NAVIGATING NEW NATIONAL IDENTITY ONLINE: ON IMMIGRANT CHILDREN, IDENTITY & THE INTERNET

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ABSTRACT

Increased immigration finds children in a quandary to develop an identity consolidating their multiple locales and cultures. Additionally, the internet is highly integrated into children’s lives and plays a consequential role in their identity formation processes. “Local culture,” as referred to by scholars (e.g. Elias & Lemish 2008, 2009; De Block & Buckingham 2007), is a major influence on diaspora children’s identity formation. Unfortunately, “local culture” is not clearly defined in literature thus far; it can refer to any combination of at-home and outside-the-home cultures with which children in a new country interact. This paper delineates parts of local culture in a way prior literature has not and introduces the notion of “new national identity” (NNID) as a component of local culture that immigrant children acquire. NNID is derived from new national culture. It is the culture of the immigrant-receiving nation as commonly available to all immigrants regardless of their ethnic background. The case studies presented here examine NNID acquired through internet usage specifically by Iranian-American and Iranian-Canadian youth. The case studies bring to light the importance of birthplace in how children of the diaspora perceive new national identity. Their perceptions and conceptions of this development can be mitigated by many factors including, but not exclusive to, place of birth, age at which emigration occurs, parental familiarity with new national culture, local social demographics, and local co-ethnic support, to name a few.
The research and writing of this thesis would not have been possible without guidance from Dr. Evan Barba and Dr. Fathali M. Moghaddam.

This dissertation is dedicated to parents and children navigating immigration together.

Many thanks,
Minoo Razavi
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Thesis Statement

Increased immigration finds children in a quandary to develop an identity consolidating their multiple locales and cultures. Additionally, the internet is highly integrated into children’s lives and plays a consequential role in their identity formation processes. “Local culture,” as referred to by scholars (e.g. Elias & Lemish 2008, 2009; De Block & Buckingham 2007), is a major influence on diaspora children’s identity formation. Unfortunately, “local culture” is not clearly defined in literature thus far; it can refer to any combination of at-home and outside-the-home cultures with which children in a new country interact. For example, information about local culture in Mitra (1997) describes ethnic Indian communities in the United Kingdom. Diaspora websites, she writes, can introduce Indian immigrants to their local British communities, events, or places of worship. In the case of Mitra, local culture means local Indian-British culture (almost) exclusively of interest to Indians in Britain, not other British people. In a paper on Russian immigrants to Israel by Elias & Lemish (2008), “local youth culture” is used to refer to the Israeli youth culture. In this case, the local culture is the local culture available to all Israelis, Russian immigrants or not. This paper delineates parts of local culture in a way prior literature has not and introduces the notion of “new national identity” (NNID) as a component of local culture that immigrant children acquire. NNID is derived from new national culture. It is the culture of the immigrant-receiving nation as commonly available
to all immigrants regardless of their ethnic background. The case studies presented here examine NNID acquired through internet usage specifically. The case studies bring to light the importance of birthplace in how children of the diaspora perceive new national identity—a notion that had not been included in the initial hypothesis.

Why This Study?

The internet is most admired for its ability to “eliminate” physical distances. Unsurprisingly, this development has prompted a considerable amount of research focused on immigrant usage of the internet to overcome geographic separation. In my own experience as a child of immigrant parents, however, the internet is not limited to being a way to connect with my parents’ culture continents away; I regularly use the internet as a tool to connect to American culture. This may seem ironic, because even though I physically reside in the United States of America, I and many of my peers often interact with its culture through virtual means.

Literature on the topic of immigration, youth, identity, and their online activities only partially covers such scenarios. It has been noted that local acculturation is a factor in immigrant identity formation (Mitra, 1997; Elias & Lemish, 2009; De Block & Buckingham, 2007), but it remains unclear what the definition of “local” actually entails.
Clarification of Terms and Research Parameters

A few notes are in order. The children referred to here are 18 years of age or younger. Age plays a determining role in how children use the internet to develop identity at different stages of their childhood. At this point in time, age-specific resources for the topic of internet and identity are still few. As such, this review is not limited to studies of one age group; there are examples of research from childhood through adolescence.

Second, “connecting” to or with a culture here denotes a purposeful reach aimed at better understanding an unfamiliar cultural topic. This is not to deny that every act is an act of connecting to a culture. In the context of this study, “connecting” is limited within the frame of immigrant assimilation. Connecting means learning (anew), discovering and solving a foreign cultural component. In this study, a purposeful action taken to learn about American or Canadian cultural values, frames of reference, or common knowledge is all represented by the term “connecting.”

Third, this thesis’s case studies are with Iranian-American and Iranian-Canadian youth. The literature review, however, is not limited to immigrants of Iranian descent.

Methodology

The methodology for this paper is inspired by Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory was first established by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss (1967) and places a heavy emphasis on data-based analysis. Any conclusion from the data should be “emergent.” In other words, one ought not have a pre-conceived theory in mind and set out to prove or
disprove it. The Grounded Theorist must allow data, data codes and categories to present an emergent theory. Like many methodologies, Grounded Theory has evolved and been improvised upon. Kathy Charmaz’s (2006) “Constructing Grounded Theory” serves as the main source for the qualitative study in this thesis.

Strictly speaking, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), literature reviews should not be conducted prior to a Grounded Theory study, lest they taint the researcher’s mind with preconceived notions. Ideally, the researcher gathers data as close to the subject as possible, in the best case collecting authentic, first-hand data. If this is not possible, extensive archival research is recommended (Ribes, 2012; Charmaz, 2006). Grounded Theory and the ethnographic perspective on data are closely intertwined. After data collection the researcher must engage in extensive data coding. Coding data involves numerous reviews of the data until one derives reoccurring themes, codes, from the content. The coding process should lead to the creation of multilayer categories that are connected to one another, such as subcategories or umbrella categories. This comprehensive analysis of the data is facilitated when the researcher is highly sensitized to subtle textual and code variations. Ethnographic reviews that emphasize understanding subjects in their whole sociocultural context are particularly useful in this type of research. Lastly, the researcher identifies emerging theories from the data. Once the researcher establishes his rendition of a Grounded Theory applicable to the data, he may conduct a literature review to critically assess the field. Nevertheless, in many iterations of Grounded Theory the literature review is already present in the scholar’s mind due to his specialty in
a subject area, or it is simply conducted as first step as with other prevalent methodologies. It is advisable to be sensitized to possible biases the scholar may inherit from extant literature—though this can never be objectively measured or controlled.

**Interviews**

For this study, interviewees were recruited from the researcher’s personal social network. All participants are of Iranian parentage, under 21 years old, currently living in the United States or Canada. The interviews were semi-structured. A part of all interviews was my presentation of a New National cultural question from my own experience (e.g. what does “driving” have to do with in a “book drive”); I would then ask if they related or ever found themselves in a similar situation with American identity. Each participant was interviewed for 45 to 60 minutes, and some were contacted again for follow-up questions. While all the participants are connected socially to this author, they are representative of different immigrant lifestyles and thus differ greatly in their local identity and their approach to the internet. The dissimilarity in subjects serves this paper well, because it reveals the many nuances a subgroup such as Iranian immigrant children versus children of Iranian immigrants presents. Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed verbatim, reviewed, and analyzed in great depth.

For the purpose of this work, conducting interviews with seven participants was most feasible. As such, expansive case studies from extant literature supplement the qualitative study of the interviewees. With this two-fold approach, this paper contributes a
solid foundation to the merits of differentiating cultural inputs in immigrant children’s “local identity” (a term from extant literature) into two distinct categories: the new national input and the local input. Both kinds of inputs are discussed in the context of diasporic internet usage.
CHAPTER 2: CHILDREN, IDENTITY, AND GLOBALIZATION

Children, youth, and adolescents are marginalized parts of the population in most countries, including in “the West” (De Block & Buckingham, 2007; Larson, 2002). They are often considered too young or inexperienced to express legitimate opinions. Pervasive globalization has increased the likelihood of children being immigrants or born to immigrant parents. Consequently, children may be dually marginalized: first because they are children and second because they are not established natives of the land to which they (or their parents) immigrated. The disadvantaged position of children in diaspora communities is a quality that will shape their use of the internet, one particular aspect of which is discussed in this paper.

Identity describes the self; it is an integral notion that develops during childhood and throughout life. Optimal psychological functioning is rooted in an individual’s sense of identity (Waterman, 1992). At the individual level, Erikson (1968) points out some of the many factors that contribute to identity: choice of vocation, ideology, philosophy of life, ethical capacity, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity are just a few examples of what shapes individual identity. Identity forms from consolidating all these choices and definitions with awareness of one’s capabilities.

A complementary definition of identity is incorporated in Jenson’s article “Coming of Age in a Multicultural World” (2003). She discusses the notion of “cultural identity.” Jenson states that one’s worldview constructs identity. A worldview is a collection of
beliefs and values “within the cultural context” (p. 190) in which one lives. Given the
diverse cultural exposure children experience, forming a cultural identity involves a more
complex issue mainly “deciding on the cultural communities to which you will belong”
(pg. 190). This is how individual identity is deeply intertwined with one’s sense of
collective identity.

In collective identity, a person seeks groups in society with which to associate
himself (Levy & Killen, 2010). “When you have exposure to more than one culture,
Jensons (2003) writes, “forming a cultural identity becomes mainly a conscious process
and decision” (pg. 190). Markstrom-Adams discusses extant literature on collective
identity and how it is formed (1992). He refers to Enright and Deist (1979), who provide
research on the mechanisms of social perspective-taking that they believe produce identity
formation. They assert that in order to understand the self or to form an identity, one must
first start by understanding others. Then, the individual must determine how he or she is
both similar to and different from others (Markstrom-Adams, 1992).

Markstrom-Adams (1992) presents data on seven-year-old children’s understanding
of the matter. Starting at age seven, children exhibit a sense of collective identity or of
“understanding others” (Markstrom-Adams, 1992). As they grow older children start to
identify what others, i.e. social groups, they are similar to or different from; thus, they
begin to shape their collective identity.

Bennett & Sani (2010) research children’s subjective identification with social
groups. They introduce their study by asserting that identity formation, from collective to
individual identity, develops in the psyche from approximately 10 years of age. By the age of 10, children indicate early grasps of notions like stereotypes or reactions to negative feelings toward their collective identity (Bennett & Sani, 2010). In reacting to negative feelings or identifying stereotypes, children demonstrate associations with various social groups; in other words, they exhibit recognition of their identity allegiances.

Studies that contribute to the understanding of children’s group affiliations and collective identity mostly involve verbal self-labeling. For example, a child might say, “I am Chinese” or “I am a girl.” Using this method, Aboud (1987, 2001) pioneered experiments on children’s sense of identity, focusing on the children’s subjective notions of ethnic identity. Self-labeling and subjective notions of identity come from the groups with which one associates oneself. In the increasingly mobile nature of populations today, immigrant adolescents face a diverse environment of groups. These groups present ample choices of associations that help form subjective notions of identity.

Bennett and Sani (2010) and Aboud (1987, 2001) focus on young children, who are not yet confronted with the transformations that occur during adolescence, defined as age 13 and over. Identity choices by adolescents are more consciously developed (Larson, 2002; Erikson, 1968, 1994) compared to the circumstantial development of identity in earlier ages. However, as stated before, due to the general dearth of applied research on this topic, this work does not eliminate reviews of important studies that involve younger children, nor those that involve older adults. The reviews in this paper all contribute consequential findings to the topic of immigrant identity formation and the internet that apply to adolescents as well as children.
In summation of this section, the development of individual and collective identity is symbiotic. Exploring individual identity impacts collective identity, and vice versa. The research here is founded on the notion that the internet as a tool to navigate identity affects qualities at both the individual and collective levels.

**Children and Globalization**

What particularly fuels studies on identity formation today is the steadily increasing international movement of populations, one of the most important aspects of globalization. Children and adolescents are at the forefront of globalization (Dasen, 2000; Schlegal, 2001; Larson, 2002; Jenson, 2003; De Block & Buckingham, 2007). As globalization increases the variety of cultures to which people are exposed (Jenson 2003; Larson, 2002; Giddens, 1991), forming a cultural identity involves a more complex process. This process, Jenson (2003) writes, is one where we “consciously decide” on our affiliate cultural communities (p. 190). From this conscious decision-making, a new diasporic identity is born (Mitra, 1997; Larson, 2002; Elias & Lemish, 2007, 2008). The diasporic identity is a consolidation of connections to the new host culture as well as the culture left behind, and the adaptation in between.

A diaspora identity appropriately suits Tajfel’s (1978) take on social identity development: that individuals strive to create a positive and distinct identity. The diaspora identity strives to take qualities of the mother culture in order to be more distinct in the
host country, and it serves to present the combination of both cultures (previous and current host) in a positive light (Tajfel, 1978). “The initial stages of cultural adaptation are among the most vulnerable of human situations that may provoke a deep sense of insecurity” (Elias & Lemish, 2009, p. 547). As such, a communication medium that allows space, flexibility and comfort is essential; the internet provides one such environment for identity formation. The next chapter elaborates on the value of the internet as a medium.
Chapter 3: The Internet and Identity Formation

Before focusing on the internet, it is important to realize that other media, older than the internet, were and are still consequential to identity formation. Wartella and Robb (2011) discuss the history of media, indicating that it has always been consequential to children’s development—from radio to television to the internet. Jenson (2003) cites a study by Condon from 1998 on the Inuit of Canada and television narratives; traditional and media-dispersed values, she concludes from Condon, both play a part in identity formation. Many scholars confirm that identity development is mediated. Giddens’ (1991) book, “Modernity and Self-Identity,” describes identity development in modern times as characteristically mediated. Lastly, Jenson (2001) demonstrates that all media makes a difference in identity formation (p. 193).

The Rise of New Technologies and the Internet

Many scholars confirm the flexibility and comfort of communication mediated by online platforms. Jenson (2003) writes:

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Media, more so than first-hand interactions with others, allow the adolescent to choose what to see and hear. Also, media usage would seem to allow for more individual interpretations than first-hand interactions in which other people are more likely to co-construct experiences. (Jenson 2003, p. 193)
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The relatively unrestrictive (compared to offline interactions) environment online for personal interpretation and expansive navigation opportunities enhance identity formation. For immigrant adolescents, if not for all children, the internet, plays a “central role” in identity formation that is “expressed in the negotiation with their real life identities” (Elias & Lemish, 2009, p. 545).

New technologies are at the core of macrosocial trends that shape the world (Larson, 2002). Today, “internet-mediated” personal growth (Larson, 2002, p. 6) is increasingly commonplace for adolescents. As children spend more time online, it becomes increasingly necessary to include online activities alongside offline ones when assessing their development (Kim, 2001). This in turn positions the online environment as complementary to children’s whole social development. Kim (2001), Elias and Lemish (2009) go as far as saying that the internet plays a decisive role in the identity shaping process. Media, according to De Block and Buckingham (2007), is “inextricably embedded within everyday life”—true, even for pre-adolescent children. Children and adolescents are at the “forefront of technology” (De Block & Buckingham, 2007, p. 18) and at the “forefront of globalization” (Dasen, 2000). More inclined to integrate online media in their daily life when developing their shifting identity than older generations, children use online spheres in a manner complementary to their offline environments.

Within the realm of the internet and its utility for these globalized children, Web 2.0 in particular is where user-centered communication thrives. Web 2.0 focuses on offering platforms that cater to the users’ needs and desires, that easily allow self-publication and user-generated content. Since 1997, literature on this topic has
experienced growth, especially on the theoretical level; in comparison, applied research and experimentation is surprisingly slim. The following sections review extant literature specifically about the internet as a platform to experiment, discover, and negotiate identity for children in diaspora communities.

The internet, inherently an open forum with freedom of speech—at least, it is supposed to be, in most places. It offers a medium where the powerless or less powerful people can voice their opinion. Wharf and Grimes (1997) discuss the ideal usability of the internet for counter-hegemonic discourses. This openness stands in contrast to print or television media, which are subject to heavy peer-review and filtering, for better and for worse.

The internet as a forum for empowerment for marginalized communities serves adolescents and youth quite well. Adolescents and youth are a marginalized group in society (Larson, 2002)—often ignored, underestimated, or limited by social norms. A study by Roger Barker (1968) found that even in the United States, young people were “excluded from many settings” (cited in Larson, 2002, p. 20) but the today tools like the internet provides them with “access” and “potential for support and affirmation.” In this way, technology gives a wider arena to youth’s choices for preparing for adulthood (Larson, 2002).

De Block and Buckingham (2007) point out the dual vulnerability of children who are immigrants. Children are often defined as “incompetent” or “vulnerable” compared to adults. Immigrant children, still fluid in their identity allegiances, are in a dually fragile
state because notion of self is not solidified for themselves either. Without the internet, marginalized migrant children’s sentiments remain largely silenced in conventional social spheres and traditional media (Larson, 2002; Grimes & Wharf, 1997). Contemporary to Wharf & Grimes’ (1997), Mitra (1997) confirms the inherent freedom for marginalized voices of the internet in an applied study that focuses on diasporic communities online.

Research on the internet and immigrant identity began most notably with Mitra’s (1997) canonical study. Mitra (1997) discusses the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom using the internet as a social sphere. The author’s main theory is about the development of in-group and out-group discourse, which is not directly about identity; however, it does provide valuable data for the topic at hand. This work is also one of the earliest academic articles focused on immigrants and cyberspace in the field of Humanities.

The “diasporic websites,” as Mitra terms them, are evidence that Indians in the United Kingdom negotiate identities of being Indian, British, and a combination (Mitra, 1997). Mitra explains that British-Indians go online to sites that connect them to fellow Indians back home in the motherland as well as other Indian emigrants abroad in the UK and other countries. Her findings point to the great consolidation of various identity inputs—narratives from the mother-land, communication from fellow expatriates abroad, etc.—together in platforms offered only by the internet. Mitra does not focus on children in the diaspora community specifically, but because her study is the first of its kind on the topic of immigrants and internet use, it is noteworthy.

The findings discussed up to this point all indicate one basic opportunity the internet offers diaspora children and adolescents: that it provides access to what is
otherwise inaccessible. This section reviews extant literature that examines three cultural spheres the internet renders accessible to users. Elias & Lemish (2008, 2009), focusing on adolescent immigrants, as well as De Block & Buckingham (2007), who study 7- to 12-year-old immigrants, dedicate a large part of their effort to analyzing how their subjects use the internet. As shown below, it is impossible to pinpoint one particular activity as the activity of choice, or even the most popular activity, with which children engage when they navigate identities online. The following paragraphs organize these scholars’ findings on what immigrant children and adolescents access via the internet into three categories, none of which dominate their online activities. They are: local connectedness, transnational connectedness, and connections to global youth culture.

“Local connectedness” is also referred to by scholars as “local culture,” “local connectedness,” “local connection,” or “local identity.” Once I review the three types of connections, I make the case for the necessity to define “local culture” in more detail. This merits establishing new divisions for what is local at that juncture: “new national identity” and “ethnic identity.”

**Transnational Culture**

For diaspora communities, the internet provides access to the culture left behind. Transnational culture is one of three categories of online connections immigrant youth seek online while forming an identity. At their own will, or at the request of their parents, children’s online activity might involve seeking connections to their former country. Elias
and Lemish (2009) discuss parents who solicit Russian media online for their Israeli-born children in an effort to keep the children connected to the former culture and language. Adolescents who experience the move themselves may feel a void and “sense of loss” for their previous country; the internet allows them to “preserve those parts of their homeland that they miss most” (Elias & Lemish, 2009, p. 547). The internet provides access to an ethnic population, family and friends, living in the original nation in a way that was not possible before.

De Block and Buckingham present their unique and expansive study, “Children in Communication about Migration” or CHICAM, on 7- to 12-year-old immigrant children in six European countries in their book, Global Children, Global Media (2007). Findings from CHICAM indicate that children seek local cultural education online if for any reason they are limited in doing so at home. For those immigrant children who do not have the luxury of living close to blood relatives in their new home, the internet greatly facilitates a “constructed family” (De Block & Buckingham, 2007). Many youngsters mentioned in CHICAM pursue familial relationships via the internet. In many cases, their online activity includes maintaining a relationship with their mother or father living back in their former “home” (De Block & Buckingham, 2007). The transnational connection facilitated by the internet is the most cited benefit when discussing internet utility for immigrants.

**Global Youth Culture**

Yet another connection children of diaspora communities pursue online is one with the global youth culture. Elias & Lemish (2008, 2009) as well as De Block & Buckingham
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(2007) cite it as a pursuit that subsumes a considerable chunk of online activity. In this endeavor, children go online seeking neither their transnational nor their local connections; rather, they seek to connect with the global youth culture. This is a culture that is wholly inclusive and unfettered by any one national allegiance. Global trends like rap music, Hollywood, international pop stars (e.g. The Beatles, Madonna), international television programs (e.g. Dora, Ugly Betty adaptations, Friends), international worldviews on politics, or internationally popular commodities (the Hello Kitty line, Nokia phones, or Apple products) are only a few of the innumerable instances of global culture with which immigrant children may identify while browsing on the internet.

“Local Culture”

Scholars have also identified immigrants accessing “local culture” through online media, but “local culture” is never defined. “Local” is used to mean geographically close to the subject’s current living environment. Authors often imply that local culture is the culture of the “new” nation to which they have migrated; this is a misleading implication. That which is local to the immigrant is not necessarily limited to the new country’s culture. In fact, there are many cultures that may be local to the immigrant. This vagueness is problematic. Local culture may be used to signify at least two distinct cultures or identities: (1) the *ethnic*, and (2) the *new nationality*, as the next sections explain in more detail. The
difference between ethnic and new national cultures, and the identity tied to each, shares one element: they are both affected by the (new/current) host country’s nationality. They differ in that “local ethnic” culture is the transnational culture mixed in with the new national culture while the “local new national” culture is only created from the host-country’s culture. (See figure below)

**Ethnic Culture and Identity**

“Ethnic peers” is a term from Elias & Lemish (2009) describing immigrant peers from the same background of an individual. This term is repurposed here to identify one of the local cultures immigrants experience. Local ethnic culture is the culture attached to the nation immigrants left behind. This culture’s identity is not quite the same as the former national identity alive in the country immigrants left behind; it is, inevitably, a variation of that culture. (e.g. The Chinese-American culture is not the same as the Chinese culture in China.) Ethnic culture, which shapes ethnic identity, is a local culture because it often exists in the home an immigrant lives—his family for example. It can be local when neighbors of the immigrant share their ethnic background. For example, Brazilians who immigrate to America may access the new Brazilian-American identity in their local culture: this is the identity rooted in their Brazilian ethnicity.
Some local ethnic cultures belong to immigrants who are highly insulated in a local community of their ethnic peers for decades without much assimilation to the country in which they live. Communities of Latin-American-origin immigrants in Florida, Russian-origin communities in Israel, and Near-Eastern-origin communities in Germany are a few of many representative examples where it is common to see insular local ethnic culture. If disproportionately emphasized, ethnic local culture can be greatly detached from the country to which immigration occurs; this identity is noticeably not assimilated to the new country’s identity, especially in comparison to the new national culture. However, it is not always the case that the local ethnic culture overpowers the new national culture. The amount of mixing between these two ethnic and new national elements, and as such the extent of assimilation, differs for each individual, family and community.

**New National Culture and Identity**

New national culture is the culture of the country to which immigration has occurred. It is the culture of the country in which the immigrant currently resides and that is why it is considered “local.” New national identity (NNID) is derived from the new national culture. A characteristic new national culture (and as such NNID) is that it is *commonly available* to immigrants from all ethnic backgrounds in that country. For instance, while the Chinese-British cannot access Indian-British ethnic culture, both Chinese-British immigrants and the Indian-British have equal access to the new national
(British) culture. New national identity is purposefully anchored in the (most recent) current country’s culture.

Assimilation and NNID are correlated. Just as an immigrant community’s emphasis on their local ethnic culture can detach them from the country in which they live (e.g. Cuban-Americans in Florida), the development of new national identity can bring an immigrant more in touch with the culture of the country in which he now lives (e.g. America). As such, it can be said that the stronger New national identification, the easier assimilation becomes. New national identification describes the identification of a person with the culture of the country to which he emigrated. Lastly, it should be noted that, the salience of new national identity relative to their ethnic identity in every individual is different case by case.
Chapter 4: New National Identity and Ethnic Identity in Extant Literature

Mitra’s study on British-Indian immigrants’ “diasporic websites” in 1997 shows that one of the earliest immigrant uses of the internet. Mitra identifies not only the expected transnational contact these websites facilitate, but also their utility in providing local information for the immigrants. Immigrants would use “diasporic websites” not only to search for local ethnic peers (e.g. fellow British-Indians) but they would also use these websites as a source on the new country’s culture (e.g. British). So these sites’ content is not exclusively produced in and about India or Indians. It is also providing content produced in Britain and about British life.

The sites link users to current news in India, and an Indian calendar for cultural references. Furthermore, the sites contain information on the Indian community in United Kingdom; the sites also offer non-India(n)-specific resources such as links to essential reference sites about the UK, e.g. school websites, websites with pertinent information about the British legal system, and mobile phone contractors in the UK. Mitra discusses the fact that it is to be expected that the internet would be used to connect transnationally, in this case to India. Yet the abundance of resources about the immigrants new home and local identity, the United Kingdom, and global internet culture is noteworthy. She uses this evidence to support the theory that a new identity is born for this immigrant community.

The new identity, Mitra (1997) does not explicitly distinguish, is born from the combination of three cultures as presented by the content of the websites members of the
diasporic community frequent. One of three influencers is the culture produced in India and transmitted through the internet abroad: the transnational. The second is the culture produced on Indian subjects by other Indians who are not in India, such as Indian immigrant community centers in Britain. The third is the globally accessible or non-Indian-specific culture of Britain: for example, information about the United Kingdom’s mobile and telecommunication services. The aforementioned three categories represented in diasporic websites correspond, in respective order, to this paper’s proposed identity inputs for the diaspora community: the transnational, the local ethnic, and the local new national.

Elias & Lemish (2008 & 2009) make great contributions to this field with their detailed research and direct narratives from 70 diaspora adolescents on forming their identity. Their subjects are former Soviet Union immigrants to Israel. Their work also confirms the role of the internet as both “a source of information about the new society” and “a communication platform with native-born peers” (2009, p. 537). These two roles are not distinguished clearly in their writing; they both fall under the local connections categories. However, they perfectly suit the distinction between NNID and local ethnic identity presented in this paper. In other words, the role of the internet as “a source of information about the new society” corresponds to its role as a source of NNID; “a communication platform with native-born peers” describes its role as a source of local ethnic identity. The next few paragraphs describe case studies from the scholars’ papers to demonstrate their points, additionally proving the need to distinguish local identity inputs.
Elias & Lemish’s (2008 & 2009) qualitative interviews present direct narratives from adolescents confirming the empowerment they get from seeking local information online. One child explains, “First of all, when I came here, I entered Google and read the news about Israel. Through the news I discovered that in Israel there are sports, concerts” (2009, p. 538). This quote is a depiction of accessing “local youth culture”, Elias and Lemish (2009, p. 534) write. In another example, “local youth culture” involves the children talking to other Russian-Israeli peers about events in the ethnic community. It is clear that a distinction must be made between local new national identity and local ethnic identity. The internet is conducive to diasporic identity amalgamation. Diasporic websites indicate the attempt to consolidate global and transnational identity inputs as well as two main local identity inputs: the ethnic and the new national identity.

Viswanath and Arora (2000) discuss “ethnic media” in the United States. Mitra’s (1997) diasporic websites are an example of what these authors consider “ethnic media.” Ethnic media is defined as media produced by and for the immigrant community. Viswanath and Arora’s analysis confirms the primacy of media for immigrants’ assimilation processes. The authors also emphasize the language of the media. If the language is in the native tongue of the immigrants, it should not lead one to the conclusion that that media is used for transnational ties of the immigrants—ties between the immigrant and the former homeland. In fact, even when in the mother tongue, ethnic media can still serve both an “assimilatory function” and an “informational function” (Viswanath & Arora, 2000, p. 50).
Viswanath and Arora describe “assimilatory functions” and “informational functions” of ethnic media as essential to immigrant identity formation. Communication or information that is “assimilatory” provides connection with new national identity. Ethnic press, for example, can promote the ethnic “community’s involvement in local politics” (2000, p. 50). It can provide information on social services, political issues of relevance, immigration laws, health care, etc. Information about the new country for immigrants on diasporic websites serves an assimilatory function. “Informational communication” facilitates the preservation of ethnic identity in immigrants. Informational communication can be about cultural celebrations occurring locally for that immigrant community.

Viswanath and Arora (2000) state that the language of the media does not necessarily indicate whether the information is assimilatory or informational. Different immigrant audiences may be comfortable receiving both assimilatory and informational communication in different languages. Viswanath and Arora broach the difference between new national identity knowledge versus ethnic identity knowledge; they do not, however, expand on the definitions. Their paper’s scope is on analyzing media produced and consumed in immigrant communities regardless of their psychological and social factors.

Elias and Lemish (2009) also discuss the language issue for content consumed by children of the diaspora. They present evidence that many young immigrants may often be more comfortable with their native language at the beginning of their time in the new county; they greatly appreciate new national culture and ethnic culture information in their native language. Two participants of their study “look[ed] at Russian-language
websites for information aimed at familiarizing themselves with the local youth culture” (p. 539). For youth or adults, the choice of language use in ethnic media does not indicate the content type: ethnic, new national, transnational, or global.

“Domesticating Information Technology” is the subtitle of Kraut, Brynnin, and Kiesler’s (2006) book in which a study by Horrigan, “Portraits of American Internet Use”, is presented. Horrigan (2006) finds a direct correlation between internet use and stronger ties to places we live, a.k.a. the local. Two likely components of an immigrant’s local environment are the ethnic and the new national communities. The internet can encourage civic engagement and improve ties to the society in which they live, facilitating integration by functioning as immigrants’ “societal connective tissue” (p. 30). Identifying a sense of belonging to the community in which he or she lives is desirable for an immigrant child’s life in a new land.

For children of the diaspora developing their identity, the internet presents a safe haven for experimentation (Elias & Lemish, 2008; Horrigan, 2006; Tynes et al., 2008). This quality justifies why Horrigan found the internet as facilitative for strengthening offline ties. The internet is used as a playground for experimenting with affiliations with groups before officially committing to them in the offline world. In other words, online communication in these groups offers a safe way to step out of one’s comfort zone, more so than offline communication. If the experiment is successful, then offline membership is more likely. Group membership is an important feature of identity (Markstrom-Adams, 1992; Bennett & Sani in Levey & Killen, 2010). The culture of groups to which one
identifies oneself as a member are the cultures shaping one’s identity. Being a member of
an group interested in American civic activism, will inevitably contribute to an identity
conducive to the culture of civic activism in America. So group membership contributes to
identity formation.

(2001) study found that 84% of internet users visit an online group or community at least
once; of this number 56% join an offline group after first communicating with it in the
virtual world. Horrigan’s (2006) conclusion on a possible motive for people logging onto
the internet to discover groups is quite apt:

The internet, perhaps because of its anonymity, provides a comfort zone
for some people that draws them to group membership…By reducing
uncertainties inherent in joining a new group [offline and face-to-face],
the internet may prompt people to join a group they might not otherwise
[in non-virtual reality, have given the chance to] join. (p. 26)

To clarify this quote’s pertinence to this study, among a plethora of vulnerabilities the
immigrant adolescent finds comfort in the internet “reducing uncertainty in important
contexts” (Horrigan, 2006, p. 19). The internet offers options to explore, investigate, and
examine identities before establishing permanent membership in the real world; this is
inclusive, of course, of local culture connections. In the context of new national identity
these offline ties are the local ties to neighborhood organizations, sports clubs, schools, or
any such local organizations. Being more vulnerable, children and young adults can
benefit from the anonymizing quality internet communication provides as a safe haven for
experimenting with affiliation with local groups.
It is important to note that Horrigan’s 2006 analysis is not limited to children under 18. The 2001 Pew study to which he refers presents data on “American online activity” as a whole. It is fair to speculate that adolescents and older children are as likely, if not more, to engage in the activities Horrigan analyzes because they are more likely to be digital natives. Thus, despite the study’s broad subject group, Horrigan’s (2006) analyses are applicable to immigrant children developing their identity. Furthermore, Elias and Lemish’s (2009, 2008) work confirms this speculation. Using the internet to familiarize herself, one 12-year-old Russian-Israeli immigrant says that when she learned about sports and concerts in Israel—new national cultural events—through the internet, she felt that she “[was] not in a totally foreign world. I thought I had to learn everything anew” (2009, p. 538).

**Bypassing Parental Discouragement to Seek the New National Identity**

Seeking new national identity is sometimes made dually difficult if parents are discouraging toward assimilation (the acquisition of NNID) or if they, too, are uninformed about the new country. Many such cases arise in Elias & Lemish’s (2008, 2009) interviews.
Although the authors do not identify it as such, this conflict arises due to competition between new national identity and ethnic identity inputs.¹

One case presented in Elias and Lemish (2008) is that of a 13-year-old boy born to Russian parents who had immigrated to Israel. He felt restricted from accessing and expressing Israeli new national identity within his home and among his immediate family. His parents emphasized Russian culture and pressured him to learn the language, fearing it would soon be lost on him. Following his instinctual needs, the boy sought online spheres to educate himself about Israeli peers and culture and to express his Israeli identity when he could not do so offline at home. Logging onto the internet provided a more private sphere in which to express or experience the Israeli culture.

Elias and Lemish (2009) observe that most of their participants did not have “local peers who could serve as their guides into the local cultur[e]” (p. 539). Sixteen-year-old Arcadia said:

| When I arrived in the country, I found Israeli music on my own on the internet. When surfing at Zvuki.ru [a Russian musical website], I found that they had a category called “Israeli Music.” I entered, listened and loved it...since then I download Israeli songs from this site. (p. 539) |

¹ Elias & Lemish discuss the difference between “inward” and “outward” paths of migration. This distinction they make does not clarify what the identity inputs are as much as it emphasizes the way the children use media and native language.
Arcadia uses a website based in her country of origin—a transnational connection—to find music from her local culture—to make a new national connection.

In another example, Elias and Lemish (2008) talk to a parent whose child was never quite interested in his transnational, and by default, his ethnic identity. He tried not to speak Russian in the house and ignored much of his parents’ attempts to educate him about his roots. He had particular enthusiasm for his new national identity and tried to assimilate as best he could. However, after seeing a movie that referred to the Russian aristocracy, he became intrigued. Soon after, his parents were surprised to see that he had gained particular interest in learning about Russian history. He even checked out books to inform himself on the topic. Interestingly enough, in this case the child fulfilled his need to learn more about his transnational connection not through his ethnic Russian-Israeli peers, but mostly through Israeli libraries and books in Hebrew—his new national culture.

These cases exemplify many non-age-specific theories on immigrant identification and the internet (Horrigan, 2006; Mitra, 1997; Viswanath & Arora, 2000) for children. The “central role that the internet plays for the identity formation of these adolescents is expressed in the negotiation with their real life identities” (Elias & Lemish, 2009, p. 545). These sources present extensive evidence for the four identity inputs immigrant children consolidate that are facilitated by the internet: global youth identity, transnational identity, local ethnic identity, and local new national identity. They are not delineated as such but through examples, existing literature does demonstrate each four contributing strain. These
four strains are all consolidated, each to unique extents, in every immigrant’s quest to develop identity.

De Block and Buckingham (2007) cite cases where children in their study accessed the internet in an effort to educate their parents on new national identity, e.g. the “local culture” and even laws. Though again the term “local” is used, De Block & Buckingham specifically refer to instances where new national culture knowledge is sought. Connections with the ethnic culture at the local level were either not easily accessible or not desirable for the subjects in the study. In these types of cases, due to faster language acquisition, children bear the burden of their parents’ assimilation as well as their own. They are the interlocutors between their parents and society. Similar cases have also come to light in the United States where even after a decade since immigration, parents still rely on their children to speak English or complete administrative and legal forms for the whole family.

Tynes (2005, 2008, & in press) presents quantitatively and qualitatively rich studies on internet use by American adolescents. Specifically gauging ethnic identity among diverse adolescents on the internet, Tynes, Giange, and Thompson (2008) conducted a thorough and unique study. Participants of their study were between the ages of 13 and 18, living in the United States of America. Tynes et al. (2008) distinguish three demographics: European-Americans, ethnic minorities (in this study only Latin- and African-Americans), and multi-racials (everyone else of non-European, non-Latin America, or non-African American races). One measure Tynes et al. (2008) assess among their 228 participants is “ethnic identity.” “Ethnic identity” describes the salience of the participants’
identification with a parent’s or their own former nationality, indicating how consciously aware the individual is of his or her ethnic identity. A high ethnic identity in persons of the European-American group indicates that the person is strongly aware of his/her ancestry and place in American society. Ethnic identity stands in contrast to the new national identity inputs.

Tynes et al. (2008) conclude that higher ethnic identity is salient among ethnic minority groups online, especially in relation to European-Americans and multi-racials (p. 462). According to the authors, among those in the “ethnic minority” group, the internet serves to buttress the sense of ethnic identity. However, Tynes et al.’s 2008 study did not find a significant relationship between ethnic identity salience and the amount of time adolescents spend online. This lack is noteworthy because it demonstrates that increased internet usage is not necessarily indicative of a stronger ethnic bond. Nor is increased internet usage indicative of a weaker new national identity bonds. Assimilation rate, Tynes et al. find, cannot be correlated with length of online activity. The internet serves merely as a tool for both new national assimilation and ethnic identity connection. Therefore, the research does not prove a conclusion on motive of internet use by immigrant children. It would also be incorrect to claim that the higher immigrant children’s internet use, the weaker their new national identification.
Summary

Extant literature strongly suggests utility in the internet as a tool for identity formation in the hands of diaspora children. Three (unofficially established) categories of cultural inputs for identity are discussed among scholars: the global, the transnational, and the local. Of these inputs, the “local” is often undefined and used as an umbrella term to describe different circumstances. In order to clarify what “local” inputs contribute to immigrant identity formation, this paper analyzes cases in extant literature to support a distinction between two types: the ethnic and the new national local inputs. This section concludes existing literature validating the classification of “local” identity inputs. The following chapters present grounded qualitative analyses on five immigrant children, their internet usage, and identity formation through oral interviews. Comparison of these five case studies to the existing case studies from other scholars facilitates critical assessment of how children of diaspora communities navigate local identity inputs online.
SECTION TWO:
ORIGINAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SEVEN CASES

Chapter 5: Data Memos from Case Studies

Seven subjects from five families were interviewed for this thesis. Heidi\(^2\) and Diane from Maryland are siblings born in the United States to parents who emigrated from Iran; Nicole and Samy, a sister and brother in California, also share this background. Emma moved from Iran to Nova Scotia, Canada, when she was in middle school. Peyton moved from Iran to California when he was in the eighth grade. Jasmine moved from Iran to Florida during the second semester of her junior year in high school. Emma, Peyton and Jasmine were all born in Iran and raised there until their move to America. This study assumes that the experiences of emigration to the United States and Canada are similar in quality; whether a person is in Canada or the US does not play an important role or majorly change the dynamics for the purposes of this paper.\(^3\)

\(^2\) All names have been changed to pseudonyms. Also, all personally identifying information is omitted.
\(^3\) Both countries are prominent immigrant-receiving countries with a history rooted in immigrants. As a comparison, France, an immigrant-receiving country today, is not historically founded on its immigrant
The case memos in this section present factual information about the participants, explain their internet habits, and describe their responses regarding an incident when they felt the need to go online and resolve an NNID question about America, or Canada in Emma’s case. To introduce the question, I, as the researcher, retold one of my own memories of when I could not fully comprehend an American cultural reference. In one example, I recalled having no idea why a school would throw a mixer. Mixers, I thought, were tools to mix ingredients together while cooking in the kitchen; I did not know they also meant casual parties where boys and girls were invited. This episode was a case of not comprehending an aspect of my new national culture—American culture. I turned to my friends to clear up that confusion, and other times, I turn to online resources. In these interviews I ask each participant if they have ever been in a similar situation.

This chapter’s goal is to provide the reader with rich individual descriptions of the interviewees, their internet usage habits, and what they have experienced in the realm of their American or Canadian new national identity and cultural inquiries.

reception. For better or worse, the sociopolitical foundations of the United States and Canada comes from the overwhelming numbers of immigrants they received.
Heidi

- Female
- 11 years old
- Born in the United States
- Lives in the United States

Heidi and her older sister, Diane, were born in America. Their parents are Iranian emigrants to the US who have been here for almost thirty years. Before their marriage and the birth of the children, both parents were educated at universities in America and started their careers here. Heidi and Diane’s parents have raised them with strong awareness of Iranian culture: its food, music, and language. This is not to say that the girls’ upbringing is skewed toward their Iranian background to devalue the reality of their American lives and future. The parents make purposeful efforts to raise them like their American peers, in the American education system, and to be prepared for lifelong careers in this country.⁴

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⁴ Diane and Heidi’s mother told the researcher that when she decided to have children in the United States, she “swore to [her]self that [she] would raise them just like every other American child. It isn’t fair to the child to feel different and ostracized. [She] didn’t want [her] girls to go to school, open their lunch box, and get stares from classmates about how icky the food looks or smells. Children get easily embarrassed; it breaks down their confidence.” Diane and Heidi’s lives appear to be very well balanced with respect to both Iranian and American influences.
Diane and Heidi’s parents keep a regimented schedule for internet access to which the girls have grown accustomed, more or less. They may only log onto the internet on their computers for thirty minutes per day if they are browsing for fun. Internet access for homework is not restricted. The girls had had smart-phones for a month at the time of the interview; these give them more flexible internet access than the computer. Even with their smartphones, neither recalls being online for non-school purposes for longer than twenty consecutive minutes in a day. Furthermore, their schedules are so packed with extracurricular activities that they barely have time to casually browse online anyway. Both girls repeatedly say that browsing online is a waste of time and they really do not find it appealing. Heidi, specifically, sees herself as “not the type to go online”; she stresses the fact that she rarely uses the internet for non-educational purposes, although she does use email frequently for school. In sum, as far as their internet usage is concerned Heidi and Diane have developed a very utilitarian approach because of their parental restrictions.

Heidi does not spend a lot of time socializing with her local friends online, on Facebook or via email. In fact, when asked to recall her Facebook profile, she does not quite remember what is on it, asking if she could check it before she responds to the question. She uses email, Facebook, and chat applications mostly to socialize with her family living in distant places: Pittsburgh, Canada, or Iran, for example. Moreover, many of her friends do not even have Facebook accounts. Her family is very important to her, and she does make the effort to keep in touch with them online through Facebook and chat applications. She points out that her family is usually in her photos on Facebook.
Of Heidi’s time online, the majority is spent on the application Instagram. This photo-sharing application was until recently limited to smartphones before its website was launched. Heidi self-reports that the majority of her online time is spent on Instagram, where she shares pictures. These pictures are not of herself; they are from her boy-band crush “One Direction.” As a tool to “communicate with her friends,” she mentions that all her local school friends are on Instagram. Also, it is the one “social network” she participates most in, but she admits, “You’re not really chatting with [friends on] that [application]…I do not really post a lot of comments and post pictures of myself. I see what other people have there.” Communication with local friends when they are not together is mostly accomplished through text messaging and second, by phone call—not via the internet.

Heidi does not recall encountering something “American” (her new national identity) that she did not understand. She says, “No, it never happened.” In the case that it may come up, she says she does not use the internet as a major resource. She repeats on different questions that in situations when she does not understand a cultural reference, she goes to her parents to get answers. This is not surprising, as her parents have already lived in the United States for thirty years. They are highly educated, well-versed in American culture and the English language. She says if confusion occurs and her parents do not have an explanation, she will then ask her sister and her friends. As a final resort, she will use a search engine online to figure it out. She does not, however, recall any
particular incident. It is indeed uncommon for her to be in such a position to have to rely on online sources to navigate American culture—her new national culture.

Diane

- Female
- 13 years old
- Born in the United States
- Lives in the United States

Like her sister Heidi, Diane is also quite comfortable in her American skin. In fact, she thinks she does American things “most of the time” like “eating bacon.” She confirms more than once that questions about American culture (NNID) do not occur to her.

M[inoo]- Do you ever have questions about your social life or pop culture?
D- No.
M- Never?! Like, if there is a reference you don't get or something slang that you hear?
D- Not really.
M- Anything ever happened in school that made you feel like you were different or culturally not getting it?
D- Not really; no. On a rate of 1-10 in popularity in school I guess I'll give myself an 8 just because I hang out with everyone.

If such questions do come up, her parents are a resource. She says:

I guess when it’s, like, about, like, stuff that’s, like, big things, they’ve [her parents] been [in America] for. For my high school schedule registration thing I had that last week. I had my dad help me out. And he would tell me if you want to get into [the] I[nternational] B[accalaureate program]
you have to take this. If it’s, like, stuff they know what they’re doing, [I use them as a source].

When Diane does not know something about American culture and has to ask someone about it, it is not actually a reflection of her Iranian background; her issues are the same as any growing child’s. In fact, she even mentions that her father knew how to help her when her “completely American friends’ parents” did not know. For Diane, American identity, American culture, her NNID are not an enigma.

Diane used Facebook fairly regularly until a few weeks before, when she got her smartphone. With the smartphone, she says, she wastes less time on Facebook because she does not like the application. Diane checks her Facebook application a maximum of twenty times a day and only for periods shorter than five minutes each time. She, too, cannot spend more than half an hour browsing casually online. Her internet use is mostly school-related: checking grades, schedules on her high school's website, worksheets from her classes, communication with teachers, and research for homework. When asked how she contacts her friends, Diane says she relies on text messaging or face-to-face contact. Diane keeps her Facebook friends limited to those school friends to whom she is very close, a few friends from the Persian language school she attended, and her relatives all over the world. Like her sister, she spends a fair amount of time on social networks or chat applications to speak to her extended family. The usual websites Diane visits often are her email, her school website, Facebook, and search engines for research. The first interview with Diane was quite short because of the focus on her “issues understanding American identity” as opposed to her Iranian identity, and Diane consistently says that she
does not feel any shortcomings in that area. After Samy and Nicole’s interviews, the researcher realizes that for these four children, new national identity is inseparable from other aspects. There is no old versus new national identity; there has always been one identity, and that is their American identity. This American identity may be flavored to different extents with Iranian culture, but it is not a dual identity. More specifically, perhaps, it is not perceived as a dual identity.

**Nicole**

- Female
- 14 years old
- Born in the United States
- Lives in the United States

Nicole was born to an Iranian mother and father. She has an older brother, Samy, who was also interviewed for this project. Their parents immigrated to the US in their early 20s. Their father has been in the States approximately fifteen years longer than their mother. He received his PhD at an American university, and she came to the US after marrying him almost twenty years ago. They have two children, Samy and Nicole. Nicole is finishing middle school; she is in the eighth grade. Nicole’s personality in the interview was least forthcoming compared to other participants. She generally responded in brief statements. Quotes from her interview demonstrate the struggle to extract responses from Nicole.

Like Heidi and Diane, Nicole recalls her earliest use of the internet was for playing games online. She also enjoyed logging onto the Barbie website. Nicole had an email
account set up for her at that time, but she rarely used it. As she grew older, in the latter years of elementary school and early middle school, Nicole recognizes an increase in usage of the internet everyday. Insightfully, she points out that her use of electronics is “all the time increasing. I text my parents even if I am in the same house with them.” This tendency also applies to her communication with friends, mostly current and former classmates.

Nicole logs onto her school website regularly for homework and grades. She likes “stalking and finding out about people online.” Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are her most oft-visited sites, in that order. She opened her Twitter account in sixth grade and spends most of her internet time on this network. Her online connections on all three of these social networks are mostly with her local school friends or local friends she has met through her family. Facebook Messenger is her favorite chat application. On Twitter, Nicole follows local school friends and American celebrities. She has very few local Iranian-American (co-ethnic) friends. Her transnational connections are limited to a few family members with whom she rarely talks on internet-based applications. It is clear that the internet, for Nicole, serves as a communication tool for her local American new national community.

Other than social networks, Nicole likes to follow fashion trends online. She enjoys discovering new hairstyles, makeup styles, and such. Nicole mentioned using the internet for song lyrics quite often. On the topic of struggling with an American cultural concept,
she recalls one incident where she did not understand a slang expression and used the internet.

N-[When I come across something I don’t know] I would definitely use the internet
M-Do you remember being in a situation like that?
N-Uh, yeah.
M-Really?! Like what?
N-Um, let's see. One time, oh, yeah, I remember there's something called “jungle fever” where it’s, like, oh, you like black guys, so I didn't know what that meant, and obviously, I went on Google, and it said, um, “When you like a lot of black guys.” So, yeah.
M-Is it mostly with language and slang?
N-Yeah, mostly.

However, like Diane’s confusion about high school class registration, Nicole’s ignorance of what a slang expression means is not a result of her immigrant background. It is most probably because she is fourteen years old and still learning slang. Any American eighth grader, immigrant or not, might also use the internet to figure out what an unfamiliar slang expression means. In general, Nicole self-reports that she feels popular in school, comfortable and quite American.

These findings lead to the conclusion that conundrums regarding American culture (NNID) do not occur often for Nicole. For her, being from an Iranian/immigrant background is an almost invisible factor in her identity exploration. She does not attribute her question on “jungle fever” to her parents being immigrants and thus not knowing the meaning; in fact, she says her friends also did not know. Being an American to Nicole involves her Iranian background but is not consciously calculated in her identification.
Nicole identifies herself as American with little mention of her Iranian ethnicity; she is very comfortable in her Californian teen identity. This American identity falls under the new national identity category as discussed in the first section.

**Samy**

- Male
- 16 years old
- Born in the United States
- Lives in the United States

Samy is Nicole’s older brother. He, too, was born in the United States and currently lives in California. Samy is in 11th grade at his local public high school. Samy identifies himself as coming from an Iranian background, but that is not to say that he is less comfortable in his American skin. He speaks Persian at medium-level proficiency. English is his first language.

Samy identifies his use of the internet when he was younger as “not serious.” He had an email account but rarely used it. He played some games online but spent more time with his Nintendo. By 2009, the end of middle school, “as [he] progressed,” Samy started utilizing the internet for “social purposes.” “Everyone was using it, and I was part of that,” he says. Samy used Facebook heavily until a year ago. His Facebook interactions are heavily focused on local friends. These local friends are mostly not co-ethnic peers;
they are Americans of non-Iranian background. Samy rarely uses Facebook, or the internet in general, to connect with his family.

After his obsession with Facebook waned, Samy turned to Reddit. He is currently an active member on this site, where one shares original and non-original material with the global community. Samy “discovered [Reddit] through someone mentioning it in a video.” A core activity of Reddit users is posting content to share. Another activity is to “up-vote” and “down-vote” shared content to produce a massive ranked list of all Reddit content from most popular (number one on the front page) to least. Users can also be active on this site via comments posted under content. These comment streams represent the most communicative activity on the site. Users address each other, carry on a conversation, and directly communicate. Samy participates in commenting, as well. When I asked him if he actually knew most of the people with whom he communicated online in “real” life, he replied, “Nope, [it's] just a community of I'd say about 1 mil[lion members] and growing every day.” Unlike the majority of his Facebook, chat, or email interactions, Samy's Reddit interaction is not grounded in his local community as far as its members are concerned. It is very much directed at a global youth audience, and his participation is like any other American teenager his age on Reddit.

Samy is also on Instagram. He likes sharing interesting pictures of “TV show references, some shirts, a book that I'm reading” or “something interesting I had never seen before,” e.g. the new interactive vending machines. Additionally, Samy goes on YouTube a lot; the website is in his “favorites” list. He does not watch “anything serious,”
just videos with entertaining content. Overall, in his internet habits, Samy is quite similar to his American peers.

Samy uses the internet for schoolwork and research, as well. He goes on his school website to check grades. Samy mentions that his parents are not able to help him with homework questions on American history or psychology because “they just do not know.” When he runs into a problem, he asks a friend if one is at hand or else goes on the Internet. Still, he tries to stick to the textbooks in general.

With regards to puzzling new national culture situations, Samy says he experiences such situations “most of the time with [his] friends.” Given his obvious proficiency with the English language and American culture, his typically American media usage habits (highly frequent television and internet usage), it is surprising that Samy admitted to facing NNID unknowns. That excerpt of the interview follows:

S- Yeah, it happens most of the time with my friends. My friends are really into sports like basketball and baseball, and they’re always talking about baseball and basketball. Whenever they talk about that I really have no clue what they’re talking about. They would always come over and they watch the games, and I do not really care. They get super excited, I guess, when their favorite team wins. I do not really see what attracts them so much to it. Even at school. Like my psychology teacher, he plays...he’s a basketball referee, and one of my other friends also likes basketball, so they’re always talking about basketball, like last night’s game, and I have no idea what they’re talking about.

M- What about any TV references or pop culture or language references, movies...?
S- I’m usually caught up with those. I watch a lot of TV, movies...so, not particularly classic American movies but, like, mainstream stuff, so, when one makes a reference to Forrest Gump or something I haven’t seen that [sic] movies, so, I wouldn’t understand some of things they say about those movies.

A follow-up interview two weeks later reveals that Samy’s challenges with American culture do not necessarily result from his immigrant background.

I would say that the last time was this week when March Madness was going on. All my friends were telling me to come over and watch it, and I had no clue what it was. I found out later it was sports, and as I told you before, I am definitely not up-to-date with the sports here and do not care much about it. I’m pretty familiar with other American culture, so that’s basically it [as far as NNID challenges].

Samy feels at a loss on the topic of sports. He has little knowledge about sports culture; he does not even care much about it. He does not go to great lengths to understand what he does not know about March Madness, nor does he take proactive steps to inform himself on the topic. He identifies it as a signifier of his “less” American identity, even though it might simply be a case of apathy for the subject, unrelated to his immigrant background.

This conclusion holds ground because in all other aspects of American life and social knowledge, Samy is quite on par with his peers. Samy’s knowledge on movies, television, popular culture, English language skills, and general cultural proficiency are all like most other 17-year-old American boys. Had he not introduced himself as of Persian decent once in the beginning, one might not even know of his immigrant background.
Emma

- Female
- 17 years old
- Born in Iran
- Moved to Canada at 12 years of age

Emma moved to Canada from Iran five years ago to join her older brother, who had moved here a few years before that. Emma moved to Nova Scotia, which is relatively less ethnically diverse than other immigrant-receiving Canadian territories. The local ethnic Iranian community is very small in Halifax. In her school, she is the only one of Iranian descent. Emma had the advantage of joining her brother, who was already familiar with the Canadian way of life as he had moved a few years earlier. Their parents, who moved to Canada with Emma, were, and perhaps still are, not comfortably assimilated. There are many differences right off the bat between Emma and the other participants presented thus far. Emma is the first Iranian-born interviewee in this data set. Also, in contrast to Heidi and Diane, Emma has little to no restrictions on internet usage.

Emma recalls going online to play games when she was younger. Today, she is a “Facebook addict,” per her own words. Her school also encourages students to bring web-accessible technologies and connect to the Wi-Fi service provided all over campus, also as opposed to Heidi’s and Diane's schools.

One year after her arrival in Canada, in eighth grade, Emma created her Facebook account. Of her 300 (estimated) friends only 15%, she approximates, are not
geographically local to her. In other words, Emma’s online communication is heavily directed at her local Canadian peers. She spends most of her time communicating with her schoolmates. Aside from those friends, she also uses Facebook and internet-connected applications to chat with a few family members located transnationally. According to Emma, her Facebook profile represents her “daily” person. She writes statuses about the movies she watches or activities in which she participates. Emma is cognizant of the fact that her online profile is not the optimal way to get to know the “real Emma.” On Facebook, she says, there is always some “pretending.” However, she also mentions that there are “more things to talk about on Facebook.” While it does seem that Emma has a healthy social life offline, she chooses to complement, if not navigate, her offline and local social life using online media like chatting on Facebook Messenger.

Another website Emma frequents is the “Where is my Sammich?” website. Regular daily visits to this site are a typical activity among her peers. “If someone doesn't [go on this website], then they would just have not gotten anything [in daily socialization],” Emma explains. Emma’s peers heavily reference memes from this website in their daily conversation: “a lot of people, a lot of what people say just come [sic] from that [website],” Emma says. Participation in this online activity identifies Emma’s strong local new national cultural connections via the internet.

Without being prompted to recall an incident on struggling with her new national identity, Emma mentioned her usage of the internet to access local cultural knowledge when she does not understand something Canadian. Here is that excerpt from the interview:
E- I can think of food.
M- Tell me.
E- Beavertail! I was like do they eat a beaver’s tail? But it turns out that it’s just a cake, some sort of bread.
M- Oh, really? It’s like buffalo wings, that aren’t actually buffalo’s wings.
E- Yeah! Beavertail is not beaver’s tail! It’s just a snack, and it has nothing to do with a beaver. Its shape looks like a beaver’s tail.
M- When was that? Was that long time ago or recently?
E- That was actually like two or three years ago. I’ve been here for six, seven years, and I just found out about beavertail, so I’m comfortably Canadian now.

Emma promptly used internet sources to figure out what “beavertail” was when she encountered the unfamiliar concept. In fact, she says, the incident also happened to her recently, at a point when she feels “comfortably Canadian.”

In school, aside from checking curriculum-related material online, she chats with other classmates. Emma also mentions that even when some of her friends still do not have smartphones, they would have a Wi-Fi connected device like an iPod Touch. She goes online to find out where they are on campus, or where to meet for lunch.

Outside of school, Emma still communicates mostly with her Canadian peers. This is again primarily through Facebook, chat applications, text message, email, and phone calls in order of preference from most utilized to least utilized. Emma has no plans of returning to life in Iran. She is applying to her local four-year university and plans to study in the humanities field. Emma is proud of her birth nation and the country where she lived her first thirteen years of life. Nevertheless, her background does not prevent Emma from feeling like “most other Canadian teens; a little weird, but just like them” all the same.
Peyton

- Male
- 19 years old
- Born in Iran
- Moved to the United States at 14 years of age

Peyton was born in Iran and lived there until he moved to California when he was 14 years old. He skipped a year of school and started ninth grade in a public high school that autumn. Neither Peyton nor his parents had lived in another country before their immigration to the US. He was not proficient in English when he arrived here. He took ESL classes through high school, took the SATs, and was accepted to his local four-year state university. Peyton remembers having ample access to the internet when he moved to the US, and he used it regularly.

Peyton describes his initial months here as difficult because he did not know any English. “I didn't have friends…I couldn't make any friends 'cause I couldn't even talk to them!” He mentions reaching out to the sizable Iranian population in California to hang out and make friends. However, he did not limit himself to Iranians. He says:

I started working [on my English], something that I really worked on. I started watching online movies on my laptop, and, like, I used to put the subtitle [sic] on, and then I wrote down what they said and just used that during school and my classes.
Peyton was very proactive in using the internet to learn English and about American culture. He recalls his online time as being split “50% to talk to people, 50% learning about American culture.”

In his online communication with friends today, Peyton sees increased communication with people living in California and decreased communication with people in Iran. All of Peyton's extended family still lives in Iran; he also has many friends in Iran because he lived there for fourteen years. Today Peyton uses chat applications for smartphones, like Viber or FaceTime, to talk to his family and friends in Iran. However, he does so increasingly less. “I used [the internet] back then [five years ago]. Couple of years ago I used to use it a lot. Maybe twice a week or three times a week, but now maybe once every two weeks.”

In the first few years after his arrival in America, Peyton was consumed with his transnational connections online through social networks like Facebook, Yahoo Chat, email, and such. He eventually found that he spent too much time on Facebook every day, “an easy five to ten hours,” he estimates. Almost all his Facebook friends were friends or family from Iran. During his 9th grade and 10th grade years he allowed Facebook and this transnational bond to monopolize his time. Realizing this, he says, “I was just, like, 'I can't deal with this!' So, I just deleted it two years ago.” Peyton recognized that Facebook was holding him back from the American new national identity. He was overwhelmingly involved with his transnational connections. Peyton showed great discipline when he closed his Facebook account because he knew it would serve him better to minimize
transnational connections until he was well grounded in his local new national identity. The same cannot be said about many immigrant youth, such as Jasmine, who is discussed next.

One of the social networks Peyton participates in regularly today is Instagram. On Instagram, Peyton has more friend than family followers. “20% are Iranians who live in Iran, like my friends and family. About 50% American people and the rest 30% are Persian friends I hang out with here.” Peyton maintains his local connections to Americans and his co-ethnic peers, in that order from most to least on social networks. He also recently joined Twitter.

Regarding challenges understanding American culture, he says, “it happens less now, but it still happens. Like, I hear something on the radio, or I'm watching something on TV, and I do not get it. They're laughing, and I do not get it! I try to figure it out. I try to ask my friends. If I'm really close to them, I do not mind, but if I do not know them I will search for it online. I will definitely search for it on Google. Like, Google helps me a lot to figure out. And the site, [UrbanDictionary.com]. I always access it on my laptop. It's in my favorites list.” Peyton is well on his way to assimilation. He makes an active effort to grasp his American new national identity without apprehension.

Peyton was able to skip one year of school after his move from Iran. He is currently enrolled in a four-year state university. Peyton’s parents still struggle with English and American life, but he supports them as well as he can. Peyton sees himself staying in America the rest of his life and perhaps financially supporting his parents soon.
Jasmine

- Female
- 17 years old
- Born in Iran
- Moved to the United States at 16 years of age

Jasmine was born in Iran to Iranian parents and moved to the United States with them in 2011. Jasmine started the second semester of 11th grade in January 2012 and is currently a senior at her local Florida public high school. She had never travelled substantially outside of Iran prior to her emigration. Jasmine’s father earned his Master’s of Science degree in the US almost thirty years ago. Jasmine’s mother was born and raised in Iran; she had never lived abroad until recently.

Jasmine admits to being extremely reliant on the internet. Internet-based platforms, applications, and websites consume her life. They facilitate both in her transnational and local communication. “If it wasn’t for the internet,” Jasmine says, “I do not know how I could survive here. I use it for everything.” Jasmine continues to describe her dependency on internet-based sources:

I use it to talk to my best friends in Iran. I use it to talk to my [older] sister [in Iran]. Google Translate is on my phone and iPad. Wikipedia and Google searches help with school. Everything, really. I couldn’t imagine how immigration would be without the internet.
The first purchase Jasmine made, just days after she arrived, was an iPad so that she could connect to wireless internet networks. She only recently received a smart phone from her parents.

Jasmine is a member of Facebook. During the past two years, Jasmine deactivated her Facebook account twice and reopened it again within weeks. Today, with her smartphone, she receives push notifications from the website. She approximates logging onto the Facebook application or website at least fifty times each day. “I know I’m addicted,” Jasmine admits. But for her, Facebook facilitates her transnational communication with high school friends and family in Iran whom she left behind. Only 15% of Jasmine’s Facebook friends are American. Of those, the local friends she connects with on Facebook are mostly co-ethnic peers, Iranian-Americans. “Maybe 5% of my Facebook friends are non-Iranian local friends,” Jasmine estimates. She takes great comfort in keeping her connections with her former classmates, her sister, and the nation in which she lived for the first 16 years of her life through Facebook and online messengers.

From another perspective, this aspect of internet communication may also be a hindrance in Jasmine’s assimilation. Facebook and online messengers are present in Jasmine’s life 24/7, which also means that the reality of her move to another country miles away is compromised. Consequently, Jasmine’s adaption to her American new national identity is only allotted secondary attention, even though she knows that there will be no return to life in Iran for her or her family. This issue and its comparison with Emma and Peyton is discussed further in the analysis section.
Jasmine also uses the internet to access her school’s website and take an online course to receive her high school diploma on time. She watches entertaining American content on YouTube and follows celebrity news and pop culture using internet sources as well. Jasmine often gets her local and international news from television, but sometimes she checks websites for news searches. “For the Newtown shooting, I heard it at school in the morning homeroom report, and I didn’t know what it was. So I just went on Yahoo News to find out the details.” Another website Jasmine spends time on is Pinterest. She likes learning about fashionable clothes, make-up, hair design, and home-improvement ideas from this website. Her Pinterest activity has little to do with Iran. “I log onto Pinterest five times a day or so. I usually get to know about American fashion and style there.”

Discovering Jasmine’s new national identity, American identity and culture, finds her referring to two main sources. Jasmine’s first source for any “important question” she has is one particular teacher she had the first semester she attended school in 2012. She maintains her relationship with this teacher through email and occasionally runs into her at school. Jasmine considers herself very lucky to have had this teacher at the beginning of her time in America. For lighter topics, or less consequential NNID issues, Jasmine uses Google searches, Google Translate, and Wikipedia. After these options, Jasmine asks a friend she trusts to help her.

Jasmine does not use her parents as a source for NNID, even though her father is fairly proficient in the English language and American culture, given his MS education in the United States thirty years ago. This is mostly because her father works full-time in a
demanding job and is not very accessible during the day. Her mother, Jasmine relates, is not a good resource for questions on English or anything about America. Instead, Jasmine’s mother asks her for help once in a while.

Jasmine’s local socialization outside of school is mostly with Iranian-Americans (co-ethnic peers). However, these Iranian-Americans are often second or third generation, so “they are more American than Iranian. It’s just that their parents or grandparents are Iranian.” She speaks English with them and uses them as a third source for NNID questions. She also spends time doing her community service hours with these friends. Jasmine does have non-Iranian friends with whom she communicates outside of school. Recently, she went caroling for Christmas with them. She says it was quite a fun experience, and her friends helped her with the music. In terms of this paper’s framework, these friends of Jasmine are more facilitative of her new national identity development as much as, if not more than, her online connection. Jasmine plans to go to community college and transfer to a four-year university soon after.
Chapter 6: Confirming Global and Transnational Connections Online

The presented cases and the extant literature discussed prior agree on the fact that global and transnational identities are bolstered through online activity. This chapter applies the literature on global and transnational connections to the subjects interviewed. Chapter 7 focuses on the notion of new national identity and how it realizes itself in children’s lives.

Global Youth Culture

Global youth culture is commonly accessed among all seven participants. Global youth culture describes the international popular culture teens indulge regardless of their national allegiances. All participants played online games in their earliest use of the internet. They all currently use the internet as a source to listen to popular music or watch popular music videos. Fashion is another category specifically mentioned in Samy, Nicole, Jasmine, Emma, and Diane’s interviews. Diane, Jasmine, Emma, and Nicole also use the internet to access international celebrity news. These case studies on immigrant children confirm participation in global youth culture via the internet, mentioned specifically by Elias and Lemish (2008, 2009) and de Block and Buckingham (2007) in the literature.
Research on Iran

Most subjects use the internet to strengthen their transnational ties. In this study, the children learn more about Iran, Iranian history, Iranian culture, or the Persian language using the internet. This pattern is consistent with a few cases Elias and Lemish (2008, 2009) present. Nathanel, a 13-year-old boy born in Israel to Russian immigrants, became curious about the Russian Monarchy after watching a movie in that topic. Soon, his parents found him independently researching the topic. This is surprising to his parents, because Nathanel seemed generally averse towards his Russian heritage before the incident.

Heidi and Diane venture online when they choose school projects on a topic related to Iran. They make use of their parents’ knowledge as well, but they mainly use “databases and research sources” online to write papers or for presentations. The material they access is exclusively in English, but they do appreciate choosing something about their parents’ homeland for a school project. Emma uses internet sources when she does schoolwork on the topic of Iran. She is interested in news related to Iran as well. The internet is a primary source for news and research in Emma’s case. Even Nicole, the participant who is most reluctant to discuss her Iranian roots, goes online to “find out things about Iran for [her]self.”
Communication with Friends and Family in Iran

As far as communicating transnationally with friends and family in Iran, Heidi, Diane, Jasmine, Peyton, and Emma rely on the internet. With Emma, Peyton, and Jasmine, it is most natural to expect transnational communication because they lived in Iran for many years. The later the immigration occurs in a child’s life, the more attention they are likely to give to their transnational social life. Furthermore, the longer the child stays abroad, the less their transnational communication.

Jasmine, who was 16 years old when she moved almost two years ago, not only left her best childhood friends behind, but also her only sister. Among all the subjects in this study, she spends the most time communicating with her sister, friends, and extended family in Iran using online websites or applications. Jasmine uses Facebook, email, Apple’s FaceTime, the applications Viber, What’sApp, Skype, and others to talk to her high school friends and sister in Iran on a daily basis. Jasmine’s friends list on Facebook and her contacts on chat applications are almost exclusively Iranians in Iran. She is friends with very few people from her current school on Facebook. Jasmine also told me that she could “not survive living in the United States the past two years if it were not for all these routes of communication between her best friends in Iran and her sister.” She “could not imagine how bad it was for generations who emigrated prior to the internet.” Jasmine will likely decrease her transnational communication as she settles in her life here, gets busier with college applications, and feels more at home. However, at this time, she is adamantly
keeping up with her social world in Iran regardless of the time difference and her
demanding schoolwork.

Peyton, who moved five years ago when he was 14, also spends time online
communicating with family and some friends, but less so than Jasmine. Peyton’s nuclear
family is living with him in the United States. He communicates with transnational ties
“once every two weeks.” This frequency is a decrease from his earlier years after
immigration, when he would talk to them “twice a week or three times a week.” In fact,
Peyton disconnected his Facebook account because he felt “overwhelmed” with the
demands of his transnational socialization. He felt it was keeping him back from “moving
on” with life in America. The account deletion signifies quite a courageous step for a teen
who emigrated. In fact, Peyton’s choice likely sped up his assimilation and comfort as an
American. Contrasting his case to Jasmine’s constant Facebook activity and her statuses,
Jasmine slows down her American assimilation through intense socialization with her
Iranian contacts left behind. Recall that Jasmine closed her Facebook account twice and
reopened it again within weeks during the past two years. This equivocation is perhaps a
sign of her struggle with the issue of letting go of the life she left behind.

Emma, who has been out of Iran for longer than either Peyton or Jasmine,
maintains transnational connections through internet platforms. She left Iran five years
ago, when she was 12 years old. Most of her extended family is in Iran, but she does have
family in the US and Canada. Of her Facebook friends, Emma approximates that of her
“300 Facebook friends...85% are local [contacts]” she knows from school and in her local
community. “15% [are] family in Iran [and] my cousins in California.” Emma left Iran
when she was twelve years old and only in sixth grade. Unlike Jasmine, who left at 16, for example, Emma did not have many close friends she left behind. Her friendships were not as deep at that time; she had also just changed schools a year prior. Overall, Emma does use the internet for transnational connection with her family, but she does so much less than her peers Peyton and Jasmine.

Among the four participants who were not born in Iran, transnational communication with family or friends is much less frequent than Peyton, Jasmine and Emma’s, and in some cases is nonexistent. The people with whom they connect are also different. Diane, Heidi, Samy, and Nicole do not have any friends in Iran with whom they keep in contact, as they never lived there. Less than half of Diane and Heidi’s extended family lives in Iran. They have visited Iran a few times and have met many cousins, aunts, and uncles. They are friends with them on Facebook and sometimes use different chat applications to talk to them. Sometimes, they are friends on Facebook with family they have not personally met but their parents have. As an effect of their utilitarian internet usage, Heidi and Diane’s online time is heavily dominated by school-related material first, and secondly with transnational connections. They communicate most often with their local connections, but they do so over the phone more than over the internet.

The majority of Samy and Nicole’s extended family is in Iran. They have a maternal aunt and her family in the US and some cousins on their father’s side. Their maternal grandparents are also green-card holders; they stay in US for at least six months out of the year. Most of their paternal aunts, uncles, and cousins and all of their mother’s great
extended family are in Iran. Samy is Facebook friends with many of his cousins in Iran, but he barely knows most of them; some he has never even met, and the extent of their communication is yearly “happy birthday” greetings. Some family members in Iran have friended Nicole, but their communication is minimal, if any. Samy and Nicole use text messaging and phone calls to keep in touch with their grandparents when they are away. They also maintain close contact with their aunt and cousins in Arizona through text messages and phone.

The subjects have differing frequencies of transnational communication with Iran. Often their frequency of communication is related to how much time has passed since their emigration. Samy and Nicole’s online transnational communication with family in Iran is almost dismissible. Diane and Heidi primarily use the internet to communicate with their family in Iran. Mona, Peyton and Jasmine use the internet to communicate with people in Iran more frequently than the latter four. Among themselves, their transnational connections fades as time passes since their emigration. Transnational connections in this study appear in two forms: communication with family or friends in Iran and gathering information or news about Iran. Elias and Lemish (2009) characterize communication with transnational ties in these children; it “preserve those parts of their homeland that they miss most” (p. 547). Transnational connections are not limited to speaking to people in the homeland. Seeking out music that is popular there, news or popular trends are all included in transnational cultural connectedness.
Chapter 7: Seeking New National Identity in the Transcripts

The first section of this thesis offers the following framework: internet activity by immigrant youth contributes to the transnational, global, and local aspects of their identities. “Local” describes the communications or connections that are geographically close to the youth. In the local category, two different spheres should be distinguished: 1) new national, 2) ethnic. In the case of participants in this thesis, their new national cultures are American and Canadian. The ethnic local culture for the participants is the Iranian-American or -Canadian. Extant literature already identifies ethnic culture. Mitra (1997) writes about Indians going online to find out about Indian celebrations or places of worship in Britain, for instance. However, another activity literature describes as “local” access is when immigrant children in Israel go online to learn about Israeli music (Elias & Lemish, 2009). This latter example is in reality an attempt to seek new national identity. It must be distinguished from the co-ethnic, even though they both describe the subjects’ access to something local.

The initial hypothesis predicted that children of immigrants (children born to parents who emigrated before they were born) and immigrant children (children born abroad before the family’s emigration) access new national identity using the internet. This was suspected to be the case because both groups, despite their birthplace and early upbringing, lack a new national home environment. Among the subjects, none of their
parents are fluent enough in American or Canadian cultures to give them the upbringing other American or Canadian children receive at home. Yet, the data demonstrate that among these participants, two different findings on NNID and culture emerge.

The different findings on new national identity stem from birthplace and the country where the children spent a majority of their childhood. One group (Group A), children of immigrants who were born in America to immigrant parents, do not overtly recognize the American identity as a “new” identity being introduced to them in their non-American households. It stands to argue that this group does not identify NNID, or if they do, they perceive it differently. Another group (Group B), immigrant children who were born abroad and moved in their teens, are conscious of a new national identity that exists separate from their Iranian identity and, consequently, is a foreign entity to be discovered.

**How Immigrant Children See New Nationality**

Emma, Peyton, and Jasmine (Group B) all instantly recognize NNID challenges. All three are quick to confirm the primacy of the internet as a major resource for resolving any questions they face in their daily lives in America or Canada. The subjects in Group B recall vivid examples of NNID explanations sought online, as presented in the case memos. Emma knows she has to check out “Where’s My Sammich” to keep up with her peers’ conversations. Jasmine searches for clarification online or with her favorite teacher via email, e.g. what “caroling” means or what the “prom” is. Peyton frequents Urban Dictionary to decipher American culture. He uses the internet “50% for talking to people
and 50% for understanding American culture” so he “can get what the disc jockey says in his morning radio show,” or “just to be able to communicate” with people in America. For Group B, new national culture or identity vividly exists. Part of assimilation for these youths is to figure it out and integrate in with the other aspects of their identities.

**How Children of Immigrants See New Nationality**

Group A has a different take on new national identity. Clearly, American identity and Iranian-American identity exist in their local society. As first generation immigrants, both Iranian and American cultures inevitably contribute to the person they are. However, with American identity, for Group A may be new to their ethnic composition, (they were Iranian until a generation ago), but it is not “new” to the children born in America. The American identity inputs are integrated into their lives almost seamlessly. Diane and Heidi claim that not understanding something American never occurs to them. Upon further questioning, they both say that the extent of them feeling “un-American” is that they do not like watching football. Samy’s epitome of “not getting American culture” is that he does not know too much about sports and he does not find it interesting. Like Diane and Heidi, Samy is simply describing a personal preference, not illiteracy or unfamiliarity with his new national culture. Furthermore, Samy did not go online or ask anybody about what March Madness was, nor do Diane and Heidi try to force themselves to like sports. While Nicole went online to figure out what “jungle fever” means, again, her issue with the term was not necessarily a lack in American cultural knowledge because of an immigrant
background. She simply did not recognize the expression because she is a teenager who is still learning vocabulary, as evidenced by the fact that her native-born peers also did not know the term.

**Self-Identification Among Children of Immigrants**

What reinforces the emergent theory is that with Group A, all children of immigrants, the narratives share a similar characteristic. In coding for self-identification, Group A rarely self-identifies based on ethnicity. Furthermore, their minimal ethnic self-identification is unaffected by how much their lifestyle is immersed in co-ethnic and transnational Iranian bonds. Diane and Heidi self-identify as little as Samy and Nicole do, even though Diane and Heidi are very well connected to their local co-ethnic Iranian-American community and keep transnational ties alive. Samy and Nicole are relatively less close with their co-ethnic Iranian connections. Despite all of their varying degrees of Iranian connection, they rarely mention anything about being Iranian in their self-identifications. New national identity, their American identity, is present, but they do not consciously delineate it as an identity that is separate from their Iranian backgrounds. Excerpts from each interview below illuminate the common coding in this group.

Given Heidi’s young age, one would not expect her to use the word “identity.” Yet, given her and Diane’s various involvements in and connections to Iranian culture and people, it is slightly surprising that neither says they are Iranian-American. The first question in Heidi’s interview is the question about herself, which was purposefully composed with the vague pronoun “here,” leaving it open to the interviewee’s
interpretation of it meaning this state, this country, this house, this city, etc. Heidi interprets it as the house she currently lives in. As seen below, different iterations of the question do not provoke a response wherein she identifies her ethnic composition.

M-[inoo]- Tell me a little bit about yourself. How old are you? When did you start living here?
H- So, I started living [in their current house] when I was in first grade.
Uh. I'm 11 years old. My birthday's May 25. I play volleyball.
M- How would you introduce yourself to somebody you just met at school?
H- I'd be, like, “Hi, I'm [Heidi].” I'd kinda, like, say my name, like, who I am.
M- Who are you?!
H- I'm [Heidi] [last name]!! [laughs]
M- Do [people] ask you about your name?
H- Well, about my last name, some people think, like, they do not really ask questions, but they want to know where I'm from, and I'm always, like, from Iran, so. People think I'm Italian.

While Heidi is quite Iranian and American in her everyday activities and her cultural surrounding, the distinction between the two different identity sources (American and Iranian) is not obvious.

Diane does not self-identify as Iranian, either:

M- What does identity mean to you?
D- Identity. Does it mean like the person you are and the information you have, like, stuff like that? Yeah, basically, personal information.
M- So, what's your identity?
[Discussing social networks like Facebook]
Diane sees her identity as her name, birthdate, and talents. “Personal stuff,” she clarifies in her responses, does not include Iranian- or American-ness, or nationality in general.

Nicole seems to be the least attached to anything Iranian among all the participants. Therefore, her lack of self-identification as such is not surprising. The researcher first asks her:

M- How do you introduce yourself to somebody you’ve just met?
N- I would go up to them. I would say, “Oh, what’s your name? My name is [Nicole]. What school do you go to? Err, like, where were you born?” And stuff like that.

At another point in the interview she is asked how she describes herself:

M- What information do you give about yourself?
[Nicole is reluctant to say anything. She pauses. The researcher continues,]
So, you say, “My name is [Nicole]. I’m from…”
N- [Jumps right in] But I prefer asking them more about themselves than me [telling them]. So, yeah.

Another question directly asks about her background. “If [people] ask you where you’re from, what do you say? Immediately, Nicole replies in a matter-of-fact tone, “Um. I’d just say, ‘Oh I’m from here in America!’” Later in the interview, the topic comes up again:

M- Does anybody ever ask you a question where you have to say something like, ‘My parents are from Iran?’
N- Oh, yeah, they do.
M- Does it happens often or not so much?
N- Mmm. It happens often. Yeah.
M- How do you feel about that? Is it cool? Is it annoying? Is it boring?
N- I don’t know. I think it’s just something people would ask in general.
It’s, like, a normal question.
M- Do you feel offended?
N- I do not feel offended.

Suffice it to say that the words Iranian, Iran, Persian, or any other variation of those words do not come from Nicole during the entire interview.

On the other hand, Samy self-identifies right away:

M- Introduce yourself to me as if I do not know anything about you.
S- I’m [Samy]. I’m 16. I am a junior in high school, I go to [school name].
I live in [town name], California. I’m Persian, both my parents are from Iran, I have a sister, she’s in eighth grade. I guess...what do you need to know about me?! I like to program some stuff on the computer...

It is possible that Samy mentions his ethnicity in an attempt to appease the researcher. All the interviews began with the researcher telling the interviewees that she was interviewing people who are Iranian and American about their internet usage habits. This may be a fair assumption, because when he is asked to describe an incident of confusion or ignorance while accessing new national culture, his example of not “getting sports” is more an issue of simply not liking sports. Aside from his personal preference against sports, Samy mentions himself that “in general [he is] pretty comfortable with American stuff.”

To conclude this section, an emergent theory that describes new national culture as perceived by children of immigrants is bolstered by another common category in data from these subjects. The reluctance, or ambivalence, of self-identifying in terms of ethnic composition by children of immigrants confirms the unimportance of ethnic factors in
their perception of self. This disinclination stands in contrast to immigrant children, who pointedly indicate the addition of and struggle to consolidate a new national culture in their identity.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Exacerbated by increased global movement today, identity formation involves “multiple strands of identity” (De Block & Buckingham, 2007, p. 18). The challenge of consolidating what may often be “contradictory influences” on identity creation occupies the lives of children affected by immigration (p. 187). Additionally, children use a combination of media “to create a fluid sense of cultural identity” (Sreberny & Zoonen, 2000, p. 71). Their perceptions and conceptions of this development can be mitigated by many factors including, but not exclusive to, place of birth, age at which emigration occurs, parental familiarity with new national culture, local social demographics, and local co-ethnic support, to name a few.

This study finds that at least in declarative statements, first generation children of immigrants do not indicate conscious delineation of Iranian versus American influences in their formation of identity. New national identity as a “new” entity introduced in their ethnic composition is not clearly visible to them. Immigrant children, however, vividly describe new national identity as a new addition to their identity’s composition. New national culture is, of course, locally accessible to these children, as it is the culture of the nation to which they have immigrated. New national culture is one of two local cultures contributing to their notion of self. NNID influencers should be distinguished from local co-ethnic identity influencers. Local co-ethnic identity is exclusive to members of an immigrant community from the same ethnic background. The internet, ever-increasing in
its presence, is a valuable tool for navigating all identity contributors and questions of the self. The internet is particularly advantageous to immigrant children seeking their NNID. These findings can benefit from further research addressing the following factors in more detail:

- Wider subject pool representing different age groups
- Wider subject pool representing other nationalities aside from Iranian immigrants
- Scientific observation of these children using the internet in a lab or more preferably in their normal daily life
- Longitudinal study comparing the results of each subject’s approach vis-a-vis their mental health, social comfort, reflection of self
- Parenting factors influencing child’s perception of NNID
- Expounding on what assimilation means in terms of NNID and how it manifests itself in internet activity

The findings in this thesis are consequential to future research efforts on the topic of diaspora children, their identity formation, and the internet because the following precedents have been introduced:

- Immigrant children and children of immigrants, even if differentiated by only one generation, perceive, if not conceive, their multicultural identity differently. Studies should take this difference seriously in their subject pool or topic scope.
- Assimilation to the culture of an immigrant’s destination country is mitigated by the ease of accessibility to local new national connections and local co-ethnic connections.
- Communication media permeating daily life may serve to isolate or acclimate immigrant children, depending on how it is used.
There is no deterministic verdict to be said about the utility of the internet in the identity formation process.

The value of such research efforts partially lies in its immediate applicability in today’s world. Some may argue that there is an urgent need for better comprehending this aspect of childhood development. As immigrant-receiving nations grow more powerful, their children’s development becomes increasingly consequential. Extant literature and studies such as this thesis emphasize the necessity for interdisciplinary academic research to evaluate the human condition thoroughly.
References


