

**THE CHILDREN OF “LIQUID MODERNITY”  
CONFLICTS OF BEING AND BELONGING AND  
THE BIRTH OF THE GLOBAL IDENTITY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The children of “liquid modernity”, conflicts of being and belonging and the birth of the global identity.**

**Caroline Malhame**

This thesis discusses how people with different backgrounds who have clashing identities and problems of belonging deal with their identity issues and how they find a way to resolve their identity conflicts by finding a new way to define and re-unite their selves as a whole person. When people in my sample were unable to resolve their identity conflicts, they fell into a depression. The thesis escalates from the micro to the macro as individuals learn to describe themselves as global citizens in an attempt to give themselves a sense of belonging and reduce the dissonance that results from identity conflicts. Not much work has been done on globalization from the point of view of Identity. It has been researched more as an economic and political phenomenon so this research bears new ground in terms of understanding the development of the global self. I interviewed a snowball sample of 11 Individuals which ranged from the ages of 24 to 57 with self defined identity crises and identity issues of various sorts. We discussed the types of conflicts, the participants coping mechanisms and their successes and failures at resolving the conflicts and redefining their identity. Erikson, Mead, Cooley, Durkheim, Goffman, and Bauman provided insights and the main theoretical framework. The main conclusion was that respondents re-invented themselves as global citizens to reduce the dissonance they felt and to integrate their fragmented and conflicted identities.

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## **Introduction**

### **Defining Identity**

Identity is the blueprint of personhood. It is the boundary of the self that one uses as a point of reference in social life. It is the reply to an existential question of being that has plagued children as well as philosophers for centuries, the social answer to the question of belonging. It is the seat of meaning, the core of selfhood, where we store our deepest values and our dearest beliefs. Identity is the human capacity rooted in language to know who is who and what is what. This involves knowing who we are and knowing who others are, (Jenkins, 2008:5). Identity is also a security blanket, a shield that protects us against the endless pit of meaninglessness, the “maelstrom of modernity” and the violent winds of conflict. It is able to do this because it provides an explanation for our origin and an answer for our demise at the hands of our own death and because it is the thread that ties all our fragments of being into a self. For William James identity is a social self and we come to know it through our social interactions with others. According to Erikson identity is a dynamic fitting together of parts of the personality with the realities of the social world so that a person has a sense of both internal coherence and meaningful relatedness to the real world. Erikson is also convinced that identity is “as unfathomable as it is all pervasive” and that “it deals with a process that is located both in the core of the individual and in the core of the communal culture. Giddens states that “A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if they are to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur

in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.”(Giddens, 1991:54). Bauman insists that neither identity nor belonging are cut into rock and that they are not secured by a lifelong guarantee. He states that they are eminently negotiable and revocable: and that one’s decisions, the steps one takes, the way one acts –and the determination to stick by all that are crucial factors for our identity. (Bauman, 2004:11)

Understanding people’s personal and social identity, which are intimately interlinked and observing the lengths they will go to defend them, is central to understanding the human condition.

### **Conceptions of identity**

Stuart Hall and Kenneth Thomson distinguish between three different conceptions of identity. First those of the enlightenment subject, what they call those of the sociological subject and the post-modern subject. In the days of the enlightenment it was believed that the person was a fully centered unified individual who was given the capacities of reason, consciousness and action with an inner core which first manifested itself when the subject was born and unfolded itself but essentially remained the same or identical with itself throughout the individual’s existence. A person’s identity was actually the center of the self. ( Hall, 1996: 597) .

The second conception is that of the sociological subject. It is a conception of identity which reflects the growing complexity of the modern world and a growing awareness that this inner core of the subject is not autonomous and self–sufficient but is formed in relation to significant others who transfer to the subject the values, meanings and symbols of the world the person is living in. Mead and Cooley are the two main scholars who elaborated this interactive conception of identity. According to the views of

these symbolic interactionists, identity is formed in interaction between self and society. The person still has an inner core but it is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the outside world. Identity is what bridges the gap between the outside world and the inner self. It stitches the subject into the social structure. It stabilizes both the subjects and the cultural world they inhabit making them both more unified and predictable (Hall, 1996 :598 ) .

In post –modernity , the subject, previously seen as having a unified and stable identity, slowly becomes seen as more fragmented and composed of several contradictory identities as opposed to a single one. This produces the post modern view of the subject as having no fixed essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes formed and transformed in relation to the ways we are represented in society. The subject experiences different identities at different times and places. Identities are not unified around a coherent self. but contingent. Contradictory identities can be found within us so that our identifications are constantly being shifted about. If we feel we have a unified identity, it is only because we construct comforting self – narratives about ourselves. According to this view the fully unified completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead we are confronted with a multitude of possible identities ( Hall,1996:598).

### **The importance of being and belonging**

Identity matters to us because it is the very personal and cultural lens through which we form a life narrative that gives our existence and our actions a sense of meaning, direction and purpose. It is vital for our psychological and personal health and acts as a buffer against conflict and an anchor during times of distress. It is unfathomable and terrifying for beings that ‘are’, and who are aware that they ‘are’, to come to the

realisation that they will one day cease to be. It is even more unfathomable for a human being not to know who or why they are and why they came to be.

Our quest for an identity is the quest for a life story that resolves three existential questions of being and belonging and gives our life meaning. It is also a quest for immortality. Once confronted with their own mortality and the lack of explanation for their origin, a human being is forced to ask the questions: “Who am I?” and “How do I want to be remembered?” “What will I leave behind?” Human beings turn to their society and culture in the hope of finding an answer to the question of being and finding a sense of belonging. We turn to religion, to science and to philosophy as well as to other traditional or non-traditional narratives, in the hope of finding this answer and in the hope of understanding the dynamics of the world around us so that we can understand where we belong in the scale of things. The meaning that a person finds within the scope of their own cultural and personal identity acts as a guide for their life and a source of hope when they are confronted with the thought of their own death (Lifton ,1974: 88 ).

### **The Delicate Dance of the Hypermodern Identity**

*“I think your sense of identity changes depending on your circumstances. That is what makes life challenging. It is as if we are constantly creating ourselves. In a nutshell, life is a long process of picking up and unloading ideas of ourselves as we go along. It is always changing, always posing new challenges.”*

*Andre*

The hypermodern world that we find ourselves in today forces us to constantly re-evaluate and re-invent ourselves. Life becomes “a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration



and renewal of struggle and contradiction” (Berman, 1988: 15). Our hypermodern reality that is so eager to do away with the old and move on to the new implies a change in the dynamics of our own identity. We can no longer make the claim that identity is an unchanging rock in a world where as Marx put it “everything that is solid melts into thin air”.

The hypermodern identity is in constant motion. It needs to be dynamic and flexible, diverse and malleable, so as to adapt to its surroundings, but it also alters its surroundings as it changes creating a cycle of ceaseless movement. It is then continually being challenged by the very collective movement it creates. The rate at which outdated facets of selfhood become replaced by new ones accelerates. It exists in a world of ambivalence and conflict, where divided beings linger between different parallel worlds and strive to sow the contradictory fragments of selfhood into a single unit. It exists in an era where uprooted youth attempt to bring two or three divergent heritage lines to converge at a single point they can call home so that they can realise their dream of belonging.

In all this confusion there comes a point when too much multiplicity and fragmentation becomes undesirable and where human experience strives for unity despite the beauty of its multitudes (McAdams, 1997:54). There comes a point where human beings strive for a coherent narrative of selfhood that will allow us to retain a sense of unity and purpose in our lives. There also comes a point where a divided person needs to assuage the waves of dissonance and ambivalence that stir up the sea of selfhood so as to feel whole again.

## **Chapter Outlines**

This introduction outlined and defined the two main components of identity, entitled “being and “belonging” and also touched upon what it is like to try to develop a sense of identity in the era of post modernity. The first chapter deals with the aim of the study, the method applied and the advantages and disadvantages of the research design. The second chapter, entitled *Being and Belonging*, consists of two parts. The first one deals with “being” in detail. It compares the eleven participants’ different self-concepts and varying self-definitions and talks about the complex nature of identity. The second part deals with “the need to belong” and talks about the social nature of our identity, the need for roots and a sense of belonging to a group and the consequences of not having any. The third chapter entitled *The fragmentation of self, conflicts of being, dissonance and depression*, deals with how certain people can come to feel distressed because they are fragmented or feel divided between two places they are from and the conflicts they experience. The chapter also discusses how identity conflicts that are not resolvable leads one to become distressed or depressed and discusses what people do to reduce their distress. The fourth chapter entitled *Lost identities, stigma and depression* deals with the loss of self and its relation to depression and explains how failing to maintain a self persistent self in time can have detrimental effects on the person involved. It also talks about conflicts between self and society.

The fifth chapter entitled *The Birth of the Global Identity*, deals with the lack of belonging and the conflict of being that the participants with multicultural identities feel today. The respondents explain their strategies of conflict resolution, and how they

develop a new sense of being and a sense of belonging by shifting their self-narrative from a “national identity to an “international” or “global” identity.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative and descriptive analysis of the conflicts of identity that are taking place within the present era of modernity. The aim of the study is to try to outline the reasons why and the way in which major shifts in self definition are taking place within our society today. I am attempting to describe the delicate balancing act that “the children of modernity” have to go through to manage to retain both a sense of being and a sense of belonging in the midst of the maelstrom of modernity and also attempting to describe how the multi-national person manages to integrate their fragments of selfhood into a single identity and find a place to call home. I discuss the various meanings that these individuals ascribe to their lives, the conflicts and changes they undergo and the way in which they deal with them.

I conducted eleven qualitative semi-structured interviews with five females and six males. Seven of the interviews were face-to-face interviews and four were conducted via e-mail. The reason this particular interview style was selected was to have some form of structure and to be able to retain the possibility of responding to what the subjects were saying and dig deeper into their conflicts and their self definitions so as to gain a better understanding of their social and psychological dynamic. I felt the flexible structure of the interviews helped the subjects to relax and open up. The face-to-face interviews were one and a half to two hours long and were conducted in a comfortable and quiet setting. This allowed the participants to feel at ease and helped with the quality of the recording making the interviews extremely easy to transcribe.

I used a convenience, snowball sample because it was impossible for me to develop a complete sampling frame. I began by recruiting friends and acquaintances in my immediate surrounding then recruited their relatives and friends through them.

All of the respondents reported that they had problems of “belonging” and 10 out of 11 reported identity conflicts. The eleventh was older and had resolved them. Cultural conflict almost always led to some degree of depression, either situational or clinical. People sometimes saw a therapist and took medication. The focus though was not so much on the depression as on the type of conflict expressed, the lack of belonging felt and the solutions developed in terms of re-invention of the self. While some depression is normal (situational) all thought that cultural conflicts of one sort or another compounded their problems, and all came to develop new identities out of their old ones: What they called global identities.

Using a snowball sample turned out to be extremely useful because it allowed me to discover a “global “subculture whose members all considered themselves “citizens of the world” and interacted together in much the same way as do most minority groups. The age range of the sample was from 24 to 57. Six of the respondents had dual nationalities, three carried up to three passports, one had four passports and one had a single passport but had grown up outside her home country. Two respondents had moved, from country to country, up to eleven times in their lives. All subjects considered themselves to be multicultural, all participants actually had lived or were living outside their home country. All participants had either completed or were in the process of completing a university degree and spoke a minimum of three and a maximum of eight languages. Five applicants already had a Master’s degree or were in the process of

getting one and six either had or were currently completing a Bachelor's degree.

Participants were from nine different universities and between them covered four out of the five different world continents. All but two participants were Canadian citizens, only one of whom was actually born in Canada.

Name	Age	Sexual Orientation	Nationality	Schooling	Identity Issues	Depressed	Self description
Stephanie	24	straight	Lebanese Canadian	British	Does not fit in Lebanon and dating a guy from a lower class that his parents do not accept. Does not feel like she belongs	Depressed	Describes Herself as a citizen of the world
Max	29	Straight	Chilean Swiss Canadian	French	He is a westerner who thinks like an Easterner and who lives in the west. Does not feel like he belongs	Depressed	Describes himself as a citizen of the world
Omar	31	Gay	Palestinian Canadian	British	He is a gay man with an Arab background. His parents and culture don't accept his homosexuality. Does not feel like he belongs.	Depressed	Describes himself as a citizen of the world
Marco	24	Straight	Italian English Scottish Canadian	Canadian	Does not feel Canadian although he was raised in Canada.	Depressed	Describes himself as a child of the earth
Stephan	28	Gay	Lebanese Cypriot Lives in US	British	He is gay and Arab. His need to fit in conflicts with his need to stand out.	Depressed	World Citizen

Name	Age	Sexual Orientation	Nationality	Schooling	Identity Issues	Depression	Self Description
Anuk	27	straight	Turkish.Canadian immigrant	Turkish French	Feels torn between Turkey and Canada and does not feel she belongs in Canada.	Depressed	Feels like she lives two different lives she cannot join.
Frederic	26	Straight	French, Brazilian Canadian	English French	Feels he is neither French ,nor Brazilian nor Canadian and that he has no roots	Depressed	Feels he has no roots He feels cosmopolitan
Silva Mai-Ling	24	Straight	Chinese Canadian	English and Chinese	Feels she does not belong.	Depressed	Canadian Chinese Dzhu-hing
Youmna	55	Straight	Lebanese Canadian	French	Lost Identity. No longer knows how to Define herself since her children left the nest	Depressed	I feel Lebanese But have a Canadian Mentality I am a Westerner as well as an easterner
Asma	26	Straight	Egyptian Lived in Cyprus	English	Does not feel she has the Egyptian mentality or fits in or belongs in Egypt or anywhere	Depressed	Multicultural
Andre	57	Straight	French Canadian Lebanese	Schooling French	Retired and is wondering about the next phase of his life but feels like he belongs and has no identity issues.		Feels like a mixture with Lebanese roots.



## **Advantages of Research Design**

The first aim of the study is qualitative and is to explore the relationship between Identity issues and conflicts, lack of belonging and depression and the second aim of this study is to understand and describe the particular coping mechanisms the respondents developed to deal with their conflicts, crises and depression, and ultimately their re-definition of their identities. It is also the aim of this study to understand the dynamics and social processes that underlie a particular subculture that I have called and will continue to call the ‘global subculture since most participants redefined themselves as “citizens of the world”. I feel that I was justified in using a non probability sample. One of the advantages of this snowball sample is that it was extremely diverse even though it was not a random sample. The interviews purposefully began with extremely general questions. This was done to encourage the person who was being interviewed to disclose their self-concept and their narrative of selfhood without being influenced by preconceived notions of identity. Hence, it was an advantage that I did not begin with the usual basic questions about age, sex, birthplace and origin because the participants were challenged and engaged in conversation from the very start. Beginning with general questions also provided a base for follow up questions. The flexible style of the interview allowed for a deeper understanding of the universe within each person and helped with the flow of communication. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed setting and the tape recorder was placed on one side out of the direct line of vision of the respondent. Active listening turned out to be an extremely useful tool. Since one of the main criteria for the interview was Identity conflicts, most of my respondents needed to

talk and “let things out”. I specified that I was not a psychologist and that I was conducting an interview but three of them actually thanked me during and after the interview, telling me that it had really helped to “talk things out” or that they felt the experience had been “liberating”.

I felt most of the respondents trusted me and felt at ease, which I found to be crucial for self-disclosure and the honesty and details of the responses. Three of the four e-mail interviews went a lot better than expected. The respondents were extremely familiar with this electronic mode of communication.

### **Disadvantages of the Research Design**

One of the major disadvantages of the design is that a probability sample was not used so there is no way to know what portion of the population this minority group or this particular subculture represents. While it may be useful to generalize the results to the “global subculture”, it is not possible to generalize them to the rest of the population as the unit-national and traditional population was left out of this thesis. None the less, the study works, providing useful qualitative data, clarifying the problems of belonging the respondents had, the negative consequences of conflicted identities, and the coping mechanisms which the respondents developed in creating new global identities.

One of the face-to-face interviews was extremely difficult to make use of because the person was not completely at ease with the idea of open self-disclosure. The third e-mail interview was also problematic because the person was not as used to this mode of communication as the other respondents who were interviewed via mail.

## **Summary**

Chapter one describes the aim of the study, the method applied and the advantages and disadvantages of the research design. The aim is to try and outline the reasons why and the way in which major shifts in self definition are taking place within our society today. It is an attempt to describe the delicate balancing act that the people interviewed have to go through to manage to retain both their sense of being and a sense of belonging in the midst of living in modernity. It is also an attempt to explore the relationship between Identity issues and conflicts, lack of belonging and depression. Finally it is an attempt to describe how the multi-national person manages to integrate their fragments of selfhood into a single identity and find a place to call home. The method consisted of conducting 11 semi-structured interviews that were 1 to 2 hours long. A snowball sample was used for convenience. The inclusion criterion for the interview was that people had experienced some form of identity conflict. The age range of the sample was 24-57. Six subjects had dual nationality and all subjects considered themselves to be multicultural. There is a table within Chapter 1 that can be referred to for more details. The advantages of the research design are that the sample was diverse, that the participants were asked very general questions in the beginning which allowed them to disclose their self concept and allowed for a base for follow up questions, that the interview was flexible allowing for people to express themselves and allowed for a better flow of communication. The fact that there was trust between the participants and I was also an advantage because it got them to open up. The disadvantages of the research design were that a probability sample wasn't used which made it impossible to know what portion of the population the

minority group or the particular subculture represents. The results are therefore not generalisable to the general population

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**BEING AND BELONGING**

**Explaining Being**

*“I am who I am... There is me. There is my body. There is also the fact that I am aware of the awareness of myself. I am not sure what you call that.”*

*Marco*

Human beings live in a strange reality. We seem to be the only species on the planet that has developed self-consciousness. We are not only aware that we “are” but we are also aware of our own awareness. We spend our entire lives discovering and creating “who we are” and “why we are” in an attempt to build meaningful narratives of selfhood with the collaboration of our culture and society. Things would be complicated enough if the story were to end here, but there is something else that keeps coming back to haunt us.

The fact that this self we have come to know so well and spent our whole life becoming may one day disappear and disintegrate with the death of our own body. It is because of this that we push the thought of our own death to the backburner of our consciousness and strive to “be” despite the fact that we know we may “cease to be”. To be able to function properly in society we must somehow resolve, transcend or deny this question of the death of our own selfhood and adopt a form of what Lifton calls “symbolic immortality” that will make our narrative of selfhood eternal.

Understanding our fear of death, our tendency to deny it and our need for an immortal meaningful narrative of being, are essential components to a proper understanding of human existence.( Lifton , 1974: 95) Knowing this, I decided to open the interviews with questions like ‘Who are you?’ and ‘Where are you from?’ ‘What do you struggle with as a person?’ The diversity of the responses the participants gave is the very proof of the extent of the complexity of our own identity.

I decided to let the eleven participants introduce themselves so as to allow the reader to get a better glimpse of their self-concept and their identity.

### **Who am I? A brief introduction to the children of modernity**

The 11 participants were asked general questions like who they were ,where they were from and to describe the conflict they were undergoing and I quoted some of their answers to formulate these introductions. The questions were left purposefully open ended to give the participants the chance to describe themselves and their conflicts with the least amount of interference possible.

Stephanie  
Age 24  
School Teacher

*“I am Stephanie. I am part of the totality of life and existence. I am in love with Karim. I love him a lot. I am Aida’s and Jeffrey’s daughter. I am Cynthia’s sister. I am a human being. I studied romantic literature and sociology. I grew up in Cyprus but don’t speak Greek,I was born in Lebanon but don’t speak Arabic , I only lived there 5 years and don’t identify with the mentality. I went to a British school yet am not British. My parents spoke French at home not English nor Arabic. I also am Canadian but only lived in Canada for four years and don’t have the accent or play hockey. I do not feel nationalities define me. I am sensitive. I am caring... sometimes... Foreigners think I am thin, Lebanese think I am fat. I am dating a guy I love whom my family doesn’t really accept. He could be said to be from a lower class and from a more traditional background than me. I feel tension because people around me do not approve. I feel sad I am making my parents worry. I am sad because I love them and I know they love me. I do my best to be with Karim without stepping on their toes.”*

Max  
Age 29  
Undergraduate student  
(Long pause)

*“I am Max. I have Chilean, Swiss and Canadian nationalities but have no ethnicity. I am cosmopolitan, so I am a mixture by definition. I have a cosmopolitan wife whom I love very much. We have very different backgrounds but ended up speaking the same languages. I am in political science, I have divorced parents, and I believe in God, I am a convert to Orthodoxy a Christian. This makes me a Westerner, who thinks like an Easterner. My life is a series of never ending conflicts. My mother married my ex-girlfriend’s father while we were still dating. It was really stressful because when there was tension in one couple there was tension in the other and she was my girlfriend and my stepsister at the same time.”*

Omar  
Age 31  
Businessman

*“I am a man... that’s the first thing I think about, the other item after being a man is being Palestinian and being a citizen of the world because I do feel that my interests are very varied and very eclectic. One of my facets is the fact that I am gay. It is something that I have a conflict with because I do feel that it is a label that represents something that is commercialized that is not necessarily me. I don’t like theatre for example, I don’t like shopping or decorating.... I love cars and rugby... so this whole gay identity for me is very problematic because it clashes with a lot of things that I do enjoy. I lived in Saudi Arabia but never felt like I belonged, I have the Canadian citizenship and lived here for more than half my life but do not feel welcome. I have Middle Eastern values, I lived a clash between the conservative Arab environment I was living in where being gay is a shameful thing and the need to accept and live out my homosexuality. I tried to repress my feelings for a long time. Today I find myself struggling with the foreign American Image of Homosexuality. I am expected to fit a label I do not feel I represent. I want to meet a man and have a long-term relationship but people here are not very fond of marriage or monogamy .The fact that I am Arab does not really help me integrate because there is a very negative stereotype of us here. It is really an uphill battle and it starts with your name”*

Marco  
Age 24  
Undergraduate Student

*“I am who I am... I could give you a nice sophisticated explanation but it would contain a cosmological view. I am just a concept. There is me. There is my body. There is also the fact that I am aware of the awareness of myself. I am not sure what you call that. I think Deepak Chopra might call it the spirit. I come from sperm and ovum. I was born in Montreal; I guess you could say I was Canadian but whatever, for me that meant that I just ended up being born in some land mass called Canada. I hate nationalism; I could not care less about the patriotism of any country. I am a child of the Earth. My father was born in Italy, he is ten per cent Catholic and ninety percent Atheist but he goes with the Tradition. My mother is English and Scottish. I feel Human.”*

Stephan  
Age: 28  
Graduate student

*“I am a twenty-eight year-old man from Lebanon who is currently living in the US with his partner of two years and who is studying for a Ph.D. at Yale. I was brought up Lebanese but also hold the Cypriot citizenship and feel I am more Mediterranean and a world citizen than anything else. I also feel western. I actually feel more like a Westerner than an Easterner, because the "Westerner" gave me a language, tools and framework for living that the Easterner did not. My parents are more Lebanese than I am, primarily because they grew up in Lebanon, in a less globalized world and without having had to go through any major conflict between who they were and what society wanted them to be. There was no clash for them. There was a clash for me. A lot of who I am today was formed in reaction to what it means to be “typically Lebanese” and the clash remains between Lebanese society and me today. The fact that I am gay has always been and will always be a black spot for me. My need to fit in is in constant conflict with my need to come out. Being myself" has always meant recognizing and dealing with my simmering "homosexuality" underneath it all. There is a part of me that will always want to fit in, that thought of getting married to a woman and having children because I would belong and be accepted and because it would satisfy my need for security...”*



Anuk  
Age: 27  
Graduate student

*“I am a girl who was born in Turkey in 1976 and who lived there most of my life until I came to Canada when I was 24 years old... I became myself in my high school period and I became more myself and more mature in Canada. I am describing myself in a linear way because the more time passes the more I find myself. I started somewhere, I experienced a reality in a place and then I changed my place by coming to Canada. This changed my way completely. Turkey and Canada are different experiences, different lifestyles, different realities different forms of input... so I think that I learned more than I would have by staying there and I think this put more spice on my character. The strangest and not so nice part about all this is that I am living two different standards in my body. Something really weird is happening in me. It is like I am living two different lives that have some pauses and that I feel I cannot join because one exists there and the other exists here so I feel like I am divided in two....”*

Frederic  
Age 26  
Masters student

*“Ok... who am I ... I am a man... I am 27 years old... Circumstances have it that I was born in France from a French family on my father’s side and a Brazilian family on my mother’s side. Right then and there, there is already a conflict because I have two sides of a family with two different backgrounds... so, in terms of identity, I don’t think that I am French, even though I carry the passport. I also carry the Brazilian passport but that does not make me a typical Brazilian. It does not make me a typical anything really... because I am not French and I am not Canadian. I did not really have the choice but to keep moving and because of that that makes me a person who has a little bit of everything and at the same time a little bit of nothing... so identity wise... I guess I am the product of many things... I am the product of my family, the product of the places where I have been, the product of my education, my teachers, and because of my going around the world, that is pretty much a very diversified group of people.”*

Silva/Mai ling  
Age 24  
Masters student

*“For me I am Silva, I am also Mai Ling that is my Chinese name. I am a Chinese I would say, but I am a Canadian Chinese, even though I immigrated here when I was eleven, I have changed a lot since I came. My skin is yellow, my eyes are black, my hair is black, so I am definitely a Chinese but when I go to Chinatown to get something, people will speak English to me even if their English is horrible. I don't have a strong bond with Hong Kong any more. I would say that I am a Montrealer... so in a sense I am more Canadian ... I am a girl, I am not only a girl, and I am a woman as well. I am the daughter of my mother, I am a wife, well a fiancée but for me I am a wife... because, well when you are engaged, it is the same as being married, so I am a wife.”*

Youmna  
Age 55  
Artist

*“I am a mother and a woman. Very artistic and sensitive. I come from Lebanon... A beautiful country. I feel Lebanese when I think of my roots, my gut feelings, my love for my country, my belonging to a nation. I come from a family of very educated people which makes me more open minded than a lot of people here, so I identify a lot more with the western mindset. It is a fact... I have a Canadian mentality but feel I belong to Lebanon. I am a woman with multiple faces, a westerner as well as an easterner. Being a mother was the most beautiful experience of my life .It was a capital experience for me...but I found it impossible to be a professional and independent woman, a good wife and a caring mother at the same time...to play all these roles well and harmoniously. So I sacrificed a part of myself...”*

Asma  
26  
Designer, stay at home mum

*“I am a woman as well as a girl... My parents were born and raised in Egypt so I consider myself Egyptian but I only fit in by nationality. I moved back to Egypt after spending twelve years in Cyprus and one year in the US. I have been here for seven years and feel like I am still adjusting to day-to-day life. In Cyprus, the major difference between me and the other kids was that they had more liberal parents so I found I had to constantly explain myself to them. The more people I meet... the more different I feel from everyone else. I think that is because of my multicultural background, I'll never feel like I truly fit anywhere... My teenage years were miserable and traumatic; I was struggling with weight issues and trying to strike a balance between a social life that was approved*

*both by my peers and my father who was very overprotective and strict. I am happily married and love my husband and child but marriage and a baby caught me by surprise. I thought I'd have been rid of my anxiety attacks and self-doubt by now, on the road to a career in design. I think I have become the worst version of me... I have become more introverted and distracted... I'm a hypochondriac and have too many phobias to count. There's very little of 'me' left in there... I am Asma the wife, the daughter, the mother but I've lost touch with myself.”*

Andre

57

Businessman

*“I am one-third North American, one third European, one-third Mediterranean. I love Canada because of its openness, efficiency and respect for human beings. It is the country of the second chance, respected by all. I love France because it is the cradle of my culture and because of its way of life pleasant and intellectually challenging. I love Lebanon because of the quality of its human relations, its fabulous climate and most of all because it needs me. My roots are in Mediterranean Lebanon, the sea of the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the French and the ancient Egyptians. My mind is the son of oriental subtlety, Mediterranean culture, French humanism and western rationalism. I have recently retired and am undergoing a deep self-reassessment, wondering about what the next phase of my life should look like.”*

The eleven men and women interviewed expressed their identities in different styles. For some it was the age that was mentioned first; for others it was gender or roles; others began with their names but 10 out of 11 emphasized their cultural conflicts due to national or cultural contradictions. Andre mentioned his mixed background first. Asma , Omar, Frederic and Anuk began by describing themselves through their gender then went on to talk about their various backgrounds. Youmna described herself as a Mother first then a woman and a sensitive artist. Max, Silva and Stephanie first defined themselves using their first names. Silva used two names. Her English name which was Silva and her Chinese one which was Mai Ling. Stephan defined himself by age, followed by gender. Marco defined himself in a philosophical way by saying he was ”a concept”

A lot of people mentioned their mixed national background when asked where they were from but few managed to mention their mixed background without bringing up a conflict they were living. Their identity conflicts were also articulated in different ways. They were however of three main types. A clash between the person's cultures, a clash between the self and the family and/or a clash between the person's self and one of the cultures.

### **The looking glass self**

*"Each to each a looking-glass*

*Reflects another that doth pass"*

Charles Horton Cooley, 1967

To understand how the participants identified themselves and why they identified themselves in this way it is important to look at Charles Horton Cooley's theory of the looking glass self. According to Cooley, the looking glass self is imaginary. It is based on who we think we are but that in turn is based on what others think of us. It is based on how we perceive ourselves to appear in other people's minds and the kind of feelings that this engenders within us which are determined by what we attribute to those minds.

(Cooley, 1967:183) Cooley gives the example of the looking glass and how we all look inside it and either like or don't like what we see to illustrate how we can be affected by the way another person views us or thinks of us. There are three principle elements that make up the looking glass self. They are: How we perceive to appear to the other person. The way we imagine that person would judge us and how we end up feeling about all of it. (Cooley, 1967:184) In the case of Stephan and Omar whose parents both disapproved

of their homosexuality. They knew what their parents thought of them and how the judged them, and most-likely developed negative self-concepts and feelings of shame and guilt at the thought of being who they were as a result of all of this. The imagined judgment is quite essential in all of this according to Cooley. What makes us feel emotions such as pride and shame is not just the reflection we have of ourselves but the imagined effect that reflection has in another person's mind and their judgment of us. What makes this obvious is that these feelings change depending on the character and weight the person in who we see ourselves has in our mind. The fact that it was Stephan and Omar's parents who disapproved of them as well as their close circle of friends from the same background meant a lot because these are the significant others in both Stephan and Omar's minds. Cooley also points out that we can be ashamed to feel evasive in front of a person who is straightforward but not ashamed in front of an evasive one. We can feel ashamed to be act like an idiot in front of a person who is smart but will not necessarily feel the same way in front of a dumb one. This points out that the personality of the person judging has a role to play in how we are going to be judged and how we are going to react to that judgment. We are always imagining the judgments of the other minds and tend to internalize those judgments. The ideas related to what the person is feeling therefore obviously vary with the varying personalities and environments they encounter. All of this is a fundamentally social process, others judgments are affected by social factors, which means that the self does not exist apart from society.

## **The need to belong**

*“Being cosmopolitan and being international and being a person of the world from an outside perspective seems cool but the downside of this is that you don’t belong in any one place. You can adapt and kind of fit in to a lot of places but it is a short term fit because you don’t have roots, you don’t have enough time to stay in one place to allow them to grow... As a matter of fact, whenever I moved to a place I moved with the same disposition, I said to myself, ok! I am moving here and I am going to build roots! So when I moved from Brazil to Victoria I said, I am going to build roots in Victoria! When I moved to Ottawa I said to myself, I am going to make roots here! I guess that when you don’t have roots, you don’t feel like you belong anywhere and you look and yearn for roots to ground you because without them it becomes really hard to find your place and your function (...) Identity and roots are related but they are not the same...for me, identity is who you are. It evolves with time and is personal but has an environmental factor to it. Roots deepen with time and give you a sense of belonging.”*

*Frederic*

It might strike us as obvious but the concepts of “home” and “belonging” are extremely interdependent at first glance. Our home is where we belong, in every way, whether it be territorially, existentially and/or culturally. It is the place where our community family and friends surround us and where we can grow and identify our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world. Belonging actually brings about feelings of “homeness” as well as “homesickness”. It also plays a great role in a person’s identity. Home is basically the place where we feel we belong. But there are cases when we feel divided between two places we belong to or when our cultural or ethnic home doesn’t match our civic home. Here belonging separates into its two constituent parts: “Being” in one place and “longing” for another. (Hedetoft, 2002: vii)

Identity and belonging are plainly conflict-ridden because nationalism can become divisive (Giddens, 1999:129) and nationalism has appropriated and reconfigured most people’s sense of belonging and identity in ways that deeply affect belonging so that it is not necessarily always harmonious. (Hedetoft, 2002: viii). People may find themselves

elsewhere than at home or in a new home in voluntary or forced exile as part of a minority that may feel adopted or rejected by the culture they are in; in which case belonging more often than not turns into a question of longing to be at home. This condition will often produce images and memories of their authentic roots which are out of touch with contemporary realities. Sometimes people may feel so divided that they may come to believe they are cosmopolitan or global rather than national. People may also feel that they have several belongings, several places, several cultures they belong to and that determine their identity as multiple, situational, fluid whereas others react with uncertainties and feel a lack of belonging to any one place. (Hedetoft, 2002: ix)

In an article entitled “An Analysis of the Push and Pull of Migration” Angelina Leggo attempts to explain why people choose to migrate from one place to another and highlights the factors that cause them to move and the repercussions the move has on peoples’ sense of identity and belonging. She starts by mentioning that the concept of home is a very complicated concept to deconstruct but mentions that it can be exemplified and goes on to talk about how people can live in one place but feel that another is home or how they can sometimes feel divided as they are pushed and pulled between two places. She mentions that people are constantly negotiating their identities and sense of belonging so that they can adjust to the place they are living in. Sometimes they may feel like they belong in one place and the other and in neither place at the same time. At a point in the article Leggo talks about her personal experience dealing with her own migration and discusses how torn and divided she felt about her own identity. She says it takes a lengthy process of self negotiation and re-negotiation but that over time she learned to self-negotiate so as to be able live in two worlds. She mentions that the

push and pull factors that act on the self and are behind migration do not end with migration but continue to affect the person once they have moved. She also spent a good part of the article talking about how most people that live between two homes spend most of their time being pulled by one place and then pushed back to another.

To belong in a particular society, individuals have to feel like they are part of the community they are living in. For this to happen they must be accepted by this community and considered to be what Erving Goffman calls “a normal” ( Goffman, 1986:3). They must also accept the society they are living in and be integrated within it.

For Erik Erikson, belonging to a conventional adult culture that provides a clear rite of passage that tells apart a child from an adult and stresses the responsibilities of adulthood is crucial for adolescents because it protects them from the effects of too much “role confusion” while they are undergo their identity crisis and makes it easier for them to attain a clear “ego identity”, allowing for the crisis to be resolved. This leads to growth and helps to produce the basic strength or ego quality. It is not so much identity crises, which are often characterized by anxiety, distress, disorientation and a certain amount of “role confusion” that Erikson viewed negatively. It is the inability to successfully resolve one of the eight crises so as to grow and move to the next stage of life and develop the corresponding virtue that leads to various forms of pathology. The eight crises are: Basic trust vs. Basic Mistrust in which infants must learn to trust their care giver and hence the world or end up developing a sense of mistrust towards them and towards mankind in general ,Autonomy vs. Shame and doubt where children learn to control themselves and the environment around them by beginning to feed themselves alone to walk alone and to go to the washroom by themselves but may develop shame and doubt if there sense of



autonomy is not encouraged and they fail to become self-sufficient ,Initiative vs guilt .Here children appear more themselves more loving and activated ,they become more assertive and act with more initiative .The danger of this stage is the possibility of falling into a sense of guilt over the goals contemplated especially if they are not attained .This can happen if adults around the child do not encourage them to take initiative and be independent . Industry vs Inferiority where children must learn to obtain recognition by producing things and applying themselves to school work. If children succeed they develop a sense of industry and put work before pleasure. If children fail to do this they run the risk of undergoing a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. The fifth stage is that of adolescence and the fifth crisis to resolve involves developing an Identity or suffering role confusion as already mentioned above. It is followed by the crisis of Intimacy vs. Isolation .Here the young adults who have successfully developed their identity should be ready for intimacy. The avoidance of such experiences because of fear or ego loss may lead to a deep sense of isolation that Erikson calls distantiation. It is in turn followed by Generativity vs. Stagnation where mature men must feel needed and must accomplish the need to guide a next generation and contribute to society. If this fails to be accomplished stagnation, a dissatisfaction and lack of productivity as well as a personal impoverishment will result. It is followed by Ego Integrity vs. Despair where people must come to accept their life and develop what Erikson calls ego integrity which is to look back on one's life with a sense of satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment. The lack of the ability to develop this ego integrity leads to despair, where one looks at one's failure and develops a fear of death. (Erikson, 1950: 247-268)

Feeling a sense of belonging to a culture is of primary importance for each stage of development because the development of “being” does not occur independently from the development of belonging and the development of the self and of society are intimately intertwined. Erikson states this clearly when he writes “Each basic stage crisis has a special relation to one of the basic elements of society .This is because the human life cycle and man’s institutions have evolved together” (Erikson , 1950: 250).

In the case of adolescence, psychologically healthy individuals emerge with a sense of a clear “ego identity”. They know who they are and they know where they belong in a given society, because they have successfully managed to carve an integrated image of selfhood that the community they live in accepts and attributes meaning to. This makes the development of “ego identity” possible only if the person concerned belongs to a culture in which the achievements of selfhood can take on a specific meaning in the first place (Erikson, 1950: 236). Knowing this, it should be obvious then why this task is much harder to achieve for a multicultural hyper-modern person like Frederic, who lacks a sense of roots and belonging and at one point states: “There are no cultural boundaries for me because I don’t have a culture, in the sense that I don’t have a strong cultural background.” Individuals who find themselves unable to resolve the identity crisis suffer too much role confusion, which leads to role repudiation – an inability to bring together one’s various self-images into an identity that forms the core pathology of adolescence.

For George Herbert Mead, the need for belonging is also of primary importance because he believes that the reflexive self is not present at birth. It is created through social interactions that take place in society and is a collection of our personal and social experiences. The group therefore comes before the self. (Mead, 1972:140)

Mead states that it is society and the social process which lead to the development of self consciousness and of self. (Mead, 1972:135) The self is not a tangible fixed object that exists alone but is the result of continual social relationships with others.

Mead makes a critical distinction between what he calls the “sensuous self” which he uses to refer to our sensual and bodily experiences of fear, pleasure and pain and the reflexive self, which he uses to describe our self-consciousness. It is the self conscious self which consists of this very capacity that the self has to become an object to itself that fascinates Mead. (Mead, 1972:136)

This self conscious self is not present all the time. There are moments in life where a person does not have time for self reflection, like the instances when people are running away from something or someone. On the other hand we will find that there are moments that are just as intense, like moments when we are dying or drowning where our self consciousness is at its peak and where we are suddenly flooded with memories of our life experiences. (Mead, 1972:137)

This ability to experience one’s self as an object does not occur directly and in isolation but occurs indirectly through the eyes of the other members of our society or from the generalized standpoint of the social group to which the person belongs. A person becomes an object to themselves and develops self consciousness in fact only by taking on the attitudes of others towards themselves while in a common environment with them.(Mead ,1972 :138) That is primarily why Mead says that the reflexive self is a social structure that arises in social experience. It comes as no surprise therefore that the unity and structure of the self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole. (Mead,1972:140-144) Self-consciousness is developed through a means of

communication Mead calls the social act.(Mead,197:142) The social act contains significant symbols and its basic mechanism is the gesture .(Mead,1972:145) Communication especially in the form of language is key to the development of the self because the social interactions needed to give rise to self reflexivity and the thought process which Mead views as an internal conversation can only take place through the exchange of common significant symbols such as words and gestures that have a shared meaning. The external conversation and the communication process is a social act according to Mead because it requires at least two people in order to take place. It is important to state here that a gesture or symbol may or may not be vocal but that it is universal in the sense that everyone in the social group that uses that symbol or gesture in conversation gets the same basic meaning from it. A gesture also often brings about the same response in the person making it as it does in the person receiving it, making conversation understandable. (Mead, 1972:146)

For Mead it is when a person can begin to talk to themselves and reply to themselves in the way that another person would speak or reply to them that self reflexivity arises. The internal conversation where a person imagines themselves and another conversing is dependant on the external conversation because it cannot occur without the person first having learned a certain set of vocal gestures and significant symbols from others. The self that manages to view itself as an object otherwise known as the “me” therefore has to be a social structure and arises through social interactions. It is therefore impossible to have a self without the presence of the “other”. Once the self has risen, it can isolate itself but will continue to respond to itself as another responds to it, through this internal dialogue which allows the thought process to take place. Mead then goes on to speak of

two other illustrations of social acts which give rise to the self reflexive self. They are play and the game. (Mead, 1972:149)

Play usually takes place in young children and in what Mead refers to as primitive societies. The main thing that differentiates child play from the play of animals is that there is an element of role taking involved in child play. It is through this process where one takes on the role of another, like the role of a parent, a doctor or a policeman that self objectification develops in the case of children allowing for a certain organized structure to begin to take place. (Mead, 1972:150)

After play children begin to play at the game. This involves a more multifaceted more differentiated form of role-playing than that involved in play. The child is now supposed to internalize the roles of all others who are involved with him in the game instead of just his own role. To be able to do that, he must understand the rules of the game which condition the various roles. This arrangement of organized roles according to rules brings the attitudes of all players to form what Mead refers to as a symbolized unity: this unity is what he calls the attitude of the "generalized other". The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. When the individual can see themselves from the standpoint of the generalized other, "self-consciousness" is finally attained and the individual is said to attain selfhood. This reflexive ability or self-consciousness, to "internalize the generalized other" and view oneself as an object, as well as this ability to view oneself from the standpoint of others and take on their attitudes, is what allows human beings to attain the state of consciousness and to develop a clear sense of self. By internalizing the generalized other, the person is now able to

function in society and the dialectic of the self and the other can now arise. (Mead, 1972: 54)

When one comprehends that it is the social act, particularly the linguistic act, that acts as the link between society and individuals and helps them to form the self and when one understands that it is “The organized community or social group which gives the individual its unity of self” (Mead, 1934:154), one can understand the distress the participants felt at the idea of not feeling like they belonged to a community and the depth of Stephanie’s statement when she said:

*“I grew up in Cyprus but don’t speak Greek, I was born in Lebanon but don’t speak Arabic, I only lived there 5 years and don’t identify with the mentality. I went to a British school yet am not British. ”*

Tajfel also speaks of the importance of belonging but phrases things differently. For him what is of primary importance to the well being of a group of individuals is having a distinct positive collective identity, from which he considers a positive distinct personal identity and a sense of personal values can be derived (Hogg and Abrams, 1990). Don Taylor, drawing on his work in “The Quest For Identity”, states that we need to have both a clear sense of personal identity and a clear sense of our collective identity, which we derive from our sense of belonging to a group that is positively looked upon by other groups to be able to function in society, and that a person who happens not to have a clearly articulated sense of both identities, will be dysfunctional. Taylor draws on the case of the African-American and Native minorities in Canada, who experience more academic underachievement, social problems and suicide than other ethnic and non-ethnic communities, to explain one of the ways in which an unclear and a negative collective identity can occur in minority groups that have been subjugated to

“meaningless colonialism” through what he calls “cultural discontinuity”. This discontinuity involves drastic social changes occurring in a colonized culture in an extremely short period of time in an attempt to make them conform to the mainstream colonizing culture. Another way that an unclear collective identity may come about is through what Taylor calls “collective identity overload”. He claims that young people, particularly young men, are suffering from an unclear identity because of the infinite possibilities for collective and personal identities available to them today. There are so many models to choose from that there is a lack of clear, distinct role models. Hence, youth are much more likely to go through what Erikson calls “identity confusion” than ever before. One can only imagine how much more “collective identity overload” a youth who has been socialized by more than one culture will experience in this era of late modernity. One can also wonder and this is an interesting for further research, if the speed at which Globalisation is occurring today may not be causing the same drastic changes in certain societies leading their citizens to experience a form of “cultural discontinuity”

Emile Durkheim, also talks of the need to belong but does so by talking of the utmost importance of being integrated in a society. He compares society to an organism whose main purpose is to perform the regulatory function of civilizing humans. It is only in society, an external moral agency, where man’s desires are restrained by moral rules and regulations that he can find happiness (Durkheim, 1961: 272). Belonging to secondary societal groups is also of primary importance, because they implement and reinforce the rules of social relations and insure that individuals are regulated and integrated into society (Durkheim, 1957: 293, 294). The educational system is one of

those groups and plays the role of socializing the individual (Durkheim, 1961: 264). The societal elders teach him, or her, the morals of that particular society. Conformism is encouraged and deviance punished. The child is also taught to participate in the moral collective life of the group and trained to realize the ideals of the society. He is equipped with the necessary physical, moral and intellectual states that are required for him to survive and thrive in this society. The educational system's main function, then, is to transform the individual into a social being ready to be let out into that particular society.

Upon reading these texts, one might understand why Stephanie, who grew up in Cyprus and went to a British school all her life – hence was trained to realize the ideals of a British society –, did not fit into the Lebanese society when she returned to her country of origin. It would also explain why Andre, a Maronite Lebanese man, whose parents and grandparents had been French-educated and who had been to French school all his life, but had not left Lebanon until he was in his late twenties and never lived in France said:

*“Home is the Mediterranean and the French culture. My roots are in Mediterranean Lebanon, the sea of the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the French and the Ancient Egyptians. My mind is the son of oriental subtlety, Mediterranean culture, French humanism and Western rationalism.”*

He had lived all his life in one place but been socialized by another hence felt like he belonged to both. It also explains why Frederic, while defining himself said:

*“Identity-wise I guess I am the product of many things... I am the product of my family, the product of the places where I have been, the product of my education, my teachers, and because of my going around the world that is pretty much a very diversified group of people”.*

What he might subjectively interpret as a lack of belonging might simply be a lack of social integration.



It is perhaps in his study on suicide that Durkheim mostly stressed the importance of social cohesion in the form of social regulation and social integration. . He found that Protestants had a higher suicide rate than Catholics and was able to demonstrate that the only difference between the two religious groups was that Protestants were much less socially regulated and integrated than Catholics at the time (Durkheim, 1951:157). He was convinced that the stronger the integration of the members of a religious group, the less likely they were to commit egoistic suicide. It is from this study that he concluded that to avoid this, individuals had to be integrated in secondary social groups. If these groups weaken, disintegrate, or do not regulate the individual properly, man's social identity also disintegrates and leads him to commit egoistic suicide (Durkheim, 1951: 250).

The second form of suicide out of the four Durkheim talks about is termed "anomic suicide". It is related to his notion of anomie which often occurs during a period of rapid social change when society, and more particularly legal, educational, judicial and other occupational groups, become incapable of performing their regulative function. They fail to exercise moral constraints on the individuals in that particular society (Durkheim, 1951: 247). Social and moral norms and rules become unclear or simply cease to exist. Social bonds are weakened. Social order and morality are no longer present to limit human goals. This leads to the pursuit of ceaseless unattainable goals, which leads to unhappiness and anomic suicide (Durkheim, 1951: 248). It can be argued that at least egoistic suicide which is related to lack of integration can also be seen as suicide that results from lack of belonging. It can also be argued that the same lack of regulation that occurs in anomic populations and results in anomic suicide, and the same

lack of integration that results in egoistic suicide can occur in people who are either not strongly integrated in society or whose integration pattern has changed thus threatening that person's sense of belonging and their identity.

One must not forget though that Durkheim also talked about "altruistic" suicide that was the result of excessive integration meaning that the other end of the spectrum is not any healthier and that too much of a sense of belonging or an identity that is too rigid and fixed may be just as bad as one that is too loose and boundless. Erikson stated that a little "identity confusion" was healthy and could even guard a person against extremism. There comes a point though where a person feels they have no boundaries, no center and no point of reference and where they feel the fundamental need to be "grounded" in a society.

### **Summary**

Chapter two talks about Being, "the need to belong" and discusses the social nature of our identity, the need for roots and a sense of belonging to a group and the consequences of not having any. It talks about the fact that we spend our entire lives discovering and creating "who we are" and "why we are" in an attempt to build meaningful narratives of selfhood with the collaboration of our culture and society. It mentions that the opening interview questions were who are you? And where are you from? And what do you struggle with as a person? The participants are then quoted one by one so as to demonstrate their self concept and the identity conflicts they had. The eleven men and women interviewed expressed their identities in different styles. There were three types of identity conflicts over all. A clash between the person's two cultures, a clash between self and family and/or a clash between self and one of the person's cultures. Cooley's

theory of the looking glass self is then described in an attempt to understand how some of the participants defined themselves and why they defined themselves in this way.

Cooley's looking glass self is imaginary and is based on who we think we are and how we imagine ourselves to be in others minds. There are three principle elements that make up the looking glass self. How we imagine we appear to the other person. The way we imagine that person would judge us and how this ends up affecting us. (Cooley, 1967:184). We then move on to the Second part of the chapter which is entitled "The need to belong". It starts off with a quote from Frederic who explains what it feels like not to have a sense of belonging and how moving from place to place all his life didn't allow him to build roots or a feel like any one place was home. It then talks about Hedetoft's ideas on belonging and home in order to shed some light on the subject. He states that habitually our home is the place where our relatives and friends are and where we feel we belong. There are however cases where we can't find one place we belong to but rather feel a clash between two places or feel we belong to one place and live in another. This is when belonging separates into its two constituent parts. Being and longing. The importance of belonging for Erik Erikson and the identity crisis is then discussed. He states that belonging to a mainstream adult culture that provides a clear rite of passage that distinguishes a child from an adult and outlines the responsibilities of adulthood is of the utmost importance for the adolescent because it shields him from the effects of too much "role confusion" while he is undergoing his identity crisis and makes the task of attaining a clear "ego identity" easier, allowing for the successful resolution of the crisis. It is not so much the eight crises as the inability to resolve them that Erikson viewed negatively. Feeling a sense of belonging to a culture is of primary

importance for each stage of development. Individuals who find themselves unable to resolve the identity crisis suffer too much role confusion, which leads to role repudiation – an inability to bring together one’s various self-images into an identity that forms the core pathology of adolescence. George Herbert Mead’s thoughts on reflexivity are then discussed. It is stated that the reflexive self is not present at birth but comes into being through social interactions and is a compilation of our personal and social experiences. The group therefore precedes the self. Hence the importance of belonging to a culture. This ability to experience one’s self objectively arises not directly and in isolation but rather indirectly through the eyes of the other members of our community or from the generalized standpoint of the social group. Self consciousness occurs when the individual can view themselves from the stand point of the generalized other and internalize the whole community. By internalizing the generalized other, the person is able to function in society and the dialectic of the self and the other can arise. When we come to understand that it is the social and the internalization of the generalized other that forms the self which is a social structure one can understand how distressed participants were to feel they were not part of a community. Tajfel also speaks of the importance of belonging to a culture when he states that it is of primary importance for individuals in a group to have a positive collective identity from which he believes a distinct positive identity will be derived. Don Taylor draws on his work and claims that we need to have both a clear sense of personal identity and a clear sense of our collective identity which we derive from our sense of belonging to a group to function in society. He states that people who have experienced a cultural discontinuity or a cultural identity overload will not have formed a positive collective identity or positive personal identity

and will have chances of being dysfunctional. It is stated that it is possible for a youth who has lived in various countries and moved around many times to experience collective identity overload. Emile Durkheim also talks of the need to belong by talking about the importance of being integrated in society and the negative effects of anomie. Education is the main way in which the child is socialized and trained to realize the ideals of the society. The educational system's main function, then, is to transform the individual into a social being ready to be let out into that particular society. It is pointed out that it becomes understandable upon reading these texts why Stephanie who grew up in Cyprus and went to a British school had trouble fitting into Lebanese society and why Andre a French-educated Lebanese man felt he was partly French. Stephanie had been trained to learn the ideals of a British society and Andre a French one. It is in his studies on suicide that Durkheim mostly discusses the effects of lack of integration and regulation. He demonstrated that the stronger the integration of the members of a religious group the less likely its members were to commit egoistic suicide. He therefore concluded that men should be integrated in secondary social groups and stated that if these groups weaken or disintegrate so does man's social identity. The second form of suicide is anomic suicide. It is related to the notion of anomie which occurs during periods of rapid social change when social groups become incapable of performing their regulative functions. It can be argued that egoistic suicide which results from a lack of integration can also be seen as suicide that results from lack of belonging. It can be stated that the same lack of regulation that occurs in anomie and results in anomic suicide can occur in people who do not belong in social groups.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

## **THE FRAGMENTATION OF SELF, CONFLICTS OF BEING, DISSONANCE AND DEPRESSION**

### **The fragmentation of self**

*“I am a person who is able to separate myself into two”*

*Silva*

Upon describing herself, Anuk, who is a Turkish immigrant, stated: “I started somewhere, I experienced a reality in a place and then I changed my place by coming to Canada. This changed my way completely. They are different kinds of input, different experiences, different lifestyles, different realities”. When asked if she had experienced any conflict between her Turkish and her Canadian values and which ones she felt she related to most, she repeated what she had said earlier and replied: “I am living two different standards in my body”. She went on to describe how she had been a waitress in Canada to support herself while she was studying and how her family had been less than pleased about it. She claimed that being a waitress in Canada and being a waitress in Turkey meant two completely different things. Here it was “completely normal”. It is something “a lot of students do” and she did it herself to get by while doing other things. Hence, when she crosses waitresses in Canada, she will not consider them to be from a lower class or define who they are by what they are doing, and will often talk to them. However, when she goes to Turkey and is served by a waiter she behaves differently and says: “this reality that I adopted in Canada does not become my reality in Turkey.” Over

there, it is a completely different reality because he is not from my class and there, in that reality, you don't do that... So I don't talk to him..." She tried to explain that it is not because she is snubbing him, but because it is something that is not considered normal there and so the very act of talking to him takes on a different meaning. Neither he nor her friends would be used to it and it would seem like a strange thing to do. Moreover, he might even think she likes him! She concluded by stating: "There, I am a Turkish that grew up with their rules and here, I am trying to adapt myself to Canada's standards... and I know not to judge people just by looking at their jobs or at their appearance."

It seems that the paradox of unity versus multiplicity, plays a particularly important role in Anuk's and in most of interviewees' lives. William James described this paradox rather well. He advocated multiple selves by saying that "a person has as many social selves as there are distinct opinions about whom he cares", but insists that the same person experiences "unbrokenness in the stream of selves" (James, 1892:169).

The function of multiplicity has never been as clear as it is in the post-modern or hypermodern context we are living in today. In a world where we come into contact with so much cultural diversity, where we regularly travel across the globe and go back and forth between a myriad of different settings, the only way to function properly and not continuously disrupt societies' "social scripts", is to act according to what each setting expects of us. Beginning with Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959), symbolic-interactionist and dramaturgical perspectives on the self have emphasized the ways in which individuals adopt multiple roles and enact multiple performances in order to negotiate meanings, status and position in life. Social identities are linked to the particular exigencies of external role and situational demands change the corresponding identities

change as well. Selves reflect the social world. As that world becomes more complex, unity and coherence in self conceptions should become rarer and rarer. In a social world that demands flexibility in self presentation and role playing, the most adaptive form of selfhood may be to have multiple self conceptions. (Ashmore, 1997:51)

In that sense, it seems that Erving Goffman's theory that the self consists of a repertoire of manageable fronts that it can perform over various social settings, rings truer today than ever before. (Goffman, 1953: 208). According to Goffman, people play parts and when a person plays a part he asks his spectators to take seriously the impression he makes on them. The person performs and puts on his show for other people's benefit (Goffman, 1953:17) A person may or may not be taken up by his own act .If he isn't taken up by his own act he is said to be cynical about it. Either way, the person is playing a role. It is through these roles that we know each other and that we come to know ourselves (Goffman, 1953:19). The way we conceive our role becomes natural to us and forms a vital part of our self. Goffman defines a front as "The part of the performance which regularly functions in a general manner to define the situation for those who observe the performance" and says that a front consists of a "setting" which consists of a place or geographical location necessary for the performers to begin their act (Goffman, 1953:22) and the "personal front" which consists of items such as the person's posture, rank, sex, clothing looks, facial expressions and bodily gestures. Goffman divides the stimuli which make up the "personal front" into those of "appearance" and "manner". Appearance is what gives away the performer's social status whereas manner refers to those stimuli which warn a person of the interaction role the performer is to play in an upcoming situation. While manner and appearance may tend to contradict each other like



when a performer who appears to be of higher class than his audience acts in a manner that is equalitarian or intimate, a certain consistency is often generally expected between appearance and manner. There also tends to be a consistency between setting, manner and appearance. (Goffman, 1953:24-25) Observers only need to be familiar with a small manageable variety of fronts in order to know how to orient themselves across many settings and in a wide variety of situations. The tendency for a large number of different acts to be presented from behind a small number of fronts develops naturally according to Goffman. (Goffman, 1953:26) Certain social fronts tend to be institutionalized. When an actor therefore takes on an established role he often finds that a front has already been established for it. In such cases the actor must both perform and maintain the corresponding front. (Goffman, 1953:27) Most fronts tend to be already established and tend to be chosen as opposed to created. It is perhaps one of Silva's statements that provided the most support for his "dramaturgical analysis of the self":

*"I don't behave the same way in Montreal as I do in Hong Kong at all! Here I would say I am freer, I am able to express myself. But in Hong Kong, I feel that I have the obligation to seal myself. Of course when I am with my family I am myself, but when I go out with my mom to the city we suddenly both don't speak that much any more... Just like that, you just change the channel, I would say just like a click ..."*

When asked if the channels ever mixed Silva replied:

*"No, not really, they never mix. I am a person who is able to separate myself into two so when I am in Hong Kong I would just adapt myself to a new cultural identity. At that moment, in this place, I am like that but when I am back here I am just me the way I am here again. So in a sense, it is like putting a mask on, I put it on and when I come back here I put it off..."*

Goffman asserts that a front is the part of the performance which generally functions in a culturally or socially fixed fashion and that an “idealized” front conforms to conventions, mores and rules required by the societal audience. (Goffman, 1953: 22) Understanding this helps us to understand the reason why Anuk felt like it was not appropriate to behave the same way in Turkey as in Canada and why Silva was one person in Hong Kong and another in Canada. The techniques of impression management are, after all, aimed at avoiding performance disruptions and carrying out a coherent, credible and consistent performance that abides by the appropriate social scripts (Goffman, 1953: 208).

While multiplicity has its functions and seems to be a useful tool for the adaptation of a person with a dual or multiple nationality, it is a double-edged sword and the divided person often longs for and tries to find a way to integrate their different fragments of selfhood into a united narrative of self. Anuk, who seemed rather disturbed by her situation and later in the interview, admitted that it depressed her, stated:

“I realised that what is really weird is in myself because it becomes two different lives that has some pauses. When I am there, I push on pause and then I go to Canada, and it is like I start to record another tape, so it is like I have two different cassettes and I am recording two different lives. You know when I am in Turkey, it’s one and in Canada it’s the other one and when I go back to Turkey I push the pause button again and I put the other tape and continue from the place I stopped there. It’s completely weird. I find it very different and very difficult because it is like two realities, two lives going on at the same time but I can’t join them... so I feel like I am divided into two.”

In an article called “The case for unity in the post-modern self”, Dan P. McAdams (1997) also claims that there comes a point where too much multiplicity may not be desirable, where the multitudes of self tend towards a fundamental sense of unity and that the integration of multiple selves into a coherent narrative of selfhood is crucial for our

well being. Tajfel and Turner also seem to have come to the conclusion that multiplicity tends towards unity. They state that we have a general self-concept that consists of a collection of self images arranged on a personal and social continuum. (Ashmore, 1997: p52) Donald Taylor (2002) calls this self-concept the “unifying glue that holds the multiple schemas and selves together into one coherent whole and gives us an overall mental picture of our selves”. He insists that the importance of the self-concept cannot be overestimated because meaningful human behaviour would be impossible without it. Once defined, the self-concept acts as a lens that makes the universe around the person comprehensible and manageable. If we are not able to organize our multiple selves into a coherent self-concept, we will end up with conflicting values and goals that will lead to dissonance and stress, lack of motivation and poor social functioning.

Anuk’s and Silva’s cases, as well as several other cases that will be discussed later on, reflect the truth of these statements. Both women felt distressed at the idea of feeling divided and both seemed to find a way to unite their fragments of selfhood into a single identity to alleviate this distress: Silva used a hyphenated word to unite her two nationalities into one self-concept and said “I am a Canadian-Chinese”. Anuk managed to arrange her various self images into a united narrative and said: “I am a girl who was born in Turkey in 1976 and who lived there most of my life until I came to Canada when I was 24 years old. I became myself in my high school period and I became more myself and more mature in Canada”.

## **Conflict, anxiety and depression**

*“I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not if I could be both handsome and fat, well dressed and a great athlete, make a million a year, be a wit, a bon vivant, and a lady killer as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, African explorer as well as a tone poet and a saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire’s work would run counter to the Saints’; the bon vivant and the philanthropist would trip each other up. The philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such characters may at the onset of life be possible to a man but to make one of them actual the rest must be suppressed. All other selves become unreal, but the fortunes of his self are real. Its failures are real failures and its triumphs real triumphs”.*

*(James, 1892:174)*

According to James, the refinement of selfhood can only be accomplished by choosing one possible self over another. This is done through what he calls the “self industry of the mind”, where our intellect continually decides between conflicting realities and varying and often contradictory potential self-narratives. (Ashmore, 1997: 55) The problem then is not so much with multiplicity in itself, than with being able to reconcile our multiple roles and beliefs so that they do not constantly clash. The reality is such, though, that the more roles and beliefs we have, the more likely it becomes for our roles to clash and for us to encounter conflict. While a certain amount of conflict leads to growth, the inability to resolve a conflict may lead to a great deal of distress.

Freud (1973) states that people are overwhelmed by emotion or “libido” in situations of extreme mental conflict. The fear of being overwhelmed by this emotion and facing disintegration of the ego leads the person to use the defence mechanism of repression and somehow put the impulse he is feeling, which is incompatible with his view of himself, out of consciousness and so temporarily flee from this tension and avoid inner conflict. The repressed impulse or drive may come back in the form of a psychosomatic symptom or a neurosis. There are cases where the neurosis is a harmless solution to inner conflict that is tolerated socially. There are other cases, though, where the symptoms are a lot more debilitating and the neurotic ends up needing treatment. The failure of the ego to successfully resolve conflicts leads to symptoms that are as bad as, or worse than, the conflict they are designed to replace.

The behaviourist Ivan Pavlov (1927) also recognized the relationship between conflict, stress and mental health. He conducted an experiment where he paired a circle with food presentations and an ellipse with no food and showed them to a dog. After the discrimination was formed, he made sure the stimuli were made more and more similar until the subject of his experiment could no longer distinguish between the two shapes. The conflicted dog become agitated, barked, salivated, bit at his harness, and eventually went insane. Pavlov believed that experimental neurosis resulted from a conflict between excitation and inhibition and occurred due to an irresolvable problem the dog was faced with.

While he was describing why he hated feeling conflicted and why he tried to avoid not making a decision between two things Frederic stated:

*‘I guess if you have to choose and you can’t choose and you come to an indecision I guess that would bring somebody into a depression, and I am conscious of this because I experienced it, so I make myself choose. Because if*

*you cannot choose and you are left, right, left, right left, right, at some point you get paralysed and for me the definition of depression is paralysis. I don't know what the technical word for it is, but, in my experience, depression is paralysis, where you know where you have to be somewhere but you can't bring yourself to that level. It can be physical, like you know, you have to be at work but your body cannot take you to work, or you think I should have this level of education or be at this level in my career but look where I am. So the distance between where you think you should be and where you are, if the knowledge of that distance paralyses somebody, this is my definition of depression so I force myself to choose."*

While the paralysis Frederic felt could have been due to the excitement and inhibition he went through when he was faced with an irresolvable problem, it could also, as he stated, have been caused by "a distance between where you should be and where you are". Higgins found that conflicts that came in the form of discrepancies between the idealized self and the actual self could lead to depression and that conflicts or a discrepancy between ought and actual selves leads to anxiety (Higgins, 1987:331). Youmna, a stay-at-home mom who had always longed for a career but who also loved being a "full-time mother", underwent a major depression and experienced what she called a "loss of identity" when her children grew up. Aside from the loss of self, she felt that one of the things that led her to experience depression was that she was living a conflict between who she wished she had become and who she found herself to be. She stated:

*"I felt very frustrated when I compared myself with career women friends. I could have been like them, respected for my own value. I felt like I was nothing. It was so hard that I went through a depression having a negative idea of the self I was compared to the self I could have been"*

I found the last sentence of her statement particularly interesting because she identified the negative image she had of herself that resulted from the discrepancy between her idealized self and her real self as one of the reasons for her depression.

When asked what she thought of herself in school, Asma stated: “My teenage years were miserable and traumatic” and she outlined one of the two reasons as the fact that she was “struggling with weight issues”. When asked if she had ever devalued herself, she replied:

*“All the time. For some reason I was conditioned into thinking that overweight was wrong or ugly... I would look at pictures of myself and want to 'fix' parts of my body. I was very down. Although I wasn't terribly overweight. I probably drowned my sorrows in food – I loved snacking and would do so a lot, especially when I was down... I also read a lot of beauty magazines... you don't see guys pining over someone like Rosie O'Donnell or Oprah, so there was an unspoken impossible standard to live up to...”*

Hence, the discrepancy between the ideal self, usually set by a combination of society's ideals and our real self, seemed to strike again and lead Asma to have a negative image of herself and get depressed.

### **Dissonance: The fiancée who knew she was a wife**

*“I also have a conflict because in my mind for example I am a wife for me but for my friends we are not husband and wife but fiancées, although it is similar. It makes big difference because at home he will call me wife except when my mum is around. So, this sometimes will make me struggle when I am in front of other people who regard us as engaged. So my solution is to just call him by his name.”*

*Silva*

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957) states that we seek balance while experiencing conflict through cognitive reformation. The theory states that we have an inner drive to hold all our attitudes and beliefs in harmony and avoid disharmony or dissonance. If our cognitions are inconsistent with each other, we fall into this conflicted dissonant state of being which is experienced in terms of an extremely unpleasant

psychological tension and then feel a need to adjust our beliefs or adjust our behaviours so as to achieve consonance. According to this theory, dissonance occurs when we are forced to make decisions, to choose between two mutually exclusive concepts and attitudes, especially when the choice involves our own self-concept or identity. Other times at which we experience dissonance is when our attitudes or our beliefs are contrary to our behaviours or when we are forced to reconcile new divergent information with a particular set of ideas.

Silva who is a devout Catholic and believes, as do most Catholics, that sexual relations before marriage is a sin, fell in love with a man whom she is currently living with. Silva and the man she loves are currently engaged but are not married – at least not in the eyes of the Church and of the law. She felt torn between her faith and the love she felt for him for a very long time and “struggled”, wondering if she was “a good Catholic.” She eventually decided that she is not a fiancée or a girlfriend but a wife and states: “When I say I am a Catholic I will more look at myself as a Catholic who is already married rather than I am a Catholic but not married, because if I say that, I will have a conflict within myself.” This conflict she talks about is exactly what Festinger calls dissonance. When asked how she felt before she pictured herself as his wife, she replied:

*“Oh I felt horrible! Honestly it is like there is a constant battle with yourself. When I went to see my mentor or to Church, I could not concentrate or focus. When I went back home, I would feel really guilty, and then, at one point, I did not want to, you know, be with him in that way anymore and then this conflict affected not only me but him as well... and then he told me, ‘Come on, I love you. It is because of you I can do this’, and I understood, but there was something inside that was not working properly, so I said I don’t fit with this role, so maybe I should look for another role. This issue is not black and white... When this topic comes up, there is a really grey zone inside of my head, I feel this way; no that way, no this way; no that way... and I end up feeling really frustrated.”*



Two factors affect the strength of the dissonance: the number of dissonant beliefs, and the importance attached to each belief. So the greater the amount of conflicting beliefs you have and the more important these beliefs are to you, the more distressed you will feel. To feel better, you would have to either find a way to reduce the importance of conflicting beliefs, change the dissonant beliefs so that they are no longer inconsistent and/or conflicting, or change your perception of reality so that it fits within those beliefs. In the quote below, Silva explains how it was only when she began to see herself as his wife that she managed to reconcile two key elements of her self-concept, the belief that continuing to live with the man she loved was right and also feel like she was a good Catholic. She states:

*“So then I did my prayer to try and seek an answer and then suddenly, after six months, seven months, eight months where I felt this battle, where I felt doing it, I was not happy, and not doing it, I was not happy, I was very depressed, I felt like physically I was ok but inside, the little me was twisted, crossed, divided. I don’t know... so after that period I went to St. Patrick’s church and I did a little prayer and I realised, ‘Come on! I am not his girlfriend! I am the wife!!! And I will always, always, always, be the wife!’ So since I realised that, everything is gone... So now, wife has become one of my roles. It is part of my identity as well, this is something I will do deep inside me, I will really admit that I am the wife and it is the identity that brought everything together. Because what is the difference between now and later, we live together, we support each other. We are living together but not in that common law sense, because there you have a chance to look at other people. This is not our case. We are really committed. It was not something that just occurred to me in the street. I was in the church and I said, ‘Oh, come on I am the wife’ and it’s holy and I really have faith in that.”*

Silva did the same thing with her nationalities when she defined herself as Canadian-Chinese as opposed to Canadian or Chinese. We will also see participants feel dissonance when it comes to their multiple nationalities and observe how they will resolve the conflict in chapter 5.

Hence, all inconsistency or imbalance and conflict among the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal elements of the self generates a tension that is the driving force for some change so that inner balance can be restored. Silva therefore managed to resolve all this inner conflict by re-defining her identity.

### **Summary**

The chapter begins with Anuk's description of herself. She states that she lives two different realities. One in Turkey and one in Canada and that she experiences a conflict because she feels she lives two different standards in her body but adapts herself to each country's norms and values. The paradox of unity versus multiplicity is then discussed and William James who says that we have as many selves as we have opinions but who insists that there is an unbrokenness in the stream of selves is then quoted and the function of multiplicity discussed. It is stated that in a fast paced world like today where everything is constantly changing it is impossible not to have multiple self concepts and that most psychologists and sociologists today actually believe that people's self concepts are multiple. Goffman's ideas about the self consisting of a repertoire of manageable fronts that it can perform over various settings are then discussed at length. Silva's statements about how she does not behave the same way in Montreal as she does in Hong Kong and about how she feels she is a person who is able to separate herself in two were statements that provided the most support for the Dramaturgical analysis of the self. It is then stated that a front is the part of the performance which generally functions in a culturally or socially fixed fashion and that an "idealized" front conforms to conventions, mores and rules required by the societal audience (Goffman, 1953: 22). It is pointed out that this helps us to understand the reason why Anuk felt like it was not

appropriate to behave the same way in Turkey as in Canada and why Silva was one person in Hong Kong and another in Canada. It is then stated that multiplicity can be a double edged sword and the fact that multiplicity tends towards unity is discussed. Dan P. McAdam's ideas about how the multitudes of self tend towards a fundamental sense of unity are talked about. Tajfel and Turner's work that mentions that we have a general self-concept that consists of a collection of self images arranged on a personal and social continuum is also discussed. Donald Taylor's work that mentions that the self-concept is the "unifying glue that holds the multiple schemas and selves together into one coherent whole" is also talked about. It is mentioned that if we are not able to organize our multiple selves into a coherent self-concept, we will end up with conflicting values and goals that will lead to dissonance and stress, lack of motivation and poor social functioning. The fact that both Anuk and Silva felt distressed at the idea of feeling divided and that both sought to unite their self concepts and managed to do so is discussed. The fact that choices must be made between conflicting selves is then discussed and James's ideas that state that the refinement of self can only be made by choosing a possible self over another are talked about. It is stated that the problem is not so much with multiplicity in itself as with conflict between multiple roles. The inability to resolve conflict may lead to a great deal of distress.

work is discussed. It is stated that in situations of extreme mental conflict where the ego is overwhelmed by emotions a defence mechanism called repression is sometimes used to put the impulse being felt out of consciousness allowing the person to avoid conflict. We then turn to the work of the behaviourist Ivan Pavlov. He showed that a dog that was divided between two very similar stimuli and went through a conflict between excitation

and inhibition could be driven insane. Frederic then describes how conflict leads him to depression and how the definition of depression for him is the inability to choose between two things. We now turn to Higgins's theory that states that conflicts in the form of discrepancies between idealised self and actual self could lead to depression. Various participants' depressions are then talked about. It is pointed out that most participants concerned felt a discrepancy between their real and their ideal self, a lack of belonging and a loss of self in three cases. We turn to Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory which states that we seek balance while experiencing conflict through cognitive reformation. The theory states that we have an inner drive to hold all our attitudes and beliefs in harmony and avoid disharmony or dissonance. If our cognitions are inconsistent with each other, we fall into this conflicted dissonant state of being which is experienced in terms of an extremely unpleasant psychological tension and then feel a need to adjust our beliefs or adjust our behaviours so as to achieve consonance. Dissonance can occur when we are forced to choose between two mutually exclusive sides of our identity. Silva's case is then discussed. She is living with a man but is not married and is a devout catholic. This caused her great distress. She reduced the dissonance by deciding that she was not a fiancé but a wife and by doing so managed to reconcile two key elements of her self-concept and redefine her identity.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **LOST IDENTITIES ,STIGMA AND DEPRESSION**

#### **Lost Identities**

We live in a period of rapid and accelerating change. We probably will see more changes happen in our lifetime than ever before. No sooner have we adapted to a new technology than another one must come out. No sooner have we taken in one piece of information than a contradictory one is thrown our way. We have no choice but to juggle multiple roles, learn new skills and adapt to constant cultural and ideological changes. We must be able to change in order to adapt to our environment. It is a question of survival of the fittest! Despite all of this, self-consistency remains one of the central themes of self and identity. No matter how many self-schemas and self-bins one may have, they all function to maintain self-consistency.

There is an excellent cross-sectional study on personal persistence, identity development and suicide conducted by Michael J. Chandler and others (2003) that looks at the relationship between personal and cultural persistence and suicide. The researchers state that there is a paradox of sameness and change that exists in all of us. The core of the paradox is that we have to simultaneously keep changing or die and somehow manage to remain similar enough to ourselves in the process so as to be recognizable to our selves. They argue that this paradox arises in the normal course of identity development. Failing to maintain a continuous sense of self or what they call personal persistence has

very harmful effects on the person involved. They lose all notions of moral responsibility and can no longer perceive their future and set goals for themselves. They found in one of their studies that failure to ensure self-persistence was directly related to suicide. Other data from their study reported that rates of suicide were higher in First nations than in the general population and that great variability existed between suicide rates in different native communities. In every case of the study, they found that the suicide rates were lower in native cultures that showed cultural continuity. So the capacity to maintain cultural and personal continuity seems to be just as important as the need to be able to adapt and to change along with our environment.

Youmna, who had to sacrifice career so that her husband could pursue his in a foreign country and they could keep their family together, claimed that being a mother was the best experience of her life and went through a major depression when her children left the country to go to university and states:

*“.... I felt once they grew up, once my role of a mother was fulfilled that I was worth nothing... I felt empty and worthless... It was a total loss of identity for me. One role was over and I had to reconcile myself with who I was... I was devastated and lost.”*

While Youmna’s depression seems to be linked to the discrepancy between her ideal and her real self, it seems to also be linked to a “loss of identity”. She felt like she was “nothing”, she also says that she managed to overcome her depression only once she managed to accept her life choices and her new situation and discovered other aspects of her identity.

Asma, who claims that marriage and a baby took her by surprise and is an aspiring graphic designer, is experiencing panic attacks and also feels like she is losing herself. She states:

*“I think I have become the worst version of me... I have become more introverted and distracted... I'm a hypochondriac and have too many phobias to count. There's very little of 'me' left in there... I am Asma the wife, the daughter, the mother but I've lost touch with myself. I'm just going through the motions. I feel like nothing matters, so what if I eat myself to death or stay home and don't go out for days? Maybe I am depressed and don't know it.”*

Marco, who also lost his sense of self when he experienced a conflict at eighteen between what he considered to be his concept of “love” and the real world after his girlfriend broke up with him, states:

*“The point of the conflict was my conception of love and the reality of life. I realized that my concept of love was not true and this created a conflict in my life, because I held the concept very close to me. It was really, really important to me because it was more than just a concept, it formed part of whom I was, it was a component of my concept of self. So when my concept of love broke down, so did my concept of self and I realized that who I was based on a bunch of silly concepts.”*

When asked how this made him feel he replied:

*“It was as if reality slapped me in the face, I realized that the way I saw the world was just a fantasy. It was equivalent to my discovery that Santa Claus didn't exist; it caused the same sick feeling in my stomach. I was very depressed, I broke down, and I hated myself. I hated my life. I wanted to die. I was crying all the time... I was a mess, a freaking mess.”*

As the literature and the participants' quotes demonstrated above, it is possible to lose oneself when faced with sudden changes in the society around us, especially if we are forced to give up a belief or role that forms the core of our self-concept. This “loss of identity” seemed to be related to depression.

This might be because some of the participants were low in self-complexity. Patricia Linville (1985) discovered that people who have a more complex self-definition that is based on multiple roles and identities are less likely to feel distress when they encounter failure than people who are lower in self-complexity and have a less complex

self definition. A person whose entire identity rests on their academic self, for example, should feel more distressed after encountering academic failure than a person who encounters the same kind of failure but whose self-definition is based on a multitude of alternative independent components and has a more complex self representation. Multiplicity becomes an advantage in this case because while it does not alleviate the distress of fragmentation, it does shield us against the angst and stress of selflessness when we lose a part of ourselves the way the participants did above and allows for a more malleable, hence, more adjustable self-definition.

### **David and Goliath: When the self clashes with Society**

*The fact that I am gay has always been a black spot for me. My need to fit in is in constant conflict with my need to come out*

*Stephan*

There is an old Chinese proverb that states, “The nail that stands out will be pounded”. What Stephan calls the clash between himself and his society, the third type of conflict, seems to have been the most severe in terms of its psychic consequences for all three of the eleven respondents. Three of the eleven people I interviewed lived through this kind of conflict. Two claimed to have undergone a clinical depression diagnosed by their psychiatrist or psychologist as a result. The third person experienced multiple burnouts and attempted suicide as a teenager. Two out of the three participants continue to take anti-depressants today.

Stephanie, who is from a “higher class” than the man she loves, is living in a society that places great emphasis on social class and feels her family and society do not



approve of her relationship. She and her boyfriend are madly in love but he has trouble being accepted in her circle and she has problems fitting into his.

Stephan and Omar are both gay men who have conservative Christian Middle Eastern backgrounds which place a lot of importance on the founding of a family and the reproduction of children and consider homosexuality an abomination. In describing the problem he had with certain aspects of Middle Eastern society, and after taking the time to make sure that I understood that it was not a problem that was exclusive to Lebanese society but that occurred in any conservative culture, Stephan stated:

*“There is an assumed hetero-normativity, an assumed conformity with respect to family, marriage, religion, political affiliations and expectations. The ‘Lebaneseness’ that I describe is an overarching norm of community that emphasizes the social not the individual.”*

Omar also stressed the role that the conservative culture played in his life and in his family relationships by stating:

*“My mother has... expectations of me... and one of her expectations is you know, me getting married and having kids... A lot of it has got to do with her role as a mother and the fact that she wants to become a grandmother, and obviously now that she is surrounded with other women her age who are now becoming grandmothers, she feels a certain pressure to fit in as well, because that is what is expected to happen in our culture, and when they are talking about grandchildren, she wants to have grandchildren to talk about too.”*

Every society has a set of norms, laws and mores that guide social behaviour. In “Stigma”, Goffman explains how society establishes the means of categorizing persons to facilitate social interaction and in turn leads us to lean on these anticipations and beliefs that we have, converting them into “normative expectations” and into righteously presented demands (Goffman, 1963:2). It is only when a person violates these norms that

people actually become aware of them and label the person concerned as deviant (Becker, 1963). The deviant labels people receive are often negative and involve a societal stigma. This stigma infringed on the person leads him to be discredited by society. He loses the respect and the acceptance of others around him and loses the right to call himself a “normal”. He also loses his sense of belonging to the group of “normals” around him that discredits his identity and considers him to be somehow “less than human” (Goffman, 1963: 3).

In trying to explain why he considered getting married at one point in his life Omar explained the distress he felt at being labelled a deviant and expressed his desire to be a “normal” by saying:

“I think if anything it is seeking normalcy, to have that normalcy. I want to be like everybody else, Typical Joe. I want to have the same things other people have, I wanted to get married for those reasons. I even posted my picture on a website last year, to find a woman to marry me and I was doing it as openly gay, too... so it is not something I am doing to suppress my homosexual identity, it is more to fit in, to belong. It is also because I do want to be a father. I do have a paternal side to me that I need to fulfill. I was raised in an environment which has conservative values and which has expectations. I was raised in an environment where the signs of success are getting married, having a family and being able to have a good life, so for me to feel successful, I needed to do these things! These are things that were bred into my head!”

When talking about deviance, it is possible to talk about anything from what constitutes a punishable crime for society to what is considered mental illness today to what might be what threatens the collective identity and way of being of a particular society. There are also certain personal identity traits that stand out in a person, like uncleanliness and unattractiveness that are considered to be flaws and might lead the person to be considered deviant by their community. Possessing them can lead to great discomfort across different social situations. Deviance is particularity distressing when

the norms violated are the norms of social identity because the psychological integrity of the individual is put in question (Goffman, 1963: 128). Mere desire to abide by the norms is not enough in cases like these because the person concerned is often physiologically and psychologically incapable of abiding by them (Goffman, 1963: 129). The case of homosexuality in a conservative Christian or Middle Eastern community, who refutes it, is a good example of this.

Once primary deviance has occurred and the person has received the negative label from society, his self-concept and social identity may be drastically changed. He may internalize the negative label and come to think badly of him or herself. Edwin Lemert called this internalisation secondary deviance. This internalisation of the negative label infringed upon the individual is the beginning of a new deviant career in Goffman's eyes. Stephan illustrated this at two different points. Once, when he was talking about how he felt left out in his high school and once, when he got depressed. Here is what he had to say on each occasion. On the first occasion he said:

*“Deep down, I wish I could have belonged, by being straight, but also by being part of “the group”, rather than introverted, more macho, whatever that means, more conformist... but once I realized all of that was impossible for me, it was only then that the narrative turned into something like, yes, I am proud of being different!”*

On the second occasion, while outlining the reasons for his depression he said:

*“I got depressed because as a result of regarding my gayness as despicable, I ended up being involved with guys who had really deep personality issues, and who ultimately hurt me even more than I hurt myself and I got depressed because I thought all of the above was normal, that it is normal for me to be despicable, that it is normal for me to lust after and form relationships with drug addicts, type A personalities, HIV positive people.”*

The deviant person will feel an extreme amount of ambivalence, according to Goffman, because he acquires his identity standards from the very same society that is condemning him. He will often apply these societal standards, which he has internalized, and in a sense form a part of his identity to himself in spite of his failing to abide to them (Goffman, 1963: 106). Omar expresses his struggle below:

*“... It was like two pieces of the puzzle that did not fit together, on the one sexuality and on the other hand the image that I have for myself. They didn't fit together! Because as much as I feel an attraction towards men, I was not comfortable and am still not comfortable with the idea of growing old and being gay. On the other hand it is reality because I am not attracted to women, and I will never be. So the sad thing here, is on the one hand I know what my limitations are, see for me it is a limitation, I am even saying it is a limitation, I know what my reality is but my image of success has still to evolve, I do not feel it has really evolved. Yet, I am still not really comfortable with what I see myself as in the next 20, 30, 40 years.”*

The lack of acceptance from their surrounding social group and the disapproval they experienced from their cultural surrounding lead to the internalisation of the negative labels in all three cases. This was in turn related to a negative self-image and depression. Silva, who is now an honours student, gave a great description of how a negative label can be internalized while outlining the reasons why she was depressed as a child:

*“My sister was the smart one, really the smart one so they got really good grades... but when it comes to me, I am not good at maths, I am not good at language either. So I failed those topics, which my brother and my sister did really good at, so at one point they looked at me and said ‘What happened to you!’ So I felt really bad and really guilty and I felt the pressure and I wanted to be good as well. I was really depressed when I was young, I felt inferior. I had a low self-esteem. I hated myself at the time...I would write things like you are garbage in my diary... At one point I felt so depressed that I dumped all my schoolwork aside, and I said yeah ok, they will be the good ones and I will be the bad one! ”*

A negative label is not all that individuals who undergo this kind of conflict between their selves and the society have to deal with. They often face the great challenge of needing to choose between who they feel they are and who society tells them they should be. The choice is one that is almost impossible to make because if they choose who they are over their society, they lose their sense of belonging and if they try and deny whom they are to fit in, they lose part of their sense of being. The fact that being and belonging are two important components of identity means that either way they lose a part of themselves. Society often gives the stigmatized person mixed messages telling him he is a member of the group, and therefore a normal human being, but that he is also different and an alien or semi-human simultaneously. Hence, the stigmatized individual finds himself facing a contradiction and is very conflicted in the way he comes to view and think of himself. The conflict they undergo is not the kind of conflict that can be solved from one day to the next and so they are more likely to get depressed.

In expressing how the lack of acceptance by those she loved made her feel Stephanie stated:

*“Had I been stronger it wouldn’t have made a difference... but already I was going through a depression. So right now whatever anyone says that is negative makes me cry.... I want to cry right now. Life is supposed to be simple... you love so you are with the person you love. People around don’t accept that and they don’t shut up about it.”*

There are two ways to resolve this kind of conflict, according to Goffman. (1963) The first is for the person to try to support the norm despite himself. Omar went to extreme lengths to do this. He claims that he went as far as to convert to Islam to try and repress his homosexuality and states:

*“Islam did not leave any room for homosexuality ... it is very anti-gay and I needed that extreme in my life, to erase my homosexuality because in my head there was no way I could be a Muslim and gay... it is mutually exclusive...I also became Muslim because Islam*

*is a very strong identity in the Middle East and for me it was a way of embracing the mainstream.... A very homophobic mainstream, but because I prayed, because I went to the mosque, because I became a part of that mainstream there was no way I could be gay... so I tried to convince myself."*

That coping mechanism did not work. It is very difficult for a person who does not abide by the norms of identity to change that because they often have no control over the part of themselves that is breaking the norm according to Goffman. This can be extremely distressing because it can also create a discrepancy between real and ideal self if the person longs to be a "normal" but remains a "deviant" despite themselves. Omar explains this below:

*"Whenever I did anything with a man it was followed with a huge sense of guilt, there was a lot of guilt to the point that I would cry...um. I was depressed because of the guilt that I felt because as much as I tried to suppress my homosexuality, it was never something I could suppress."*

The other suggestion Goffman (1963) gives is for the deviant to keep a distance from the community that upholds the norm, refrain from developing an attachment to it and find a community, which accepts them. This is something that both Stephan and Omar have done. While talking about his move to the west, which he now considers home, and his relationship with his parents Stephan states:

*"The turning point for me started when I realized there is no way under high heaven I can develop sexual feelings for women, and hence I ought to find a place where I have a place and I am realizing that cutting them off, as they have with me in many ways, from major parts of my life, helps."*

While describing a phone conversation with his mother, Stephan, who has now come to accept who he is and was told his homosexuality would never be accepted in his society and milieu, responded by saying: "the point is that I have come to choose my

social circle”. When asked if he had any friends that considered him to be “abnormal” or who were homophobic, anti-Palestinian, Omar responded:

*“No, because that person would be rejecting me... even if there is only a hint of anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian sentiment. I was rejected by the whole world; I don’t want to be rejected by my own friends... The whole point of having friends is because I want them to accept me.”*

Both these options outline the importance of a social group that accepts the stigmatized individual and hence the importance of belonging. There is a third option; one that I have not come across in the book that also outlines acceptance and that Stephanie seems to have chosen. It involves surrounding herself with other people who are not considered to be “normals” and avoiding those who look down on her relationship while remaining in the society. This option involves the stigmatized individual finding a community within a community that supports and accepts them and who are going through the same things they are. When Stephanie was asked how she dealt with the social disapproval that involved her relationship, she responded by saying: “I don’t care about society... though snobby neighbors give me looks sometimes. I just distance myself from people who make a huge deal about my being with him.”

It seems that in all three cases what made the situation easier to bear was to have a support group that accepted the “deviant” and gave them a sense of belonging. The third option is an interesting one and might be the one that allows for social change to happen. It did after all only take one child to look at the emperor in the story of the emperor’s new clothes and shout out that he had no clothes for everyone to open their eyes and see that this was so. Real life is a little more complicated than the fable because it often involves persecution by the surrounding society. Darwin, Galileo and Columbus were all examples of that but if the self does win the battle, if David manages to aim for Goliath’s weakest

point, there is a chance that the societal norms may crumble and give rise to new ones. If the stigma is too deep and the person cannot seem to find a way to change the norms without sacrificing themselves, the best solution is often the second one, which involves packing and moving to a place where they feel like they can belong to and be themselves at the same time.

### **Depression**

There are a variety of conflicting opinions found within general medicine, psychiatry and psychology about what constitutes depression. The “disease” category remains elusive, however, and careful inspection of the literature reveals that researchers from the different psychological schools give priority to different varying phenomena when they diagnose and write about depression. Most psychiatrists and most general practitioners today treat depression as a syndrome that is comprised of various symptoms. They rely on the biomedical model and use the dominant medical discourse to explain the “risk factors” and “etiology” of the” disease (MacLean and Stoppard, 2004). This model is the driving force behind the DSM IV (1994), which classifies clinical depression as one of many varying mood disorders (dysthemia, bipolar disorder and seasonal affective disorder being examples of the latter). Major depression is diagnosed when the presence of various inclusion criteria are detected. The existence of a “depressed mood” combined with four symptoms, involving insomnia or hypersomnia, loss of appetite or over eating, low energy and/or poor concentration, low self worth, irritability and thoughts of death or suicide will label a person with the disease. While there is an axis that considers the environmental causes that can contribute to the illness (Axis four), these factors are



viewed more as trigger or risk factors that effect an already faulty mechanism and not the causal factors of the underlying state the person is going through.

Ten of the eleven participants interviewed underwent one or more depressive episodes at some point in their lives Depression was found to be related to conflict that came in the form of discrepancies between the real and ideal selves, to paralysis which resulted from conflicting beliefs that formed an integral part of the self-concept, to negative self image, to sudden changes that created a lack of self continuity in the self-concept and created what the participants referred to as a loss of self and to a lack of belonging to a particular group or society.

Lifton (1974), who was a psychiatrist, explains how conflict, loss of identity and loss of belongingness can lead a person to depression. He claims that we encounter both “death imagery and “life imagery” while living our lives. Death imagery involves separation, loss of belongingness, disintegration and fragmentation of our identity and loss of a sense of wholeness. It is associated with loss of purpose, and an absence of worthwhile goals and a sense of depression. Life imagery, on the other hand, is associated with connectedness and belonging and with a coherent whole self by which we are known. Both life imagery and death imagery are present in us and everywhere around us, but while life imagery leads to a sense of wholeness and security and confirms to us that “we are”, death imagery is associated with what Lifton calls “death anxiety”. Hence, identity conflicts and anything that works to fragment the self and break it down, as well as any incoherence in our identity that threatens the legitimacy of the self as an existing entity, brings death imagery to the forefront of our mind, reminding us of the possible disintegration of selfhood that may come with our final breath. This drives us to

desperately seek wholeness, integration and life imagery so as to gain a sense of security and so that we can seek to live despite the inevitability of death.

This drive for meaning, for security, for life imagery and for self-persistence, the need to reduce dissonance and conflict and to belong to a particular group, all drive us to seek to unite our often conflicting and contradictory fragments of selfhood into a coherent narrative that encompasses and reconciles all the aspects of our being and gives us a sense of belonging.

### **Summary**

We live in a period of rapid change. Self consistency however remains one of the central themes of self and identity. No matter how many self-schemas and self-bins one may have, they all function to maintain self-consistency. So despite the fact that we must juggle multiple roles we must still find a way to remain self-consistent through time. Michael Chandler states that we must simultaneously keep changing or die and remain unchanged enough in the process to be recognizable to ourselves. Failing to maintain self persistence has detrimental effects on the person involved and can be directly related to suicide. Suicide rates in his study were also found to be lower in native cultures that showed cultural continuity. So the capacity to maintain cultural and personal continuity is important for personal wellbeing. Youmna, Asma and Marco who all felt a loss of self were all found to be undergoing a depression. It is pointed out that loss of identity is related to depression. This loss of identity in the participant's lives was temporary however and they were able to re-construct their self concepts. One of the ways it is possible to re-construct one's self concept easily is if one is high in self complexity.

Patricia Linville states that people who have a more complex self definition that is based on alternative components of self encounter less distress when they encounter failure or a loss of part of their identity than people who have a less complex self definition.

Multiplicity is an advantage here because it shields against the angst and stress of selflessness.

We then move on to talk about conflicts between the self and society and discuss the fact that three people lived this conflict. Two claimed to have undergone a clinical depression as a result. The third person attempted suicide and experienced multiple burnouts. Stephanie who is of a higher class than the man she loves feels her family and society do not approve of her relationship. Stephan and Omar are gay men who have conservative Middle Eastern backgrounds which disapprove of their homosexuality. Goffman's ideas on the fact that each society has a set of norms and that breaking the norms would have a person labelled as deviant are discussed. It is also mentioned that the person who broke the norms would carry with them a certain stigma which would lead them to be discredited by society. Omar discussed how he craves to be accepted, normal and to belong. Stephan also talks of how he wished he could have belonged and how he got depressed as a result of regarding his gayness as despicable. It is pointed out that deviance is particularly distressing when the norms violated are the norms of social identity like that of homosexuality because the psychological integrity of the individual is put in question. The lack of acceptance and disapproval experienced from their surrounding social group lead to the internalization of the negative label in all three cases. There are two ways to resolve this conflict according to Goffman. The first is that the individual uphold the norm despite himself. The second is that the deviant keep a

distance from the community that upholds the norm and finds a community which accepts them. This is something that Stephan and Omar and Stephanie have done by either moving to the west or finding social groups who accept them. This also outlines the importance of belonging and of finding a good coping strategy to deal with conflict.

The fact that ten out of eleven participants underwent one or more depressive episodes is then discussed. Depression was found to be related to conflict that came in the form of discrepancies between the real and ideal selves, to paralysis which resulted from conflicting beliefs that formed an integral part of the self-concept, to negative self image, to sudden changes that created a lack of self continuity in the self-concept and created what the participants referred to as a loss of self and to a lack of belonging to a particular group or society. Lifton explains how conflict, loss of identity and loss of belongingness can lead a person into depression. It happens through the death imagery we encounter which involves separation, loss of belongingness, disintegration and fragmentation of our identity and leads us to feel death anxiety. It is countered by life imagery which involves a sense of connectedness and belonging and leads to a sense of wholeness and integration.

The need for self persistence, to reduce dissonance and conflict and to belong to a particular group, drive us to unite our often contradictory fragments of selfhood into a coherent narrative that reconciles the various conflicting aspects of our being and gives us a sense of belonging.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE BIRTH OF A GLOBAL IDENTITY

#### Dzhu Sing

Silva, who considers herself a Chinese-Canadian, has two names; her Western name, which I have just mentioned above, and her Chinese one, which is Mai-ling. In an attempt to assert her identity, she states: “My skin is yellow, my eyes are black, my hair is black so I am definitely a Chinese”, but at another point in the interview she says, “I am a Montrealer” and claims that “In a sense I am more Canadian than I am Chinese”. Silva speaks perfect Cantonese and fluent Mandarin but when she goes to Chinatown, she is distressed to find that everyone speaks to her in English, “even if their English is horrible” and wonders why they do not speak to her in her dialect. She suspects it might be the way she dresses and claims that people from Hong Kong, where she originally comes from, “really stay on top of the fashion,” while she dresses down more and wears whatever she likes, which she considers to be more Canadian. She claims that most of them will mistake her for “Canadian born Chinese” so that her identity shifted as a result and she became “Canadian-Chinese”.

At my request, she proceeded to explain the difference between “Canadian-Chinese” and “Canadian-born-Chinese”:

*“There is a word for Chinese when you are not 100 per cent Chinese. In Cantonese slang they call it Dzhu Sing. It’s a word that is related to bamboos. You see, bamboos are made of many closed sections. If you take a section out you won’t see a whole. This word refers to the centre of two bamboo sections and what it means is that people who are Canadian-born Chinese do not have the Chinese heritage, they look Chinese but they are not Chinese, because they*

*adapted to Western culture so they are no longer pure Chinese. So even though their bloodline is Chinese, they are just like a white person with a Chinese coat on them... When I go to China town people will look at me as Canadian-born Chinese because they think that I am not able to speak Chinese. But that is not who I am, I speak Chinese, I am Canadian but I am also Chinese... I am a Canadian Chinese."*

In this simple explanation of the word Dzhu Sing, Silva illustrates well the dilemma of the person who has a multicultural identity. A person with a dual or a multiple identity might feel split between two worlds or feel completely rootless and pulled in many different directions, hence may end up feeling like a "hybrid" or a "mixed bag" that is the sum of all those worlds. They may feel like they have partially assimilated their heritage culture but feel somehow different from other people in that culture because of their second nationality, or they may run the risk of not absorbing their heritage culture and may have moved so many times during their lives and received so many types of schooling and so many modes of socialization that they are not truly integrated in one particular society. This kind of person often has the advantages of being well traveled and speaks several languages. They are open-minded and can easily adapt to new environments. However, they may experience a greater amount of conflict than the average person because they are being pulled in many directions at the same time. They feel like a constant foreigner that has grown familiar with the land they are visiting wherever they go but never feel completely at home anywhere. They are Canadian to the Chinese because they have a Canadian mindset and Chinese to the Canadians because they have Chinese names and have parents who have a Chinese heritage. They belong everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. They are "floating without support in a poorly defined space, in a stubbornly vexingly betwixt and between location" (Bauman, 2004: 29).

### **There is no place like home**

When asked in which of all the cities he had lived in he fit in best, Max, who has moved a total of 10 times in his life, sat back with a perplexed and troubled look on his face: “Fit in?” he asked, as if the term was completely foreign to him. “Nowhere”, he stated, almost matter-of-factly, as if the answer was obvious. When asked why he had desired to end his life at the age of twelve he replied: “Because I felt like I didn’t belong in the world”. Today Max considers himself “cosmopolitan”. He claims he is a mixture by definition, that home is where he happens to be and likes to think that he surrounds himself with other “ cosmopolitan and worldly people ”. He even has a “cosmopolitan wife”. They are “from different backgrounds but ended up speaking the same languages”.

When asked where home was, Omar who considers himself to be a “citizen of the world”, looked at me with a sad smile, as if I had just touched on a sensitive point and replied, “I don’t have one”. I repeated the question, rephrasing it differently: “Are you sure there is nowhere you feel you are at home or no place can you call home? He shook his head and replied:

*“No, because for me Palestine is an imaginary place, I have never been there. It is an identity just like someone who is Jewish but who has never been to Israel it is the same, the exact same concept. I have an idea of what Palestine is but it is only an image of a place... I see it on the news, but I have never set foot there. The Palestinians in Palestine have been accustomed to a completely different life experience than mine, so if I were to go back to Palestine right now, like a lot of Palestinians who tried to go back, I would not be considered a real Palestinian... I lived in Saudi Arabia where, unless you are from there you don’t belong so I never felt like that was my home. I have been in Canada for more than half my life. I have the Canadian citizenship but I don’t feel welcome. My name is ethnic and hard to pronounce so it does not matter how hard I try to work on my French, I will never be a Tremblay or a Boisvert”.*

All eleven participants found it hard to answer the question of what place or image came to mind when they thought of the word home.

Stephan, who has a Middle Eastern background and has gone to a British school all his life and who is currently living in the United States, seemed confused about it and mentioned that home was the Mediterranean but also the West and claimed he was a “world citizen”. When asked where he was from Marco said he came from “sperm and ovum”. When I rephrased the question and asked him whether he was Irish, Scottish or Canadian he replied that he was human. He then insisted the entire planet was his home and that he was a “child of the earth”. Asma, who had grown up in Cyprus and also gone to a British school, claimed that while she had chosen to live in Egypt, she felt very different from the rest of the people around her and was not a “typical Egyptian”. She felt that because of her “multicultural background”, she would never “feel completely at home or fit in anywhere”.

Anuk, who had been to a French school and not moved to Canada until she was twenty-four, mentioned she felt at home in Montreal. She also stated that she felt home in Turkey and that she often felt divided between Canada, where the man she loved lived and her new family was, and Turkey where her parents lived.

Mai-Ling, who had moved from Hong Kong at the age of eleven and had been to a British school then had switched to the Canadian system upon moving to Montreal, stated her home was in Montreal and that she was a “Montrealer” but followed up with some mixed feelings about the topic and said:

“In a sense I am a stranger when I go back to Hong Kong. I don’t feel that home sense any more. I like to go back to my area, my corner, because there is a lot of Westerners and I am comfortable with it. I feel like I am coming home



because my parents are there, but at the same time I am not home, I am a stranger when it comes to the city.

Youmna, who was schooled in French, clearly stated: *“je me sens très liée à la France, mais pas en appartenance géographique”*. She claimed her mind and her way of thinking was western and that her culture was French but said “I belong in Lebanon” and “I feel Lebanese when I think of my roots” and was able to claim that Lebanon was her home. She did not however feel like a typical Lebanese and often felt like more of a Westerner in Lebanon and a Lebanese in the West. Andre stated that for him home was the Mediterranean and the French culture and that he made a distinction between the word ‘home’ and his countries. He mentioned he was a “mixed bag” and that his roots were in the Mediterranean.

Stephanie, stated “no one place is home”. When I asked her where she came from she replied:

*“The real answer is from existence... but there is some mystery there and always will be. If an immigration officer asked though... I’d mention Cyprus, Lebanon and Canada; but really I am just from life and from that whole and mystery. I do not feel my nationalities define me ... Nationality wise I am international.... yes... meaning I feel part of life and existence in general and above socially constructed nationalities”*.

Frederic claimed that he felt like he was international as well and said that he felt like he had no roots, no culture and no boundaries. Home, for him, was Montreal because he claims it is a cosmopolitan city, but he insists that it is purely circumstantial. When asked where he came from he replied:

*“I don’t think that I am French, even though I carry the passport, and I also carry the passport from Brazil but that does not make me a typical Brazilian actually, that does not make me a typical anything really ... because I am not French and I am not Canadian... I did not really have the choice but to keep moving and because of that, that makes me a person who has a little bit of everything and at the same time a little bit of nothing... so identity wise... I*

*guess I am the product of many things... I am the product of my family, the product of the places where I have been, the product of my education, my teachers, and because of my going around the world that is pretty much a very diversified group of people.”*

When I asked him who his friends were, he said:

*“I would say that all my friends have the same profile as me in the sense that they are not typical anything, they are people that are international. So people that come from one country and live in another country or come from several countries. I have never met anyone who has the same pedigree the same profile as me...I have met a lot of people with mixed backgrounds... no one purely Canadian so I relate to people and have long lasting relationships with people that are not from one specific place and I think that it is not because of chance, I think it’s a way of being you think differently “*

### **Summary**

Silva’s case is discussed. She considers herself Chinese-Canadian. She states she is Chinese but also feels like a Montrealer and claims to be more Canadian than Chinese. She claims that most people consider her as a Canadian born Chinese and that her identity shifted as a result and that she became Canadian-Chinese. Silva then goes to describe the dilemma of a person with a multicultural identity by explaining what the word Dzhu Sing means and how she feels split between two worlds and feels rootless or that they might belong to neither world. People with multinational identities may feel like they have moved so many times during their lives and received so many types of schooling and so many modes of socialization that they are not truly integrated in one particular society. They may also experience more conflict than the average person because they feel pulled in many directions at the same time. They belong everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.

Max who had moved 10 times in his life mentioned that he considers himself cosmopolitan and a mixture by definition. Omar who considers himself to be a citizen of the world stated he felt he didn't have a home. All eleven participants found it hard to answer the question of what place or image came to mind when they thought of the word home. All but one mentioned they felt either cosmopolitan or like a mixed bag. Stephan stated he was both Mediterranean and from the west and that he was a "world citizen". Marco said he came from sperm and ovum and that he was "a child of the earth, Asma that she had a "multicultural background" Silva and Anuk felt torn between their two countries. Youmna stated her home was Lebanon but mentioned she was very linked to France. Andre stated his home was the Mediterranean and that he was a mixed bag. Stephanie stated "no one place is home" and Frederic claimed he was international.

## Conclusion

### The Citizen of the World and the Birth of the Global Identity.

Bauman begins his book on identity by expressing the distress he felt and his inability to choose between one of two anthems at his graduation ceremony.

*“I was asked to choose between the British and Polish Anthems, well, I did not find the answer easy. Britain was the country of my choice and by which I was chosen through an offer of a teaching job once I could no longer stay in Poland the country of my birth because my right to teach was taken away. But there, in Britain, I was an immigrant, a newcomer: Not so long ago a refugee from a foreign country: An Alien. I have since become a naturalized British citizen but once a newcomer can you ever stop being a newcomer? I had no intention of passing for an English man and neither my students nor my colleagues ever had any doubt that I was a foreigner, a Pole to be exact. So perhaps the Polish anthem should have been played? But that would also mean acting on false pretences: thirty odd years before the Prague Ceremony I had been stripped of my Polish citizenship. My exclusion was official, initiated and confirmed by the power entitled to set apart the ‘inside’ from the ‘outside’. Those who belong from those who don’t, so the right to the Polish national anthem was no longer mine.” (Bauman, 2004: 9)*

He then vividly describes how choosing to use the European anthem alleviated conflict and helped him resolve a possible identity split because it was the identity that embraced all the alternative conflicting reference points or identities. He describes the decision as simultaneously “inclusive” and “exclusive” and states that “it removed from the agenda an identity defined by nationality”, allowing him to retain all of the facets of his selfhood while also providing him with a source of belonging and unity (Bauman 2004: 10). He states enthusiastically:

*“Why not use the European Anthem?” “Indeed, why not? A European no doubt, I was, had never stopped being – born in Europe, living in Europe, working in Europe, thinking European, feeling European; and what is more, there is thus far no European passport office with the authority to issue or to refuse a “European passport” and so to confer or to deny the right to call ourselves European.” (Bauman, 2004: 10)*

It is for these exact same reasons and in the exact same way that the participants who had multicultural backgrounds came to see themselves as being ‘world citizens’. It is only by calling himself “Mediterranean” that Andre can reconcile his Middle Eastern roots with his French upbringing, and it is only by calling themselves “citizens of the world” that Omar and Stephan can bring together their Western mindsets with their Eastern origins. Without calling himself cosmopolitan, Max cannot join all of his separate national identities under one self-concept and find a way to belong everywhere at the same time. Without calling himself a “child of the Earth”, Marco can’t feel like he has a place he can call home; and without calling themselves international, Stephanie and Frederic cannot bring together their different backgrounds and modes of socialization into a single narrative of selfhood and cannot retain their sense of belonging.

We have already seen in the previous chapters the effect that identity conflict and dissonance, loss of selfhood and lack of belonging can have on a person’s mental health. What the participants are doing by calling themselves “international” is the exact same thing Silva was doing when she called herself “Canadian Chinese”. They are reducing dissonance and bringing their different fragments of selfhood into one united self-concept. They are shifting their multiple national reference points to a single global one so as to feel whole and regain a sense of belonging. They are obliterating the imaginary border lines that exist in their heads so as to feel home everywhere instead of nowhere.

This form of identity is not an imaginary one. It is at least no more imaginary to be “international” than it is to be French, Lebanese or Canadian. For, if one can be truly French and truly Lebanese and truly Canadian, then one can also be truly French-

Lebanese-Canadian and hence feel like they are a “mixed bag” that simultaneously belongs to three continents – and so to the world. If a person speaks eight languages, they cannot help but feel like they are somewhat cosmopolitan. If they are schooled and socialized by a culture different from the one they have inherited at home and live in yet another culture, they cannot help but feel like a “world citizen”. Bauman explains in his book how “the idea of identity and national identity in particular did not ‘gestate’ and incubate in human experience “naturally”. It did not emerge out of that experience as a “self evident fact of life”. He goes on to describe how the idea arrived as a fiction and was transformed into a fact and states that “The idea of identity was born out of a crisis of belonging” (Bauman, 2004: 20).

Belonging and identity, however, are not “cut in rock”. They are not secured by a lifelong guarantee; they are eminently negotiable and revocable (Bauman, 2004:11). “Globalisation means that the state no longer has the clout to keep its marriage with the nation rock solid and impregnable” (Bauman, 2004: 20). It is very rare for people to work and live in the same country they were born in today and it is common for an ethnic person to get an ‘English’ or an ‘international’ education. Western nations are opening their arms wide to immigrants, to improve their economy and make up for their low population growth. Mixed marriages are occurring all over the world and more multi-national children are being born every day. They can no longer turn to the nation in the hope of giving them a sense of belonging for, as we have seen in the chapter above, it is almost impossible for them to feel completely at home in one country. As a result of this and of the other effects of globalisation, “seekers of identities, can expect little reassurance, let alone fool proof guarantees from the state powers left with but meagre

remnants of their once indomitable and indivisible territorial sovereignty” (Bauman,2004 28).

In the same way that the “nationals”, who have a single cultural background, continue to turn to their nation for their sense of being and belonging, so the “multinationals”, who have internalized various sets of rules and norms from several cultures and who have several generalized others that all form fragments or facets of their identity, try to reunite their multitudes in a global identity in order to find a coherent narrative of self hood and turn to the world to find a sense of belonging.

While one might claim that I have only interviewed a minority of people who are not representative of the general population and that it might be argued that they are merely trying to reduce their identity conflicts and so refer to an imaginary identity, the person who would make this claim would be missing two fundamental points I tried to make in the earlier chapters. The first point that is of fundamental importance is that identity is a process that is dynamic and negotiable; it is created out of a need for a human being to have a reference point in society and feel the security of having a sense of being and belonging. The fact that it is negotiable makes it possible for us to shift from one way of identifying ourselves to another over time. So a shift from a national to a global identity is not merely an imaginary one but a reflection of and an adaptation to the changing reality. The second point is that this minority of people is a growing minority. Shifts in identity definitions can be traced across the last three generations and will continue to take place. This process might begin in the imagination the way any other identity process begins; out of a need to reduce conflict and find a unity of being and a sense of belonging, but it is nevertheless a very real process that is occurring and that has

real connotations. Stephan and Stephanie, Max and Omar all specifically stated, without being asked, that they felt more international than their parents. Stephan stated that his parents were more Lebanese than him primarily because they grew up in “a less globalized world”. The results show clearly that children of parents with multinational backgrounds – Max, Frederic, Stephanie and Marco – all felt a lack of belonging to a particular culture or society; they did not feel that their nationalities defined them in any way and were more inclined to call themselves “citizens of the world.” Children of ‘uni-national’ parents who had immigrated to different countries while raising their kids retained an emotional tie to their nation of origin but did not feel like they really belonged there, and were inclined to mention their country of origin when they were asked where they were from while at the same time stating that they were “citizens of the world”. On the other hand, children of parents that had a uni-national background that had spent a good part of their life in their country of origin and immigrated to other countries when they were adults like, Anuk and Youmna, were easily able to identify their roots and tended to have a national as opposed to a global identity, even if they felt divided between two places.

Frederic and Max both stated that they purposefully sought “cosmopolitan friends”, meaning that there is now a “cosmopolitan community” where “citizens of the world” can mingle and get to know each other. Max, who has three cultural backgrounds mentioned he had a “cosmopolitan wife” who is also Canadian but has two other cultural backgrounds of her own. One can only imagine just how “cosmopolitan” their children, who will have twice as many cultural backgrounds as they do, will feel. It is only logical



to assume that the children of the sample of the eleven participants that were interviewed will feel “more global” than they are.

The equation is not as simple as it first appears though. The second factor that played a role in how “cosmopolitan” the participants felt was the amount of times they moved cities or countries in their childhood. Frederic, who had moved a total of six times, and Max a total of seven times in his childhood, both felt they lacked roots. Stephan and Omar, who also moved more than once, felt they were citizens of the world as mentioned above. Andre, who had also moved in his childhood felt like he was a “mixed bag”.

The third factor that seemed to influence a person’s sense of belonging and how “international” a person felt was the number and intensity of different modes of socialization that they had received. Stephanie, Asma and Stephan all grew up on a Greek island and went to a British school but had parents who either spoke French or Arabic at home. Asma, whose father was a traditional Muslim man, grew up feeling like the upbringing she had at home was a world apart from the one she had at school. All the participants ended up following a school curriculum that was not the one of their culture of origin. It seems then that the faster the world moves, the faster populations mix and the more varied the different forms of socializations become, the more “multinational” the corporation gets, the more likely its employees are to be shifted around the globe and the more “worldly” their children will feel.

I am not claiming that it is the end of nationalism. If anything, this hypermodern maelstrom may serve to explain why certain people are attempting to hold on to their national identities with an iron fist. They may be acting out of fear of losing their culture

and being assimilated. The renewed attachment to the nation as well as the renewed popularity of religion can both be explained by the very same need to retain a whole sense of being and belonging and avoid the pit of selflessness. By holding on to their origins and their traditions and attempting to ground their roots as deep into their land as they possibly can, these people form a movement that acts as a counter-current that tries to resist this colossal wave we call globalization. I am not drawing any conclusions about which current will have the final word or trying to outline how they interact. This is a captivating topic that is worthy of further research but is not the aim of this study.

The principle conclusion that can be drawn from this thesis is that, out of a need to reduce the distress encountered by dissonance and to resolve conflicts of being, and out of a dream and a very human need for belonging, a new identity is being born before our very eyes today. Its birth is resting on the same need for belonging that gave birth to nationalism. This identity is the “global identity” and it belongs to the citizens of the world.

## Appendix 1

### Interview Questions:

Questions were mostly a guideline as most interviews were in depth unstandardised interviews.

General open ended questions:

Who are you?

What social groups are you involved with?

Could you please describe three of your closest friends?

If you are married or in a serious relationship (classified as more the sixth month with a future) could you describe your spouse/boyfriend/ girlfriend/

Questions on Ethnic origin and Ethnic identity

Where do you come from?

What is your country of origin- where are your parents from?

Where do you feel at home? Which nationality do you identify with?

Where do you fit in/blend in?

How many languages do you speak?

What is your first language?

What is the language you feel most at ease in?

What are your friend's first language?

What are their backgrounds?

For those who have a dual nationality: If you had to choose between x and y which would you choose?

Are your parents uni- national or multinational?

Where did you go to school?

Questions on faith and or Religious identity:

Do you consider yourself religious? (Give a definition of religion)

Do you attend services on a regular basis?

Are your parents religious?

If so are they of the same religion as you and as each other?

Do you feel a conflict between your religion/faith and your secular lifestyle?

Have you ever felt any kind of religious conflict or a need to choose btw two

Religions?

Have you ever had to do or say anything at work that is against your beliefs or your religion?

How does it make you feel?

What does your religion have to say about gay marriage or sexual orientation?

What is your sexual orientation?

Have you experienced any conflicts between your sexual orientation and your religion or culture?

Are your parents accepting of your orientation?

Are your friends accepting of your orientation?

Of what orientation are your friends?

Do you have any friends who do not accept you for who you are or who do not understand you?

Have you ever experienced any kind of conflict in your life?

How did it make you feel?

How do you reconcile your orientation with your religion?

Your job with your religion?

Have you ever seen a psychologist /psychiatrist /counselor?

Have you ever had anti depressants?

Have you ever felt down?

How often do you feel down?

Why do you feel down or depressed?

What get you down?

What is your level of education?

Have you ever felt like you did not belong somewhere/like an outsider?

Have you ever been excluded from a group? How when and why?

How do you feel towards that group?

Have you ever been depressed? If so can you please describe the circumstances surrounding your depression?

What upsets you?

Have you ever felt discriminated against?

What is your biggest conflict?

How do you deal with conflict?

Do you like conflict?

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