

How do Second Generation Immigrants Experience Immigration?

Understanding the impact of the immigration process on
second generation immigrants through
the lens of psychoanalytic thinking.

A dissertation submitted

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the impact of immigration on second generation immigrants by investigating their lived experience. Using a hermeneutic methodology, this research focuses on second generation immigrants' experience of themselves and being in the world. It aims to investigate the psychological impact that immigration has had on this population. While many studies have been interested in second generation immigrants' mental and physical development, education and career prospects (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), little has been written about the internal struggles that they face.

As a way of gaining proximity to the internal world of this population, a hermeneutic literature review was carried out on a selection of literature written by and about second generation immigrants. The central theme of this research identified a conflict in this generation to individuate from their parents and experience their own struggles, which are often unthought and felt as unspeakable. A psychoanalytic lens was applied with an emphasis on Bion's (1962a) concept on container/contained in order to bring these experiences into consciousness. Further analysis of these findings speculated into the nature and quality of these conflicts. Findings were grouped into three main categories: "conflict in being different", "conflict with the container", and "complication in grieving". Implications for the practice of psychotherapy for this population are discussed. Suggestions for further research are made.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Chapter One

Introduction



静夜思
李白

窗前明月光
凝视地上霜
举头望明月
低头思故乡

*Before my bed
There is bright-lit moonlight
So that it seems
Like frost on the ground:*

*Lifting my head
I watch the bright moon
Lowering my head
I dream that I'm home.*

*Thoughts in the Silent Night
Li Bai (701-762)*

1

2

You may wonder how do second generation immigrants experience immigration when they have not lived through the transition? If this is your question, I hope you will find some insights towards an answer through reading this dissertation.

I am an immigrant, I am also a second generation ‘immigrant’. My father moved from a small village to a metropolitan city, where he met my mother and made his home. Migration within the same country might not seem to be much of a challenge in comparison to moving countries. However, I imagine it could not have been easy for this young man to be the first ever university attendee from the place he grew up – a humble farming village on an island. When I try to think when and where I got the idea for this particular topic, perhaps my father’s story was where it all started.

My immigration journey may seem different to my father’s story; yet, at the core of it there are more similarities than differences. We both left home for better opportunities,

¹ Artist unknown, art work retrieved from <http://img1.gtimg.com/kid/pics/hv1/146/41/700/45528101.jpg>

² This is one of the most well known Chinese poems. The author Li Bai was away from home and wrote this poem to express his feeling of homesickness. He thought of home, as he saw a moon that was round and bright, just as the one he would see at home.

separated from our families by the ocean, moved to a different cultural society, and took on a lonely journey filled with possibilities and the unknown. I was never very interested in the topic of immigration and neither was my father, he hardly talked about his story; but I am sure of one thing about my father – his heart still belongs to that humble village, even after almost 40 years.

My journey was smooth sailing, it did not take long for me to feel at home and settled in a foreign land. Living in an era with advancing communication technology, the distance from home has felt much closer than it is physically. The years have gone by quickly, and sometimes I have forgotten that I am an immigrant to this land. It is like the label ‘immigrant’ has become invisible, covered by a thick layer of dust. However, an invisible label does not mean the label is gone; it will never go away. It has been quietly sitting in my sense of identity, waiting until I started to reflect on my life and my family’s life. As I have found empathy for others and myself, I started to notice this ‘immigrant’ label and realised that I might have been avoiding the feelings this label carries and knowing what it represents.

In the training towards becoming a psychotherapist, I worked with clients who had an immigration background. I worked with immigrants who had relational problems with their children and I worked with children of immigrants. I became increasingly aware of the challenges in moving countries and started to wonder how parents’ experiences of immigration impact their children. Researchers have suggested that the immigration process challenges the stability of one’s psychic structure and family organisation, and this impact is transgenerational (Halperin, 2004).

I did an article search in the Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing (PEP) database, looking for articles with the keyword ‘immigration’ in the titles, and located only 29 results. Although this number does not represent how much psychoanalytic literature has been written on immigration, it does show that the literature on such a significant phenomenon is limited. In an interview with Salman Akhtar, the author of the article *A third individuation: Immigration, identity, and the psychoanalytic process* (Akhtar, 1995), he was asked “why do you think the topic of immigration and its impact on the analytic encounter had received so little attention before your paper?” (Akhtar, 2016,

pp.17). Akhtar believed that the early immigrant Continental analysts avoided topics concerning immigration because their own immigration experiences were connected to escaping from the Holocaust and Nazi atrocities, and these experiences were too traumatic and painful to face again. Immigration used to be, and still is in many cases, attached to traumatic events; for example, famine, war, colonisation, political movements, slavery trades and human trafficking. Studies of these events have shown damaging consequences on the suffering population, which has perhaps contributed to intergenerational trauma (Apprey, 1993, cited in Akhtar; Hazel, 2010; O’Loughlin, 2012).

Immigration itself is a complicated process and has been recognised as a traumatic experience (Antokoletz, 1993). Several psychoanalytic researchers have written about the challenges of immigration from many different perspectives including the emotional impact of immigration in relation to the immigrants’ infantile relationship to their parents (Akhtar, 1995; Antokoletz, 1993); and the function of culture in relation to one’s parents, internal change, self-subject, and as a holding environment and more (Antonkoletz, 1993). Further topics comprise loss and mourning (Ainslie, Harlem, Tummala-Narra, Barbanel & Ruth, 2013; Akhtar, 1995, 2011), ethnic/cultural identification (Ainslie et al., 2013; Akhtar, 1995; Antokoletz, 1993; Tummala-Narra, 2014), impact of racism (Ainslie et al., 2013; Akhtar, 2011; Stopford, 2009) and discrimination (Tummala-Narra, 2014). As I read these studies, I developed a greater understanding of my own experiences, and how immigration still can be a traumatic experience for people, like me, who have chosen to emigrate of our own free will.

It has been a journey of working through my own conflict in connection with this study on immigration. It was a painful topic, one that I wanted to hide away from and dismiss how personal it is for me. That is, until I read O’Loughlin’s (2012) introductory words. O’Loughlin referred to his process when writing a book on the Irish famine, particularly around its impact on his father. He wrote, “Yes, it felt intensely personal” (O’Loughlin, 2012, p. 233). These words contained my experience and plainly spoke of what I was too scared to admit. As I was able to acknowledge my fear, I felt free to examine my own reluctance in facing it. I realised that my avoidance in becoming personally engaged with this study reflected my resistance in facing the

impact that immigration (both my father's and mine) has had on me. As I started pondering the challenges that immigration imposes on immigrants' psyches, I wondered how it would impact their way of being with their children. That is, how are the children being affected by this experience of immigration?

The Research Question

Research dedicated to understanding the impact of immigration on second generation immigrants is limited. However, a trace of information related to this topic can be found in studies on immigration and generational trauma, including intergenerational conflicts in immigrant families (Ainslie et al., 2013; Mann, 2004; Tummala-Narra, 2014) and transgenerational implications in immigration (Akhtar, 2011; Antokoletz, 1993; Halperin, 2004).

In casual conversations with people about my topic of interest, I noticed that some immigrant parents seemed anxious, as if they were worried about what they might have missed and what could have negatively affected their child without them even knowing. There was also a sense of judgment. I wondered if perhaps they experienced a feeling of being judged for not giving their children the best possible upbringing. In addition, I wonder if it was I who felt judged for investigating something for which the parents might possibly feel responsible. This made me aware that my topic could provoke guilt in the parents about not having been the parents they thought they were or wished to be. As I noticed a discomfort in them, realising that my research and question could bring forth realities that may be unwelcome and distressing, I became curious about the nature of such defences from both generations. How could I acknowledge and empathise with the unavoidable silencing pain, loss, guilt, and shame that the immigrants have experienced, while giving an honest voice for the children who may have had experiences that their parents find too painful to know? Thus, I decided to do a study developing an understanding of the second generation immigrants' experiences, instead of focusing on the intergenerational implications of immigration on the second generation immigrants.

Aims of Research

The aim of this research is to expand current psychoanalytic understanding on immigration and, more specifically, the intergenerational impact of immigration. A hermeneutic literature review of second generation immigrants' stories will bring meaning and understanding to their lived experiences. I believe their experiences will provide rich information towards understanding the intergeneration impact of immigration. I conduct this study with a goal to inform my practice as a psychotherapist and the hope of bringing new perspectives to other psychotherapists who work with second generation immigrants.

We are living in a time where immigration is common and there is an increasing population of children and grandchildren of immigrants. This study also aims to provoke thinking around the impacts that have not yet been articulated. It is my hope to encourage greater understanding and empathy towards the experience of immigration, and thus promote a healthy and contained environment for the children of immigrants. Further, it is my hope that this environment will develop their ability to contain and articulate their experiences and emotions.

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter I have introduced this study. Chapter 2 considers the methodology and methods that I applied to this study. Chapter 3 explores the key concepts which are included in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings, telling the untold stories and experiences of the second generation. Chapter 5 discusses the synthesis of the overall findings, limitations and implications of this study, and concludes the dissertation.

Chapter Two

Methodology and Method

Grant and Giddings (2002) suggested that perhaps no single paradigm is better than another, unless a particular problem or question needs to be solved or answered. The choice of the research paradigm and methodology for this study has been a thoughtful process. In this chapter, I explore my reasons for choosing an interpretive hermeneutic approach to do a literature review. I also outline the method and specific steps by which the search was conducted.

Methodology

My research – “How do second generation immigrants experience immigration? Understanding the impact of the immigration process on second generation immigrants through the lens of psychoanalytic thinking” – seeks to understand the impact of the event of immigration on a meaningful level. Therefore an interpretive paradigm fits well with my question, because it focuses on people’s experiences, the meanings they make from their experiences, and how these meanings attach to the events in their lives (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Another reason I chose an interpretive paradigm is because it values the researcher’s self-understanding of the participants’ experiences. This gives me permission to bring in my own experience as an immigrant and as a daughter of an immigrant while exploring the literature. This paradigm also regards interpretation as necessary in expanding understandings of the material, of which the participants may not be aware (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The interpretive paradigm is a crucial epistemic framework for this research as it allows me to look beyond the written words and ponder the unspoken and unnoticed material to find meanings.

One methodology within the interpretative paradigm is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics refers to the science or art of interpretation (Smythe & Spence, 2012) to explore what lies behind what is being said (Grant & Giddings, 2002), giving voice to and drawing out different subjective understandings of existence (Schuster, 2013). The hermeneutic approach acknowledges that truth stays hidden and reveals itself in multiple facets (Fleck, Smith, & Hitchen, 2011). The truth lies in both the aesthetic and the historical structure of its appearances, and hermeneutics challenges us to engage in a critique of

both the aesthetic and the historical consciousness (Gadamer, 2013). Although it looks for the truth, a hermeneutic approach “does not assume that correct or ultimate understanding can be achieved, but instead is interested in the process of developing understanding” (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, p. 159). From a hermeneutical perspective, understanding must attach to an event in which meaning arises, and in the event, the meaning of all statements is formed and actualised (Gadamer, 2013). It is an ongoing process to allow meaning and understanding to occur. A literature review with a hermeneutic approach focuses on analysing the text and expanding the understandings of interpretation and language (Smythe, 2012). This has guided my focus in seeking meanings in my research.

Hermeneutics

While the subjectivity of hermeneutics provides the framework for my research, two different views on hermeneutics have guided my thinking while reviewing the literature. Gadamer (2013) talked about both Schleiermacher’s and Hegel’s view of hermeneutics, both of which support my thinking and application of the hermeneutic approach to this literature review.

Schleiermacher’s view of hermeneutic thinking involves relocating historical knowledge and reconstructing the tradition (Gadamer, 2013). It is a way to restore the original meaning of the art, text and writing, by looking into the history and the past life in which they were created. Doing so highlights the importance of investigating the background of the stories and understanding the story as a whole. The context of this current study, on second generation immigrants, is related to their parents’ experience of immigration. Therefore, although it is my intention to focus on the experience of second generation immigrants, I acknowledge the significance of their parents’ journey. That is, the children’s experiences of immigration only exist through their parents’ immigration, and their experiences are inseparable.

Another hermeneutic perspective, suggested by Hegel, is that the elements of the art (texts) contain original meanings which are in a living relationship to the viewers, rather than just representations of the past (Gadamer, 2013). This view of hermeneutic thinking focuses on the interaction between the viewer and the art, wherein the

meanings in the art can be found by the viewer through his or her interactions with the art. Thus, by engaging with second generation immigrants' stories, I will gain understandings of their experiences. Such engagement will deepen my understanding of their experience and enable me to connect with elements of feelings that might have otherwise remained unconscious. The unspoken experiences weigh heavily and have a strong influence on the findings in this study.

These two views – reconstructing the work (Schleiermacher's view) and holding on to the futility of restoration (Hegel's view) – are prominent in this research. In this way, hermeneutics involves understanding the experience of the past and the unspoken past, as well as honouring present and future perspectives.

Hermeneutics and Psychoanalysis

I briefly looked into literature on the relationship between hermeneutics and psychoanalysis, because I felt there were similarities in the processing and interpreting of information. I found that many authors compared and contrasted the two. Friedman (2000) argued that “the Freudian analyst might prefer to silently enlarge his or her understanding by *mentally* addressing imaginary questions to the patient, as a hermeneuticist does to a text” (p. 323). Summers (2014) highlighted the influences of hermeneutic thinking in the development of psychoanalysis. Bouchard (1995) addressed problems in written literature around the discussion of psychoanalytical understanding and interpreting unconscious meanings as a hermeneutic discipline. Bouchard (1995) and Ahumada (1996) related hermeneutics to Freud's thinking around the unconscious and suggested that hermeneutic aspects described psychoanalytic methods in allowing unconscious enactments to become representable and ostensible.

One of the key psychoanalytic models that helped me conceptualise this topic is Bion's (1962a) concept of container and the contained. Bion's developmental ideas suggested that the mother's ability to contain and process her infant's unbearable/unthinkable state helps the infant to bear his or her experience, as the mother digests her infant's unconscious experience and make sense of it. The containing process requires the 'container's' capacity of reverie to bring the unbearable unconscious into consciousness. This has many similarities to the way hermeneutic enquiry seeks understanding.

Hermeneutic enquiry is interested in the unspoken messages in the text, including meanings hidden behind the visible materials, as well as the unconscious thoughts of the creator (e.g. artist, writer). This unconscious information can be expressed in themes, characters, images, physical responses, dreams, and more. Freud suggested artists transformed their wishful fantasies into art and associated art with the artist's repressed unconscious wishes. These unconscious fantasies were acted out in bodily symptoms, creating patterns and images that represent the repressed information (Sayers, 2007). As psychoanalysis is interested in a person's unconscious experiences, hermeneutics is interested in the unconscious/unspoken experiences in the art.

Debate abounds on the topic of intersubjectivity in hermeneutics and psychoanalytic experiences. Friedman (2000) discussed the use of language and dialogue, suggesting that the function of text is interpreted differently from an intersubjective perspective than from a hermeneutic perspective. I consider otherwise. In making interpretations, hermeneutics is inevitably an intersubjective process, in which the person doing the interpreting brings in his or her own subjectivity. This subjective feeling and thought is connected with the object, and brought forth by the encounter with it. Overlapping with psychoanalytic experience, intersubjectivity recognises that the psychoanalytic experience rests upon the human encounter, where we act upon and influence one another even though we do not have knowledge of each other (Reeder, 1998). The intersubjective dialectic of interpreting between the conscious and unconscious representations brought forth the pursuit of the truth in hermeneutics.

I encountered many arguments during my search for literature that supported my belief that there is a close relationship between hermeneutic thinking and psychoanalytic approaches. While I am intrigued by the complexity of this topic, I am not going to discuss it further. In taking what I need for my current research, I hope that my reasoning has given a good enough picture to illustrate my choice of hermeneutics. As a psychotherapist, it is through a psychoanalytic lens that I interpret the literature. The similarities between hermeneutic philosophy and psychoanalysis thinking further reinforce my choice for using a hermeneutic methodology.

Bias

This research was brought forth by my own experience and interest. Firstly I am an immigrant in New Zealand from China and I identify as a second generation immigrant. Secondly, I have experience in providing psychotherapy to second generation immigrants in New Zealand. Given my own experiences, subjectivity and bias, my writing thus far has evidenced a proposed hypothesis that immigration has an intergenerational psychological impact on the second generation. I have felt a sense of fear and anxiety around ‘what might be the impact?’ These feelings motivated and inspired me to seek understanding through conducting this research. In the hermeneutic enquiry, it is inevitable to include the researcher’s own experiences and emotions in interpreting texts. A hermeneutic way of being is based on trying to understand one’s self and others in a common world (Fleck et al., 2011; Schuster, 2013). According to a hermeneutic perspective, it is inevitable that researchers are embedded in a context of explanation that interferes with the context of the data (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). On the other hand, as Hegel’s view (Gadamer, 2013) on hermeneutics suggests, the art (data) represents its own meanings, and it is my intention to stay open and perceive the meanings which the text represents (Schuster, 2013). With this in mind, I endeavour to remain aware of my feelings and carefully work with any emotional responses to the texts before further progressing to a deeper level of interpretation (Schuster, 2013).

Method

I used Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic’s (2010, 2014) seven progressive steps of a hermeneutic framework for the literature search and acquisition. Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) also suggested an analysis and interpretation circle, but I chose to apply Reeder’s (1998) model of four stages of hermeneutic circles for processing information from the literature. According to Reeder’s model, the researcher’s emotional experience is indispensable to the hermeneutic enquiry in order to obtain meaning. I found this model more relatable to Bion’s (1962a) theory of thinking, which emphasises emotional experience as the foundation of mental development that facilitates one’s capacity for thinking.

Literature Search

1. Searching

Although searching is named as the first of the seven stages, it should be noted that it is often not the beginning of the research (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). As this research has been guided by hermeneutic enquiry, it is important to acknowledge the beginning of the search started from locating my own experience, as discussed in the introduction.

The databases used in my search included PEP for psychoanalytic literature; Auckland University of Technology (AUT) library search; Google Scholar for academic literatures; Google search engine for inspiration and examining available books/stories about and written by second generation immigrants; and Auckland Council libraries for novels and books.

A range of keywords were used to search for psychoanalytic literature that helped me gain understanding of the experiences of second generation immigrants. The keywords in my initial database search were: “container and the contained”, “Bion”, “third individuation”, “immigration”, “immigrant”, “child”, “children”. The keywords I used in the second search included: “immigration”, “second generation immigrants”, “experience”, “impact”, “generation”, “trans-/inter-generation”, “memory of immigration”, “stories written by second generation immigrants”, “books written by second generation immigrants”. Additional searches included keywords: “shame”, “super-ego”, “true / false self”, “differentiation”, “separation”, “individuation” “guilt”.

2. Sorting

I sorted the literature initially by relevance. Search engines such as PEP and Google Scholar highlighted the searched keywords in the body of the articles in the displayed results. This helped me to get a basic overview of relevant articles for my topic. I also sorted the results by year and author. In this instance, I looked for primary sources and texts that were written by specific groups of authors.

3. Selecting

I read the abstracts of the literature to aid my decision on which articles to include and which to discard. However, this process was not straightforward as most of the time I felt indecisive after reading the abstract. There appeared to be very little qualitative research directly addressing the topic. After gaining a more comprehensive understanding of hermeneutic enquiry, I extended my search to include non-academic texts.

4. Acquiring

Most of the academic texts were obtained via an AUT library search. As a student of AUT, I had access to most of the journal articles. There were a small number of articles that I found on the Google search engine with free pdf files available for downloading. I also requested books from AUT Library and Auckland City libraries.

5. Reading

This step is for increasing understanding of the literature and, as mentioned above, I have opted to use Reeder's (1998) model of the four stages of the hermeneutic circle to process information from the literature. I will discuss Reeder's model in more detail in the following section.

6. Identifying

As I processed information and engaged with the stories, I wrote down themes that arose in the process. I then identified a theme(s) that would deepen my understanding of the experience of second generation immigrants for further searches.

7. Refining

Combining the new themes retrieved from reading the texts brought new light to my search. I revisited and refined my previous search terms and introduced new keywords to the search engine. This took me back to the "beginning" of the circle, Stage 1, searching.

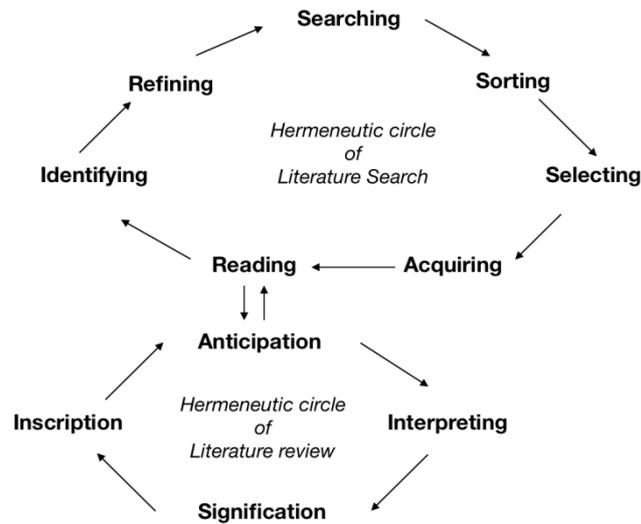


Figure 1. The hermeneutic circles of literature search and literature review in this study.

Literature Review

Reeder (1998) emphasised that entry into the hermeneutic circle can occur at any of the four stages, which include anticipation, interpretation, signification, and inscription. Bion’s idea around the development of thinking is also represented in the following discussion to reflect my preference for using Reeder’s model.

1. Anticipation

This links to fore-understanding; an understanding we previously have that helps us to navigate in the world and project its inherent possibility towards a future. In the moment of anticipation, the researcher/reader may have a feeling of knowing, but the understanding has yet to become accessible as a psychological reality (Reeder, 1998). I found this moment of anticipation similar to Bion’s (1962b) thinking on “pre-conception”, which suggests an inborn expectation and *a priori* knowledge that was triggered by, but has not yet been applied to, the current experience. It was important to acknowledge that my responses to the reading could be from my own experience and/or the writers’ experience.

2. Interpreting

Interpreting brings the anticipation to a possible psychological reality, through forms of “saying, dreaming, fantasy, heedful action” (Reeder, 1998, p. 66). It is a creative process to bring forth a new reality that is different from the old. It moves from seeing only the representation of the fore-understanding (anticipation) to investigating the spontaneity underlying events that give substantial quality to the moment (Reeder, 1998). A similar process, known as ‘reverie’ (Bion, 1962), is often noted in psychoanalysis, where unconscious material is communicated and received in forms of imagery, memories, and so on. This unconscious material is then made conscious by the receivers, who in the ideal situation have the ability to make meaning of the material raised in the experience. Reeder (1998) emphasised that interpretation must be informed by an event and, further, that interpreting is not pure spontaneity without being informed by its context; the intention is to find meanings in the hermeneutic act. This is also a way to ‘think’. Bion (1962b) explained that the apparatus of thinking develops when our pre-conceptions became thoughts through the use and ongoing development of *alpha function* that transform *beta elements* into *alpha elements*.

3. Signification

Interpreting brings information to the consciousness; whereas signification solidifies the interpretation and tests the subjective fantasies against the objective reality. Signification highlights the impact of the meaning that is given to the experience and with this opportunity the subject interacts with the reality (Reeder, 1998).

4. Inscription

The process of signification creates an experience from interacting with the world, and inscription is about the giving and taking of that experience (Reeder, 1998). Reeder (1998) referred the moment of inscription to Freud’s term ‘unconscious thoughts’. This experience might also be related to *beta-elements*, which are unthought/unmetabolised affective experiences that can be turned into *alpha-elements* through *alpha function* (Bion 1962a, 1962b). The moment of inscription

fascinates me the most, as I wonder in what moment it occurs and how do these unconscious thoughts move along the path of interpreting and so on. Reading selected articles, the moments of inscription represented my engagement with the writers' conscious and unconscious experiences.

Inscription was the first to be discussed amongst the four moments in Reeder's (1998) paper. I decided to discuss it last because I only became aware of my own process of inscription (the existence of my own unconscious affective experience) at a later stage of my thinking process during this study.

As I started reading and exploring material for this research I kept a journal of thoughts and experiences. As thoughts, images, and memories came to me, I attempted to write as freely as I could. I made labels and wrote down themes that came to mind as I read. Slowly, similar themes started to occur repeatedly and with that I carefully conducted another literature search on those topics, thus re-entering the hermeneutic circle.

As a circle does not have a beginning or an end point, exiting the hermeneutic circle was a careful choice to make. I stopped going further with my search when I felt I had enough understanding to produce this current dissertation. As an ultimate understanding cannot be achieved (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014), hermeneutics does not see truth as something that can be possessed, but as always "on its way" (Reeder, 1998, p. 66). To me, this current research is just marking the starting line for developing our understanding on the second generation's experience of immigration.

Introduction of Literature

To obtain lived experiences of second generation immigrants I have chosen a mix of resources that tell stories of immigration families and second generation immigrants. The following is a synopsis of the novels and the references of literature with stories of second generation immigrants that I have selected for this study. I chose these books and papers because the stories reflect my own and my clients' experiences of being a second generation immigrant.

***Everything I have not Told You* by Celeste Ng (2014)**

A fiction thriller about a 16 year old girl who died from drowning in a lake next to her house. The book tells a story about her life and the people around her. Her father is a child immigrant from China, who has always longed to “blend in” and her mother is an American, who always wanted to be different. She had a high achieving older brother and an invisible younger sister.

***The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan (1989)**

This novel tells 16 stories of eight women: four mothers (one died, and her story was told by her daughter), who immigrated to America from China, and their four American born daughters. They shared stories about their lives and memories that often relate to their relationship with their own mothers.

***Fresh off the Boat* by Oscar Kightley and Simon Small (2005)**

This is a dialogue of a play that tells a story of a Samoan family – a mother and her two New Zealand born daughters – living in New Zealand. The family has to face culture conflicts and complications as they welcome the mother’s brother from Samoa to live with them.

***Fresh off the Boat* by Eddie Huang (2013)**

A memoir of Eddie Huang’s life as a child of immigrant parents. He talks about food, family, music, and culture to tell his family’s immigration story and his story of what it means to be an American.

***Immigrant Parents and Their Emigrant Adolescents: The Tension of Inner and Outer Worlds* by Mali A. Mann (2004)**

Case vignettes of three immigrant children used in Mali A. Mann’s study. The children talked about their struggles and their relationships with their parents.

***Immigration and Acculturation: Mourning, Adaptation, and the Next Generation* by Salman Akhtar (2011)**

Selected texts and personal communications about children of immigrants used in Chapter 7 ‘*The Next Generation*’.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed my methodology, hermeneutics, and the existing bias in this study. I outlined the method I chose for this study and introduced selected literature. The next chapter attends to the context of the research, presenting discussions of key concepts and refining key terms used in the study.

Chapter Three

Introduction of the Main Concepts

Second Generation Immigrants

The group of people defined by the term ‘second generation immigrant’ can be ambiguous. The book, *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation* by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) included child immigrants, who arrived to the United States of America (USA) with their parents, as well as children of immigrants who were born in the USA. There is also a term ‘2.5 generation’ used to differentiate children born to one native-born parent, as opposed to children born to two immigrant parents (Ramakrishnan, 2004). For this present study, the term ‘second generation immigrants’ comprises children born in a country that is different to one or both parents’ birth country (Liddell, Nickerson, Sartor, Ivancic, & Bryant, 2016; Suro & Passel, 2003). In other words, second generation immigrants are children born in the country to which one or both of their parents have immigrated to.

Studies on immigrants’ perspective of life, found that the second generation generally do better in standard accounts of immigrant assimilation, compared to child immigrants and native-born children (Ramakrishnan, 2004). Many studies have found education success and attainment amongst the second generation immigrants (Ramakrishnan, 2004; Suro & Passel, 2003; Xu & Wu, 2017). On the other hand, a study found higher prevalence rates for mood, anxiety, and personality disorder in the second generation immigrant population in comparison to first generation immigrants (Liddell et al., 2016). This study was set in Australia and suggested that the increasing prevalence of reported mental health disorders could be because the second generation were more familiar with western notions of mental disorder (Liddell et al., 2016). However, I would like to also consider the impact of immigration which may have increased psychological disturbance for the second generation.

Akhtar (2011) has described a number of unique challenges that second generation immigrants face, including experiencing and dealing with biculturalism from birth and having to negotiate the cultures that are at the core of their being. This research is

focused on gaining further understanding of what second generation immigrants experience and how they manage these experiences.

Container and the Contained

The conceptual model of ‘container and contained’ describes a psychoanalytic notion, developed by Bion (1962) who stated “both container and contained are models of abstract representation of psycho-analytic realizations” (p. 90). Bion’s model of container/contained is a development of Melanie Klein’s concept of projective identification, which Bion also suggested is an early form of one’s capacity to think. The container (mother/analyst) is able to receive the projected intolerable feelings from infant/patient and transform them to something that is re-introjected, and therefore tolerable for the infant/patient (the contained) (Bion, 1962). Bion introduced the term alpha-function, a psychic process that transforms affective experiences from an undigested fact to an emotional thought/manageable psychic event (alpha elements) (Brown, 2013). The capacity of reverie is part of the alpha function (Bion, 1962), in which the unconscious information (beta element) emerges in themes, characters, images, physical responses, dreams and more; and its function in the psychotherapeutic relationship has been widely studied (Ferro, 2015).

Besides the mother-infant and the analyst-patient dyads, the concept of container and contained is also found useful in understanding many different communicative dimensions (Eizirik, 2013). Biran (2015) described three other aspects of the container as she experienced them. They are the developed internal container, the containing function of the ‘word’ and the containing function of the group, the society. Living in a new country is like being in an unfamiliar container (e.g. language, society), and what is assumed to be ‘normal’ may no longer be normal. Thus, the individual (the contained) might have to learn new ways to be within the new container, and the container (e.g. the society, capacity of making meanings) might also be challenged in receiving the foreign ‘contained’ (e.g. the individual, unfamiliar feelings).

Children of immigrants are prone to becoming the container for their parents’ unspoken residual mourning (Akhtar, 2003) and deposited parental guilt (Akhtar,

2011). As the children of immigrants assimilate to the culture faster, they may also be susceptible to becoming the container of the anxiety and fear generated by their parents' experience in the new culture. The developmental model of container/contained in the mother/child relationship can be reversed in the dynamic of an immigrant family. That is, the children might have to manage the parents' projections of unprocessed thoughts. Mann (2004) proposed that because it was a tremendous task to cope with the loss and mourning process in immigration, immigrant parents were often unable to provide emotional support to their adolescent children in dealing with complex developmental tasks. Furthermore, internal conflicts within children can be increased with the projections of their parents' own identity conflicts that have arisen from navigating the two cultures.

This research is built on the belief that the children of immigrants experience immigration from receiving unconscious projection of their parents' immigration experiences. Thus, the immigration experience is transmitted to the children in the container/contained (Bion, 1962) process. Most of these unconscious experiences and feelings are acted out in the parent-child relationship, rather than being understood or noticed. In reviewing the stories, as a researcher, I aim to understand these unconscious experiences through the lens of container/contained (Bion, 1962). That is, I will remain open to feelings that are provoked in me when I read the stories, and use my own experiences of these feelings and psychoanalytic writings to understand them.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the two main concepts that set the foundation of this research. The information was collected in my initial search, where I grappled with the difficulties in focusing on the second generation immigrants' experiences, as the main subject of this research (as distinct from their parents' immigration experience). It was difficult because the impact on the children was an indirect result of the impact of the immigration on their parents.

Chapter Four

Findings

Along the Way

Feeling Stuck and Overwhelmed

It has been a complex and overwhelming experience reviewing stories and literature related to this topic. Unlike reading for leisure, I read with the intention of developing understandings and finding meanings in the stories. During this process, I repeatedly encountered many poignant feelings such as sadness, confusion, and loneliness. I sometimes found myself stuck in finding words to describe my experience while reading, and was left frustrated. However, at other times I found myself overwhelmed by vivid memories and images that were provoked by these feelings. I learned to note down my experiences, whether it was a feeling of being stuck or a feeling of being overwhelmed, so I could revisit my notes later and understand these experiences. This process is described by Reeder (1998) in the hermeneutic circle of a literature review. The experience I had when I was deeply immersed in the material that I was reading is part of the process of searching and meaning making.

When I felt stuck, I often stared at a blank page in my notebook feeling frustrated. That perhaps is a moment of inscription (Reeder, 1998), where my responses were impacted by being engaged with the material. My internal responses sometimes brought up familiar feelings (moment of anticipation) and other times provoked images and memories (moment of interpreting). During these moments, I found myself writing poems and short stories to keep my experience real and alive. Often in discussion of the above, with my supervisor, I found my capacity to connect with these feelings increased and I gained deeper understanding of the material I had read. Thoughts and meanings were deepened through conversations with others and from reviewing my own experiences against the material that I had read (moment of signification). This was an ongoing developmental process to find a proximity of meanings, unlike quantitative or more experimental scientific reports that pursue trends and patterns.

As I frequently experienced the feeling of being stuck and overwhelmed, I became curious about these undigested feelings I had while reading the second generation immigrants' stories. It made me wonder if these feelings were dismissed, neglected, unspoken, unheard, and unseen. It felt as if there was so much that could not be talked about. This is illustrated in the book *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 2014), when Lena St.Clair, whose parents are Scottish and Chinese, has something she sees and experiences but does not talk about:

And after that I began to see terrible things. I saw these things with my Chinese eyes, the part of me I got from my mother. I saw devils dancing feverishly beneath a hole I had dug in the sandbox. . . . And when I became older, I could see things that Caucasian girls at school did not. . . . I didn't tell anyone about the things I saw, not even my mother. (p. 106)

Avoiding the Parents

As I was trying to write the finding of this research, I encountered a great deal of internal resistance in bringing the second generation's experiences forth. It has been very difficult to focus on writing about just the second generation because their existence and experiences are closely related to their parents, who are the first generation immigrants. I felt torn in having to constantly re-direct my thoughts back to focusing on the second generation. Winnicott (1965) famously said "There is no such thing as an infant" (p. 39), and he pointed out that there would be no infant if there is no maternal care. Ogden (1985) elaborated on this thought and suggested the mother-infant is a psychological entity, and the study of the infantile psyche is also a study of the development of mother-infant to mother and infant relationship. Perhaps the need is inevitable to refer to the first generation immigrants when coming to understand the second generation's experience of immigration. On the other hand, my struggle in bringing the second generation's story to be the core focus of my writing may also reflect how little space there might be for the second generation to bring themselves forward in the parent-child dyad relationship. Furthermore, my difficulty in solely focusing on the experience of the second generation immigrants may highlight a specific challenge in differentiating between the two generations; as if the children's sense of self is always under the shadow of their parents. It may be difficult for them to

separate from their parents; to individuate and develop their own unique identity. Perhaps unconsciously they closely identify themselves with their parents. I will further discuss this challenge of individuation in the later section - “Go”, in this chapter.

The following sub-chapters are written in acknowledgment of the enormous amount of psychological demand the first immigrants experience when migrating to a new country. The challenge of providing for the next generation while managing their own struggle in the new land is not something that I intend to discount in this study. My aim is to single out the two topics, so that they can be thought about separately. I am aware of my fear of being seen as dismissive of the parents’ sacrifices and hard work, if I am to find material that only focuses on the second generation immigrants’ needs. At the same time, I have noticed my defensive responses saying “by no means am I dismissing the parents’ feelings”. This defensive response seems to quickly push away an uncomfortable feeling of being misunderstood and blamed. I wonder if this is how some of second generation immigrants may feel, like they were misunderstood and perhaps blamed for acknowledging their feelings and needs when it may possibly hurt their parents or be seen as a disloyalty. This would have added pressure to the second generation immigrants to recognise and honour how they feel.

In the following three sub-chapters, I explore second generation immigrants’ experience of being in the world, based on material from the selected books and literature that are listed in the previous chapter. I am using one of my own writings from my process to connect the findings.

Fresh Air

*The window opens to a breath of fresh air
new lights no one has seen before
Fascinating, intriguing*

*But mum sees it differently
Questions, puzzles
I see fear in her eyes but why?
(my reflection, pt.1)*

Differences

It can be easy to see the two worlds that immigrants have to navigate. Second generation immigrants are often recognised as a 'local' or native person because they were born and raised in the country to which their parents immigrated. They may speak and behave like the local people, having implicitly adopted behavioural norms. This may become a façade, in which they appear to have acculturated and found their identity in the mainstream culture. However, second generation immigrants are faced with the challenge of straddling the family culture and the main societal culture as early as birth (Akhtar, 2011). Thus, this façade makes the challenge of managing the two worlds almost invisible and unnoticeable. The children are growing up in the two worlds, identify with both worlds, but also see their own differences in comparison to others in each world.

Feeling different is very common amongst second generation immigrants. They recognise the ways in which they are different to the local children. They may look different to their local friends. They can speak a different language or their family may speak with a different accent to the locals. They may think differently to the majority of the local population, as they grew up following a different cultural standard and carry the values passed down from their immigrant parents. In addition to feeling different from the 'outside world', they may also feel culturally different to their parents. They have often learned to behave differently when they are at home to when they are with the locals, and they may also notice their family act differently compared to the local people. Akhtar (2011) suggested that being different can bring feelings of shame in the

children. As I pondered this feeling of shame, I noticed there was more to it than just being different. Being seen as connected with both cultures may disguise their need to process their feelings toward their differences in both cultures. It is as if the spotlight is on the acculturated part of the individual and the other part of them that faces the conflicts is hidden in the shadows. Erikson (1956) suggested that the feeling of shame is related to feeling exposed and self-conscious; that “one is visible and not ready to be visible” (p. 97). Perhaps the second generation immigrants’ experience in recognising their ‘difference’ contributes to a felt sense of being exposed when their differences are noticed in their mainstream communities. It is possible that second generation immigrants experience greater shame at times when their differences make them stand out because they are not ready to be seen as different. The following are examples of common experiences that children of immigrant parents have, during lunch time at school, where the child is given lunch food that is different to most of the local children.

My son was around six years old, in first grade in elementary school. I had begun noticing that his lunches would come home “untouched.” I would pack roti (Indian bread) for lunch on some days, in addition to the options available in school. It was on those days that he would skip eating. When I asked him, he told me that he was being made fun of because of his “different” food. It was difficult to watch him go through these experiences. After talking to him about the differences in people around the world, I had asked my son to tell the children that the matter would be taken to the principal of the school if they did not stop. Luckily, the teasing did stop in a few days.

The same experience recurred around his eighth year, and this time the principal of the school had to be notified. Once again, the school had to discuss “differences” in the assembly and things subsided. Now as a twelve-year-old boy, he clearly expresses his opinion on some traditional food choices that cannot be taken to school and are preferably eaten only at home (Akhtar, 2011, p. 121)

Every day, I got sent to school with Chinese lunch. Some days it was tomato and eggs over fried rice, others it was braised beef and carrots with Chinese broccoli, but every day it smelled like shit. I’d open up the Igloo lunchbox and

a stale moist air would waft up with weak traces of soy sauce, peanut oil, and scallions. I didn't care about the smell, since it was all I knew, but no one wanted to sit with the stink kid. Even if they didn't sit with me, they'd stand across the room pointing at me with their noses pinched, eyes pulled back, telling ching-chong jokes. It was embarrassing so I asked Mom to start packing me some white people food. (Huang, 2013, p. 30)

Some children are able to ask their parents to make a change for them (Huang, 2013), but some, like the boy in Akhtar's (2011) story, cannot until later in their life. I become aware of a feeling of pain in being made fun of, and a sense of shame, when reading about the boy in Akhtar's writing, that he was not able to express his opinion for six years.

Shut Down

From reading the stories and case studies, it occurred to me that when immigrant children ask their parents questions about their 'differences', the parents who are ambivalent about their own bicultural identity would likely give ambivalent answers. For example, answers such as 'because we are xx (where the parent migrated from), that is just how we do things' [or 'because they are xx (the nationality of the people)'] and 'no, you are no different to them'. First of all, these two answers do not encourage further discussion; nor support the children as they develop their own bicultural identity. Instead, second generation immigrants may feel as if their questions are not appreciated, which may discourage further exploration of the two worlds in which they live. Second, some children notice their parents' discomfort in being different, which may increase their own anxiety when recognising their own differences as compared to others. These two types of answers produce opposite responses in the children. The first answer alludes to separation, where we (the family) and they (the main stream culture) are separated, and that the two cannot co-exist. The two cultures are being compared and separated, and one is often seen to be better than the other. Whereas the second answer produces a sense of fear in being different. Therefore, their differences are denied and the challenges that the children have to face are ignored. Furthermore, the children may identify with the conflicts their parents experience and internalise the anxiety and fear of being different. These feelings are not being contained and stay as unformulated and

unthinkable thoughts. As a result of the fear, anxiety and unthinkable thoughts, they feel ashamed if and when their differences are exposed. In addition, both responses seem to hide something that is important in the children's process of finding their identity. The experience of *not being seen* as a whole can provoke a feeling of shame of who they are (Tharne, 1979).

Mismatching

I have briefly mentioned that the children of immigrants often feel different to their parents in terms of their cultural identity. The ways they relate to the 'outside world' can be very different to their parents, influencing their differences in responding to events. Mann (2004) wrote about his client Robert, whose parents are both Iraqi, and his experience of living his life in accordance with the decisions his parents had made for him:

Robert went to an all-private boys' school in his middle and high school years. He failed to do well in his freshman year in college, which he related to the arrangements his parents had made for him to live at home, even though he was accepted at several other universities in the United States and outside the country. Robert was angry with his parents for not permitting him to leave home and enrol in an out-of-state university. (p. 149)

Children of immigrants may often feel dismissed by their parents, and that their parents are interested in things of which they are not. These experiences make the children feel frustrated, sad, disappointed, and angry. However, most of the time they do not challenge their parents' experiences or decisions, because the urge to protect the bond they have with the parents is strong. In some of the stories, the children feel resentful and guilty after challenging their parents' ideas. A sense of guilt suggests that the ego is coming to terms with the super-ego; that anxiety (from challenging their parents) has matured into guilt (Winnicott, 1965). In these mismatching moments, the children often feel powerless and demanded upon. The parents' decisions are influenced by their super-ego, which holds their cultural values (Freud, 1989). Although the children recognise that the standards and demands are inapplicable to the society they live in, they feel pressured to conform. These mismatching experiences can have a long term

impact on the child's development. Brandchaft (2007) suggested that caregiver's deadening, impinging, frightening, or abusive mismatching expressions interfere with the child's vitalising expressions in his/her development; this pattern of feeling out of sync will continue automatically and affect the child's self-reflective awareness.

Go

*She says "go and be, it is good outside";
but why's there fear in your eyes?
"Come back to me" she says;
"learn and grow
and help me and guide me to the light"*

*I am frightened,
But the excitement and her wish are stronger than my fear
I'll go and be good
I'll learn and make her proud.
(my reflection, pt.2)*

Torn between the Two Worlds

Strength to navigate between the two worlds is required throughout the life of a second generation immigrant. In the selected stories, it was commonly found that children started to notice their differences and learned to handle themselves in different situations when they entered school. During school age, children are exposed to a wider variety of social settings and start to form peer groups. The standards of conduct and the values that they have learned at home may be challenged by other social standards. This becomes more confronting during adolescent years because it undermines two key developmental tasks: finding their sense of identity (Erikson, 1956) and becoming a member of society (Blos, 1967). Adolescence has been recognised as the process of second individuation, which requires a departure from family dependency and loss of infantile object ties, and these changes in the psychic structures heighten the vulnerability of the personality organisation (Blos, 1967). Adolescents face the challenge of assimilating their experiences in the world in order to triumph the

separation-individuation process. The greater the cultural gap between home and the outside world, the harder it will be for the child to negotiate. The demand of navigating the two worlds intensifies ordinary developmental conflicts, and as children enter adolescence, they face greater challenges in managing both worlds (Ahktar, 2011).

The developmental tasks during adolescence for the children of immigrants are massive. They often have to learn different sets of rules that apply to the same situation. This can be very confusing and may lead to problems in society and at home. The complexity in managing different demands requires space and guidance to facilitate such learning. However, often immigrant parents may also struggle with their own journey of individuation. Ahktar (1995) compared the challenges that immigrants face during immigration and called it 'a third individuation'.

Second generation immigrants often learn to adapt to situations over time, and they are good at finding their place in many different settings. I believe this is due to the demand on them to behave accordingly, following different rules in two or more different cultural environments from a young age. However, the possible flip side of being skilled in adaptation is lack of integration. On one hand being adaptable is an asset to have in the world but, on the other hand, the child may experience confusion and anger about the demands made by different groups of people. Eddie (Huang, 2013), whose parents are both from China, recalls his struggles when he was growing up:

... but I knew how it felt to have someone standing over you, controlling your life and wanting to call it something else. From the people at Christian Fellowship to First Academy to my parents to Confucius to thousands of years of ass-backwards Chinese thinking, I knew how it felt. Everything my parents did to me and their parents did to them was justified under the banner of Tradition, Family and Culture. And when it wasn't them it was someone impressing Christianity on me and when it wasn't Christianity it was whiteness. (p. 123)

In the centre of managing the demands from all cultural entities, the child may experience feelings of being torn apart. The task of navigating the familial culture and

the outside world never stops for second generation immigrants and this feeling of being split may continue into adulthood.

Being the Container for Their Parents

Akhtar (2011) pointed out that because the children often learn about the local culture in a more rapid and deeper way than their parents, they are forced into the role of being their parents' teacher. They are put in a position to “‘translate’ (literally or metaphorically) the ways of the culture-at-large for their parents” (Akhtar, 2011, p. 125). That is, the parents depend on their children to help them navigate the society, by relying on their children to understand how things work. This kind of relationship transfers the role of teacher from parents to the children, and the children become the container for their parents. As language and society provide a containing function (Biran, 2015) that helps us understand and make sense of our surroundings, moving countries requires immigrants to re-learn ways of thinking according to the new cultural rules. Immigrant parents who are less acculturated than their children will rely on their children to make sense of their experiences for them. This can be seen as the children explaining matters to the parents, or the parents may only experience the outside world through their children's understanding of the world. There are also instances where the parents deposit their unprocessed frustrations (for example, grief in leaving home, guilt in leaving loved ones behind, and anger toward the new and confusing country) onto their children, and their children learn to perform accordingly to soothe their frustrations. The teacher role requires maturity beyond the children's age as their ability to navigate the world and process information is not yet fully developed. The children also need to be contained, and this means having an empathic person who provides them with space and is able to help them learn about themselves and their relation to the world.

In such relationship, the children are unable to prioritise their own needs. Like a parentified child³, their attachment with their parents requires them to be attuned to their parents' needs (Grebow, 2010). These children are usually praised for being understanding and helpful at a young age. The parents' recognition of them weighs so

³ I want to point out the use of 'parentification' here. The implication of parentification in this discussion, suggests the child took on the parental role only in certain areas of life. The demand on the child is task specific and related to cultural integration. Further research on the impact of such parental tasks on immigrant children may be valuable.

heavily that they forget about their own needs. That is, they too are struggling to make sense of their world which is full of difference and conflict. I found it difficult to make any conclusions on how the children felt in being a container for their parents. I believe this portrays the lack of containment there is for the children. Reading the literature and drawing from my clinical work with second generation immigrants, there is a sense of pain from not being understood and from their needs not being attended to during childhood. This realisation often comes to light later in the individual's life, as the sense of pain is always hiding behind the praises they receive over the years for being understanding and good.

When second generation immigrants recognise their neglected childhood needs, they often feel a sense of guilt, loss, sadness, and shame around having needs; as if it is a way of betraying their parents' dependence on them. If the children have been exposed to "parentally induced guilt" (Akhtar, 2011, p. 126), in believing that their parents immigrated to a new country and struggled through this immigration process for their (the child's) wellbeing, acknowledging their own needs can feel 'bad' and ungrateful for the sacrifice their parents have made for them. It is also possible that they feel as if their needs would shine a bad light on their parents for not giving them enough, which may increase the parents' shame. Experiencing their parents' shame is scary for the child.

It is also sad for the children to confront their unmet needs, and it is common that second generation immigrants feel powerless about getting their needs met by their parents. As the children have not been able to pay much attention to what their own needs are, they often feel very lost when asked about how they would like to be supported. This process is compounded by the guilt mentioned above, and by a well-developed compassion for their parents. Thus, second generation immigrants have a complex relationship with their own needs, as if having needs is bad or forbidden. The feeling of shame is provoked by feeling the 'badness' in themselves, and feeling the vulnerable, small, and needy parts of the self that were previously out of their conscious knowledge. Since they have been the capable bridge for their parents, having needs and thus feeling vulnerable is rather frightening. This is illustrated in the following extract from *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 2014), that articulates the internal dialogue of Lena during a disagreement with her husband, Harold:

But I can't help it, because I realise now that I don't know what the point of this argument is. Am I asking Harold to support me? Am I asking to pay less than half? Do I really think we should stop accounting for everything?

Wouldn't we continue to tally things up in our head? Wouldn't Harold wind up paying more? And then wouldn't I feel worse, less than equal? Or maybe we shouldn't have gotten married in the first place. Maybe Harold is a bad man.

Maybe I've made him this way.

None of it seems right. Nothing makes sense. I can admit to nothing and I am in complete despair. (pp. 179-180)

Lena's story possibly reflects some second generation immigrants' experiences, where they become conscious of feelings of loss and despair (later in their lives) through their intimate relationships (or in therapy). I believe these feelings originate from their childhood and are part of their experience of being the teacher, care-giver, and container for their parents. These are the unformulated feelings that are not paid attention to nor contained, and remain as beta-elements that feel disturbing and frightening (Bion, 1962a).

Complication of Leaving Home

In working with second generation immigrants, I have noticed a complex struggle around finding their independent self and leaving home. Part of them wants to leave home, and the other part does not think it is possible to leave. There may be two main reasons which make it difficult for second generation immigrants to leave home (both physically and psychologically). The first is that they feel responsible for their parents and their family. As identified above, they grow up being teachers and care-giver for their parents. Their parents' dependency on them produces 'separation guilt' (Akhtar, 2011). This guilt becomes more pronounced when they wish to move away from home. They feel responsible to remain in the helper and care-giver position throughout their life, even after moving out from home and building their own families. The following extract is from Akhtar's (2011) book, about a second generation immigrant's relationship with his/her parents:

I moved across the country after high school and built myself a life on the East Coast. But it is a difficult decision, being the only child and knowing that my parents will likely depend on others more, not less, as they age. Even now, they depend on me to read their letters, write their emails, call customer service on their behalf and serve as interpreter. Though my mother is clever enough to feel her way around a computer, her lack of English vocabulary means I have to Google things for her, and phone her with the results. (pp. 125-126)

The dependency may increase as their parents get older, as they may become more distant from society and development in the world. Second generation immigrants experience being torn between caring for their parents and feeding their dependency, and living the life that they wish.

Another reason that makes leaving home difficult is that some young adults feel dependent on their parents. This dependency can be encouraged by cultural traditions. For example, children from a collectivist culture often live at home until they get married and have their own families. There is no pressure for the children to move out and the parents often support them to stay at home by offering free rent and food. This arrangement makes the option to stay at home very attractive, even when the individual desires to be independent from his/her parents. Some second generation immigrants feel conflicted about asserting their feelings and needs to be different in the parent-child relationship because they are afraid to 'burn the bridge'. The following is a conversation between Samoa (aka Englebert) and Evotia, who are second generation Samoans in New Zealand, from the book *Fresh off the Boat* by Kightley and Small (2005). In the first dialogue Samoa is on the phone with his mother, presenting to her an idea for him to move out:

Samoa: *Hi Mum, it's Samoa here ... Englebert ... I'm at Evotia's ... You know how I said we we're looking for a place to live, 'cause Evotia wants to move out of home? ... Well we found this place in town. You don't mind if I move out of home, do you Mum? ... Huh? ... You don't? But I'm the youngest...! Yeah, all right, I'll see you soon ... Thanks.*

Evotia: *Good on you Samoa! You can't plan a revolution while you're still living at home.*

Samoa: That's right. I need to experience life's struggles - like getting the power cut off and eating your cooking!" (pp. 56-57)

The dependency of the second generation can be a response of their parents' personal need for the family to stay together. Immigrants bear a great amount of loss, pain, and loneliness as they leave home and their family members. When they grow their own family in isolation from other family members, their spouse and children are the only family they have. The family unit becomes so important that they deposit their hopes and dreams of being united with the family back home into their spouse and children. The children may experience this closeness as love and care, and therefore delay leaving home. The balance of this closeness can be 'tipped' and the child may become enmeshed with his/her parents. Furthermore, they may have only learned to desire the things that their parents desire, while any desires that may differ from their parents may get little encouragement or is simply not registered.

One of the important aspects that mark an individuation process is the "shedding of family dependencies" (Blos, 1967, p. 163). The complex dependent/co-dependent relationship between second generation immigrants and their parents may prolong this individuation process. It can be confusing for second generation immigrants to recognise which experiences belong to them and which experiences are projective identifications. Their feelings and needs are sensitively connected to their parents', and this makes differentiation difficult. They have to confront the well-established relational patterns, which are shaped by the family dynamic as they break through this dependency and develop their true sense of self. This can be frightening for the children, as being different can be received as bad and destructive to family norms.

They may feel pressured to respond to the responsibility imposed on them in the closed family dynamic. They may also feel comforted by the familiarity of being in such dynamics. At the same time, they may desire alternative ways of being, which honour their bicultural identities. However, to allow the true self to develop, they must confront difficult realities that are shaped by the family dynamic. This is scary, because it is full of unknowns. The expectations and dependency take away their freedom, which they

need in order to experience life fully as an independent person. It is difficult for some second generation immigrants to separate from such close family dynamics.

Who Do You Want Me to Be?

Please don't punish me for my differences

I'm just doing what you wished me to do

I'm here to make you proud

Who do you want me to be?

You or them?

How can I be both? I don't know

and you don't.

(my reflection, pt.3)

Guilt in Being Different

I have discussed second generation immigrants facing their differences in the previous section; in this section I will discuss the particular feelings of guilt they may have in being different to their parents. Second generation immigrants are usually acculturated to the mainstream society (Ahktar, 2011). This naturally creates differences between them and their parents who are less engaged or completely unengaged with the mainstream culture. These differences are sometimes not welcomed by the parents, especially when the differences concern seemingly fundamental matters such as attitude towards life and work, choices over career, and choices over future partners. The following is a conversation between Rose, an American born Chinese, and her mother in *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 2014):

“He is American,” warned my mother, as if I had been too blind to notice. A *waigoren*.”

“I’m American too,” I said. “And it’s not as if I’m going to marry him or something.” (p. 124)

The following is a conversation between Elizabeth (mother) and Evotia (daughter) in *Fresh off the Boat* (Kightley & Small, 2005):

Elizabeth: I'm not saying don't do your course Evotia. It's a sign of maturity that you want to find out these things. Couldn't you get a part-time job that fitted in with the course?

Evotia: I've got one - the band!

Elizabeth: Something that pays more than 50c an hour would be preferable. I have to get Mervyn's car back to him. We'll talk about this later.

(Elizabeth exits)

Evotia: If I'm still here! (p. 55)

In many writings, second generation immigrants seem to find their parents' comments frustrating and they often push through the comments and continue to do what they want. Underneath the frustration, it seems that they feel judged for what they do. The frustration acts as a defence over being judged for being wrong.

Being told one is wrong, by those in authority, often provokes a feeling of guilt. Akhtar (2011) talked about immigrant children unconsciously bearing excessive amounts of guilt. The guilt they experience here may be seen as the "parental induced guilt" (Akhtar, 2011, p. 172) and it seems to follow them even when they are adults, as the parental expectations continue to live on in the super-ego. Guilt is a common feeling that we all experience; it is an expression of the tension between the ego and the super-ego (Freud, 1989). Second generation immigrants' experience of this particular guilt is flavoured by their bicultural identities. Freud (1989) drew a connection between culture and the super-ego, suggesting that cultural traditions and behaviours operate powerfully through the ideologies of the super-ego. He suggested that the child's super-ego establishment was largely influenced by their grandparents' super-ego. This intergenerational view on super-ego development gives an explanation of the heritage of culture and family traditions that last for many generations, even when they are fully disconnected with the country from where the culture originates. Therefore, I suggest that they experience guilt both from the parents' disapproval and from the well-developed super-ego that upholds cultural values from the generations before them.

Second generation immigrants grow up with exposure to two cultural ideals, and in some cases these ideals are opposed. As they learn and grow outside of the family environment, they embrace and adopt the cultural ideals that are represented by the mainstream society. They become likeminded with the locals, which influences their beliefs and values. The super-ego is capable of modification by internalising social norms that are imposed by other external authorities (Sandler, 1960). This modified super-ego will hold moral standards that are different to the super-ego developed from identifying with their parents. In some situations, an individual can live under the influence of two super-egos which uphold completely opposite moral standards. Balancing different moral standards can put a lot of pressure on an individual. Deep down, second generation immigrants experience a sense of guilt that is evoked by the inherited super-ego that carries the cultural expectation. Being themselves and embracing their newfound beliefs may be too frightening because it hurts their parents.

Achievements For You or For Me?

As second generation immigrants do not feel the freedom to be themselves, they often partially conform to who their parents want them to be. One of the themes that occurred in all the stories was 'meeting the expectations to achieve'. Most of the stories contained segments about the children's endeavour to do well and to put in the hard work to fulfil their parents' wishes for them. It is usually when they fail to achieve these wishes and/or attend therapy that they realise the goals and achievements were not what they had dreamed of. It becomes obvious that these achievements and goals originated with their parents rather than themselves.

Jing-Mei (Tan, 1989) recalled her mother's expectation of life by being in America:

My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and could get retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You could become instantly famous. America was where all my mother's hopes lay. (p. 141)

Sometimes people move to a different country hoping to provide opportunities and a better life for their children. Similar to Jing-Mei's mother, their hopes and dreams may be supported by the expectation that everything is possible or at least should be easy to achieve in the new country. As the children grow and experience life outside the family, they may soon learn that this hope is not the only thing that matters; rather, that this hope is necessary for their parents and for the family. In order to protect the necessary bond with their parents, they comply with the expectations and demands. The children learn to accommodate their parents' need to maintain the surviving bond with their parents and would neglect their true self in order to perform according to the expectation of the parents (Brandchaft, 2007). These children may experience failure in the family as a threat to the bond, so that they would do what is expected in order to be the antidote to their parents' disappointment. As the children diligently keep score to please their parents, there may be little opportunity for them to discover their own wishes and motivation that is indifferent to their parents. The parents may be preoccupied with 'knowing' what is the best for their children and, therefore, it is likely that there is no space to contain the child's frustration and differences that come with learning (Bion, 1962a). The unacknowledged and unsolved frustration gets repressed.

Melancholy - the Shadow of Object Fell Upon the Ego

In many ways second generation immigrants get caught in a catch-22 situation; but instead of having the choices of sanity versus insanity, they are caught in the conflict of being the same versus different, and the choice between being you versus being me. Whatever they decide, they face difficult ramifications. It is an inevitable dilemma that second generation immigrants have to juggle throughout their lives. Assimilating into the culture at large can mean that they are farther away from the likeness of their parents. These differences from their parents can be more painful and frightening to deal with than being different from the society. Children may experience that their differences from their parents are being attacked, and experience their decision to be their own person as potentially hurting their parents.

It feels that there are a lot of losses in the life of a second generation immigrant. The nature of these losses is things never received, rather than things gained and then lost. As they do not know what they have lost, it is difficult to grieve and feel sad for the

loss. The sadness always seems to be hidden behind frustration, confusion, guilt, or shame. This heavy sense of sadness and the disconnected feeling of grief that I connected in the stories, took me to Freud's (1917) famous writing *Mourning and Melancholy*. He suggested that melancholy relates to the unconscious loss of a love object; unlike mourning, which relates to a conscious sense of loss. When the lost object cannot be identified, the person cannot grieve over his/her relationship with the object, instead the sense of loss is trapped and becomes part of the self. In Freud's (1917) words "Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object" (p. 249). Not being able to mourn and grieve continues to put pressure on the ego to hold the conflict of ambivalence which creates states of depression.

An exchange between Elizabeth and her daughter Evotia, in *Fresh off the Boat* (Kightley & Small, 2005):

Elizabeth: We're not in the Islands. You've got a romantic notion of the Islands being a tropical paradise. Life isn't easy there either. Here, what counts is having work and building a life for yourself around a career, not how gracefully you can do traditional dances or make kava. Look at Ula; she can't expect her sports success to give her a secure future either, no one can. You have to work for it.

Evotia: You can say that because you've done both things. Ula's the same. She can understand some Samoan because she had more time with you and dad speaking it all the time, but what about me? I don't know the language and Ula and me don't know our background, or any customs. We don't know anything about our culture. It's important! (p. 50)

Immigration challenges the parents' ego integrity, which perhaps makes it difficult for them to be emotionally available to help their children develop their ego strength and integrate their self-identity (Mann, 2004). Second generation immigrants may continue to experience such loss as they struggle to recognise and grieve over something that they never received. An internal conflict within their sense of identity, which causes a loss of belonging and security.

Chapter Summary

This chapter tells the experiences of second generation immigrants being in the world. Through thinking and learning about their experience, I recalled a metaphor Winnicott (1989) used to illustrate the necessity of having nightmares of change and challenging the loyalty, in order to make psycho-analytic theories:

No advance in psycho-analytic theory is made without nightmares. The question is: who is to have the nightmare? The further question - why does he need to have nightmares? - is not relevant and can be ignored. In our Society here, although we serve science, we need to make an effort every time we attempt to re-open matters which seem to have been settled. It is not only the inertia which belong to the fear of doubt; it is also that we have loyalties. We associate specific ideas with peaks of achievement that mark the progress of our pioneers. (p. 458)

Perhaps there are many undreamed nightmares hovering around for the second generation immigrants. They perhaps are going nowhere, fearing that any turns they make will be a wrong turn, but not able to make a turn is causing them to feel stuck, like being in a box. The box is perhaps built with their parents' fears and dreads, as well as their own sense of dread, as if they dare to tamper with the box. They are perhaps terrified of the consequences that await them if they made any turn; that they would be prosecuted for being 'disloyal', as if they would kill something or someone. The box then of course becomes unbreakable, and the nightmare remains undreamable. It is possible that once we are able to have the nightmare, then we will be able to face our fear and dread.

Chapter Five

Discussions and Conclusion

Discussion of the Findings

There are three parts to the findings which are threaded together by a piece of writing I composed during the data collecting stage of research. This piece of writing captured an essence of a second generation immigrant's internal experiences of the world inside and outside her home. These internal experiences were mostly unconscious feelings, which felt messy and were difficult to describe. As mentioned in the introduction of the findings, this writing was a product of my own reverie from engaging with the material and it provided a structure in bringing those unconscious experiences to life. The findings present a perspective into second generation immigrants' world, and in the following paragraphs I discuss the synthesis of the findings.

I noticed a slight chronological trend in the order of these three findings, but it was not intended that way. All the experiences that are described in the findings chapter can occur in any stage of a second generation immigrant's life. The sub themes portray the second generation immigrants' experience of themselves and their relationship with the world, under the influence of immigration. I have categorised these into three major themes, including 'conflict in being different', 'conflict with the container', and 'complication in grieving'.

Conflict in Being Different

Being different is a reality for second generation immigrants. The level of differences each individual experiences can vary depending on how different their family culture is in comparison to the mainstream culture. However, I found that the amount of conflict that the individual experiences, may be irrespective to the level of differences between the familial and mainstream cultures. For example, a second generation immigrant from Canada in New Zealand does not necessarily experience less conflict than a second generation immigrant from India in New Zealand, despite having more similarities in culture. Instead, the findings suggest that the conflict is more related to how the differences were processed, contained, and understood. The findings also suggested that

second generation immigrants experience difficulties in processing, containing, and embracing their differences. Consequently they unconsciously feel shame, guilt, and generally feel bad about themselves. Although these feelings occur commonly during a person's development, the immigration history places extra demands on second generation immigrants' development, which increases the impact of these feelings.

Conflict with the Container

Bion's (1962) idea of container and contained suggested a model for the development of thinking, where the container (e.g. mother) contains the projected intolerable feelings from the infant and transforms those feelings to something that is tolerable to the infant (contained). This process also helps the infant to develop an internal container (i.e. alpha function) that is able to transform feelings into thinking and make sense of his/her own experiences. When intolerable feelings are not digested or understood (contained), it will create much frustration and be acted out. It was suggested that the children of immigrants become the container for their parents, as they receive the unconscious projection of their parents' guilt and unspoken residues of mourning (Akhtar, 2011, 2016), which stem from the immigration journey. In this research, I have suggested another way second generation immigrants become containers for their parents, which is using their experience of the outside world to help manage their parents' anxiety and worries in dealing with the new culture. They are put into this role from a young age. The emotion required for complicated matters adds pressure on the children to grow up faster than perhaps other populations of children. Second generation immigrants learn that their parents see and think about the world differently from them. There is a mismatch of experiences and interpretations, which often causes second generation immigrants to feel misunderstood by their parents. Despite feeling misunderstood and disappointed that their parents are not being the 'container' for them, they may continue to hope that one day they will be understood and guided by their parents. Therefore, they feel conflicted in their role as the container, whilst longing to be contained.

Complication in Grieving

I have become aware of a sense of sadness that is delicate and hard to grasp in second generation immigrants' stories. This seemed to relate to an internal demand to which they have unconsciously learned to conform to. This demand seems to distract them

from the opportunities to just be themselves. Perhaps, it is a demand for them to be available for their parents, to do what is unconsciously expected and to be understanding. I sensed that on the receiver side of this demand, there is a vulnerable child that longs to be attended to, to be freely himself/herself and to be understood. The demand leaves no space for the child to feel the sadness and acknowledge his/her unfulfilled wishes. This sadness does not go away, but is rooted inside the child. It is complicated for second generation immigrants to grieve and acknowledge their needs. It seems that they may not know what they have lost and that feeling their vulnerability is foreign, perhaps scary, to them.

Implications for Practice

The focus of this research is on the experiences of second generation immigrants in relation to their parents' immigration. As psychotherapy practice is interested in the unconscious experience within the individual, this research provides insights into the internal world and the unconscious experience of the second generation immigrant population. In responding to the three themes mentioned in the previous section, I offer suggestions for working with second generation immigrants.

First, I would like to highlight the need to recognise the impact of immigration on the lives of second generation immigrants, even though they did not go through the process themselves. Understanding the client's experience of his/her family's immigration history will enrich the understanding of the client's experience of his/herself and his/her world. It will also provide the client with an opportunity to talk about these important experiences that have perhaps never been talked about.

I identify that one of the core struggles for second generation immigrants is in dealing with their differences (or similarities). This struggle is often hidden, because it provokes difficult feelings of shame and guilt that are too painful for the self to experience. The therapist may need to gently approach the fear and anxiety in seeing the client's differences, to support the client to differentiate from his/her family and societal expectations, so that the client can find his/her own identity in the midst of demands and expectation for him/her to be a certain way.

In therapy, the therapist is often seen as the container (Bion, 1962). As children of immigrants might have a conflicted relationship with their container (their parent), the therapist may experience an ambivalent dependency when working with them. It would be worthwhile to understand their history of providing the containing function for their family, and to provide a space allowing them to experience being contained and understood. It is also important to acknowledge their fear of trusting someone else rather than themselves.

Furthermore, an important goal to consider in therapy with second generation immigrants would be to aid in the process of grieving. This research has found that children of immigrants experience unconscious losses. It may be hard for them to connect with and process their grief, as they cannot identify these losses. The feelings related to such losses get buried and displaced into their sense of self. To help them grieve, therapists may first help them to identify and name what they have lost. This may be something that they have longed for but never received. This kind of loss is often hidden and overlooked, just as their feelings and vulnerabilities have been overlooked for a long time. In this grieving process, they may also have to face the reality that their parents may not have the capacity to meet these needs. By grieving for the loss, they may find empathy and compassion for themselves and allow themselves to truly feel.

Limitations

One of the challenges in this research was to exit the hermeneutic circle of enquiry. In the process of writing, I found my understanding of the topic continued to deepen, as there was always more to understand. This is the nature of hermeneutic enquiry, where understanding continues to deepen, and a final truth cannot be reached. Whenever I considered exiting the hermeneutic circle, I also realised that there was so much more to understand and discover. This reflects the challenge of understanding people's experiences, which is always an ongoing learning process. Unlike working in therapy, this process has to come to an end; yet I feel that there are still many areas that this

research was not able to include. The size of this dissertation limits the coverage of the research.

Given the dissertation requirements, I considered applying inclusion and exclusion criteria on ethnicity, age group and location factors, which would result in focus on a certain population and narrower findings. However, I did not apply an exclusion criteria because I felt that the internal experiences that I was interested in can be universal, just as the process of container/contained is a universal concept of a relationship between a mother and her infant (Britton, 2012). I did not add an age limit to the search because, from a psychodynamic point of view, the past can be re-lived in the present. That is, the internal experience of the adult can originate from his/her childhood. On the other hand, I would like to acknowledge that there is a place for ethnicity, age, and location specific studies on immigration related issues, which would bring richer understanding to more specific immigration experience and trauma. For example, the global immigration caused by wars, where a lot of literature has been written on the trauma of war, but little has been written on the impact of immigration during war time. The impact of immigration is overshadowed by the impact of the war, and is, therefore, overlooked.

Another limitation in this dissertation is that there is limited literature available on my topic. There is a small body of literature written on the challenges that children of immigrants face, through understanding the impact of immigration on their parents. As my research is focused on the impact of immigration on the children of immigrants, by understanding the immigrant children's experience, I found little relevant literature. I could not construct interviews to collect people's lived experience due to the small size of this dissertation and the limited time frame. Collecting data from novels and stories written by and about second generation immigrants has provided rich lived experience for this current study. However, further studies which include interviews with second generation immigrants on their experience of being immigrant children may provide more in-depth data to this area of study.

My own subjectivity is also a limitation in the current study. The methodology of hermeneutics welcomes the researcher's subjective experience and values this subjectivity in the interpretation of the data. This means I brought in my own

phenomenological experience of being an immigrant, my identification as a child of an ‘immigrant’ and my own experience of being a therapist for first and second generation immigrants. Therefore, the findings and discussion in this dissertation are limited by my own lived experiences and my ability to interpret the material I selected for this study. At the same time, I am aware that the audiences of my dissertation will also explore my research with their own bias and subjectivity. In doing this qualitative interpretive study, I learned to recognise that the results do not present a complete answer to the research question, but instead introduce a topic to encourage further conversations and expand our understandings.

Conclusion

The study offers a unique research contribution because it focuses on the experience of second generation immigrants and avoids shining the spotlight onto their parents’ immigration experiences. Much research has been written about the conflicts between immigrant children and their parents, and has drawn understanding from the children’s experiences through these conflicts (Akhtar, 2011; Mann, 2004). This research draws attention to the impact of immigration on second generation immigrants by investigating their experience of being the children of immigrants.

I applied the philosophy of hermeneutic enquiry to interpret and understand experiences through the lens of Bion’s (1962) conceptual model – container and contained. Psychoanalytic theory provided me with a container that allowed space to process and digest these experiences. This is a continuing process for which I do not envisage an end point.

The findings of this research offer insights to second generation immigrants’ internal experiences in the world. The three major themes – ‘conflict in being different’, ‘conflict with the container’, and ‘complication in grieving’ as presented in the discussion, shed light on the internal conflicts that they struggle to deal with. These findings confirmed my speculation of the impact that the process of immigration has on second generation immigrants.

Final Reflection

It has been a rich and challenging journey looking into something that feels taboo. On one hand the experiences I have had from this research are very personal; on the other hand, these experiences feel like a slippery fish that I have to skilfully catch. Coming to the end of this study feels like I am slowly waking up from a nightmare of a journey I have lived through. On one hand I know it is not mine; yet it is very much mine. It is possible that this is a common experience of second generation immigrants. Although immigration is not really their story, the story is very much part of them.

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Appendix

A complete version of the poem I wrote during this study. It was used in the findings chapter, and provided a thread to present the experience of the second generation immigrants.

The window opens to a breath of fresh air
new lights no one has seen before
Fascinating, intriguing

But mum sees it differently
Questions, puzzles
I see fear in her eyes but why?

She says “go and be, it is good outside”;
but why’s there fear in your eyes?
“Come back to me” she says;
“Learn and grow
and help me and guide me to the light”

I am frightened,
But the excitement and her wish are stronger than my fear
I’ll go and be good
I’ll learn and make her proud.

Please don’t punish me for my differences
I’m just doing what you wished me to do
I’m here to make you proud

Who do you want me to be?
You or them?
How can I be both? I don’t know
and you don’t.