiences (p.95). For the purpose of my research, this argument highlights the ways in which the RCD that is embedded deep in the belly of the school board's website organizes the exclusion of South Asian mothers from the high school journey of their children. The cross panel team invites South Asian mothers onto the transition stage only when they have to perform their mothering work for course selection while the entire elaborate dance of transition planning and pathways predictions has already begun on various other stages long before that moment in time. This analogy goes back to Smith's (1987) explication of the "problematic" wherein she emphasizes that "the organization of their known world" that begins

from their location within it "is generated in its varieties by an organization of social relations that originate elsewhere" (pp.91, 92).

Other Considerations

Accuracy and credibility, according to Rubin and Rubin (2012), are the most important aspects of interview data. According to these scholars, the major strength of qualitative interviewing lies in researcher credibility. They also assert the importance of accuracy and transparency in reporting. They remind researchers that participants have to be knowledgeable about the research topic and that the questioning is best restricted "to what they know firsthand" (p. 64). By interviewing South Asian mothers about their mothering work in preparation for high school transition, I am fulfilling these conditions:

- Credibility in qualitative interviewing also comes from evidence that the researcher has spoken to people who are well informed about the research concerns. In choosing a topic such as course selection for transition to high school as well as selecting a participant group that comprises of South Asian mothers of students in Grade 8, I am focusing on the expertise and familiarity of my respondents with my research interest.
- The South Asian mothers are experts in their role. They are able to respond from the standpoint of what they know first-hand. This is a feminist standpoint wherein women's ways of knowing are acknowledged and invited for the wealth of information that they contain. Following in the path charted by scholars such as Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), I am interested in the "subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated" (p.113).

A sample of the informed consent form is included in this paper as Appendix B.

Storing and Organising Data

Verbal responses to the in-depth interviews were recorded using a digital recording device that I always stored securely and carried on my person. I stored notes, observations and reflections of the researcher in journals along with all recordings, field notes and in-process writings in a locked office safe in my home office. The USB on which the recordings, field notes and in-process writings were stored was password protected. Relevant sections were phonetically transcribed in the spoken language. Loose translations have been provided throughout my writing. The interview schedule is included as Appendix C.

Chapter 4

Data dialogue and Data analysis

The soul-work of conversation

December 2013, was the winter of Ontario's terrible ice storm. Trees looked like they were made of shimmering crystal. Some had split wide open and stood like shattered sentinels of an almost post-Apocalyptic landscape across the GTA. Driveways and streets were converted into sheets of ice. Unless you were a skater or a hockey player, it was a time of walking gingerly over every centimetre of frozen driveways and hope that there wasn't a broken hip at the end of the trek. Anti-freeze salt had disappeared for the two week period and it felt like a time of scarcity that some of us in Ontario may have remembered, depending on where and how we had lived in our lives this far. During that two week period of the winter break from school, also popularly known as the Christmas vacation, I conducted seven interviews in a community room at the public library. I chose this setting as it was inclusive enough for my research participants to bring their children if they wished. I had planned to invite a few high school volunteers to help with babysitting for the duration of the interviews. In exchange, the students would receive community volunteer hours of which they need a minimum of forty, as a mandatory graduation requirement for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.[26] It turned out that my research participants were able to make other arrangements for childcare with family members or their older children. Therefore this option of childcare was not needed.

[26] www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/curriculum.html has details about requirement of volunteer hours as a prerequisite for graduation from high schools in Ontario.

All the participants wanted the interviews to be conducted during the winter break, primarily because they were not inundated with mothering work at that time. One of the mothers wanted to bring her daughter who was in grade 12 then, for translation support and she could participate only during the break. This was a very manageable schedule for me, as my mothering work was also on vacation mode. My daughter was home from university and my son, on vacation from his high school. Chores were shared. I did not have to watch the clock or rush from one activity to another. I had some uninterrupted time to focus on my research.

What becomes data for an ethnographer, explicates Smith (2005), “is always a collaborative product”. As an institutional ethnographer, I recognized that “the data is always created as an interchange between the ‘subject’ and the interviewer” (p. 125). My participants wanted to know about me just as I wanted to know about them. Some asked about my day, others asked about my children. Some of them wanted to know how much it cost to do my master’s program and whether I would get a promotion at work after I completed it. Some asked me about my cooking schedules on the days that I had classes and were impressed that I was able to do this work at this stage in my life. They also marvelled that my children supported my academic ambitions. Three of the mothers asked if I had salt for my driveway. One of them asked me to let her know if I didn’t get salt the next day. She promised to buy a large bag at Costco when she bought her own supply as I was busy with my research. If they didn’t have any, she said she would share half of what she had at home. I was touched by their individual concern and kindness.

My participants spoke about the expectations they had for their children’s futures, and their reasons for wanting the best for them. There were pauses filled with puzzlement, tears, wistfulness, and laughter. Often, after an interview, I would sit in silence and stare at the snow covered landscape that stretched outside the large windows of the library. It often took many

moments, sometimes even half an hour, before I was able to gather my composure and drive home. I was often caught in the midst of the swirling stories. While my professional training and the rigor of research practised during course work had taught me to be stoic and observant, there were moments when I found myself swept up and tossed about by the tides of emotion that the participants brought forth in themselves and therefore reflexively, in me. It is then that I felt most acutely, the tenacious tension of the insider-outsider position. I knew that I couldn’t interfere in the sharing without interrupting the research process. Yet when one participant after another expressed angst, anguish, puzzlement and pain, when they asked me why this happened or that didn’t, there was nothing I could do, except listen. That silence weighed on me more than all the transition work that I have done in a decade.

I felt at times as if I was caught in a dream, hammering impotent fists soundlessly against a one way glass wall through which I could see my participants going about their mothering work with their best efforts and intentions. It felt then as if only I could see what the institution had set in store for my participants’ children through the years of high school, if they chose one pathway instead of another. Yet there was no way to reach out and change the course of that decision as I, as the researcher, could not interfere. I could only observe and it was not a pleasant feeling.

The starkness of the snowfields outside the library absorbed much of my pain on such days. I would just sit and stare for a long time, then gather my bag and leave. I went home, stared some more and drank a lot of tea. My children, who knew that I was immersed in the research process, did the mothering work at home. They always gave me room to revive my spirit and then we would do something peaceful or fun together. I would set out again the next day to interview one more participant.

Conversations with South Asian Mothers

While engaging in conversations with my seven research participants, I found that I was more comfortable to listen to their experiences, stories, questions and wonderings than I had ever been before. Perhaps it was because the foreboding that I used to feel in earlier years, before I embarked on my research, now had a name. It was known as the problematic. It was real. I wasn't imagining it.

In the four years since I had started my graduate courses, I had also acquired the academic learning and language with which I could write about my research. I had practised the skills I needed to analyze the data gathered from research participants based on what they had experienced through the supplementary work that they did for schooling (Griffith & Smith, 2005). Moreover, I had explained my intent honestly to my research participants. I was conducting research with them, not on them.

In order to honour the experiences and the voices of my participants, I decided to scribe their words almost verbatim wherever possible. In this paper, I have included transcribed sections of Gujarati, and Urdu using the Roman alphabet. Although I can write in other languages, I have deliberately retained the Roman alphabet as a decolonizing decision. English speaking readers may feel a vague sense of discomfort when they phonetically decode the words that were spoken by the South Asian mothers during their interviews, but may not understand the meaning of their words. Through the conscious use of the Roman alphabet to transcribe the heritage languages of the research participants, I am inviting the institution and the academy to acknowledge and experience the discomfort felt by South Asian mothers when they read the regulatory texts of the MOE: they can read the words but are puzzled about the deeper meaning. I invite my audience to

understand and appreciate the standpoint of those who are marginalized due to the ubiquitous hegemony of English in the institutional texts of the MOE in Ontario.

Wherever the participant spoke in English, I have intentionally retained the colloquial essence as a decolonizing method. The seven South Asian mothers were very articulate and capable of speaking about their experiences. Their language is rich and valuable. I consider any alteration to their words and any attempts to repackage these rich narratives as an academic appropriation of their experiences and voices. I respectfully request the institution and the academy to join me in understanding the intent of their thoughts while reading these verbatim conversations. They, as the mothers who spoke, are diverse, not deficient.

The Stories of Seven South Asian Mothers

Interview 1:

Mrs. E had come to Ontario from Gujarat, India in 2010 with her husband and daughter who had entered grade 6 with an ESL designation following "some tests done by the school". She reported that her daughter went to another teacher in a small classroom to receive support in Grade 6 where she did some beginner level English speaking and writing work. My teacher lens recognized this as a withdrawal support model with the ESL teacher. She was then placed in regular Grade 7 and 8 classes. Mrs. E's daughter was in Grade 9 at the time of the interview.

This mother had a degree in business and commerce from a renowned university in Gujarat, India. She mentioned that her brother had immigrated to Ontario a few years before her. She had heard good things about Ontario's education system from immigration posters and websites. She said, "Ontario maan education bahuchh sarass chey. Etley hamey aiyaan aavyaa" *(Loose translation: Education in Ontario is very good. That is why we came here.)* She also reported that she had to go to work here. "Ek pagaar maa kaam na chaley, aiyaan" *(Loose*

translation: One income just isn't sufficient here). She mentioned that in her back home [27] she had the entire day to do her mothering work, had help at home and was able to take her daughter to tutoring and help her review her work before tests. She acknowledged that in Ontario, she faced greater pressure to get paid work, than she had in India. "Aiyan toh badhha job karey. Karvu padey chey" she explained. *(Loose translation: Here, everyone works. You have to work)*. She also eased into a comfortable kinship:

> Tamney toh khabaar chey, ne aapda back home ma. Girls ne kaam kyan karaavey koi? Maney bhanvaanu gamut hathu, etley mein degree layee lidhi.
>
> Loose translation: You know how it is, back home. In our back home, no one sends girls to work. I didn't have to work nor was I expected to work there. But I got a degree because I loved to study.

In doing so, Mrs. E inadvertently indicated that she came from an affluent family and had not worked for a living when she lived in Gujarat. It is important to note that in that moment of assuming an identical affluence between her lived reality and mine, she had brought my attention back to the individual standpoint: hers was different from mine when it came to mothering work, I had always juggled many tasks, while she had done her mothering work to the exclusion of everything else. She had had more unpaid work time and many resources to help her support her daughter until she had come to Ontario. I had not had that luxury in my life, whether I was raising my siblings or my children.

[27] "Back home" was a term that was used by all seven research participants, irrespective of their country of origin. Whether Tamil from Jaffna, or Trincomalee, Gujarati from Ahmedabad, or Baroda or Pakistani from Karachi or Lahore, each one spoke of "back home" and "our back home" with me, assuming and indicating that I was one of them and had the same roots.

Mrs. E then said that she helped her daughter differently in Ontario than she had done back home.

> Tyaan toh hun kaam nothi karti ne, etley maaro badho time enee saathey spend karti hati. Eney tution ma layee jaoon, eney exam paper banaavi apoon, eney project maan madat karoon. Ghar ma pan help hathee aney maaro friends group pan saaro hatho. Aiyan havey toh evu nathi.
>
> Loose translation: I wasn’t working there so all my time was spent with her. I used to take her for her tutoring classes, I would draft quiz papers for her and I would help her with projects. I had help at home and I had a great group of friends. It is not like that here, or now.

She addressed issues of social isolation in her life in the GTA as compared to what she had experienced in her former home. She also mentioned that she helped her daughter with school work here too but she wasn’t very happy when she reported her mothering work for her daughter’s education in Ontario:

> Hun enee saathey besoon choon. Kyaarey thaaki gayee hovun. Toh suyi jaoon choon. Pann eney eklu nahin lagey etley besoon choon. Thodi vaarey sui jaoon choon. I don’t do much help tareekey.
>
> Loose translation: I sit with her when she works late. Sometimes I am very tired and I fall asleep. But at least she doesn’t have to sit alone. I just sit beside her and doze while she works. I don’t do much by way of helping.

Mrs. E mentioned that she helped her daughter by listening to her when she talked about her day, when she experienced frustration about a bad mark on a quiz or when she spoke about her future plans. She also said that she was unsure about what would happen with her daughter’s

educational pathway after grade 9. She hadn’t asked, she said and no one had told her. She was concerned about lack of permission from her daughter’s Grade 9 teacher to let her take advanced English courses.

> Eney geography maan 75% mallyaa toh enaa teacher eh kahyu ke saaru chey, tamey fikarr karso nai. Toh eney English maan pan 75 % mallyaa pan enaa teacher eh aji sudhi eney permission nathi aapi academic levaa matey. Em kem? 75% etley 75%. Ema problem sun chey, advanced English course levo hoi toh?
>
> Loose translation: She got a 75% in geography and her teacher said that everything is well, don’t worry. Then, although she had 75% in English too, why has the teacher not given her permission to take up academic English. What is that all about? 75% is 75%. What is the problem if she wants to take an advanced English course?

Mrs. E was confused that although the teacher had said that a 75% in geography was a good mark, she did not give permission to her daughter to switch to an academic English course for Grade 10 in spite of having 75% in English. She was puzzled that if a 75% mark was okay in one subject, why was it a barrier to advancement in another. She insisted that academic English was a course of her daughter’s choice as she had heard from her friends that it was a university pre-requisite. Her daughter had also heard that she would have to make that change before she finished Grade 10 or she would be stuck without a university admission. Mrs. E reported that her daughter was frustrated by what she called “the lack of teacher’s permissions”.

> Evu kevu hoi? Amney toh kaichh khabar nathi. Enaa Grade 8 teacher eh kem na kahyu amney ke academic na hoi toh university na javaai? Enaa Grade 9 teacher eh pann eney na kahyu. Eney enaa friend paase thi khabarr padee. Amey aiyan enaa future matey aavya. Eh ESL hathi, etley eney university nahin java de ah loko?

> Loose translation: How does this work. We don’t know anything about this system. Why did her Grade 8 teacher not tell us that without an academic English course, she cannot go to university? Why did her Grade 9 teacher not tell her that? She found out from her friends. We came here for her future. She was an ESL student. Does that mean that these people will not let her go to university?

Mrs. E blamed her family’s decision to travel to India in her daughter’s Grade 8 year for the lack of information about course pathways. She reported that the problems with high school transition had started due to their absence when the high school team had visited the elementary school. She also reported that the family had travelled to India in the December to February period of that year for several reasons.

1. Before the winter break, ticket prices were lower than in summer.
2. During the winter months in India, the weather is pleasant and it was possible to travel comfortably.
3. The family recognized that once their daughter entered grade 9, she would have a heavier work load and would not be able to travel during the school year.
4. Mrs. E had been laid off her old job then and could travel before she started looking for another.
5. The family had saved up enough money to go.

Mrs. E said that when they returned in February, there was no time to delve deeper into the high school information discussion. “Badhu due hathu, jaldi, jaldi high school maan”. *(Loose translation: Everything was due quickly at the high school).*

She reported that her daughter had heard from her friends that all the preparatory events such as the high school’s visit to the elementary school, the parent information night at the high school

and teacher-supported course selection discussions had all taken place during the family’s trip to India. Mrs. E also reported that her daughter’s teacher had met with them on two occasions, once before they went away and once upon their return. She reported that she and her husband had been quite relieved that the teacher had been very supportive.

> Emney hamari bahu help karee chey. Emney kahyu keh ena math aney science saraa chey. Etley eh banney ma hun academic apee sakoo choon. Pann eh ESL chey, etley havey eney academic English hun na aapee sakoon. Science aney math academic chaley. Havey etli help karee chey toh aa pan sacchi vaat hasey. Emney pan mari daughter na saara mateychh kahyu hoi. Etley hamey eh courses layi lidha jehna matey emney permission aapyu hathu. Hamney modu thayee gayu hathu. Em toh saaru ke emney ek jagyaa rakhi hathi ena maatey. Pachhi gusso aavey toh? Pardes chey.
>
> Loose translation: He [the Grade 8 teacher] had helped us a lot. He said that her math and science are good. So in those two subjects, he gave her permission to apply for admission in academic courses. But because she is ESL, he said that he would not give her admission into academic English. He had helped us so much so this too must be true. He too must be thinking for the good of our daughter. So we took the courses that he allowed her to take. We were late for the selection. We were lucky he had even saved us a spot. So we didn’t ask for anything more. What if he got angry? This is a foreign country.

It appeared that Mrs. E was afraid of repercussions against her daughter if she or her husband pushed the teacher for more information or asked for advanced, academic, courses. She said that they did not ask any more questions for fear of angering the teacher. She also believed that the teacher had it in his power to prevent admission to high school and that he had done them a favour by saving a spot for her daughter. She reported that she was grateful for this. Mrs. E also

believed that the teacher’s recommendations were well intentioned and based on his desire to ensure positive outcomes for her daughter. Her understanding of the teacher’s role was based on her worldview: the permission required from teachers to take a particular course, spaces lost at good schools due to missing an admission deadline and the special favour done to their family by the teacher who held a spot for their daughter even when they had gone away on a vacation. Her understanding of the situation made her very grateful to this teacher. She seemed regulated by her experience with the power vested in the educational institution and its authority figures by the relations of ruling in her country of birth as well as her adopted country, Canada. She insisted that she did not want to anger the teacher and that this was a foreign country to her and her family. It therefore appeared that Mrs. E’s lack of information about transition practices played a large part in her acceptance of course recommendations as she had referred to not knowing anything about this education system earlier in the interview.

Interview 2:

Mrs. A had a degree in commerce from a university in Gujarat. She was a housewife whose younger son had just gone to grade 9 at the time of the interview. Mrs. A has some understanding of a semester and non-semester system in high school as her daughter who was in university, had gone to a non-semester high school in another school board in the GTA.
Mrs. A reported that her son was quite independent.

> Eh badhu jaateey karey chey. Maney pachee bataavey chey, darr vakhtey. Ah jo, Mummy baraabar karyu ne? Dayo chey.
>
> Loose translation: He does everything by himself. He always shows me after he has finished everything. He says Look, Mummy, did I do this correctly? He is a good boy.

Mrs. A seemed blissfully unaware that her son was accommodating her lack of knowledge about transition and therefore made tokenistic gestures to involve her with the course selection process: he showed them to her on the computer screen after he had submitted them. She asserted that this manner of always showing her what he did, made him a good boy. She also mentioned that her son was very capable of selecting his courses and did so independently based on his abilities and support from friends, teachers and his sister. She said that her son was a confident young man who knew what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go.

> Eh amney keh chey, tamey banney bahu busy hovo cho, tamarey maari koi pannn jaat ni fikar nahi karvaani. Hun badhu karee leis. Tamaarey school ma aavaa ni jaroor pann nathi. Sacchey, bahu dhyaan rakhey chey amaaru”.
>
> Loose translation: He tells us that we are always so busy that he wants to help us by not adding to our worries. He says, I will do this all by myself. You do not have to worry about a single thing. You do not even have to come to my school. He really is a very thoughtful boy. He takes care of us.

Mrs. A didn’t seem to realise that through his emerging capability and by developing his support network of friends, teachers and his older sister, her son had effectively marginalized both his parents from his educational decisions. In telling them very politely and kindly not to worry about him, and not to add to their work load by coming to his school, her son had ensured that he was in charge of his educational decisions.

It appeared from Mrs. A’s responses that she was busy with day to day cooking and cleaning, keeping house and coordinating the household for her family. This is the mothering work that supported her son in high school. She did not know about the school board’s website or even the existence of its regulatory text, the RCD. She had not activated these texts at all

through her son’s educational journey from Grade 8 to Grade 9. From Mrs. A’s interview responses it appeared that her son was quite in control of his learning and if he followed this model of self-reliance, this South Asian mother would continue doing her mothering work on the home front through his high school years.

Mrs. A’s story of her son’s high school journey speaks of a traditional role of the mothering work. She was secure in her role as a homemaker and had a discursive lens when she examined her mothering practices and mine. She told me that every weekend she packed a week’s worth of home cooked food for her daughter living away from home in Ontario which her husband then dropped off. She offered her sympathy to me as my daughter was studying in another province. She told me that she understood how bad it must make me feel that I was not able to cook for my daughter and that she had to cook for herself and study as well.

Although transition roles are clearly laid out in MOE documents and are connected to policy and procedures on parent voice and parental engagement, high schools do not require anything more than a parent’s signature on the course selection form. I know from my experience with my children’s course selections for high school that this signature is proof that the parent has seen and approved the courses in order to confirm the selection with the Guidance Office of the high school. This happens once the courses have been formally submitted online. Therefore, the marginalization of mothers such as Mrs. A appears to be ensured by the regulatory processes of the institution.

I wondered what would happen if a student was not as capable as Mrs. A’s son? What would happen if a student did not have the support from an older sibling in university who has been doing the mothering work for transition from her off site location, away from the home? The institution through its policies and procedures, expects that parents will engage, and if you

are not able to because your child is capable and pushes you to the margins, that is up to you. This is just how it is.

Interview 3:

Mrs. T has three children and the oldest was in grade 9 at the time of the interview. The younger two were in grade 8 and grade 3 respectively. Mrs. T said that she was a trained nurse in her back home before coming to Canada and is now a housewife. She had left her homeland in Northern Sri Lanka two decades ago because of a civil war, the rumblings of which, she reported are still felt in that country. Although she spoke a little English, this participant was not completely comfortable speaking to me directly. She had earlier wanted her older son to translate for her but as her husband was also in the room, she chose his help. Both parents asked their son to leave and wait for them outside. "I am here, so he is not needed" her husband said to me. Mrs. T's husband did not work in Ontario. He worked for a large oil company in Alberta for two weeks at a stretch and returned home for a week. Mrs. T was therefore a lone mother (Standing, 1999) who did her mothering work with no assistance from her husband on a day to day basis. She reported that she did not drive and relied on her cousins to drive her children to the library when her husband was not at home.

Mrs. T's interview was in part, spoken to me and partly to her husband in Tamil which he then translated. She shared some information with me that is listed below. As this interview was conducted with the help of a translator, it was not as conversationally smooth nor as detailed as the others. This made me reflect that when the institution does not decolonize conversational spaces for South Asian mothers, these conversations are perhaps not always as meaningful or extensive as when the mother has the linguistic freedom to express herself freely. Although logistically sound, the institutional method of asking parents to self-identify as needing a

translator sometimes causes some of them to refuse translation support even when there is actually a need. I have heard from my students and from mothers who ask me for help with translation, that many South Asian mothers refuse translation support for reasons of social acceptance for their children with their friends, or for themselves with their own peers.

Mrs. T spoke in short points that I have scribed as jot notes rather than as dialogue. At times, she would stop her husband's translation and say, "No, no, that is not what I want to say". Then she would say it again in English directly to me. The points below summarize some translations by her husband and some in Mrs. T's own words.

Mr. T's translation

- He chose academic, as he wants to go to university.
- Now he has problems in math, French and music because he chose everything advanced.
- We let our children choose what they want.
- We are not like other South Asian parents. We don't push them to study hard and go to tuition [28] and to take subjects that we want them to take.

Mrs. T's own words

- The high school teachers came to his school and told him how to do the course selection and he went on the website.
- When he printed the form, I signed it.

[28] Tutoring is referred to as tuition within the South Asian diaspora and is often the cause of much mirth when discussed discursively in the field of education as that word is incongruous to a Canadian understanding. Here, it indicates the money spent for a college or university education. That South Asian mothers use this word to stand for tutoring, is tacitly considered their ignorance. However, I have heard elite speakers from England speak of tutoring as tution. That does not get laughed at.

- His father was not at home. He was at his work at that time and we asked him on the phone what to do.
- When he said okay, I signed the form. I did not see the website, and he did not see the website, my son just told him. My husband said okay, then I signed.

Although Mrs. T was the parent on site and was engaged in day to day mothering work for her children, at the crucial juncture of course selection, both she and her son waited for the patriarchal stamp of approval before submitting the courses online. The pervasive presence of patriarchy thereby appears to have touched the transition talks in the home of this South Asian mother. By interrupting her husband’s translation when he started to speak of what had happened in his absence, Mrs. T took back her standpoint somewhat and spoke to me directly. “You were not there, I was” she seemed to say when she stopped him and told me what had happened in her life. This aspect of her conversation reminded me to be cognizant that although South Asian mothers may ask for a translator, they do and can wish to have their story told from their standpoint, in their voice.

It is therefore important for English speakers within the institution not to address the translator but the South Asian mother instead, even though she may choose to speak through the translator. It is also critical that translators use their linguistic expertise to translate accurately and to relay back *exactly what the South Asian mother says* and not interpret her words or add their own flavour to the intended communication. This is an ethical responsibility.

Interview 4:

Mrs. R had a son in grade 9 and a daughter in grade 8. She also had a daughter in the primary division. Her older daughter looked after the younger one at the library during our interview. The interview began in English as per Mrs. R’s request during the informed consent discussion.

However, as the questions became more complex and required more explanation, she asked if she could speak in Urdu.

> Apney back home mein exams hotey they. Yahaan pe nahin hotey hain, Grade 8 takk. Achcha hai, bachchon ko stress nahin hoti hai. Mujhey yahaan sab achcha lagaa. Main bahut involved hoon. Main sab jaanti hoon, mere bêtey ke passwords bhi mere paas hain. Hamarey ghar mein sab khula hai”
>
> Loose translation: In our back home we used to have exams. Here you don’t have that until Grade 8 is done. That is nice that kids do not have any stress. I like the education system here. I am a very involved mother. I know what is going on. I even have my son’s passwords. We have an open relationship in our family.

Mrs. R reported that she was a very involved mother and even made surprise visits to her son’s school to ensure that all was okay. She said that she drove past his school several times a week.

> Mainney pehle se high school dekhi hui thi, research bhi ki thi. Aur website pe search bhi kiya that, rating ke baarey mein aur EQAO scores kaisey hain. Phir mere friends ne bhi kahaa, achchi school hai. Ghar ka mahaul achcha hai toh bachchey nahin bigadtey. Aur main kabhi kabhi surprise checks bhi kar leti hoon. Jab uskey baba ghar pe hotey hain, hum kabhi drive-by kartey hain. Usko pataa hai ke Mamma kabhi bhi a sakti hain”
>
> Loose translation: I had researched about the high school before my son started. I had looked up some websites for the rating of the school and their EQAO scores. Also my friends said that it is a good school and that I should send my son there. If the home environment is good then kids don’t go astray. And I also do some surprise checks. I drive by during his lunchtime sometimes when his father is home from work and we

> make sure that the school surrounding is safe. Our son knows that, at any time Mamma could visit.

From Mrs. R’s responses it appeared that she had made many informed decisions about her son’s education. She had taken the time to research the high school’s EQAO scores, look up information about the high school on the Internet and had listened to her friends’ recommendations. In conversation with me, she clearly attributed student success and social safety to the solidity of the home environment. Her subtle use of the mothering discourse in the context of education reflected in her ongoing self-assessment, done in a very amiable and pleasant manner.

Mrs. R was glad that she had engaged with her son’s Grade 8 teacher as early as November. She reported that he was smart and well on his way to a successful high school outcome

> Hamney pehle se hi uski teacher se baat ki thi, November mein hi. Hum nahin chahtey they ke course selection ke waqt pe kuch gadbadee ho. Phir mamlaa jaldi jaldi mein khatamm karna padtaa hai. Uski teacher accchi theen. Unhon ne kahaa, ke mein usko sab subjects ke liye academic ki permission de hi deti hoon. Sirf French mein applied lega, aisa unhon ne kahaa. Main khoosh thee ke unhon ne usko sabhi advanced courses ki permission de di, November mein hi.
>
> Loose translation: We had met his Grade 8 teacher in November, early. I did not want to wait until the time of course selection to do this in a hurry. So we talked. She was very nice. She said right at the start, that she was going to give him the permission to take academic courses for everything. Only French, she said, he could take applied, according to her permission. I was happy that he got permission for all advanced courses right in November.

Right at the start of her son’s Grade 8 year, Mrs. R was aware that he would have to choose courses for high school. She was also aware that talking to the Grade 8 teacher early on, in November was going to allow her to make informed choices and give her time to find out more information about the high school.

In her interview, Mrs. R spoke about her high level of engagement with her son’s education and transition process. She had researched school ratings and communicated with her son’s Grade 8 teacher via email. She regularly used her unpaid work time to drive by his school with her husband to assure herself of his safety. Yet she was blissfully unaware that the final decision of course selection was in her hands as a parent, all along. It was interesting to note that Mrs. R was one more South Asian mother from my group of participants who credited the homeroom teacher for being generous enough to recommend university bound pathways for her son. She firmly believed that his homeroom teacher had full and final authority to permit and decline courses for high school. She hadn’t questioned the teacher or asked why her son was not allowed to take higher level French, although the homeroom teacher did not teach that subject but had recommended the applied stream. She was delighted that in November itself, her son had received permission to take courses in the academic stream. She had not engaged with the school board’s website or the RCD in particular for the course selection process although she was very active with digital research. It was clear from this interview that Mrs. R was engaged in the cursory processes of mothering work for transition in a deep way, but not aware of the relations of ruling even in passing.

Interview 5:

Mrs. C had a son who had just gone to Grade 9 in September 2013, before the interview was conducted. She reported that he was a quiet child prone to ill health in earlier years. She mentioned that he was stronger now and was keeping well. Her daughter, who was in grade 12, had accompanied her to the library in case she needed translation support. Mrs. C spoke to me in short sentences without the help of her daughter who had come along just in case she needed translation support. She was confident and engaged, just not very conversational. Therefore this interview is also very concise.

- He didn’t show us anything. He didn’t tell us anything.
- He never speaks to anyone at home. He doesn’t show us his course selections or anything.
- He said his teachers have told him what to do and he is going to look at his marks and decide.
- Maybe he is not confident that we will understand anything.
- We did not go to school in Canada, you know. Back home is different.
- Also my English is not so good, so maybe I don’t understand this system, yeah?
- He just selected the courses and got his father to sign the form.

Mrs. C spoke quite confidently in English throughout the interview. She did not need her daughter to translate for her at all. She spoke to me with an element of camaraderie. She shrugged her shoulders to indicate that her son did what he pleased and seemed happy with his choices. Yet, she insisted that her English was not good. As before with Mrs. T although Mrs. C did all the mothering work, her husband had signed the course selection forms to confirm the pathway that their son had selected. “He signs everything”, she said to me. “I take up the

homework, but he signs everything”. Although Mrs. C did the mothering work for her son’s education and was capable of looking over her son’s course selection form as well as signing it, she stepped back or was expected to step back, when endorsing the final decision. Her husband was the one who had taken that responsibility upon himself. Therefore it appeared that patriarchy lived in this home too. I make this suggestion based on the absence of my Amma’s signatures from my educational documents as explicated earlier in this paper.

Mrs. C spoke of her perceived deficit about her linguistic abilities in a matter of fact manner. She unknowingly brought to my attention the issue of literacy embedded in language and the degree of empowerment experienced by the speaker the more aligned her linguistic abilities are with the socially dominating accent, fluency and colloquial nuances when compared with an ephemeral ideal. The SNAF code was alive and well in Mrs. C’s mind as it was in the institution that regulated her. On account of her linguistic abilities, she did not see herself as a SNAF mother although she came from an intact family headed by her husband.

Interview 6:

Mrs. K had an older son in university and a younger son in grade 9. Although in my research, she was speaking of her younger son’s transition, she frequently returned to her mothering work and issues around her older son’s schooling. She wanted to talk about him first and set that matter aside before she was ready to talk about her younger son. Here are some things she shared.

Mrs. K was a high school graduate from Jaffna, Sri Lanka. She spoke to me in fluent English, yet apologized at several points in the interview as she said that she did not speak it very well. She asked also if I could understand what she said. I reassured her that I could. She smiled then and said she felt comfortable talking to me as “back home, we speak and understand all

types of English”. Although Mrs. K seemed to refer to the deficits attached to English when spoken with an accent that is not considered valuable, she recognised that English is and can be spoken in many ways across many lands. As she got comfortable with the interview, she grew quite confident in her ability to communicate. She told me that she did not feel shy speaking with me anymore, as I was also from back home. With this affirmation, Mrs. K acknowledged our colonial past as both of us spoke English and neither of us spoke it with the accents privileged in socially dominating groups within the GTA.

Mrs. K spoke about the education system in Ontario as being very different from what she was used to in Sri Lanka. She said that she did not fully understand how people could take a range of subjects in high school and then chose further pathways later. She said she was surprised that people take a business degree after doing science. She explained to me that there was an Arts, Science and Commerce stream in Sri Lanka and that you had to choose the high school courses based on what you wanted to do for your post-secondary qualifications. “It is the same in your back home too, no?” she asked.

Responses about older son now in high school:

- My older son didn’t get a lot of help from me.
- He always asked me why I could not help like other mothers.
- I had the younger one who has autism, so I could not do a lot.
- Then he grew up and he started saying that I should not go to the school with him as I didn’t speak good English like his teacher.
- After that when I went for meetings, I would just shake my head or nod.
- They talked to me and I understood. But I did not speak because he was shy. No, I think he was ashamed of me, I think.

- I always got only 10 minutes with the teacher so I never spoke. I have to look for words in my head to say what I think. It takes me a long time to speak so I did not speak.
- I did not know that I could ask for a meeting at any time of the year. I always think that you can meet only when they ask if you want to talk about the report card. No one told me. Now I know, but it too late for my elder son. I feel sad for that.
- His teacher said to me that I am pushing too much, when I asked what I could do to help him at home to improve from a B to an A. I think the teachers say this to the child too.
- I didn’t ask the teacher to do more work. I asked her what I could do. Still she said don’t do anything. When he does badly he is my child, but when I want to help him, she stopped me.
- My son also started saying the same things to me: Mom you are greedy for my marks. You are a South Asian mother, you are all like that.
- Why is he saying I am South Asian? We never say we are South Asian. I am Tamil, Miss. He is hearing this from his teachers, yeah?
- I didn’t push him. I said 70 % is okay but if you are capable of 85%, why don’t you try?
- When he had a hard time getting into the university he wanted, then he said it was my fault because I did not push him. But his teacher long back told me to stop and he also told me to stop.
- At that time, he told me that it is my fault. He said that I should not have listened to his teachers and I should have pushed him. What can I do now? It is too late for him.

Responses about younger son who has autism

Mrs. K spoke of her concerns with bullying during her younger son’s transition to high school. She was worried about him missing class due to being unaware of his schedule. She said

that she had written out her son’s timetable onto a small piece of paper and asked him to keep a copy in his jacket and another in his pant pocket. She was thankful that he had settled down well.

She felt frustrated that the high school did not seem to follow through on the course advancement from the ‘locally developed’ work place bound courses to ‘applied courses’ that would lead to a college education for her son. She said that although they had promised to shift him to college bound courses, they had not followed through on time and that he was still in workplace bound courses. She said that it took time to get a hold of the community liaison support teacher who could help her. She asked if she could go to the high school on her own and whether the school would help her get a translator if she needed one.

- He has autism so everything is different. It is not like my older son. He has a hard time.
- I used to go to the old school in the other board to ask for extra help because he is like this.
- The teachers for the autism class said I could get a translator. They never told me that for the older one. But here, I think they wanted to show me that they are doing everything to help, so they told me. I had questions for the older one too. But no translator.
- When I asked for an EA so that he could go into a regular class with the support, the principal in the old school board yelled at me “I do not have an EA in my desk drawer. Stop asking me”.
- How can he say that to me? I think he said it because I do not have the words to answer back. I am not Canadian, you see, I have little English. I cried that day. I cried a lot. He was so rude, but I did not have the words to answer him back.
- My husband also told me to stop asking because he said now the Principal was not looking at him even when he said good morning.

- I think everyone is thinking of their own problems and their own benefits: the principal is thinking how much money do I get for my school and how can I spread it all over. The teacher wants to make sure that I do not call every week about what my son is learning or why my son is not learning. And the government is making budget cuts so support is less.
- If they teach my child well now, that is good for all, yeah? If he is able to support himself after I am gone, then he will not take anything from the government.
- I do not want my child to depend on the government. For one thing, I am not like that, I want my child to work and look after himself.
- Another thing is how do I know that there will not be more budget cuts when he is older? How can he look after himself if he cannot get a good job?

At the end of the interview Mrs. K requested, “Can you tell your university and the school board that there are more problems for a family and for the mother, when a child has special needs? Will you tell them please?”

She spoke of what I recognised as mothering discourse in her workplace. She said that she was being teased and judged by her co-workers.

I have so many problems at work too. I sometimes do not cook everyday so that I can spend some time with my younger son and help him do his homework. So I cook every other day. At work the people say that I am saving money and am stingy. They do not know what it is like in my life, in my house.

Mrs. K also spoke of societal misunderstandings about autism. She said that her son looks normal but she is afraid that he will be taken advantage of in the world, if he is not able to access education at whichever level he can. When I asked her if I could mention his exceptionality, she gave her wholehearted permission. She said,

> Yes, please. Say that he is a special child. No, no. You must say that he has autism. People need to know that. And they also need to know that it is not easy for him and for me. He is like other children and he deserves to learn and grow up well. He is also not like other children and the school board and your university must hear that too. If you don’t tell anyone, no one will believe this has happened to me. You please tell them everything I said.

She wept then and we sat in silence for a long time. I had no words to offer. What does one say in situation like this? I really didn’t know.

After some time, Mrs. K composed herself and said,

> I know people are trying. But some children need more than that. Some mothers also need more than that. The school board and the government need to know that and they cannot give me the same thing that they give any other mother. Her child does not have autism. And if her child has autism, there are many different types, no. Why the school does not understand that? They know the autism books, they know the IEP books and they know the law. Then they do not know that every child needs different things? That is a big problem.

Mrs. K spoke of the strength in grassroots advocacy and the community support that she had accessed. Through one such meeting, she reported that she had met someone who did not look like her on the surface, but due to the needs of her child, had some similarities with her. She said that she had spoken to that mother a lot. Mrs. K reported, that this mother talked of her own struggles with advocacy.

> She was a real Canadian, you know, not like me. But first, long back, she also did not know how to get support for her child. She also had to fight like I did. Maybe it is the child that made us stronger, no? Because they needed help, we learned how to get it.

Like Mrs. C in the earlier interview, Mrs. K did not see herself as a real Canadian and seemed to understand how she was perceived in social and educational settings due to her racialization as well as her self-perception of her linguistic abilities. She said that as she was Tamil, she was not a real Canadian.

Her ways of knowing seemed to go back to her experiences with her older son’s shame about her accent, the rudeness that she had experienced in another school board when asking for in-class support for her younger son. It appears that Mrs. K considered the other mother to be a real Canadian while she was not. Perhaps that other mother could trace her roots to “the West” and Mrs. K clearly saw herself as belonging with “the Rest” (Hall, 2007, p.56). She could have also imbibed the SNAF code through her everyday social interactions. Mrs. K did not see herself as belonging to a Standard North American Family. As she juggled work, educational advocacy and homemaking, she was aware that she had had limited time to help both her sons during their schooling. Although she did not know that the SNAF code existed, she considered her mothering practices as deviant based on some implicit understanding of this ideological sorting. She had found kinship with a real Canadian mother whose child had similar learning needs as her son. That entry point into educational advocacy was Mrs. K’s way of belonging and learning how to be a real Canadian.

This interview made me realise that although I am a SERT and that I have worked with students with special needs for a decade, I had never had a conversation as deep as this one. I therefore suggest that the institutionally determined role of teachers creates a distance that

prevents such an in-depth understanding of what really goes on in the head, heart and life of a mother of a child with a disability. Had this South Asian mother and I met in a professional setting, I do not think she would have spoken to me in as much detail and with such openness. Then I would have been the person who just took notes and kept track of assessment data. As she and I had met through my research, as just two people without institutional ties, I was able to listen to her story.

Mrs. K had begun the interview by insisting that she was not proficient in English. Yet as can be seen from her conversation, it is evident that she was not only able to articulate her thoughts very clearly in English but also understood the problematic in the niche of special education. She was aware that her racialized presence in the previous school board had perhaps allowed professionals to dismiss her concerns and speak with her rudely as she was not a real Canadian. Her advocacy was based on knowing the big picture. She seemed to believe that every person and level in education had a role to play, and had their own constraints.

In spite of expressing a lot of anguish at the barriers that she had experienced in her mothering work for schooling, Mrs. K demonstrated a lot of patience and grace in her responses. Her courage and ability to weigh the perspectives of different stakeholders in her children’s education was a humbling experience for me as a privileged member of a publicly funded school board in the province of Ontario.

In suggesting next steps, Mrs. K was able to confidently articulate the need for putting in place specifically differentiated support models for mothers of students with special needs. She was able to see the big picture and the linkages between education and future employability. She also emphasized the importance for the Government of Ontario to ensure

that students with disabilities receive equitable outcomes in their learning, so that it accrues long term savings when they become self-supporting adults with sustainable employment. This aspect of independent living has been long articulated by the MOE in its transition documents.

Mrs. K was a South Asian mother who gazed directly at the institution. She wanted for her son, the same sustainable employment that the MOE wants for all students in Ontario as emphasized in its transition texts. Although she grappled with the problematic, she did 'get it' and she got it very well. Her anguish came from the reality that she did not receive the educational outcomes she expected in return for all her mothering work.

Interview 7:

Mrs. N was a dentist with work experience in two countries before her immigration to Ontario in 2012 with her husband, who was an engineer. Her two sons were in grade 7 and 4 when they arrived. It was interesting to note that although Mrs. N was a professionally qualified South Asian mother and extremely fluent in English, she chose to slip back and forth from Gujarati and English to communicate with me, out of a sense of comfortable camaraderie because she knew that I spoke both languages as well.

She reported that her family had had a great deal of difficulty in their everyday lives because of what she called the newcomer problem. "Hamey navaa chey etley thai chey. Pachee thee adjust thayee jasey, I think". *(Loose translation: It is happening because we are newcomers. I think it will settle down later).*

She reported that her husband had quickly found work related to his training but she had to take courses and write exams that were made available just once a year. She struggled with household chores, and their living arrangements along with having to study for the Canadian

accreditation of her qualification in dental surgery. She was going to withdraw her sons from school for a day and go to a town in southern Ontario where the exams were to be written. They were going to hire a car and stay in a hotel. She wondered aloud why these exams were not being offered at multiple sites and in the GTA.

> Then I would not have to book a hotel room, rent a car and take my children. All this costs money, you know and I will also have to look after them in a small hotel room even when I am supposed to study or focus my thoughts just before the exams. They always want to watch TV and they talk all the time. They are children. What can I say?

Mrs. N confided that she found it difficult to live in new circumstances when they had previously “lived in a big house, not like this, in someone’s basement”. This arrangement bothered her as the family had enjoyed a higher social status in India as well as in the Middle East where they had lived and worked. Mrs. N reported that due to her son’s eagerness in education and her own involvement with it, both of them had faced ridicule in his new school in the school board. She also reported that they had experienced a certain distance from teachers, and students when she continued her advocacy efforts.

Mrs. N reported that due to her experience of living and working in two other countries before coming to Canada and as she and her husband were professionally qualified, she had a wealth of knowledge about the educational criteria required by professional institutes around the world. She also said that she had a wide focus of interest in secondary and post-secondary education beyond Ontario. She had had many questions about transition last year and had asked them. However, she had not got any answers as she was told by the teacher that she was asking too early and that in the winter of Grade 8, they would tell her everything. Mrs. N also reported that she had asked about availability of math, English and science text books in Grade 7 as she

had wanted to bring them home and help her son prepare for Grade 8. She explained that as he had come to that school half way in Grade 7, he may have missed some learning. She reported that her requests had been dismissed and had not been supported at all.

> They told me that there aren’t enough copies of the text books so they cannot let me take one home. I will buy them but I don’t know where to go for that. They also said that one text book is old and another one they don’t like. What do the teachers mean when they say that they don’t like a text book? What is to like in that? It is the curriculum, no? How will I know the curriculum and what he must know for this year and next year? We had heard so many good things about your education system before we decided to leave everything we had to come here. How is this possible? This is Ontario.

Mrs. N said that no text books were being used on a regular basis for core subjects such as math, English or science, or sent home when she wanted. She experienced frustration while trying to support her older son in school. She said that she just did not know what her son was learning. She reported that her many trips to school embarrassed her son. She said that she found this matter surprising as she said that is what mothers are supposed to do: help the child and go to school for help. She was also saddened by the teasing that her son had experienced due to her presence in his school through grade 7. She mentioned that she felt responsible for having brought her children to Ontario but was not ready to go back to the Middle East yet as she wanted to try this educational system that she had heard so much about before coming here.

Mrs. N said that she consoled her son often by saying that it was better he knew early in life how to deal with bullying. She said that she had been having a hard time when she was not treated respectfully as she went to ask for volunteer opportunities at dentists’ offices or when she experienced exclusion when she went to the school.

> I feel foolish to ask the same questions to so many people. But when no one tells me the complete answer or gives me information about the big picture, I have to ask again and again. Then they look at me as if it is a waste of their time. It is my child, no, Mrs. Jani? I have to ask. I am all alone here.

Mrs. N had some explanations as to why her advocacy efforts hadn’t been very fruitful. “Maybe it is the way I am dressed, you know the newcomer problem. And I think in a basement, my clothes smell of my cooking. It is all the spices I use, maybe. Your hair looks nice. Can you tell me where you got it cut?”

It appears that in Mrs. N’s mind, her educational advocacy was strong. It seemed to come from her self-perception (Agnew, 2007) that as a professionally qualified woman with a strong understanding of the education system in many international settings, she should have had better access to information.

When she asked her son’s Grade 7 and 8 teachers about other education options such IB and AP in Ontario’s fast track programmes, or how the Ontario curriculum compared to the ICSE or CBSE curricula that she was familiar with in India and the Middle East, she found that they did not know much about these other systems of education. “I cannot compare Ontario to these other good curricula, because the teachers have never heard of them”, she said.

Mrs. N was perplexed and puzzled about why she continued to experience the barriers to information. She asked, “How is it that they don’t tell me?” She was not aware of the RCD or its related course selection website at the time of the interview in December 2013. According to the transition timetable in Appendix A, it is only in January that the high school shares information regarding course selections. For me, this was a moment of blinding clarity and considerable anguish: while the MOE of Ontario always has these regulatory texts embedded in its layered

website, and uses them relentlessly to coordinate transition work, it is left largely to each high school and cross panel transition team to decide when this information will be released to the South Asian mothers whose lives and work it regulates.

Although Mrs. N was professionally and linguistically competent and through her attempts at educational advocacy, behaved like an already-there mother (Brantlinger, 2003), the results of her efforts to gain successful transition outcomes for her son were futile. According to the parent engagement criteria listed in the MOE’s transition policies and procedures, Mrs. N was on paper, a dream come true. The frustration that she experienced at the lack of information and from being dismissed along with the questions she asked, were quite incongruous with the MOE’s expectation of parental involvement in education.

Soon, the interviews were completed. Every interview brought to my attention, the standpoint and lived experience of each research participant. I realised also that the regulatory text, the RCD of the school board, although aligned to the policies and procedures of the MOE, does not clarify any key understandings of post-secondary pathways. It merely shows the courses but it does not explain in everyday language what the expert terms mean. Therefore it is left to the guidance department and individual Grade 8 teachers to remind students that they can take a course combination of applied and academic courses. Some mothers can do the work needed to help their children make appropriate choices. Others may not know how and there is no special support available to them or their children unless a critical educator steps forward. Although each mother and each student is distinct and unique, the replicable text treats them as if they have identical learning and support needs. Based on my interview data, I assert that in this one-size-fits-all model of service delivery of the MOE and its extensive transition machinery,

lurks the inequity of educational outcomes experienced by children of many racialized South Asian mothers in this network of schools within the GTA.

Data Dialogue and Data Analysis

Institutional ethnography, says Smith (2005), “initiates dialogue with people in interviews or in field situations to create a major part of what becomes its data” (p.135). According to this argument, data is dialogic in nature. While listening to a recording, while reading a transcript, or poring over my field notes, I began to rediscover “what was said or observed” at the time of each interview (Smith, 2005, p.137). It took me a long time to extricate myself from the spoken words in the recordings and the feelings that those entanglements evoked. I had to bring myself to a place of observation in order to analyse the data.

As I am an employee of a publicly funded school board, I am aware that I am accountable for the way in which I write and present my report.

> Thus, the ethnographic dialogue isn’t just an opportunity for the researcher to learn, it aims at a particular product. The dialogue between interviewer/observer and informant or between observer and his/her own experience is implicitly a dialogue organised by the ethnographer’s participation in institutional ethnographic discourse. The researcher is oriented to a discourse to which he or she will be accountable if the research is written up for publication or as a report to those people or organizations it is intended to serve. (Smith, 2005, p.136).

During each of the seven interviews, I listened to the stories of South Asian mothers while struggling greatly with the overwhelming desire to step in and help. At this time, I truly realised that as an institutional ethnographer, I was looking at the very institution of which I was a part. I

was the human face of the mighty MOE and that realisation though lived every day, came to me a hundred fold while conducting my research.

I began to see that the RCD outlines each course in detail, yet does not explicitly indicate that it contains information about the permutations and combinations of academic and applied courses. It leaves this matter of information sharing to the individual discretion of Grade 8 teachers and high school guidance counsellors. The MOE through its subordinate texts (Smith, 2006) continues to treat individuals as identical agents with identical decision making experiences and capabilities. It thereby expects identical results from parents in their implementation of its transition policies and cookie cutter compliance to its course selection guidelines. If a South Asian mother doesn’t know what to ask, how can she be held responsible for not asking all the right questions? The MOE doesn’t appear to have considered this aspect.

Data analysis in qualitative research is an intricate process, posits Creswell (2013). It is not merely a process by which researchers can analyse text and image data. He argues that it involves “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them” (p.179).

I follow the scholarship of Kirby and McKenna (1989) who posit that the “great volume of data produced by the method of researching from the margins needs careful management” (p.129). They explicate that research from the margins needs “intersubjectivity: an authentic dialogue between all participants in the research process in which all are respected as equally knowing subjects” (p.129).

The feminist methodology of institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987), fundamentally depends on the experiences of individuals. Experience is contested amongst feminists “as to its epistemological status, thus its usefulness in knowledge claims,” suggests Campbell (1998, p.

55). She also explicates that as a research strategy, institutional ethnography is located in the theoretical approach known as the social organization of knowledge. Based on my research, I posit that there is a dire need within the MOE in the province of Ontario, of acknowledging the epistemology of South Asian mothers involved in mothering work for transition to high school.

> The analysis begins in experience and returns to it, having explicated how the experience came to happen as it did. The objective of making the analysis is to open up possibilities for people who live these experiences to have more room to move and act, on the basis of more knowledge about them. (Campbell, 2006, p.91)

Experience, asserts Griffith, (1998), is the “access to an analysis of the social organization of domination and oppression” and explicates that experience is “shaped, structured and known socially. The focus of inquiry then, is the social organization of experience” (p.369).

My researcher position as a part of the institution at which I was now gazing made each of my interviews an experiential conversation between the research participants and me, as well as between me and my experiences with the institutional discourses of which I am a part.

> The experiential dialogue can thus be viewed as a moment in a social relation, a sequence of coordinated action that organizes the dialogue between informant and researcher as a step or moment in a sequence that hooks back into the institution of academic, professional and related specialized discourses. (Smith, 2005, p.136)

Litchman (2013) asks, “What makes a study feminist?” She explicates that the feminist movement led to feminist theory that mainly aimed at the “inequality in treatment of women” (p. 110).

Smith (1987) speaks about that standpoint located in "relations of ruling our societies" in her scholarly work around the problem of "sociology written from the standpoint of men" (p.1). She also argues that "as women we had been living in an intellectual, cultural and political world from whose making we had been almost entirely excluded and in which we had been recognised as no more than marginalized voices" (p.1). Therefore my research can be classified as a feminist study because seven South Asian mothers have intentionally walked over from the margins of the transition process to take up their positions as co-creators of knowledge. By sharing their responses about the mothering work that they did for their children's transition to high school, they have generated primary data that brings to light the work that goes on in their everyday lives. Their responses showed me how diverse each experience was from another while in some way being the same, as it is regulated by the ruling relations embedded in the institutional framework, and perpetuated through regulatory texts of the MOE in Ontario.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), the initial stages of ethnographic analysis are made up of the process of reading through the body of data gathered during the research and generating concepts that make sense of this data. From the standpoint of institutional ethnography, I shall focus on the words of Smith (2006) who argues that "the importance of texts, as of any phenomena of language, to the social is as coordinator of the diversities of peoples' subjectivities, their consciousnesses" (p. 65). This understanding of the power of textually mediated local activities can be applied directly to my research while I analyse how the RCD and website of the school board in the GTA coordinates the work and affects the lives of South Asian mothers.

Themes in Data

It is quite common in qualitative analysis, says Patton (2002), for a large amount of field notes and months of work to reduce to a few select themes. I took heart from this position that it is the quality of the insights generated that matters, and not just the number of the insights.

I had placed my data into a framework of a decolonizing institutional ethnography. This meant that my inquiry had aimed at the discovery of "how things work, how they are put together" (Smith, 1987, p.147, as cited in Griffith, 1998, p.370). I was now analysing my participants' interview responses ethnographically. As I continued to gather data and review it, due to the nature of experiences and the trajectories of participant responses, I became aware of new categories and subcategories.

> …we looked for similarities between women's experiences of mothering. As we looked further, we began to see that by analyzing the data in this way we were developing a description very similar to those already in the literature. (Griffith, 1998, p. 371)

The Standard North American Family or SNAF

The main theme that emerges from the research data of my inquiry aligns with Smith's (1993) position on SNAF or the Standard North American Family, explained in chapter 2. In my research as some of the South Asian mothers - Mrs. A, Mrs. R, Mrs. C or Mrs. N - primarily stayed home and devoted their time to mothering work while their husbands provided for their families, the cross panel teams should have perceived them as SNAF mothers. Based on their systemically perpetuated ignorance about the course selection processes as well as the regulatory aspect of the institution or from their subliminal dismissal and marginalization in transition talks, I argue that these South Asian mothers had very little agency within the cross panel network. When Mrs. E, Mrs. N or Mrs. K asked questions, they just did not get answers that met their information needs.

I therefore assert that there appears to be an element of upward-striving and already-there classification (Brantlinger, 2003) woven through the way in which the cross panel team in this school board takes up the SNAF code which in turn affects how educators evaluate the transition work done by South Asian mothers. When the cross panel network perceives these mothers as upward-striving and ignorant about transition pathways or unrealistically ambitious for their children, their mothering work is easily dismissed and does not beget the results that already-there SNAF mothers enjoy. Moreover, their lack of success labels *them* as being deviant from the middle class engagement model of elite groups like People for Education or the very vocal educational advocacy that emerges from SNAF mothers in digital texts and social media in the province of Ontario and across Canada.

SNAF and Mothering Discourse

A discourse, explicate Griffith and Smith (1991), does not consist merely of statements that are made. It also consists of "interchanges among experts doing research" (p.90). Therefore, they assert, that the discourse "provides the working language coordinating teachers' classroom experience with that of other educators and administrators" and "links the preparation of courses in high school and colleges to practices of reading and learning on the part of professionals and lay practitioners (mothers) etc." (p. 90). According to Griffith and Smith (2005), some discourses like the mothering discourse, are intimately linked to the educational discourse due to "particular institutional links" wherein "the educational discourse provides the working knowledge coordinating teachers' classroom experience with that of other educators and administrators" (p. 34). Based on this scholarly assertion, I argue that these linkages, between the mothering discourse taken up for South Asian mothers and the educational discourse of members of cross

panel teams engaged in transition, affect the ways in which the transition work of South Asian mothers is viewed.

While conducting their research with mothering work for schooling, Griffith and Smith, (2005) noticed a relationship between the unpaid work of mothers and the educational outcomes of their children. They also discovered that there was some relationship, as yet unspecified, about “the standard North American family that was consequential for schooling” (p.2) between the organization of the middle class family or the Standard North American Family or SNAF, as a prototype of the North American middle class. Smith (1993) argues that “where data is ordered according to SNAF, it will be so ordered” (p.50). Where it cannot be ordered according to that code, SNAF ordering generates deviant codes. Therefore, according to this explanation, when the data of any social situation does not fit the SNAF code, it is found to be deviant or deficient. This deviance and deficiency is also attributed to South Asian mothers’ transition work when their engagement efforts are dismissed or do not bring forth the results that they expect. It is rarely, if ever, attributed to the systemic barriers that deny them equitable access to educational outcomes for their children. Therefore I suggest that the stay at home status or eager engagement of some of my research participants did not automatically grant them SNAF status. That door opens only if they are perceived as middle class within the SNAF prototype along with all its trimmings of language and power. These South Asian mothers entered the institutional spaces packed inside The Little Brown Box that did not allow them to occupy the seats reserved for mothers of SNAF families or what Mrs. C and Mrs. K called real Canadians. Therefore their marginalization was imminent even before they began their mothering work, right when they entered the hallways of the institution.

Common Sense Sexism and Racism

I, like Ng (1991) use the term "common sense sexism and racism" (p.101) to include "those unintentional and unconscious acts which result in the silencing, exclusion, subordination and exploitation of minority group members – that is what people generally refer to as sexist and racist attitudes" (p.101). Due to the generalization of experiences of South Asian mothers by the MOE and its T-discourses, many casual comments are directed towards them and their children during the process of course selection for transition The scholarly work of Ng (1991) addresses issues that she experienced as a racialized marginalized woman by asserting that "the mundane off-hand remarks illustrate how (a) power is enacted interactionally, and (b) common sense sexism and racism operate as part of the relations which constitute our educational experience" (p.102). I follow in the footsteps of Ng (1991) and move away from the notion that sexism and racism are just products of the attitudes of individuals, although like her, I acknowledge that they cannot be distinct from an attitudinal framework "by emphasizing that they are *systems* of oppression giving rise to structural inequality over time" (p.101, emphasis in original). This awareness is important for the purpose of my research and my lived experience as a racialized and minoritized woman living and working in the field of education in the GTA within the province of Ontario.

> Indeed certain norms and forms of action are so entrenched that they have become the "normal" and taken-for-granted ways of doing things. For example, when men unconsciously and automatically control and direct topics of conversation in an interactional setting, it can be seen as one form of common sense sexism. (Ng, 1991, p.102)

Bannerji (1987) writes that "common sense" is a term that is generally used to indicate a good sense that is down-to-earth and often irrefutable for its simplicity that it even wins over logic and explicates that common sense is "thought to represent the distilled truths of centuries of practical experience" (p. 48). She also argues that the 'diffused normalised set of assumptions, knowledge and so-called cultural practices" in which we come across racism at its most powerful because [it is] pervasive" (p.11).

The pervasive presence of common sense racism came across quite glaringly in my research participants' responses.

- Mrs. K was very articulate about her experiences with common sense racism that she experienced with her older son's schooling where she reported that he had told her repeatedly that she was a South Asian mother and was greedy for his marks because they are all like that.
- Mrs. K had been told by her younger son's principal in a school board that he did not have educational assistants in his desk drawer. Mrs. K reported that this statement was rude and targeted her due to her inability to stand up for herself due to her English fluency. She also said she knew that she wasn't a real Canadian.
- Casual conversations in shared spaces within education speak of South Asian mothers as incapable of supporting their children's learning by insisting that they do help but they do not know what is needed in schools and thereby dismissing their efforts as being incapable of helping their children improve their educational outcomes.
- Mothers who do the mothering work for schooling have their presence diminished by their husbands who speak English and dismiss their questions when they

> charge into the conversation and translate for them. Mrs. T had to interrupt her husband several times and chose to speak to me directly to tell me what had really happened in her home while her husband was away during the course submission.

I think of the many times that I have been spoken to dismissively in my children’s schools and how quickly that tone of conversations changes as I calmly continue to engage in the discussion while intentionally and fluently speaking the institutional language of educators. I do not even have to mention that I am an educator in Ontario; just my usage of the insider language is enough to immediately elevate my status at the table.

From my experiences and from speaking with my participants, I argue that the discursive gaze with which racialized South Asian mothers are examined within social spaces including schools in the GTA has a lot to do with the fluency of their English communication and the accent of that language which subliminally points to a slice of social class and perpetuates systemic oppression. The space in which these discursive evaluations occur lies at the intersection of SNAF and common sense racism. I know because I often chuckle when various people in institutional settings speak to me slowly or loudly so that I understand. And I do.

The educational discourses in my everyday problematic are peppered with phrases such as “communities in Keswick, Jane and Finch schools, Malvern kids, Brampton schools, Markham communities”. This is a coded message that only an insider understands. The use of the personal pronoun “our” affixed to the nouns - students, parents, community, communities, and schools - does nothing to reduce the marginalization. When communities are seen through deficient perspectives, data such as high school graduation rates, transition difficulties, job losses, and standardized test scores conveniently fit the initial assumption that these communities and people were indeed lacking in something (Razack, 2007). This standpoint reifies the

embedded stereotype of racialized communities as being less capable of pulling themselves up and achieving economic and academic success. Researchers who delve in to look for disembodied, de-contexualised, numerate or observational data may often come back with a strengthened hypothesis as the data invariably fits their inherent assumptions of a deficient population and a deficient culture (Beeman-Cadwallader et al, 2011). Lawrence (1982) discussed “common sense ideas about marginalized populations” that he pointed out are a blend of “older prejudice and newer responses” formulated within contemporary economic and social crises (as cited in Loomba, 1998, pp.30, 31).

There is also the issue raised by Mrs. E where she wanted to know whether the institution would never let her daughter go to university because she was labelled as ESL. I had wondered then if that same treatment of restraining guidelines in education, based on the perceived ability of a student to handle an advanced English caseload would have been as routinely meted out to a grade 9 daughter of a Belgian diplomat. In this rhetoric lies the answer that common sense sexism and racism was indeed a theme embedded in the interview responses and it is its very nature of pervasiveness and its ability of being disguised as common sense that makes it invisible to many.

Why don’t they get it?

Based on the conversations at cross panel transition team meetings that I have attended over a decade, there seems to be a general impression amongst educators in the network that South Asian parents do not understand transition nor do they invest much thought in the course selection process. Educators in this cross panel team articulate their perceptions that South Asian parents merely check off boxes, make their children choose higher level courses and submit forms to the high school by the due date. Some of these cases cause considerable hand wringing

within the cross panel transition team before, and after courses are submitted. These deliberations typically take place in April or May when course selections are sent back to families for review in case parents and students wish to change their minds (Appendix A). It is especially critical to the high school when course pathways that Grade 8 students have selected and submitted do not seem to match their academic potential as reported by their Grade 8 teacher or recorded in their Grade 7 Provincial Report Card. Sometimes, when course selections are sent back to families for review, they come back unchanged and the higher level courses are still sitting on the Grade 9 course calendars of South Asian students. Grade 8 and high school teachers ask several questions during cross panel transition meetings at this time.

- Why do our parents not understand transition pathways through high school?
- Why do they help their children select courses in the academic stream with a higher academic rigor than what they capable of handling: don't they read their report cards?
- Why do these parents want their children to follow university pathways, when they would do so well in college bound courses?
- Why do our parents not "get it?"[29]

When such questions are routinely asked in professional settings in Ontario's educational spaces, it becomes visible that South Asian parents, also known as 'they', 'our parents' and 'our communities' are being evaluated using common sense racism and the SNAF ideological code intertwined within T-discourses of the institution. I therefore assert that these textually mediated discourses or "T-discourses are SNAF infected through and through" (Smith, 1993, p. 54).

29 Questions such as these are often raised during cross panel meetings and in professional discussions when discussing students' course selections for Grade 9 based on parental guidance. This is a matter of great concern for educators in this publicly funded school board while discussing the high school pathways of students who are deemed at risk or not up to the MOE's provincial standard referenced Level 3 mark of 70 % and above.

Yosso (2005) asks "Whose culture has capital?" (p. 69) and takes the discussion back to the existence of class divisions within education as well as the social. Brantlinger (2003) turns the spotlight on groups who can acquire middle class advantages for their children in education.

As seen from the interview data, the institution doesn't always value experience of all peoples equally. It considers the perceived deficits of racialized mothers as applicable to every one of them. If one South Asian mother successfully engages in educational advocacy, the institution and its personnel may not automatically assume that all South Asian mothers are equally competent. However if one South Asian mother is unable to engage with educational advocacy in ways in which the institution sees as valuable, then the efforts of all South Asian mothers can easily be dismissed as ineffective.

The interview data brought forth some of the frustrations experienced by many of my participants when they were marginalized by the front line workers of the institution and sometimes even their own children like Mrs. K's son, whom the institution infected with the SNAF code and taught him to see his mother as just another South Asian woman and therefore deviant. I therefore assert that the web of SNAF infected T-discourses wraps around the ankles of South Asian mothers and hinders their mothering work from producing for their children the same results achieved by middle class, already-there mothers who are SNAF approved.

Colonial Relations

It is easy to pack colonial relations away as if they are in the past and have been dealt with (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). As an intentional decolonizing decision, I have privileged this significant thread as a separate theme. I argue that the South Asian mothers' own colonized histories and perceived deficiencies within a predominantly English speaking "settler society" (Razack, 2007 p.74) have a large part to play in keeping the relations of ruling firmly in place. I

therefore suggest that it is because of their colonized past that the seven South Asian mothers did not question the relations of ruling embedded in transition practices – they just accepted their situation to be the order of things.

Based on their stories, I noticed that they had been regulated into believing that they don’t know enough, speak well enough, or having studied in a different education system were not competent enough to challenge the authority vested in front line staff or the teachers of their children. Although they were hurt or puzzled when their questions were not answered to their satisfaction, when they felt as if they were being dismissed or when their children’s course choices weren’t supported by teachers, they did not take the matter to a higher authority within the school. They relented to the powers vested by the institution in its front line workers for fear of repercussions on their children and their educational future. Mrs. K mentioned a distinct lack of comfort to discuss issues with the principal. A principal’s rudeness in another board regarding special needs student has made her wary of speaking to the administrators in this school board. I suggest that in this embodied knowing lies the value of epistemology: we know what we know because of who we are and how we have been treated.

In case of Mrs. N, living and working in an international setting appeared to have given rise to higher aspirations and a wider lens with which to view educational opportunities in high school, than those who have only had the back home versus Ontario experience. This mother had even more information about international educational pathways than some of the teachers she spoke with. However, the relations of ruling embedded in the institution are so inflexible and powerful, that they did not enable Mrs. N to get any straightforward answers from her son’s teachers when she approached them in grade 7 to ask about transition. Mrs. N stepped back when her advocacy efforts had made her appear nosy and meddlesome and when her son was teased

due to her presence in his school. In spite of being fluent in English and professionally qualified, she also returned to the margins of education advocacy and transition work. Therefore the analysis of Mrs. N’s responses demonstrated to me that a more knowledgeable South Asian mother with professional qualifications and higher expectations did not automatically get more information or equitable access to transition texts as she was not SNAF approved. It was clearly more than being the newcomer problem.

Each of my seven participants believed in the superiority of Ontario’s education system that had been relayed to them by immigration websites, media campaigns or by word of mouth of friends and family members who had not yet seen the embedded inequities. Many undervalued their own education or mothering work by stating that they were incapable of doing what the school needed them to do or what their children needed at this stage in their education.

These seven South Asian mothers considered the recommendations of Grade 8 teachers with utmost respect. Based on the words they chose when they spoke about their teachers’ power of permitting course selection, the mothers I interviewed saw the Grade 8 or high school teachers’ role exactly as the institution had intended it to be: as the gatekeeper of high school course pathways. South Asian mothers in my research therefore perceived course selections to be a prize held in the powerful hands of their children’s teachers. The colonized histories of these seven South Asian mothers appeared to have replicated themselves and aligned perfectly with the *a priori* relations of ruling within the MOE of Ontario.

Relations of Ruling

Institutional relations of ruling were omnipresent throughout the research data that came out of the seven interviews. Relevant transition information was not explicitly shared well in advance with parents in the school network until a few weeks before course selections were due. The South Asian mothers did not have access to pathways information beyond what the Grade 8 teachers shared or was made available when the school board's website was shown on the screen of a crowded auditorium at the high school during Parent Information Night. The institution did not explicitly share any transition or pathways information spanning grades 9 to 12 over an extended period of time. The South Asian mothers received a myopic view of Grade 9 courses mere weeks before the submission due date. Yet the MOE referred to Grade 7/8 as the transition years. This did not make sense.

From my professional vantage point, I know that at any stage in the transition to and through high school, teachers can only recommend specific pathways and courses. We cannot permit or decline admission to any courses per se. The MOE says that, teachers know that, the institution knows that. Yet the RCD or other texts do not explicitly state that parents are the decision makers in their child's educational journey. This lack of explicit sharing of information that the parental authority in education *is* final, marginalizes parents pervasively and persistently. South Asian mothers like Mrs. E and Mrs. R continued to be grateful to their children's teachers for permitting particular courses. Mrs. E or Mrs. N were afraid to ask for more information or a change of recommendation for fear of angering the teacher whom they saw as the face of the institution. I thereby argue that the relations of ruling of the MOE of Ontario is successfully keeping South Asian mothers in their marginalized place as they continue to look up to their children's teachers as the final decision makers for their future. Those who do not ask for

information, like Mrs. A in interview 2, are put in their place as non-participants in transition. Those like Mrs. N and Mrs. K who do ask questions are also relegated to the margins for asking too many questions, or asking for too much, too soon and meddling with the institutional status quo of cross panel teams and their transition calendars.

Ruling relations and transition discourse

Devault (2006) reminds us that “teachers and other professionals who work with parents and children are themselves caught up in the ruling relations – their treatment of [single] mothers is not simply a matter of prejudice but related to the organization of their work” (p.295). In this case, when cross panel team members speak discursively about South Asian mothers and families, the ruling relations embedded in their work coordination are responsible for the discursive lens through which they view the mothers. The overarching presence of the MOE along with the T-discourse of transition policies and procedures, its transition timelines and the course pathways embedded in the RCD of the school board create this situation.

> Those working within these ruling relations – not only mothers, but also teachers, nurses, social workers and others, are sometimes puzzled by the frustrations of their work. Institutional ethnography aims to provide, for any of us, a way of exploring such puzzles, and discovering how our activities – wherever we are at work and often without our conscious awareness – are brought under the jurisdiction of the ruling texts of institutional life. (DeVault, 2006, p.297)

Ruling relations and front line staff

The school board has granted institutionally approved power to frontline professionals in elementary schools and that power can move pathways. Grade 8 teachers are the main point of contact for South Asian mothers and wield immense institutional power to stream students. This

is a key factor for consideration while examining the coordination of South Asian mothers’ transition work. Based on the participants’ responses, I assert that these South Asian mothers irrespective of their newcomer status or their individualized needs for information have had to wait, hat in hand, for the institution to open its stash of information. Frontline professionals decide when and where these texts are activated. Grade 7/8 teachers can choose whether or not to share the course selection website with parents like Mrs. N before the high school talks about it. If Grade 7/8 teachers do not share this information, mothers like Mrs. N continue to flail and flounder in their advocacy efforts. They jump and they jump, but they cannot pull themselves out of their uninformed space. Is it the smell on their clothes, or is it the way their hair is cut? It is neither. These are just the relations of ruling within the institution.

As the MOE appears to think that all human participants in education are as identical as its texts, all South Asian mothers are expected to take up the course selection process in exactly the same way, in the short time that is given to them. They are also tacitly expected to erase the diversity of the ways in which they take up these texts. It didn’t matter that Mrs. N was a professionally qualified dentist with multinational work and life experience. Her access to information and her confusion from its inaccessibility was in no way different from Mrs. E’s confusion about the different English courses for her daughter. This misconception is cleared by the seven South Asian mothers who illustrated through their responses that different families take up transition in their own unique way. This wide variation in information sharing is discussed below.

> Given the importance of the choice, it is vital that students and their families are able to make informed decisions, but there are wide variations between boards in how information about courses is provided, and there are no standard criteria for making

> recommendations about course choices. There are also wide variations in parents' knowledge of the school system, their access to information and capacity to make informed choices. (People for Education, 2014, p.4)

The MOE, its school boards and the cross panel teams within them need to understand this diversity and support it equitably.

ESL and Special Education

As discussed in chapter 1, ESL or English as Second Language designations are assigned to students who do not meet the standards of written and spoken English set out in the institutional texts of the MOE. Such a designation can cause problems for course selections especially if its implications for the four years of high school are not discussed in Grade 8 itself. This issue became clear in Mrs. E's interview. The Grade 9 pathway for her daughter had narrowed when her Grade 8 teacher had advised her to take applied English [30] because she was an ESL student. Her Grade 9 teacher had told her that she had to take the requisite course of Grade 9 academic English after her Grade 9 year if she wanted to take academic English in Grade 10. It appeared from this interview that this possibility of catching up to the academic stream from the applied stream, had never been explained to the family in Grade 8 or at the start of Grade 9. In addition, Mrs. E reported that the Grade 9 teacher had portrayed 85% as the gold standard without which her daughter would not get permission to select academic English. Mrs. E wondered why the English teacher had set 85% as the entry point for this course when just

[30] Applied is supposed to be a 'small class size, more hands on' curriculum stream. It's more 'advanced, larger class sizes' counterpart is the academic stream. It is possible to move from applied to academic pathway with certain course combinations that are also dependent on how well the student performs in the lower stream and recommendations of frontline professionals such as guidance counsellors and subject teachers.

minutes later, her daughter’s geography teacher had assured them that 70% was at grade level. The lack of transparency from which the relations of ruling operate in the form of course recommendations through teachers is an important factor that makes public education an “engine of inequality” (Griffith & Smith, 2004, p.9).

Institutional coordination and marginalization for mothers of children with special needs is an important factor to be acknowledged. Mrs. K reported that she had had nothing to do with course selections, as there were limited options for children with autism in high school. Institutionalized marginalization is also caused due to lack of explicit information sharing with South Asian mothers about their rights as educational advocates for their children. The institution through its relations of ruling limits opportunities for children of working class parents and new comers through the foreclosure embedded in textually mediated discourses (People for Education, 2014). When a grade 8 teacher states that a student is ‘At-risk’ or ‘ESL’ or has an ‘IEP’ the meaning making that holds that student’s capabilities in place comes from the textually mediated discourse rooted in the institution.

> By international standards, Ontario has an equitable education system, but provincial data show that course choices continue to have an uneven effect on different communities. Aboriginal students, students with special education needs, and English Language Learners are overrepresented in the applied program. (People for Education, 2014, p.8)

Intertextuality in Transition Work

Mrs. E and Mrs. T whose children had institutional labels of ESL and Autism attached to their learner profiles knew that these designations had had a part to play in their future prospects. From my experience, I know that teachers’ recommendations are cross referenced between texts: report card to course directory, IEP to report card to course directory and so on. As these

intertextual conversations get louder, the ruling relations weave tighter and tighter webs. Based on the responses of my participants, I argue that the ubiquitous ruling relations are relentlessly reified through the recommendations of frontline transition years’ teachers in this school board.

Resistance to Relations of Ruling

Based on my interviews with research participants, I observed that South Asian mothers and their families appeared to implicitly recognize if they are experiencing marginalization. It appears that South Asian mothers know that inequities exist in course selection process and they often choose to err on the side of caution by selecting courses that open up post-secondary opportunities for their children. Therefore, their default position has been to pick the most advanced pathway of courses for Grade 9 that would take their children straight to the university track.

“Are we choosing correctly?” is a question that many South Asian mothers have asked me over the past decade. Course selection decisions are made either largely due to lack of explicitly stated information or a general mistrust of the system. The mistrust creeps in due to a variety of factors such as past experiences of lower track or applied recommendations by Grade 8 teachers for other children in the family or social circle. Therefore it is imperative from the perspective of both the school and the families that course selection procedures be strengthened and supported equitably. South Asian mothers within this school network have repeatedly proved that if they do not have enough information about the pathways through high school and how they link with post-secondary opportunities, they tend to err on the side of caution and choose the higher option. From Mrs. E’s experience and as stated in transition literature of advocacy groups such as People for Education, navigation from an applied to an academic pathway isn’t easy for all students. South Asian mothers in this school network seem to know this.

In my research group, only two mothers chose exactly what they were recommended to do due to the special labels of ESL and Special Education placed on their child's needs and strengths at that time. The rest either let their children choose courses based on their teachers' recommendations, or resisted the recommendations and chose academic courses anyway.

Silent or Silenced?

In a social world where literacy, language and power are intertwined, (Purcell-Gates, 2002), many of the South Asian mothers remain silent in their children's school setting. Some have told me that although they had a lot to say, they did not know how to express themselves to their satisfaction. They have said, "Hamarey paas lavz nahin hain, bataaney ke liye ke hum kya kehna chahtey hain.[31] (Loose translation: We don't have the words to express what we want to say). Yet, based on my observation and the conversations that I overhear in passing through hallways and shared spaces, South Asian mothers are neither subaltern nor silent. When they bring lunch or speak amongst themselves at the end of the day, when I see them at transition information nights at the high school or at school board events, they often discuss issues about their children's schooling quite animatedly and present their opinions to one another confidently. They ask questions to other women around them whose children are engaged in particular activities like the student council, those whose children are in a year of standardized provincial EQAO testing or those who have just enrolled for kindergarten or high school. They don't limit themselves to socialize only with women who speak their language. If students go to the same

[31] Conversations between 2011 and 2013 with Mrs. Z and Mrs. M. mothers of former students.

elementary school or if they are enrolled for the same program at the public library, their South Asian mothers interact with one another amicably in and from this common space.

Data analysis within the framework of a decolonizing institutional ethnography enabled me to stand apart from the positivist generalisations implied by the RCD. Multiple copies of an identical text are accessed by many unique and individual South Asian mothers, each one with her own responses to the information within. It is therefore important for cross panel transition teams, school boards and the MOE in Ontario to understand that while the copies of institutional texts such as the RCD are identical, the South Asian mothers are not. When decision makers in cross panel teams in the school board believe that all South Asian mothers make identical decisions, those mothers who do not adhere to this expectation are considered as deviant. Based on my data analysis, I assert that it is the relationship of the cross panel team with South Asian mothers that is deviant. The mothers are not. They are not silent. It is the institution and its relations of ruling that silences them.

Chapter 5

What now? What next?

Limitations, Recommendations, Conclusions and Future Research

I cannot consider myself a decolonizing institutional ethnographer unless I acknowledge the traditional lands on which I stand. Before I conclude my research, I wish to pay homage to this land on which I live, work and raise my children. I am mindful of the atrocities committed to the lives, lifestyles and livelihoods of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada by the steady march of colonization and disenfranchisement from historical times to the modern day.

The legacy of education in Canada has not been an equitable one although until very recently it has never been publicly acknowledged except in the hearts and minds of survivors and families on whom the atrocities were committed. [32] I acknowledge the scars left on generations of FNMI peoples of Canada through the Residential School system. The May 2015 report and recommendations released by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission have brought to light the years of abuse, silencing and systemic oppression against the First Peoples of this land. [33] I was not here then. However, now that I am here, I am ethically and morally responsible for using my multiple privileges of English language fluency, and the elite status afforded by a university education to speak up. As a newcomer to this land, it is my journey to learn how to be a strong

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32 In 2008, Prime Minister, Stephen Harper apologized to the survivors of Residential Schools. There is also a stained glass window on Parliament Hill in Ottawa that "commemorates the legacy" of Residential Schools.

33 http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3 is the website of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and contains the testimonies, stories, archival material as well as 94 recommendations to restore in some measure all that has been lost due to generations of abuse and post traumatic impact on individuals and communities. A National Research Centre on Indian Residential Schools has also been set up and is housed at the University of Manitoba in Canada.

and well informed ally as the issues that affect FNMI peoples are issues that affect us all. I understand that we are all Treaty people.[34]

This is a poem I had written in 2007 while on a day trip to St. Marie among the Hurons with my family. It brings to light my mindful meditations on the fact that the relations of ruling that impact educational governance affect the lives of all Canadians. For the purpose of this study, these relations of ruling within educational settings, impact me and other South Asian women engaged in mothering work who are immersed in the problematic of transition to high school.

St. Marie among the Hurons

Memories of another time and

Spirits speak in my ear

Reminding me gently, sadly

That the Hand that wrote their story

Writes my destiny, every day

(Karnad-Jani, 2008, p.91)

This country has had a long history of segregation of FNMI peoples as the government considered them 'the other' and therefore less than those who identified with the white settler states of England and France (Haig-Brown, 2012, Razack, 2007). As I identify myself as a

[34] This important matter is highlighted in the website of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner http://www.otc.ca/education/we-are-all-treaty-people

colonized subject of the former British Raj in India, I have a responsibility vested in me by my colonized history to interrupt the colonial agenda within the relations of ruling of the institution now that I know that they exist. The MOE regulates the educational outcomes of all whose lives it controls through its relations of ruling embedded in its educational governance framework. Racialized populations are the most affected by the streaming mechanism that is embedded in the MOE's transition policies and procedures (People for Education, 2015). These inequities of access affects all marginalized populations including the children of South Asian mothers. I argue that the children of South Asian mothers are equal citizens of this country and members of the societal framework into which they were invited or were born. They are not subjects without agency to be coordinated at the will of those who control their destinies. Therefore, they and all marginalized populations of students deserve an equitable and culturally relevant education based on the principles of social justice designed to serve all citizens of Ontario and Canada.

According to the MOE's document, From Great to Excellent (Fullan, 2013), "reduced gaps in school achievement for all subgroups of students" is a clearly stated agenda (p.6). This action plan has to therefore include all racialized students, including the children of South Asian mothers if Ontario's education has to indeed fulfil the promise conveyed by this document.

Limitations of the Study

Institutional capture during interviews

As my seven participants talked about their experiences with their children's transition, I sometimes found my thoughts wandering. I felt that my gaze was slipping away from the institution. I gradually began examining the stories from my insider standpoint of the school board and the expert knowledge that I have about the course selection process. I caught myself thinking like a transition years' teacher instead of like a decolonizing institutional ethnographer

- Mrs. T’s son would have benefitted from taking lighter, applied courses in music and French. This would have given him the room to spend more time on his academic or higher level math.
- Mrs. E’s daughter may have benefitted from taking applied English in Grade 9 followed by applied Grade 10 English for semester 1 of the following year. With that prerequisite, she could have taken Grade 10 academic English for semester 2.
- If only Mrs. N had gone to the principal or contacted the high school directly, she would not have had to go through this. If only she had asked whether there was a website she could look at.
- If only, if only, if only…

I know that, at this point, I had crossed the line drawn by McCoy (2006), who speaks of vulnerabilities of methodology in data analysis. I realised that I had veered away from the participant’s account of her transition trajectory as a South Asian mother. I was shifting my gaze from the institution and its regulatory texts and had begun to look at my research participant subjectively. I had stopped focussing my attention to the gap in information sharing from the high school to families of Grade 8 students. For a short period, I had stopped looking at the institution, the MOE. I did not look anymore at the RCD that does not explain pathways’ possibilities or course combinations to parents or students. Instead I had fallen prey to “institutional capture” that Smith, (2005) explicates as a “discursive practice, regulated by the institutional procedures of text-reader conversations, through which institutional discourse overrides and deconstructs experiential talk and writing” (p.119). I had begun to use managerial language and was at risk of seeing the mothers as objects, devoid of agency. I had begun examining my responses to the mothers’ struggle with understanding course selection pathways

through the T-discourse or textually mediated discourse of an insider in my role as an expert, a transition years' teacher who has done the work of course selection for many years. When I realised the real possibility of entrapment into textually mediated discourse, I became aware that I was teetering on the edge of the abyss of dismissing my participants' unique situations.

I realized that being aware of institutional capture is the first step to making change. Slowly, I extricated myself from the tentacles of textually mediated discourse that was making me see the mothers as objects. As I tore myself away from this discursive train of thought, I was able to move my gaze back to the MOE and its regulatory text. McCoy (2006) explicates this drawback in data analysis by bringing to light the challenge that a researcher faces to find a way by which she can analyse the interviews while keeping her gaze firmly on the institution.

I had considered the following issues before embarking on my research.

- Due to my professional status as a teacher who is also member of the cross panel team in the school board, I was mindful that my participants may choose to express what they think I wish to hear, or say things that they think were expected of them as mothers.
- Moreover, after spending many years entangled in mothering discourse or due to the discursively attributed responsibility that they should know better, and behave like real Canadians, South Asian mothers may share information they may have overheard and portray it as their own mothering work.

This aspect of discursive self-assessment did come up in many of the interviews when the participants reminded me that they were not like other South Asian mothers, in that they checked their child's homework every day, knew how to research the standardized test scores to track the reputation of schools or that they were capable of comparing different educational systems

around the world vis-à-vis education in Ontario. It was apparent therefore, that the South Asian mothers who participated in my research were also caught in the educational and mothering discourse as they compared themselves with other South Asian mothers against a discursive standard of good Canadian mothering practices for education that they invisibly carried around with them.

Due to an awareness of the discursive webs that prevail in education, and being wary of institutional capture, I have been able to present my research data with specific codes such as common sense sexism and racism, relations of ruling, colonial relations, or the SNAF code that emerge in scholarly research. I have not attempted to evaluate or judge the responses of South Asian mothers in my research. I merely noticed these themes in the participants' stories.

Thanks to my course work and interactions with many scholarly thoughts, I now have the language to name my experience rooted as it is in the problematic. I also have the academic credentials to report what seven of my South Asian research participants have experienced while helping the high school decide their children's academic journeys. In the words of Martin (1976) now that I know the hidden curriculum, what am I going to do about it? Now I know that relations of ruling exist and that they coordinate the work and regulate the activities of teachers, students, and South Asian mothers within the transition years. Where do I go from here?

Conclusions

The conclusions of this research come from the data analysis of stories that I have heard from my seven research participants. I also have within me, the lived experience due to the paid work I do as a transition years' teacher in a school board within the GTA in the province of Ontario. My work, the work of my colleagues in the Grade 7 and Grade 8 years as well as that of my high school colleagues across Ontario is governed by the regulatory texts linked to the

transition process. These texts also coordinate the lives of South Asian mothers among other parents, mothers and caregivers in a large school board within the GTA in the province of Ontario.

Based on my participants’ responses, and the experience of transition work for my two children, I argue that this cross panel network of schools “presupposes the availability of time, material resources and knowledge of the education system” when it turns its discursive gaze to South Asian mothers’ involvement in transition to high school (Standing,1999, p.58). Here are some concluding thoughts that summarize my recommendations and reflections.

Texts are essential to the institution

Through my research, I notice Smith’s argument that texts and documents are essential to the objectification of the organisation or institution. Texts and documents are also essential to determine how these organisations and institutions exist and function. Therefore I understand that texts make an institution what it is and how it is. In the context of transition in this school board, texts such as the course directory and the school board’s website provide the same “set of words, numbers or images in multiple local sites” (Smith, 2001, p. 160). These multiple local sites in my everyday world are Grade 8 classrooms in the winter of a Grade 8 year. After this first interaction, the same set of print and digital images and information may be duplicated in other local settings: the homes of Grade 8 students. Through this activation of these institutional texts in homes, the textually mediated coordination of South Asian mothers’ home life begins in earnest with a course submission deadline looming at the end of it.

Time management in transition

In the winter of the Grade 8 year, the time period between the first week of January, when the high school visits its elementary school partners and when course selections are due at the

high school in early February, has been a cause for concern for the participants of my research. As discussed earlier they have expressed the following concerns about the process:

- Short timelines between receiving the high school information in January and course submission deadlines in February.
- Lack of relevant information about the academic, and applied pathways.
- Lack of sufficient time to gather information about course codes and what each one implies
- Lack of big-picture discussions with homeroom teachers or during high school visits about what happens after grade 9 until grade 12 when particular courses are selected?
- Lack of opportunities to ask questions about the differences between the two streams namely academic and applied.
- A systemic undervaluing of parents’ understanding of academic and applied courses and feelings of “this is the Canadian system, maybe I do not understand”.
- Dismissal of their advocacy efforts as being too pushy, too demanding, and too ambitious.
- Greater value ascribed to teachers’ streaming suggestions and recommendations in the minds of their children versus that of parents.
- Confusion about why 80-85% is required at the high school for entry into high stakes academic courses like English that are a prerequisite for university applications, when 70% is an acceptable MOE standard.

Even on Parent Information Night held in January at the high school, participants reported that that there is a mere reference to the online course submission website. One of the participants had reported her Parent Information Night experience with a chuckle:

> After the presentation at the high school, they asked us if we had any questions. That is a problem for me. When I don't know this website, and I don't know these numbers for all the different courses, what can I ask? I did not see every single slide because they speak so fast, how can I ask questions? When I don't know what I don't know, what questions can I ask? Some of my friends did not even go, it was too cold and they do not drive. They asked me to get some information but there were so many people and I did not get to ask any questions. The high school teacher showed us some website but I was standing far away because there were no chairs left.[35]

Economic basis of aspirations

In all seven interviews, the South Asian mothers discussed their dilemma around course selection. Many like Mrs. N who enjoyed a high social and professional status in their home country, have travelled many routes before coming to Ontario. Others, like Mrs. K and Mrs. T have been denied access to higher education due to political problems or their family situations in their back home. Some with professional qualifications experience the unspoken indignity of unemployment or underemployment. Whatever their migratory route and employment history, I suggest that all my research participants wish for a safe and economically sound future. They tenaciously try to secure for their children, the same middle class advantages that they may have enjoyed before or what they wished for when their lives in other places were disrupted. If they have not been able to fulfil their own aspirations, they wish for their children that which they were denied due to political strife or colonial controls. The seven South Asian mothers in my

[35] Conversation with a South Asian research participant who attended the parent information night at the high school.

research merely want their children to have a strong educational foundation that will ensure their economic stability in the years ahead. They want what SNAF mothers want.

Recommendations

With my research participants, I invite the MOE and its schools boards within the GTA to think critically about the experiences that the mothers have shared. We, as South Asian mothers doing transition work to support Ontario’s high schools invite other stakeholders to form collaborative partnerships with us to bring about lasting and sustainable change in transition practices in this province.

Return the research to the participants

Institutional ethnography, explicate Griffith and Smith (2005), doesn’t stop with the experiences of participants. Therefore it is not sufficient for me to merely provide a detailed account of the mothering work that South Asian women do for their children’s transition to high school. With my gaze still firmly placed on the relations of ruling within the institution, the MOE of Ontario, I look at this coordination of their work using texts such as the RCD. I have planned to take their experiential data and my analysis back to the standpoint of the participants as recommended by Kirby and McKenna (1989), Smith (2005, 2006) and Tuhiwai-Smith (2012). Upon completion of my summative discussion with York University and after I submit the research summary to the school board, I plan to meet with my research participants in order to share with them the recommendations that I have put forward based on their stories of transition related mothering work.

In this way, when participants see their experiences honoured and presented as primary data, they will be able to reclaim their space as advocates for their children’s education and look back at the institution whose regulatory texts are not unfamiliar to them anymore. They can then

continue their advocacy to benefit their children as well as share it with other South Asian mothers and bring them to a place of equitable outcomes.

Use primary qualitative data to build community capacity

I see my research as a rich resource that can build community capacity for South Asian mothers and support cross panel transition teams by reducing the regulatory work that is entrusted to Grade 8 teachers. When South Asian mothers understand the transition process clearly and the reasons why certain courses are being suggested, they will collaborate more meaningfully with the cross panel transition teams. Through the involvement of school council teams at both the elementary and secondary level, the cross panel teams can engage families as early as Grade 6 to see the transition years as a shared path for student achievement and success.

Acknowledge that relations of ruling are an institutional characteristic

Through in-depth interviews with seven South Asian mothers, I have brought to light the reality that they are currently relegated to the margins of transition work due to the ongoing use of expert knowledge and the ubiquitous presence of the pervasive and powerful relations of ruling within the institution. This is just how institutions work. This research is not a means of placing blame on the various stakeholders in transition. Rather, it is a mindful path of acknowledging the strengths that are embedded in the aspirations of the South Asian mothers for their children. My research suggests ways of using these aspirations as assets to work collaboratively towards sustainable and equitable education outcomes that are based on mutual respect and trust.

Acknowledge the existence of the SNAF code

Due to the nature of the creation of Canada and the governing principles of education in Ontario, the SNAF code appears to be embedded in mindsets almost by default. The use of the

SNAF code in textually mediated discourse at various levels of the transition process was clearly highlighted through the research data.

In the 21st century, as Ontario's education system has an exemplary textual reputation on the international scene, this province and its school boards cannot afford to tarnish it. Therefore, the MOE cannot continue to evaluate racialized and marginalized families by the litmus test of the Standard North American Family and label them as deviant. The province of Ontario needs to monitor the use of inclusive and respectful language at all its levels and ensure that every classroom and every staffroom, every cross panel meeting and every conference becomes a model of positive climates for learning and working together. There cannot be room for the "these parents – these students – these communities" labelling any more. The Little Brown Box has to be dismantled.

Collaborate across regional and cross panel transition teams

The regional transition team and the cross panel transition team of this high school network need to collaboratively develop specific outcome driven plans based not just on their localized discursive perceptions of the needs of their communities. In this school network, these needs are currently being anticipated through discussions with Grade 8 teachers as well as administrators, and the past experiences of front line school personnel in both panels. All the feeder schools as well as the high school have their own School Council that is comprised of parents and community members. These school council teams need to be intentionally included from the very outset of the school year for outcome based transition planning. Planned partnerships with school council engagement and ongoing dialogue needs to be included in the network's development or implementation of transition plans from Grade 8 to Grade 9 and throughout high school.

Provide specialized support for Exceptional Students

Front line professionals at the high school often scrutinize course recommendations made by SERTs with great care. These selections into academic pathways are invariably considered too optimistic. Normative discursive lenses imply that students with special needs cannot do the work in higher pathways. I do not agree with this view and support students as per their needs.

As my students have specialised learning needs outlined in their Individual Education Plans, I decide my own transition work calendar. When I teach Grade 7/8 students, I do remedial work to prepare students for independent learning, I have developed a longer timeline for doing transition work that starts in September of my students’ Grade 7 year. By bringing my own mothering work and transition related angst into my work planning, I have been able to extend the continuum of access to transition information for my students. Based on my standpoint of a Special Education Resource Teacher in the transition years of a school board in Ontario, I would like to recommend the following points to the cross panel team of this network as well as the regional transition team of the school board, especially for students with special needs.

- Support students and parents with special needs by respecting the Accessibilities for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
- Support various entry points of student ability through differentiated instruction around transition practices.
- Dedicate resources to conduct ongoing professional development initiatives for high school and elementary teachers thereby enabling them to look beyond textually mediated discourse while working with Grade 8 students and parents.

- Build and sustain a proactive mindset with respect to transition capabilities within all parent communities by acknowledging and intentionally discarding the SNAF lens.
- Provide transition information to students earlier than Grade 7 and 8 to enable them, their parents and caregivers to gain equitable access to information well in advance of Grade 8 course submissions.
- Enable parents to access transition information throughout the Grade 6 to 8 years by embedding the course directory and transition information into the website of each feeder school.
- Facilitate multilingual access of transition information by embedding sites such as People for Education into feeder school websites and high schools so that parents can have first language access to understand and work with the transition process.
- Generate opportunities for parents, teachers and administrators at both the elementary and secondary level to meet and discuss their concerns regarding transition.
- Highlight pathways information without judgement of parental aspirations from the perspective of social, emotional and academic success for all students.
- Intentionally invite inclusive and respectful community involvement in the transition process from Grades 6 to 8.

Engage with community organizations to support the diverse information needs

If Grade 8 teachers in a school board in Ontario face excruciating time and task constraints due to their transition work, parents are in a more difficult position due to their lack of insider information. Moreover, parents have inequitable access to transition and pathways information

for their children depending on their prior experience with this process. If information needs of parents are addressed on an individualized basis by community organizations, it will support high schools and parents to work collaboratively and help South Asian mothers make informed decisions.

Provide support and time for Grade 7 and 8 teachers’ transition work

Transition pathways are deeply embedded into the minds of high school teachers due to their expert insider standpoint. This expert standpoint is not automatically available to new Grade 8 teachers who are expected to engage in transition work for the first time. I have often received queries about course selection from Grade 8 colleagues new to the role. I have also noticed that they have to work harder than more experienced teachers who have taught Grade 8 for a number of years. Even Grade 7 teachers have relatively limited access to transition work in their professional calendars as there just isn’t any time provided for it in their everyday lives.

Pedagogical competence of Grade 8 with curriculum related matters doesn’t automatically translate into expertise in transition work. The latter comes gradually due to repeated explicit interactions with the regulatory texts over the time period and takes a lot of effort and supplementary work on their own unpaid time. Yet, the onus of supporting students, parents and one another through transition work falls on the already burdened shoulders of Grade 8 teachers who also carry the tacitly gifted invisible load of preparing students for high school work and standardized testing scheduled in Grades 9 and 10.

When Grade 8 teachers suggest courses that are lower than parental expectations, there is room for resentment. When parents resist the recommendations, there is a possibility of discontent among Grade 8 teachers that their professional expertise has been disregarded. This difficult position needs to be understood and supported equitably within cross panel teams so that

the high schools do not inundate Grade 8 teachers with a supplementary work load for transition in addition to holding them responsible for educational outcomes in secondary education.

Closing Remarks

This research is my first, academically certified opportunity to contribute to the knowledge base about South Asian mothers' transition related work in this school board. The stories and experiences shared by the seven participants in my research will add a rich dimension to the body of scholarly research around South Asian mothers' work organization for their children's transition to high school.

This paper is a stepping-stone to future research. Through the voices of seven South Asian mothers, I have been able to bring to light the mothering work undertaken by South Asian mothers in the pursuit of transition to high school. Through my personal reflections, I have juxtaposed my embodied experience as a South Asian mother and transition years' teacher with the realities of the South Asian mothers who participated in my research.

Through the use of institutional ethnography as my conceptual framework, I have not made any generalizations, as that is not the objective of this inquiry. I did not take up this research to point fingers to the institution or to build theories out of my data. I had started out with the clearly stated purpose of examining the institutional coordination of South Asian mothers' work processes through the regulatory texts used in the transition to high school. In sharing the interview data and my analysis of it, I have reached into pre-existing published research both in mainstream spaces and in the margins.

As I did not find much information on decolonizing research methodologies or around mothering work of South Asian mothers in main stream spaces, I decided to co-create this knowledge with my participants. I have acknowledged the standpoint of participants without

judging their responses using managerial knowledge. I continue to challenge the notion of objectification of my research participants by the institutional texts of the MOE in Ontario. I also argue that they are not devoid of voice or agency. By striving to select courses that they think will bring economic prosperity to their children, these seven South Asian mothers have demonstrated that they resist institutional regulation when it threatens to limit future prospects for their children.

These seven South Asian mothers have not allowed themselves to be objectified by the textual discourses. They do not permit generalisations of their realities. When each one spoke of her story and her child’s transition, she spoke only of herself. There were instances when some got caught in discursive statements. I suggest that this aspect is a factor of social conditioning and is perhaps inescapable. Also, as the SNAF ideological code judges South Asian mothers in Ontario schools based on what I regularly overhear in shared spaces, then it appears natural that they too, place such a discursive judgement on others. That perhaps is the condition of being infected by SNAF even while it excludes you.

As a teacher in a large school board within the GTA, I have witnessed many intersections of my identity: South Asian woman, South Asian teacher, Indian mother, just me as a person, new or seasoned Canadian, throughout my research journey. I continue to weave the threads of my life through the tapestry of the stories I share. By using the privilege bestowed upon me by the fortuity of birth and access to a vast variety of rich resources over almost five fortunate decades, I seek to pay my dues to foremothers who, through their stories or their silences, raised me to speak with a strong voice.

The South Asian mothers who participated in the research will benefit from the knowledge they have created by being able to speak about their concerns and challenges, supports and

successes in high school transition. My research will help bring to light some of the concerns and questions, aspirations, advocacy patterns and agency sought and used by South Asian mothers to prepare for their children’s transition to high school. My research, both through process and outcome, will allow me to use my privilege of academic and professional credentials in the service of my South Asian sisters and their children (hooks, b, 1994). It will also allow me to collaborate within the transition teams, with my teaching partners at my school, as well as other stakeholders within the school board.

I hope that these seven stories as well as the patterns and themes emerging from their sharing, these seven South Asian mothers will be able to guide us: teachers, transition team members, administrators and school board officials to acknowledge their unique and individualised needs for information. They have shared their stories selflessly. Now it is in our hands, as front line professionals, administrators, transition team members and policy makers to acknowledge the mothering work of South Asian mothers and support them to ensure equitable, mutually beneficial outcomes through collaborative practices.

Colonization and settlement, historical injustices and atrocities are embedded in many worldviews. While none of us who live and work in education within the GTA have directly participated in those atrocities, we are not absolved or exempt from making change. We are not absolved just because we were not there or then, in that time of pain and bloodshed. We are here now. In having our feet placed together on this land that we now call Canada, we bear witness to what the future holds for the children of the South Asian mothers whose routes have brought them to this South Asian neighbourhood, as students and the youth of Ontario. As a diasporic people living in a settled land, the ancestors of the children of South Asian mothers have come here from afar on the promise of equitable outcomes. That promise has to be delivered.

The South Asian mothers whose children sing the Canadian national anthem have heard the words "The True North, strong and free".[36] They see the same flag fluttering in the crisp Ontarian air as I do. They too wear their jerseys and cheer at hockey games. Therefore this work needs to be done. All stakeholder in Ontario's education system must stand together for something meaningful in the educational history that we are creating everyday behind us.

In the field of education, I know that numerate data, therefore quantitative studies are privileged over stories. The voices of my participants were strong when they spoke with me, even when they quivered with unshed tears. The cadence of each voice, the fragrance of the many languages they speak, and in which they tell their stories, will stay with me long after these last words have been typed and read, scrutinised and approved, printed and filed. These voices have given their time to my inquiry. They have asked questions and they are puzzled. They need answers and those answers lie within the texts that coordinate the work of the lives that are inadvertently and intricately intertwine. As teachers, administrators, elite parents, researchers, consultants, people in power, people with inherent privilege, we are all responsible to answer these questions. Therefore through my research and my paid work as a transition years' teacher in the school board, I am doing my part.

Areas of Further Research

I wish to continue further research in this field. My curiosity has been awakened by the information provided by the approving committee of the school board prior to receiving my permission to conduct research. The coordinating officer, on behalf of the committee had verbally reminded me to consider the reality that all high schools do not have identical regulatory

[36] Lyrics to the National Anthem: http://pch.gc.ca/eng/1359402373291/1359402467746#a1.1

routines for their elementary schools. Some of them have fewer contacts with their students and parents than my school network. I am interested to explore this aspect by engaging in a comparative study of transition related mothering work in four corners of the school board with diverse communities to examine the notions of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation and linguistic diversity.

My overarching interest for further research lies in the field of special education and pertains to two exceptionalities - learning disabilities or LD and Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD. I shall continue to work towards my Ph.D. dissertation, wherein I shall conduct a mixed methods study across more than one school board in the GTA.

I have chosen these two specific exceptionalities as they are manifested in students through a range of needs that fall across a continuum or spectrum. In addition to acknowledging the uniqueness of individual students in Ontario, research done by specialists in these fields indicate that all students with LD and ASD are not identical in their strengths and learning needs.

I am also interested in these two areas as these two exceptionalities have large groups of elite parent advocates in Ontario and around the world who have been very active for their children’s educational success and positive integration in society from an early age.

I now wish to examine these two exceptionalities as they relate to South Asian students’ transition to high school. I wonder about the challenges faced by South Asian mothers of students with special needs. I am especially curious about the mothering work done by South Asian mothers to prepare for high school transition of their children with LD and ASD. I am curious about the following questions:

- What is the mothering work that is done by South Asian mothers of students with LD and ASD?
- What are some of the community supports that are available in Ontario for students with LD and ASD?
- How many of those supports are overtly available to South Asian mothers and students?
- What are some of the cultural, social and institutional issues that affect the mothering work of South Asian mothers for transition to high school for their children with special needs?

As I plan my future direction of academic work, I shall continue to think about what it means to be a South Asian woman in a world that is governed invisibly by the SNAF code and T-discourses. I shall also continue to document my observation within the everyday problematic as a critical thinker and a decolonizing institutional ethnographer. Through the scholarship of Celia Haig-Brown (2007, 2009, 2012), and Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), I have now found the language and the strength to decolonize myself on an ongoing basis, and to remind myself that this process is an ongoing performative one and not a fashionable metaphor. From the field of institutional ethnography, I have learned to keep the institution in view and examine its regulatory texts and discourses. I shall continue to acknowledge the mothering work of South Asian mothers as that is my standpoint as well as my insider-outsider contradiction.

As suggested by Smith (2005), an institutional ethnography evolves as it progresses and questions arise from digging deeper into the institution and its relations of ruling. Therefore I know that my questions will evolve over time. This research is not the end of my journey. It is my first attempt to bring to light the relations of ruling of the MOE that relentlessly regulate the

mothering work of South Asian mothers in the transition years of a large school board within the GTA.

I do not claim that the story of seven South Asian mothers is the story of all South Asian mothers. How can I, when the story of one South Asian mother even within a sample size of seven, did not match the story of the one interviewed before or after? As a decolonizing institutional ethnographer, I make no claims to “one best account of the social world” of South Asian mothers in this particular school network, the GTA or the province of Ontario (Griffith, 1998, p.369). There just isn’t one South Asian mother or one story.

Through this research paper, I have told eight stories. There are seven stories of South Asian mothers and then there is mine, woven through the Insider-Outsider debate that I have navigated throughout my research. Through these stories I have brought to light the mothering work of seven South Asian mothers for their children’s transition to high school. “There is a story I know”, I say to you now:

> It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now. (King, 2003, p.29)

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Appendix A

Transition calendar of a high school and its feeder elementary schools, in a large school board within the GTA.

Time of year	*Activity*	*Audience*	*Purpose*	*Responsibility*
November, first week: 'Take Your Kids To Work' day.	Grade 8 orientation to Grade 9 classes.	Grade 8 students from elementary schools in a school board and their teachers.	To orient students to high school and allow them to experience a few Grade 9 classes. To allow students to see the level of expertise and independence required in the academic and applied stream respectively so that they make informed choices for Grade 9 courses.	High school Student Success and Guidance Teams along with elementary school teachers, Special Education and ESL Teachers.
December	Video clips embedded on high school website.	Grade 8 students and parents (for home viewing)	Career pathways discussed and various pathways options explained.	High school Student Success and Guidance Teams
January	Parent Information Night at the high school.	Parents, guardians and students	Orientation to physical space and course options as well as "meet and greet" opportunities with administrators and teachers.	High school Student Success and Guidance teams.
February	High school guidance team visits elementary schools.	Grade 8 students and teachers.	Distribution of course selection booklets, registration forms. Presentation about course selections and successful transition through high school.	High school Student Success and Guidance Teams

February	School registrations due at high school	Grade 8 students and parents with teacher support	Register and save a spot at the high school.	Parents and students with support from teachers and support staff.
Early March	Course selections due on an external website that provides this service to the school board.	Students with parents and teacher guidance.	Add courses to the electronic course election data base using the student’s Ontario Education Number (OEN)	Parents and students with support from teachers support staff.
April-May	Course selections sent back to students for review and changes if any.	Grade 8 students with parent and teacher support.	Give students and parents the opportunity to confirm or change the courses selected in February.	Parents and students with support from teachers and support staff.

Note:

This calendar is based the textually regulated activities between one high school and 6 elementary schools in a large school board within the GTA, in the province of Ontario.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

(The title of this paper has been changed to "Silent Voices: "South Asian" mothers and transition to high school – A decolonizing research of mothering work"

Study title:

Silent voices: "South Asian" mothers and high school transition
A decolonizing institutional ethnography of mothering work.

Researcher:

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Purpose of the research:

I am conducting this research as part of my graduate course at York University called Seminar in In-depth Interviewing. I may also utilize some parts of this interview for my Master's Degree in Language, Culture and Teaching.

The work done by parents, especially mothers, as a requirement to support the work of schools is very valuable. It has been referred to as supplementary work done for schooling by Griffith and Smith (1991, 2005). I bring to light the mothering work of South Asian mothers involved in the transition process. I will focus on this question: What is the work that is being done by South Asian mothers that is tacitly expected yet never highlighted during their children's transition to high school? Through my research, I wish to examine the work of "South Asian" mothers that is coordinated and organized by a specific regulatory text, the Regional Course Directory that is given to all grade 8 students in January for the specific purpose of selecting high school courses for grade 9 learning that begins in September. I shall decolonize my research

With your help, I will help find out how the MOE with the help of its regulatory text, the Regional Course Directory or RCD, coordinates the work of parents, particularly South Asian mothers as they prepare for their children's transition to high school?

Method of data collection and presentation:

The research will be conducted through in-depth interviews with 10-15 mothers and will be presented in my thesis. Interviews will be conducted in heritage languages or English, based on the wishes and comfort levels of the research participants.

What you will be asked to do in the research:

You will be asked questions regarding you’re the work you do or have done for your child’s transition to high school as well as your experiences with your child’s school in the preparation for their transition to high school. Each interview will last approximately an hour.

Risks and discomforts:

There is no direct harm to you from sharing your views in the interview. You are free to discontinue your conversation with me at any time. **Participating in the research will not have any adverse effect on you or your children with the school or school board**

Benefits of the research and benefits to the researcher:

Benefits to participants:
The benefits for research subjects will be that they will through their participation, reclaim up a space within the community and the school board where their voices are heard. Through data analysis, the participants will be part of knowledge creation whereby the school board will get an opportunity to acknowledge the mothering work that 'South Asian" mothers do for the high school transition of their children. By speaking in their heritage languages if they so choose, the participants will decolonize the realm of research and share their thoughts, thereby pushing back at the perception of fluency as only being that in socially dominating languages. They will therefore be co-creators of knowledge amongst themselves and will lead to better understanding amongst school board staff who will be required to acknowledge the value of mothering work done by "South Asian" mothers.

This research will help inform teachers, staff and School Board professionals about the challenges and barriers faced by South Asian mothers as they engage with their children’s schools on a daily basis to ensure equitable outcomes in preparation for high school.

To primary researcher:
As a Special Education Resource Teacher in a transition role, this research will allow me to develop a deeper understanding of the ongoing challenges faced by parents in the communities of elementary schools in the school board. The data generated through participant responses can be utilised for professional development and to inform transition practices. This will allow the school board and its transition teams to create and sustain equitable and inclusive transition activities in schools. An improved will help parents and community members and as well as the Research

participants. The participants can perhaps also celebrate their contributions as positive partners in the learning networks that support children in minority communities.

Voluntary participation:

(This statement will be read to participants in English as well in their heritage language if they prefer that option). "Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to continue participating will not influence your relationship or the nature of your relationship with the researcher or with staff of York University either now or in the future."

Inducement to participate:

A Tim Horton's gift certificate of ten dollars' value will be presented to participants along with a thank you card. As mothers who participate in the research are taking the time away from their mothering work, this is a manner of thanking you for your time. As well, if you bring children with them and they need some sustenance until they get home, you can use the gift card for the children or themselves. As I am not providing food during the interview due to concerns of dietary needs and concern for allergic reactions, this is a way of helping the participants get home with one less thing on your list of things to do.

Withdrawal from the study:

(This statement will be read to participants in English as well in their heritage language if they prefer that option). "You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be destroyed as soon as possible."

Confidentiality:

The interview documentation/recording of the participant will not be associated with identifying information. The data will be collected as handwritten notes, and audio digital recordings.) The data will be stored in a computer and digital device such as a USB. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to the data and it will be stored securely. The data will be stored until the thesis is published and presented. It will be destroyed after the study: electronic files will be deleted and paper copies of notes etc. will be shredded in the presence of two witnesses: a research participant and a community member. The findings of the research and the thesis will be housed in Faculty of Education, York University, and Toronto.
"Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law."

Questions about the research:
If you have questions about the research in general or your role in the study that you should contact me or my supervisor Alison Griffith 416-736-2100 ext. 88796

"This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee; York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the **Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca"**

Legal Rights and Signatures:

"I, _____ consent to participate in the research being conducted by Rashmee Karnad-Jani. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____
Principal Investigator: Rashmee Karnad-Jani

Optional: Additional consent
If you require additional consent (e.g., for video/audio recording, to waive anonymity, to authorize the use photographs, to use associated data, etc.) include check boxes or request additional signatures.

1. Audio recording

Signature: _____ Date: _____

2. Associated data (filled forms, notes taken during visits to high school, or notes in the Regional Course Directory)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(This informed consent form was created in November 2013)

Appendix C

1. General Information
    a) Name
    b) Phone number
    c) Email
    d) Address
    e) Elementary school
    f) High school
2. Family
    a) How many children?
    b) In which school?
    c) Which grade?
3. Employment
    a) Mother
    b) Father
4. Education
    a) Where
    b) When
    c) Did you like school?
    d) Did you do well in school?
    e) Was your elementary school experience different from your children’s?
    f) In what way?
    g) What were some paths to success for you?
    h) What were some barriers to success for you?
5. Languages spoken at home
    a) By parents to each other
    b) By parents to children
    c) Between siblings
    d) Amongst extended family members
6. What has been your experience with your child’s schooling so far?
    a) Positive experiences
    b) Negative experiences
7. In November first week, your child went to the high school for a visit:
    a) Were you asked to attend?
    b) Did you attend?
    c) Did your child talk to you about the trip?
    d) What did you discuss? Tell me about that.
    e) Did you have any questions?
    f) How did you get answers to these questions?

8. In December, there was another trip to the high school, this time for a career fair:
    a) What did you do then?
    b) Did your child talk to you about the trip and what he did there?
    c) What did you discuss?
    d) Did you consider attending?
9. In January, there was a high school visit. Please tell me about it.
    a) Did you attend?
    b) Who did you meet?
    c) What did you do there?
    d) What questions did you have?
    e) What information did you collect?
10. In mid-January, the Guidance staff visited our school and distributed booklets and registration forms? Some parents find the book useful and others think it is too dense and wordy.
    a) Did you read the booklet?
    b) What did you or your child do with the information in the booklet?
    c) Was it useful or not?
    d) Can you show me what parts of it were useful and what for?
    e) Did you visit the www.careercruising.com website?
    f) Was it useful or not?
    g) Can you show me what parts of it were useful and what for?
    h) What did you and your child do with the information on the website?
11. On February 3rd the course registrations were due and on Feb 17th the course selections due online?
    a) Were you able to meet these deadlines?
    b) What did you do to prepare for these deadlines?
    c) What did your child do?
    d) Did you have help? Tell me about it.
12. If you look back at the course selection for high school:
    a) What was the most valuable experience? Tell me about it.
    b) What was the most difficult? Tell me about it.
13. Have you looked at the various course choices (called pathways) through high school?
14. Do you have any questions about these course choices?
15. Would you consider attending a career fair at the high school if offered again?
16. Are there ways you already support your child in school?
17. What kinds of supports do you expect him/her to need in high school, if any?
    a) Car rides to school
    b) Tutor or extra help from you after school
    c) Trips to the library to study with friends
18. How do you plan to support your child’s learning through high school?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix D
Math Pathway: Grades 9 to 12

Mathematics

This chart maps out all the courses in the discipline and shows the links between courses and the possible prerequisites for them. It does not attempt to depict all possible movements from course to course.

Mathematics **MAT1L**

This course focuses on the knowledge and skills required to be well prepared for success in the Grade 10 Locally-developed Mathematics (MAT2L). It will support students in developing and enhancing strategies that they need to develop mathematical literacy skills and the confidence to use these skills in their day-to-day lives. The areas of Money Sense, Measurement and Proportional Reasoning form the basis of the course content.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Locally-Developed **GRADE:** 9

PREREQUISITE: With Principal's permission

Foundations of Mathematics **MFM1P**

This course enables students to develop an understanding of mathematical concepts related to introductory algebra, proportional reasoning, and measurement and geometry through investigation, the effective use of technology, and hands-on activities. Students will investigate real-life examples to develop various representations of linear relations, and will determine the connections between the representations. They will also explore certain relationships that emerge from the measurement of three-dimensional figures and two-dimensional shapes. Students will consolidate their mathematical skills as they solve problems and communicate their thinking.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Applied **GRADE:** 9

Principles of Mathematics **MPM1D**

This course enables students to develop an understanding of mathematical concepts related to algebra, analytic geometry, and measurement and geometry through investigation, the effective use of technology, and abstract reasoning. Students will investigate relationships, which they will then generalize as equations of lines, and will determine the connections between different representations of a linear relation. They will also explore relationships that emerge from the measurement of three-dimensional figures and two-dimensional shapes. Students will reason mathematically and communicate their thinking as they solve multi-step problems.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Academic **GRADE:** 9

Mathematics MAT2L

This Grade 10 course is designed to allow students to solidify and extend their understanding of, and confidence in using, the concepts developed in MAT1L so that they are well prepared for success in the Mathematics Grade 11 Workplace Preparation course (MEL3E). In the Grade 10 course, students are asked to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding and level of complexity, in contexts that move them from their immediate personal environment to the larger community.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Locally-Developed **GRADE:** 10

PREREQUISITE: With Principal's permission

Foundations of Mathematics MFM2P

This course enables students to consolidate their understanding of linear relations and extend their problem-solving and algebraic skills through investigation, the effective use of technology, and hands-on activities. Students will develop and graph equations in analytic geometry; solve and apply linear systems, using real-life examples; and explore and interpret graphs of quadratic relations. Students will investigate similar triangles, the trigonometry of right triangles, and the measurement of three-dimensional figures. Students will consolidate their mathematical skills as they solve problems and communicate their thinking.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Applied **GRADE:** 10

PREREQUISITE: MFM1P - Foundations of Mathematics **or** MPM1D - Principles of Mathematics

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Principles of Mathematics MPM2D

This course enables students to broaden their understanding of relationships and extend their problem-solving and algebraic skills through investigation, the effective use of technology, and abstract reasoning. Students will explore quadratic relations and their applications; solve and apply linear systems; verify properties of geometric figures using analytic geometry; and investigate the

trigonometry of right and acute triangles. Students will reason mathematically and communicate their thinking as they solve multi-step problems.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Academic **GRADE:** 10

PREREQUISITE: MPM1D - Principles of Mathematics

Foundations for College Mathematics MBF3C

This course enables students to broaden their understanding of mathematics as a problem solving tool in the real world. Students will extend their understanding of quadratic relations; investigate situations involving exponential growth; solve problems involving compound interest; solve financial problems connected with vehicle ownership; develop their ability to reason by collecting, analysing, and evaluating data involving one variable; connect probability and statistics; and solve problems in geometry and trigonometry. Students will consolidate their mathematical skills as they solve problems and communicate their thinking.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** College **GRADE:** 11

PREREQUISITE: MFM2P - Foundations of Mathematics

Functions and Applications MCF3M

This course introduces basic features of the function by extending students’ experiences with quadratic relations. It focuses on quadratic, trigonometric, and exponential functions and their use in modelling real-world situations. Students will represent functions numerically, graphically, and algebraically; simplify expressions; solve equations; and solve problems relating to applications. Students will reason mathematically and communicate their thinking as they solve multi-step problems.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** University/College **GRADE:** 11

PREREQUISITE: MFM2P - Foundations of Mathematics **or** MPM2D - Principles of Mathematics

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Functions MCR3U

This course introduces the mathematical concept of the function by extending students’ experiences with linear and quadratic relations. Students will investigate properties of discrete and continuous functions, including trigonometric and exponential functions; represent functions numerically, algebraically, and graphically; solve problems involving applications of functions; investigate inverse functions; and develop facility in determining equivalent algebraic expressions. Students will reason mathematically and communicate their thinking as they solve multi-step problems.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** University **GRADE:** 11

PREREQUISITE: MPM2D - Principles of Mathematics

Mathematics for Work and Everyday Life MEL3E

This course enables students to broaden their understanding of mathematics as it is applied in the workplace and daily life. Students will solve problems associated with earning money, paying taxes, and making purchases; apply calculations of simple and compound interest in saving, investing, and borrowing; and calculate the costs of transportation and travel in a variety of situations. Students will consolidate their mathematical skills as they solve problems and communicate their thinking.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Workplace **GRADE:** 11

PREREQUISITE: Principles of Mathematics, Grade 9, Academic, or Foundations of Mathematics, Grade 9, Applied, or a Grade 10 Mathematics LDCC (locally developed compulsory credit) course

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Foundations for College Mathematics MAP4C

This course enables students to broaden their understanding of real-world applications of mathematics. Students will analyse data using statistical methods; solve problems involving applications of geometry and trigonometry; solve financial problems connected with annuities, budgets, and renting or owning accommodation; simplify expressions; and solve equations. Students will reason mathematically and communicate their thinking as they solve multi-step problems. This course prepares students for college programs in areas such as business, health sciences, and human services, and for certain skilled trades.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** College **GRADE:** 12

PREREQUISITE: MBF3C - Foundations for College Mathematics **or** MCF3M - Functions and Applications

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Mathematics for College Technology MCT4C

This course enables students to extend their knowledge of functions. Students will investigate and apply properties of polynomial, exponential, and trigonometric functions; continue to represent functions numerically, graphically, and algebraically; develop facility in simplifying expressions and solving equations; and solve problems that address applications of algebra, trigonometry, vectors, and geometry. Students will reason mathematically and communicate their thinking as they solve multi-step problems. This course prepares students for a variety of college technology programs.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** College **GRADE:** 12

PREREQUISITE: MCF3M - Functions and Applications

Calculus and Vectors MCV4U

This course builds on students’ previous experience with functions and their developing understanding of rates of change. Students will solve problems involving geometric and algebraic representations of vectors and representations of lines and planes in three-dimensional space; broaden their understanding of rates of change to include the derivatives of polynomial, sinusoidal, exponential, rational, and radical functions; and apply these concepts and skills to the modelling of real-world relationships. Students will also refine their use of the mathematical processes necessary for success in senior mathematics. This course is intended for students who choose to pursue careers in fields such as science, engineering, economics, and some areas of business, including those students who will be required to take a university-level calculus, linear algebra, or physics course.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** University **GRADE:** 12

PREREQUISITE: Advanced Functions, Grade 12, University Preparation, must be taken prior to or concurrently with Calculus and Vectors.

Mathematics of Data Management MDM4U

This course broadens students’ understanding of mathematics as it relates to managing data. Students will apply methods for organizing and analysing large amounts of information; solve problems involving probability and statistics; and carry out a culminating investigation that integrates statistical concepts and skills. Students will also refine their use of the mathematical processes necessary for success in senior mathematics. Students planning to enter university programs in business, the social sciences, and the humanities will find this course of particular interest.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** University **GRADE:** 12

PREREQUISITE: MCF3M - Functions and Applications **or** MCR3U - Functions

Mathematics for Work and Everyday Life MEL4E

This course enables students to broaden their understanding of mathematics as it is applied in the workplace and daily life. Students will investigate questions involving the use of statistics; apply the concept of probability to solve problems involving familiar situations; investigate accommodation costs, create household budgets, and prepare a personal income tax return; use proportional reasoning; estimate and measure; and apply geometric concepts to create designs. Students will consolidate their mathematical skills as they solve problems and communicate their thinking.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** Workplace **GRADE:** 12

PREREQUISITE: MEL3E - Mathematics for Work and Everyday Life

Advanced Functions MHF4U

This course extends students’ experience with functions. Students will investigate the properties of polynomial, rational, logarithmic, and trigonometric functions; develop techniques for combining functions; broaden their understanding of rates of change; and develop facility in applying these concepts and skills. Students will also refine their use of the mathematical processes necessary for success in senior mathematics. This course is intended both for students taking the Calculus and Vectors course as a prerequisite for a university program and for those wishing to consolidate their understanding of mathematics before proceeding to any one of a variety of university programs.

CREDIT: 1 **TYPE:** University **GRADE:** 12

PREREQUISITE: MCR3U - Functions **or** MCT4C - Mathematics for College Technology