

# Factors and Ethical Values that Foster a Sense of Belonging Toward the Host Society: The Case of South Asian Communities in Montreal's Parc-Extension Neighbourhood (Canada)

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## Abstract

Place attachment studies developed scales for measuring the sense of belonging using a range of determinants. However, ethical values are rarely dealt with as such in the literature on belonging. This study's primary objective was thus to understand and rank the factors that, within an immigrant community whose culture of origin is somewhat different from that of the host society, foster development of a sense of place attachment (neighbourhood, city, state, or country). Then, to grasp the role of ethical determinants in constructing a sense of place attachment, the study's secondary objective was to see, also by ranking, which of the values present in the host society are perceived by members of immigrant communities as fostering their attachment to it. To attain these objectives, the study interviewed forty adult members of South Asian communities living in a Montreal multiethnic neighbourhood. The results show that interpersonal relations, low crime rate and infrastructures are the most important factors to foster place attachment, while fraternity, equality and safety are the most important ethical values.

**Keywords:** sense of belonging, ethical values, host society, South Asian immigrants, Canada

## Background

Populations in Canada, Quebec, and the city of Montreal have increasingly varied ethnic origins (Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal, 2013; Dewing, 2009; Bating *et al.*, 2007; Li, 2000). This creates new challenges for public administrations, particularly in terms of integration and social cohesion. In recent years, several western nations have initiated broad collective contemplation of the models that are most conducive to fostering integration and social cohesion

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in multi-ethnic communities (Zapata-Barrera 2017; Caponio & Borkert 2010; Vertovec 2007; Castels 2002). This was the case in France, with the Stasi Commission (Stasi 2003), the Netherlands (Michalowski, 2005) and, of course, in Quebec, with the Bouchard-Taylor Commission (Bouchard & Taylor 2008), and the more recent debate on the Charter of Quebec Values (Gouvernement du Québec 2013). The tensions that sometimes manifest around these issues seem to be partially provoked by conflicting values that fundamentally come from a single source: the legitimate desire of both minority and majority community members to *feel like they belong* in the place where they live, that is, to have a sense of living in a place that is *like them*, and where they can have the life they aspire to (Banting &

Soroka 2012; Ager & Strang 2008). In this ideal that drives them, what is immediately stressed is the key importance of the *sense of belonging*, which can be defined as individuals' feeling that they matter to the other people in the group and can get their needs met through their involvement with the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

For several decades now, scientific research has made it possible to understand the sense of belonging through its individual and psychosocial aspects, among others. Several studies argue that the sense of belonging is a fundamental human need (Guérin-Pace 2006; Guilbert 2005; de Coninck 2001; Schlachet 2000; Maslow 1970) that is highly determinant of overall well-being, that is, human physical and mental health (Hill, 2006; Andersen et al. 2000; Richer & Vallerand 1998; Hagerty et al. 1996; Baumeister & Leary 1995). In this way, the sense of belonging is a major factor in a person's level of satisfaction and positive perception of themselves (Young et al. 2004; Richer & Vallerand 1998; Baumeister & Leary 1995). However, the sense of belonging is not only accompanied by mental and physical well-being; it is also based on a relationship of inclusion between an individual or a group and a defined social category (nationality, ethnicity, society, social class, etc.). A positive sense of belonging and well-being therefore imply an individual's perception of his adaptation to his environment, insofar as that environment features the social categories used to assess whether or not he belongs to the group (Fisher 2010; Leloup & Radice 2008; Oriol 1985). Conversely, the loss of an individual's sense of belonging in his environment is an important dissatisfaction factor that can lead to anguish, depression, or anti-social or self-destructive behaviour (UK Social Exclusion Unit 2001; Hagerty & Williams 1999). In other words, a sense of belonging creates a sense of internal harmony, as well as harmony between individuals and their environments (Brettell & Reed-Danahay 2011; Reed-Danahay & Brettell 2008; Dorais 2004; Hogg & Turner 1985).

Immediately, given the key place the *living environment* plays in the individual's environ-

ment (family home, friends, neighbours, community, cultural and work lives, etc.), the *sense of belonging in a place*, sometimes called "social belonging," "rootedness" or "place of attachment" (Barbeau et al., 2013; Enns et al., 2013; Rioux & Mokoukolo 2010; Alphandéry & Bergues 2004; Bonnemaïson 1981), is *one* essential dimension (as we can also belong to a family, profession, sports team, etc.) of the resulting sense of belonging and well-being. This is why, in numerous studies in the fields of economy, politics and society, the sense of belonging in a place is generally considered to be the glue of social cohesion, cultural identity, integration, or citizenship (Spoonley & Peace 2007; Di Méo 2004; Heckmann & Schnapper 2003; Forrest & Kearns 2001; Phinney et al. 2001; Abou 1981). Some of the place attachment studies developed scales for measuring the sense of belonging using a range of determinants, such as identification, shared values, social participation, the sense of acceptance or rejection, sense of personal value, etc. (Markus 2010; Avanza and Laferté 2005; Jenson 1998; Berry 1997; Bollen & Hoyle 1990). These determinants *implicitly* suggest that the strength of the sense of belonging in a place (country, state, city, neighbourhood, etc.) is closely linked to value systems that shape the individual's *personal ethic*. Yet ethical determinants are never dealt with *as such* in the literature on belonging (Walters 2007).

### **Purpose of the study**

The study's *primary objective* was to understand and rank the factors that, within an immigrant community whose culture of origin is somewhat different from that of the host society, foster development of a sense of place attachment, i.e. the neighbourhood, city, state or country. Then, to grasp the role of ethical determinants in constructing a sense of place attachment, the study's *secondary objective* was to see, also by ranking, which of the values present in the host society (in relationships between citizens or with institutions) are perceived by members of immigrant communities as fostering their attachment to it.

### Theoretical Framework

Our research team opted to address the sense of belonging primarily from its psychosocial dimension, starting with the *subjective evaluation* expressed by members of the South Asian communities living in Montreal (Quebec, Canada). Rather than taking a “distantiated” approach to belonging, involving, for example, observations of an immigrant’s integration with a social institution based on external socioeconomic characteristics, belonging was examined through its *affective* dimension, associated with the attachment a person has for a place. This evaluation is partially determined by the *personal (ethical) values* behind that person’s judgements about others and about institutions. A value is an emotionally rooted form of personal preference which structures our evaluation of things, and which propels actions (Farmer & Versailles 2019). The value can also be associated with *purposes* that are expressed in actions that are intended to achieve them. For example, the value of equality is not only a determinant for the emotional and intellectual structure that guides the subject’s actions; it is also a kind of *state of the world* that the subjects who place importance on this value are seeking to achieve (a purpose). Ethics is a search for the “good” in action. It seeks to answer the question: “what to do to do well?” (Ricoeur 1990). Therefore, to achieve good, ethics must be based on values. As a result, a person’s “morality,” “personal ethics” or “worldview” are made up of ordered values that shape how he or she perceives and acts on the world around him or her, including the place where he or she lives (Weber, 1993; Ravlin & Meglino 1987).

Accordingly, the research team needed to question study participants directly about their attachment to various places (neighbourhood, city, country, etc.). To discern that attachment, they also had to ask about certain more salient facets that characterize a place. Such facets may include such things as urban infrastructure (parks, playing fields, libraries, public transportation, places of worship, etc.), architecture, the economy, people, and so on. Such facets can also

be more *intangible*, associated with significant events that create positive or negative memories about a place, or values that define the place’s social structure and interactions between its people. Our conceptualization of belonging is thus based on the idea that place attachment develops from “valences” between the subject’s affective predispositions, rooted in values that shape personal ethics, and the place’s objective characteristics which define its specificity. Although this approach founded on valences associated with personal values is fairly unusual in the literature, it is nonetheless embedded in numerous studies, particularly in environmental psychology, in which the determinants of place attachment are physical, spatial, social or emotional (Altman & Low 2012; Debenedetti 2005; Hidalgo & Hernandez 2001).

This conceptual background was used in developing the interview guide (see table 2), as well as in analyzing (coding) the study data. The interview guide’s first section asked members of South Asian communities to assess their level of attachment to their neighbourhood, the city of Montreal, Quebec, Canada and their country of origin. In the second section, we asked them about the ethical or moral values that are most important to them in their social and private lives. We also asked them to tell us what values a society should promote to foster a sense of belonging in the people who live in it. Further details on data collection appear in the methodology section.

### Methodology

#### *Population and sample*

To better understand the notion of belonging and its ethical determinants, the study questioned *adult* members of South Asian communities who live in the Parc-Extension neighbourhood in Montreal. Either they or their parents were from four countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These communities’ cultural practices and traditional beliefs are generally fairly different from those of Quebecers of European origin (Fiore 2013; Paré 2008; Walters 2007; Poirier

2006; Dhruvarajan 1993; Meintel 1993). For example, and in contrast with most Quebecers, South Asian social networks are largely formed around families and religious leaders, which makes members' desire for individual emancipation less evident, particularly among women (Rajiva & D'Sylva 2014; Zaidi et al. 2014; Varghese & Jenkins 2009; Voigt-Graf 2005; Walton-Roberts 2004). In general, the neighbourhood's population has less education (over 50% have a high school diploma or less), and is poorer (over 40% are low-income people) than the Quebec population as a whole; Parc-Extension is the neighbourhood with the highest proportion of its labour force working in a language other than English and French (Bakhshaei & McAndrew 2011; Ville de Montréal 2010; CDÉC 2002).

The choice of these communities is therefore particularly appropriate for the study's purposes. Unlike many European immigrants, for example, for the South Asians, most of the process of constructing belonging remains to be done when they get to Canada (Vatz-Laaroussi 2009; Laczko 2005; St-Germain et al. 2005). It thus seemed easier to isolate the factors that enable the transition between "before" and "after" in the development of a sense of belonging after they arrived in Canada. In general, although of course there may be exceptions, the disjunction is less radical among immigrants with Western backgrounds and may make it more difficult to identify "local" factors in the construction of the sense of belonging (Gilkinson & Sauv e, 2012; Xue, 2007). The choice of Montreal and Quebec in Canada is also noteworthy in that it allows us to see whether the perception of belonging to place is modified by the competing integration models promoted by the central government (Canada) and a "substate nation" (Quebec) (Banting & Kymlicka, 2012).

As a result of a solicitation<sup>1</sup> on classified ad sites such as *Kijiji* and with neighbourhood community organizations that spread the word, the study team was able to recruit 40 adults who

lived in Parc-Extension. Twenty-six subjects were women (65%) and fourteen were men (35%). Since the study's main aim was to establish a ranking of the factors and values that are the most "attractive" in contributing to a sense of place attachment, the sample size was initially determined with a *view to representativity*. The team wanted to ensure that the picture of the South Asian communities the research created was sufficiently complete. We believe we have achieved that, insofar as the characteristics of the population under study (age, sex, place of origin, etc.) are all well represented in the sample. The details on study participants' sociodemographic profiles are provided in *table 1*.

**Table 1: Sociodemographic Profile of Study Participants**

	N	N%
<b>Age</b>		
> 40	26	65%
< 40	14	35%
<b>Sex</b>		
Men	14	35%
Women	26	65%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	21	53%
Single	14	35%
Other	5	12%
<b>Language spoken at home</b>		
English	2	5%
French	1	2%
Other	37	93%
<b>Education</b>		
Primary school	6	15%
High school	10	25%
College	8	20%
University	16	40%
<b>Economic situation</b>		
Below average	8	20%
Average	29	73%
Above average	3	7%
<b>Years in Canada</b>		
0 to 5	16	40%
5 to 10	5	13%
> than 10	19	47%
<b>Religious practice</b>		
Often	30	75%
Sometimes	5	12%
Rarely	2	5%
Never	3	8%

<sup>1</sup> The entire project approach was approved by the university's research ethics board.

*Data collection*

The data was collected by means of a sociodemographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire contained fifteen questions on age, sex, marital and professional status, dependent children, languages spoken at home and at work, economic situation, date of arrival in the country, and religious beliefs. The questionnaire allowed the study team to establish, if desired, cross-checks between the sociodemographic data and perspectives expressed during interviews. The interviews lasted an average of forty-five to ninety minutes, although some were longer. In general, participants were very generous and comfortable with their comments. The interviews were conducted in French or English. In two cases, the interview was carried out with the help of an interpreter. The interview location was selected based on what suited the partici-

part. Some interviews were conducted in public places, such as coffee shops or restaurants. Others were held in an office at a community organization or university. Some took place at participants' homes. Prior to recruitment and data collection, the team walked the neighbourhood for several weeks to create ties with the communities by participating in activities, such as volunteer activities, that were not directly related to the study. This preparatory work facilitated the recruitment of members as well as word-of-mouth.

To align with study objectives, the interview guide separated the questions into two distinct categories: questions on factors that contributed to the sense of belonging, and questions on the role of ethical or moral values. The questions in the interview guide appear in *table 2*.

**Table 2: Interview guide questions on belonging and values**

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BELONGING AND FACTORS	
<b>Q1:</b>	<i>In general, how would you describe the strength of your sense of belonging toward your country of origin? Toward Canada? Québec? Montreal? Your neighbourhood?</i>
<b>Q2:</b>	<i>What situations or events explain the differences? Are there any particularly striking moments?</i>
<b>Q3:</b>	<i>What characteristics must a place have (neighbourhood, city, country, state, etc.) to be attractive?</i>
<b>Q4:</b>	<i>What should a host society do to foster a sense of belonging in the members of your community?</i>
<b>Q5:</b>	<i>What should the members of your community do to become close to the host society?</i>
ROLE OF VALUES	
<b>Q6:</b>	<i>Which of these aspects played an important role in constructing your sense of belonging? Explain why and compare.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>The sense of being surrounded by family and/or good friends?</i></li> <li>b) <i>The sense of being accepted by the host society (politics, people, etc.)?</i></li> <li>c) <i>The possibility of having some level of comfort (job, health, education)?</i></li> <li>d) <i>A legal system that protects basic rights (such as religion)?</i></li> </ul>
<b>Q7:</b>	<i>What values are most important in a society? Fraternity (interpersonal connections)? Individual liberty? Equality? Religion? Safety? Explain.</i>

### Data analysis

In addition to the forty questionnaires filled out by participants, the study team assembled empirical materials that included 1,248 pages of verbatim transcripts of the interviews. Using qualitative analysis software to navigate within the transcriptions was deemed unnecessary. Since it would have taken too much space to simultaneously present a detailed analysis of the interview excerpts on our research themes with the ranking of factors and values that foster belonging, this article instead focuses on the last aspect (ranking). Another article will be published based on a more in-depth qualitative analysis of the interviews and will report on participants' words and experiences. Thus, to fulfil the study's primary objective, which addressed the factors that fostered development of a sense of place attachment, the team simply compiled all the factors participants named, then established a ranking based on the *number of times* (frequency) participants named them, and the *ranking* they were each given (factor named first, second, third, etc.). This data analysis method draws on the *prototypical analysis* method developed to investigate social representations, among other things (Lo Monaco et al. 2016; Vergès 1992). To calculate and rank the factors in order of importance, we assigned a "score" to the factor named according to its rank. A factor named first received three points, a factor listed second received two, and a factor named third received one point. This data allowed us to identify the *overall importance* of the factors that fos-

ter belonging both due to the frequency at which participants mentioned them, and their real influence stemming from the ranking they were given. In general, participants explicitly ordered factors when answering questions. Sometimes, however, in the absence of an explicit ranking, we had to interpret the ranking based on the contextual elements of the response and the emphasis that was placed on certain factors by the interviewee.

To address the second objective, which was to identify the role of values, we used the same approach as with the factors that foster belonging. We had to differentiate between the values based on their importance. Once again, we also established their frequency and ranking based on a score. For each interview, we identified the values listed in response to the questions on the topic, noting their ranking and the number of times they were mentioned. As with the factors, the importance ranking was established based on the explicit ranking applied by the participants, or based on a contextual analysis of statements in which we assessed the emphasis placed on certain values using key language markers, such as adjectives, adverbs, place in the statement, etc.

### Results

The results obtained for the importance of the factors that foster place attachment (primary study objective) are summarized in *table 3*. The results that enable an understanding of the role of ethical values (secondary objective) in constructing a sense of belonging are provided in *table 4*.

**Table 3: Factors that foster place attachment**

Factors named	Frequency and rank	Score
Economy (jobs)	2 x 2nd; 5 x 3rd	9
Infrastructure (roads, transportation, parks, playgrounds, etc.)	5 x 1st; 13 x 2nd; 11 x 3rd	<b>52</b>
Interpersonal relations	16 x 1st; 4 x 2nd; 7 x 3rd	<b>63</b>
Language and local culture	2 x 2nd; 2 x 3rd	6
Political and legal system	3 x 2nd; 1 x 3rd	7
Safety (low crime rate)	10 x 1st; 5 x 2nd; 2 x 3rd	<b>42</b>
Similar culture (presence of culture of origin)	1 x 1st; 5 x 2nd; 3 x 3rd	16
Social programs (health, education, etc.)	3 x 1st; 5 x 2nd; 7 x 3rd	26

**Table 4: Role of ethical or moral values**

Values named	Frequency and rank	Score
Equality (treatment)	8 x 1st; 5 x 2nd	<b>34</b>
Fraternity (friendship, mutual assistance)	12 x 1st; 5 x 2nd	<b>46</b>
Honesty (integrity, trust)	1 x 1st	3
Liberty (individual)	2 x 1st; 7 x 2nd; 4 x 3rd	24
Piety (religion)	1 x 1st; 2 x 2nd; 1 x 3rd	8
Respect (for others and self)	5 x 1st; 1 x 2nd; 1 x 3rd	18
Safety (personal)	8 x 1st; 6 x 2nd; 1 x 3rd	<b>37</b>
Wealth (financial)	1 x 1st	3

## Discussion

### *Ranking of factors*

In the results tables, we used bold for the three highest scores in each of the categories (factors and role of values). Among the factors that foster place attachment, the *quality of interpersonal relations* is, by far, the factor that is seen as the most positive (63 points). 29 out of 40 participants named this factor (72.5%). Interpersonal relations mean the relationships people have with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, but it also includes interactions in daily life. Here, many participants said they were delighted with how nice people were in their neighbourhood, and in Quebec and Canadian society in general. Few reported having been subjected to racist statements or actions. The two other factors with the most positive impact on place attachment are tied at 42 points: the *sense of safety* associated with the low crime rate and the *quality of urban infrastructure*. Given that the sample featured a clear majority of women (65%), it is unsurprising to see safety rank this high, since women are the most frequent targets of harassment and aggression (Kavanaugh 2013; Jeyaseelan *et al.* 2007; Wesely & Gaarder 2004). Note, though, that several men also reported that this factor was important. The feeling of safety refers to the confidence people have in circulating freely on the street without being subjected to crimes or rudeness. The notion of urban infrastructure refers to roads (streets, avenues, etc.), the transportation system, parks, playgrounds, and all physical facilities (libraries, businesses,

etc.) and equipment needed for a territory to operate properly (Steele & Legacy 2017). According to the data collected, this factor is seen as being as important as safety. In the Parc-Extension neighbourhood, one of Montreal's poorest, the proximity of services is reported as being very advantageous, given that nearly everything is in walking distance, which means households do not have to purchase a car, a very heavy financial constraint.

Among the other factors that participants mentioned less frequently, *social programs* such as health, education and support programs of all types (material help, language classes, etc.) have a meaningful position. Several participants reported, with emotion, that they had very much appreciated the help they got from various tiers of government, as well as from community organizations that are highly active in Parc-Extension. Nine participants (22.5%) also mentioned that they placed some importance on *cultural similarity* in fostering their attachment to the place. This expression refers to aspects of the culture of origin found in the host society, for example, places of worship, grocery stores, and neighbourhood festivals that celebrate the traditions of the country of origin. Finally, and interestingly, although it was sometimes suggested in the interview questions, the *political and legal system*, which includes the charters that protect individual rights and freedoms, do not appear to be a key factor in the construction of a sense of belonging, at least not expressly. Only one of ten participants presented it as a significant factor in build-

ing his own sense of belonging in the host society. Besides, only one participant (2.5 %) mentioned the debate on secularization (Charter of Quebec values)<sup>2</sup> as “negative”, even if that topic was hot in the news when he was interviewed. The factor with the lowest score is *language and local culture*, but it is not generally suggested in the questions, so that participants who selected it did so spontaneously. Moreover, in contrast with received opinion, our study showed that there is a Francophile current within the South Asian communities. Some stated that they loved Montreal’s French language and culture, even though they sometimes struggled to learn French. Some even said that they had visited other Canadian cities, like Toronto, but chose Montreal in the end because of the local culture, the pace, which is seen as slower, the safety and quality of life in Parc-Extension, and the less prohibitive cost of living.

#### *Ranking of ethical or moral values*

The values that were named as the most important in fostering a sense of belonging echo the factors. This is not surprising, since the selection of factors, which are, in a sense, the “external attributes” of places, is determined by the values, which we define as forms of personal preference that structure our assessments of things. We did not analyze the intersections between values and factors for each participant; however, the overall results suggest that it would be worthwhile to investigate how, in each individual, the values determine the social behaviours associated with construction of belonging. The value that stood out as the most important in fostering belonging to a place is *fraternity* (forty-six points). For the purposes of analyzing the participants’ statements, this value included anything pertaining to the family, friendship, mutual assistance, and solidarity. Fraternity refers to very

profound, immediate emotional needs, which no doubts explains its dominance. The second most important value is *safety* (thirty-nine points), which is understood as a type of peace of mind associated with preserving the person’s physical and psychological integrity over time. Safety and fraternity seem to directly echo the two factors that were deemed the most meaningful, i.e. the quality of interpersonal relations and the sense of safety associated with the low crime rate. The third most important value is *equality* (thirty-four points). This value refers to a person’s feeling that they are treated like others (regardless of their origin or social status), with the same respect and privileges. On this matter, it is remarkable to note that, although many study participants (40%, five years or less) had just come to Quebec, they stressed how much they valued being treated with respect, despite their “immigrant” or “refugee” status. Moreover, some participants deplored the fact that equality is not valued more in their country of origin (particularly with respect to gender and socioeconomic status).

Among the next values in the ranking, *freedom* (twenty-four points) and *respect* (twenty points) earned fairly high scores. In our study, freedom was associated with individual liberty, the ability to do what one wants to do, achieve one’s ambitions, and assert one’s personality. Respect was associated with “regard” for oneself and others, politeness, courtesy. Although these two values proved to be fairly meaningful to participants, it is still surprising to see that, in fourth place, freedom ranks fairly low among the most popular values, given that it is fairly customary to consider it as the primary motivation for the migration process. The three other values participants cited scored much lower: *piety* (eight points), *honesty* (three points) and *financial wealth* (three points). With respect to piety, defined as attachment to religion (devotion, zeal), it is interesting to note the discrepancy between participants’ diligence in religious practice, as expressed in the sociodemographic questionnaire (75% practice often), and its appeal as a factor fostering the sense

<sup>2</sup> The Quebec Charter of Values was a draft charter of secularism. It aimed to establish the common rules of a secular state and to regulate requests for accommodation. It also proposed to prohibit the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by government employees.

of place attachment. This could be due to the fact that the vast majority of study participants (or their parents, if the participants were born in Canada) did not choose to leave their country of origin on primarily religious grounds (stigmatization or religious violence in their country of origin), but rather for reasons associated with their well-being and safety, or to provide their children with a better future. Participants who discussed this issue certainly valued the presence of places of worship in their neighbourhood but, except in one case (participant thirty-eight), they did not seem to have a negative view of the host society's relatively low level of religious zeal.

#### *Comparison of results with results in the current literature*

The literature develops several models for acculturation and integration. The most well-known are: Berry's *Bi-Dimensional Model of Acculturation*, which places the various degrees of acculturation on a continuum that is bounded by the culture of origin on one side and the host society's culture on the other; it deals with behaviours such as assimilation, integration, separation or segregation and marginalization (Berry 1997); Rudmin's *Acculturative Learning Model*, which puts a great deal of emphasis on internal factors like personal motivation and the resulting learning process (Rudmin 2003); and the *Multidimensional Intercultural Training Acculturation Model* (MITA), which adds variables to take into consideration the situation of refugees who are displaced abruptly due to tragic events such as armed conflicts (Fathi *et al.* 2018). A critical analysis of these models reveals that, methodologically, the research into acculturation has neglected phenomenological research that focuses on lived experience and perception in favour of "confirmatory" studies intended to validate existing models (Chirkov 2009). This is one reason we opted to privilege a data collection method that allowed participants to explain how, in their opinion, the encounter with the host society was shaped through the development of their sense of belonging. The interview

guide was of course designed based on a pre-determined theoretical framework, but it was sufficiently "open" to allow participants to tell their stories. Our results show that there is clear interest in opening up the "space of subjectivity" to establish connections between certain personality structures, such as ethical or moral values, which shape thought and behaviour, and the socialization process usually highlighted by research into these matters.

As we note in the introduction, studies on the sense of belonging often revolve around clinical or social psychology, highlighting its importance in personal psychic balance. Most such studies also draw on quantitative methodologies that are based on the statistical analysis of answers to closed questions (frequently including Likert scales). Like the studies on acculturation, studies on the sense of belonging start from a theoretical framework (construct) whose contours can be established and measured using psychometric instruments (Hagerty & Patusky 1995). In studies on belonging, the theoretical framework is built around two notions: 1) the feeling of being valued by others and one's environment; 2) the feeling of being suited to a group or environment by means of shared characteristics (Hagerty *et al.* 1996). Even if they challenge subjects' self-assessments of their emotions and feelings, the studies aim to measure an individual's "fit"; that is, how others see him or her, and how they navigate the pre-existing standards that regulate social interactions. This perspective on the actors in belonging or acculturation (the individual, others, the environment and its standards) is constrained to a somewhat superficial type of "functionalism." Yet, given the central role they play in an individual's cognitive universe, it is fairly natural to consider ethical and moral values as the underpinnings of evaluation and social behaviour pertaining to the development of a sense of place connection. Clearly, a qualitative study such as ours is not as generalizable as quantitative research, but our respectable sample size and the clarity of the results tend to suggest that values offer some interesting explanatory power

for understanding connection to place. We could even add that, given the very intimate relationship between ethical or moral values and personality, they have a type of “anteriority” in the psychic economy that helps grasp the acculturation and integration behaviour they trigger.

In studies on place attachment, the psychometric perspective also dominates (Brown & Raymond 2007; Knez 2005; Shamai & Ilatov 2005; Williams & Vaske 2003). The most frequent variables used in measuring it are *place dependence* and *place identity*. Like the studies on sense of belonging, the studies on place attachment explore such things as a person’s *general* emotional bond with a place, without using more detailed psychological variables like values. As for the attachment studies’ consideration of a place’s “external” characteristics (physical, spatial, social, cultural, etc.), they spend very little time on the specific context of the relationship between immigrants and the places where they choose to remake their lives. Our study identified some of these key factors for communities that are very understudied in Quebec. Here, note that our results for the ranking of factors that foster belonging converge with other results in educational psychology for place attachment predictors (Lewicka 2010).

To conclude our comparison of the results with the existing literature, it seems relevant to mention *needs theory*, insofar as it may be fairly obvious to think there is a connection between an individual’s hierarchy of needs, that person’s values, and stated preferences with respect to a place. The environmental psychology literature on place attachment primarily looks at *attachment theory* (Morgan 2010; Giuliani 2003). However, Maslow’s *hierarchy of needs* (1943) identifies fundamental needs that can easily be associated with factors or values that influence the dynamics of connection to place. Thus, beyond physiological needs, which we can overlook given the study’s context, the safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization can no doubt be related to factors or values evoked in our results. Conceptually, this association

is interesting because it raises the issue of the preponderance of “deep” psychological dimensions, such as values and needs, in the ranking of preferences for places’ external attributes. It provides a better understanding of why factors that have a more indirect influence on people’s lives, such as laws and the political system, are perceived to be less significant. This once again refers back to the idea of *valences* (connections between subjective or psychological determinants such as values and external attributes) that we mentioned earlier. Here, while our study opens up a new perspective on values and their role in the dynamics of connection to place, it leaves the matter of the shared place of needs and values in this dynamic unanswered. Dealing with it would require some reflection on the distinctions between values and needs, which was not the study’s objective.

#### *Study limitations*

In our opinion, the study has some limitations in terms of generalizing the results and reproducing them in similar contexts. The first and no doubt the most significant limitation is the *language barrier*. Here, the barrier cannot be reduced simply to transitioning from one language to another, as in going from French to English and vice versa. Rather, it involves radically different *lexical registers*. For example, it was not always easy to convey to some participants what a concept like “belonging” means. It took time to explain a notion that, for some, was not self-evident. Even though we believe we were able to overcome this barrier through dialogue, it seems reasonable to assert that this obstacle had an impact on the results. The results could potentially have been different with communities in which this lexical barrier was absent.

The second limitation also relates to the language barrier. Participants were not always able to name the “factors” or “values.” The interview guide therefore planned to make suggestions. Clearly, this approach may have “guided” the answers in some cases. Although the interviewers strove to be neutral, it can still be easier for

participants to limit their answers to the selections offered. That said, the team was aware of this obstacle from the outset. In spite of this, we believe we were able to capture the essence of what the participants wanted to share with us.

The third limitation concerns the methodological approach used. If data collection had been restricted solely to the use of questionnaires, it would have been possible to develop a quantitative research design and carry out statistical analyses that delineate the scope of the results more sharply. However, we believe that establishing an in-depth dialogue with the participants, one that was characterized by trust, authorizes us to assert that we were able to more clearly establish the *meaning* of their thoughts on the issue of belonging. A closed questionnaire would have denied us this opportunity. We should add that the study included other facets and objectives not dealt with here. Lastly, with respect to *data triangulation*, we opted not to apply systematic cross-checks between the data from the sociodemographic questionnaire and data from the interviews. This is because, in light of a review of the verbatims, we judged that triangulation would not really enable a better understanding of the construction of a sense of belonging within these communities. Certain variables that could intuitively seem to favour development of a strong sense of belonging, such as date of arrival or place of birth, did not seem significant. We therefore put them aside in the more in-depth analysis.

### Conclusion

In our opinion, our study has successfully spotlighted key factors that help make a place appealing to newly arrived immigrant communities. The results appear especially interesting because they were obtained through the contribution

of South Asian communities who remain largely unknown in French-speaking Canada, and perhaps elsewhere. Moreover, by investigating the role of values in the construction of a sense of belonging, the study seems to show the relevance of linking certain fundamental psychological functions and their impact on the affinities (or valences) that develop between the social behaviours of a place's residents, and the place's apparent characteristics.

While the qualitative methodological approach privileged in our study--predominantly phenomenological--enabled a better grasp of the subjective meaning that a place's residents assign to the construction of their sense of belonging to the host society during a specific migratory journey, the fact remains that the entire issue of the relations between the internal variables associated with individual personalities and the external variables associated with place attributes could lead to further discoveries. For example, it would be very useful to know how the valences mentioned earlier in the article evolve over time in the framework of a longitudinal study design.

In the context of the mass migrations of the early twenty-first century and the political upheaval they triggered, the issue of belonging, and the resulting social cohesion are of clear interest, as shown by the many studies that explore this question. However, beyond the enthusiasm it generates, the theme does create many controversies in which ideological considerations blithely mingle with scientific imperatives. This mixed genre is seen fairly often in the mass media, in which the handling of social phenomena also follows marketing rules, but it should be avoided in scientific research and in the public policy it is supposed to orient. The desire to let the facts speak for themselves, and to separate science from ideology, lies at the heart of this study's design, and its dissemination.

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