



# Living at the Crossroads of Cultural Worlds: The Experience of Normative Conflicts by Second Generation Immigrant Youth

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## Abstract

The children of immigrants are often referred to as second-generation youth. Although there is tremendous diversity among them, they often share the common experience of being bicultural by holding both heritage and mainstream cultural identities. Given that cultures generally promote similar expectations for youth (e.g., showing respect for parents), holding two cultural identities is not necessarily problematic. Even when cultural expectations do differ, these individuals can typically switch between cultural identities (e.g., South Asian at home; mainstream Canadian at school) as a strategy to avoid conflict. For some issues, however, switching between identities will not resolve the conflict because fulfilling the normative expectations associated with one identity is done at the expense of the ones of the other identity (e.g., choosing a romantic partner that is either from the heritage culture or from mainstream culture). The current paper presents a normative approach to understanding the experience of culturally-based conflicts among second-generation youth. In addition, research stemming from this normative approach in the area of intimate relationships is presented to further illustrate the value of the model in understanding the potential cultural conflicts of second-generation youth and how they may be negotiated.

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The increasing proportion of immigration to North America, Australia, and in parts of Europe over the last decade has resulted in many second-generation youth. For example, Statistics Canada (2008a) estimates that 16% of the population 15 years or older are second-generation Canadians. Although there is tremendous diversity among these youth, they often share the common experience of being bicultural given their extensive exposure to the expectations of both their parents' heritage culture and the mainstream culture. For many bicultural youth, being involved and identifying with both mainstream and heritage cultures are central to their identity (Berry, 1997; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Cultural identities are based on a set of shared norms that delineate the appropriateness of behavior in different situations. As such, bicultural individuals have access to two sets of cultural norms. In general, cultures promote similar expectations for youth (e.g., respect for parents). Thus, holding two cultural identities is not necessarily problematic. Even in situations for which the norms from the two identities offer incompatible behavioral expectations, bicultural individuals will often switch from one cultural identity to another (e.g., South Asian at home; mainstream Canadian at school) to avoid conflict. For some issues, however, incompatible expectations cannot be addressed through identity switching because fulfillment of one set of norms is done at the expense of the other (e.g., choosing an intimate partner from the heritage or mainstream culture).

The aim of this conceptual paper is to offer a normative perspective on issues pertaining to culturally-based conflicts commonly faced by second-generation youth (i.e., children of immigrants). The normative context of second-generation youth will first be

presented followed by a description of the concept of normative conflict. Research in the area of intimate relationships of second-generation youth in Canada will then be reviewed to help further illustrate the value of the proposed model in understanding the nature of culturally-based conflict and options that are available for youth to address such conflict.

It should be noted from the outset that our perspective is largely based on research we have conducted using convenience and snowball samples of South Asian and East Asian second-generation youth in Canada. These groups represent the largest recent immigration populations in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009a) as well as a large proportion of the immigrant population in the United States. This selection also reflects a worldwide trend in migration pattern of individuals leaving Eastern countries for Western ones (Dovidio & Esses, 2001). Countries with Eastern cultural backgrounds have been described as collectivistic and are often guided by norms that are well-defined and offer little room for digression (see Triandis, 1995). Western cultures like Canada and the United States, on the other hand, are individualist cultures whose cultural norms are often less prescriptive than those held in Eastern cultures. Thus, second-generation youth who have access to both Eastern and Western sets of norms are also more likely to experience culturally-based normative conflicts, compared with those who remain within a single set of cultural norms.

### **The Normative Experience of Second-Generation Youth**

For many second-generation youth, having group memberships in both the heritage culture and mainstream culture is a central aspect of how they define themselves. These identities, like other collective identities, are constructed around networks of norms (see Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). The function of norms is to help individuals define what actions (cognitive, emotional, or behavioral) are considered appropriate or inappropriate. Adherence to normative expectations helps fulfill one's need for affiliation (see Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Second-generation youth have access to two sets of norms: one from their heritage culture, which is learned mostly through the family, and the other from the mainstream culture, which is typically acquired through peers, school, and the broader social context.

To understand the normative reality of second-generation youth, it is important to first investigate the normative context of their immigrant parents. When individuals from an Eastern culture immigrate to a Western culture, they often retain strong support for their heritage norms, particularly those surrounding issues related to the family and relationships (e.g., Naidoo & Davis, 1988). Because these first-generation Westerners have typically experienced their heritage culture dynamically at both the societal (e.g., schools, media) and interpersonal level (e.g., family, peers), their self-concept is well rooted in this culture. If immigration occurs during the adolescent years or later, the person's experience with the receiving culture occurs at a developmental period when many attitudes and daily routines have already been well-established and grounded within a normative frame set by the heritage culture (see Heine, 2008). Thus, cultural conflicts that arise for parents of second-generation youth typically originate from the expression of an Eastern heritage norm in a Western cultural context.

The experience of mainstream and heritage cultures of second-generation youth differs significantly from that of their first-generation parents. For example, these youth have not acquired their heritage cultural knowledge with the same degree of direct experience as that of their parents. Despite the increasing number of global channels for communicating

cultural knowledge, second-generation youth's primary access to the heritage culture is through the lens of their family and relatives for whom the heritage culture is often frozen at the time when they emigrated from their country of origin. Moreover, Eastern immigrant parents in attempting to maintain heritage norms in a mainstream context typically encourage their children to adopt behaviors and norms that are most closely tied to family traditions and family honor (Dion & Dion, 2001; Georgas, 1989; Kwak, 2003). Some of these traditions contrast greatly with those of the receiving western host country, which typically emphasize the development of autonomy during adolescence.

At the time when second-generation youth acquire cultural knowledge from their family's heritage culture, they are also exposed to the social norms of the mainstream culture. Thus, they are generally more involved in the mainstream culture compared with their parents. In a Western context, for example, it is easier for these young people to master the mainstream languages (Jia & Aaronson, 2003; Johnson & Newport, 1989) and more likely for them to acquire autonomy norms (e.g., seeking a romantic partner on the basis of love) that are typically not supported by the heritage culture. Consistent with the parent-child discrepancy in exposure to heritage and mainstream cultures, children of immigrants report greater endorsement of mainstream cultural norms and values as well as weaker endorsement of traditional cultural norms and values than their parents (Georgas, Berry, Shaw, Christakopoulos, & Mylonas, 1996; Knafo & Schwartz, 2001; Rosenthal, Demetriou, & Efklides, 1989). It is not surprising then that some second-generation youth may experience culturally-based internal conflicts and that they may sometimes feel as though they are 'caught between two cultures' in certain situations (e.g., Dugsin, 2001; Weston, 1994).

### *Managing sets of norms*

In general, different cultural groups place similar emphasis on what are considered appropriate everyday behaviors such as being helpful to others (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Because there is no potential for culturally-based normative conflicts in these more mundane day-to-day actions, bicultural youth are not in a frequent state of conflict when going about their regular lives.

Even when the norms of heritage and mainstream cultures are perceived as being incompatible with one another, the risk of conflict can sometimes be avoided by switching between the differing cultural beliefs as a function of the social environment (e.g., family, school) (Phinney, 1990). Although second-generation youth may perceive that some areas of their lives are associated with incompatible heritage and mainstream norms, such perceptions do not automatically lead to normative conflicts. The cultural identity of these young adults is contextually driven by environmental cues, usually of a single culture that is salient in a given situation. This process may allow them to rely on the set of norms concordant to a given situation and ignore the other less relevant set of norms (e.g., following heritage norms at home and mainstream norms at school). This notion is well-captured by the concept of *frame-switching* put forth by Hong and her colleagues (see Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). Cultural frame switching is said to occur when individuals alternate between different cultural interpretive frames as a function of the cues in their environment.

Similar ideas about the contextual nature of identity can also be found within other perspectives on identity, including the culture and language literature (see Ashmore et al., 2004). The relationship between language and culture is a complex one. At the individual level, culture is constructed around a network of knowledge sets (see Hong et al., 2000),

and the cognitive processing of this knowledge can be influenced by language (Bialystock, 2001). In their investigation of identities based on ethnicity and language, Clément and Noels (1992) have referred to the context-dependent phenomenon of identity as a *situated identity*. Boski (2008) offers a related model which parcels out different types of cultural integration. He argues that it is important to distinguish between one's linguistic identity and cultural identity. Although related, a person who is bicultural (i.e., has incorporated two sets of cultural norms and knowledge) is not necessarily bilingual in the fullest sense (i.e., has acquired and maintained fluency in two languages), and vice versa. In fact, the issue of language and bilingualism places many second-generation youth in a unique position within their families. Because they are often more knowledgeable of the mainstream culture's language and nuances, they are called upon to serve as a language broker for their parents (Dorner, Orellana, & Jiménez, 2008). Such a position has the potential to create particular types of conflicts for bicultural and bilingual youth, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Our focus is on the conflicts that arise from discrepancies in commitment to the sets of social norms prescribed by two different cultures.

### *Normative conflict*

There may be some areas in the lives of second-generation youth in which the norms promoted by the two cultures are discordant, and the adherence to one set of norms prevents fulfillment of the second set of cultural norms. Moreover, these areas are likely to be associated with important life decisions. Often underlying the incompatibility between norms are traditional values stemming from the Eastern heritage culture working against autonomy values from the Western mainstream culture. Areas in which second-generation youth are able to assert a sense of autonomy are likely to generate culturally-based conflict. For example, one major source of conflict for young second-generation South Asian women is in the area of autonomy in intimate relationships (Inman, 2006).

Implicit in the notion of bicultural normative conflict is that acculturation occurs along two independent yet related lines. Individuals are not simply moving on a continuum between heritage and mainstream identity; they can hold and endorse both identities simultaneously (Berry, 1990; see Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000 for empirical evidence). Taking a normative approach, conflict between the two sets of cultural norms of the bicultural individual will be associated with simultaneous salience of both heritage and mainstream identities – *two events that are intimately tied to each other and perceived to be undistinguishable*. Stroink and Lalonde (2009), for example, revealed that bicultural youth were less likely to simultaneously identify with heritage and mainstream cultures when they constructed a differing normative frame for each culture.

Culturally-based conflicts may lead youth to believe that they are required to choose one of two opposing normative alternatives (e.g., a partner concordant with heritage cultural norms or not). They may also feel caught between two set of norms and perceive that switching between identities is not a sustainable option to address the issue. This conflict between norms leaves the individual with a difficult and sometimes painful dilemma. In perceiving that the choice between two normative alternatives will be made at the expense of the norms from one of the two cultural reference groups, this conflict may generate the potential for social rejection for having failed to fulfill the norms of one group. Considering the asymmetry in socialization forces towards heritage and mainstream cultures encountered by second-generation youth, the conflict they experience could more appropriately be characterized as between their familial and mainstream norms, as opposed to between two cultural groups.

Issues related to family and relationships are common sources of conflict for many first- and second-generation immigrants (Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio, & Vilhjalmsson, 2005). Cultural sources for family normative expectations and personal desires cross to form four different acculturation patterns in families: (1) both the child and parents have acculturated to mainstream (e.g., Canadian) norms and values; (2) the child has acculturated to mainstream culture whereas the parents have not; (3) the child identifies closely with the heritage culture and it is the parents who have adopted mainstream culture; and (4) both the child and parents identify closely with the heritage culture. Normative conflict is most likely to occur in pattern (2). It should be noted that an individual's family dynamics are not limited to any one of these patterns in every context. The parents and their child may each endorse both their heritage and mainstream identities to some degree, and be able to negotiate between them smoothly and effortlessly in many situations. Normative conflict can still occur, however, when the two parties strongly disagree in their views on a particular issue for which integrating norms from both cultures is not possible (e.g., choosing between chastity and pre-marital sex). Because traditional norms are generally transmitted by the family, conflict for second-generation youth is more likely for family-related issues for which the relative contribution of heritage culture may be greater than mainstream culture.

Contemplating social rejection, be it from family or peers, for failing to fulfill normative obligation can place these youth in a position to experience psychological distress. It is important to distinguish between the *frequency* of conflict and the extent to which it leads to *distress*. Normative conflicts faced by second-generation youth are typically characterized as *low frequency* because they surround key life decisions that are relatively rare in occurrence (e.g., choosing a life partner, career), *but they can cause significant psychological distress* (see LaFromboise et al., 1993). Individuals adhere to norms in order to obtain social acceptance (e.g., Blackhart, Baumeister, & Twenge, 2006; see Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Anticipating or actually being forced to commit to only one set of cultural norms can result in distress because they place the individual in a position of social rejection.

Individuals adhere to social norms in part to derive a sense of affiliation with others. Violation of such norms threatens this affiliation and generates the potential for social rejection (Leary, Koch, & Hechenbleikner, 2001). Among other factors, social rejection is associated with the experience of negative social emotions (e.g., shame), which have been associated with negative consequences for psychological adjustment (e.g., depression) (Tangney, 1993). The current model offers a perspective for understanding the experience of second-generation youth and proposes a psychological mechanism underlying the relation between normative conflict and negative psychological adjustment.

Bicultural youth may be particularly prone to maladaptive conflict experiences as they simultaneously undergo a transitional period of identity development to adulthood and deal with possibly conflicting sets of cultural values (Berry, 1997; Phinney, Ong, & Madden 2000). According to Eric Erikson (1968) adolescents generate a sense of identity through the experience and resolution of normative conflicts during what he referred to as the identity-confusion stage. Marcia (1966) elaborated further on the idea of identity crisis and provided empirical evidence in support of Erikson's theory. It is important to recognize that intergenerational conflicts (e.g., conflicting musical preferences between parent and child), which tend to occur within a homogeneous cultural setting, are common regardless of cultural background. Culture may exacerbate intergenerational conflicts for bicultural individuals but not for their monocultural peers. For example, although most parents and children disagree on what is the appropriate level of physical intimacy

for young single adults, the parent-child discrepancy may be greater within immigrant families.

### Levels of Conflicts

The layered and interacting systems outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggest that human development is shaped by the norms and values embedded not only in the immediate settings (e.g., family, peers, school) but also the larger social and cultural contexts. In the case of bicultural youth, the relation between these systems and its influence on development may be highly dynamic and powerful, resulting in certain types of conflicts as compared with their monocultural counterparts. In accordance with this system, it is argued that normative conflicts can be experienced at different levels in the lives of second-generation youth.

At the *intergroup conflict level*, cultural conflicts may be experienced by bicultural individuals when they are categorized by others as belonging to an outgroup on the basis of a social categorization such as skin color, accent, or choice of clothing (e.g., Killian & Johnson, 2006). Race-based discrimination is the classic example of a cultural conflict at the intergroup level, but such conflicts can also be more subtle in their expression. For instance, inclusion in a given group may be questioned by the degree of fit with prototypical group norms. A Chinese Canadian may feel rejected by a Euro-Canadian who questions where she is from, or she may feel be rejected by another Chinese Canadian who jokes about her qualms about eating chicken feet.

Conflicts can also be experienced at the interpersonal level and the intra-personal level. At the *interpersonal level*, second-generation youths' interaction with their parents or peers can be negatively affected by their dual normative commitment. Examples include parental disapproval of the child's intimate involvement with a partner from a different ethnic background, or peer pressure preventing abstinence from alcohol consumption. Finally, at the *intrapersonal level*, conflict can be experienced within the individual, which can be described as the experience of 'feeling torn' between two cultures. Normative commitments become internalized along with any incompatibilities between these norms (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Thus, bicultural individuals may find themselves divided on what are considered appropriate behavioral responses to certain situations.

These two latter levels of normative conflict will be discussed further by reviewing research on the experience of normative conflict in the area of intimate relationships. The review will address the normative perspective of second-generation youth with a focus on illustrating their perception of different normative reference points. Because of the asymmetry between heritage and mainstream norms, with heritage norms being more closely tied to the family than the heritage culture, the influence of family connectedness (i.e., collectivism at the family level; Lay et al., 1998) is an important factor to consider in the experience of these youth. Adherence to heritage norms should vary according to the extent to which an individual's self-concept is tied to the family. This level of self-construal is captured by the psychological concept of *family allocentrism*, or the expression of cultural collectivism at the family level (see Lay et al., 1998). After discussing the implications for the current normative perspective, we will present work that addresses the distinction in the perceived differences between norms and the internalization of a normative conflict as well as its relation to psychological adjustment. Finally, results from quasi-experimental studies suggesting that normative conflict is associated with the experience of negative emotions for second-generation youth will be discussed.



### Cultural Norms of Partner Selection and Preferred Mate Attributes

An important issue facing the majority of young adults is the type of person they will choose to be their life partner. It is generally recognized that norms regarding interactions in intimate relationships are primarily defined and transmitted by culture (Berscheid, 1995). Dating and relationships, therefore, can be associated with considerable culturally-based tension within many immigrant families (see Hynie, 1996 for a review). It is not surprising that cultural conflict related to issues of dating and marriage is a consistent theme across a number of qualitative studies looking at South Asians immigrants living in Canada (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Weston, 1994) and the United States (Dugsin, 2001; Pettys & Balgopal, 1998; Segal, 1991).

For second-generation Eastern immigrants in a Western culture, close relationships are typically associated with two distinct and often contradictory sets of norms (Tang & Dion, 1999). In many Eastern cultures, the primary purpose behind the union of two individuals is to promote the maintenance, continuity, and well-being of both families involved (Dion & Dion, 1993). Arranged unions are common, alluding to the significant role that parents play in choosing their child's future partner. Young adults are expected to respect their parents' desires regarding the choice of a spouse, and understand love to be a state that follows rather than precedes marriage (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000). This Eastern view contrasts sharply with that held by Western cultures (e.g., in Canada and the U.S.) in which unions are formed to publicly demonstrate a couple's feelings of romantic love (Dion & Dion, 1996; Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson, & Choo, 1994). Adolescents committed to two distinct set of norms of Eastern and Western cultures are likely to find themselves caught between the desire to fulfill strong family expectations and maintain family honor, and the belief that love is the ultimate route to personal fulfillment and happiness within a union. Thus, issues surrounding intimate relationships may be prone to elicit normative conflicts for young biculturals (Dasgupta, 1998; Hynie, 1996).

Based on these different perspectives on unions, culture can exert a strong influence over partner selection for bicultural individuals. Research conducted by Buss et al. (1990) demonstrated considerable cross-cultural consistency across 37 nations in the attributes that men and women desire in their lifelong mate. Regardless of cultural background, individuals tended to prefer a partner who will be kind and considerate; this is consistent with our findings with young adult Canadians (Hynie, Lalonde, & Lee, 2006; Lalonde & Giguère, 2008; Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004). In many cultures, mate selection occurs within homogeneous cultural contexts in which potential partners share ethnic, religious, and linguistic features. Because the vast majority of Canada's population growth from international immigration is concentrated in large urban centers (Statistics Canada, 2009b), second-generation youth are likely to reside in these metropolitan areas with their families. Particularly relevant to dating, their pool of potential partners in these urban areas is culturally heterogeneous with the key feature being the great diversity of ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds.

#### *Normative conflict and intimate relationships*

What then happens to the second-generation youth who develop two sets of cultural norms that contain contradictory behavioral prescriptions regarding preferable traits in a mate as well as the nature and meaning of the union with a life partner? The

potential for culturally-based conflict increases as these young adults face difficult decisions in which they must choose between normative commitments, either to the family's expectations or to the mainstream norms displayed by their peers. Lalonde et al. (2004) examined the potential for normative conflict and the role of family connectedness in partner trait preferences of second-generation South Asian youth. It was hypothesized that bicultural individuals would be aware of two different sets of cultural norms regarding mate selection and that they would still be influenced by their heritage culture while living in a Western culture. Results indicated that bicultural youth had in fact internalized some of their heritage cultural norms, such that they showed a stronger preference for 'traditional' attributes in a mate (e.g., family reputation, parents' approval) compared with their European Canadian counterparts. A second study with a different sample of South Asian Canadians demonstrated that the young adults who displayed greater preference for traditional attributes in a mate identified more strongly with their South Asian heritage and were more culturally connected to their families.

Betancourt and López (1993) postulated that in order to assume that a cultural variable underlies an ethnic group difference, a direct measure of that specific cultural element must be obtained to ensure that the groups actually differ with regard to that variable (see also Matsumoto, 1999). To determine that the differences in normative support between second-generation youth and their mainstream peers occur in part because of the way they construed themselves, Lalonde et al. (2004) examined family allocentrism as a mediator of the relation between cultural group membership (i.e., European Canadian vs. South Asian Canadian) and preference for traditional traits in a partner. As predicted, collectivistic self-construal at the family level accounted for the different levels of normative support for preferred traditional traits in a life partner. This finding offers a significant contribution to the literature by revealing a mediating factor that helps explain *why* normative conflict occurs rather than merely pointing out the existence of cultural differences.

Hynie et al. (2006) studied the views on desirable mate attributes of both second-generation Chinese Canadians and their first-generation parents. Chinese immigrant parents who had lived in North America for an average of 30 years rated traits associated with traditional family structure, function, and roles as being moderately important relative to other potential characteristics. In contrast, their North American-born children perceived the same traditional characteristics as being relatively unimportant in an ideal mate. In addition, Hynie and her colleagues also offered a conceptual replication of the influence of family allocentrism on mate preferences reported in earlier work by Lalonde et al. (2004) with South Asian Canadians using a sample of Chinese second-generation youth. Second-generation Chinese Canadians' preference for traditional mate characteristics reflected their degree of family connectedness, with greater connectedness leading to preference for traditional traits. Finally, Hynie et al. (2006) found that parental preferences for traditional attributes in a mate for their children were positively correlated with the children's actual preferences for the same attributes, corroborating the belief that parental cultural expectations will shape the views of their children about relationship partners.

The studies described above indicate that second-generation South Asian and Chinese Canadians tend to endorse more traditional attributes in a mate compared with their Euro-Canadian counterparts. In addition, their preference for traditional attributes vary as a function of their sense of self, with greater family allocentrism leading to preferences for traits associated with the heritage culture.



*Normative conflict in intimate relationships and psychological distress*

Some of our more recent research (see Lalonde & Giguère, 2007, 2008) simultaneously sampled youth from Chinese and South Asian backgrounds along with Euro-Canadian youth, which were included as a quasi-control group. This study conceptually replicated stronger preferences for traditional attributes in a mate (e.g., similar religious and cultural background, parental approval) by South Asian and Chinese youth compared with Euro-Canadian youth. Moreover, a stronger preference for traditional mate attributes was also observed in the South Asian sample than in the Chinese sample. In addition, differences between groups in preference for mate attributes were explained by the degree of family allocentrism.

The above-mentioned study also examined other aspects of intimate relationships including chastity as a preferable trait for a partner and norms regarding sexuality. In a cross-national study of desirable partner attributes, Buss et al. (1990) found that the attribute of chastity elicited the largest cultural difference. India and China were among the nations that judged chastity as highly important whereas the English-speaking and French Canadian samples ranked chastity as one of the least valued attributes in a mate. A multi-dimensional scaling analysis of the respondents from all nations indicated that India and China were the most distinct (i.e., greater distance from other cultures) on a dimension that contained chastity as a central element. Similarly, Lalonde and Giguère (2008) report that compared with Euro-Canadian youth, second-generation youth from South Asian and Chinese background held a stronger preference for chastity in a mate. Once again, differences between cultural groups were accounted for by family allocentrism. Differing preferences for chastity between cultural groups highlight another important potential source of conflict for second-generation Canadians, namely, norms regarding sexuality.

Beyond chastity, norms regarding premarital sex in a romantic relationship also offer a potential area of conflict. As expected, Lalonde and Giguère (2008) report observing that South Asian and Chinese youth perceived premarital sexual intercourse as less appropriate than did their Euro-Canadian peers, though this difference was greater for South Asian Canadians. More importantly, the ratings of South Asian Canadians statistically fell in-between the beliefs they thought their parents would have (i.e., premarital sex is not appropriate) and what their Canadian friends would have (i.e., premarital sex is quite appropriate). These findings suggest that second-generation South Asian individuals consider their own views on sexuality as falling between two sets of cultural norms.

*Internalization of conflict*

It is important to recognize that different normative reference points do not necessarily lead to normative conflict. Evidence of conflict – perhaps at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels – is found when second-generation youth acknowledge different normative reference points and believe that the discrepancy is likely to negatively impact their relationships with others. For example, second-generation youth may be forced to make difficult choices when they are attracted to someone from a different cultural or religious group. In such cases, individuals may experience interpersonal conflict with their parents, particularly if the parents expect their children to marry someone from their own cultural background (Konanur, Lalonde, Uskul, & Cingöz, 2006; Uskul, Lalonde, & Cheng, 2007). Second-generation youth may also experience intrapersonal conflict if they find themselves attracted to someone from another culture. They may be tempted to give in to their own desires and explore the potential of the relationship. At the same time,

however, they may attempt to ignore the feelings and wait for a more 'appropriate' person. Given that recent Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2008b) data indicate that the number of inter-ethnic and inter-faith relationships is increasing in Canada, it is likely that such cultural conflicts are being experienced by many second-generation youth, with the prospect of having a partner from a different cultural background being a more realistic reality.

To investigate the key aspect of bicultural intra-personal conflict more directly (i.e., feeling caught between two cultures), items were adapted from the conflict and distance construct proposed by Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) to make them specific to the area of intimate relationships (see Lalonde & Giguère, 2008). Items on the conflict subscale were intended to measure the degree to which individuals felt torn between cultures with regards to the degree of intimacy in their relationship. Items on the distance subscale tapped into the extent to which individuals perceived heritage and mainstream culture as holding different norms for intimacy in their close relationships. As Lalonde and Giguère (2008) reported responses on these scales showed that South Asian Canadians experienced greater conflict and distance than both Chinese Canadians and Italian Canadians. In addition, a sense of feeling torn (i.e., conflict) was negatively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction for South Asian Canadians. On the other hand, perceived distance between cultures was negatively associated with self-esteem for Chinese Canadians. Overall, these results suggest that the experience of intra-personal normative conflicts in the area of intimate relationship can be negatively associated with well-being for second-generation youth.

Individuals are motivated to adhere to group norms primarily to obtain social acceptance (Blackhart et al., 2006; see Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). To experience ambivalence in one's normative commitments, therefore, should be psychologically upsetting. In the process of socialization, individuals learn and experience different types of social emotions such as shame and guilt that signal a lack of social acceptance (Leary et al., 2001). Lalonde, Giguère, and Naveh-Benjamin (2008) conducted two studies that examined the emotional consequences of normative conflict as a potential psychological mechanism underlying the experience of conflict. In the first study, South Asian and European-Canadian young adults were asked to recall either a culturally-based interpersonal conflict (conflict with the parents over dating) or a negative control event (being late for an appointment). Emotional responses to each events showed that negative social emotions (e.g., shame) were more likely to be generated by culturally-based conflict than by a negative control event for South Asian Canadians. Moreover, no difference in the emotional responses to the two conflict primes was observed for a European-Canadian sample, suggesting that they were not affected by the cultural component of the conflict.

In a similar second study, young adult Chinese and European-Canadian youth were asked to recall a culturally-based conflict (problem with school performance) or a different negative control event (not completing a family chore). For Chinese American immigrant families, strong values for obedience combined with a demand for high academic achievement represent a major source of intergenerational and bicultural conflict for second-generation youth (Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000; Sung, 1985). In Western cultures, relative to Eastern contexts, there is less of a focus on strict obedience, and academic achievement is not as strongly emphasized (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1994). Lalonde et al. (2008) reported that Chinese Canadian participants' emotional responses to a conflict concerning academic achievement generated more negative social emotions than a conflict concerning family chores. No difference in the emotional responses to the conflict primes was observed for the European-Canadian sample. Taken together, these findings

suggest that negative social emotions are generated by the experience of normative conflict as a result of deviation from cultural group norms prescribed for bicultural youth.

#### *Other potential areas for bicultural normative conflicts*

Although the discussion has primarily focused on the issue of intimate relationships and dating, normative conflict can occur in many other areas for second-generation youth. Because Western cultures typically encourage autonomy and independence whereas Eastern cultures tend to value family connectedness and interdependence, children of Eastern immigrants might experience interpersonal and intra-personal conflicts when they attempt to assert their autonomy (e.g., Phinney et al., 2005). Normative conflict may be observed in young adults' motivation to leave the familial home for alternate living arrangements. For example, in many European-American cultures, moving out is recognized as an expression of independence, whereas in Asian cultures, moving out typically occurs at the time of marriage or for high educational attainment (Mitchell, 2004). This difference alludes to the importance of personal preferences and goals in one culture and family obligations and duties in another.

The importance of family allocentrism found in preferences for traditional attributes in a mate can also be extended to one's motivation to leave the parental home. In the context of the family, Eastern cultures' heavy emphasis on filial piety prescribes that adult children are expected to remain at home until they marry; individual autonomy is subordinated to the needs of the family. Research shows that South Asian Canadian young adults reported 'a great deal' of parental influence on the decision to leave home compared with British-Canadian young adults (Mitchell, 2004), demonstrating a stronger sense of family connectedness. On the other hand, although still holding obligations to their family, Euro-Canadian adolescents experience greater equality with their parents and less emphasis on fulfilling familial expectations (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Thus, leaving the parental home to achieve independence may be an issue around which inter-generational conflict occurs for some bicultural young adults who have access to both Eastern and Western cultural norms.

Another example where contradictory cultural norms may be simultaneously salient is in the domain of education and career choices. The Western norms of individualism and autonomy may guide the individual to pursue a career goal that is not typically linked to financial security and status (e.g., an Arts degree in literature, theatre school). On the other hand, the family connectedness associated with Eastern cultures may drive the individual to pursue career paths that are valued and recognized by the heritage community (e.g., medicine, law, business) and can contribute easily to the family's prosperity. Findings from our recent work suggest that greater familial and cultural pressure for good academic performance is placed on the children of Chinese immigrants than on European-Canadian children. These pressures may be associated with stress and other negative emotional implications for second-generation Chinese Canadians (Lalonde et al., 2008).

#### *Other approaches to bicultural conflicts*

Multiple perspectives on issues related to biculturalism have emerged since the idea that individuals could hold multiple cultural identities simultaneously was introduced. Currently, one of the prominent approaches to this issue is that of Benet-Martínez and her colleagues (e.g., Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), who proposed a seminal model

examining biculturalism from an individual differences perspective – which can be contrasted with the social influence focus of the current model. These researchers suggest that ‘although all biculturals identify with both mainstream and ethnic cultures, some biculturals perceive their dual cultural identities as compatible and integrated, whereas others see them as oppositional and difficult to integrate’ (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002, p. 496). To capture this individual difference they developed the construct of bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Bicultural individuals high in integration view their two identities as compatible with one another, whereas those low in integration view them as opposing forces. Cheng et al. (2008) also discuss the notion of identity integration using a social identity approach, and describe it as the ability to flow naturally from one social identity to the next.

A prominent approach to understanding human thought, behavior, and affect is to adopt a person by situation approach. Such an approach can provide insight on how the experience and outcomes of normative conflict among biculturals vary as a function of individual differences and situational contexts driven by the norms of both the mainstream and heritage cultures. Benet-Martínez and her colleagues have opened avenues to examine issues pertaining to bicultural identity from an interactionist perspective. For example, cultural frame switching, a process influenced by social cues, is moderated by individual’s degree of bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). Individuals high in integration made attributions that were congruent with the cultural cues that they had been primed with, whereas individuals low in integration made incongruent attributions. An interactionist approach where it is assumed that (1) some individuals may be predisposed as a function of their personality to more easily avoid or negotiate culturally-based conflicts, and (2) that such conflicts are driven by social norms, can help us to better understand the psychological impact of culturally based conflict and ways to resolve such conflict.

### *Limitations*

Our notion of normative conflict also requires researchers to consider the socio-political context around immigration (Bourhis, Moïse, Perrault, & Senécal, 1997; Dovidio & Esses, 2001). For example, exploring bicultural normative conflicts within Canada requires examining these processes within a given political context that is concerned with immigration and multiculturalism issues. Canada’s official policy states that ‘Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence making them open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures’ (Canadian Heritage, 2004). This policy facilitates the maintenance of heritage and cultural affiliation, allowing biculturalism to be a viable option with respect to the societal institutions. In countries where policies regarding immigration and acculturation assume that immigrants should acculturate to the mainstream culture and abandon their heritage one, immigrants are faced with a different challenge – one in which intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of conflicts may be less important than intergroup conflicts.

### **Conclusion**

For second-generation youth, life is usually no different from that of their mainstream peers whose families have been in Canada, the United States, or host countries for many generations. These bicultural individuals, however, are bound to experience some

circumstances in which they are faced with conflicts that may force them to compromise and negotiate between the expectations of the norms of their heritage culture and mainstream culture. It is important to understand the experience of second-generation bicultural youth who are in the process of establishing their identity, developing their autonomy, and creating intimate relationships – all of which can elicit incompatible cultural expectations from their heritage and mainstream cultures. As immigration rates continue to soar in Western countries, so will the proportion of bicultural individuals. Research in this area will lead to a better understanding of normative conflicts experienced by young immigrants and provide guidelines for building strategies geared towards helping youth develop an integrated bicultural identity.

### Short Biography

Benjamin Giguère is a PhD candidate at York University in Toronto. He received his BA from McGill University. His research intersects the fields of cross-cultural psychology, intergroup relations and group processes. He is particularly interested in understanding the influence of collective identities and cultural norms on the regulation of behaviors.

Richard N. Lalonde is a Professor of Psychology at York University in Toronto. His research falls at the intersection of culture, identity, and intergroup relations, with a particular focus on issues that are pertinent to multicultural societies. Much of his work has focused on the cultural identities of 1st and 2nd generation immigrant groups in the Canadian context. His current research focuses on bicultural identity and the situations where a conflict between two sets of cultural norms is likely to arise. Lalonde obtained his BA at the University of Ottawa, his MA and PhD at the University of Western Ontario. He has also collaborated in research projects at McGill University where he held a postdoctoral fellowship and at the University of Queensland where he was a visiting scholar.

Evelina Lou is an MA candidate at York University in Toronto. Her current research lies in the areas of social and cultural psychology. She is particularly interested in the influence of biculturalism on social behaviours and on issues of identity for first- and second-generation immigrants. She holds a BA from the University of Western Ontario.

### Endnote

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