

Unheard Voices of Ethno-Racial Minority Youth: A Community-Based Research Project

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Executive Summary

Dilemmas about sexuality are often difficult during youth, which is an important period of identity formation. These dilemmas are especially complicated for those from ethno-racial minority (ERM) youth. The intersection of ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality are important for ERM youth growing up in Canada. ERM youth have to deal with cultural influences both from their families and ethnic minority group and those of mainstream Canadian society. Trying to navigate between both cultures can present specific challenges to both youth and their families.

Using a community-based research process, we engaged ERM youth in the research, program decision making and community action on intergenerational communication, family relationships and sexuality. Throughout this research project ERM youth provided pivotal leadership in generating knowledge about and finding solutions to these issues. Through interviews and focus groups with 35 ERM youth, we sought to encourage youth to speak up about sexuality.

The youth participants in this research expressed that sexuality is a taboo subject in their families and communities; however they still received clear messages on sexuality from parents, peers and society. Youth were not fully satisfied with these messages, as they were often categorical, leaving little or no room for discussion of differing opinions. They were triggered by gossip based on other community members' experiences, by the portrayal of sexuality in Western media, or used as warnings to prevent youth from becoming sexually active. For most participants, messages from parents, peers and schools about sexuality were either so out of sync with youths' lived realities, or so uncomfortable to talk about, that they did not resonate or connect with youth.

Faced with significant barriers to communication, youth are more likely to look for supports outside the family. They may base their decisions on information from friends or from personal experiences. If their friends and partners are not well informed about issues of sexuality, this may not be a safe or healthy way for ERM youth to learn about sexuality. ERM youth need culturally appropriate and youth appropriate resources on sexuality education in order to make informed and healthy decisions.

This research project received Ethics approval from the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba.

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Introduction

Background and History of the Project

For many years, the Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC) has been working on intergenerational communication and conflict specifically regarding sexuality for ethno-racial parents in Winnipeg for the last five years. Through this work SERC came to realize that there is a gap in knowledge, programming and services for Ethno-Racial Minority (ERM) youth regarding intergenerational communication breakdown and sexuality. While we had been exposed to adults and parents' perspectives on this dilemma, we had had very little exposure to youth's insights on the matter. In order to do this effectively, SERC engaged ERM youth in a community-based research (CBR) process. This new knowledge was intended to help SERC and other youth-serving organizations to develop meaningful programming for ERM youth regarding these issues.

Our goal was to develop and implement an ERM youth-led community-based research process. This goal was achieved through:

- The design and implementation of a community-based research training curricula for ethno-racial minority youth.
- The design and implementation of ERM youth-led community-based research in the area of intergenerational communication, family relationships and sexuality that enabled ERM youth to acquire transferable skills and develop expertise in the area of community-based research and community action.
- The collaboration of ERM youth with service providers and academics.
- The dissemination and creation of opportunities for public dialogue with and community action for relevant audiences such as other ERM youth, service providers, policy-makers and academics.

Research Problem

Dilemmas about sexuality are important during youth, an important period of identity formation, and are especially intricate for those from ethno-racial minorities. The intersection of ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality are important issues for ERM youth growing up in Canada. ERM youth have to deal with cultural influences both from their families and ethnic minority group and those of mainstream Canadian society. Trying to navigate many cultures can present specific challenges to both youth and their families. These challenges can lead to intergenerational communication breakdown and conflict.

Currently, there is limited research on ERM youth in Canada as it relates to intergenerational conflict, sexuality and other aspects of youth identity formation. The community-based research process is effective because it

engages ERM youth in the research, program decision making and community action on intergenerational communication, family relationships and sexuality. Through this research project ERM youth provided pivotal leadership in generating knowledge about and finding solutions to these issues.

Research Questions

What are the experiences of ethno-racial minority (ERM) youth as related to sexuality in Winnipeg, the Canadian context and a new society?

More specifically:

- How does ethno-racial minority youth's interaction between their family's cultural background and understanding about sexuality affect their integration into Canadian society?
- What are the factors that facilitate or prevent communication about sexuality across generations for 1st and 2nd generation immigrant youth?

A Literature Review

Scope of the Research

In this research, we use the term ethno-racial minority (ERM) youth to acknowledge the complex socio-cultural dimensions of ethnicity and race faced by ethno-racial minority youth other than Aboriginal groups in Canada. As our focus is on understanding the experiences ethno-racial minority youth within ethnic groups in relation to the changes faced within intercultural contexts, we focus on first and second-generation immigrant youth. These two groups are more likely to have to deal with intercultural conflicts as they are regularly exposed to the contrasting realities of the outside and home worlds.

The term ethnicity refers to culture as a determinant factor in differences between people (Harrison 1995). However, as the sole reference to ethnicity, this term may overlook the impact of race in the experience of many people. As race describes how an individual has been socialized based on how others perceive him or her and how he or she perceives him or herself (Helms and Talleyrand 1997), we consider the use of ethno-racial minority as more accurate within the context of this research. A few Canadian studies have dealt with the racialisation of youth as an externally imposed categorization and the impact of this categorization on youth identity formation (Shahsiah 2006). To learn about youth ethno-racialized experiences, our research encompasses the experiences of African Continental, Latin American, Caribbean and the diverse Middle-Eastern and Asian youth.

Youth as a stage in people's lives towards adulthood is at times taken for granted. Adolescence and youth appear simply to refer to an objective, universal, and immutable status. However, this stage is determined by cultural assumptions and legal strictures rooted in late nineteenth-century Euro-American preoccupations with social order, virility, national expansion and colonialism (Lesko in Schellenberg, Ormond and Linneback 2001).

The literature on immigrant or ethno-racial minority youth hardly discusses the age parameters utilized to define this group. However, literature on youth can be informative about differences in estimation of the most appropriate age range. It appears that when looking at adolescence, some researchers follow the "age of minority/majority" as dictated by the laws of the country. A more general definition of youth follows the age categories found in national statistical reports (e.g., 15 to 24 years of age) or draws from definitions developed by international agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) that defines "young people" as those within the ages of 10 to 24, or the United Nations, which defines youth as those within the ages of 15 to 24. In some cases, the age range is wider to reach the age of 29. These differences

indicate that youth is an age-related process, where youth is constructed through social processes. Definitions of youth, including the nuances of the term “youth” often vary across countries and cultures, depending on specific socio-cultural economic, historic and political factors.

For the purpose of this study, we had originally adapted the official Census definition of youth; persons aged 15 to 24. However, during the study and through our discussions with our youth research team, it was necessary to expand this definition to include youth in their late 20s. Members of the youth research team argued that although ethno-racial minority youth experience important events in determining their identity during the ages of 15-24; for some, the determining issues of identity formation related to their sexuality may play a more determining role in their later 20s. The youth team referred to the fact that parental expectations during adolescence early 20s, such as school performance, may delay the youth having to deal with some other issues, such as dating. These “social circumstances” can therefore define the category of youth more meaningfully than chronological age (Bucholtz 2002:526).

A literature review reveals that one of the major limitations of the current research in Canada is the under-representation of ethno-racial minority youth in research (Desai and Subramanian 2003). This is a matter of concern if we consider that ERM youth make up a significant portion of the Canadian population in major cities. Further, many reports would speak about these populations in an indirect manner. For instance, Desai and Subramanian (2003) indicate that, while Canadian governments do report on youth issues, needs and new policy and programming initiatives, ethno-racial minority youth are represented using only demographic information. They note that “while these reports are necessary to help set policy and programming to meet the needs of youth, they are superficial in terms of dealing with the specific challenges and concerns of ethno-racial youth” (2003:123). They do not provide qualitative information on the lived realities of ERM youth, and some of their unique challenges and needs. Some aspects of ERM youth’s lived realities are discussed in the following section.

Identity Formation among Ethno-Racial Minority Youth

Intergenerational conflict has been described as one potential outcome associated with the stresses of integrating to a new society among immigrant and refugee families (Goodenow and Espin 1993, Khanlou *et al.* 2002, Berry *et al.* 2006, Seat 2003). Youth, mainly those from first and second generation migrants, face the dilemmas of having to deal with the values and cultural traditions learned from their parents and other community adults while at the same time having to deal with the values and social norms from the Canadian society. This process may lead to family conflicts, in particular if parents’ expected cultural practices are questioned and even rejected.

As Das Dasgupta notes, “(a) significant aspect of the process of ethnic identity consolidation is the desire to perpetuate it by socializing the next generation to accept some key practices and rituals of the native culture” (1998:958). However, the expected social roles of ERM youth within their families may conflict with the expected social roles within mainstream Canadian society. Youth living this “bicultural experience” (Tang and Dion 1999:20) may feel that they cannot reconcile their different social roles. If they maintain their parents’ cultural heritage, language and practices, their adaptation in Canadian society may be more difficult. However, if they do not maintain links to their parents’ cultural heritage, they may feel disconnected from their families (Tang and Dion 1999). Tensions between parental beliefs and practices and those of Canadian society can lead some ERM youth to feel as though they do not belong in either cultural system; which leads to feelings of alienation, stress and unhappiness (Wolf 1997).

Intergenerational conflict regarding social roles and expectations can be more intense depending on the gender of the youth. Female children are more often expected to adhere to parents’ cultural heritage values and gender roles (Dion and Dion 2004, Das Dasgupta 1998). Dion and Dion (2004) found that this led young women to reflect on their parents’ ethnocultural background and to use “traditional” cultural practices and values in the formation of their identities to a greater extent than young men. This creates increased pressure on young women to follow traditional roles, and this stress may lead some females to resent their cultural heritage (Sodhi Kalsi 2003).

Problems related to sexuality and identity formation for ethno-racial minority youth can be especially complicated (Goodenow and Espin 1993). In fact, sexuality, a central aspect in identity formation, is an issue that may reveal high potential for intergenerational conflict (DeSantis *et al.* 1999, Migliardi 2001). Parents may believe that providing sexuality education or discussing sexuality may lead their children to be sexually promiscuous (Orgocka 2004). Conflicts around sexuality can result in lost ability on the part of the parents to exercise authority over their children.

Dating is one the issues more widely recognized as creating cross-generational conflict. The idea and practices around dating may differ between parents’ original cultural norms and practices and those from Canadian or North American society (Khanlou, *et. al* 2002, Ruiz 1992, SERC 1998). Dating norms are differentially applied to young females and males within families from different ethnocultural minority backgrounds, and female youth tend to face stricter dating regulations than their male counterparts (Espin 1997, Khanlou, *et. al.* 2002, Murphy Kilbride *et al.* N/D, Sodhi Kalsi 2003). Research on South Asian youth in Canada reveal that parents often resist allowing their children, particularly their daughters, to date outside their ethnic group, leading to intergenerational crisis (Kurian 1986, Das Dasgupta 1998). This research

demonstrates that gender is a critical factor in the analysis of intergenerational relationships and conflict for ethno-racial minority youth.

Ethnicity, race, and gender, including sexuality, seem to play important roles among youth growing up in a culturally diverse society like Canada. It is only very recently that youth from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds have become a central focus of the research in Canada (Murphy Kilbride *et al.* N/D). Further, the specific problematic of sexuality/gender, ethnicity and race have been scarcely explored among this population. Also, organizations that are trying to reach out to youth are in dire need of relevant and current information about ethno-racial minority youth to better respond to their needs (Murphy Kilbride *et al.* N/D, Chekki 2006).

Ethno-racial Minority Youth in Canada: A Snapshot

A picture of ethno-racial minority youth in Canada, and more specifically in Manitoba, can be drawn from the official 2001 Census. This picture can be constructed through a review of data that presents youth ethnic identification, migratory and visible minority status.

In Canada, racial or visible minorities have grown from representing less than 1 percent of the population in 1971 to 13.4 in 2001. The largest groups are Chinese (3.4 percent), South Asians (3.1 percent) and Blacks (2.2 percent). Most racial minorities in Canada are immigrants, but a born-in-Canada generation is emerging: by 2001, it constituted 29.4 percent of the racial minority population (Canadian Centre for Social Development 2006).

In 2001, a little more than two-thirds of the visible minority population had been born outside Canada. There were over 1.5 million youth under the age of 25 that fall in the category of visible minority. Almost 16 percent of the approximately 4 million Canadian youth 15-24 years of age, identified themselves as visible minorities (excluding those of Aboriginal descent). The three largest groups of visible minority youth are South Asian, Chinese, and Black, accounting for about 64 percent of the total young, visible minority population (Canadian Centre for Social Development 2006).

Children and youth in Canada are more diverse ethnically than their adult cohorts. English, French and Canadian ethnic origins constitute less than 50 percent of all children and youth cohorts.

Age group	Percent of age group that identify with origins OTHER than British, French, Canadian or Aboriginal
Children 0-5	49 percent
Children 6-11	46 percent
Children 12-18	46 percent
Youth 19-24	38 percent

(Statistics Canada 2003)

According to the 2001 Census, in Manitoba, 52 percent of children and youth under 25 years of age identify themselves or are identified as of other origins than British, French, Canadian or Aboriginal. One in ten children in Manitoba is a visible minority, with more than 90 percent of visible minority children living in Winnipeg (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 2004).

A recent Statistics Canada study has projected that by 2017, racial minorities will make up 20 percent of the Canadian population. In 2017, according to the reference scenario, this proportion would remain about the same, with 4.8 million of 7.1 million visible minority persons being immigrants. However, the number of visible minority persons born in Canada could almost double between 2001 and 2017, to reach 2.3 million people (Statistics Canada 2005).

As the children of relatively recent immigrants, most of these Canadian-born members of racial minorities are young: 63.3 percent are under 16; only 16.2 percent are over 25. Still, because they constitute an emerging young adult population with a perspective that differs from that of immigrants, the second generation is critical to an assessment of the long-term impact of immigration (Boyd 2000; Reitz and Somerville 2004).

Immigrant Youth

Over a third of immigrants entering Canada for the period 1995-2004 are children and youth under the age of 25. Among these, over 50 percent came from Asia and the Pacific regions, with 20 percent coming from Africa and the Middle East and the remaining average 10 percent being from South and Central America. In Manitoba, about 20 percent of newcomers were under the age of 25 in 2004, with an even gender split (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004).

We also need to acknowledge that the largest group of immigrants arrives into Canada during their reproductive years. This indicates the likelihood that the number of ethno-racial minority children and youth would increase over time.

In 2001, more than 316,000 (5.5 percent) Canadian children under age 15 were immigrants, up from 5 percent in 1996. For youth aged 15-24, over 470,000 (11.8 percent) were immigrants, up from 11.4 percent in 1996 (Canadian Council on Social Development 2006).

Among immigrants who arrived in Canada in 2004, "37 percent were under age 25. Of these 87,000 young newcomers, 51,000 were under age 15 and 36,000 were aged 15 to 24. The number of young immigrants was 9 percent higher than the previous year, but almost identical to the number who arrived in

1994. Fluctuations over the decade ranged from a low of 67,000 in 1998, to a high of 92,000 in 2001" (Canadian Council on Social Development 2006).

Today, it is estimated that 20 percent of Canada's young people under age 18 are immigrants or children of immigrants; by 2016 they will constitute 25 percent of Canada's children.

Research Methodology

Collaborative Approach

The project followed a community-based research (CBR) approach. This approach is characterized by the principles of collaboration, co-learning and action. We believe this approach is better suited to answer our research questions and allow for the necessary exploration of youth experiences regarding identity formation, with a focus on sexuality, within an intercultural environment.

Community-based research involves members of the community affected by or interested in a particular issue. The background of the youth researchers - and for that matter of the researchers in general - is important in research of this nature because of the fact that the researcher is the research instrument and needs to be taken into consideration in the process of the project (Patton 2002).

Community-based research is a highly involved process that requires that decisions are made using processes that are agreed on by all parties involved. Consensus was built for decisions, ensuring that most team members - in particular the youth group - agreed on every point. This proved challenging when not all youth could attend all meetings. Therefore, each meeting we took time to go over past decisions and open up the discussion to include the voices of those who may have not been able to give input; via email, telephone or previous meetings.

The project involved youth in a community-based research project to build capacity on research methodology and sexuality related matters amongst partners; youth, community agencies and others. Other outcomes of the CBR process are to foster collaboration, equity, and empowerment. The involvement of many actors in the development of the project draws our attention and reflection to the ownership and control of the process of conducting research, as well as the resulting research products. These matters are explored in detail in upcoming sections.

Community-based Research Involving Youth

The approach was modeled in part on documented benefits of youth participation in the research process. It was based on the initiative titled *Youth-Led Research, Evaluation and Planning* (Youth REP), London, Zimmerman and Erbsstein (2003), which documented the many benefits to youth involvement in research, evaluation and planning. Among these benefits were the development of research skills, attainment of employment experience, insertion in institutional networks, learning about institutional context and

work environment, and learning about the connection between knowledge production and community action. This research also found that when youth are involved in research they develop leadership skills by obtaining civic leadership experience, improving public communication, being actively involved in outreach, developing organizing and advocacy skills, and gaining opportunities for mentorship (London, Zimmerman and Erbstein 2003, London 2000).

In addition to the benefits that youth may obtain from participating in research, other benefits have been identified. The literature shed light on the fact that participatory research would generate valuable and reliable data and be infused with the necessary input for informed community decision-making (Fernandez 2002). However, the research also shows the many challenges that CBR with youth faces. Among those challenges are the varying levels of research skills that youth and other members of the team bring to the process. Other concerns have been raised around the reliability and validity of the data when youth look at matters that could be influenced by their personal life experiences. There may be also tensions in the questions that youth and other members of the team would like to get answered, the timelines and differing agendas, and the type of action that should be pursued (Fernandez 2002; Harper and Carver 1999).

The process and the results of this project are equally important. We envisioned this project as a means for generating insights and knowledge for individual, program and organizational development. As demonstrated by the above-mentioned research, the community-based research model provides a means by which youth are empowered to play leadership roles in addressing community issues. In addition, SERC and other organizations involved in the process would learn to provide services to better support ERM youth. The capacity-building process inherent in this project involves putting learned concepts into action while ensuring that adequate support and skills development are in place for youth leadership in research.

The Youth Team

One of the initial steps in the development of this research was the hiring of youth coordinators.¹ The youth coordinators were selected based on several criteria, the most important being that of coming from the same population of interest, namely, ethno-racial minority youth, having experience or being comfortable working with youth, and indicating interest and experience in research.

¹ Initially two project coordinators were hired to set up the project and establish the youth research team. Only one coordinator continued throughout the development of the complete project.

A youth team was established at the beginning of the project. The youth team was recruited through oral presentations, posters and one-on-one conversations in places where youth meet, such as university and college campuses, community-based organizations and ethno-cultural associations. The main requirements for youth to participate were based on the interest of ERM youth in research, on the general topic of the project (sexuality in an intercultural context), and time availability. A commitment of up to a year was also required for youth volunteers to become part of the team. However, some members of the team chose to attend a few initial meetings and explore their commitment to the project, as they were more available at that time of the year (spring-summer).

In our original proposal we anticipated that due to the length of the project (3 years) and the multiple responsibilities and opportunities youth may encounter, we would face a high turnover of youth researchers. However, except for a few cases of youth leaving the province for educational or work opportunities, most members of the team continued to meet throughout the life of the project (mid-2005 to the end of 2007).² Half-way into the project, a few new members joined the team.

The profile of the team is diverse. There are a total of about ten core members of a variety of ethno-cultural communities, including Filipino, East Indian, Chinese, Eritrean, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Jamaican, Trinidadian and Cameroonian. Their ages have ranged from 21-30, and there are a larger number of males in the team.

The youth team participated in a series of initial group-building activities with the purpose to establish the research team, introduce the area of research and build some research methodological skills. These activities included guided discussions on youth matters, in particular intergenerational issues, or hands-on activities to explore observation and listening skills. This included a photographic inquiry about ERM youth-friendly spaces in Winnipeg, which gave the team the chance to analyze their feelings on being observers and participants, as well as making group decisions.

These sessions were followed by a training session in basic research methodology. The training was designed to fulfill the need to develop the research proposal while learning about the principles of research. The topics of the training included an introduction to community-based research, forming research objectives, choosing the right research methods, developing of research tools, developing a research ethics protocol and creating a research

² The project counts on funding from the Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism Program, until the end of October 2007 when all main dissemination activities will be completed.

plan.³ This training was followed by a series of sessions designed to address specific issues stemming from the data collection process, such as recruitment and interviewing processes. As data was collected, we also conducted sessions on qualitative data analysis, including an introduction to the use of qualitative data analysis software.

In order to maintain participants' interest over time, we introduced a number of activities and opportunities. These opportunities strengthened the youths' sense of belonging to the team and enhanced their skills. We pursued some opportunities to obtain free tickets to sporting events and organized some social outings with the team (e.g., barbecues, dinners, entertainment). These activities would happen at least twice a year. We also shared information of interest to the group, such as educational, employment and volunteer opportunities and community events. We pursued the possibility to obtain a few more hours of service from members of the youth team through Youth Serves Manitoba program of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. This program supports post-secondary students to engage in community service. Upon successful completion of at least 100 hours of service, approved students receive a \$500 bursary towards tuition or student loans. We were successful in obtaining opportunities for all the applications in two consecutive years with a total of 5 volunteers providing extra support to the project through this program.

Outreach Process

In order to promote the study and solicit youth participation, youth members of the team approached youth at a number of locations. The main locations were bars, bus stops, various spots at local universities, a college and an inner-city high school (in hallways, bookstore line-ups, presentations, and student organizations), outside local malls, and researchers' apartment buildings. Various media were also used to recruit participants, including articles in community newspapers, and radio interviews, as well as posters placed in areas where youth congregate. Most participants heard about the research through word of mouth.

One-on-one or small group conversations with youth were the most successful approaches for recruitment. In many cases, youth researchers decided not to

³ Prior to attending these sessions, a few members of the team participated in the Community-University Participatory Inquiry Designs (CUPID) workshop. This two-day workshop on community-based research was designed to make research accessible to community members. The workshop was developed in partnership between the Manitoba & Saskatchewan Research Technical Assistant (RTA) housed at Nine Circles Community Health Centre, Nine Circles Community Health Centre and the Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC) Research and Program Evaluation Coordinators, the British Columbia RTA housed at BC Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA), and the Assistant Director of the Health Research & Methods Training Facility (HeRMet) at Simon Fraser University.

involve their immediate network of friends to avoid introducing “bias” by inviting youth that may have similar views on the issues as them. They also felt this would minimize any risks associated with having access to their friend’s personal information or their previously unknown perspectives, which might put the researcher in a position of power. They also believed that even if their friends were interviewed by other members of the team, they might not be candid enough about their views because the information might eventually become accessible to their friends in the team. Therefore, youth researchers contacted “people who knew people” by phone, in-person or e-mail to ensure participation.

Many youth showed interest in the study. However, because most of them preferred to participate in individual interviews, we were not able to accommodate most of them. At the end of the project, we counted a list of about 30 youth who had signed up, but were not able to participate in interviews.

Youth indicated that time constraints due to family, employment and school obligations prevented them from attending focus groups. However, in addition to these practical reasons, some youth felt that Winnipeg is a small city and they were bound to see some of the potential members of focus groups in other social situations. Therefore confidentiality in focus groups was a major concern.

Data Collection

The ERM youth team was also a valuable resource in the process of data collection. We conducted individual interviews and focus groups with ERM youth. The youth research team helped to create a semi-structured questionnaire for focus groups and interviews, which ensured that all the content was covered, while allowing flexibility to ask for more detail in certain areas. We used this questionnaire as an interview training tool with the youth; they took turns interviewing one another using the questionnaire to troubleshoot situations that they might encounter, identify gaps for further questioning, and to practice their interviewing skills. We also conducted mock focus groups and introduced potential conflicts that the interviewers could practice facilitating.

Most youth team members had little or no experience with interviewing, and were understandably nervous about interviewing others on such sensitive subject. Some conducted more interviews than others, based on their level of comfort and the flexibility of their schedules. Others chose not to conduct the interviews, and contributed by doing transcription and data analysis.

The varying levels of comfort and experience in interviewing meant that it was difficult to maintain consistency across interviews. Some youth did not have

the chance to apply the skills they learned from their first interview to subsequent interviews, due to their schedules and the timeline of the research. The interviews therefore ranged greatly in terms of length, and in the depth of the information given.

Focus groups and interviews were recorded on audiotapes and transcribed by ERM youth team members. The use of audiotape helped the youth team members to consider the importance of interviewing interaction and its impact on the outcome of the interview. While interviews were not recorded without the participants' consent, the presence of the recorder may have inhibited their comments or made them more careful with their answers.

One of the many benefits of having the youth team conduct interviews and focus groups was their first-hand knowledge of similar situations and experiences to the participants. The issues that the youth were conducting interviews on were close to their own lives. Participants felt comfortable sharing their stories with interviewers who could relate to them. However, this also meant the youth team had to be well-prepared to deal with potentially sensitive and upsetting subjects, and to separate their own lives from the research as much as possible. We ensured that the youth team did not embark on interviews until their training was complete, that team members were comfortable with one another and ground rules were well-established.

Youth team members were given a list of items to bring to the interview in order to facilitate the interview process. This included the consent forms, recording equipment and a resource sheet we created on the organizations and agencies that offer counseling and other services for youth.

The interviews and focus groups took place between the summer of 2006 and the spring of 2007. The team conducted 19 individual interviews, and four focus group interviews with a total of 16 participants.

We discussed in the previous section some of the limitations in reaching youth for focus group interviews. We insisted on conducting a few focus groups and were able to do so. However, one of the challenges that we faced was the low attendance of youth. Last minute changes in their schedules were the main reasons for not attending the group. We also believe that the fact that we were not providing an honorarium may have also been a factor. It appears that other researchers involving immigrant or minority youth have faced the same challenge (Peera 2003).

Data Management and Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The project coordinator, members of the youth research team or youth collaborators to the project transcribed the interviews. The project coordinator and other members of the team checked the transcripts for accuracy.

In our attempt to enhance our team's research capacity, the data analysis process provided room for discussion of the interviewing process, skills that are recognized as good practice and others that require improvement. For this, we developed a series of mechanisms to ensure a climate of respectful learning within the team. For instance, we decided to avoid including the names of interviewers in the transcripts.

These matters were incorporated in the discussions on data analysis. Further information on the data collection process was gathered through an observation sheet. This was used by each interviewer and included a self-reflection on any contextual and personal interaction issues that may have unfolded during the interviewing process. This was meant also as a debriefing tool with project coordinators. The tool was designed to assist with continual improvement of interviewing skills. These methods helped the youth team to reflect on the interview process as a team, as well as individually.

After data was transcribed, the youth team helped with data analysis. They identified relevant themes in the research, often using their own first-hand knowledge of the issues being researched. They then read through interviews and marked the areas that related to each theme. From this analysis we were able to establish initial findings that helped to create the framework of the report.

With these initial findings, we then held feedback sessions in April 2007 with former interview and focus group participants to ensure that the information gathered was complete and representative. Two feedback sessions were held and information gathered about the participants' reactions to the preliminary findings. Participants were given the chance to comment on what stood out for them in the research, and we gathered more information from them about the impacts of peers on their self-identification, racial stereotypes and their impact on sexuality, and the participants' feelings about homosexuality and homophobia.

The feedback sessions helped to confirm the accuracy of the information collected while also giving us a more in-depth discussion and analysis around some common areas of interest and concern.

The youth team discussed the dissemination and authorship, including ownership of the project by the sponsoring agency, of the final report. There

was caution in the group regarding having their full names associated with the project, because some participants and team members did not fully disclose their participation in a project associated with SERC. The name of the agency may have had negative connotations among members of ethno-cultural communities, making it difficult for youth to talk about the project.⁴

Conducting social research was not the focus of existence of youth team members, who were pursuing other courses of study, working, and meeting family and other demands. Although activities such as conducting interviews, regular meetings, and personal contacts helped to keep the team involved, it was hard to maintain a close focus on the data at all times. However, this may well be the case for single researchers or those hired to conduct a research project. The youth team remained committed to the topic of the research because of their close experience and “insider knowledge”, as well as to gain volunteer experience.

Ethical Matters

As another step in the learning process for conducting research we had to delve into any ethical matters concerning this research. As part of this process, the team decided to obtain ethics approval from a local university. One of the academic members of the Project Advisory Group supported the submission to the Joint Faculty Ethics Review Board of the University of Manitoba.

Originally, we decided to invite youth between the ages of 15 to 24. Including underage youth in the research meant that we needed to put in place mechanisms to ensure that all youth were well protected throughout the process; but especially those between the ages of 15 to 17.

All participants had to sign a consent form that described the purpose of the research, the procedures involved during the interviewing process, any benefits and risks, and to secure confidentiality. Due to the fact that some experiences shared during the interview process may trigger emotional issues we also included an information package with referrals to counseling and sexuality related services including teen clinics and Community Health Centres.

However, when approaching youth aged 15 to 17, we also had other ethical concerns to address. Youth within that age group were to sign an assent form; while their parents or guardians were the ones to provide consent for their children to participate in the research. Although we were cognizant of the potential barriers to gain parental consent based on our experience working in

⁴ The term ‘sexuality’ often generates misunderstanding and apprehension. Many youth and participants felt uncomfortable disclosing to their families and relatives that they were working on a project about sexuality, as it is not considered to be something that families should discuss, or that youth should be involved in.

the area of sexuality and how sensitive this matter can be for parents and youth, we proceeded to utilize this approach.

Our experience shows that even with a large investment of resources in promotion and recruitment of youth 15 to 17 years of age, our access to youth in this age group was very limited. In fact, we obtained consent from only one parent and his son to participate. In this case, we found that consent was easily obtained because of the existence of a close family relationship between the youth and his parents, where sexuality related matters are openly discussed in the family.

All other attempts to reach out to youth and their parents failed to recruit any 15-17 year old participants to the research. Youth who were willing to participate initially, withdrew from the project when they were informed that part of the process involved approaching their parents to gain consent to participate. On one occasion, we were able to access a parent, but their child declined to sign the consent form. In two other cases, youth preferred to wait until their 18th birthday to participate. Both turned 18 during the research process, so we able to interview them right after that date.

Had we continued to reach out to younger youth, the process of obtaining parental consent would likely have made it difficult to get a representative sample of ethno-racial minority youth. Our only interview with a youth under 18 illustrates the potential sample bias that requesting parental consent within this youth population may have produced. Due to the need for parental consent, we would likely have recruited mostly youth who were able and comfortable to communicate with their parents about issues of sexuality. For our research project, this would mean a lack of representation of youth who do not communicate with their parents or guardians about sexuality and who experience intergenerational conflicts. Youth and children whose parents do not provide consent may be facing intergenerational conflicts as result of cultural clashes, and may not receive parental consent due these family issues. Other research projects involving youth have had similar findings (Johnson *et al.* 1999).

As we progressed along the data collection process and learned about the barriers to engaging youth aged 15-17, the team decided to approach the Ethics Board to request that the need to obtain parental consent be waived. The Project Advisory Group supported this decision. To strengthen our argument we proceeded to conduct a brief literature review on the matter.

We found that the according to the Informed Consent Guidelines from the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Medicine Bannatyne Research Ethics, waiving parental consent was possible when participants are older adolescents and when the research is clearly below minimal risk. The guidelines indicate some specific circumstances under which a waiver may be desirable;

- when research is beneficial to the participant, and
- when knowledge by a third party of the adolescent participating in the research may put them at risk or intimidation (including studies on sexuality)

(University of Manitoba, Faculty of Medicine Bannatyne Research Ethics, n/d)

On an international level, the Scientific and Ethical Review Group of World Health Organization's Human Reproductive Programme has developed specific guidelines for research on reproductive health involving adolescents. These guidelines assert the rights of adolescents to participate in sexual and reproductive health research without the involvement of parents or guardians. The WHO guidelines state the need for sound research on the matter based on the parental responsibilities to provide dependent adolescents with preventive and therapeutic health care. The WHO indicates that unless there are specific legal provisions, "consent to participate in research should be given by the adolescent alone", provided that the adolescent is fully informed of the purpose, risks, benefits and procedures of the research.

We also found that other researchers involving youth and children have also started to address the issue. When it comes to sensitive topics and hard to reach populations, Leadbeater *et al.* (2006) have also found limitations in utilizing the conventional ethical guidelines followed by universities.

Despite the fact that we believed we had a strong case to waive the need to obtain parental consent, this proved not to be the case. The Ethics Board decided to deny our request. Unfortunately, their response did not indicate any reasons for their decision.

Research Participants' Profile and Background

A total of 35 youth participated in the study; 19 in individual interviews and 16 in focus groups. There were 21 male and 14 female participants. The participants were between the ages of 16 to 28, with an average age of 21.8. With regards to participants' ethno-cultural or national background, the composition includes youth from Southeast and South Asia (East Indian, South Indian, Filipino, Chinese, and Laotian), the Middle East (Lebanese), the Caribbean (Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian, and Barbadian), Latin America (El Salvadorian) and Africa (Eritrean, Ethiopian, Nigerian, Togolese, Malian, Sudanese, Tanzanian, and Zimbabwean). A few participants whose parents were from different national or ethno-cultural origin spoke about having multiple ethnic backgrounds.

Just over one-half of the participants were Canadian-born (20 Canadian born/15 immigrant). Being Canadian-born is sometimes referred to as being a "second generation" immigrant, meaning that one was born and raised in

Canada. Of the male participants, nine were born in Canada and 12 were born outside Canada. The males who were born outside Canada (making them “first generation” immigrants) arrived in Canada between the ages of 6 months to 22 years. Most arrived in childhood, as the average age of arrival was 10 years old, with only three males arriving in the 18-22 age range. Of the female participants, 11 were born in Canada and 3 were born outside Canada. Of those born elsewhere, all arrived in Canada under the age of five, meaning that they are first generation immigrants, but they have grown up mostly in Canada.⁵

Most of the participants (71 percent) lived at home with their immediate family (parents and siblings). A few lived with their extended and immediate family (e.g. parents, siblings and grandparents, nieces and nephews, cousins, uncles and aunts). Only one participant lived in a single-parent household, two other participants lived alone and one lived with a partner.

The majority of participants (88 percent) were either in University or had completed a University degree. At the time of the interviews and focus groups, 68 percent of youth were in University and 20 percent had attained their Bachelors degrees. One participant was going on to a Masters degree. Of the other four youth, three had completed high school education, and one was in the process of completing high school. Over 80 percent of the participants were employed, and many were part-time employees in the retail, service and manufacturing industries while carrying out their studies.

Participants’ parents and their families had moved to Canada seeking a better future for themselves and their children or because they had undergone refugee-like situations. Some of the parents arrived in Canada holding post-secondary education and having worked as professionals in their home countries. In one case, the parents owned a business in their home country, which they had to leave behind due to changes in the political regime.

Many parents were working in the service, manufacturing or maintenance/janitorial sector. At the time of the interview, one of the participants’ parents had recently been laid off due to the movement from a local manufacturing industry towards outsourcing. The few parents who were employed in other areas were entrepreneurs, worked in the health care industry, were able to continue working in their professional field in Canada (e.g., teachers, lawyers, doctors), or were retired. There were a few cases of downward mobility after arrival in Canada, where parents with post-secondary education could not find work in their professions in Canada.

⁵ The term ‘second generation’ refers to the children whose parents are immigrants. However, recent literature also includes those children who come to North America before they reach adulthood. See Zhou, M. (1997)

Research Findings

Ethnicity, Racism and Youth Identity Formation

In order to understand ethno-racial minority youths' lived experiences in regards to growing up or integrating in Canadian society; we began exploring youth ethno-racial identity. This is an important aspect of identity formation, including its relation to sexuality. Two dimensions of ethno-racial identification were explored in the interviews. The first relates to their self-identification, with primarily Canadian culture, or with their parents' ethno-cultural heritage. The other relates to their experiences and identification as ethno-racial minority youth.

Youth self-identification

When youth discussed whether they identified more with their parents' cultural heritage group or with Canadian culture, most participants identified themselves as belonging first to the ethno-cultural background of their parents. This was very common for both foreign-born and Canadian-born youth. Only one participant considered herself to be Canadian, mostly because she has been able to "pass" as Canadian, and believed her skin color did not reveal her ethno-racial status. She believed this to be an advantage that prevented her having to face racism and discrimination. In some cases, identifying as Canadian meant that participants always had to explain their backgrounds, because their "color is what other people see first", meaning that being Canadian is not considered explanatory enough when your "overall look" or skin color is non-white.

In spite of a strong identification with their parental ethno-cultural background; many participants identified themselves as "being stuck in the middle" of differing cultures or being "50/50."

I think when you are born here; you're pretty much stuck in the middle. So you're both; but I think I consider myself more [ethnic group] than I do Canadian, even though I was born and raised here - because you can't change who you're or where you came from. I think that is what structures you.

It was believed that the reality of belonging to different cultures created some pressure on youth when faced with contrasting or irreconcilable differences or expectations. These expectations come from parents, peers and mainstream Canadian society and challenge ERM youth to navigate among different worldviews while shaping their identities. Some participants felt that newcomer parents sometimes do not understand the challenges their children face while adapting to or growing up in Canada.

[If] parents are so strict and holding on to the old ways, of course your kid is not going to grow up right in a totally new environment... you can hold on to some old things, like founding principles, but be flexible.

Pulled between these multiple expectations and realities, participants make comparisons “back and forth, back and forth” between their parents’ ethno-racial backgrounds and their lives in Canada. Some found themselves “somewhere in the middle”, attempting to strike a “kind of balance between life here and what their parents want for them”. Some felt responsible for explaining their middle ground to their parents, interpreting the differences they saw between their parents’ backgrounds and Canadian mainstream culture. One participant referred to this as bringing her parents up to “the speed to where kids these days are... what a Canadian kid is like.”

Participants were able to find many aspects of their cultural identity very gratifying. Participants expressed their cultural heritages in many ways, including; communicating in several languages, having other “ways of doing things” (such as time management and family supports) eating ethnic foods, wearing cultural dress, communicating with family outside Canada, and learning about their ancestry’s history, politics and religion. Cultural heritages were also expressed through less formal activities, such as the way participants talked to their families or the way they treated others. These practices, as well as participating in cultural holidays and functions made some feel closer to their cultural identities.

Maintaining their ties to cultural heritage and practices was important to some participants in order to keep that part of their identity alive. One participant explained that this is because her cultural identity is more “fragile” than her Canadian identity.

[My cultural identity] will always be more threatened than my Canadian identity. There’s absolutely no way I can shake off my Canadian identity. It’s embedded in my mind.

Another participant expressed a similar view, that if she did not cling to her cultural identity it would become “tarnished” or disappear. In contrast, most participants did not feel they needed to practice particular aspects of Canadian culture, as their Canadian identities were formed and expressed during everyday life and experiences.

Participants also found that because of their backgrounds, it was inevitable to see differences across cultures, not just between their own predominant ethno-cultural identity and Canadian culture. Some of them indicated that they adopt and adapt aspects of socio-cultural life that are based on cultures other

than their own cultural heritage. One participant said: “there’s a lot of other different cultures that I’m picking up from and adapting into my own and making my own”, and another youth took “pinches of different customs”. For these participants, being embedded in a multicultural setting “it’s like [having] the best of both worlds.”

Some participants were aware of the ways that they could use their multiple cultural identifications to their own advantage. They were aware that there were certain times when it might benefit them to identify themselves as more “Canadian” or more “ethnic”. One African participant explained:

I definitely won’t be the president of this country, but . . . if I get to know the right people and if I get to present myself in the way that is pleasing to whoever is up there; I think I can go as high as I want to.

Another felt that when applying for some jobs, it was an advantage to put a check in the ‘visible minority’ box. It appears that participants used their identities in ways that helped them to confront and combat discrimination and racism in mainstream Canadian society.

It’s that extra incentive of being a different colour, literally. It’s that extra advantage that I think is needed - still needed as a visible minority in an area such as Canada.

In all, participants drew from their family ethno-cultural backgrounds, and other ethno-cultural sources, including the “Canadian” one, to form their identities. Identity formation includes aspects of choice, conscious navigation between various identities and cultural practices, as well as aspects that are absorbed through everyday activities in Canada, and those that are learned from other cultures.

Youth ethno-racial identity formation

Youth ethnicity and race are intimately related when it comes to defining identity. Youth shared their views and experiences of racism and stereotyping as part of their lives as minority youth in Winnipeg. Many of these experiences are based on their daily interactions with people in their immediate circles, including other youth in school and out of school, and in their workplaces.

I’d say a negative [aspect of being a minority] is a lot of racism and stereotypes. I guess youth, they’re not really mature, so they don’t think how it’s going to affect people in the long run. If they’re immature like that, then it just keeps on spreading.

Just being a young black male, people perceive you be certain way. They wouldn’t expect me to be in school or in Science, things like

that. The way I dress, for example. It just makes me work a lot harder to succeed. My uncle said to me, 'just being who you are [from a minority group], you have to work ten times harder than the average person to succeed.'

The impacts of racism and stereotypes on identity were mainly illustrated by youth experiences throughout their adolescence, and in particular in the school setting. The school setting plays a central role in youth lives and their experiences as minorities. Most ethno-racial minority youth are at the margins in the school setting. They would go through many of their formative years experiencing isolation and racism as "the way it is."

Those who have attended schools where ethno-racial minorities were a large part of the school body appeared to have had more rewarding experiences as minority youth. Isolation and discrimination was not as blatant for those who attended schools with high populations of students from ethno-racial minority groups.

In contrast, in schools where ERM youth constituted a true minority in the face of a large group of "white", likely socio-economically privileged youth, they quickly gained a sense of "otherness". Youth who were disconnected from their peers in high school had high levels of distress due to the sense of "not fitting in."

Honestly, I didn't like high school too much. Sometimes, I didn't really associate myself with those people too much. I feel that, especially the community [that attended the school]; a lot of the times is very secluded. They don't really try to open up to other cultures. When I was a kid, they didn't really open up to other cultures. I kind of held my distance.

All of the kids in my class were white . . . the way I looked was different compared to them. So I felt like there was something wrong with me compared to the way that they were, or just the foods that we ate, or just different cultural things, like the way my parents were.

While some participants felt they were ignored or left alone because they were visible minorities, others experienced "unwanted attention" as minorities.

They like to make fun of me. I stick out like a sore thumb, so that makes it worse, and they keep ragging on me. But I guess they like it because there is no coloured person but me.

Another participant described that having different clothing and hair from other students at a predominantly "white" school led to constant teasing. This

made him feel like an “outcast” and contributed to his shyness. He also felt that it made him dependant on the one person who would speak up in his defense.

For some, the sense of “otherness” was minimized once they completed high school and transitioned into the university setting. In this new setting they were able to encounter a more diverse population and develop more peer relationships.

I didn't realize it when I was in school, but looking back after I graduated, I realized how segregated I was in the school I attended. When looking back and analyzing the different cliques and who were popular and who weren't, it could just be the school, but the popular people were Caucasian, blond. And it was really hard for people how were ethnic, who were obviously a non-white person, to put it bluntly, to really integrate into school and to find that they were accepted. And when they were finally accepted, it was from people who were also from ethnic minorities. It wasn't something I realized while in school. Although, I knew that something was wrong.

Some participants who had not experienced racial discrimination or such sense of “otherness” early in life, due to being raised within a large ethnic community or in close contact with other minority communities, indicated being exposed to this experience later on in life, mostly in the workplace. These experiences informed their identities as ERM youth.

Some felt that Caucasian people still have the advantage in the workplace, and that it is harder for minorities to get ahead at work. One participant felt more comfortable working with “anything but white” people, because she felt that Caucasian people were more likely to judge her or cast her in a specific role due to her skin colour and cultural heritage. Another worried that she might have been accepted in her position simply because her workplace wanted to have “minorities working for them”, not based on her individual merit or abilities.

With the growing use of the internet to make friends or develop a potential romantic interest, ethno-racial minority youth may face discrimination in relationships in the virtual world as well.

I would say meeting people face-to-face you don't really get a reaction from you being a different colour. However, when you are online and people have more choices, that's a totally different reaction. I talk to some people and they will be all excited, but as soon as you send a picture or video, like they just disappear.

This experience suggests that people may make a greater attempt to hide racial discrimination in in-person interactions, but the internet may provide a more discrete and anonymous space that enables people to harbour racism and to isolate ethno-racial minorities without direct consequences.

Experiences of racism are not limited to interactions between mainstream European or Caucasian communities and those of visible minorities. Stereotyping and discrimination also happen within the inner circles of ethno-cultural communities. Youth identified this as a common occurrence between Canadian-born and recent immigrants from same ethno-cultural or national background, based on their identification as first or second generation immigrants.

I'm Canadian born and there are people that come from the [name of the country], and there is still racism between us. We have names for them, and they have names for us. It exists everywhere. It exists between different people.

Youth belonging would be labeled in different ways. Some Canadian-born minority youth might be insulted by terms such as "coconut", "banana" or by comments like "you're the whitest Chinese guy I know". One Canadian-born female said that people in her home country assumed she had a boyfriend simply because she was living in Canada.

[It's] like you should be so forward that you have two or three boyfriends going on. . . if you are in Canada, no matter what, you have a boyfriend.

First-generation immigrant youth would be called "FOB" (Fresh Off the Boat) by their Canadian-born ethnic counterparts. They were sometimes perceived by their Canadian-born ethnic groups as being "stuck to the culture."

Some stereotypical labels would be applied by mainstream and minority groups as identifying features of others from specific ethno-cultural groups. In all cases, the stereotypes youth perceive that others associate with ethnic or national background influences their sense of belonging. Youth find they have to separate or explain themselves in opposition to those stereotypes. In particular, youth fought against stereotypes about being a young person from a specific cultural group, such as being Jamaican and "smoking weed", or being Filipino and gambling, "being dramatic", or inevitably driving a "rice mobile."

Stereotyping and discrimination may lead youth to an increased identification with the ethno-cultural background of their parents and to an increased bond with youth from their own ethno-racial background, including when it comes to dating or choosing a partner.

I tried most of my childhood to be quote unquote "Canadian", and finding that I would never be accepted as "Canadian". And where I found acceptance was amongst my [ethnic designation] friends . . . the [ethnic designation] community. So, I consider myself [ethnic designation] because of that. . . there's a point of subtle racism, and there's a point of blatant racism that I've experienced, and to that point where I've experience blatant racism, I realized, no, I can't deny my skin colour and that I'm [ethnic designation]. So, I've stuck with that.

For others, it was considered more advantageous to associate with mainstream groups in order to enjoy life in Canada and "fit in".

We (ethno-racial minority group) did hang out and stuff, but it's not like we hung out to an extreme amount. I think even then, they became fairly "white". . . I credit my whiteness to elementary school.

For one participant, there was some desire in the family to disassociate themselves from their ethno-racial community due to family's unsatisfactory experiences within the community and the belief that a stronger association with other communities may lead to a better future. This disassociation led to a decision to establish relationships with others, primarily Caucasian Canadians.

In all, it appears that youth ethno-racial identification was influenced by their appearance or "look" and some of the most superficial aspects of their culture. Even for those who did not personally identify themselves as being a visible minority, they felt they were perceived that way by others, and treated differently as a result.

Ethno-racial minority youth also formed their identities in part in reaction to images and messages from various media. Nearly all the participants expressed the opinion that visible minorities are underrepresented and misrepresented in today's media, and that they were virtually absent in the 1980's and early 1990's, when the participants were children.

This lack of representation in media had varying degrees and types of impact on the participants. Some felt that the media was "boring" and had "no influence" or did not "apply" to them because their ethno-racial groups were not represented, or were misrepresented in a way they could not relate to.

I don't think media really portrays any kind of culture correctly anyways, so it doesn't really influence me directly.

However, others worried that misrepresentations would affect the ways in which mainstream society identified their ethno-racial group.

Definitely if a visible minority commits a crime that is offensive enough, that in the media will overshadow everything [positive] . . . If for some reason an [ethno-racial minority] guy is profiled in the media for committing a crime, what should the other ones do? Should we be worried because now that this guy did that, are we all going to be stereotyped?

The overrepresentation of Caucasian people in the media, especially on television, affected the ways that some participants perceived and identified themselves.

Something about that is not normal, that we all have to relate to white kids, that somehow they represent everybody.

[I] just sit back and go like 'Oh, am I supposed to be like that, and then if I am not like that, what am I? Am I not what I'm supposed to be?' It's conflicting.

Many of the youth coped with these messages by ignoring them; refusing to watch television or to even own a TV. For others, they attempted to find media that they could relate to, by watching ethno-specific television shows and buying ethno-specific magazines.

Ethno-Racial Minority Status and Sexuality

Participants talked about some aspects of belonging to a minority group that defined their sexuality and sexual identity. Among these aspects, youth spoke about gender expectations within and outside their communities that influenced identity definitions and sometimes created conflicts. For instance, some of the expectations that women faced within their certain cultural groups and outside their group (from other cultures or mainstream Canadian culture) created significant pressure. In one case, a cultural group expected women to be "submissive", "quiet", "not out-spoken", or "subservient".

Body Image, Self Esteem and Sexuality

The experience of being considered within certain fixed ethno-racial parameters may influence youth experiences of their sexuality, including their self-perception of their personal attractiveness, and their attractiveness in mainstream culture and to potential relationship partners. Influences from their own and other ethno-racial groups, mainstream Canadians and the media about beauty, dating preferences and sexual stereotypes can affect ERM youth's body image and self esteem and sexuality.

Some participants discussed media stereotypes of beauty and their impact on ERM youth. For some, “always seeing white girls”, or “a beautiful, very skinny, blonde with blue eyes, fair-skinned” woman as “poster” girls made them feel that they didn’t like the way they looked, that they wanted to be white, or that they would not have careers in the media (i.e. as an actress) because they were not Caucasian. One participant elaborated that she only saw light-skinned Asian women in the media, not Asian women with darker skin, because light skin is considered to be more “pretty”.

The dating market, where ERM youth encounter prospective dating partners, is another area where ERM youth face stereotypes about race, culture and gender roles that affect their body image and self esteem. One participant experienced such stereotyping from mainstream Canadian men.

Asian women stereotypes . . . stupid guys that you meet at the bar who think you are submissive and they say, ‘Oh, let me guess what degree you are taking - it’s Biology’ . . . And I do encounter that a lot but that’s for them to think and for me to know.

A male participant faced similar stereotyping in the dating scene, and felt that it affected his sexuality in term of who would be attracted to him.

White girls . . . I think you have to look at things from their point of view, like they are the majority, and especially girls who are a little more adventurous, those are the girls who would be interested.

His comments indicate that for some mainstream Canadians, dating an ERM can be seen as exotic, or something only attempted by those who are looking for something different. The effects can be dehumanizing for some ERM youth.

Other stereotypes about sexual characteristics and behavior of ERM groups come from mainstream Canadian society.

If you’re a sexy [ethno-racial minority] woman you get the money. You’re looked on more as an object for pleasure than anything else. If you’re not a good looking [ethno-racial minority woman] not much value is placed on you.

I think North America has an obsession about penis size, if I want to be candid, then Asian guys are known to, how do you say it, to be not very big. I’ve never looked at any studies, but there is a generalization that Asians have smaller penis sizes. If you view that as a measure of masculinity, obviously we are seen as not ideal. Maybe we get engineering degrees or nice cars to compensate, so there you go.

These comments illustrate the destructive or negative impact that stereotypes about the physical attractiveness of ERM youth have on their body image and self-esteem. Participants express feeling that “no value” is placed on them, or they do not fit the “ideal”.

These perceptions create pressure on youth from inside and outside their cultural groups to behave and identify themselves in a particular way. Many ERM youth internalize these stereotypes and begin to question their identities and self-perceptions about sexuality.

Communication about Sexuality in the Family

The first reaction to the topic of family communication about sexuality was to point out that youth do not “talk” with their parents about sexuality, and that communication about sexuality does not happen within the family. However, a deeper understanding of the meaning of communicating or talking about sexuality in the family lead us to believe that there are definite messages communicated across generations, and that families utilize different means and styles of communication on the matter.

The main messages regarding sexuality received from parents are about who would be a suitable (marriage) partner, expectations about gender roles, and views on sexuality in Canadian or North American culture.

Appropriate and inappropriate dating practices and partners

When addressing sexuality related issues in the interviews, youth would immediately gravitate to their experiences around dating and what dating means to their parents. Youth would point out that according to their parents dating should not be part of youth’s lives, as they would have to first follow a series of other activities before progressing into their own family lives. For most participants, this process involved going to school, finishing university, finding an appropriate partner, getting married, and having children.

In my culture, [sexuality] is a taboo subject. So people don’t really like to talk about it whether it’s dating or anything like that even. I have a girlfriend right now, it’s been a while. At first I hid it from my parents because education was their main priority. They didn’t think education and dating meshed together. Dating is time consuming, so they thought I wouldn’t have enough time for my studies.

Youth who do not follow the culturally appropriate chain of events face disapproval, anger and disappointment from their parents and sometimes also

from their ethno-racial communities. This could include moving out of the parental home before marriage.

Well, it's kind of tradition that once you get married, you move out . . . other than that, you live in your parents' house until you die.

One participant describes that this expectation can be so powerful that even when a child moves out, parents might not be able to accept it, and might still expect them to move back home even years after they have left the house.

Dating while in school or having sex before marriage are also unacceptable deviations from the parents' expected process during youth. Youth faced potentially being forced to leave their parents' homes if they were found to be dating someone at a young age, while they were still in school. Many participants spoke of their parents' fear and worry that if youth were allowed to date, they would become sexually active. This might lead parents to perceive their children differently.

The [ethnic designation] way is that as soon as you have sex and you're not married, you are lower than dirt and you are considered a "man-ho", a "girl-ho."

Another participant explained that it can be a "huge adjustment" for parents to think about their children having sex. "They'd have to kind of give up a lot of ideas that they had for me and the kind of life that I would lead."

Youth have not only received messages about the proper time to start dating, but also about their parents' preferences for dating and marriage partners. Inter-racial dating was felt by many to be the "biggest issue." In most cases, the parental preference was towards finding a person within their own ethno-racial or cultural background. One participant felt that this was considered preferable because there would be more understanding between the couple. "Other cultures don't know about our life, our community."

In cases where finding a partner within their own ethno-specific group was not a concern, some youth would still receive a clear message about which ethno-specific groups were preferable, and which were definitely not acceptable. This differed widely, from cases where parents believed it would be unacceptable for their children to date Caucasians, to situations where the preference was for ethno-racial groups whose skin was lighter.

I don't think white is acceptable [to my parents] but I think . . . darker skin is definitely not acceptable . . . I didn't realize that until you said it.

I know in my culture like if you were to date like a Canadian for

instance, [my parents] would think of it as a success, 'cause [in my home country] it's like really poor there and to marry a white guy it's like, 'Oh, he has money and he will take care of you forever' kind of thing.

The rules could also be affected by the gender of the youth, as was the case with one participant, who said that while her community accepted black men dating white women, they did not approve of black women dating white men.

These comments indicate that there is a dating hierarchy created by some parents, based on the perceived advantages or disadvantages of being involved with someone from a particular racial group. For some parents, marrying a Caucasian person is associated with improving financial and social status. For others, becoming involved with a Caucasian is a disappointment due to the history of oppression and colonization by Caucasians.

In some cases, the issue was not about ethnicity or race at all. For some, having the same religious affiliation was more important than belonging to specific ethnic groups. For others, the most important attribute for a partner was that they had a "future", generally seen as the desire to succeed in life through education and professional achievement. Again, the gender of the youth affected the traits that were sought after. One participant felt that her community thought that having a good career and economic security were important characteristics for a male partner, but not as important in a female partner. Instead, they believed that a female should be "pretty, nice . . . career I think is like fourth or fifth on the list." Another female participant said she felt her parents might not approve of her dating a male from another ethnic or religious group, but that they would overlook it as long as she gave them grandchildren.

The subject of same sex relationships and marriage was one that most participants had received strong messages about, whether directly or indirectly. For the most part, homosexuality was not seen as acceptable, and having a same sex partner was something that the youth felt their parents would be angry, disappointed or "heartbroken" about. In some cases, participants mentioned that homosexuality had provoked violence in their home countries, and in their communities in Canada.

Messages about homosexuality sometimes came from cultural beliefs and practices, such as with one participant who mentioned that homophobic sentiment was expressed in the music of his home country. In other cases, messages came from religious sanctions against homosexuality.

A bigger shock than never getting married is being gay, and never getting married is a huge shock for them. They live their whole lives to give you away. In fact, in (religious affiliation) culture they say if

a father can't give his daughter away, he doesn't get into heaven.

In these cases, it appears as though parents feel that having a homosexual child indicates a shortcoming or a failure in their parenting. Youth also said that parents worry about how the community will react and if they will be ostracized for having a gay child.

There was also a great deal of silence around homosexuality in many families and communities. Some youth noted the lack of discussion particularly around female homosexuality. Others said that as long as homosexuals keep quiet about their sexual orientation, they might be accepted in the community.

Only two participants mentioned receiving positive messages about homosexuality. For one of them, having a parent who had homosexual friends made her own homosexual friend feel more accepted and welcomed at her home. For another, knowing that his parents would support him regardless of his sexual orientation enabled him to explore his sexual identity freely. However, he also expressed that his experience was not typical amongst his extended family and other ERM friends.

The participants' own perceptions of homosexuality appeared to be more tolerant than those of their parents. Many indicated respect for people regardless of their sexual orientation, and support for homosexual friends and community members. However, they indicated the lack of support for homosexual ERM youth in many families and communities. As one participant indicated, this means that being gay is "living dangerously" for many ERM youth, and puts them at risk of being alienated, rejected or even targeted for violence.

The youths' personal expectations with regard to appropriate partners were varied. It seemed that preferences were shaped by parental and/or societal influences depending on what youth believed to be more acceptable and help them to succeed and fit in. While for some this may be within their own group or other ERM communities, others felt that dating white people would help them to better navigate Canadian society, based on their own and their family's experiences integrating into Canada.

Gender roles and expectations

Expectations around sexuality, including dating, differ for young males and young females. While parents appeared to be concerned about youth dating, more restrictions and supervision were used with female youth than with male youth. Many youth would still date with or without full consent or knowledge from their parents, but young males' experiences differed from those of young females.

Young males were able to date more freely than young females. Some of the male participants did not have as much pressure around dating as long as they avoided a long-term commitment. A participant's experience illustrates this point: "My dad [says] 'Dating is okay, but eventually, I would like for you to marry someone from the same culture, the same background' ". Yet, this freedom to date freely across cultures exposes youth to the real possibility to eventually commit to long-term intercultural and interracial relationships. The participant continues to explain:

It is hard growing up in Canada. It's hard when you're dating, because you know what you're going to get from your family, not to mention your friends, just from dating someone who is Caucasian or just different from you. There are barriers, and you know that they're there, but it's your life.

Pressure for males to marry within their own ethno-cultural group appears to be based on the belief that differences in gender roles between the home culture and Canadian culture will create difficulties for an inter-cultural relationship.

(f) for example, a Nigerian and a Canadian, they are not brought up the same way. They are males, and you do not expect the same thing from a Canadian male to a Nigerian male, same as females. So basically, if you have a Nigerian male date a Canadian female, the female expects a bunch of things from the male, because of the way she knows [Canadian] males have been brought up, and vice versa. And if they work out that difference, it will never add up.

Dating for young females was more restricted than that of males. This was expressed in who and when they were allowed to date, as discussed earlier, but also in how late they were allowed to stay out and whether they could date males that they did not intend to marry. In most cases, females from various ethno-racial groups had earlier curfews, were restricted to the number of evenings per week that they could go out, and were monitored more carefully by parents. Parents would request to meet their friends, including male friends, and would phone them to check up on them while they were out. Some also said that it was not considered appropriate for them to "look for a man" or to approach a male they were interested in dating.

The female participants felt that the explanations their parents gave them relate to the ethno-racial and cultural ideas about women's gender roles.

I ask why [I'm not allowed to stay out as late as my brother], it's because he is a boy and nothing can happen to a boy. And it's the whole thing, if girls, if anything happens to you, you get pregnant and everyone knows . . . your reputation, that whole thing will go

down the drain.

When you're a girl you're kind of, kind of have that pressure of carrying the family traditions.

For most female participants, the ethno-racial and cultural gender role that informed their parents' expectations of them was one in which women should be in the household, should look after children and cook, and should be "second in command" to a man. While many of the participants planned to work outside the home, and some had mothers who worked outside the home, there was still an immense pressure for them to marry, have children and stay at home. A male participant elaborated on this expectation;

I'd say it probably has to do with the laws of this country and the laws of African nations. For example, laws of the this country say that it's a half and half thing where the woman has to do a bunch of things and the man has to do a bunch of things. If it doesn't work out in the relationship, the woman gets the benefit, while the guy loses. And those laws are not back in Africa. Like, in African way, they follow the Bible, like, the man is the head of the family, and the woman is second in command. It doesn't mean they are not equal, it doesn't mean the woman doesn't get to make the decisions in the family as usual, because the women always do, right? But it just means that the woman would have to give the man more respect than usual. For example, I'll say cooking. It's always the woman's occupation to cook in the house, right?

For male participants, the male gender role also had parallels across different ethno-racial and cultural groups. In general, males were expected to be the "head of the household" or the "man of the family", which included expectations for an education, a professional career and economic security. Males were expected to marry and to provide financially for their families.

As mentioned above, males faced fewer restrictions on dating, and it seemed to be generally accepted that males would break rules, be "mischievous" or act like "bad boys" in their youth. However, for one participant, the strong portrayal of black youth as "lazy" or "thugs" influenced the supervisory patterns of his parents, in particular his mother, who was afraid that her son was developing some of the widely spread characteristics of western society.

Sexuality in Canadian/North American culture

Many of the messages that youth received about sexuality indicated their parents' concern that Canadian and North American culture are very sexual and sexually open. Youth believed their parents feared the influence of Canadian culture on youths' beliefs and practices around sexuality.

Messages from parents around the dangers of being influenced by Canadian culture included that it is disrespectful to talk about or be open about sexuality. Some felt that there were “no morals” in Canada with regard to sexuality, and some parents would contrast this to their own ethno-racial minority groups, saying to youth that no one from their home country would act that Canadian youth do.

Some parents would warn youth that they were expected not to act the way they see Canadian youth acting. One participant said his parents are concerned about how Canadian youth are dating.

[My parents] say ‘What are Canadians doing here?’ or ‘What are Canadian kids doing here?’ They don’t want me to do that.

By drawing comparisons between appropriate behavior in their home countries and Canadian culture, as well as direct messages, parents send messages to youth that they do not agree with Canadian culture’s concept of sexuality.

Styles of Communication

While messages are important, we also found the style of communication to be a key factor in how sexuality related information was passed between parents and their children. Adolescent sexual behaviour is more likely to be influenced by adult models and behaviours than direct communication between parents and children. Most adults are embarrassed and uncomfortable discussing adolescent sexual feelings and desire.

Often, youth received indirect messages about sexuality, including dating, through the views that their parents expressed about relating to their own ethno-cultural background, or if their parents expressed strong views on certain ethno-cultural groups. Youth could draw their own conclusions based on what they heard their parents say in passing on these subjects.

Youth provided other examples on how further indirect communication about sexuality would happen within their families. Communication was mediated by third parties’ experiences or interventions. This was the case within groups where information was passed along or exchanged through “godmothers” or “uncles” or “aunties”.

Barriers to Communication

As pointed out in the previous section, styles of communication may act as barriers to communication. In many cases there was no dialogue involved in the process of conveying messages about sexuality. When youth received direct

messages, they were often conveyed in authoritarian mode, with no room for discussion. As one participant said:

They do not allow dating, so how can I talk about it?

One participant said the only message she got from her parents about sexuality was that it was “wrong” and “discussion closed”. Another described a similar reply:

I was never satisfied with the answers that I, and I’m sure many other [ethnic designation] children were given when they had questions about something that is problematic or controversial. And the answer, ‘That’s just the way it is’ . . . ‘I’m not going to give you a reason. I’m just going to impose them on you.’

Early learning of parents’ views and tone of the message acted as barriers that would moderate youth response. Youth would quickly learn how their parents react to certain sensitive topics and decide not to bring them up or to avoid them altogether. Some youth would not raise certain issues (e.g., dating, drug or alcohol consumption) when they already knew their parents’ inflexible views on the matters. Opening up these topics would not result in a conversation but a lecture.

My mom is always talking about marriage, but I’m too young to be thinking about marriage and whatnot . . . I really don’t say anything. I may say something like ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but I’m thinking something else in my head.

[When I was young] I was always trying to say the right thing. A lot of times, I wouldn’t say what was on my mind. I just said what they wanted to hear because I was scared to say something that was different from what [my parents] thought.

Some youth would withhold information because they were unsure of their parents’ opinions and did not know “what’s acceptable”, or to “retaliate” for a lack of openness from their parents. Other youth would only discuss certain topics, such as dating, if they were asked directly by their parents.

Language issues, such as a limited proficiency in English and/or in the parents’ mother tongue, may also prevent youth from communicating with parents about sexuality. As sexuality is not often discussed, youth may not know the words for sexual organs or acts, and cannot bring up the issues or questions they want to discuss.

Different world views or expectations between parents and youth on dating and sex can make it difficult for them to find common ground in communication.

I think my ideas are different from those of my parents because they grew up in a different country, in a different time frame than I did.

In some cases, youth grow up in households where the parents do not feel it is appropriate to show affection, even kissing. This creates an atmosphere where youth feel that intimacy is something that has to be hidden. Some youth also fear that their parents will judge them or assume that because their children are asking about sex, they must be sexually active.

Gossip in cultural or ethno-racial communities can also be a barrier to communication. Some participants felt that if they talked to their parents about their dating lives or their friends' dating lives, it would get around to other parents in the community. One participant felt that once information had circulated in the community, they might hold it against a person for years.

If it's a woman, it doesn't matter, it's like; 'Oh, she's a psychologist but when she was 15 she did this and this' you know? There's always that threat.

Facilitators to Communication

Some styles of communication are great facilitators of information about sexuality. Others factors include the parental traditional childrearing roles. Youth are more likely to talk with mothers or get messages from mothers about the subject, even if in indirect manner. In most cases, fathers appear to transmit these types of messages less frequently.

For participants who were able to discuss sexuality with their parents, many felt that their parents' attitudes, beliefs and educational backgrounds made them easier to talk to. In some cases, youth attributed their experience to their parents' profession such as being a teacher or a psychologist. Others felt their parents were "liberal", "open minded", "proactive", "not old school", and this made them more approachable and comfortable to talk to.

My parents have always been open to discussion and I've always been able to reason with them and compromise on certain things and that makes it more understandable for me. Like if they're open to saying 'yes', then the times that they do say 'no', I can respect it more because I know they're probably doing it for a good reason and not just because they said so.

Other experiences that have facilitated communication for youth have been their observation of how parents have handled these situations with older siblings. In these occasions, they were able to observe parental styles of communication and messages conveyed to siblings. This has influenced the

extent and the areas for communication among participants and their parents. For many youth, they saw their older siblings as path breakers, who had faced a greater struggle to communicate with parents, but made it easier for younger siblings to talk about issues as they got older.

Age and gender may also influence how communication happens. It appeared that communication was easier for females and definitely for older youth (in their 20s) than younger youth. Most participants indicated that they and their parents were more prepared to communicate when youth older than when they were in their teenage years.

While gossip was discussed earlier as being a barrier to communication, in some cases gossip about others could facilitate communication across generations. Morality-based stories about the experiences of other families in the community, in particular regarding teenage pregnancy, could provide openings for families to talk about important issues. By discussing other peoples' families, parents and youth could discuss issues from a distance, rather than bringing them up in the context of their own families.

Another facilitating factor is the media. Television programming - where many issues may come up due to pervasive messages anchored on sexuality, from commercials, music videos, soap operas or sitcoms - were used to raise some of the issues between generations.

I mostly talk about [sexuality with my parents] when a situation either comes up on TV or a movie or something . . . if it happens, it gets the ball rolling, into what you think of it and what they think of it. Other than that it's just not spoken of.

Communication with Friends / Peer Influence

Most youth get messages about sexuality from their friend or peer groups, and these messages may conflict with those they hear at home from their parents. In some cases, strong family expectations may be at odd with peers expectations of what youth should do. Peers may not understand the strong inclination and need of ethno-racial minority youth to study hard, to avoid dating, or to obey curfews and restrictions on spending time with friends.

I find that I relate better to (ethno-racial minority youth) because I can talk about things in my family or if I say 'My parents won't let me go there' they'll understand why . . . whereas my white friends would kind of not understand or encourage me to lie or rebel against my parents because they didn't understand what I was going through.

Most participants said they would approach their friends for advice, but would restrict this to certain aspects of life, such as school, relationships, or things

they know their friends care about or “have experience on.” Only a few felt they could talk about intimate relationships with their friends. In these cases, youth would talk to close friends who had been through similar experiences.

Coping Strategies

Youth use many coping strategies to deal with challenges to communication and to the diverse expectations they face from parents and friends. In order to avoid confrontation with parents about sexuality matters, participants would sometimes “lie” or keep secrets. In some cases, they would lie about where they were going or who they were with, in order to be able to date without their parents’ knowledge. In other cases they would meet their partner at school, during the day. A few would have alternate cell phones and keep P.O. boxes without parental knowledge to communicate with friends and dates.

Participants would also prepare in advance for how they would deal with it if their parents found out they were dating, so they wouldn’t be caught off guard. Some participants were not ready to face conflict with their families about dating, and so chose to cope by avoiding or delaying dating.

Youth also found it helpful to confide in their partners, siblings and friends to deal with challenges in their families and with regard to sexuality. One participant said that finding friends who face the same challenges with their parents was helpful. For some of the older youth, participants would initiate conversations with parents about sensitive topics, feeling more comfortable because they were older.

Using humour and making jokes also helped youth to cope with challenges such as stereotyping, racism and talking about sexuality with their parents.

I think [sexuality] is one of those issues that if you don’t approach with jest, you’re pretty much at a dead end.

When youth and parents were not able to meet an agreement on expectations around sexuality, both groups appeared to engage in what one participant called an “intricate dance” around the subject. This included both parties ignoring behaviour that they were not comfortable discussing or confronting. Parents might not allow youth to spend the night with their partners, but would turn a blind eye when youth visited their partners during the day, at hotels, or if they went away for a weekend together. One participant explained why she thought this strategy helped youth and parents to cope:

I find that parents kind of know that it’s going on, but they’d rather not hear about it . . . if you actually say it then it becomes true.

Sources of Sexuality Information

School-based sexuality education provided most participants with a lot of basic information on sexual and reproductive health matters. A few participants felt that it was easier to learn about sexuality at school than at home.

You feel different learning about it at school, and I would rather learn about it from my teacher that I'm only going to see for one year than from my parents I am going to see day in and day out for the rest of my life.

However, many youth indicated not paying much attention to the messages conveyed in school. The main barrier was attributed to the lack of connection between the messenger (teacher) and the recipient of the message (student):

To be honest with you, I didn't pay much attention to [these issues] in school. They way they taught it . . . they got to the point, but I don't think it really connected with the kids.

Some school-based messages were in dissonance with youth needs and realities. For instance, one participant commented that the main message he got in his schooling years was abstinence, which did not resonate with the student population.

I had a lot of lectures about abstinence being number one. There wasn't any other option.

For others, the messages from school were too focused on biological processes, such as childbirth, and not enough on relationships or social aspects of sexuality.

Other barriers in school-based sexuality education include the use of parental consent forms, which some youth felt their parents would not sign, and the lack of sexuality education in some private schools as opposed to public schools.

Day-to-day contact with friends provided another source of information, and youth sometimes felt more comfortable approaching friends with their daily struggles with sexuality. However, while friends could sometimes provide opinions on relationships, many youth felt that friends gave "immature and inaccurate", "horrible" "stupid" or "bad" advice about sexual behavior.

[Youth get] erroneous and false information [about sexuality] from friends and older siblings and stuff like that; and from their own blunders and experiences. Not the best, safest way to learn, I don't think.

The media, especially the internet, offers youth a fast and private way to search for more information on sexuality. Some youth were aware of the need to look for reliable and reputable websites. Others also got information from TV shows based on sexuality education.

We noted a lack of knowledge among youth of specific local organizations or information services where they can obtain reliable information. Only one participant mentioned having visited a local community clinic for information. She was informed about it by a friend, and then made a point of telling her other friends about it. She would go to the clinic with them to make them feel more comfortable accessing information. One other participant got information from a doctor.

This lack of awareness may in part be due to the learning environment at home. Most youth believed their parents obtained information on sexuality from personal experience, old wives tales, or their friends. If parents are unable to provide youth with resources, they do not set a precedent for youth to seek information from health organizations and health professionals.

Ideas for Action

Community organizations play an important role in providing safe, private and up-to-date information and resources for youth around sexuality. Due to the disconnect some youth feel with older people such as teachers or parents giving them information about sexuality, many participants felt more comfortable going to community organizations for support.

I think that just establishing the fact that you're there for them; you are there to help them, is a very big thing. As a young male, just knowing that there is a support system in place to help me out is a very big thing, whatever the problem is. You don't necessarily have to go to your parents. I can talk to people like you, for instance, about certain things. Just knowing that I can do that - that there are different options if I'm too scared to talk to my parents. If I am too scared to see my friends or teacher, I can seek different organizations. I think that is a very big thing.

In order to **get the word out to youth**, and especially to ERM youth, some felt that extra resources should also be put into community organizations to create more anonymous phone lines where youth can call in for help without fearing that they will be identified or that their parents will find out they were inquiring about sex. Resources could also be put into outreach to ERM youth, by sending pamphlets to settlement and other agencies that serve newcomers, as well as sending information to high schools.

School-based sexuality education is another area that participants felt needed improvement in the future. Access to relevant information would be better if students were not required to have parental consent in order to attend sexuality education classes. Some also said that the information was presented only once when they were young, and felt it would be useful to go over sexuality education again each year in high school.

The approach and content of school-based sexuality education can also be changed to make them more meaningful to youth. One participant felt that the focus should not be based on fear, negativity and abstinence, as this can cause alienation or retaliation among youth.

With school, don't put such a high emphasis on 'Oh, you will get an STI disease if you try it', 'cause that's how it feels like at school . . . you do that, you're just challenging the guys to be more brave about it.

Others felt that a more **positive, pro-active approach** would help youth to deal with the realities of what to do after becoming sexually active, or if they become pregnant. One suggested that schools "demystify" the process of going to a community clinic by taking students there on a school trip. Students might be more likely to go to community organizations for help once they knew where they were, what services they offer and if they encountered a safe and respectful environment. Another suggested that schools support young mothers by having daycares available for them on school premises, so they could continue attending classes.

The messengers who provide youth with information can also affect how many youth relate to the messages they are given and if they take it seriously. Many youth mentioned that **peer resources and peer learning** would make information more accessible to youth. Finding other ERM youth in the position of providing sexuality-related services would also breach the information and service gaps for ERM youth. This kind of peer support could come from programs in schools and community organizations. Participants felt that the closer the presenters were to them in age, ethnic background and life experiences, the more youth would listen and find the information relevant.

I think [it helps to have] different speakers available that have been through the same kinds of struggles that are actually in the same age range as the youth

Even with sex ed. class, maybe having people closer to the students' age group, 18, 19, 20 years old, talk to the teenagers. Being a 14 or 15 year old in school, having to hear a 50-year-old male talk about that type of stuff, I just didn't really connect.

Youth wanted to see more messages in the **media** that were directed to and presented by ethno-racial minority youth. Participants suggested that media can be used to pass on relevant and accurate information to youth to help them make informed decisions about sexuality.

Probably the best way is to get actual individuals, don't get these actors and stuff like that, you know? Get the people who have been through it, who've had the problems and issues, to be in a commercial or whatever. Then they could more or less share the same similarities.

Targeting the ethnic media would be a good idea . . . it's like how people sell cereal to kids - you get the kids to tell the parents that they want it . . . get the kids to teach the parents, 'cause they are in a new country.

One participant also suggested that organizations should place informational ads in ethnic community newspapers to reach ERM youth.

Cultural events can also help to reach ERM youth and present information in a culturally appropriate way. Youth felt that cultural "gatherings" or other social events could both "bring people together" and "bring across ideas". Organizations, communities and schools could organize these events to discuss issues facing ERM youth. One participant felt it would be useful to bring together parents and youth in this type of discussion.

I think - one thing I'd like to see. I'm not sure how well it will work out; but just seeing different forums with both kids and parents present at the same time. Sometimes all you need is a base so that they can open up to each other. Sometimes, they just don't know how to bring up a subject.

Creating safe spaces for ERM youth and parents to come together could help them to begin a discussion about important and sensitive issues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth identify with both the ethno-racial and cultural backgrounds of their parents and with Canadian culture. Their navigation between cultures while forming their identities can cause conflict and tension. Youth make some conscious decisions about how they will practice their cultures and express their identities. However, the pressures they feel from parents, peers and mainstream Canadian society can cause stress, isolation and pressure to conform to practices and identities that youth do not relate to and feel coerced into adopting. Youth expressed the desire to have the choice and the space to decide for themselves how they will express their identities as individuals and as ERM youth.

With regard to sexuality, the youth participants experienced significant conflicts between parental expectations, based on parents' home cultures, and societal norms, which they are exposed to on a daily basis. Young females experience greater restrictions on dating and greater pressure to marry an "appropriate" partner. Very few participants indicated agreement with the messages they have received from parents. For the majority of participants, messages from parents about sexuality were either so out of sync with youths' lived realities, or so uncomfortable to talk about, that they did not resonate or connect with youth.

This study reveals that communication between generations about sexuality happens mostly through different styles of communication. Youth perceived that sexuality is a taboo subject; however, clear messages were still transmitted. Youth were not fully satisfied with these messages, as they were often categorical, leaving little or no room for discussion of differing opinions. They were usually triggered by gossip based on other community members' experiences or by the portrayal of sexuality in Western media.

Accounts from older youth (in their 20s) indicate that family relationships change over time. Young adults are able to communicate with more ease with their parents, in particular their mothers, than when they were younger. Where youth were able to talk to their parents, it was often because it had become obvious to parents that youth are dating or sexually active, or because they no longer lived at home. Therefore, in some senses open communication about sexuality is only occurring "after the fact", not when youth need information that will help them to make informed and healthy decisions. The extent of intergenerational communication is still impaired by awkwardness and the lack of timely communication on matters of sexuality.

Due to the fact that sexuality is a taboo subject, youth get unreliable information about sexuality from friends, or from personal experience, much in the same way as they believed their parents got information. This is not always a safe or healthy way for ERM youth to learn about sexuality.

ERM youth cope with conflicting or irrelevant messages about sexuality by pursuing their own paths in life while attempting to meet parental expectations. This requires tricky navigation, and may require duplicity - lies and secrets - to deal with the "bicultural" context in which they live. While some youth shaped their behavior to meet parental expectations, by delaying dating or staying in certain fields in school, this was not an option to many other youth. Through keeping secrets, relying on friends, joking, or mutually ignoring touchy subjects, many youth maintained control over what information they gave their parents. They did this not only for their own sakes, but also to "protect" their parents. They felt parents did not want to know about their sexuality and worried about gossip getting into the community and causing their parents embarrassment.

The experiences of these youth appear to indicate that many are facing expectations that they feel are impossible or unrealistic for them to live up to. Their lived realities differ drastically from parental expectations. Youth need ways to express themselves and make their voices heard so they can fight the taboo around talking about sexuality and gain access to information that is relevant and meaningful. This will promote their emotional and physical health by ensuring that ERM youth make informed choices.

Implications for Health Promotion

Health promotion needs to resonate with ERM youth and their experiences as minorities in Canada, as well as their experiences with sexuality. Much of the current research studies on health promotion for adolescents has been conducted using Western values, and "stress individual autonomy over inter-generational interdependence, individual rather than social approaches to decision-making, and competition over cooperation" (Friedman in Schellenberg, Ormond and Linneback 2001). The perception of adolescence as a time of individualism and separation may not resonate with or apply to ERM youth and their families, who value the importance of interconnectedness and do not view adolescence as a process of becoming autonomous from the family.

Health promotion must also recognize the importance of relationships, including intimate or romantic relationships as a part of adolescent development (Schellenberg, Ormond and Linneback 2001). Sexual activity can play an important role in adolescent development and identity formation, and can contribute to emotional well-being and to the perceived quality of relationships (ibid).

The lived realities of interconnectedness, intimacy and sexuality in ERM youth's experiences must be recognized in adolescent health promotion research. ERM youth's worldviews and desire for meaningful relationships may be expressed through sexuality, and health promotion should include research on the contributions that these expressions can make to health and well-being.

Implications for Future Research

For many of youth participants, this was the first time that they had opened up on the topics that emerged through the questions. At the beginning the participants, and sometimes the interviewers themselves, indicated a certain level of constraint when talking about sexuality. However, by the end of the interview process, participants acknowledged that they believed their experiences and views would help other ERM youth. These incursions into unexplored aspects of ethno-racial minority youth identity also indicate the need to further explore some of these aspects in more depth.

As well, the ERM youth team was essential in recruiting and interviewing other ERM youth and making them comfortable enough to share their personal stories. The community-based research process was also a positive experience for the youth research team, who connected as a group and learned new skills. Their success as a youth research team indicates that more such projects and programs should be created for ERM youth with the leadership and participation of ERM youth.

Issues raised relating to the subject of this project demand further research to fully understand the many dynamics that were revealed. This includes ERM youth's experience of racism, and how race, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds play a role in sexuality and ideas of socially acceptable or prospective intimate partnership. As well, we need a better understanding of the implications of racial, ethnic and cultural aspects of sexuality on the social cohesion and integration of ERM youth into Canadian society.

Some of these issues raised by youth during research that were beyond the scope of this project provide guidance on areas for future research on ERM youth experiences of sexuality. These include research regarding the implications of sexuality within gang related activities among minority youth, sexual practices and sexually transmitted infections and HIV among ERM youth, and sexuality related experiences among international students.

Recommendations

Some recommendations for schools, community organizations, governments and the public that emerge from this research include:

- Educate the public about ongoing racism and discrimination against visible minorities in Canadian society

For example, equity programs may act as an incentive and provide visible minorities' access to services, employment and educational opportunities that many youth felt helped them to access opportunities that would not have been available to them otherwise. However, as one participant noted, even these

equity programs may reinforce racism in Canadian society, in particular among those who do not believe in the disadvantages faced by minority groups. Greater public education of the realities facing visible minorities, including immigrants to Canada is needed to combat this racism and build understanding.

- Include youth 17 and under in discussions about racism, adaptation in Canada and sexuality to get their perspectives on the impact of these aspects on youth identity formation and the supports that youth need to deal with them
- Create culturally-appropriate and youth-appropriate approaches to sexuality education:
 - Participants considered a peer education approach to be more appropriate in dealing with sexuality
 - Participants indicated that having educators of similar ethno-racial background, age and life experience would make education more effective
 - Youth believed that community-based education would provide relevant information and a more appropriate environment to share and deal with sexuality issues
- Improve current school-based sexuality education:
 - Most participants felt that sexuality related information from schools was too limited and sporadic
 - Youth would like to see the inclusion of materials and discussions reflecting the realities of minority youth, including their struggles fitting in to Canadian society
 - There is a need to expand the content beyond regular health topics (reproductive system or sexually transmitted infections)
 - There is a need to include social related issues that contribute to youth sexuality and sexual behaviours and practices, such as dating and peer relationships
- Increase outreach to ERM parents and youth on issues of intergenerational communication, sexuality and acculturation to Canada

The youths' lack of awareness of resources dealing with issues of adaptation to Canada and sexuality highlights the need for greater outreach to ERM youth and their parents. Participants believed that parents, family members and the community would benefit from discussing sexuality matters. Community organizations, schools and media can help by promoting intergenerational communication and creating an atmosphere of safe mutual learning between parents and youth.

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