BULLYING, ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION, OR BOTH? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the experiences of victimization and immigration among immigrant youth in the Peel region in Ontario, Canada. Victimization included the experiences of bullying and ethnic discrimination in the school environment. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to investigate how immigrant youth interpreted their experiences and whether they identified victimization as bullying, ethnic discrimination or both. The effects of victimization on adaptation and acculturation were also explored. Results from individual interviews of six youth (ages 16 or 17) indicated that immigrant youth viewed bullying and discrimination as separate constructs. Themes that emerged from the interviews included the importance of language proficiency; the role of peer affiliations; and factors associated with resiliency. It was evident through their descriptions that immigrant youth face unique challenges, which include adjusting to a new culture and country of residence, establishing a new social circle, and gaining comfort in utilizing the English language.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................................. iii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................... v

1. Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
   a. Bullying and Ethnic Discrimination ........................................................................................... 1
   b. Immigrant Youth in Canada ......................................................................................................... 3
   c. Gaps in Literature ......................................................................................................................... 5

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review ................................................................................................... 7
   a. Acculturation Theory and the Challenges of Immigrant Youth ................................................. 7
      i. Challenges Faced by Immigrant Youth that Influence Acculturation .............................. 9
      ii. Language Barriers .................................................................................................................. 10
      iii. Social Exclusion ................................................................................................................... 11
      iv. Acculturative Stress ............................................................................................................... 11
   b. Victimization: Bullying, Bias-Based Bullying and Ethnic Discrimination ............................ 12
      i. Bullying and Bias-Based Bullying ....................................................................................... 13
      ii. Ethnic Discrimination ........................................................................................................... 17
      iii. Integration of Bullying and Discrimination Definitions .................................................... 21

3. Chapter Three: Methodology ........................................................................................................ 23
   a. Participants ................................................................................................................................. 23
   b. Recruitment ............................................................................................................................... 25
   c. Procedure .................................................................................................................................. 27
   d. Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................. 28
4. Chapter Four: Results ........................................................................................................32
   a. Findings ..........................................................................................................................32
   b. Sample Description .......................................................................................................33
   c. Defining and Experiencing “Bullying” and “Discrimination” ........................................34
   d. Initial Experiences when Starting a New School ..........................................................40
   e. Themes ..........................................................................................................................42
      i. Language and Accent ..................................................................................................42
      ii. Peer Affiliations .......................................................................................................46
      iii. Multiculturalism and Cultural Stereotypes .............................................................51
      iv. Resiliency ................................................................................................................55

5. Chapter Five: Discussion ..................................................................................................59
   a. Experiences of Victimization by Peers among Immigrant Youth .................................60
      i. Defining “Bullying” ....................................................................................................60
      ii. Defining Discrimination ...........................................................................................61
      iii. Language and Accent ..............................................................................................63
      iv. Difficulty with Identifying with the Culture of Heritage and the New Canadian Culture ..................................................................................................................65
   b. How Immigrant Youth Understand their Victimization by Peers ...............................66
      i. Understanding and Interpreting Bullying ................................................................66
      ii. Understanding and Interpreting Discrimination .......................................................67
      iii. Perceived Outcomes of Victimization ....................................................................68
      iv. Language as a Motivator for Victimization and a Contributor to Adaptation .........69
v. Peer Affiliations ........................................................................................................70

vi. Resiliency ................................................................................................................73

c. Immigrant Youth’s Perceptions on Adaptation and Adjustment to Canada ..........77
   i. Multiculturalism in Canada and Diversity in the School Environment ..........78
   ii. Immigration Experiences and Acculturation .....................................................78

d. Limitations of the Study ..........................................................................................80

e. Implications for Social Work Practice and Research ..........................................81

6. References .................................................................................................................84

List of Appendices:

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster ..................................................................................90
Appendix B: Information Sheet/Consent Form ...............................................................91
Appendix C: Revised Information Sheet/Consent Form ...............................................94
Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire ....................................................................97
Appendix E: Interview Guide .........................................................................................99
Appendix F: Debriefing Form .......................................................................................101
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Peer victimization, or bullying, occurs throughout development, including childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Pepler, Jiang, Craig & Connolly, 2008). Although some literature has indicated that bullying behaviours decrease in adolescence (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009), other research has found that bullying in adolescence continues to occur in high schools (Abada, Hou & Ram, 2008). In addition to bullying, victimization such as ethnic discrimination, or differential treatment due to ethnic, racial or cultural differences, occurs among adolescents (Zeman & Bressan, 2006). The school system provides an environment in which students interact both positively and negatively with their peers. School provides an opportunity for youth to form meaningful relationships and social networks that can contribute to their identity formation, social development and self-esteem (Faircloth, 2009; French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2000). The school context can also foster an atmosphere in which harmful behaviours can have lasting effects on psychosocial functioning, such as bullying and discrimination. The present study investigates immigrant youth’s described experiences of victimization by their peers in the secondary school system and how they make meaning or understanding these experiences.

Bullying and Ethnic Discrimination

Bullying continues to be an ongoing issue in Canadian high schools and includes physical and emotional aggression (Abada, et al., 2008; Zeman & Bresssan, 2006). Bullying has been defined as

a specific type of aggression in which (1) behaviour is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behaviour occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) there is an
imbalance of power with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one (Nansel, et al., 2001; p. 2094).

Bullying can take a number of forms and has been typically defined using three categories bullying: verbal (e.g. name calling, threats), physical (e.g., hitting), and relational (e.g., rumours, exclusion; Nansel et al., 2001).

Negative social experiences such as bullying among youth can be motivated by a number of factors. The term bias-based bullying has emerged in the literature to describe bullying behaviour that is motivationally specific. Greene (2006) defines bias-based bullying as bullying that is motivated by the victimized child’s membership in a particular group that is often viewed as marginalized. For example, bias-based bullying has been utilized in research to describe bullying behaviours that are motivated by sexual orientation whereby LGBT students are targeted (Daley, Solomon, Newman, Mishna, 2006; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon, 2007). Bias-based bullying can take direct forms such as physical assaults (Daley et al., 2006), or indirect forms such as derogatory and stereotypical name-calling (Greene, 2006). This form of victimization can be especially hurtful because membership can be perceived as out of one’s control, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, or gender (Mesch, Turjeman & Fishman, 2008).

Another form of negative social experience can be observed in discriminatory behaviours, such as ethnic discrimination. Ethnic discrimination, by definition, refers to the differential treatment that individuals receive due to their racial, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds (Zeman & Bressan, 2006). Discrimination can manifest in behaviours such as verbal aggression, physical assaults, and social isolation, motivated by the individual’s ethnicity or immigrant status (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Liang, Grossman, & DeGuchi, 2007).
Bullying and ethnic discrimination, both considered forms of victimization, can significantly affect students’ academic experiences and performance, self-esteem and identity formation (Grossman & Liang, 2008; McKenney, Pepler, Craig & Connolly, 2006; Schafer, Korn, Smith, Hunter, Mora-Merchan, Singer, & de Meulch, 2004; Wong, Eccles & Sameroff, 2003). Faircloth (2009) suggests that identity, or the manner in which a person defines one’s self, is socially constructed and is highly influenced by interactions with others. Victimization such as bullying and ethnic discrimination are experiences that can have a detrimental impact on how one perceives one’s self and one’s location in the immediate environment.

**Immigrant Youth in Canada**

Immigration is a growing trend in Canada. In a study conducted by Statistics Canada in 2006, it was estimated that between the years 2001 and 2006, foreign-born Canadians increased by 13.6% (Chui, Tran & Maheux, 2006). Chui and colleagues (2006) define “immigrant” as a foreign-born individual, belonging to both visible and non-visible ethnic backgrounds, relocating to another country. The term “immigrant” is used throughout this paper with the intention of utilizing this definition to refer to a newcomer who has recently immigrated to Canada. In 2006, approximately 223,000 immigrants to Canada were 14 years old or younger and an additional 167,600 were between the ages of 15 and 24 (Chui, et al., 2006). The top five countries of birth of recent immigrants were China, India, the Philippines, Pakistan and the United States.

More specifically, Toronto Ontario and its surrounding areas have been referred to as the “major gateway” for immigrants in Canada (Chiu, et al., 2006; p. 27). In 2006, 47.8% (206,200) of the population in Toronto was born outside of Canada, representing an increase of 7.9% since 2001. Brampton, Ontario, which is approximately 40 kilometres north-west of Toronto and is included in the Greater Toronto Area, received 42,900 immigrants between 2001 and 2006, with
the majority of those individuals migrating from Asia (India and Pakistan) and the Middle East (Chui, et al., 2006). It has been suggested that between 2001 and 2006, this suburban outlier has increased in foreign-born population by 59.5% (Chui, et al., 2006).

This growing trend of immigrant youth relocating to the Greater Toronto Area, including Brampton, is reflected in student enrolment across secondary schools in the Peel region, which includes Mississauga and Brampton. In the 2009-2010 academic year the Peel District School Board registered 4,000 immigrant students throughout its 36 secondary schools.¹

Research indicates that immigrant youth experience a number of significant challenges associated with relocation. Moving to a new country and all that it entails can be a daunting time that is characterized by the immigrant youth’s attempts to adapt to their new environments, maintain their cultural heritage, and develop positive affiliations with their peers (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2000). Socially, they often experience detrimental treatment from their peers that can be motivated by their ethnicity or immigrant status (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006). The occurrence of bullying and ethnic discrimination of immigrant youth can complicate an already challenging time, characterized by adjusting to a new school and culture and transitioning from elementary to secondary school. “Acculturation” refers to the process of change when an individual relocates from one culture to another (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006). A focus on victimization experiences by immigrant youth can provide insight into the effect these experiences may have on their ability to adjust to their new country and their perceptions about the new country’s culture. The ability to adjust to a new country can be weakened when perceptions of the new community are negatively impacted by social

¹ This statistic excludes the number of immigrant students enrolled in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board (which has 26 secondary schools), as these numbers were not available.
experiences (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). Li (2009) suggests that “in the dynamic of peer competition for power and popularity, newcomer adolescents are often left out because they are seen as less desirable by native-born or more acculturated students” (p. 498).

Gaps in the Literature

There appears to be a gap in research regarding the bullying experiences of immigrant youth (McKenney et al., 2006), and their acculturation process (Berry et al., 2006). Negative experiences of immigrant youth are typically described as discriminatory rather than bullying (e.g., Grossman & Liang, 2008; Liang, et al., 2007; Mesch, et al., 2008; Qin, Way & Mukherjee, 2008). Yet, many immigrant youth report being targeted based on their ethnicity, race or culture (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). It was has been suggested that further research be conducted to investigate the unique experiences of victimization among immigrant youth (McKenney, et al., 2006). Therefore, the present study addresses this gap in research by exploring how immigrant youth define their experiences of victimization by their peers and whether they view these experiences as bullying, discrimination, or perhaps, both. Given the parallels in definitions, a primary goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of how immigrant youth interpret these experiences.

This study utilizes a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of victimization by peers, which in this paper refers to bullying and ethnic discrimination, of immigrant youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario, Canada, and more specifically, the Peel region, which includes the cities of Brampton, Mississauga and Caledon. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and the meanings that the individuals give to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The aim of the current study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of immigrant youth with respect to victimization by
their peers and its subsequent affects on acculturation. The following research questions were examined:

1. What are the experiences of victimization by peers among immigrant youth?
2. How do immigrant youth define their experiences of victimization by peers? How do they make meaning of, understand, and describe their experiences?
3. How do these experiences affect the way immigrant youth view their new country of residence and how do they report their adaptation?

Understanding the peer victimization experiences of this population of youth is important because it will increase understanding of these challenges immigrant youth face and the effects of these challenges on their adjustment, psychosocial well-being, and acculturation.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Acculturation Theory and the Challenges of Immigrant Youth

Acculturation refers to the “process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact” (Berry, et al., 2006, p. 305). Acculturation is the ability of immigrants to adjust to a new culture and environment after moving from their originating country. This process can be very challenging if the culture of the originating country differs significantly from that of the new “host” country. It is an experiential process that is influenced by social interactions with family, peers, and teachers. Moving to a new country can be particularly complicated for adolescents as they attempt to adapt to their new surroundings and culture while also entering a transitional stage of education from elementary to high school (French, et al., 2000). In a time when self-esteem is being developed and social networks are formed, it can prove difficult for those who enter into the high school setting with little or no social affiliations (Newman & Newman, 2001).

The process of acculturation is complex and influenced by various contributing factors. Berry and colleagues (2006) describe a bidimensional process, in which acculturation is dependent upon two aspects: the individual’s desire to maintain his or her culture of origin and the willingness to involve oneself in the new society. Based on this model, four types of acculturation are clarified and outlined (see Table 1).
Table 1.

The horizontal axis refers to the level of the individual’s connection to the new country, while the vertical axis represents the level of connection the individual has to the original culture. Berry and colleagues (2006) identify four acculturation profiles. First, immigrants who maintain their culture of heritage while developing a connection with the new country of residence are described as belonging to an integrated profile of acculturation. Second, the separation profile of acculturation is described as the maintenance of the originating culture while avoiding any positive connection with the new country. Third, the assimilation profile is described as an individual’s choice to affiliate oneself with the new culture and reject the culture of origin. Finally, immigrants with low connections with either the new or originating culture belong to the marginalization profile of acculturation. In a study examining the acculturation profiles of
immigrant youth (ages 13 to 18) in 13 countries, Berry and colleagues (2006) found that the two most common profiles among this population were the first two: integration and separation. This suggests that the majority of immigrant youth attempt to preserve some affiliation with their culture of heritage after relocating to another country. Participants belonging to the integrated profile were also more likely to report better psychosocial adaptation (Berry et al., 2006). This profile was more common with longer residency timeframes as the integrated profile was observed more often with adolescents who had lived in their new country for a longer period of time. It thus appears that as residency progresses through time, it is likely that positive experiences will increase and positively affect the individual’s perceptions of their environment and cultural identity.

**Challenges Faced by Immigrant Youth that Influence Acculturation**

The challenges that accompany immigration, regardless of experiences of victimization, can make the transition difficult for adolescents. Research indicates that factors such as language and cultural differences can be associated with negative outcomes including social exclusion and increased levels of stress (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Li, 2009; Qin, 2009; Lueck & Wilson, 2010). Immigrant youth are more likely to report experiencing discrimination and academic difficulties (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Li, 2009). These experiences can hinder the process of acculturation and negatively impact the youth’s perceptions of their new environment as language barriers not only make transitioning to a new culture difficult, but can increase the immigrant youth’s vulnerability as a target for victimization.

Given the challenges that immigrant youth inevitably face when adapting to a new environment, investigating their experiences with victimization is important in order to increase understanding of how these experiences may exacerbate an already difficult time. The following
section focuses on how factors such as language barriers and social exclusion can result in feelings of stress and thereby possibly affect acculturation. By examining these challenges, one can understand how experiences such as bullying and ethnic discrimination can complicate the acculturation process.

**Language Barriers**

Language is a strong contributor to stress experienced by immigrant youth. The ability to speak the language of the new country can play a significant role in an individual’s social affiliations and psychosocial functioning. Li (2009) explored the experiences of Chinese immigrants in the United States and found that proficiency in English positively affected adjustment. Students who immigrated to the United States with greater knowledge and usage of the English language were more likely to adjust positively to their new environment. Similarly, in a study focusing on the acculturation of Korean immigrants in the United States, Lee and Koro-Ljungberg (2007) reported that “English fluency was the most important tool when attempting to cope with bullying, as well as, for improving social relations and increasing the Korean students’ feelings of belonging” (p. 108). It has been suggested that as English proficiency improves, negative treatment, such as harassment, by others decreases (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). McKenney and colleagues (2006) investigated bullying experiences of immigrant youth in Canada and argued that students who did not speak English at home were 2 to 4.5 times more likely to experience bullying at school. Yu, Huang, Schwalberg, Overpeck and Kogan (2003) reported that adolescents from non-English speaking households were more likely to experience bullying based on race or religion. Finally, Lueck and Wilson (2010) suggest that linguistic factors had the largest effects on acculturative stress.
**Social Exclusion**

Language proficiency is only one of the reasons immigrant youth can often find themselves excluded from their peers in the new school culture. Other factors that can contribute to social exclusion include immigrant status, physical attributes and ethnicity (Liang et al., 2007; Qin, et al., 2008). Social exclusion has been found to be related to feelings of anxiety and depression (Grossman & Liang, 2008) and to contribute to self-isolation or exclusive affiliation with the youth’s ethnic group. When excluded by peers, some individuals choose to withdraw from social situations to avoid further feelings of anxiety, while others will affiliate with people belonging to the same ethnic group with whom they feel they have the most in common. This affiliation with their own cultural group has been linked to feelings of safety and reduction of negative effects of ethnic discrimination, such as poor self-esteem, mental health, and academic performance (Li, 2009; Wong et al., 2003). This tendency to only affiliate oneself with people of the same ethnic group is significant in relation to acculturation because of its similarity to the separation profile, which is the maintenance of the cultural heritage while rejecting the new culture. As previously mentioned, the separation profile is associated with poorer psychological adjustment (Berry et al., 2006). Finally, social exclusion can influence an immigrant youth’s outlook of those around them and the new environment to which they are attempting to adapt. Lee and Koro-Ljungberg (2007) suggest that negative experiences with peers and staff in the school system were directly related to a decreased perception of one’s community.

**Acculturative Stress**

The stress related to harmful interactions, whether physical or emotional, can impede psychosocial functioning. “Acculturation stress” is described as the negative effect on an individual’s mental well-being due to the challenges faced in the new community. Common
factors that contribute to “acculturation stress” are language proficiency and experienced discrimination (Lueck & Wilson, 2010).

Acculturative stress can also be influenced by the fact that immigrant adolescents often try to preserve their original culture at home while trying to adopt their new culture in the school environments (Li, 2009; Qin, 2009). This tendency to live in two cultural worlds simultaneously is a common lifestyle reported by immigrant youth (Li, 2009) and can lead to both at home and in school to adhere to each culture.

Immigration to Canada appears to be on an increase, which is reflected in statistical reports (Chui et al., 2006) and which has resulted in a growing population of immigrant youth entering the school system. The process of acculturation can prove to be stressful since the school environment can present challenges such as discrimination, language barriers, and social exclusion, all of which can negatively impact psychosocial and mental well-being.

In Canada, multiculturalism is encouraged and supported (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). In an area such as the Peel region in Ontario where the influx of immigrants is evident, it would be valuable to investigate the experiences of immigrant youth to determine if this multicultural emphasis is present, or if they are, in fact, being victimized by their peers.

**Victimization: Bullying, Bias-Based Bullying and Ethnic Discrimination**

Bullying and ethnic discrimination among immigrant youth are concerning phenomena since the victimized youth are targeted based on their ethnic backgrounds and immigrant status, both of which are out of the individual’s control. Although these phenomena, which are both forms of victimization, have received limited attention and research (Liang, et al., 2007; McKenney et al., 2006), Mesch and colleagues (2008) describe discrimination among immigrant adolescents as a source of chronic stress because the motivational basis of the behaviour is
something these youth cannot change. Factors such as ethnicity, culture and race are aspects that many use to identify and define one’s self. Being victimized due to such aspects of one’s self that are considered uncontrollable or unchangeable can be especially disheartening.

Research examining experiences of immigrant youth has typically focused on bullying (Graham & Juvoven, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001) or ethnic discrimination (Liang et al., 2007; Qin et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2003), viewing these constructs as disparate and characteristically different from one another. Furthermore, a large amount of the available research utilizes populations of native-born, ethnic minority youth rather than immigrant youth (Gonzalez, 2009; Grossman & Liang, 2008). This approach can be problematic because one cannot generalize the experience of native-born ethnic minority youth to all ethnic minority youth; nor, can one grasp the unique experiences of the immigrant youth population without gaining an understanding of the meanings they assign to each experience. This population, as previously outlined, may experience added complexities when compared to their non-foreign counterparts, such as language barriers, lack of familiarity with the community and peers, and a history of lived experiences in another country and culture. The added experience of victimization, such as bullying or discrimination, can therefore be perceived differently by immigrant youth and subsequently affect their adjustment and socialization.

**Bullying and Bias-Based Bullying**

Bullying is an ongoing problem among children (Perren & Alsaker, 2006) and adolescents (Abada, et al., 2008), throughout the world, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Australia, and Austria, among others (Nansel et al., 2001; Smith & Sharp, 1994; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Rigby, 2000; Strohmeier, Speil & Gradinger, 2008). Bullying is a phenomenon that occurs in elementary and high school. Although research has
found bullying to be more prevalent in children (Nansel et al., 2001), bullying continues to occur in adolescence and it has been suggested that long-term effects are more apparent when experienced in later ages (Schafer, et al., 2004). Schafer and colleagues (2004) found that participants who experienced bullying during high school were more likely to have low self-esteem, difficulty maintaining social networks, and, in some cases, higher levels of suicidal ideation. Low self-esteem and relationship-building difficulties extended into adulthood in most of these cases (Schafer, et al., 2004).

Bullying is associated with several negative effects with respect to psychosocial and mental wellbeing, including increased reports of loneliness and social isolation, and problems with social and emotional adjustment and with relationship-building skills (Nansel, et al., 2001). Bullying is associated with other adverse effects, such as poor academic performance, depression and anxiety (Nansel et al., 2001; Rigby, 2000). It can cause distress for the victimized youth, which can be exacerbated by a lack of social support, isolation and withdrawal from school due to fear of future victimization (Rigby, 2000). A retrospective study by Schafer and colleagues (2004) found that adults who had been bullied in the past reported having low self-esteem and self-concept. Additionally, these participants were classified as having fearful attachment, as reflected by their reported discomfort with getting close to others despite their need for support and emotional connection (Schafer, et al., 2004).

The negative impact of bullying is a serious concern, especially since according to statistics regarding the Greater Toronto area as well as nationally and internationally a large amount of students experience this form of mistreatment. According to Statistics Canada, 21% (n=3290) of students in grades 7 to 9 reported being bullied at least once during the reporting year (Zeman & Bressan, 2006). Immigrant youth are more likely to report experiencing bullying
than native-born youth (Abada et al., 2008; Zeman & Bressan, 2006). Therefore, bullying is a serious issue that is present in schools within the identified geographical area for the present study and, according to incidence rates, can be more serious for students who have moved to this region from other countries.

**Bias-based bullying**

Bullying can be motivated by the victimized youth’s connection with an identifiable and marginalized group. Englander (2007) parallels some bullying behaviours to hate crimes as the motivation behind the bullying is often in response to perceived differences, such as sexual orientation, ability, race, or ethnicity. These perceived differences are often used by the aggressor to define or justify his or her superiority over those who he or she is bullying.

Although the term bias-based bullying has not been utilized often when describing victimization motivated by ethnic differences or immigrant status, this type of motivational basis is evident in related literature. McKenney and colleagues (2006) refer to “ethnic bullying”, in which

...direct forms of aggression such as racial taunts and slurs, derogatory references to culturally-specific customs, foods, and costumes, as well as, indirect forms of aggression, such as exclusion from a mainstream group of peers because of ethnic differences (p. 242).

McKenney and colleagues (2006) investigated the prevalence of bullying experienced by immigrant youth in comparison to that of native-born youth in elementary and high schools in Toronto, Ontario. Although no significant difference emerged with respect to general victimization between these two groups, the findings suggest that immigrant youth were at a higher risk to experience ethnic bullying by their peers. One conclusion of this study, which was
to identify prevalence, was that further exploration was required in order to gain a better understanding of the experiences of ethnic bullying by immigrant youth: “...we have little understanding of how immigrant youth experience this particular form of victimization...are they bullied through racial slurs, physical aggression and intimidation, or social ostracism by native-born youth?” (p. 254)

Similarly, in a report by the Department for Education and Skills (2006) in the United Kingdom, the term “racist bullying” was used to describe,

a range of hurtful behaviours, both physical and psychological, that makes the person feel unwelcome, marginalized, excluded, powerless or worthless because of their colour, ethnicity, culture, faith community, national origin or national status (p. 33).

According to this report, racist bullying is quite prevalent in the United Kingdom school systems and it was recommended that school officials become more aware and responsive to these incidents. This recommendation is not limited to the United Kingdom. In a report submitted by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009), it was stated, “racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, and gender-based violence” is present in Ontario schools, prompting the launch of the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in April 2009 (p. 15). This social initiative placed the responsibility on educators and school officials to promote diversity tolerance and inclusiveness in Ontario schools.

The definitional similarities between bias-based bullying, ethnic bullying and racist bullying seem quite apparent, as they all refer to victimization based on the bullied individual’s membership in a particular group (in the current study, ethnic group or culture). Such experiences are related to several negative effects, such as social alienation, depression, anxiety
and low self-esteem (McKenney et al., 2006; Mishna, et al., 2007). Targets of bullying experience distress due to social exclusion and rejection (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). Furthermore, ethnic bullying can interfere with identity formation and psychosocial adjustment (McKenney et al., 2006). Experiencing ethnic bullying can affect how immigrant youth view themselves and the culture to which they belong, which can ultimately impact their psychosocial wellbeing and peer relationships. While the available research of ethnic and racist bullying does not explore the subsequent effects on acculturation, Liang and colleagues (2007) found that negative behaviours motivated by race or ethnicity, such as racial discrimination, negatively impacted the acculturation process of immigrant youth.

**Ethnic discrimination**

Ethnic discrimination is reflected through various behaviours including social exclusion (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007), and verbal harassment based on culture or language (Liang et al., 2007; Qin et al., 2008). These behaviours are often motivated by ethnicity-related stereotypes or characteristics such as language, physical appearance and accent.

Membership in a particular cultural or ethnic group can bring about its own challenges for adolescents, especially youth who struggle with cultural conflicts between their home and school environments (Li, 2009; Qin et al., 2008). This conflict can be stressful to immigrant youth as they try to form social affiliations and meaningful peer relationships. On the one hand, they are maintaining their native culture with their families and on the other hand, they are trying to “fit in” to the peer culture:

- at home, they cannot communicate well with their parents because they do not speak their native language; however, at school they get teased for speaking their
native language and not being able to speak English fluently as non-immigrant students (Qin et al., 2008; p. 502).

This internalized cultural conflict can be exacerbated by negative interactions with peers, such as ethnic or racial discrimination. Discrimination combined with cultural conflict experienced at home can make the acculturation process very difficult and emotionally taxing (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Liang, et al., 2007; Mesch, et al., 2008).

“Discrimination distress” refers to the internalization of perceived discrimination among adolescent minority youth and the associated negative effects of this stress (Grossman & Liang, 2008). Racial or ethnic identity is in large part dependent on one’s experiences with peers and their perceptions about the individual’s ethnic or racial group (Gonzalez, 2009). Adolescents thus learn to define themselves and the culture to which they belong based on their experiences with those around them. If they perceive that their peers view their ethnicity negatively, they are more likely to reject their culture and affiliate themselves to a greater degree with the majority or peer-accepted culture. Several research studies suggest that immigrant youth and youth belonging to ethnic minority groups have experienced discrimination based on factors, such as language, ethnicity, immigrant status, and education (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Liang et al., 2007; Qin et al., 2008).

Discrimination has been reported by youth in Toronto schools. Twenty-one percent of youth in grades 7 to 9 report being bullied whereas 34% of youth admitted to feeling discriminated (Zelman & Bressan, 2006). Immigrant youth are more likely to report discrimination than non-immigrant youth (Zeman & Bressan, 2006) and to report being harassed more often (Qin et al., 2008). Such findings are concerning due to the negative outcomes
associated with discrimination. Discrimination among immigrant and native-born ethnic minority youth is correlated with poorer academic performance, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and self-efficacy, and social withdrawal (Cassidy, O’Connor, Howe & Warden, 2005; Grossman & Liang, 2008; Mesch et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2003).

In addition, ethnic discrimination can affect the acculturation process. Many studies suggest that the experience of discrimination can impede a student’s ability to adapt to the new culture and environment (Li, 2009; Liang et al., 2007; Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Wong et al., 2003). As previously outlined, immigrant students who experience discrimination will often affiliate themselves with students from the same ethnic group for protection and safety. Such actions may make it more difficult for the youth to adapt and accept the culture of their host country. In contrast, “stereotype threat” is described as the tendency to reject or avoid certain behaviours that are viewed as conforming to negative stereotypes of their national culture (Wong et al., 2003). For example, a student may decide to stop talking or attempt to change how they speak because of the presence of an accent. Both of these diametrically different behaviours demonstrated by immigrant youth, involving rejection of either the original or new culture, significantly influence the youth’s acculturation process. Based on Berry’s model of acculturation, such behaviours can lead to either assimilation or separation. To review, assimilation refers to the adoption of the new culture while rejecting the culture of origin. Conversely, separation refers to the maintenance of the culture of origin and rejection of the new culture (Berry et al., 2006). In Berry and colleagues’ (2006) study, youth who reported discrimination or perceived discrimination were more likely to demonstrate separation or marginalization (or rejection of both cultures) profiles. Certain acculturation types, such as assimilation, separation, and marginalization, have been linked to poorer psychosocial adaptation.
(Berry & Sabatier, 2010). Furthermore, Lueck and Wilson (2010) argue that experiences of discrimination can lead to increased acculturation stress. Individuals who reported experiencing overt discrimination (e.g., harassment, threats) and covert forms of discrimination (e.g., perceived differential treatment by others because of ethnicity or immigrant status) reported higher levels of psychological distress relating to the adaptation to the new culture (Lueck & Wilson, 2010).

Immigrant youth are more likely to be exposed to negative peer interactions in the form of ethnic or racial discrimination. They are often treated differently by others because of their ethnicity, language, and immigrant status. This can be direct, for example, through inappropriate stereotypes and slurs directed at the youth, or indirect, for example, through social exclusion (Grossman & Liang, 2008). Ethnic discrimination is prevalent in schools in the Toronto area (Zeman & Bressan, 2006) and is often associated with negative psychological and psychosocial outcomes, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and poor academic performance (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Mesch, et al., 2008). Given these outcomes, ethnic discrimination can make the process of acculturation quite challenging as youth experience discrimination by those from the country and culture to which they are attempting to adapt and accept (Lueck & Wilson, 2010). Negative experiences such as discrimination can impact the immigrant youth’s perception of the new country, and the youth may develop a mistrust towards those belonging to the new culture. This can then lead to a stronger affiliation to those belonging to their own culture (separation profile) rather than attempting to blend the two cultures in a healthy manner (integrative profile; Berry et al., 2006).
Integration of Bullying and Discrimination Definitions

Despite the existence of a large body of evidence examining bullying (Graham & Juvoven, 2002; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Rigby, 2000; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001) or discrimination and perceived discrimination (Cassidy, et al., 2005; Liang, et al., 2007; Qin, et al., 2008; Wong, et al., 2003) as separate constructs, these phenomena have been defined using similar characteristics. Bullying behaviour has been described as a perceived imbalance of power as a motivator to bullying behaviours (Nansel et al., 2001), whereby the child or youth who bullies attempts to cause distress to someone who is considered less powerful (Mishna, Pepler & Weiner, 2006). This imbalance of power is also considered integral to the definition of discrimination. Liang and colleagues (2007) refer to a “rule of nature”, which describes the idea that non-immigrant students “discriminate against immigrants, who are considered perpetually powerless outsiders” (p. 199). In a study by Graham and Juvoven (2002), the students belonging to the statistical minority ethnic group were considered to be less powerful than the majority and reported more frequent harassment. Bullying behaviours are defined as intended to harm the victim through various forms such as physical or verbal abuse, social exclusion or isolation, including direct behaviours such as physical assaults or verbal threats, as well as indirect behaviours such as gossip and rumours (Mishna, et al., 2006). Research examining discrimination of youth also describes these behaviours as physical or verbal harassment (e.g., Liang et al., 2007; Qin et al., 2008) and social exclusion (e.g. Grossman & Liang, 2008; Lee and Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). For example, Nansel and colleagues (2001) describe bullying as an action that is repeated over time. Similarly, Mesch and colleagues (2008) argue that ethnic discrimination is not an isolated event as well, and often occurs in high frequency.
In addition to the commonalities in defining characteristics, bullying and discrimination are associated with similar negative outcomes such as increased levels of anxiety and depression as well as poor academic performance (McKenney, et al., 2006; Mesch, et al., 2008; Cassidy et al., 2005).

With the emergence of bias-based bullying and the recognition that this victimizing behaviour can be motivated by an affiliation to a particular group, the differentiation between bullying and ethnic discrimination becomes more blurred. It can be more difficult to discern whether bias-based bullying motivated by ethnicity and immigrant status is different from ethnic discrimination, or whether they are characteristically the same. Thus, when referring to bullying or discrimination, the term victimization is used to encompass this group of harmful treatment.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was utilized to collect and analyze data. In addition to focusing on lived experiences, phenomenology recognizes that the meaning of each experience is unique to the individual. Starks and Trinidad (2007) describe phenomenology in terms of “truth”: “The truth of the event, as an abstract entity, is subjective and knowable only through embodied perception; we create meaning through the experience of moving through space across time” (p. 1374). Phenomenology, therefore, investigates one phenomenon through numerous eyes and interpretations. It recognizes the personal aspect of a phenomenon and explores the “essence” of an experience, which refers to the central meanings that are commonly given by a group of individuals about the same occurrence (Moustakas, 1994). Due to the lack of research on the victimization of immigrant youth, a phenomenological approach was perceived to be the most appropriate way in which to gather data on the victimization of immigrant youth. Prior to commencing this project, approval was granted by the University of Toronto Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (REB).

Participants

Six participants were individually interviewed for this study, which was considered sufficient to identify significant themes and obtain thick descriptions. It was felt that saturation was reached with this number of participants as similar themes emerged across all interviews with no new themes surfacing. The inclusionary criteria included the following:

1. Participants who were between the ages of 16 and 18.

2. Participants who immigrated to Canada within the past 5 years. This criterion was established based on the literature that indicated the imminent challenges upon arrival to
the host country. As well, the literature review indicated that recent immigrants were more likely to experience victimization by their peers (Berry et al., 2006; Zeman & Bressan, 2006).

3. Participants who were comfortable speaking in English for the entirety of the 60 to 90 minute interview. The main reason for this criterion was due to the lack of interpretation or translation services.

The age of the participants ranged from 16 (n=3) to 17 (n=3) and all were enrolled in secondary schools in Brampton and Mississauga. Five of the participants were female and one was male. The ethnic background of the sample was quite homogeneous, with five participants identifying as Southeast Asian: four from Pakistan and one from Bangladesh. The remaining participant immigrated to Canada from China. The average length of stay in Canada was 4.22 years. Due to the difficulties present during recruitment, one youth who has lived in Canada for 10 years was permitted to participate. All six participants identified English as their second language. The demographic information is presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Length of Time in Canada</th>
<th>Language Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Cantonese, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Urdu, Hindi, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Bengali, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Urdu, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Urdu, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Urdu, Hindi, English, French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment

The recruitment process proved to be challenging. It is not clear what contributed to the difficulty or whether one factor was the youths’ hesitancy to speak about negative experiences. In research investigating the disclosure of bullying by children, it has been found that disclosing these experiences can be impeded by feelings of self-blame or fear of repercussion or further victimization (Mishna, et al., 2006). The sensitivity of this topic can also be present for adolescents. Liang and colleagues (2007) favoured individual interviews over focus groups when investigating the victimization of immigrant youth because this phenomenon is often viewed as shaming and leads to reduced participation. It became evident through the feedback given by youth workers assisting with this process that many adolescents who had recently immigrated to Canada were reporting positive experiences and a lack of victimization by their peers, and therefore believed that their information may have been irrelevant to the study.

The primary setting of recruitment took place in two settlement agencies in the Brampton and Mississauga areas. Settlement agencies provide supportive services to individuals and families who have recently relocated and immigrated to Canada. Services include language instruction, counselling, and referral to appropriate support services, such as legal aid or social assistance. Another key service provided by settlement agencies entails support to youth either through individual or group programs. Youth services incorporated in services provided by settlement agencies offer support from trained youth workers who provide such activities as mentorship, social events, assistance with homework assignments, and counselling services.
Recruitment posters were posted in several settlement agencies, outlining the inclusionary criteria and contact information (See Appendix A). Posters also indicated that participants received a $10 gift incentive for participation. Participants were encouraged to contact the Principal Investigator through a confidential email to set up an interview session. Information Sheets/Consent Forms were also provided to youth workers at the settlement agencies to distribute to interested or suitable participants. Information Sheets/Consent Forms included a description of the study, including the purpose, the risks and benefits of participation, and the rights and expectations of the participant (See Appendix B). The potential benefit to participating in the study was the opportunity to discuss their experiences with immigrating to Canada, the subsequent challenges they faced and the possibility that this information could be helpful to other immigrant students. A potential risk of participating in the study was identified as being asked to talk about hurtful and sometimes painful experiences that occurred in their past and possibly their present lives. In order to address the potential risk of participation, each participant was provided with a list of supportive services in the area, including contact information for counselling services and distress lines.

Due to low numbers of participants, the recruitment process was amended to include group presentations facilitated by the Principal Investigator to youth groups at the settlement agencies to provide information about the project. Following the revision of the Information Sheet/Consent Form (see Appendix C), the Principal Investigator visited several youth groups and met with small groups of students who met the eligibility criteria. The goal of this process was to provide the students with an opportunity to ask questions directly to the Principal Investigator. It was also used as an opportunity to begin establishing comfort levels of the students with respect to communicating openly with Principal Investigator. Students were
encouraged to participate regardless of whether or not they experienced victimization. Students who were interested in participating then met briefly with the Principal Investigator to review and sign the Information Sheet/Consent Form and schedule an interview time that coincided with their schedules.

An additional change to recruitment was the inclusion of immigrant youth who reported a positive immigration experience characterized by a lack of victimization. This was due to feedback provided by the settlement agencies’ employees that many of the youth participating in group programs reported that they did not feel their experiences would be relevant to the study since they did not experience peer victimization. The information provided by these youth was considered relevant and valuable because they were able to provide their definitions of “bullying” and “discrimination” and provide insight into factors that contributed to their positive immigration experience.

Procedure

Following initial contact by potential participants, an interview session was scheduled. Interviews took place at either a neutral location that was outside of the settlement agency or in a self-contained interview room within the agency that was separate from any group or activity.

Prior to the interview, the Principal Investigator reviewed key points included in the Information Sheet/Consent Form. Each participant was assured that all information they shared would be confidential. They were also informed that any identifying information, such as their names and names of their friends or schools, would be excluded in the analyses and that they would subsequently be provided with a participant number. By signing the Information Sheet/Consent Form, each participant was reminded that this indicated an agreement to have the interview audio-taped. It was explained that after transcription and analysis of the interview all
materials would be destroyed. Each participant was given an opportunity to ask for clarification or further information before signing the document.

The participant was then asked to complete a short Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix D). This form included basic information pertaining to: age; last grade completed; defined ethnicity; age when he or she moved to Canada; reason for moving to Canada; country of origin; family and household composition; and language fluency. Each participant was informed that he or she could refuse to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable.

The researcher followed a semi-structured interview guide to assist in providing appropriate prompts and consistent questions to each participant (See Appendix E). Topics that were discussed included: experiences of immigrating to Canada; treatment initially received by peers; current treatment by peers; and coping strategies. Each participant was asked to provide their own definitions for “bullying” and “ethnic discrimination”, and to talk about how they defined their own experiences.

At the end of the interview, a Debriefing Form, including a list of local supportive resources was provided (Appendix F). The researcher also allowed extra time to answer any questions that the participant had regarding the study. The Debriefing Form provided the rationale and purpose of the study, which was to investigate the experiences of victimization of immigrant youth. This form also emphasized the goals of determining how immigrant youth defined terms such as “bullying” and “discrimination” and of identifying how the youth interpreted their experiences specifically as bullying, discrimination or as both.

**Data Analysis**

The process of analyzing data has been derived from Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. The concepts of *composite textural* and
composite structural descriptions are introduced in this process. The former refers to identified themes provided in each individual description of the phenomenon. The latter refers to themes that are present across the entire group. By focusing on the individual patterns of interpretations and a collective description of the phenomenon, the researcher can reduce the data into meaning units or the “essence” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Saturation was met with the six participants as common themes were shared among all of the interviews and no new themes emerged. Cresswell (2007) states that saturation is met when “the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category” (p. 160).

This method of analysis is a four-step process. First, each audio-taped interview was transcribed verbatim. Second, the transcription was used to identify significant statements; meaningful terms or words that are repeated throughout the interview; and definitions and descriptions of the participants’ experiences. The researcher first read through the transcribed interview and took detailed notes about repeated statements and patterns of statements. A coding guide was then developed identifying these themes and each theme was colour-coded (e.g., references to social isolation = green; statements about accent or language = pink). The researcher then reviewed the transcription again and administered the colour-codes to the text. In the third step of this process, this extraction of meaningful units of information was conducted with all the interviews.

The final step of this process is to identify common themes and meanings throughout all the interviews. This was accomplished by using the coding guides developed for each interview and identifying patterns of frequent themes that were consistent among all of the interviews.

In addition to the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis, specific information from each of the interviews was extracted that was relevant in answering some of the research
questions posed, including each individual’s perceived definition of the words “bullying” and “discrimination”. To review, the following questions were investigated:

1. What are the experiences of victimization by peers among immigrant youth?
2. How do immigrant youth define their experiences of victimization by peers? How do they make meaning of, understand, and describe their experiences?
3. How do these experiences affect the way immigrant youth view their new country of residence and how do they report their adaptation?

**Validation of data**

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the data being analysed. First, in order to appreciate individuals’ meanings of their experiences, it was important for the researcher to “bracket” any pre-existing beliefs, biases, and experiences with bullying and discrimination (Cresswell, Hansen, Clark, & Morales, 2007). “Bracketing” refers to the ability to recognize and set aside these pre-existing ideas (Cresswell, 2007). By doing so, Moustakas (1994) explains that the researcher will approach the study with *epoche* or freedom of judgment, in order to appreciate the essence that is shared by the participants. Through bracketing, this researcher was able to identify the importance of focusing on this population, especially as a second generation of Filipino immigrants. As a youth, observing the experiences of family members moving to Canada, the negative outcomes of victimization were evident and painful. However, when preparing for data collection, it was important to recognize that not all immigrant youth will experience victimization.

Second, it was essential to ensure that the interpretations of the participants were conveyed accurately. In order to do so, the researcher continuously checked with the participants throughout the interview whether the interpretations were being understood correctly. This was
accomplished through rephrasing or clarifying responses with the participants to ensure that information was not being misunderstood or misinterpreted. The dependability of the data was increased through audio-taping and verbatim transcription of each interview. Finally, in order to share the descriptions provided by the participants, direct quotations were used from the transcriptions to ensure that the statements were portrayed correctly.
Results

Findings

Several themes emerged through analysis of the individual interviews. The participants were asked to discuss how they were treated by peers following their move to Canada. The participants were asked to describe their own definitions of the terms “bullying” and “discrimination” and to provide examples of each, including both their own direct experiences and observations of peers around them. Many of the participants described moving to Canada with their families for similar reasons, more particularly seeking better education and opportunities. Themes that surfaced through the data analysis included the importance of English language fluency; the presence of discrimination and “racism” in the secondary school system; and the initial social challenges of moving to Canada, such as feeling excluded socially, developing friendships, and adjusting to a new culture. The participants differed in terms of their reported experiences of bullying or discrimination. Of those participants who reported positive adjustment and experiences in the school system, there was a focus on contributing factors towards this adjustment, which included established supportive social networks and personality characteristics, such as high self-esteem and self-confidence.

Language appeared to be a predominant factor in the participants’ immigration experiences. It is noteworthy that language was described as a multidimensional contributor with different levels of meanings. For instance, language and accent were described as a motivating basis for others to victimize them, as well as a strong contributor to adaptation and adjustment to the new school environment.

The following section will address the study’s research questions by outlining a description of the sample’s composition, the themes that emerged, and the participants’
definitions of the terms “bullying” and “discrimination”. Since half of the sample described a positive immigration experience, which was exemplified by a reported absence of bullying or discriminatory treatment, one section will focus on resiliency and the factors contributing to positive adjustment and adaptation.

Sample Description

Six participants 15 and 16 years of age were interviewed. Five participants were female and the remaining participant was male. Five of the participants identified themselves as Southeast Asian, immigrating to Canada from Pakistan (n=4) or Bangladesh (n=1). One participant immigrated to Canada from China. The most common reason for moving to Canada was to find better opportunities and better education: “We moved here because my parents wanted us to have good education and stuff, start, like, have a good life. So, more opportunities and stuff” (Participant 4). Five out of the six participants moved to Canada with their families and one youth moved from her parents’ home in China to her extended family in Canada. The participants’ ages when they immigrated to Canada differed. Three participants immigrated to Canada when they were still in elementary school and the ages ranged from 5 to 12 years old. The remaining three participants immigrated to Canada in high school, with their ages ranging from 15 to 16 years of age. Five of the six participants shared that they were excited to move to Canada, while one participant could not recall her feelings about moving due to her young age.

All six participants were enrolled in secondary school and were attending either grade 11 or 12 and identified English as their second language. Primary languages were Urdu, Hindi, Mandarin, and Bangladeshi. Half of the participants reported that they had learned English after their arrival to Canada, and participated in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs through community agencies or through school programs: “I took ESL...so, it helped me a lot,
right? ‘Cause whenever I had homework problems or homework issues, I can always go to the ESL teacher and she can help me explain my work” (Participant 5). The other half of the participants had immigrated to Canada with a grasp of the English language, which they gained through their education from their original country:

“We followed a British system, so some of the words are, like, British...And I never really went for ESL classes because I never needed it” (Participant 2)

“There are people who don’t learn English there, but that used to be, like way back. Now, they teach English a lot in every school” (Participant 4).

Length of residency in Canada varied among the sample, ranging from four months to five years. An additional participant immigrated to Canada 10 years ago and was added to the sample and provided a retrospective account of the immigration experience. Four of the participants immigrated to Canada during high school and the remaining two were in elementary school when their families relocated.

**Defining and Experiencing “Bullying” and “Discrimination”**

The definitions of “bullying” and “discrimination” provided by the participants were similar. “Bullying” was described as the mistreatment of others because of a perceived difference of power between the youth who bullies and the victimized youth. Many of the participants viewed bullying as unprovoked, stating that it often occurred “for no reason at all.” Some viewed bullying as a manifestation of individual insecurities developed throughout their childhood or home life, describing it as an act to make one feel better about one’s self:

“I don’t know, it’s like, people who don’t feel good about themselves. They like picking on other children, just to, you know, feel good about themselves” (Participant 2)
“They are just looking for a target who they can pick on and just to show how powerful they are” (Participant 5)

“I think, one person is dominant and that person has, not the power, but the person feels powerful and they take whatever they have happening in their life out on someone else” (Participant 3)

“Discrimination” was defined as individuals being treated differently because of their colour, ethnicity, or language, through behaviours such as statements referring to cultural stereotypes:

“When people sort of wanted to put you by yourself, they would say bad things about where you come from, or like, the way you dress because of where you come from” (Participant 3)

“Telling the jokes of my background or my country and the whole class is laughing” (Participant 1)

“…call them names and stuff, and tell them why are they here…and for Muslims, they, like, have a very hard point of view. Like, all Muslims are doing wrong things and stuff like that because of all that is going in the world” (Participant 4)

The experiences of bullying and discrimination differed to some extent across the sample. Interestingly, while half of the sample reported a lack of either experience, upon further investigation, descriptions of experienced or observed discrimination and bullying were shared by five of the six participants.

Four of the six participants described experiencing bullying victimization, typically upon their initial arrival to Canada. The participants reported that bullying often occurred within the
first year of starting their new school and that it decreased as time progressed and they started to establish their own social circles. The most commonly reported bullying behaviours included social exclusion and spreading rumours, for example being excluded from group projects and lunch periods.

“I sat alone in that class, after that. Even like, you know how we have group project? I was not in any group” (Participant 2)

“...no one talks to me, especially in lunch. I was, like, alone, and I don’t know anywhere to go” (Participant 1)

Participants acknowledged being ridiculed due to various factors, such as language, accent, physical appearance, and popularity status. Some stated that because of their language barriers and strong accent, peers made comments about them based on the belief that they were “stupid” or not intelligent: “I know they were saying something ‘cause they assume I don’t understand English at all. But I still know. They were always saying, ‘Oh that girl is stupid’” (Participant 1).

Discrimination was described as stereotypical comments made about the person’s cultural background, including religious beliefs, cultural traditions, physical dress, and food. Five of the six participants talked about direct or indirect experiences of discrimination they experienced such as derogatory and stereotypical comments by peers about the cultural group to which the participants belonged (e.g., cultural traditions, food, clothing, language):

“I started wearing a hijab, right?...They’re like, ‘Oh, why don’t you just go back to Pakistan if you care about the culture like that?’” (Participant 6)

“And this girl sees a cook book and she takes some Indian recipe, and she goes, like, ‘These dirty Indians’. And then, she like, tears the page out from there. And
she put the book back. And I’m standing right next to her. And then she just walked off” (Participant 2)

In some instances, these comments were made directly to the participants whereas in other instances comments were made indirectly, such as in a classroom discussion or in a group setting, whereby the culture in general rather than the participant was the target:

“Once in my religion class,...they said how bad communist party is..I got pretty offended but I can’t do anything because the whole class could think things that way...I’m always saying, ‘Okay, I am communist so what are you going do to me?’” (Participant 1)

“They have an eve of Diwali party every year, and then I heard some of the girls behind me saying, someone asked, ‘What’s Eve?’ and someone said, ‘Oh it’s just some brown thing’. So I didn’t like that” (Participant 3)

“Like, in class, they’ll be a group of people in the back talking randomly about brown people...They’re just, they’re like “Brown people are so dumb,” and this and that” (Participant 2)

The participants sample viewed bullying and discrimination as different and distinct, with only one participant expressing that her experiences could be defined as both since she perceived that she was targeted because of her ethnic background and, more specifically, the lack of English proficiency: “If I speak, then they will laugh at me or they will pick on me” (Participant 1). In this case, the participant believed that the bullying behaviour (i.e., ridicule) she endured was due to her culture, which was reflected in her accent or inability to speak English fluently.

Effects of bullying included feelings of depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and academic difficulties. For instance, one participant stated, “I’ve stopped talking to people that
much, because of my accent. And, it’s kind of resulted in, I don’t know, my studies too, ‘cause first semester I’d ask my teachers when I didn’t understand. But now, I get scared of, like, talking to people, especially new people” (Participant 2). Participants reported feeling sad and homesick when they experienced negative treatment by their peers:

“I start missing home. And I call my friends and talk to them. So it gets me distracted” (Participant 2)

“I was, like really depressed…I can’t, I couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t eat well” (Participant 1)

Anxiety surrounded social interactions, and some participants said that they developed a fear of speaking in public or asking questions in class. The participants explained that they consequently withdrew from social situations, either because of their accent or their fear of being mistreated or targeted again. Academic difficulties were reported by some participants, which they mainly attributed to language barriers and fear of asking questions during class discussions.

“I fell back on studying. I think I could have done much better first semester, only if I had like gone and asked for help. But then every time I go and ask, they go like, “What? What are you saying?” and I have to repeat myself. So they don’t exactly tell me I have an accent, but indirectly I feel like my accent is so, if I need help, I go, I run to the ESL room” (Participant 2)

“It was so hard for me to communicate, you know, and let them know what I think about certain issues. When we were having class discussions, it was so hard to, you know, put my ideas or explain my thoughts. So, one of the hardest parts was the language” (Participant 5)

“And then they started laughing and then I got really upset. Then I was, like, I don’t talk to them anymore” (Participant 1)
“I didn’t really know English very well, so I didn’t really know what to say to people. I even had a hard time sometimes understanding the teacher” (Participant 3)

Some participants stated that they received limited support from teachers and that the teachers often referred them to ESL classes or implied that the curriculum was too difficult:

“\[I used to go sometimes for help when, you know, I had major assignments and I wanted to, like, double check. That’s the only time I went to ESL. Otherwise, that teacher used to send me for every test to the ESL. She’s like, “No, your English is weak, you need to go to ESL”\]” (Participant 2)

In a similar situation, this participant shares how other immigrant students were perceived by teachers as unable to succeed in the mainstream curriculum because of language:

“\[...the teacher kept giving her low marks and telling her ‘You are not fit for my classroom, you should go to ESL’ ... then, this one thing my friend did an exceptionally well essay and the teacher still marked her low and said, ‘You cannot, there is no way you can write such good English’\]” (Participant 2)

As English proficiency improved, academic grades appeared to also improve:

“\[Once you understand the language and can speak it, everything becomes easier\]” (Participant 3)

“I learned English a lot faster, then the teacher told me you don’t need to go to (ESL) class anymore because you’ve already, the teacher thinks you’re good, you know it well enough. And so that was really good” (Participant 3)

It became clear through the analysis of the data that “bullying” and “discrimination” were seen as disparate constructs, as most of the participants viewed and differentiated their experiences as one or the other. Bullying was described as individually targeted experiences that
often occurred during younger grades when they initially started their new school after moving to Canada. Behaviours were characterized by aggression that was directed towards the participant only and not towards others. Bullying was described as being motivated by the bully’s need for power or feelings of being powerful. While discrimination was described as behaviours directed towards the participant as well, it was also reported that inappropriate comments were sometimes directed towards the cultural group in general and therefore not individually targeted.

Discrimination was described as being motivated by cultural stereotypes and inaccurate beliefs held by the individuals who were making the comments. The majority of the participants talked about experiencing or observing discrimination in their school environments. When either bullying or discriminatory behaviours were directed towards the participants, they described experiencing negative outcomes, for example fear of future victimization, anxiety in social interactions with peers, depression and loneliness.

**Initial Experiences when Starting a New School**

All of the participants were asked about their school experiences following immigration to Canada. More specifically, they were asked about how they were treated by peers and any memorable experiences from when they started their new school. In three instances, participants described their move to Canada as positive, with very few challenges identified when starting school, making friends, becoming involved in school activities and adjusting to a new culture and environment:

“It was fabulous…a great change”. (Participant 5)

“And then when I came here, I was, like, ‘This is the place where I want to be for the rest of my life because the people here are better.’” (Participant 6)
In contrast, the other three participants talking about negative experiences they had starting a new school in a new country. These included difficulties meeting friends and “fitting in”:

“Um, first few months is bad. Like, not really bad, but it was okay. But now I’ve adjusted and started liking the place more. But first, I hated it... It was people in general. The way they acted, they’re moral values and mine were kind of different.” (Participant 2)

“When I first got here, the first year was really though ’cause I experienced a lot of discrimination and bullying” (Participant 1)

Reports of starting new schools with no friends or social circles were common. While the participants arrived in Canada with their families or lived with extended family, they were expected to establish a social circle on their own and reported that they did not know anyone who attended their new school. Making friends proved to be challenging for many of the participants, particularly for those who started school after the normative transition period, which is typically the change from elementary to secondary school. In Peel region, this transition period occurs between grade 8 and grade 9. Some of the participants stated they found it difficult to make friends because social circles were already established prior to their arrival to Canada since some started their new schools after grade 9. Because their peers did not know the participants, they often mistakened them for grade 9 students, since they did not belong to already existing social circles:

“No one wanted to be your friend because, in grade 9 it’s different, but grade 11, people already have their own groups. So it’s hard adjusting so, because in school, it was, um, I didn’t know where to go because I didn’t have anyone there... So, practically everyone in my grade had the old uniform and I had the
new uniform. So, I kind of stood out. And, um, I had the grade 9 uniform so everyone was like, ‘Oh, there’s a grade niner. Let’s bully her.’” (Participant 2)

“It was kind of hard, because especially when you move you decide, “Okay, I’ll make another group of friends.” But when you get there, you realize people already have their own group of friends” (Participant 3).

Themes

According to Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis model for qualitative data, composite structural descriptions, or common themes across all interviews, are extracted. In this study, four main themes emerged from the six interviews, in particular: the role of language and accent; the importance of the peer group; the role of multiculturalism and cultural stereotypes; and resiliency factors that contribute to successful adaptation to their new country of residence. These themes will be explored in more detail in the following section.

Language and accent

As previously mentioned, proficiency in English emerged as a predominant indicator of adjustment and establishment of peer groups; it also served as a motivating base for victimization however, particularly when proficiency is low. While four of the six participants reported knowing little to no English upon their arrival, all six participants identified the knowledge and use of English as an integral part of “fitting” into the school culture. The participants utilized various strategies to improve their English proficiency. For example, some attended ESL classes until they were identified as able to manage in mainstream classes. Others chose to affiliate themselves with peers from other cultures rather than their own because it “forced” them to speak English in the school environment: “You need to have at least two or three friends...who
don’t speak the same language as you. So you start talking to them in English, right?”

(Participant 5)

The ability to speak English was recognized as essential to their peer affiliations. Many of the participants stated that when they first arrived to Canada and their English proficiency was not sufficient, they refrained from social interactions with peers. This was because of their inability to express their feelings or thoughts effectively and answer questions. Some participants commented that when they initially tried to speak up in class or to others, they often experienced victimization in the forms of bullying or exclusion, which they attributed to their peers’ difficulty understanding what they were saying:

“I remember when I went to speak on stage, as soon as I opened my, I tried talking, and then one guy in the back, he starts laughing. And then, I was like, “I think I should just stop and, you know, go there, and then, no, my friends want me to do this. I should keep doing it. I just went on and, um, I completed it”

(Participant 2)

“They were laughing at my accent and the way I talk and they were, like, I can’t speak English” (Participant 1)

“Some people used to be like, ‘What are you saying? I don’t get it,’ right? And you feel so bad, you don’t want to say it again…” (Participant 5)

This situation was particularly difficult for those who were expected to speak their native language at home, which served several functions. First, although their parents were often working and expected to speak English, they were more comfortable speaking their native language outside of work, which typically involved social networks and family conversations in the home. Second, some participants stated that their parents expected them to speak their native language at home in order to preserve their original culture. When some attempted to speak
English at home, they were often reminded by their parents to speak in their native language:

“Even if I’m talking on the phone to my grandparents or, you know, back home, I suddenly say stuff in English and my mom gives me this glare...I’m like, ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to, it just came out of my mouth’” (Participant 5). The consequences of speaking English at home included being labelled by other family members living in their native country as being assimilated or forgetting their heritage: “Usually when I talk to my dad in English, he’s, like, more strict, because he...doesn’t want me to forget Urdu completely, right? Because when I go back to Pakistan, they’ll be like, ‘Oh wow, she went to Canada and forgot all the Urdu’” (Participant 6).

The emphasis on language was also apparent among the participants who arrived in Canada with strong English proficiency. In this case, social aspects such as making friends and “fitting in” was described as easier, which in turn assisted in their adjustment: “If you know their language, it’s not that hard” (Participant 4). It appears that language can either facilitate or impede the process of establishing a peer group.

Another important element that appeared to contribute to adjustment to the new culture was the perception of an accent. According to the participants, it was common for their accent to be misattributed as a negative characteristic that resulted in ridicule, offensive language or use of stereotypes related to a particular culture. Similar to language proficiency, some participants said that due to their accents and the response that they initially received from their peers, they would often withdraw from social situations. In some cases, there was a “fear” that related to the reoccurrence of bullying behaviours or comments that excluded them from other peer groups.

“I didn’t really go and confront people and, you know, ask them if I could be in their group because I was scared they’d say no and start laughing at me. So, I’d keep away from people” (Participant 2)
Participants depicted their accent as an identifying factor which highlighted to others that they were from a different country. Having an “accent” was an element that some believed to be out of their control and therefore, any harmful treatment towards those with accents was seen as unfair. “Everyone has a different way of speaking...Most of my teachers have an accent. But still they teach. And we follow them and we listen to them. So if you’re not being judgemental on the teachers, they why on students?...I don’t think it’s fair” (Participant 5). In some cases, participants believed their peers who belonged to other cultures became preoccupied with the accent, often mentioning that the accent was present and noticeable:

“I don’t want to have, like, a big accent where everyone is, like, ‘What are you talking about?’ I don’t want to be like that...I still have my accent and my English is not that good. So I still have to improve my English” (Participant 1)

“...it’s like, “What, what are you saying?” So I have to repeat myself like three times, so automatically I know I have an accent.” (Participant 1)

Some participants believed that as their accent faded with time and their proficiency in English improved, their experiences and confidence levels in social interactions with peers increased:

“...my English had improved, I had some friends in school. I feel better” (Participant 1)

“(When people mention the accent) I don’t take it that, ‘cause I’m kind of used to it by now. So I just laugh it off. I have more friends definitely now but the first few were difficult to adjust, like, the first few months, difficult to adjust” (Participant 2)
Peer affiliations

The role of peer affiliations and social belonging emerged as essential to a participant’s ability to adapt to the new school environment. Themes related to peer affiliations focused on social belonging and the need to be accepted by others, as well as, the composition of their peer groups, such as cultural makeup and predominant language use.

The importance of social belonging was emphasized by all participants, which was reflected in the fact that those who experienced challenges with making friends also described their immigration experiences as being negative and difficult. The challenge of making friends, whether due to the language barriers, physical appearance, or unfamiliarity, was evident for those who reported little to no language proficiency on arrival:

“Because on the first day of school, um, I sat next to this guy and I started talking to him. I was just trying to, you know, be friendly. And then, the next day, he just got up and he left and he changed his place. And then, after that, like, his whole group, they were talking about “brown” people” (Participant 2)

While all participants noted that family members or close family friends were available to them, some stated that these relationships were not helpful for them in starting their new schools. For example, some participants reported that their existing support networks provided warnings of possible victimization by others and commented that this placed “fear” of negative treatment when the school year began. Participants described warnings that discriminatory behaviour was likely in the school system:

“She’s like, “Your accent is going to give it away”. I’m like, “What?” She’s like, “Yeah. Don’t you know people are racist in that school? And, um, that got me down a lot” (Participant 2)
It appears that while all participants had family members, such as cousins and siblings, who were close in age, participants often shared that they felt essentially on their own and were expected to develop their social circles independently. In only one instance, a participant developed a social circle prior to the school year, which led to positive experiences when the school year began: “I made friends with them and it turns out that they’re in the same school, so it wasn’t that hard” (Participant 4).

Social networks were considered to be essential in providing immigrant students with support and belonging. Those who reported isolation or lack of social circle described their initial experiences as challenging. Highly stressful times occurred during largely social activities such as lunch or group projects. It was common for the participants to try to find alternative activities or locations during these times when social interactions were most common.

“...usually I went to washroom in my lunch time or go outside or go home”
(Participant 1)

“Cause for... the first few months I used to go, in lunch, I used to go the library ‘cause I didn’t know anyone. So I used to like read books and spend my time there” (Participant 2)

Isolation resulted in feelings of sadness and depression.

“I felt pretty alone, because I didn’t have anyone who wanted to come and talk to me...it was kind of upsetting knowing that no one wants to be friends with you”
(Participant 3)

“I just go into depression for like a day or something. I start, I don’t know, it’s, it’s like when they say such things, I just go silent, I don’t know how to react to it”
(Participant 2)
Group composition appeared to be important. The majority of the participants reported that they preferred to associate with a diverse group of friends rather than one that is predominantly homogenous and characterized by individuals belonging to the same culture. This preference was explained in different ways. For some of the participants, while their social group consisted of friends belonging to different cultural backgrounds, they often associated with individuals who were also new to the country. This similarity created common discussion topics such as their experiences when they initially arrived to Canada and the struggles that they faced with making friends. “So, they keep telling me how it was like back there and how it is here in Canada. And then we start, you know how Canada is bad. That’s a mutual thing among my friends. No one likes Canada” (Participant 2).

For other participants, associating with a diverse group of peers allowed them to learn and practice English more readily, which improved their confidence in their proficiency. Some stated that belonging to a multicultural group of peers was important because it allowed them to celebrate the diversity that is characteristic of Canada:

“We’re multicultural. Some of my friends are Jamaican and others are...Spanish...We live in a multicultural country after all, right?” (Participant 5)

“I hang out with people of different backgrounds so it gives me a perspective on what their background is. I’m more open to diversity...Since Canada is multicultural, why not hang out with everybody who’s multicultural?” (Participant 6)
Others perceived homogenous peer groups as negative and implied that affiliating with students from the same cultural background could impede an immigrant youth’s ability to adjust to the new country:

“For people who are new, they try look for the people who have the same background as them. Because obviously it’s going to be easier, you can talk in your native language with them...If you have the same people who speak the same language as you, you’re not even going get experience how to speak English...if you’re all speaking the same language, how are you...going to learn English?” (Participant 1)

Some participants believed that by staying close to their cultural backgrounds they may not be able to learn about the new culture and may exclude themselves from other peers: “Some kids feel that when you hang out with the person that is from your background, you’re just excluding all the other people, just because they’re not from where you are and for them, that’s offensive” (Participant 6).

While most of the participants viewed homogenous peer groups as a poor choice that potentially limited their adjustment, one participant reported a homogenous peer group consisting of individuals belonging to the same cultural background as the participant. This student described social affiliations as accepting and comfortable because of the commonalities in language and cultural beliefs: “I would be more friends with people who are the same as my culture, be in their group. If you have people from your own culture, you don’t have to work things a lot. You have something to talk about then” (Participant 4). Yet, despite these similarities, the participant indicated that the peer group would speak predominantly English to each other.

**The role of friendships**
In addition to affiliating with a group of peers characterized by cultural diversity another common theme that emerged was the importance of social belonging and support. All of the participants viewed their friendships and social circles in a positive light. Friendships, for the most part, were described as trusting, which often became helpful during times when the participants needed to talk about feelings of anxiety or anger:

“I talk to them a lot. Like, I have this...friend... she’s like really, really close to me. I tell her everything…” (Participant 2)

“I would say friends are one of the most important ones, because as long as you have somebody there beside you...You can’t discuss everything with your parents. There are certain things which you can’t and...someone needs to be there for you at that certain moment when you need to talk to them...I had so many friends here and it was so amazing” (Participant 5)

The common bond that was formed between the participants and their friends contributed to their perceptions of the school environment. This was reflected in statements about gradual improvement of school experiences as peer affiliations became more regular and consistent:

“I don’t really like Canada before at all. I hated it but then now that I’m used to it, I started liking it. ‘Cause now I have like more friends you know to go out with, spend time with” (Participant 2)

“...after the second year, I think I’m start to fit in to society. I start to have friends” (Participant 1)

Additionally, friendships provided a learning environment that allowed participants to gain confidence in their ability to utilize the English language in a conversational setting. This includes the informal use of the language, use of slang and common vernacular among peers their age that is typically not found in curriculum-based English as a Second Language.
programs. One participant explained however, that affiliating with a homogenous peer group proved to be beneficial as it provided security, social belonging and common beliefs. Regardless, strong social interactions and relationships positively contributed to immigrant youth`s experiences in the school environment.

**Multiculturalism and cultural stereotypes**

The themes of multiculturalism and cultural stereotypes were common throughout the interviews. Paradoxical viewpoints on the role of multiculturalism were also apparent, with some participants perceiving multiculturalism as helpful in adjustment and others viewing it as contributing to stereotypical beliefs by those who do not belong to their ethnic group.

One perception of the participants was that multiculturalism is helpful in the adjustment phase of immigration. For some of the students, adjustment in school was uncomplicated because of the diversity that was evident in the school environment. For example, some of the students stated that the Southeast Asian culture was predominantly present in the high school population. This reportedly made it easier to adjust and “fit in” to the peer culture as there were commonalities in language, and religious beliefs and practices. In this case, the participants also found teachers to be more knowledgeable about South Asian cultures and traditions:

“It doesn’t happen as much now, just because most of the people that go to (school name), there from the same area. There mostly from South East Asia. I like that, it’s more common now...” (Participant 3)

“Now there used to people coming over from all parts of world. Because they see a lot of...other culture people here and stuff. I think they’re getting more used to it...they (teachers) kind of know a lot about our culture too” (Participant 4)
Some participants perceived the multiculturalism present in the schools as a direct reflection of the multiculturalism for which Canada is defined. Diversity in the school systems was therefore considered by some participants as a factor which facilitated their positive adjustment, due to the tolerance that was reportedly present in the school environment. Another factor considered to increase comfort levels among immigrant youth when entering school was often finding other individuals who belonged to the same cultural background.

In contrast, other participants viewed multiculturalism as contributing to cultural stereotypes. As previously mentioned, while not all participants reported experiencing bullying and discrimination, all of them reported hearing inaccurate and stereotyping statements by peers regarding their cultural or religious beliefs. Through analysis of the interviews, it emerged that although multiculturalism is present in the school settings, there remains a tendency for students to hold stereotypical beliefs about other ethnicities. Some participants found this situation frustrating, especially when according to these stereotypes their culture was depicted as “inferior,” “unintelligent,” or “underprivileged” as compared to Canadian lifestyles:

“And even, they used you be like, “You’re, um, I’m surprised your speaking English.” I’m like, “I also spoke English”. They ask me stupid questions, like “Do you have Christmas in Pakistan?”” (Participant 2)

In some cases, division appeared among peers belonging to the same cultural background, based on differences in immigration status and Canadian lifestyle. Some participants said that while the school population tended to be divided among ethnic groups, they explained that subgroups also formed within specific cultural groups, in which the immigrant students were separate and distinct from the Canadian-born students. The participants thus
described experiencing discrimination, for example about having an accent, from peers in their own cultural group as illustrated:

“(Canadians) sometimes...don’t hang out with immigrants because we have an accent.” (Participant 1)

“They don’t want to tell people they’re from Pakistan, just cause...they’ve grown up here all their life, so they consider themselves more Canadian than Pakistani, I guess...” (Participant 6)

Subgroups that formed within ethnic groups were clearly defined in the school culture. According to participants, immigrant youth who tended to affiliate with students belonging to the same ethnic group and speak in their native language or have strong accents were often called “FOB”s by Canadian-born ethnic minority youth or non-ethnic students, which is an acronym used among the youth population that stands for “Fresh off the Boat”:

“For example, they called me “FOB”, and I was like, “What’s FOB?” (Participant 1)

“There’s this one hallway that people labelled ‘the brown hall’, ‘cause there’s Afghani people, Pakistani, and Indian that mostly go down that hallway...They have this term FOBs for them...they talk in Urdu and stuff like that, they don’t know that much English and they go back to their culture and actually show it off” (Participant 6)

The division within ethnic groups was associated with social pressures to conform to each lifestyle. Participants explained that on the one hand, immigrant students who attempted to adapt to the Canadian culture would be accused by other immigrant students of abandoning their
cultural heritage: “I mostly talk in English. So,...one of these guys, he actually came up to me and was like, ‘Oh, don’t be all...white or English and speak Urdu’” (Participant 6). On the other hand, the comments they received from Canadian-born peers regarding their accents often reminded the immigrant youth that he or she was not Canadian: “Whenever I speak, they laugh at me. That’s part of the reason I am really aware of how I speak...I want to be Canadian...I want to fit into the group...” (Participant 1). This situation contributed to uncertainty for the student, who was confused about the possibility of belonging to both social groups and the development of his or her own identity: “Yeah, I don’t fit in either group” (Participant 1). To further complicate the situation, the students described being pressured by their family members and friends in their original country who implied that the students may be losing their culture and immersing themselves in the Canadian lifestyle: “When I talk to my friends back home, they say, “You already have an accent” and people over here say I have an accent, so I’m stuck in between both” (Participant 1).

The participants therefore viewed multiculturalism in Canada to be both a contributing and mitigating factor in their adaptation to their new school environments. On the positive note, diversity in Canada seems to have allowed the participants the opportunity for increased exposure to different cultures, which is associated with a certain degree of tolerance and understanding by peers and teachers. In some instances however, it emerged that the diversity in the school systems could lead to inaccurate and offensive generalizations and stereotypical beliefs about particular cultural groups.

An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews was the matter of a subdivision among the ethnic groups whereby immigrant students were considered different from Canadian-born students from the same cultural background. Based on analysis of the interviews, this
division was associated with various outcomes. First, the subdivision was described as further pressuring the immigrant student to “choose” which group to belong to: the students with immigrant status and shared common experiences and language, or the Canadian-born students who represented the mainstream culture of the school setting. Second, the participants reported that the tension that seemed to be present between the subgroups often resulted in immigrant youth being bullied or discriminated by peers belonging to the same ethnic group but who were Canadian-born. This further exacerbated the victimization for the participants, since this was a group from whom they expected safety or protection as they were students belonging to the same cultural background. Finally, not only is the student’s choice of peer group associated with the level of pressure and victimization they may experience by others, but it can also have a negative impact on the individual’s self-esteem, sense of belonging and identity formation. This added pressure experienced by both peer groups and, in some cases, social groups outside of school such as family members and people with whom they communicate from their original country, can intensify the tension they may already be feeling.

**Resiliency**

An additional theme that emerged from the individual interviews was resiliency because some of the participants reported that they did not experience victimization upon their arrival to Canada. Those participants who did report victimization by their peers were offered an opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions on ways to cope with and avoid mistreatment by others. In their discussions, the importance of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-advocacy were emphasized.
The participants who reported a positive immigration experience characterized by no victimization by peers explained their experiences by elaborating on their ability to make friends easily:

“If I want to be friends with someone, I just go and talk it out…” (Participant 4)

“I’m sort of good at making friends. That’s one of my skills…I’m more of a person who will go up to them and start talking.” (Participant 5)

The participants felt that this ability to make friends was mainly due to a reported confidence level in the participants’ ability to ‘fit in’ and communicate effectively. English proficiency played a large part in this confidence as participants who were educated in English in their country of origin were more likely to report adjusting quickly to the new school culture. In addition to English proficiency, good self-esteem was a strong contributor to students’ adjustment. Many of the participants described themselves as confident and explained that even when they were treated in problematic ways or victimized, they did not internalize this negative treatment. This way of coping appeared particularly true for those who defined ‘bullying’ as an issue within the perpetrators of bullying behaviour, such as personal insecurities or the need to feel better about themselves.

Positive self-esteem was also reflected in the sense of indifference that some participants displayed towards victimization and mistreatment. For example, some of the participants reported that they simply “did not care” about what others thought of them or said about them:

“I am who I am. I’m not going change no matter what anyone says…but, like, bullying, I think I took it pretty well because I didn’t really let it affect me.” (Participant 6)
“I’ve tried not to care as much about what people think...I think everyone likes to be accepted, but I realized that if I don’t fit into a group, I’m not going to try so hard.” (Participant 3)

“I’m not the type of person to get angry and you know go and react to people. I’ll just stay quiet and talk to my friends about it.” (Participant 2)

This indifference seemed to contribute to the participants’ resiliency and according to their reports, seemed to deter victimizers from targeting them in the future because the reaction received by the participants was not the anticipated reaction.

“Once you answer them back, everything’s done. Now they know who they’re talking to, right?” (Participant 5)

“They backed off after that...Now people know me as like, they know I won’t take bullying. And they know that if they say anything to me, I will stand up for myself.” (Participant 6).

Finally, self-advocacy emerged as an important strong resiliency factor. This was displayed in the participants’ tendency to stand up for themselves and to report victimization to either staff members or family members.

“Let the authorities know...tell your parents about it, that’s the biggest thing. If you tell your parents about the problem...they’ll know what to do...they’ll know how to handle it.” (Participant 4)

“Some people like me will actually take a stance and we will go, like, to the Principal and be like, ‘There’s bullying going on in this school and stuff’” (Participant 6)
All of the participants, regardless of their reported experiences of bullying or discrimination, reported increased confidence due to their ability to respond to perpetrators of victimization in a way that showed the perpetrators that they would not tolerate such behaviours. Following such incidents of self-advocacy, participants reported that they did not experience further victimization by peers because they were viewed as individuals who will “fight back”.

Resiliency was explored to identify contributing factors that assisted in positive immigration experiences by immigrant youth. Several key components were emphasized by the participants in this study, including the importance of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-advocacy. By having high levels of all three of these factors, the immigrant youth portrayed themselves as not vulnerable targets for victimization because they were able to assert themselves in negative social interactions. Additionally, the presence of a strong social support network was identified as a key element to resiliency as immigrant youth were able to receive encouragement and support from friends and family, which helped allowed them to cope with victimization experiences.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences of bullying and discrimination among immigrant youth with their peers in the school system. The current study contributed to the literature by investigating the victimization by peers experienced by immigrant youth, in the forms of bullying, ethnic discrimination or both. It emerged in the individual interviews that the participants experienced both bullying and discrimination shortly after starting their new schools after arriving to Canada. It became apparent that the participants viewed their experiences of bullying and discrimination as two separate constructs rather than interpreting them as the same phenomenon. Along with the normative experiences and peer pressures that are to be expected among adolescents regardless of immigrant status, such as developing and maintaining friendships and “fitting in” (Graham & Juvoven, 2002), the participants described unique pressures. These included such finding a way to adopt both their culture of heritage and the Canadian culture, and increasing their language proficiency. This added complexity which immigrant youth experience has been documented in the literature with the suggestion that this population of youth may face challenges that are unlike those that are experienced by non-immigrant youth (Ochacka, 2006). In a study investigating the peer experiences of immigrant youth in Waterloo, Ontario, Ochacka (2006) states, “it seems clear that immigrant youth deal with numerous pressures, stresses and challenges as a result of their experiences as immigrants, in addition to other stresses that high-school aged youth are confronted with” (p. 50).

Several research questions were posed in this study to gain a better understanding of the experiences of immigrant youth related to victimization by their peers:
4. What are the experiences of victimization by peers among immigrant youth?

5. How do immigrant youth define their experiences of victimization by peers? How do they make meaning of, understand, and describe their experiences?

6. How do these experiences affect the way immigrant youth view their new country of residence and how do they report their adaptation?

Experiences of Victimization by Peers among Immigrant Youth

The participants in this study defined bullying and discrimination as characteristically different. Bullying was perceived as a behaviour perpetrated by someone who needed to exert power over another and whose victim was often chosen based on perceived weakness or inability to fight back. Discrimination was described as occurring when a person or group of people held stereotypical and inaccurate beliefs about a particular cultural or racial group and would display these beliefs through derogatory comments or isolating individuals belonging to that group. While this description is similar to the definition of “bias-based bullying” provided earlier, the participants viewed discrimination as being characteristically different from bullying.

Defining “bullying”

At the onset of the interviews, four of the participants initially reported positive experiences of immigrating to Canada, and were not victimized by peers. With further investigation however, it emerged that many of these participants described incidents that were indicative of bullying or victimization. Five of the six participants acknowledged that they experienced bullying by peers after starting school shortly after arriving in Canada. Bullying was perceived by the participants as motivated by factors such as physical appearance or intelligence level. Some participants believed that the prime motivator fuelling the bullying behaviour was the participant’s status as outsider to the popular circle. These participants
viewed the youth who bullied them as insecure and thus needing validation and power. This behaviour was perceived as victimization unrelated to their ethnicity or culture.

Bullying behaviours that were experienced by the participants included rumours about them, people talking about them “behind their back,” and social exclusion. Behaviours such as these have been defined as relational and are common forms of bullying (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Relational bullying has been associated with feelings of depression, anxiety and low self-concept (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2005). Participants who reported having been bullied stated that they were often bullied by more than one person at a time, such as a small group of peers outside of their own social circle. The most common form of bullying reported by the participants was rumours about them or exclusion from social groups. These covert behaviours are most commonly reported by girls (Casey-Cannon, et al., 2005). As the sample was predominantly female, this finding corresponds with the literature surrounding this gender-specific bullying behaviour. In instances of relational bullying, there appears to be a power differential in the form of popularity status, which is a common motivating factor in bullying (McKenney et al., 2006).

**Defining “discrimination”**

Although some of the participants initially denied experiencing discrimination, five of the six participants described hearing stereotypical or derogatory comments by peers about their cultural heritage or directed towards them individually because of their accent or language. What differentiated the participants who initially denied experiencing discrimination and those who admitted to experiencing discrimination was the manner in which they managed the incidents. For example, those who initially denied experiencing discrimination acknowledged that these behaviours occurred but stated that they were not bothered or affected by the
behaviours. Conversely, those who acknowledged experiencing discrimination stated that these behaviours were hurtful and led to painful feelings such as depression or to social withdrawal.

Previous research has identified verbal harassment based on language or ethnicity as discriminatory behaviours (Liang, et al., 2007). Other behaviours described by the participants that correspond with the definition of discrimination included name-calling and ridicule motivated by the participants’ ethnicity, lack of English proficiency or cultural traditions and dress. Most of the participants experienced social exclusion by their peers, for example, being left out of group projects or social circles. Discriminatory behaviours such as social exclusion occurs due to perceptions of the victimized individuals by those who do the excluding as “different” or “awkward” because they belong to a different background (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007).

While many of the participants denied experiencing discrimination at the onset of the interviews, the behaviours they later described (e.g., stereotypical and derogatory comments, name-calling and exclusion) are indicative of discrimination as they describe differential treatment by others based on ethnicity, culture or race (Liang et al., 2007; Zeman & Bressan, 2006). Cultural stereotypes are used to generalize about a particular population and can be hurtful when a cultural practice such as food or national clothing is seen as negative or “strange.” It has been suggested that separation from Canadian-born peers because of dress or food is associated with feelings of rejection and marginalization by immigrant youth, who subsequently have difficulty adjusting to their new school environment (Ochocka, 2006). Many immigrant youth who experience these stereotypes may consequently disengage from their culture in order to assimilate to the mainstream environment, or they may choose to affiliate themselves with only those who belong to the same background because they feel ostracized or misunderstood by
individuals who do not belong to their culture (Li, 2009; Ochocka, 2006; Wong et al., 2003). Some of the participants described their initial perceptions of Canada as negative and uninviting and. Experiences of discrimination or perceived discrimination has also been associated with the tendency to view the new country and its culture negatively, in response to feeling targeted or isolated by those belonging to the new cultural environment (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007).

While initially the participants expressed varying degrees of victimization, and some reported being victimized while others stated they were not victimized, it became evident that bullying and discrimination were common occurrences for most of the participants when they initially arrived in Canada and entered the Canadian school system. It was also clear that the participants viewed bullying and discrimination as two different experiences rather than similar. While bullying was viewed as constituting behaviours related to the perceived power differential between the child who bullied and the victimized child, discrimination was seen as a more complex phenomenon, characterized by stereotypical beliefs and intolerance of cultural and language differences. Regardless of whether they perceived bullying and discrimination as the same or different, the participants described incidences of both shortly after beginning their new schools in a new country. This finding coincides with the research that shows that immigrant youth are likely to experience negative social experiences by non-immigrant and/or non-ethnic peers (Qin et al., 2008; Zeman & Bressan, 2006).

Factors Associated with Victimization

The role of language and accent

Language or an individual’s “accent” played a large part in the participants’ experiences of victimization. Most of the participants described being ridiculed by their non-immigrant peers or being treated by peers or by their teachers as though they were lacking in intelligence and thus
unable to understand. Experiences such as these are reflected in research that has shown that language often differentiates groups and can form divisions among peer groups which contributes to immigrant youth finding it difficult to “fit in” (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Li, 2009; Liang & Grossman, 2007; Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Ochocka, 2006; Qin, et al., 2008).

According to Ochocka (2006), “youth often saw their knowledge of English as key to navigating their way through Canadian society, and the main factor determining whether or not they would be accepted at school” (p. 13). The negative treatment by peers based on language and accent was characterized as quite distressing to the participants who talked about feeling depressed and homesick. When mistreated by their non-immigrant peers, immigrant youth often feel alone and separated from friends and family in their native country (Ochocka, 2006). Regular contact with family and friends from their native country through phone or email was common among the participants and was considered an outlet through which to express their frustrations or to feel supported by others.

Some of the participants considered their accent to be a personal characteristic that was uncontrollable. Participants stated that this was a source of frustration because they were unable to change their accent. Even the participants who had been in Canada for a longer period of time acknowledged that although their English proficiency had improved, their accent remained and that they continued to hear comments made about their accents (despite their attempts to improve). Realizing that the motivation behind the victimization is beyond one’s control has been found to lead to higher levels of stress and psychosocial difficulties (Mesch et al., 2008). This was seen in the descriptions provided by the participants. When they experienced ridicule by others because of their accent, participants reported feeling self-conscious and more aware of these differences, which caused them to feel anxious during social interactions in individual and
group settings. The perception of their accent as uncontrollable and unchangeable exacerbated the anxiety because they began to internalize the ridicule by identifying their accent as a flaw or an aspect about themselves that differentiated them from others. Internalization of discriminatory experiences is characterized by the youth focusing on his or her own inability to communicate and has been associated with low self-concept and difficulty coping with this mistreatment (Grossman & Liang, 2008).

**Difficulty identifying with the culture of heritage and the new Canadian culture**

Discrimination based on language and accent was also associated with feelings of anxiety and stress. These feelings of anxiety were reflected in the social withdrawal and fear of speaking in public described by the participants, who attempted to avoid further ridicule. Such feelings and responses are considered common indicators of “acculturative stress” (Lueck & Wilson, 2010). Acculturative stress was also seen in the participants who were expected to speak their native language at home as they were often discouraged from speaking English at home or were criticized by friends and family in their native countries who saw them as losing their culture of heritage. Cultural differences at home can lead to inter-generational conflict, which is demonstrated by parents urging the youth to speak the native language and maintain their culture of heritage while the youth are trying to improve their English proficiency and adapt to the new culture (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000). In these cases, the participants reported feeling stress because they found themselves unable to identify with their former and present culture, making it difficult to establish their own identity (Li, 2009; Qin et al., 2008).
How Immigrant Youth Understand their Victimization by Peers

Understanding and interpreting bullying

As noted, the majority of the participants viewed bullying and discrimination as dissimilar. Indeed, only one participant considered bullying and discrimination the same, describing bullying behaviour as motivated by ethnicity or race.

For the most part, bullying definitions offered by the participants corresponded with those provided in the literature. Bullying behaviours were often described as motivated by external factors such as the perpetrator’s need for power or control. In some cases, the participants defined bullying as a way for children who bully to cope with issues in their own lives that may make them feel insecure or vulnerable. This view has conflicting perspectives in the literature. In a study conducted by Baldry and Farrington (2000), youth who bully were more likely to report conflict at home with one or both parents and to describe their parents as punitive or engaging in authoritarian discipline. Beaty and Alexeyev (2008) however, identify two categories of youth who bully. The first is characterized by low self-esteem caused by a stressful family environment, whereas the other category comprises youth with high self-esteem who gain status and popularity through the victimization of others.

The participants described youth who bully as considering themselves to be more powerful or superior over the victims. This power differential is a key component in the conventional definition of bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying has been defined as “an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one” (Nansel, et al., 2001; p. 2094). Power encompasses many things, including physical stature, intelligence, popularity status, and ethnicity or culture (Craig, Pepler & Blais, 2007). Research has shown that culture, ethnicity and race has been viewed as a source of power, with the cultural
majority having more power than those who are considered minorities. For example, in settings where Caucasians are considered the majority, Caucasians are seen as more powerful (Liang et al., 2007). This is significant because ethnicity and culture can then be a motivating factor for bullying behaviour. Graham and Juvoven (2002) found that individuals belonging to the ethnic group with statistical minority were more likely to report peer harassment. Thus, ethnicity has been found to be connected with beliefs of power and status among children and youth, which can be motivating bases for bullying others who are seen as belonging to the less powerful ethnic group.

**Understanding and interpreting discrimination**

Discrimination, on the other hand, was viewed as the expression of stereotypical beliefs of a particular culture, race or ethnicity. Discrimination was perceived as a more general occurrence rather than an individually targeted incident. For instance, discrimination was often described as generalizing comments about the cultural group rather than directly to an individual. This occurred in group settings, such as classroom discussions or social interactions with large peer groups. When derogatory comments were made directly to the participants, these often referred to stereotypes related to physical appearance, language and accent, and cultural traditions or practices, such as food and diet. Similarly, Lee and Koro-Ljungberg (2007) found that immigrant students attributed mistreatment and victimization by peers to differences in speech and appearance indicative of a different culture, such as clothing. Ochocka (2006) stated, “for newcomers who have arrived at school with no social connections, who wear clothes that are not representative of the current trends, who eat different foods and speak different languages, and who are not aware of the current symbols of youth culture, they may have an incredibly difficult time fitting in and finding peers with who they can identify” (p. 25). Themes
of language and accent appeared to resonate among all participants who viewed these characteristics as essential in blending in with the peer group, which finds support in the literature (Ochocka, 2006).

Based on the definitions provided by the participants, the view that bullying, and more specifically, bias-based bullying and ethnic discrimination are characteristically similar was not supported by the participants. While bias-based bullying describes bullying behaviour motivated by the victimized child belonging to a marginalized group, such as ethnicity and culture (Greene, 2006), this was not seen in the definitions provided by the participants. Rather, bullying was seen as being motivated by the need of the child who bullies to feel good about him or herself, as well as, the need to feel powerful over another person. Ethnicity or culture was not mentioned as motivating factors for bullying among these participants. Future research should further explore these questions.

**Perceived Outcomes of Victimization**

Bullying and ethnic discrimination both were described by the participants as resulting in negative outcomes, such as academic difficulties, social isolation, depression and anxiety. This coincides with research that suggests that experiences of bullying victimization are linked to poor psychological functioning (Rigby, 2000), difficulty making friends (Nansel et al., 2001), and academic difficulties, such as poor concentration and attention (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Specifically, bullying due to ethnicity has been found to increase anxiety, depression and social withdrawal (McKenney et al., 2006). Similarly, discrimination has been associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety (Cassidy et al., 2005; Grossman & Liang, 2008), low self-efficacy (Mesch et al., 2008), poor mental health and academic performance (Gonzalez, 2009; Wong, et al., 2003).
While both related to negative outcomes, discrimination appeared to be more painful as described by the participants because it was seen as offensive not only to the participants, but also to their families and their heritage. This is significant because research has indicated that discriminatory behaviours can lead to challenges in identity formation as individuals become confused about the negative perceptions that others have about their culture and ethnicity (Gonzalez, 2009; Liang et al., 2007; McKenney, et al., 2006). The Department for Education and Skills in the United Kingdom (2006) suggests that victimization due to race, religion, and culture can lead to youth believing that to be different is a flaw. It appears that discriminatory behaviours were more likely to be related to internalization by the victimized child than bullying behaviours. Participants talked about their tendency to feel anxious and depressed when being directly targeted or hearing general comments about one’s ethnicity and culture as many of them defined themselves based on these factors.

**Emerging Themes Regarding Adjustment and Adaptation**

Several themes emerged from the descriptions by the participants that were common across all interviews. These themes broadened the understanding of the immigrant youths’ immigration experience and, more specifically, factors related to adjustment and adaptation. They included the importance of language, peer affiliations and resiliency.

**Language as a motivator for victimization and a contributor to adaptation**

As previously described, the role of language and accent played a large part in how participants described their treatment by others and their perceptions about their new country of residence. The ability to speak English upon arrival to Canada was identified as an essential tool
for adaptation. The language barrier made it difficult for those who did not speak English to adjust to the school curriculum and to engage in social interaction. These individuals found it challenging to make friends and perform well academically. Those with a good knowledge of English prior to moving to Canada still found it difficult to be understood by others, which they attributed to their accent. Despite their good grasp of the language, these participants were still identified as outsiders because they did not speak as comfortably as their Canadian peers and had not mastered informal vernacular, such as slang and age appropriate axioms. The importance of language is reflected in research findings as many studies identify language as key to acculturation, adaptation, social affiliations, and self-esteem of immigrant youth: “For some youth, the ability to speak English was directly related to their confidence level, comfort at school and their ability to make social connections. The presence of a language barrier often heightened the anxiety of students as they began school and adjusted to a new culture” (Ochocka, 2006; p. 12). Low proficiency in English and the presence of an accent were noticeable identifiers that immigrant youth were different and as such are easy targets by others for ridicule (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Ochocka, 2006).

**Peer affiliations**

The role of social support was evident. Corresponding with the literature, having social networks positively affected individuals’ well-being (Reis, Azmitia, Syed, Radmacher & Gills, 2009). Participants who recalled the challenges of making friends or of being isolated by their peers discussed feeling lonely and sad. These participants’ perceptions of their immigration experiences were often negative, and were described as “horrible” or “awful.” The need for social support and peer affiliation is considered vital during adolescence and particularly during the transition from elementary to high school (French, et al., 2000). Peer groups assist in identity
formation which is crucial during this developmental stage (Faircloth, 2009; Graham & Juvoven, 2002) as youth often define themselves based on the culture of their peer group. In the case of immigrant youth, then, the challenges associated with developing such networks can influence their perceptions of the new culture, especially if they believe that they have been excluded based on their cultural differences (Ochocka, 2006).

Peer affiliation also served as a buffer for experiences of victimization. Participants who described having a supportive social circle were more likely to disregard peers’ attempts to bully or discriminate against them (Grossman & Liang, 2008). The ability to establish social circles was found to be associated with the presence or absence of victimization. Participants who reported high comfort levels in initiating and developing friendships also reported a lack of bullying or victimization by peers when they arrived to Canada. Conversely, those who identified challenges in establishing friendships also disclosed experiences of bullying or victimization by others. These youth also reported negative outcomes resulting from their victimization, such as depression and anxiety. They attributed these outcomes to the perceived lack of support they received from others. Previous literature has also suggested that the level of supportive networks in an individual’s immediate environment can positively affect his or her ability to cope with victimization (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Rigby, 2000; Wong, 2003).

One finding of this study that was particularly interesting was the importance of the peer group composition, particularly the cultural makeup of social circles. Research has suggested that ethnic minority youth who experience perceived discrimination often affiliate themselves with individuals from the same minority group as a way of protection and safety (Li, 2009; Wong et al., 2003). This was not supported by the descriptions provided by the sample. On the contrary, the majority of the participants reported a culturally diverse peer group, consisting of
peers belonging to different backgrounds. In some cases, participants opposed culturally homogenous groups and believed that the choice to affiliate solely with individuals belonging to their cultural heritage was a way of excluding oneself from the mainstream culture of the school environment. For example, participants stated that speaking the native language in school differentiated and separated immigrant youth from the rest of the students, who predominantly spoke English. Participants who encouraged culturally diverse peer groups identified advantages of these affiliations. For example, diverse peer groups served different adaptation purposes, including providing an environment to improve English proficiency. Diverse peer groups were also seen as a method of adapting to the diversity that is characteristic of Canada. Some participants said that having a culturally diverse peer group was a way to adhere to the multicultural climate by which Canada is defined. Therefore, while the research has illustrated the advantages of homogenous peer groups, the participants in the study chose differently and associated themselves with individuals belonging to different cultures in an attempt to adapt to Canada and improve their knowledge and use of the English language. Ochocka (2006) identified the advantages of both strategies for the purpose of improving language proficiency:

Some manage to learn English by aligning themselves with youth of the same cultural and linguistic background who can support them and translate for them, while others surround themselves with people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, to encourage them to learn English faster (p. 18).

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the further division of ethnic minority groups into subgroups. There emerged a clear division between immigrant youth and Canadian-born youth who belonged to the same ethnic background. In some instances, immigrant youth who have lived in Canada for a longer period of time and considered more
“Canadian” were grouped with the Canadian-born youth rather than the immigrant youth. Canadian-born youth and “Canadian” immigrants were described as proficient in English and current with respect to popular culture, such as fashion and mainstream vernacular. Immigrant youth who recently immigrated to Canada were described as less proficient in English and more connected to their cultural heritage than the Canadian culture. This delineation made it very difficult for new immigrant youth to find acceptance, as they received pressure from their own social circle to preserve their cultural heritage and pressure from the other subgroup to adopt the Canadian culture. Li (2009) suggests that acceptance by peers in the same ethnic group is further complicated because of similar subdivisions. Additionally, subdivisions of the ethnic group may also be associated with the victimization of immigrant youth. For example, new immigrant youth are more likely to experience social exclusion and intense pressure by the other subgroup to adopt the Canadian culture such as reducing their accent and improving their English proficiency. In some instances, new immigrant youth are victimized by “Canadian” immigrants, which was seen as more hurtful: “this rejection was a much greater offense than being rejected from Canadian-born youth...this occurred when youth ‘want to pretend they are Canadian’” (p. 28). These subgroups could also make adjustment difficult because of the research that suggests peer groups consisting of individuals from the same ethnic group served a function of protection and safety (Li, 2009).

**Resiliency**

The original recruitment process sought participants who reported victimization following immigration to Canada. Following the challenges of recruiting participants, this process was later modified due to the fact that youth workers assisting in recruitment reported that many immigrant youth being approached for the project reported a lack of victimization.
after immigrating to Canada. Therefore, the original criteria were changed to include all immigrant youth regardless of the presence of victimization by peers.

In light of this change and the inclusion of individuals who reported positive immigration experiences and the absence of the peer victimization, the issue of resiliency was explored further in the interviews. Resiliency has been referred to as the ability to overcome obstacles or cope with negative experiences in a healthy manner (Denny, Clark, Fleming, & Wall, 2004). When investigating the factors that contributed to resiliency, aspects such as self-esteem and length of residency were emphasized.

Self-esteem played a large part in the ability to adjust in Canada. The participants who perceived their immigration experience as positive, regardless of experiences of bullying victimization or discrimination, believed that their self-confidence was associated with their positive immigration experiences. In these instances, self-esteem and confidence seemed to contribute to the youth’s ability to make friends and develop strong affiliations. These youth also reported having the ability to disregard or ignore discriminatory comments and assert themselves when victimized by peers. In many instances, these individuals stated that upon their arrival to their new school, they were initially victimized by their peers. The participants believed that their ability to assert themselves against their victimizers was related to the discontinuation of this behaviour. Past research has shown the relationship between self-esteem and social functioning. For example, low self-esteem and confidence has been associated with lower levels of psychosocial well-being and higher occurrence of depression (Orth, Robins, & Roberts, 2008). Furthermore, individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to assert themselves against bullying, either as a potential victim or a bystander (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to stand up for
themselves when others bully them or to intervene when they observe someone else being
victimized. Therefore, there may be a correlation between the participants’ reported self-esteem
and ability to manage victimization after immigrating to Canada.

Length of residency also emerged as associated with the ability of the participants to
adjust to living in Canada. This finding is supported by the literature, which suggests that as
length of residency increased, experiences peers and social interactions became more positive
(Berry et al., 2006). This was seen in several areas. In some instances, as English proficiency
improved, through ESL classes or increased social interactions with others, participants reported
a decrease in negative experiences such as bullying and discrimination. Comfort with language
proficiency was also associated with improved academic performance and confidence speaking
in public. This finding corresponds with research that has shown that as language proficiency
improves, experiences with adjustment and victimization improves as well (Lee & Koro-
Ljungberg, 2007; Li, 2009). Participants seemed to believe that as the length they lived in
Canada increased, so did their ability to assert themselves with peers who attempted to victimize
them. In these instances, participants reported that they began to disregard the opinions of others
and “did not care” what others thought of them. Similarly, in a retrospective qualitative study,
former victims of bullying reported that their bullying experiences decreased when they were
able to assert themselves (Frisen, Jonsson & Persson, 2007). In this case, the effectiveness of
this strategy was attributed to no longer portraying themselves as targets because they no longer
fit the description of being weak and vulnerable. In spite of this, there is some literature that
contradicts this view. Craig and colleagues (2007) found that children who reported being
bullied were more able to respond effectively to this behaviour when there were supportive
adults that were present in his or her life. It was also suggested that victims of bullying who do
not have supportive adults to report this behaviour to were more likely to choose not to respond or would respond inappropriately due to emotional distress, which would often increase bullying experiences. The importance of a supportive network was also found to be important with this sample.

In summary, the meanings and interpretations that the participants shared about their experiences with immigrating to Canada and the treatment they received from peers were similar. Bullying and discrimination were viewed as separate constructs with different characteristics. Bullying was attributed more to the need of the child who bullies to exert power over another person, while discrimination was more related to inaccurate perceptions and stereotypes about the cultural, racial, or ethnic group to which the individual belonged. Bullying behaviours were described as targeting one person whereas discriminatory behaviours could be directed towards one person or generalized to the entire group. The experiences of bullying reportedly occurred shortly after their arrival to Canada while many of the participants were attending elementary school. As time progressed, participants reported an absence of bullying and more occurrences of discrimination by peers. Therefore, it could be that bullying was viewed more as a phenomenon that occurs among children, whereas discrimination may be perceived as more prevalent in older adolescents. This would coincide with the idea that bullying more likely occurs in childhood and then decreases in later years (Nansel, et al., 2001; Wang, et al., 2009). The participants provided congruent accounts on factors contributing to adjustment to Canada, which included language proficiency and peer affiliations. Other personal characteristics participants identified as contributors to resiliency including positive self-esteem, self-confidence and the length of residency in Canada. The participants talked about normative transitional and developmental milestones as their non-immigrant counterparts, such as identity.
formation and the need to be accepted by those around them. Unique to their situations however, was the need to learn a new language in a new country, and the emphasis on creating social circles with little or no assistance.

**Immigrant Youth’s Perceptions on Adaptation and Adjustment to Canada**

During the interviews, the ability to adapt to the Canadian culture was a prominent theme raised by participants. All of the participants reported significant differences between their cultures of heritage and the Canadian culture, which appeared to increase the challenge of adjusting to their new country. There was a clear division in participants’ interpretations of their immigration experiences, with half of the sample defining their experiences as positive and half reporting a negative experience. Current perceptions of Canada were identical however, as all participants reported enjoying living in Canada. As time progressed and they gradually made friends, their experiences were described as more positive than their initial arrival, which has been supported in past research (Berry et al., 2006). Social support and an already culturally diverse school setting played large roles in adaptation.

Participants who were able to establish friendships shortly after starting their new schools were more likely to report a positive immigration experience, characterized by a lower degree of reported bullying or discrimination. In contrast, participants who expressed difficulty in being accepted by peers and establishing friendships reported negative social interactions and a higher degree of reported bullying or discrimination. Friendships were essential in adjustment as they provided an outlet for the immigrant youth to share feelings of fear and anxiety accompanied with starting a new school in a new country. Friendships were described as trusting and encouraging, particularly when the participants needed support for victimization by others.

**Multiculturalism in Canada and diversity in the school environment**
A common emphasis that was made by the participants was the already existing diversity in the school system, which, for the most part, made it easier for the youth to acculturate. This was because of a reported increase in tolerance and knowledge of cultural traditions by peers and staff. Canada is often defined by its multicultural climate, which is seen in the school environment as well (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). Multiculturalism allowed the immigrant youth to feel some comfort in starting a new school since there was some degree of acceptance and familiarity of their culture already. In a study conducted by Berry and Sabatier (2010), integrative acculturation (the maintenance of cultural heritage while adopting the Canadian culture) was more likely in Montreal, Canada than in Paris, France. This finding was attributed to the idea that maintenance of cultural heritage is encouraged in the multicultural climate of Canada.

**Immigration experiences and acculturation**

The descriptions given by the participants related to their ability to adapt to the Canadian lifestyle were compared to acculturation theory elucidated by Berry and colleagues (2006). According to this theory, the participants who described themselves as adopting the Canadian culture while maintaining their cultural heritage would be defined as developing an integrated acculturation profile (Berry et al., 2006). The participants who identified with both the Canadian culture and the culture of heritage preferred to affiliate themselves with a culturally diverse peer group because it allowed them to improve their language proficiency and adopt the Canadian lifestyle more readily. They were also more likely to report the importance of maintaining their cultural heritage however, by speaking the national language at home and continuing cultural and religious traditions. These participants reported a positive immigration experience and stated that their lives had changed for the better since their move to Canada. Positive psychosocial
adjustment is associated with the integrated acculturative profile as it depicts a healthy balance of both the culture of heritage and the new culture (Berry et al., 2006).

The few participants that showed the tendency to maintain their cultural heritage and reject the Canadian lifestyle due to initial negative interactions with peers would be considered to belong to the separation profile of the acculturation theory (Berry et al., 2006). According to the theory, individuals displaying this acculturative type were more likely to experience challenges in psychosocial adjustment (Berry et al., 2006). Participants who chose to favour their culture of heritage were also likely to take longer to adjust to the new environment and reported negative outcomes, such as depression, loneliness and anxiety. They were more likely to report experiences of bullying and discrimination.

The experience of bullying did not appear to effect on acculturation type as individuals displaying both integration and separation profiles reported being bullied, which they attributed as a normative occurrence in adolescence and high school. The experience of discrimination, on the other hand, appeared to be related to acculturation as individuals who reported direct discrimination (towards them rather than generalized stereotypical comments) were more likely to describe a separation profile, due to the developed mistrust of non-immigrant peers.

Although Berry and colleagues’ (2006) acculturation theory can be applied to the descriptions provided by the participants, it is evident that there were some areas that were not reflected in this model. For example, participants who described their affiliations as “in between” both their past and present cultures may not necessarily fit into any of the acculturation profiles described by Berry and colleagues (2006) because there is no definitive affiliation described. While many of the participants showed a genuine interest in adopting a balance of a Canadian lifestyle and maintaining their cultural heritage, they explained that, at times, they did
not feel as if they fit into either culture. This was attributed not to their attempts to adopt these cultures, but rather the reactions that they received from those around them. In these instances, they believed that they were not “Canadian” enough or were seen as abandoning their cultural heritage. The information that was gathered from the interviews illustrated a complex process of adaptation and adjustment that reflected not only the individual’s characteristics but also external sources of influence such as their peers. Acculturation theory, with its four acculturation types, identifies the individual’s willingness or choice to affiliate oneself with one or both cultures and does not recognize the impact that external sources such as peers and community may have on adaptation. For example, some participants stated that while they were attempting to adopt both cultures, they continued to receive pressure from peers to conform to one or the other, making it difficult for the participants to find a place in the peer culture. The willingness to affiliate one’s self to both cultures was not sufficient for adaptation thus, since there was still a feeling of exclusion. Therefore, acculturation theory may place more weight on the individual rather than acknowledging the contribution of external contributors. Chirkov (2009) suggests that quantitative studies investigating acculturation such as the acculturation model do not recognize the complexities and unique characteristics of immigrating to a new country: “the majority of the studies are confirmatory by nature and are built around testing hypotheses and justifying empirical generalizations discovered in previous research, whereas, there is little research that is exploratory or descriptive in nature” (p. 100).

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations in the present study. As a result of the challenges of recruitment, the majority of participants were female. Further research gaining insight into both male and female experiences would likely provide a more comprehensive outlook on the
immigration transition. Victimization behaviours that have been found to be more typical among females, such as social exclusion and rumours, were reported more often than physical aggression that may be occurring with the male immigrant youth. Second, although similar themes emerged with the six participants, interviewing more participants may have introduced new themes and patterns of behaviours that did not surface in the present study. A larger sample size may have elicited more diversity as well as rich descriptions of the immigration process. Finally, the majority of the participants belonged to the same ethnic background and reported similar experiences of starting a new school. Interviewing participants from a more diverse group of cultural backgrounds would have been beneficial in understanding whether the themes that emerged in the present study are exclusive to this culture or if they are similar in others. Conversely, interviewing youth from different backgrounds could uncover other themes that were not present in this study.

**Implications for Social Work Practice and Research**

The findings of the present study provide insight into the experiences of immigrant youth in the Peel Region in Ontario, Canada. As noted, statistics indicated that the Peel region, including Brampton and Mississauga, has shown increases in immigration (Chui et al., 2006). It is evident through the descriptions provided by the participants that immigrant youth who are entering into the secondary school system are encountering challenges with adjustment and acculturation. These challenges include lack of English proficiency and experiences of bullying and discrimination by their peers. These added obstacles can exacerbate the already complex stages of identity formation and transition from elementary school to high school. While bullying and discrimination were seen as characteristically different, both phenomena resulted in negative outcomes, such as depression, anxiety and social withdrawal.
While the significance of peer support emerged as a predominant influencing factor in the interviews, the role of familial support did not appear to be a primary focus. Due to the overall findings of this study however, social work professionals working with immigrant youth may find it helpful to educate family members, particularly parents, about the prevalence of victimization among this population. By doing so, parents can be offered appropriate support and direction on methods of communicating with their children who may report such experiences. This strategy can also encourage and enable parents to take a proactive stance towards victimization and be aware of warning signs and therefore provide a forum in which their children can express themselves regarding the challenges they may experience at school. Further research on the role of the family can be helpful in understanding how parents and siblings can positively contribute and assist in the adjustment of immigrant youth.

In light of the experiences reported during this study, it is essential for professionals working in the school system and social services such as settlement agencies, to recognize these common obstacles and provide appropriate support. Helpful services that were outlined by the participants included ESL classes provided by the schools or within social service agencies, as well as a supportive school environment that welcomes diversity and cultural differences. Immigrant youth would benefit from gaining information about services upon their arrival to Canada. Furthermore, programs such as Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, which focuses on diversity, tolerance and acceptance in the school system, are important in providing knowledge to all students about cultural differences. This can, in turn, decrease the frequency of stereotypical comments or statements being made as individuals will have more information and insight into the different cultures. Although bullying and discrimination were seen as different phenomena, incorporating diversity and inclusiveness into anti-bullying
interventions may be beneficial. Inclusive strategies in the education system have been recognized in the literature as a viable prevention method for victimization (Gonzalez, 2009; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Mesch et al., 2008). Additionally, supports need to be in place to assist immigrant youth with negative outcomes such as depression and anxiety to assist in managing these symptoms effectively.

While it seems unfortunate that immigrant youth are reporting incidents of victimization that can subsequently affect their adjustment and acculturation to Canada, it was encouraging to find that the participants in the study perceived negative treatment by peers in the school system as less frequent. This was attributed to the belief that students and teachers are becoming more aware of different cultures representing the Canadian climate and more specifically in the Peel region.

Further research is needed to understand the experiences of immigrant youth in Canada. Chirkov (2009) critiqued current acculturation research and recommended that “the ultimate goal of this study should be not the verification of the laws of immigration and acculturation but to gain a deep description of immigrants’ experiences and the dynamics of their negotiation of their old and new identities, which should lead to the understanding of the meanings that immigrants construct for their functioning in a new society” (p. 102). As evident in the present study, acculturation theory that recognizes the four types of acculturation types may not acknowledge the complexities of immigration nor the fact that these types cannot describe the experiences of all immigrants. Furthermore, while one study was found that supported the idea that immigrant youth affiliate themselves with culturally diverse social groups (Ochacka, 2006), there is a large amount of research that asserts that immigrant youth affiliate themselves with individuals from the same ethnic group for protection and safety (Li, 2009; Wong et al., 2003). In light of the
descriptions provided by the participants, future research is needed to investigate which practice is in fact more prevalent among immigrant youth and the psychosocial implications that surround either choice of group composition.
REFERENCES


Appendix A. Recruitment Poster
Appendix B. Information Sheet/Consent Form

Information Sheet/Consent Form

Research Project: Bullying and discrimination experiences of immigrant youth

Dear Student:

I am writing to ask for your help. Under the supervision of The Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, I am conducting a research study to learn more about the how immigrant youth describe their move to a new country and how they were treated by others.

Why am I doing the study?

Bullying and discrimination are two phenomena that youth experience. What appears unclear is how students understand their experiences and define them. For immigrant youth, it could be even more difficult to define since bullying and discrimination can sometimes overlap and look similar. I am interested in gaining a better understanding of how immigrant youth define their experiences. More specifically, I am interested in understanding if immigrant youth describe the treatment they received from their peers as bullying or ethnic discrimination.

When and where will the study take place?

I would like to interview participants individually and in person for approximately 60 – 90 minutes to talk about immigrating to Canada and their experiences of bullying and discrimination. These interviews will take place in the public library study rooms to make sure that the interview is confidential. Scheduling of interviews will be based on the participant’s available time.

Who is being asked to take part and what will they do?

Immigrant youth, ages 16 to 18, who have been in Canada for five years or less, who are proficient in English are asked to participate in an individual interview.

What will I do?

If you agree to participate, I am asking you to contact me by email at cindy.delvillar@utoronto.ca and provide your name and contact information. Contact information will include either a telephone number or your email address. I will then contact you to schedule an interview that fits your schedule. During the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences in moving to Canada and how you were treated by your classmates and peers. The interview will be audio-taped, with your permission, and the tape will be destroyed after it is transcribed. By not revealing any names in my study, all information that you share will be confidential.
What are the risks and benefits of participating in this study?

A good thing about this study is that it will give you an opportunity to voice your experiences. The information you share can also help others to understand how your experiences affected you and can help others who are experiencing the same thing. However, I recognize that talking about being bullied or discriminated against can be hurtful. If you find that speaking about what happened to you becomes upsetting, there are services in the area that can provide support for you. A list of these services will be provided to you at the end of the interview. If you wish to receive help in accessing these services, I will also be available to help you. Although the information you share is confidential, there are a few situations where this confidentiality may need to be broken. If we think you might hurt yourself we will speak with you and contact a social worker to make a referral. Also, if you share that with me that you are aware of a child under the age of 16 is being harmed or abused, I will have to notify the Children’s Aid Society.

Can I decide if I want to be in the study?

This study is completely voluntary. You can stop being in the study at any time. Just let me know that you no longer want to participate. While you are participating in the interview, you can choose to discontinue at any time. All participants will receive a $10.00 gift certificate as a small token of our appreciation.

Who will know about what I did in the study?

Your participation in the study will be kept confidential. Only myself and my advisor will know what you tell me. I will not tell anyone. We will give you a ID number that we use instead of your name. After the study is finished, we will destroy the audio-taped interview and transcription. All other data will be stored and locked for seven years and will be destroyed in July 2017. No information will be given out or published that would in any way identify you or your school.

Who do I speak to if I have questions or concerns?

If you have any questions, at any time, you can speak to Cindy del Villar using the telephone numbers or email addresses below. If you do not have access to email, please contact Dr. Faye Mishna at the phone number listed below.

If you have any questions about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact Rachel Zand, Director, Office of Research Ethics, rachel.zand@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3389.

Results of the study.

A written summary of the results will be made available to participants if they request one.
Sincerely,

Cindy del Villar
Principal Investigator
MSW Student
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1
Email: cindy.delvillar@utoronto.ca

Dr. Faye Mishna, PhD., RSW
Thesis Advisor
Interim Dean
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1
Email: f.mishna@utoronto.ca

I have discussed the information provided with the researcher and understand what I am expected to do for this study. I also understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time.

__________________________________________
Participant Signature

__________________________________________
Date
Information Sheet/Consent Form

Research Project: Bullying and discrimination experiences of immigrant youth

Dear Student:

I am writing to ask for your help. Under the supervision of The Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, I am conducting a research study to learn more about the how immigrant youth describe their move to a new country and how they were treated by others. For this project we will recruit potential participants from youth programs in several settlement agencies in the Brampton area, as well as, secondary schools within the Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board.

Why am I doing the study?

Bullying and discrimination are two phenomena that youth experience. What appears unclear is how students understand their experiences and define them. For immigrant youth, it could be even more difficult to define since bullying and discrimination can sometimes overlap and look similar. I am interested in gaining a better understanding of how immigrant youth define their experiences. More specifically, I am interested in understanding if immigrant youth describe the treatment they received from their peers as bullying or ethnic discrimination.

When and where will the study take place?

I would like to interview participants individually and in person for approximately 60 – 90 minutes to talk about immigrating to Canada and their experiences of bullying and discrimination. These interviews will take place in meeting rooms at various recreation centres in Brampton (e.g., Brampton Soccer Centre or South Fletchers Recreation Centre) to make sure that the interview is confidential. Scheduling of interviews will be based on the participant’s available time.

Who is being asked to take part and what will they do?

Immigrant youth, ages 16 to 18, who have been in Canada for five years or less, who are proficient in English are asked to participate in an individual interview.

What will I do?

I will be making brief presentations to youth groups offered by various settlement agencies in Brampton about my study. Attending these presentations is completely voluntary. I will be sharing the purpose and goals of my study, as well as, the possible risks and benefits of participation (outlined below). At this time, if you have any questions, please feel free to ask me. You will also be given a copy of this Information Sheet/Consent Form either at the end of my presentation or by your settlement worker at a later date. If you agree to participate, I am asking you to contact me by email at cindy.delvillar@utoronto.ca and provide your name and contact information. Contact information will include either a telephone number or your email address. I will then contact you to schedule an
interview that fits your schedule. During the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences in moving to Canada and how you were treated by your classmates and peers. The interview will be audio-taped, with your permission, and the tape will be destroyed after it is transcribed. By not revealing any names in my study, all information that you share will be confidential.

What are the risks and benefits of participating in this study?

A good thing about this study is that it will give you an opportunity to voice your experiences. The information you share can also help others to understand how your experiences affected you and can help others who are experiencing the same thing. However, I recognize that talking about being bullied or discriminated against can be hurtful. If you find that speaking about what happened to you becomes upsetting, there are services in the area that can provide support for you. A list of these services will be provided to you at the end of the interview. If you wish to receive help in accessing these services, I will also be available to help you. Although the information you share is confidential, there are a few situations where this confidentiality may need to be broken. If we think you might hurt yourself we will speak with you and contact a social worker to make a referral. Also, if you share that with me that you are aware of a child under the age of 16 is being harmed or abused, I will have to notify the Children’s Aid Society.

Can I decide if I want to be in the study?

This study is completely voluntary. You can stop being in the study at any time. Just let me know that you no longer want to participate. While you are participating in the interview, you can choose to discontinue at any time. All participants will receive a $10.00 gift certificate as a small token of our appreciation.

Who will know about what I did in the study?

Your participation in the study will be kept confidential. Only myself and my advisor will know what you tell me. I will not tell anyone. We will give you a ID number that we use instead of your name. After the study is finished, we will destroy the audio-taped interview and transcription. All other data will be stored and locked for seven years and will be destroyed in July 2017. No information will be given out or published that would in any way identify you or your school.

Who do I speak to if I have questions or concerns?

If you have any questions, at any time, you can speak to Cindy del Villar using the telephone numbers or email addresses below. If you do not have access to email, please contact Dr. Faye Mishna at the phone number listed below.

If you have any questions about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact Rachel Zand, Director, Office of Research Ethics, rachel.zand@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3389.
Results of the study.

A written summary of the results will be made available to participants if they request one.

Sincerely,

Cindy del Villar
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Phone:  (416) 978-3255
Email:  f.mishna@utoronto.ca

I have discussed the information provided with the researcher and understand what I am expected to do for this study. I also understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Participant Signature                      Date
**Appendix D. Demographic Questionnaire.**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Thank you for your participation in this interview about the experiences of immigrant adolescents with their peers at school. Please complete this questionnaire so that I can learn some general information about you. Your responses are confidential and your participation is voluntary. Please **do not** write your name on this questionnaire. You do not have to provide any information that you are uncomfortable providing. If you have any questions or problems while answering the survey, please ask me for assistance.

If you have any questions or suggestions about this survey, feel free to contact:
Cindy del Villar:  **cindy.delvillar@utoronto.ca**

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| 1. | What year were you born?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 2. | Where were you born?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 3. | How would you define your ethnicity?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 4. | What date did you move to Canada?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 5. | How old were you when you moved to Canada?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 6. | Do you know the reasons for moving to Canada?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 7. | If you are currently attending school, what grade are you in? If you are not currently in school, what is the highest level of education that you have completed?  
|   | __________ |
| 8. | Do you have any siblings?  
|   | Yes  
|   | No  
|   | How many?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 9. | How many people live in your home?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 10. | Who do you live with?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 11. | What do your parents do for work?  
|   | ____________________________ |
| 12. | What languages do you speak?  
|   | ____________________________ |
13. What language(s) do you speak at home?
Appendix E. Interview Guide.

Interview Guide

In consideration of Moustakas’ (1994) recommendation that interview guides be used flexibly, the following questions could be posed during the interview process.

On immigration process

1. How long have you lived in Canada?
2. Where did you live before you moved to Canada?
3. What feelings did you have when you found out you were moving to Canada?
4. How would you describe your experiences moving to Canada?
   (Probes: Positive experience? Negative experience?)
5. Is there anything that really stands out in your mind when you think about your move now?
6. How has your life changed since you moved to Canada?

On school experience

1. How do you like your current school?
   (Probes: What do you like the most about your school? What do you like least about your school?)
2. How would you describe the way your classmates treated you when you first started your school?
   (Probe: Are there any experiences about how you were treated when you first started your school that stand out to you now?)
3. How would you describe your relationship with your friends?
4. (Probes: Positive? Negative? Do you feel comfortable telling your friends when you are feeling sad, hurt, or angry?)
5. How would you describe your relationships with your classmates?
6. (Probes: Positive? Negative? How would you describe the way your classmates treat you now? Can you think of any recent experiences at school with your peers that stand out for you?)

On victimization

1. Have you ever been hurt, either physically or emotionally, by your classmates?
   (Probes: What kinds of words were used? What kinds of actions were used by your peers?)
2. What feelings did you have when you experienced this?
3. Are you still being hurt, either physically or emotionally, by others?
4. What does the word “bullying” mean to you?
5. What does the word “discrimination” mean to you?
6. Why do you think you were treated this way?
7. When looking back at your experiences, do you think you were bullied or discriminated against, or both? Explain why.

On coping and acculturation

1. How have you managed or coped with your experiences with bullying or discrimination? (Probe: Did you tell anyone when you were being bullied or discriminated against?)
2. Do you think that these experiences have affected or changed you in any way?
3. How have your experiences affected the way you feel about living in Canada?
4. How have your experiences affected the way you feel about living in your community?
Appendix F. Debriefing Form.

Bullying or Ethnic Discrimination or Both?

A phenomenological study of the experiences of immigrant adolescents

Thank you very much for volunteering to participate in this study. Your experiences and the way you define them are extremely important in understanding what immigrant adolescents are experiencing in their new country and school environment.

The purpose of this study is to see if immigrant adolescents are being victimized by their peers because of their ethnicity, their immigration status, their culture, or their language skills. Bullying is a serious problem in Canadian schools but the experiences of victimization among immigrant youth have often been defined as discrimination instead of bullying. Even though discrimination is also a hurtful experience, it is still unclear if such experience of immigrant adolescents is considered bullying, discrimination or both. This is concerning for several reasons. First, many schools adopt anti-bullying programs that may not see the importance of including cultural acceptance and awareness. Second, it may make it more difficult for immigrant adolescents to report their experiences if it is unclear what they are experiencing. Third, researchers and professionals need to be clear about what these experiences look like in order to fully understand the seriousness of bullying in Canadian schools. Finally, appropriate services and resources should be available to immigrant adolescents so they can cope with these experiences in a healthy and positive way. With the information you have provided, this sometimes confusing use of bullying or discrimination can become more understandable.

I am grateful for your willingness to tell me your story. However, it may be stressful or hurtful for you to share your personal experience. If you feel that you need to talk to someone about this in more detail and, more importantly, deal with your experiences, whether they are in the past or present, I have provided several contacts and programs in the Brampton/Mississauga area that may be helpful. If you would like a referral to your school counsellor, please let me know and I will support you in this process to the best of my ability.

The results of this study will be available to you upon the completion of the study. If you are interested in obtaining these results, or have further questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at cindy.delvillar@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact Rachel Zand, Director, Office of Research Ethics, rachel.zand@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3389.

Thank you again for your participation.

Cindy del Villar
Principal Investigator
University of Toronto - Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
Support Services in Brampton/Mississauga

Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
www.kidshelpphone.ca
Provides 24 hour counselling and information services

Distress Line Peel 905-278-7055
Provides 24 hour counselling and information services

Rapport Youth & Family Services 905-455-4100
www.rapportyouth.com
Provides individual and family counselling services to youth ages 12 – 20 years

Brampton Neighbourhood Resource Centre 905-452-1262 (general)
905-453-4622 (Settlement Services)
www.bnrc.org
Provides individual and family services to newcomers to Canada. Settlement services also has a YouthHOST program for immigrant youth, which includes mentorship, recreational activities and support services.

Newcomers Centre of Peel 905-304-0577
www.ncpeel.com
Provides settlement services for newcomers to Canada and Peel. Also has a YouthHOST program serving youth in the Mississauga area.

Nexus Youth Services 905-451-4655 (Centralized Intake Services)
(Peel Children’s Centre) www.peelcc.org
Provides counselling services to youth between the ages of 12 and 24 in the Mississauga/Brampton area.

Additional Online Resources

PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence): http://prevnet.ca
Bullying.org www.bullying.org
Bullying Canada www.bullyingcanada.ca
Provides online resources and group chats for additional support services.