

# Universal Processes of Cultural Change: reflections on the identity strategies of Indian and Australian youth

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper explores the universality of processes of cultural change by comparing identity narratives of young people living in periods of intense social and personal transformation in India and Australia. The responses of Indian youth to economic liberalisation in that country and the generational experiences of young people from migrant backgrounds in Sydney highlights that, despite different contexts, common responses to change appear in the processes of identity re-evaluation and in the creation and consumption of strategies of identity. These processes revolve around the tensions of difference and continuity, managing hybridity and the reconciliation of 'being in-between'.*

## **Introduction**

A field trip to India in 2003 took place during *Navratri*, a Hindu festival invoking the goddess Durga and incorporating a restricted diet for women. Visiting the house of a friend in New Delhi, our lunch was a Navratri meal as her daughter was undertaking the fast. I was surprised that Debjani, 17 years old, wearing jeans and a singlet, 'dating' a young American over the Internet, growing up in a secular, feminist home, speaking English fluently and listening to American rap music, would take part in Navratri in this way. When I asked her why, her response was simply 'Ritual'.

After several years of work with young people in India I should have guessed that answer. Many of my research participants were urban, upper income, teenagers with all the accoutrements of a 'modern', 'Western' lifestyle. But repeatedly there was an expressed need for continuity, for tradition and ritual to mark out the certainties of identity in this period of rapid social change as India underwent economic liberalisation in the 1990s.

Their descriptions of their sense of self and the processes of change they were undergoing were markedly comparable to those of young people of a similar age (approximately 15–20 years old), second-generation migrants from culturally diverse backgrounds in western Sydney who took part in a qualitative study in 2001. These young people were also negotiating their identity between familial expectations

(‘tradition’) and the expectations of a mainstream national identity (‘being Australian’).

The following paper compares the responses of these two research cohorts to explore the similarities in their narratives, and as a result argues that it is possible to envisage universal experiences and responses to cultural change and processes of adaptation. In the face of much contemporary research on identity that argues for a fluid sense of self, I would argue that the notion of identity and the process of its formation could be separated. That is, identity can appear in hybrid or fluid forms, but this is a manifestation of analogous processes of identity re-evaluation that occur in a multiple of environmental or social circumstances.

In comparing the narratives of the research cohorts, their conjunctions and divergences, there are recurring motifs of ‘being in-between’ and of constructing identity through negation (either by being in a situation where they are clearly different, or by constructing difference, for example, the creation of an immoral West). There is tension between a desire for belonging and independence, between articulated poles of identity such as India versus the West, Australia versus homeland, and between constraints (from ‘society’ or family) and new possibilities. These tensions highlight what Daniel Bell (1973) has described as an ineluctable struggle between release and restraint, a dynamic that I argue is integral to the process of cultural change. Family is a key point of orientation, of certainty and conflict, as is the need to find a point of comfort to reconcile the disjunctions that rise when cultural dimensions shift.

A common practice among the young people in both Indian and Australian studies was the reconciliation of discomfort in the expression of multiple identities and their display, via everyday activities and value recitation, in compartmentalised spaces. In this process their re-evaluation of identity is strategic, deliberate, not without some level of reflection or confusion, influenced a great deal by friendship networks, and expressed through the creation and consumption of what are deemed appropriate cultural resources. This process can be referred to as developing ‘cultural strategies of identity’ and the following section elaborates on this framework of analysing cultural change.

### **Cultural Strategies of Identity<sup>1</sup>**

In many ways Debjani’s story, above, is a typical example of the notion of hybridity, a familiar concept now in the research describing contemporary global change. There have been several neologisms to denote this interaction of local and global cultures including glocalisation (Robertson, 1992), vernacularisation (Appadurai, 1997), creolisation (Hannerz, 1996), cultural translation (Gillespie, 1995), translocational postionality (Anthias, 2001), and chutneyfication (Rushdie, 1997). They allude to a process of intermingling: an articulation of the local and the global to create new forms of expression, and in their consumption, new forms of identity. Yet this dynamic applies not only to change involving contemporary global flows. Interactions between familial generations, dominant and subaltern groups, regional centres and

peripheries, form a diachronic flow of cultural change consisting of syncreticism and synthesis, continuity and disjunction.

Individuals and collective organisations use cultural resources, established and new, to actively construct identity, creating what Friedman (1992, p. 360) has described as ‘cultural strategies of identity’. These strategies reflect the relationship between large totalities such as the state or the global, and small, more personal or community oriented action. In a sense, Friedman is attempting to link macro-scale activity (such as shifts in economy and centres of hegemony) and everyday social change. As a result, strategies of identity are multiple and not mutually exclusive—for example, a young person could adopt a nationalist identity in the public sphere and an ‘ethnic’ or religious identity in the private space of home—and such strategies can incorporate definitions of belonging other than global/local, modern/traditional dichotomies, such as class, gender, religion and age.

Updating his earlier ideas, Friedman (1999) now argues that there is a solidification of identity around poles of nationalism, transnationalism, ethnicity, regional or indigenous identities. He doesn’t allow much room for the notion of hybridity, regarding the world as being reconceived as ‘mixtures of such essential things’ (1999, pp. 198–199). Friedman is in fact a fierce critic of the concept although I would argue he is referring more generally to the phenomenon of ‘happy hybridity’ (Lo, 2000) rather than its more practical application by young people in this study (see also Ang, 2003; Anthias, 2001; Bhabha, 1998 for their various arguments on the notion of hybridity).

Strategy is an appropriate concept, however, implying as it does what other researchers such as Bijapurkar (1998), Glick-Schiller *et al.* (1992), Noble *et al.* (1999) and Yeoh and Willis (1998) have referred to as the element of deliberate, conscious choice in identity construction. These strategic choices are made at sites of power that attempt to control the direction of change. This would include the state (with its assumed natural monopoly over national discourse and representations) and the market (which cannibalises and localises in an attempt to legitimate consumption). But identity strategies are also applied at a local level: the boundary defining activity of sub-cultures, for example, and the agency of consumers/individuals who produce identity through their impulsion, creation, interpretation, assimilation and/or rejection of content or characteristics of other identity strategies.

The scope of this paper is limited to focusing on the latter, on young people as consumers and creators of cultural strategies of identity, to demonstrate how their choices, and the motivations behind them, are designed to manage the dynamics of change that they find themselves both subject to and willing motivators of. Similarities in these practices of identity re-evaluation point to a sense of universality in the process.

## **Methodology**

The Indian research was conducted between 1996 and 1998 as part of a wider study examining the impact of transnational television on Indian culture (Butcher, 2003). Young people from upper and lower urban socio-economic classes and rural regions

took part in 20 focus groups. In the Sydney study, in-depth interviews were conducted with over 50 young people from second-generation migrant backgrounds living in the western suburbs (see Butcher & Thomas, 2001). The author designed the semi-structured interview schedule used in India, carried out the interviews and conducted the analysis. The Sydney interviews were conducted by a team of research assistants using a semi-structured interview schedule designed by the author and Dr Mandy Thomas.<sup>2</sup> Results were analysed by the author and Thomas.

Given the different circumstances of their environments, the different times the research took place, the varying research methodologies and the relatively small numbers involved, critics may consider these two cohorts as not legitimately comparable. Yet it is precisely the differences between the groups that are necessary variables to test whether universal frames of identity re-evaluation within situations of intense cultural change could hold true.

The comparability of the groups lies in their both being at a nexus between the same two forces, or drivers, of change, namely, localisation and globalisation (more fully explored in Butcher, 2003; Butcher & Thomas, 2003). These forces impact on both groups of participants' identity practices, expressions of values and everyday activities. Secondly, the re-evaluation processes are driven by a similar dynamic, that is, the defining of identity in opposition to a dominant culture (the West or Anglo-Australia), which will be more fully elaborated on below.

No results from the Indian lower socio-economic and rural groups have been used to maintain some demographic regularity. This paper contains an analysis of narratives from participants from similar socio-economic background (urban middle to upper income, English speaking, at least secondary schooling) and who accessed similar global resources through the consumption of products and media, and through relationships within transnational family and friendship networks. While I would argue that responses from rural and low income groups in India, and similar research on the adaptation processes of migrants in other countries, would also support the premise of this paper (for example, Ibrahim, 2004), a more limited approach is given here to focus the initial testing of the hypothesis.

The interview questions that formed the basis of the responses were extremely close, if not identical, in both cases, particularly when relating to how participants defined and re-defined their identity. The following sections examine the commonalities and divergences between the narratives in an effort to identify the possibility of universal experiences and responses, focusing on in particular: the creation of disjunctions and continuity, with the family as a key point from which judgements are made; being in-between and the subsequent misrepresentation of hybrid appearances; and the reconciliation of difference and belonging through the creation of multiple identities and the compartmentalisation of their spaces of display.

### **Disjunction and Continuity, Difference and Belonging**

Participants' identity narratives reflected a dual tension between disjunction and continuity, that is, a desire to change, to adapt, to be different, but also to belong and to feel connected to wider social formations. Affiliations to particular identities were

then related to the activity of finding and maintaining a point of comfort and balance between these tensions, that is, removing the dissonance that comes in a period of liminality when the boundaries of cultural spaces begin to shift and grate against each other. Their identity re-evaluation was an attempt to resolve the disjunctions between former routines and new possibilities, such as seeing Pamela Anderson Lee jogging along Malibu beach now available on New Delhi television (Ohm, 1999), or drinking unchaperoned at a party in Sydney. It was at these moments of juxtaposition when, by comparison, their existing values and cultural practices came most clearly into view, and the fact of being different was highlighted.

I mean *Beverly Hills* or other serials of that sort, (...), we can only just think of *Baywatch* and all, we can't imagine such a situation in India. (...) It's something very, very alien to us and we see [it] just because we are youngsters. We have our own interest to see such programs. (university student, New Delhi)

Yeah I guess when they're bagging [Lebanese] out in the media. You feel protective. When you sit with people from other cultures you see the difference. It's like they don't see where you're coming from. It's good to be a Lebo though. (...) You're so connected. (Reema, 19 years old, Sydney)

Axes of identity were constructed around familiar poles of being Australian or Ethnic, Western or Indian, using normative cultural resources that also excluded or made inferior identities that were deficient in those traits, such as 'correct' family relationships.

I mean there are good aspects as well, but you do tend to see a lot which is ... like ... which shock me, like you know [the West] are so taking the step of liberalisation and advancement ten steps further and become very ... I just feel that their views have radically changed to a point where it's become absolutely alien to any human sort of value. The concept of family doesn't exist much there. (high school student, New Delhi)

Such narratives, creating an 'immoral' other, not uncommon in India and to some degree also in Australia, revealed dynamics of duplicity. For despite placing the family at the centre of Indian culture, and consequently her point of distinction from the West, the young woman above was herself 'Westernised' in aspects of her dress and behaviour (dating, independence, work), and came from a divorced family (as did several other participants who also nominated family as the key marker of Indianness). In this sense, cultural resources such as the family, or normative 'traditions', language, close social networks in the Australian context, were used to create rhetorical difference.

According to Pellow (1996, p. 219), these responses are part of the 'logic of distinction' that is a guiding principle of social organisation and the demarcation of cultural space; also I would argue, a key motivation for the adoption of identity strategies. Among young people in this research, wanting to belong heightened the importance of peer groups and collective consumption, but they also desired 'independence' (from former points of authority, from 'tradition' and family).

Participants in India nominated elements of an Indian lifestyle (in particular family and festivals) as markers of separation from a nebulous West, but also accepted attributes of a perceived Western lifestyle (in particular, 'independence') as markers of distinction from parents. Standardised icons of national belonging were adopted in their narratives, while the outward expressions of modernity (English language, jeans, changing behaviours such as 'dating') asserted attachment to new possibilities. Participants in Sydney utilised essentialised elements of Australianness (such as 'drinking beer' and being 'laid back') as markers of their belonging (and difference from their parents and other members of their community), and used elements of 'homeland' (family, food, festivals and community connections) to mark out difference from mainstream Australian.

I would argue that the 'logic of distinction' was motivated at times by a desire to not be subsumed into homogeneity, and also to heighten the sense of pride in the belonging to a cultural identity that there is no escape from—their appearance will forever mark them out as Indian or migrant no matter how 'Western' or 'Australian' they behave. These tensions contributed to effectively structuring the outcomes of their identity re-evaluation into a 'system of differences' (Falk, 1994, p. 4; see also Appadurai, 1997, p. 42; Low, 1996, p. 161).

As alluded to above, family practices and relationships were most often the benchmark from which judgements were made, the point at which young people felt closest to their cultural background and their sense of an identity, but also the point that generated most conflict.

My mother's a housewife. I don't want to be a housewife. I want to do a job or something. My mother, she chose this, it's her thinking, it's her life. I don't want to be exactly like her. Okay, she has been a very good mother to me, but I just don't want to be limited to the house. (...) My mother, even she wants that I should have a career. She doesn't want that I should just be a housewife. Even now she realises that she should have done something. But she couldn't because of financial ... (high school student, New Delhi)

My mum got married at 20 and had kids. She wasn't educated, her friends were her brothers and sisters, you know stuff like that makes us two completely different. [Values] has a lot to do with upbringing as well. The world revolves around the house and the kids. (Safiye, 20 years old, Sydney)

In both of the cases of these young women, new desires marked out change from the past orientation of the family and the expectation of roles within it. Yet while the desire for change is contextualised by social constraint, these young people also had the capacity to limit change, again relying on familiar narratives to define their space of comfort and certainty.

A: [The West] is being too free and all that. In the sense you should have limits.

B: You don't like being free!

A: I like freedom but to an extent.

C: Too much freedom is too bad. You must have something to identify with others.

D: Probably you have a sense of belonging to a group, your friends.

(college students, Bangalore)

*How are you similar to your parents?*

I look like them! Religion, morals, the way someone should live their life, being a good person. (...) We have different views as well, like marriage. They say to me I've got to marry someone Turkish where as I feel that that's ridiculous because they moved here and we were born here and we were brought up in a multicultural country where the percentage of Turkish people is 0.01. So I think that it's really unreasonable for them to expect me to marry someone Turkish. But I would prefer to marry someone Turkish. (*Why?*) Easier. Same religion, same background, you speak the same second language, your parents, your family will get along. (*On relationships with different cultures?*) I get asked out by guys and I say no because I think that why start something that I'm just going to end? (Guliz, 20 years old, Sydney)

The tension between release and restraint indicated in these narratives is a factor in determining the form and expression of their identity re-evaluation. The subjective levels of confusion or anxiety that participants felt motivated the search for strategies of identity that incorporated elements of continuity, such as national belonging, to alleviate those feelings.

Nearly all interviewees still regarded existing points of authority, such as the state, as viable frames of identity reference. The majority of participants in the Sydney study, all from non-Anglo backgrounds, cited being Australian as some or all of the five 'Bs': blue eyes, blonde hair, beach, beer and barbeques. While this physical image of being Australian applied to none of the participants in that study, and the activities that they articulated as denoting Australianness applied to only a few, the majority of interviewees still subscribed to the notion that they are Australian. Similar results were seen in India.

A: I value my country, my family.

B: Don't say that, you value your country, it's used.

A: I do. It may be an outdated sense of loyalty.

C: It's safe.

A: This is where I'm from. This is where I'm comfortable. (...) I'd rather subscribe to the national culture because it probably influences every area of the country (...).

(college students, Bangalore)

In fact, with the rise of a post-liberalised media landscape in India that combined Western aesthetics with familiar icons, India seemed far 'cooler', that is, more consumable, increasing, according to market research at the time, levels of national

identification among urban young people. Recent years have seen a similar process of reappropriation of particular elements of popular culture in Australia (an act reinforcing that ‘system of differences’). Just as the formerly ‘low brow’ pop music of Hindi films has been revitalised as one of the battery of cultural resources used to differentiate India from the West, so, to a lesser extent, ‘wog’ culture in Australia is being re-appropriated (for example, in popular television programming such as *Pizza*, and in the use of the term ‘wog’ in everyday vocabularies). There is an inversion in the perception of these elements and an infusion, as a consequence of their role as markers of identity, with a new sense of ownership (although it must also be recognised that several of the Sydney participants still had a case of cultural cringe when associated with particular ‘wog’ stereotypes).

Where there was a sense of divergence from the notion of national identity, as in the case of Sarah below, an alternative overarching frame of reference was found.

*Would you describe yourself as Australian?*

I don’t know. I find myself laid back and easy going but it doesn’t mean that I’m necessarily Australian. I’d consider myself as Turkish even though I was born here, lived here and have the whole accent thing going. (*On whether she feels in-between?*) Not really, I consider myself to be Turkish. (Sarah, 17 years old, Sydney)

Sarah could not bridge the dissonance between being Australian and being ‘ethnic’, but rather than express an ‘in-betweenness’, her choice was to align herself with a substitute nationalist discourse, namely, her parent’s former state of Turkey. In India the perceived choice was not so much between such national cultural affiliations but between understandings of ‘modern’ (Westernised) and ‘traditional’ forms of Indianness. For some participants, their contemporary lifestyle meant there was at times a need to nominate someone else to maintain tradition, that is, cultural continuity, on their behalf (Bajpai & Unnikrishnan, 1996, also document this phenomenon), although their conversation below ultimately punctured the ideals of the traditional Indian village.

A: The woman who works in my house, the washerwoman, she’s straight from a village. So is her husband. Her kids have *Doordarshan* [state television] and they’re like becoming so Westernised, try to talk in English, they try to wear English clothes, and want to read Archies [comics] even though they hardly have access to all this. It’s just amazing. And they don’t want to go back to the village. Like this woman wants to go back because she hates the city, she hates life here. But they say ‘no, we want our school, we want our friends, we want our entertainment, we will not get that in the village’. [...] It is wrong! Because like nobody wants the old ways. (...) Fine, you can have stuff like computers [in the city], stuff like TV, but ultimately it’s your roots. [...]

B: Why do you want to send those poor children back to a village where they’ll be bitten by mosquitoes all night, where they wont have clean

drinking water, where they won't have electricity, where they won't get to see whatever little of Hindi movies. Why shouldn't ...

A: It's a beautiful village, it's much more beautiful ...

C: It's all crap okay, no village in India is beautiful.

While continuity and the desire to belong to or maintain former frames of identity was a strategy adopted by these young people, the simultaneous dynamic of distinction, driven by the desire to manage or incorporate new possibilities and new belongings, created hybrid expressions of identity.

### **Being In-between and the Misrepresentation of Appearances**

Hybridity has become a well-used term in cultural studies but it is hard to deny the appearance of pastiche in the media landscape, on the bodies of these research participants and very much in their narratives. As argued in the previous section, for the participants in both India and Sydney there was still an underlying reliance on familiar assertions of identity, in particular, nationalism and ethnicity, but at times these tropes were repackaged. Therefore, I prefer to define hybridity as the reinvestment of familiar poles of identity with new meaning. However, I would suggest that there are limitations to the use of hybridity as a concept to describe cultural change, and question whether in fact participants shifted from one, more essentialised, identity referent to another depending on the cultural space they were operating within (be it family, peer group, community, etc.) at a particular time.

All participants in both research projects evoked hybrid expressions to some extent in dress, language and behaviour. In India, the superficial appearance (dress and skin colour in particular) generally marked out a sense of belonging, while new thinking and new behaviour suggested change. In the Sydney cohort, skin colour demarcated difference, and new thinking and behaviour was required to fit in.

*How do you define being Indian?*

A: Colour.

C: It's not just the [appearance], it's how the person thinks also. I think Westerners are more broadminded than what Indians are (...).

A: Traditional values like respecting elders. I don't mind doing that, it's a good thing, nothing bad like.

(college students, Bangalore)

*How would you describe your cultural background?*

I'm an Aussie. Well I don't look like one but I've been born and raised here so that's what I am. I would like to apologise to the Australian government for saying that because now they can't blame all my mistakes on Lebanon and the war and shit. (...)

*How do you define being Australian?*

Eating my meat pie, drinking my beer on the beach. I love that life. I think it's a changing concept that until maybe 10 or 20 years from now we won't have a definition of. (*Why?*) Because Australia is only new and it needs more time to develop before it can reach a stable identity. (Mustafa, 20 years old, Sydney)

Hybridity appeared as a strategy to cope with shifts in the dimensions of social organisation and everyday practice. It was at the point where the reconciliation of identity strategies took place, through undertaking the redrawing of boundaries and redefining meaning, that syncretic images were used by young people to outline new frames of reference. This agency was often impelled by feelings of discomfort. Words such as 'lost', 'confused', 'fusion' and 'being in-between' were consistently repeated in both bodies of research.

Some people are satisfied with only *daal* and *roti* [lentils and bread] and just live. Whereas there are others to whom life is more than just *daal* and *roti*. You can be satisfied with *daal* and *roti* as well as satisfied with KFC. (...) There is no Indian culture as such. (...) It's just the way we do it that's different. Our culture is good for us ... it's a mix, fusion. (university student, New Delhi)

*Would you describe yourself as being Australian?*

Yeah of course I would describe myself as being Australian. I mean I was born here. I grew up here. Born and bred Australian so why wouldn't I? I mean I'm proud of the Australian culture because the Australian culture is a fusion of many cultures. Obviously because of that it's going to be open-minded and I'm proud of anything that is open-minded.

*If we use the term 'Australian culture', what does that mean to you? Are you a part of that culture?*

Like I said, Australian culture is a fusion of many cultures and yeah I am a part of that culture. But I'm not only of an Australian background. I am Lebanese, so I'm not going to say that I'm Australian, I'm Australian-Lebanese because I can't forget my roots I'm proud of my roots. (Rana, 19 years old, Sydney)

These young people experimented with combinations of cultural resources and self-assertions, giving different weight to items of Indian and Western, global and local, Australian and ethnic. Their sense of in-betweenness was reflected in their identification with montaged images, applying re-versioned meanings to their understandings of what it is to be Indian or Australian or ethnically 'other', creating, consuming and utilising hybrid forms of popular culture such as language (Hinglish in India, Arabish in western Sydney), dress (*kurthas* with jeans, cedar pendants with Fubu football gear), and music (Bhangra and Canto pop) in the process. In Sydney, the hyphen has become the ultimate marker of hybridity but with multiple definitions.

I'm an Arab and I love being an Arab. Wouldn't wanna be anything else. How do I describe it? Proud, yeah, we're proud.

*Would you describe yourself as an Australian?*

I'm a Lebo-Australian. (Haisam, 22 years old, Sydney)

As with Rana, in the previous quote, there was a recurring use of the conjunction 'but' within many of their descriptions ('but I'm also ...', 'but I'm not ...', see Ibrahim, 2004), and the recognition of power and constraints that are acceptable or from which some modicum of independence was sought. For many of the participants their narratives were marked by convolutions as they struggled to find the appropriate vocabulary to describe where they fit in.

A: We still have that Indianness somehow.

B: We have that traditional outlook, we respect human relations.

C: But they do that everywhere, all over the world. So basically I think we are modern. (...)

B: Traditional [but] not to the core. When it comes to all this superstitiousness, these beliefs I just don't go for that. But *as far as something has meaning*, it has sense ... (...)

D: We don't know what's going to happen. We are just confused, we don't know what ... we have to follow this, we have to take this, where will we end up or where will we reach we just don't know, like everything in life.

(college students, Bangalore)

The appearance of hybridity can be misleading however and requires contextualisation within the diachronic stream of cultural change. The guesthouse I stay in in New Delhi is a household established during the colonial Raj. They make breakfast each morning including chai (tea with spices and milk boiled together). In this house the chai is poured into a china teapot and a tea cosy placed over it no matter how hot the temperature outside. Such remnants of the Raj are just one indication of India's thousands of years of syncretic experience, of invasion, trade and imperialist enterprise. This remnant also represents a public debate around the delineation of what is 'good' and acceptable change.

The limitations of hybridity among the participants was seen in the young Indian man who wears a *kurtha* (long shirt) with his jeans (the archetypal representation of hybridity in India) but who espouses values in alignment with the Hindutva (cultural nationalist) movement, or in the revitalisation of Homeland among some young people in Sydney, in a challenge to the dominance of Anglo culture. Young people from different Islander backgrounds 'look' hybrid in their Tommy Hilfiger jackets and sneakers, with rap booming out of their cars, but they congregate on national lines and clash over imaginary territory, relocated to the streets and youth clubs of Sydney.

Anthias argues that '[h]ybrid cultural forms are not necessarily more desirable or progressive than others' (2001, p. 628), nor are they necessarily a demise in racist sentiment, or a shift in mainstream longings. Young people in western Sydney

expressed a sense of belonging to the region but also that they wouldn't mind moving to the more affluent north Sydney if they had the chance. At present, they lack the financial and cultural capital to do so. Young people in India wouldn't mind visiting America, even living and working there, even though they describe the country at times in less than flattering terms. In these scenarios the hybrid appearances they created appear as a form of dissent or created difference in opposition to a lifestyle that some young people accepted they would never be able to obtain.

Rather than within a strategy of hybridity, the reconciliation of difference and belonging, release and restraint, continuity and disjunction, was at times found in the adoption of multiple identities. This again required the strategic use of cultural resources by both groups to demarcate where the boundaries lie between identities, and a subsequent compartmentalisation of spaces of everyday practice and value recitation took place. The result is the construction of strategies of identity for different times and places.

### **Multiple Identities and the Compartmentalisation of Space**

When asked to nominate their own identity, participants' responses were very much premised on their understanding of who was asking the question and an awareness of the cultural space they were in at the time.

*Would you describe yourself as being Australian?*

Sometimes, I do on the passport (laughs). So yeah I would say so actually, yeah I am influenced by ... I think there are ways of defining being Australian and that's just depending on where you're from. I define myself as being a south-westerter if that makes any sense. I think there are more of the cliques in the city groups than in the South West [suburbs of Sydney]. I wouldn't say Australian but I would say South Westie. (Haline, 20 years old, Sydney)

When we are at home we are like Indians, but outside home we are like westerners. (university student, New Delhi)

As participants in this research shifted from one cultural space, such as home, to another, such as the schoolyard, they accordingly adopted appropriate behaviour, language, even values expressed as particular attitudes for that setting. This movement between cultural spaces required the management of strategies of identity: to fulfil the requirements of continuity and place in the home or the communal space by perhaps adopting 'tradition', or the innovative and the hybrid representation that provided the symbolic underpinning of new understandings of those spaces. Participants also incorporated other identity referents, such as religious icons, gender or regional significations, into their repertoires.

Identity re-evaluation, the application of strategies of identity, the juggling of social roles and the movement across cultural spaces was for some a more stressful process than for others and it would be a useful area of future research to assess the aspects that lead to this divergence. These more cosmopolitan urban groups, from higher

socio-economic backgrounds with the financial capacity to access new forms of cultural expression, or who experienced intercultural interactions on a daily basis because of their migrant backgrounds, tended towards a greater ease in adjusting to new social contexts (see Butcher, 2003 for a comparison between low income/rural and urban groups in India). However, many participants expressed at times a sense of confusion centred on no longer knowing the criteria on which correct judgements were to be made.

One thing I hate about the West is the culture of mink coats. (...) Bringing in stuff like etiquette that's not needed. (...) It's just getting shallower and shallower with those kinds of images (...) that we are trying to borrow from the West. I think the whole problem is with us, we don't know what to borrow and what to leave. (college student, Bangalore)

I take the things that I think will give me a positive effect on my life later on. I try to adopt things from either race that are good qualities and leave those that are bad. For example, the generosity of Australians and the strong work ethic of the Chinese. (...) I'm Australian because I've adopted these concepts in my identity but nothing else. I haven't accepted beach, booze and beer into my life. (Chi, 22 years old, Sydney)

Judgements and discernments were often based on criteria reinforced by family and peer groups. As many of the narratives have indicated, participants' need for social acceptance motivated their choices, or they found a new peer group to resolve any discomfort.

There certainly is pressure from say a friend's circle. Certainly. You are looked down upon if you don't wear jeans. (college student, Bangalore)

I'm more open-minded, that's because I haven't grown up around people of my own culture all my life. I used to live in Coogee which was mainly Anglo-Saxon, I went to school in Coogee so that was Anglo-Saxon. That's why I'm more open-minded than my Lebanese friends who have been surrounded by Lebanese people all their life. (Rana, 19 years old, Sydney)

These choices, as with identity strategies themselves, can change over time. Pyong and Kim's (2000) essay-based study of Asian-American identities found that '[m]any native-born Asian Americans consider themselves American when they are children, but increasingly adopt the ethnic identity of their parents as they grow older' (p. 738). These studies made similar findings:

I don't think I have much of [a cultural background] at the moment. I had one, when I was younger but I feel like I have—I've distanced myself from it. I don't know if it's always been like that.

*What changed?*

Just my friends and me making my own decisions in my life. It just happened, doing my own thing. (Safiye, 20 years old, Sydney)

Strategically adopting cultural identity addressed affective aspects of change, such as

fear and desire, that result from new social contexts. This in some cases means realigning a sense of identity by adopting the strategies that will achieve new possibilities (such as being a single mother), or ossifying boundaries to protect the familiar (such as reasserting an ethnicity or a nationalism). There are of course shades of grey. Young people in this research were capable of being flexible in one quarter of their lives but quite fundamental in another, and the difference was often illustrated by external (appearance) versus internal (values and beliefs) choices. This would comply with Worsley's (1984) stages of acculturation (a progression from the external, to the institutional and finally internal values, the most resistant to change), although I would argue that it's never a simple linear process. However, it's not surprising that participants and hybrid theorists highlight appearance or etiquette, as these are the most visible markers of cultural change.

## **Conclusion**

While there are some divergences between the two research cohorts I would argue that there are thematic patterns in their responses that suggest that there are similar processes of intercultural interaction and adaptation being undertaken by both groups. These processes entail the reconciliation of the disjunctions of cultural change via identity re-evaluation seen in the creation and consumption of cultural strategies of identity, and the compartmentalisation of spaces of their display.

The strategic use of both local and global cultural resources to demarcate identity was an attempt to define a solution to the disjunctions created by cultural lag in both research sites. Tensions between duty and desire, obligations and expectations, the collective and the individual, versus new possibilities needed to be reconciled. This process of reconciliation is the pre-eminent function of cultural strategies of identity. Their reassertion of identity boundaries was an attempt to reinstate comfort and remove the dissonance of 'being in-between'. Developing cultural strategies of identity also established markers of community as the production and consumption of cultural resources formed a shared vocabulary that is familiar, or in the case of the creation of new cultural spaces, comfortably relevant.

Divergences in approaches to identity re-evaluation between the research cohorts were related to the specific context of each group. A rapidly globalising urban India skewed concern there towards defining Indianness (in opposition to the West), and making the distinction between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. In a culturally diverse western Sydney, identity re-evaluation among young second-generation migrants focused more on defining the place of their ethnicity in relation to a predominantly Anglo Australia. However, the re-evaluation processes of both groups were driven by a similar dynamic: the defining of identity in opposition to a dominant culture (the West or Anglo-Australia).

In both cases similar practices of change management occurred, involving the creation of strategies of identity utilising existing and new cultural resources (examples of appearance, everyday practices and relationships have been given in the narratives above). This activity was an attempt to resolve the sense of confusion that resulted from 'being in-between' by reinforcing certainties and platforms from

which to make judgements, or by creating new certainties and points of authority from which judgements (of acceptability, inclusion, morality, etiquette, etc.) could be made. Both groups highlighted cultural change as a process of tension between release and restraint (between social expectations and the desire for 'freedom' or independence). The family and interpersonal relationships were key points of orientation in defining their sense of self, particularly in terms of defining who they are not, as were former collective points of authority and identity referents such as the state or ethnicity. The construction of difference in opposition to a dominant culture, for example, the creation of an immoral West or overt expressions of 'wog' youth culture, both revolving around nationalist identity discourses, is tempered by a desire to, in some way, still belong to a mainstream or a grouping that resonates with their sense of self.

Where expressions of hybridity were evident, they were qualified by tensions of release and restraint, the constraints imposed on young people, both social censure and lack of physical resources, and the desire for new possibilities. The state still controls an infrastructure of power, as does the market with particular regard to processes of commodification. The individual in these circumstances can reject or appropriate cultural resources, wear their hybrid fashion and speak hybrid slang, but the space within which these actions take place is often restricted by larger cultural formations and the social imposition of limits at the level of the local such as peer group or family.

Tradition, variously redefined by participants, and other points of continuity such as the family and the state, were still frames of reference around which young people oriented themselves as they re-evaluated their sense of cultural identity. The ability to contest and shape these components of cultural space, however limited, as well as submit to culture's shaping forces, points to an ability on the part of young people to interpret totalising identity referents such as Western, Indian, Australian or Ethnic, but also when necessary willingly adopt them.

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### **Notes**

1. This section is developed from work in Butcher (2003) *Transnational Television, Cultural Identity and Change: when STAR came to India* (New Delhi, Sage).
2. Interviews in Sydney were carried out by our research assistants Ozdem Cemali, Diane Ngo, Hiba Souied, William Leveni and Sivear Ung.

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