BEYOND ACCULTURATION:
CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IMMIGRANT RESILIENCE AND BELONGING IN THE
CANADIAN CONTEXT

by

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Abstract

The psychological literature on immigrants has identified numerous challenges of resettlement. Research on acculturation indicates that adaptive functioning is characterized as a bicultural prospect in which individuals balance their heritage and the dominant culture within the receiving society. This conceptualization of positive adaptation typically relegates culture to a broad-based and static property circumscribed within ethnicity, neglecting diverse cultural representations and the way specific mechanisms affect the process of adaptation. The current research sought immigrants’ subjective accounts of resilience. The aim of this study was to identify specific markers of significant adversity and corollary positive adaptation that intersect with diverse mechanisms of culture to develop a theory of cultural adaptation.

A constructivist grounded theory approach was implemented in data collection and analysis. Eighteen first-generation immigrants, who represented a range of cultural backgrounds and geographic regions, each participated in one semi-structured interview. The overarching theme that emerged from data analysis, Belonging, was found to explicate the meaning of resilience for immigrants in terms of their cultural adaptation. Belonging indicated a process by which immigrants gained a sense of identification with and inclusion in Canadian society.

Immigrants’ perception of Belonging was affected by two mid-level themes, Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance. Forming Attachments was contextually driven and highlighted a personal process of developing cultural attachments. The advancement of
attachments, interpersonally, occupationall and to the larger sociocultural environment, was meaningful to recovery and had implications for Belonging. The second mid-level theme identified a reciprocal process of acceptance that revealed a struggle to accept cultural changes as well as the significance of feeling accepted as an equal member of society. 

Taken together, Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance had a significant effect on immigrants’ sense of Belonging and were contextualized within a range of cultural domains. This study highlights the dynamic role of culture in immigrant adaptation and contributes to both research and health care professionals by offering a framework of immigrant resilience that may promote healthy forms of functioning.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Multiculturalism is one of Canada’s key defining characteristics and indicates a confluence of multiple identities and cultures that reside together. Immigrants represent a significant portion of the population. According to the Statistics Canada 2006 census, the foreign born population is four times greater than the growth rate of the Canadian born population. Changes in sociocultural environments can be a stressful experience for immigrants. For instance, immigrants face difficulty gaining employment (Reitz, 2001), loss of socioeconomic status and social support (Lipson, 1992), racial and ethnic discrimination (Noh & Kaspar, 2003), psychological distress (Beiser & Hou, 2006), chronic, immigrant-specific hassles (Safdar, Lay, & Struthers, 2003) and cultural changes in norms, values, and behaviours (Yakhnich, 2008). Psychological research has indicated that the way in which an individual deals with social problems is influenced by their cultural beliefs (Yoshihama, 2001).

Quantitative research has examined cultural differences between groups and has largely focused on broad-based cultural representations (e.g., country of origin) without identifying specific cultural processes (Cohen, 2009). Many studies neglect to investigate the way immigrants are affected by beliefs, value orientations and practices that affect adaptation and integration (Chirkov, 2009). The research area of acculturation has attempted to address the significance of cultural changes for immigrants and its effect on resettlement. The predominant model of acculturation was conceptualized by Berry (1980, 1997, 2001) who suggested that the most adaptive form of functioning for immigrants involves integrating one’s heritage culture and the culture of the host society. However, Berry’s emphasis on biculturalism does not recognize that individuals hold and are affected by intersecting cultural constructions simultaneously (Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Cohen, 2009; Cole, 2009; Ho, 1995; Moodley, 2007). Similarly, Chirkov (2009) critiqued Berry’s model on
the basis of its singular focus on group level explanations of intercultural contact and indicated that his model does not describe the way in which cultural processes or psychological mechanisms operate at the individual level. Moreover, research studies and specifically, quantitative measures of culture, have not offered a coherent model that explicates the way culture affects immigrant adaptation. The current study addressed this gap by examining the way a range of cultural schemas such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and concomitant values, norms and behaviours affect immigrant resettlement.

Another important element of immigrant adaptation is the need to explore specific mechanisms of positive adaptation. Psychological research to date has tended to focus on problematic aspects of immigrant functioning. The body of research on resilience offers a way to address this gap as it focuses on mechanisms of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Research in the area of resilience illustrates some of the possible biological and psychological mechanisms that enable people to flourish under conditions of hardship. However, psychological studies on resilience rarely consider the way in which cultural processes facilitate wellness (Coll et al., 1996; Jordan, 2005; Ungar, 2010). Authors, such as Wright and Masten (2005), have argued that mechanisms of resilience cannot be separated from the context in which they occur. Wright and Masten suggested that human adaptive systems are grounded in cultural traditions, which have not been examined extensively within the research on resilience. Thus, a cultural framework within the study of resilience would provide a helpful foundation from which to comprehend the way immigrants cope with transition to a different sociocultural environment. The importance of understanding resilience from a cultural standpoint is particularly necessary in a multicultural society such as Canada, where there is a continuous increase in immigrants and extensive diversity within and between cultural groups.
The following overarching question guided the current study: How does culture in its various representations affect immigrants’ experiences of resilience? This study addressed this question and the gaps in the psychological literature by examining: 1) many domains of cultural socialization, beliefs, value orientations, and practices that influence pre- and post-immigration life; 2) the way in which culture, either negatively and/or positively, affects immigrants’ adaptation; and 3) a theoretical formulation of cultural adaptation within the context of immigrant resilience. A more emergent, qualitative methodology is most suited to provide greater understanding of immigrants’ perspective of adaptive functioning in response to significant adversity. Furthermore, in-depth qualitative analysis is best suited to examine interactive and dynamic cultural processes that are difficult to capture through a quantitative design.

The ensuing literature review begins by identifying pertinent issues related to immigrant resettlement and adaptation. Specifically, common forms of adversity are highlighted as well as stressors associated with intercultural relations. The review discusses significant concepts proffered within cross-cultural psychology that pertain to immigrant adaptation (i.e., acculturative strategies) as well as related theoretical and research limitations. An example of qualitative research highlights important cultural processes that influence adaptation in the context of adversity. The second section on culture reviews important definitional and methodological considerations. A critique of broad-based usages of culture (e.g., country of origin) and meta-cultural theories are discussed; a rationale is presented for expanding cultural contexts (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status) and for examining specific mechanisms of culture. The third and final section details the extant psychological research on resilience. Conceptual and methodological critiques of resilience are discussed as well as the need to identify a model/cultural framework of immigrant adaptation within the context of resilience. The following sections include the results from this study and a discussion of the findings.
Immigrant Resettlement and Adaptation

According to Statistics Canada 2006 census, there were 6,186,950 foreign-born people in Canada, who account for one in five (19.8%) of the total Canadian population. Between 2001 and 2006 the census estimated that 1,100,000 immigrants arrived in Canada between January 1, 2001 and May 16, 2006, increasing Canada’s foreign-born population by 13.6%, which is four times greater than the growth rate of the Canadian-born population. Racial minorities made up the largest segment of the immigrant population; the majority (70.2%) of the foreign-born population designated a mother-tongue other than English or French.

Immigration and intercultural adjustment are considered stressful experiences (Padilla, Cervantes, Maldonado, & Garcia, 1988; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Immigrant adaptation is an important area of research when considering the vast numbers of immigrants and their diverse cultural and linguistic differences. This section identifies important issues related to resettlement (e.g., common types of adversity) as well as interpersonal factors that affect adaptation such as ethnic relations. In addition, psychological research on immigrant acculturation has identified a range of acculturative strategies that immigrants may use to adapt to a novel environment. An examination and critique of these strategies will be explored. The section ends by attending to examples of research that explore important cultural processes, which contribute to positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity.

Adversity in Resettlement: Significant Findings

Research on immigrants has documented many areas of resettlement stress that can result in psychological and health-related consequences (Christopher, 2000; Yakhnich, 2008). A review of the psychological literature indicates a range of common forms of adversity that confront immigrants such as the following: difficulties related to cultural changes (Yakushko, 2010), discrimination with housing (Dion & Dion, 2001), gender
discrimination (Noh, Wu, Speechley, & Kaspar, 1992), employment barriers (Reitz, 2001; Zeynep & Berry, 1996), economic hardship (Simich, Hamilton, & Baya, 2006), loss of socioeconomic status and social support (Lipson, 1992), problems with linguistic fluency (Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Padilla et al., 2008), racial and ethnic discrimination (Noh & Kaspar, 2003) and psychological distress (Beiser & Hou, 2006).

Specific adjustment needs and concerns in post-immigration can be influenced by various antecedents. For instance, Castro and Murray (2010) noted that immigrants may represent manual labourers or professionals seeking to increase their employment opportunities. Other factors such as experiences of trauma and persecution may be relevant to immigrants’ lives in resettlement. Consequently, pre-immigration contexts need to be considered when examining adaptation and associated stressors. Moreover, pre-immigration factors can contribute separate psychological effects on immigrant adjustment from post-immigration factors. Birman and Tran (2008) found that pre-immigration trauma significantly predicted anxiety in post-immigration whereas alienation in resettlement was positively correlated to depressive symptomatology as well as negatively associated with life satisfaction. Thus, the context of immigrants’ lives is important to consider when identifying stressors related to immigrant adaptation.

Research on adaptation in post-immigration has often focused on explicit forms of adversity such as under- and unemployment, which can obfuscate the reality of equally destabilizing chronic everyday stressors that affect immigrant adaptation. For instance, Safdar et al. (2003) examined the effects of chronic immigrant-specific hassles (e.g., ethnic stereotyping by out-groups) as well as non-specific daily hassles in relation to depressive and somatic symptoms. Safdar et al. found distinct acculturative challenges for immigrants that involved interactions both within and outside their cultural group. In particular, they noted in-group strain such as pressure to conform to past cultural values as well as out-group stress such as interpersonal problems with other groups (e.g., prejudice). The findings
suggest a strong relationship between immigrant-related stressors and mental health and also identify the negative cumulative effects of chronic hassles in the lives of immigrants on their physical health. Therefore, it is important to consider both chronic everyday stress as well as conspicuous forms (e.g., prejudice, under-employment) within the immigrant population.

Psychological research has identified a diverse range of stressors that can affect immigrant's lives. Patterns of immigrant stressors indicate five broad domains of adjustment (Yakhnich, 2008): changes to cultural norms; instrumental stress such as poor housing conditions and loss of social status; interpersonal distress such as prejudice, discrimination and loneliness; changes to family structure (e.g., loss of family and network); and psychological stress. The potential for an interaction of these domains supports the notion that resettlement reflects a process of adjustment, rather than representing a single adverse event from which to overcome (Yakhnich, 2008).

Upon review of Yakhnich's (2008) indicators of adjustment, many aspects of the five domains have cultural underpinnings. For instance, change and/or loss of family through separation may represent a breakdown in ethnic-based socialization norms by individuals who highly prize a communal structure. Change to one’s social status can represent the loss of socioeconomic status. Finally, interpersonal distress associated with prejudice often affects visible minority immigrants and highlights the need to consider issues related to race and ethnicity. In each case, the context of culture can provide meaning to the challenges of adaptation.

Taken together, Yakhnich's (2008) and Safdar et al.'s (2003) research indicate that immigrant stressors need to be contextualized within multiple areas of functioning that may be overt (e.g. prejudice) and/or chronic and subtle. Moreover, an immigrant’s heritage culture (i.e., in-group) may also represent a significant form of stress. Therefore, it is
necessary to consider the impact of relationships both within and between one’s identified culture.

**Intercultural Relationships**

The relevance of intercultural relations to immigrant adaptation was highlighted by Berry (e.g., 2001) who indicated the need to identify two interrelated components: adjustment in regard to ethnic relations as well as the way cross-cultural contact (i.e., acculturation) affects immigrants’ adjustment.

*Ethnic relations.* The significance of ethnic relations is well-illustrated by social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974). In brief, social identity theory posited that individuals have a proclivity to favour their own group and ostracise out-group members, even when based on the most trivial circumstances (e.g., preferences for shapes versus preferences for colours) (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Tajfel’s foundational theory highlights the way in which groups can readily separate themselves by perceptions of difference as well as challenges immigrants potentially face in being accepted by the dominant cultural group. Thus, intercultural relations are important to understanding immigrant well-being as it helps to delineate pertinent stressors that affect adaptation (Berry, 2001).

Consistent with in-group bias, a national survey on ethnic attitudes in Canada found that individuals who were not of European origin were viewed more negatively (Berry & Kalin, 1995). Cultural minorities who identified as ‘white’ did not perceive the same degree of negative attitudes towards their group as did racial minorities. This suggests the more disparate a group is perceived from the cultural majority, the greater the likelihood of negative evaluation.

Individuals who view their group as being judged less favourably may retreat from the mainstream culture; however, research has indicated that they tend to find emotional strength in their heritage culture (Verkuyten, 2005). Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000) also found that immigrants with a strong connection to their heritage culture experienced better
psychological well-being; however, the researchers noted that the quality of interpersonal relationships within and between one’s culture of origin contributed to adaptation. Therefore, good adaptation relies on both connection to one’s culture and positive interpersonal relations.

Research studies on interpersonal relations indicate that the quality of both intra- and intercultural relationships affect immigrant adjustment and contribute to psychological health (Safdar et al., 2003). An important aspect of interpersonal adaptation for immigrants involves cultural adaptation. In fact, shifts in cultural environments present an opportune time to examine the way culture affects the process of adaptation. The process of immigration and resettlement has been considered an experience in which cultural awareness comes to the fore (Safdar et al., 2003) and was expressed by Draguns (2008) in the following way:

…subjective culture is like the air we breathe; we become aware of it only when we are deprived of it. Such a state may occur when human beings are removed from accustomed habitat and are confronted with a situation where their rules of living no longer apply. (p. 23).

Changes to sociocultural environments involve numerous adjustments and challenges. The psychological literature has documented many of these significant stressors such as chronic, daily hassles related to one’s in-group and out-group, socioeconomic changes, prejudice, psychological and somatic distress. Research on immigrants has also identified coping strategies related to intercultural adjustment. The following section highlights important acculturative approaches to resettlement.

**Acculturative strategies.** Research on acculturation has attempted to explain the way in which cross-cultural contact affect immigrants in their resettlement (e.g., Berry, 2001; Kurman & Ronen-Eilon, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 2001). One of the earlier conceptualizations of acculturation stemmed from research in anthropology, indicating that it
is a process of cultural reconfiguration in which two different groups are impacted by contact from one another (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936; as cited in Chirkov, 2009). Similarly, Berry (2008) characterized acculturation as a mutual cultural change in groups from cross-cultural contact. A contemporary and detailed perspective on acculturation was provided by Chirkov (2009) who noted that it involves:

…a deliberate, reflective, and, for the most part, comparative cognitive activity of understanding the frame of references and meanings with regard to the world, others, and self that exist in one’s ‘home’ cultural community and which one has discovered in a new cultural community. This process emerges within the context of interactions, both physical and symbolic, with the members of the ‘home’ and new cultural communities (p. 94).

Chirkov’s view of acculturation underscores its complexity and reflective nature involving an examination of one’s own cultural worldview as well as the cultural frames of meaning within a new community.

Research on acculturation has attempted to clarify the way a novel environment and culture impact on one’s sense of identity as well as corollary adaptation. There have been a number of ways in which to examine and conceptualize acculturation. Initially, researchers proposed unidimensional perspectives, and later, more comprehensive theories used bidimensional and multidimensional models (Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006).

Unidimensional constructs of acculturation demarcated a linear conception of acculturative strategies. These models measure the process of acculturation on a continuum with home culture at one pole and the dominant culture at the other (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). Additionally, researchers theorized that induction into the mainstream culture resulted in a cultural shedding of one’s heritage, without the possibility of maintaining both home and host cultural traditions. The unidimensional viewpoint has been criticized for being a simplistic and misleading rendering of cultural transformation (Ryder et al., 2000;
Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). Additionally, unidimensional models have failed to explain the way individuals differ in their process of acculturation, such as the amount of contact they have with home and host cultures as well as specific factors that impact on the rate of acculturation (Ryder et al., 2000).

The development of bidimensional measures of acculturation provided remediation of some of the measurement difficulties (Ryder et al., 2000). In particular, Berry (e.g., 1980, 1997, 2001) developed one of the most robust models of acculturation in the psychological literature. Berry’s framework of acculturation outlined four strategies of adaptation, which include: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization.

Integration reflects a strategy of biculturalism, whereby individuals retain aspects of their heritage culture and seek engagement with other groups. This strategy is facilitated by reciprocated integration and interaction of one’s heritage culture with the dominant culture of the receiving society. The second strategy, assimilation, is characterized by disengagement with one’s cultural heritage with a preference towards the host culture. The third approach of separation is proximally equidistant to assimilation and is characterized by retaining heritage culture and avoidance of the dominant group’s cultural mores. The fourth type of acculturation is marginalization. This strategy is defined by a loss of heritage cultural maintenance as well as disengagement with the dominant group. Berry (2001) indicated that a bicultural standpoint, in which both heritage and host culture is integrated, represented the most favourable in terms of positive adaptation.

Critiques of acculturation theory and research. Berry’s (1980, 1997, 2001) fourfold typology of acculturation has received criticism on a number of grounds. One issue concerns generalizations about cultural value orientations. For instance, the concept of cultural integration (i.e., biculturalism) has been described as the superlative acculturative strategy in buffering against acculturative stress for newcomers (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). However, some individuals may not view this strategy as available to them
based on conflict between their heritage culture and the ideals of the dominant cultural group (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001). Problems arise when culture-based beliefs and practices are in opposition to mainstream cultural norms, thus precluding the possibility of full biculturality. One example of cultural duality is when an individual holds the notion of abstaining from premarital sex while living in a society in which there are no cultural/religious restrictions to this belief (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001).

Additionally, the reasoning behind marginalization as a strategy is flawed. In particular, researchers have argued against the idea that marginalization is preferred as Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) explained that marginalization is better considered imposed by the mainstream culture, rather being viewed as a choice, as they stated, “First, people rarely prefer to distance themselves from the reference community to which they prefer to belong. It is almost an oxymoron to say that people have marginalization strategies” (p. 43). Moreover, some individuals may align themselves with a more individualistic cultural identity, engendering numerous traditions; therefore, marginalization, connotative of maladaptation or isolation, appears to be less befitting a descriptor when a contextual approach is considered (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006).

Another problem with Berry’s (1980, 1997, 2001) four strategies is the variable and contradictory findings regarding healthy acculturative approaches. In line with Berry, many studies have suggested that separation is a poor strategy with negative consequences for immigrants. However, there has been variable support for this notion as research has also indicated that separation can represent a healthy strategy when considering important individualized and contextual factors. For example Safdar et al. (2003) found that Iranian immigrants who were considered educated and possessed greater financial resources in Canada were more inclined to use a separation strategy, which did not predict psychological distress as would be expected based on Berry’s model.
The confounding theoretical underpinning of Berry’s model of acculturation (1980, 1990, 1997) and the lack of attention to context highlight some of the problems related to measurement. Moreover, in a content and meta-analysis covering a 22 year period, Yoon, Langrehr, and Ong (2010) did not identify any significant findings related to the relationship between acculturation/enculturation and mental health adjustment and well-being. The authors also noted that although “…acculturation contexts has been emphasized ever since Berry’s literature in the 1980s, social contexts have rarely been included in research designs as a study variable beyond conceptual discussion, revealing a gap between theoretical/conceptual development and empirical research” (p. 9). Similarly, in a review of research studies on acculturation, Chirkov (2009) highlighted that “The dominant way of operationalizing culture (88%, 35 articles) was to equate it with ethnicity or nationality or both” (p. 99).

It is important to understand social and cultural contexts of immigrants’ lives. Immigrants bring with them a system of meaning that is culturally embedded. People construct meaning in a particular context that guides them through a socially constructed world such as shared ideas, norms, and values, which is negotiated and maintained by others in their environment. In resettlement, immigrants are often confronted with different cultural constructions of reality and therefore need to comprehend novel cultural rules and norms in order to robustly engage (e.g., occupationally, socially) in a meaningful way. This process requires an examination and adjustment of previously held constructions of meaning. Research on acculturation has failed to adequately identify a model of culture that includes interactive relational processes affecting contact that is grounded in immigrant perceptions of positive adaptation (Chirkov, 2009).

Acculturation models have also been critiqued for lacking sensitivity to within-group differences. For example, Salant and Lauderdale (2003) conducted a review of research studies that examined the way acculturation affects the health of Asian immigrants. Some of
the concerns reported in their review related to problems with measurements not accurately capturing heterogeneous experiences of Asian participants. Quantifying culture remains problematic because it involves complex interrelated processes that are contextualized. Salant and Lauderdale highlighted this problem as they stated, “...acculturation research in Asians has been unable to consistently articulate the cultural domains that change with acculturation or to explain how non-behavioural cultural features (e.g., cultural beliefs) fit into the larger picture of acculturation-related health outcomes” (p. 86). Rather than quantifying culture and focusing on outcomes, contextualized research is needed to investigate culture as a dynamic individualized process that evolves during resettlement.

The specific mechanisms of culture (e.g., beliefs, values, practices) have not been adequately explored in acculturation research and have often been supplanted by broad generalizations related to ethnicity (e.g., country of origin) (Chirkov, 2009). In addition, psychological studies often disregard multiple forms of culture (e.g., SES, religion) that are integral to socialization and identity (Cohen, 2009). Qualitative interview methods enhance theory building by gaining more knowledge about the way immigrants construct their cultural identity and the mechanisms of culture that affect their trajectory of adaptation. Thus far, the acculturative literature has not provided insight into the way diverse internalized cultural perspectives influence resettlement and the notion of positive adaptation has not been fully explained from an immigrant’s perspective.

Cultural Influences of Immigrant Adaptation

There have been a small number of research studies that have attended to cultural mechanisms that facilitate recovery. A study conducted by Goodman (2004) provides an example about the context of culture in facilitating recovery from significant adversity. Specially, she explored the significance of pre-migration factors and related culture-based forms of coping. Goodman interviewed 14 Sudanese refugees to the United States who experienced pre-migration traumatic events such as forced migration, starvation, witnessing
death, and persistent threat of death. The interviews revealed distinct cultural forms of coping such as holding a sense of collective responsibility vis-à-vis caring (i.e., affective and instrumental) for other refugees and the notion of continuing the family lineage, which bestowed courage to survive under extreme conditions such as poverty, scarcity of food, and fear of death. The participants’ ability to access cultural responses to trauma (e.g., collective practices; making sense of trauma through religious conviction) emerged as a significant source of resilience. One way of identifying those cultural values was through the use of a qualitative design, which identified the meaning of a number of cultural (e.g., religion, collectivistic ethnic identity) and historical contexts that are relevant to adaptation.

Cultural systems of belief provide individuals with the means to garner strength in the face of adversity (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Indeed, religion may be one significant way that immigrants deal with transition. Hao and Johnson (2000) conducted a large scale database study that included native born citizens of the United States and immigrants from Cuba, Asia, Western Europe and Mexico between the ages of 51 to 61 years old. They assessed a number of domains such as emotional health, economic attainment, human capital (e.g., educational attainment, employment); religious affiliation; family structure; and kinship network. The results indicated that cultural factors served as protective mechanisms for emotional well-being. In particular, religious affiliation played an important role in the emotional well-being of both immigrants and native born Americans; participation in religious activities was especially crucial for life satisfaction and emotional contentment of immigrants. The authors speculated that involvement in religion was especially important among immigrants as it “offers immigrants many opportunities for co-ethnic contact, emotional support and the exchange of information” and “may provide critical support to immigrants struggling with the special demands of adaptation and adjustment to a new country” (p. 626). Hao and Johnson demonstrated the importance of perceived social connection;
religion, while offering spiritual support, appears to have a corollary effect of providing a sense of social support and sociocultural adaptation.

Taken together, Goodman (2004) and Hao and Johnson (2000) provide insight into the way the personal context (e.g., pre-immigration stressors) and cultural forms of coping facilitate psychological strength for refugees and immigrants. Although these studies predominantly highlight ethnic and religious-based coping, they indicate that cultural influences (e.g., socialization, family and social systems as support) are relevant during times of distress and make an important contribution to adaptation, rather than being reduced to a background variable that is often the case in quantitative studies.

Research on immigrant adaptation needs to move beyond bicultural models that limit understanding about differing cultural forms of socialization and more fully engage in the way immigrants are affected by diverse and internal cultural processes (Chirkov, 2009). Qualitative methodology allows for contextual analysis of these processes from the perspective of immigrants. Goodman’s (2004) study highlights the value of in-depth interviewing as a method of exploring the way in which cultural beliefs and other processes (e.g., emotion-based coping) promote meaning in the face of hardship as well as psychological endurance. Qualitative interviews assisted the researcher in accessing specific cultural mechanisms of resilience and their meaning to individuals such as the role of social connectedness and faith in a higher power as forms of stability. Her study also revealed the importance of attending to the personal context of adaptation as a wide range of factors can be relevant to an immigrant’s life during resettlement.

Acculturative research would be enhanced by understanding how immigrants respond to adversity including the mechanisms and meaning of positive adaptation. Research using a qualitative design could further clarify the role of culture in recovery from major stressors in resettlement. The current research study addressed the lack of attention to specific cultural mechanisms involved in adaptation and broadened the examination of
culture to include multiple domains (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation). The following section demonstrates the importance of examining the context of culture in immigrant adaptation.

Culture

Culture is a complex construct and has been defined in various ways across disciplines and within the psychological literature. In particular, quantitative studies frequently define culture in broad and generic terms such as country of origin, whereas qualitative studies focus on a particular group, which can sometimes neglect within group differences. In order to understand the way culture affects immigrants in resettlement, a different approach is needed that allows for more diverse representations of its qualities and processes in order to provide greater context and specificity about its impact on immigrant functioning. The following section begins by situating culture in a historical framework and then details the way it has been examined in psychology, as well as reviewing methodological concerns and the importance of grounding culture in context.

Historical Context of Culture

A historical annotation of culture is rooted in the classical Latin word *colere*, which ascribed to it a process of tending or cultivation in regard to husbandry (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). The cultivation of the mind, expressed as *kultur* in German, posits a refinement of character (Baldwin, Faulkner, & Hecht, 2006). As a topic of study, academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology have emphasized different mechanisms of culture. Therefore, the meaning of culture, in part, reflects the philosophical perspective from which it is being studied (Toomela, 2003). The variability in usage and emphasis over the years attests to the malleability and complex nature of both the scope and depth of culture’s interactive influence on humanity, society, and physical environment.

Early use of the term culture, for the purpose of anthropological research, has been credited to Tylor, who in 1871, described it as a “complex whole which includes knowledge,
belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1958/1871, p. 1). For Tylor, culture was gleaned through multiple domains of socially constructed meaning that served as social blueprints of behaviour. Another notable anthropological definition of culture succinctly referred to it as the all-encompassing “man-made” part of the environment (Herskovits, 1948, p.17).

Since the inception of the term, a prolific range of definitions has been suggested in which attempts were made to locate its fundamental nature. In Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s (1952) omnibus exposition of culture, they described over 150 usages. Kroeber and Kluckhohn suggested that culture designates normative behavioural patterns, which influence interpersonal dynamics, as well as expectations of behaviour within a group. After collating a dictionary of usages, they indicated that culture thrives, and is transmitted through social means, which is comprised of meaning and value orientations. Kroeber and Kluckhohn also contended that culture is embodied by two critical elements: the hardware (i.e., external or tangible forms such as symbols and religious institutions) and software (e.g., morals, values) that delineate a mental construct (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002). Traditionally, anthropological research focused on material and observable elements of culture such as artifacts and behavioural surveillance rather than internal and psychological representations (Berry et al., 2002).

Despite attempts in a cross-section of academic domains to be definitive and robust in explaining essential elements of culture, Baldwin et al. (2006) addressed the difficulty of placing ultimate structure and parameters around its essence and aptly regarded it as “…an empty vessel waiting for people—both academics and everyday communicators—to fill it with meaning” (p. 4). Although culture may be difficult to pinpoint, various definitions presented thus far construe it as a dynamic and socially constructed element of life that provides meaning and value to societal functioning.

*Conceptual and Methodological Challenges*
The field of psychology has offered a number of conceptually driven approaches to the study of culture, which has largely focused on quantitative methodological designs. Articulating the way culture operates on an individual level has been pre-empted by identifying meta-level cultural patterns through the use of top-down a priori assumptions in research. The attempt to explain broad-based differences between groups has been rooted in a belief that universal principles across societies can predict and explain behaviour. However, one problem with the use of cultural presuppositions is that the psychological measures designed to test hypotheses often lack rigorously tested internal and external validity with ethnic minority populations (Sue, 1999). Although there is value to understanding cultural patterns within a given society, an over-reliance on quantitative models has resulted in a dearth of empirical knowledge regarding how individuals experience and express culture (e.g., the way it operates relationally) and the differentiation in experiences and meaning of particular cultural contexts such as gender and socioeconomics.

One of the most prolific theories of culture was developed by Hofstede (1980), who posited that societies are governed by overarching value systems such as individualism and collectivism. This conceptualization has also been referred to as meta-cultural patterns or ‘cultural syndromes’ that “…consist of shared attitudes, beliefs, norms, role and self definitions, and values of members of each culture that are organized around a theme” (Triandis, 1996, p. 407). Individualism signifies the tendency for people to act in independent ways from their group and generally favour competition and self-reliance. Collectivism’s core sensibility is that of interdependence, and emphasizes family unity and connectedness among extended family (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001). Distinctiveness about cultural regions is considered to be reflective of distinct behaviour through a system of shared beliefs (Triandis, 1996).
Research studies that examine individualism and collectivism frequently attempt to predict group similarities and differences between societies. Despite the fact that there is support for cultural differences, there is a growing trend to account for individual variation within cross-cultural studies (Matsumoto, Weissman, Preston, Brown, & Kupperbusch, 1997). Additionally, critiques of individualism and collectivism and other meta-cultural patterns indicate that the variance in data in cultural groups is often greater than cultural disparity in the means (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Researchers have also pointed to more significant flaws in the way individualism and collectivism have been examined from an empirical basis (e.g., Brewer & Chen, 2007; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Schwartz, 1990; Takano & Osaka, 1999). For instance, there have been concerns with measuring culture in a standardized way, relying on translation and inherent limitations of using Likert questionnaires, which arguably obscure cultural differences (Heine, et al., 2002). Furthermore, research identifying individualistic and collectivistic attitudes, often described as stable characteristics of a society, change along generational lines (Matsumoto et al., 1997).

There is a need to place contextual parameters around the concept of individualism and collectivism, which has been neglected in large scale studies. Takano and Osaka (1999) critiqued the common view that individuals from Japan and the United States represent collectivistic and individualistic societies respectively. Specifically, the researchers argued that individual behaviour adapts to different situational contexts for survival. For instance, collectivism was more prevalent in Japanese society during the Pacific War in 1945, which functioned as a protective mechanism. As well, they explain that economic insecurity facilitated a collectivistic attitude up until the growth of the economy in 1973. However, once Japan established itself and became militarily and economically secure, individualistic attitudes increasingly developed. This would suggest that individualism and collectivism is prone to influence by contextual factors such as war and economic changes.
This point is further illustrated by Takano and Osaka as they state, “Innumerable historical instances attest that threats from the outside typically elicit attempts to enhance solidarity inside a group by suppressing the individualistic behaviour of its members. This tendency is observed universally and not confined to particular cultures” (p. 328).

Takano and Osaka (1999) reviewed 15 empirical studies to assess the accuracy of Japan as representing a collectivistic society. The studies compared Japan and the United States on the individualism and collectivism continuum. Results from 14 of the 15 studies did not support the notion of Japan as a collectivist society. In fact, five studies identified participants in the United States to be more collectivistic than their Japanese counterparts. Only one study they reviewed by Hofstede (1980), in which a sample was drawn from a multinational corporation, indicated that Japanese participants had more collectivistic characteristics; however, his study was noted to have serious validity flaws that confounded support for the conclusions.

The review by Takano and Osaka (1999) elucidates the difficulties in attempting to fundamentally describe a group as there are many factors that complicate quantitative studies which use culture as an independent variable in isolation from its historical, political, and economic contexts. Moreover, there have been intrinsic discrepancies between research that focuses on global qualities of a society—resulting in social categorization such as individualism and collectivism—and the actual expressions of individuals (Tripathi & Leviatan, 2003). Thus, the meaningfulness of classifying culture in terms of global cultural typologies is called into question.

Psychological studies, particularly using quantitative methods, have ignored the critical question of how culture affects behaviour and its intra- and inter-subjective meaning that bonds groups together. The current tide of research that isolates culture as a static variable inhibits the formulation of theory building, as Betancourt and López (1993) explain:
…we learn that cultural group, race, or ethnicity may be related to a given psychological phenomenon, but we learn little about the specific elements of these group variables that contribute to the proposed relationship. The limited specificity of this research impedes our understanding of the behaviour of a group or groups (p.629).

Betancourt and López highlight the need for research to delve into the way culture affects individuals rather than pointing to broad relationships between factors. They also emphasize that individuals are affected by a range of factors such as socioeconomics, health, race, and ethnicity, which suggests the need to use a more contextualized approach to understanding the way culture is meaningful.

A compelling theoretical position by Ho (1995) situated culture as a dynamic and internal process in which “…cultural influences operating within the individual…shape (not determine) personality formation and various aspects of psychological functioning” (p. 5). Ho questioned the extent to which individuals share meta-cultural perspectives and instead focused on the granularity of individual differences in the expression of culture. Ho disputed broad assumptions and stereotypes as he explained that group members of comparable socioeconomic status across cultures and regions may bear more similarity than members within the same group who are of a different socioeconomic status. Ho’s notion of an internalized and particularized cultural frame of reference diverges from broad-based explanations of seemingly arbitrary cultural boundaries that sometimes oversimplify cultural patterns and shared experiences. The definition of culture within the field of psychology illustrates differing conceptual emphases on its essential properties.

However, it is important to recognize that vast cultural experiences exist within groups. One problem with focusing on cultural universals is that diverse forms of culture are overlooked. Moreover, examining a range of cultural influences that reside within individuals provides better context into its meaning and influence. Research that identifies specific
aspects of culture such as religious affiliation, particular regions within a country, and socioeconomic status allows for balance between knowledge of significant universal mechanisms as well as more particular aspects of culture that impact on human functioning (Cohen, 2009).

Diverse Constructions of Culture

An important debate in the psychological research has illustrated the question of how to study culture; such as using quantitative designs to predict behaviour or smaller samples to understand cultural processes and dynamics. Another consideration is the question of what to study. Thus far, the dominant pattern in psychological research on culture has focused on ethnicity, often equating it to country of origin in large scale studies (Cohen, 2009). Despite the significant amount of research within the cultural domain of ethnicity, definitions leave more debate about its core construct than answers (Moodley, 2005; Phinney, 1990; Sue, Bingham, Porché-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999).

However, a common definition of ethnicity distinguishes it as a group who are affiliated within a particular region or nationality and connected through different forms of cultural mechanisms (e.g., language) (Betancourt & López, 1993). Thus, ethnicity appears to be contained by a region and involve specific actions and cultural practices that bond individuals together. Problems with studying ethnicity stem from the unwieldy prospect of explaining the complexity of the construct. In particular, ethnic identity formation can be derived through a range of factors such as social systems, religious affiliation, norms, language, and value orientations that reflect adaptations to the environment (Phinney, 1990). The diversity of cultural processes within the construct of ethnicity suggests the need to develop qualitative, constructivist approaches that examine the complex meanings and behaviours of the wide-ranging constituent processes of bonding within groups (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999) instead of broad-based descriptors (e.g., country of origin); therefore, the problem does not lie specifically with ethnicity, rather it is the manner in which...
it is conceptualized and studied (e.g., using a priori assumptions, lack of specific mechanisms).

Although ethnicity represents an important aspect of culture and is pivotal to one’s internal frame of reference, critical theorists have pointed to other significant cultural constructions that intersect and affect functioning such as race, gender, and social class, which is particularly relevant to stigmatized populations (Moodley 2007; Robinson 1999). However, in light of the lack of agreement with regard to definitions of ethnicity and with culture in general (Betancourt & López, 1993), is there justification to add more typologies of cultural influences? Indeed, Cohen (2009) proposed that many types of culture exert influence on human functioning and illustrated the significance of ethnicity, as well as specific regional cultures, religion, and social class. He considered these forms of culture to be one of many important domains to be investigated given the distinctness of each type, which is indicated by the degree of disparity in normative functioning, beliefs, values, and behaviour between them. According to Cohen, the expansion of diverse cultural patterns increases both the scope and depth of culture’s influence and facilitates a better understanding of culture.

Given the possibility of innumerable domains of culture, Cohen (2009) posited three basic principles that could foster the development of more cultural experiences and proposed the following selection criteria: 1) a cultural typology that represents a specific group affiliation, bonded by particular group dynamics; 2) availability of concepts and psychological research that provide a knowledge-base from which to articulate the phenomenon; and 3) belief that the cultural influence is significant in its effect on behaviour. One advantage of considering these guidelines is that they attempt to separate individual differences from a distinct cultural phenomenon.

A number of cultural domains have been identified by critical cultural theorists that would conform to Cohen’s (2009) criteria. For instance, Moodley (2007) discussed the
notion of stigmatized identities, which represents many significant forms of culture such as gender, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation. Each of these domains contains their own set of values, norms, and behaviours. Additionally, Moodley explained that each cultural set is “…not seen as fixed, trans-historical or essentialistic but flexible and multiple in the way they influence an individual’s identity…” (p. 13).

Research on socioeconomic status provides an example of the way diverse domains of culture include their own set of norms, beliefs and values. Socioeconomic status can involve wide-ranging differences based on power and influence, advantage, and social capital (Cohen, 2009). For instance, a study by Bowman, Kitayama, and Nisbett (2009) emphasized a number of cultural differences across social class. One important finding was the relationship between social class and agency. Individuals from working class environments were more likely to be self-reliant and tended to gain support from immediate family. In contrast participants who identified as middle class sought more advice and perceived support from close associates as well as perceived more personal control and choice in their lives. An interesting aspect of the study that sheds light on how diverse cultural domains intersect is that gender was found to moderate some of the social class affects; specifically, they found women in the working class cohort to be more reliant than their male counterparts and women in the middle-class group were more prone to seek advice than their male counterparts. The authors indicated that their findings are consistent with other research on socioeconomic status in which unique social class cultural differences have been identified. The research on socioeconomic status highlights the significance and necessity of engaging context when examining culture. Specifically, it is important to be attentive to the way cultural schemas influence behaviour and reflect unique experiences as each individual holds multiple constructions within their identity (Cole, 2009; Ho, 1995; Moodley, 2007).
Socioeconomic status represents one of many diverse internalized cultural frames of socialization and identity within an individual; attention to these cultural processes prompts researchers to think of culture as a complex construct that more accurately mirrors the way individuals perceive themselves and experience life. However, both quantitative and qualitative studies often explore singular cultural identities such as ethnicity, race, or gender. Robinson (1999) suggested that the overriding discourse of Western cultural individualism typically renders a categorical and separated notion of identity. His perspective impresses that all identities are socially constructed and interrelated.

**Cultural intersections.** In a multicultural society, individuals may be viewed as disparate if one focuses on external or regional differences of their past such as country of origin; alternately, they can be perceived as connected through a range of internalized cultures such as gender or socioeconomic status. Additionally, Markus and Adams (2001) noted that there are numerous implicit and explicit cultural factors that impact on and link an individual’s system of belief, which can influence people unwittingly. For instance, Markus and Adams indicated that the culture of Protestantism—while appearing to belong to one group—is enmeshed in psychological functioning in ways that may not be easily discernable. They illustrated the ubiquitous and inconspicuous impact of Protestant culture as an “…often implicit, unrecognized part of the institutions, practices and artifacts that constitute everyday reality in mainstream American settings…..Its legacy is present, for example, in the idea that success is the result of self-discipline…and internal attributions of happiness…” (p.290). Thus, individuals may embrace their own religious beliefs but engage in implicit Protestant values. In this view, humans are shaped by many cultural aspects within their environment.

Advancing this point further, Hermans and Kempen (1998) suggest that globalization increases the interconnectedness of individuals and societies, which belies the notion of fixed cultural homogeneity. They argue that globalization has fundamentally altered the
interaction between the individual and cultural socialization, which has resulted in a form of ‘hybridization’ of identities. This refers to a process of cultural amalgamation through exposure to numerous cultures in a variety of mediums (e.g., use of the internet, proliferation of multinational corporations, multiple forms and ease/low cost of travel, ubiquity of cell phones, and increases in migration worldwide). Consequently, internalized culture is transformed by exposure to and incorporation of many cultural practices and identities, which is reflected by “…a London boy of Asian origin playing for a local Bengali cricket team and at the same time supporting the Arsenal football club…” (Hermans & Kempen, 1998, p.1113). The concept of hybridization has also been proffered by Bhabha (1994), who described culture as a dynamic process that evolves when individuals encounter another culture. The cultural self can be considered evolving within an interconnectedness of others through the trend of globalization; this, in turn, facilitates the influence of multiple-cultural identities (Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Markus & Adams, 2001).

In addition, social, political, historical and economic factors also need to be considered when viewing an individual’s internalized culture in context as these factors contribute to identity (Paradise, 2002). Increasing globalization and associated cultural enmeshment highlights the need to not only attend to traditional constructs of culture (e.g., ethnicity) but also examine the idea of cultural commonalities beyond geographic borders such as gender, socioeconomic status, and religion.

In fact, the use of multiple domains of culture is one valuable way of accessing the evolving and dynamic construction of human identity. Immigrants are a particularly relevant population to examine culture as they experience changes to their sociocultural environment as well as relational adjustments that hold embedded cultural processes. Thus far, greater theoretical grounding of culture is needed within the domain of immigrant adjustment (Castro & Murray, 2010; Chirkov, 2009). The bicultural view of immigrant acculturation offered by Berry (e.g., 2001) would be enhanced by examining a range of internal cultural
contexts. Critiques of Berry’s model highlight its lack of complexity in capturing diverse experiences of immigrants, which could be accessed through in-depth qualitative analysis (Castro & Murray, 2010). The current study addresses this gap while also considering how immigrants conceive of positive adaptation in relation to adversity.

The research domain of resilience presents a compelling way of investigating immigrants’ experiences of major setbacks and recovery processes (Castro & Murray, 2010). Indeed, culture has been implicated as a blueprint for positive adaptation, which offers an answer to the question of why it is important to study. Culture has been identified as more than a shared experience that includes rules, norms, and values; it has also been considered to facilitate “…individual and societal growth, adjustment, and adaptation; culture is represented externally as artifacts, roles, and institutions, and it is represented internally as values, beliefs, attitudes, epistemology, consciousness, and biological functioning” (Marsella, 1988, p. 9). Thus, culture arguably has growth-promoting qualities that contain evolutionary properties, which fosters human adaptation. The way in which cultural factors contribute to the construct of resilience is not clearly understood (Arrington & Wilson, 2000). The need to explore resilience associated with cultural learning has been noted by authors such as Wright and Masten (2005), who stated:

Just as biological evolution has equipped human individuals with many adaptive systems, cultural evolution has produced a host of protective systems. Protective systems are often rooted in culture. Cultural traditions, religious rituals and ceremonies, and community support services undoubtedly provide a wide variety of protective functions, though these have not been studied as extensively in the resilience research (p.30).

Wright and Masten posit that cultural processes bond individuals together, provide social meaning, and serve as protective factors; however, they indicate that despite its adaptive quality, culture is often absent from research on resilience.
Although studies on resilience have rarely considered the immigrant population, it is a promising area of research because resilience identifies major areas of adversity as well as positive adaptive functioning that leads to recovery. The following section situates immigrants and culture within the paradigm of resilience.

Resilience

Research on resilience has garnered interest and insight into the value of attending to healthy and hardy forms of adaptive functioning in the context of adversity. Recognizing human strengths as a way of ameliorating adversity is not a new concept in the psychological literature. The notion of resilience – one aspect of positive psychology – developed in the psychological literature when researchers began investigating patients who adapted well despite having a serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia) (see Luthar et al., 2000). The early foundation of research on resilience provided a new approach to psychopathology by seeking ways in which positive development is fostered in response to significant adversity (Wright & Masten, 2005).

The field of psychology has historically focused on models of disease and weakness (Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006; Cowen, 1991). Preoccupation with pathology is rooted in the notion that change is best accessed through the understanding of and attempts to repair dysfunctional behaviour. Despite these efforts, over the past 50 years, models of psychopathology have not made significant gains in being able to prevent serious psychological problems (Seligman, 2002). The domain of positive psychology has attempted to advance mental health through its focus on prevention. The movement towards wellness is emphasized by “…a perspective focused on systematically building competency not correcting weakness” (Seligman, 2002, p.5). The literature in the field of positive psychology has provided new ways to attend to mental health by focusing on psychological processes that buffer against mental illness such as the mindsets of courage, optimism, faith and
perseverance (Seligman, 2002). Accessing diverse frames of reference can offer new insight into the way hardy individuals deal with stress effectively.

The literature on resilience has grown exponentially over the years; however, caution has been signalled due to muddled conceptual and methodological shortcomings (Luthar et al., 2000), which has hindered the advancement of the concept (Kaplan, 2005). One important critique from the literature is the need to attend to specific types of resilience that are contextually grounded (Masten, 2001). In particular, attention to immigrants and associated cultural forms of adjustment has received little attention in the psychological research (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). The current review highlights the need to include and develop a concept of resilience that pertains to immigrants within the context of diverse cultural pathways that influence their lives.

**Conceptualizing Resilience: Important Findings**

Research on resilience has identified novel ways to approach human functioning. One appealing aspect of resilience is that healthy and adaptive functioning in the context of adversity provides an important pathway onto which prevention programs can be developed. Pre-empting adversity, particularly for stigmatized segments of the population such as immigrants can potentially increase the functioning of individuals who often face significant challenges by tapping into adaptive systems of support.

The study of resilience was borne out of inquisitiveness in understanding how individuals thrive when exposed to significant risk. The earlier research on resilience typically emphasized the cultural ideology of individualism, which indicated that people are primarily responsible for their own success (Wright & Masten, 2005). This cultural value suggested that resilience was tantamount to possessing an inexorable character trait against adversity. However, research over the years has deflated and remedied the romantic notion of resilience as possessing extraordinary characteristics or representing a
statistical outlier, in favour of being situated within an evolutionary construct that is best characterized as commonplace to human functioning (Masten, 2001).

One major critique of resilience is the heterogeneity of the construct (Kaplan, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000). Research studies have often characterized the specific qualities of resilience in differential ways (Masten, 2001), which has resulted in a lack of cohesiveness of the construct (Arrington & Wilson, 2000; Gordon & Song, 1994). Specifically, Luthar et al. (2000) highlighted that resilience studies have differing criteria of measurement. For instance, the idea of competence has sometimes been described in terms of an isolated area of functioning (e.g., academic achievement) while other researchers have required positive adaptation in a number of domains to satisfy their conception of resilience. Resilience has also been considered the achievement of the positive end of a continuum with vulnerability at the opposite pole (Rutter, 1990). In contrast, resilience is sometimes operationalized as the absence of pathology (Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993). The variability within the definitions of resilience creates problems for measurement as well as reduces clarity about the fundamental qualities of the concept (Kaplan, 1999).

One often debated area of resilience is whether it represents a stable trait or is context dependent. Research on resilience over the years has examined personality markers and related styles of coping that are responsible for positive adaptation in the context of adversity. Skodol’s (2010) review of the literature pointed to several factors that appear to bolster adaptation such as maternal warmth, an engaging environment, and personality traits (e.g., extraversion in childhood), which can buffer the effects of socioeconomic deficit. In addition, during adolescence and early adulthood, traits such as autonomy and ambition were associated with academic and occupational achievement and other personal characteristics such as “…confidence and optimism, insight and warmth, productive activity, and social interaction skills…” (p. 119) were negatively associated with the development of psychological disorders and interpersonal, educational or occupational
problems. However, Skodol noted the difficulty in determining causal relations between personality traits and resilience across domains, highlighting inconsistency in the findings to date. This problem may partly be due to the fundamental way resilience has been conceived as Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) rejected an adherence to a stable trait approach or internal attribution model, preferring to view resilience as involving both internal strengths and external resources, which arguably better contextualize its mechanisms.

Additionally, the question of hardiness has come to light, prompting the question, how hardy does one need to be? An appealing approach was discussed by Rutter (2007) who emphasized the comparativeness of resilience as he suggested that it reflects relatively positive outcomes in response to adverse experiences. Thus, Rutter’s positioning of resilience is grounded in a contextual framework rather than applying a universal measurement; within this perspective, resilience is not conceived as a stable trait or construct within an individual but rather as dynamic and changing process across situations (Luthar, et al., 2000; Rutter, 1990). That is, individuals rarely display consistent positive adjustment across all domains in their life and fluctuate from adaptive responses to maladjustment over time.

The process of recovery according to Rutter (1990) may include mechanisms that decrease risk, mechanisms that increase self-esteem and efficacy through supportive relationships and attainment of goals, and mechanisms that increase opportunity. Thus, processes of resilience can be multifunctional with some reducing risk and others promoting health. Rutter explained that “Protection does not reside in the psychological chemistry of the moment but in the ways in which people deal with life changes and in what they do about their stressful or disadvantageous circumstances” (p. 329). Another point that can be derived from Rutter’s view is that change occurs within a specific set of circumstances rather than a definitive moment in time; thus, responding to adversity involves particular and related sets of actions that respond to adversity without a strictly defined timeline.
One way of identifying mechanisms of resilience could involve greater specificity and context within adversity. Luthar et al. (2000) suggested that research would benefit from greater specificity in terminology (e.g., emotional, academic resilience) to assist in solidifying contextual definitions of resilience. As well, a contextual approach takes into account the numerous influences on successful adaptation such as personal, situational, and environmental variables (Gordon & Song, 1994).

Although there is considerable variation in the way resilience has been defined, as well as a need for greater specificity in types of resilience, there is converging agreement about its basic properties. For instance, numerous researchers have defined resilience as a dynamic process of recovery involving positive adaptation in relation to significant adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Ong, Bergeman, & Boker, 2009; Rutter, 1990; Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010). However, a review of the literature readily highlights sticking points in terminology in which the critical components of resilience such as risk factors and adversity as well as protective factors and positive adaptation are used inconsistently. The use of terms such as risk and protective factors appear to be best suited when examining probability estimates (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999) and are more applicable to quantitative measurement. The term adversity has been noted to involve any environmental conditions that threaten one’s ability to achieve adaptive outcomes (Wright & Masten, 2005). Additionally, early conceptualizing of risk/adversity focused on discrete experiences (e.g., childhood abuse) but later included cumulative adverse events (Ong et al., 2009). Therefore, adversity can be considered to involve numerous circumstances (i.e., a cascade of negative effects) rather than one experience or stressor, which is more in line with Rutter’s (1990) concept of resilience as process.

The process of positive adaptation has been identified as a contextual pattern of recovery to adversity (Zautra et al., 2010) that supports development and attainment of goals (Kumpfer, 1999). Thus, positive adaptation cannot be delimited in a generalized way
as it is context dependent, which was addressed by Reich, Zautra and Hall (2010), who contended that the recovery process needs to identify meaning within positive adaptation. Specifically, in considering both adversity and resilience, attention to context facilitates “…insights into differences in resilient processes across cultures, an area that requires greater theoretical and empirical interrogation” (Zautra et al., 2010, p 5). Moreover, the recovery process is considered a separate dimension from adversity “…that confers unique physical and mental health advantages not accounted for by assessments of relative risk…Resilience depends as much on keeping separate that which is different as on integrating parts that fit together to make a congruent whole.” (Zautra et al., 2010, pp. 9-10). Consequently, adversity and recovery are not represented by a linear, cause-effect relationship as each can hold unique sets of contributions to an individual’s experience of resilience.

Identifying contextual conditions in immigrants’ lives can inform specific meanings of recovery. One important area that has not received attention, and could enhance understanding of immigrant adaptation, is the interpersonal context. For example, relational-cultural theory associated with Jordon (2005) suggests that psychological growth is facilitated through relationships by “involving mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and movement toward mutuality” (p.82). This theory emphasizes interdependence by viewing the individual in connection to the other, rather than situating resilience in isolated terms such as focusing on individual traits or internalized dimensions of functioning (e.g., cognitive forms of intelligence, self-esteem). As such, psychological adaptation is derived from the cultural context of relationships. Pertinent to interpersonal functioning is the degree to which an individual perceives social support. A robust finding within the psychological literature indicates that social support can increase one’s capacity to cope with traumatic events as well as facilitate adaptation (Helgeson & Lopez, 2010). Jordan’s cultural-relational model
and research pertaining to social support highlight the importance of culture in facilitating a sense of connection to others and the positive effects that result from being part of group.

Bartelt (1994) also discussed the importance of the social context. He argued that the criterion for what constitutes resilience is fluid and inextricably linked to the social context. Given the connection between interpersonal functioning and culture, it would seem necessary for research to engage in the way cultural beliefs, values and behaviours contribute to resilience. Bartelt identified an ideological bias in research towards a Western cultural ethos. He believed that the inconspicuous influence of this value orientation implicitly assigns normative functioning without engaging in cultural issues or questioning cultural norms, thereby unintentionally promulgating a universal definition of normative behaviour. Additionally, the over-reliance on samples gathered from Western-based norms reduces the generalizability of the findings on resilience in diverse cultural groups and indicates the need to examine a range of cultural perspectives that affect adaptive functioning (Reich et al., 2010).

**Culture and Resilience**

Culture influences all aspects of experiencing one’s environment (Wong, Wong, & Scott, 2006). The prevalence data on markers of risk illustrate that differences exist among gender, race, ethnicity, and other stigmatized domains of culture, and are often accompanied by social issues such as discrimination and poverty; at the same time, these forms of sociocultural adversity can be counteracted by “…the presence of affirming cultural patterns…” (Fraser et al., 1999, p. 133). Consequently, risk factors that are relevant and more likely in specific cultural contexts involve culturally-bound forms of responses and recovery.

The lack of attention to cultural processes that facilitate wellness within mainstream psychological research has largely been maintained by an ethnocentric bias that upholds normative Western values (Coll et al., 1996; Reich et al., 2010; Sonn & Fisher, 1998). The
designation of key terms within studies on resilience such as competence does not account for individual variation in response to differing social contexts (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). The use of universally-applied psychometric measurements of resilience to cross-cultural contexts can unintentionally pathologize groups by not acknowledging that different environmental conditions incur unique struggles, dissimilar availability of resources, and culturally determined perspectives of successful and adaptive functioning. Ogbu (1981) asserted that there is an assumption about competency, which is sanctioned by the dominant group without regard for different cultural practices and context-driven adaptation. He suggested that competencies need to be considered in relation to the demands of the environment. Thus, survival strategies are grounded in the social context and could represent alternative forms of protective mechanisms. The lack of engagement of context within the study of resilience misappropriates poignant social struggles that are foundational to community survival.

The definition of resilience within a given study needs to consider adjustment based on culturally relevant adaptation rather than imputing dominant cultural ideals onto individuals with whom these experiences are not salient. Therefore, resilience is best viewed as a malleable construct that is represented by a contextualized and culturally sensitive framework.

**Identifying cultural forms of resilience.** Engagement in cultural forms of resilience within psychological research enhances knowledge about specific cultural mechanisms of recovery. For instance, Lee (2005) conducted a study examining perceived ethnic discrimination and corollary protective mechanisms within a sample of eighty-four Korean-American college students using a survey method. The study hypothesized that cultural resources such as ethnic identity and other-group orientation would moderate the negative impact of perceived discrimination. Ethnic identity was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that assessed the following: an individual's sense of belongingness to their ethnic
orientation; ethnic pride such as positive feelings to one’s group; and interest in one’s ethnic group. Other-group orientation measured an individual’s attitude and eagerness to engage with other ethnic groups, thus facilitating a sense of connectedness with their community. The findings partially supported the hypotheses of the study. Individuals with high ethnic pride had fewer symptoms of depression and a greater amount of social connectedness when perceived ethnic discrimination was low. However, individuals who perceived a greater amount of ethnic discrimination experienced more depressive symptoms and a decrease in social connectedness. As well, the study showed that individuals who had lower amounts of ethnic pride were less socially connected and exhibited a greater number of depressive symptoms regardless of their experiences of discrimination. Therefore, an increase in discrimination appeared to be most relevant to difficulties in adaptive functioning, regardless of the degree to which individual’s possessed ethnic pride.

Lee (2005) surmised that participants identifying higher degrees of pride were consequently more offended by their experiences of discrimination, which resulted in greater emotional and social distress. The study did not find other-group orientation to be a moderator of perceived discrimination. In order to account for these findings, the author suggested that Korean-Americans are more insular than other Asian-American groups and therefore, other-group orientation does not serve to buffer against perceived discrimination.

Lee’s (2005) study provides a useful illustration of the way in which issues related to ethnicity and culture can be examined within research on resilience. His study, however, does not account for the cultural processes (i.e., the interaction between perceived discrimination and attempts to cope) that serve to either detract or facilitate resilience. The need to understand how culture influences behaviour is lacking in the literature (Coll, Akerman, & Cicchetti, 2000). The engagement of cultural forms of resilience is important but clearer models of culture would help provide greater understanding about relationships between adversity and positive adaptation.
A contextualized framework of immigration experiences improves methodological practices and makes research more congruent with experiences. A study by Holleran and Waller (2003) attempted to explicate cultural values that facilitate resilience. They examined the relationship between ethnic identity (i.e., identification with traditional Mexican values and beliefs) and perceived life challenges such as minority status, financial deprivation, and dislocation of family members. The participants included thirty Chicano/a adolescents, some of whom were gang members, living in an urban setting in the South Western United States. The study used an ethnographic approach; data was collected through focus groups, fourteen semi-structured interviews and observation of adolescent interactions.

The themes that emerged from Holleran and Waller’s (2003) study suggested that cultural beliefs and values enhance resilience. In particular, collectivistic attitudes and \textit{religiosidad} (i.e., unavoidability and personal growth associated with suffering) emerged from the data. One theme related to collectivism involved the notion of \textit{familismo}, which was defined as esteem for family connectedness and pride associated with protecting family members from potential harm. \textit{Religiosidad} was also considered an important part of Mexican-Catholic identity as Holleran and Waller explained, “God’s will, the spirit world, the miraculous, and folk healing are very powerful influences on both practices and worldview. A core aspect of this worldview is acceptance of hardship, suffering, and death as inevitable and integral parts of life” (p. 339). These beliefs provided a sense of meaning for individuals living with the constant presence of violence.

The ecological context has been considered an important factor in influencing individual behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The findings of Holleran and Waller’s (2003) study emphasize the importance of ecological factors, such as the social context of poverty and violence. Moreover, their study addresses complex social issues that are imbued in cultural protective processes. For instance, the authors note that membership in a gang could be viewed as antithetical to resilience: gang activity tends to propagate violence and is
associated with criminal activity. However, involvement in a gang, while living under threat of impending violence may also provide a sense of safety for members as well as a way to ‘own’ a sense of agency over harsh environmental conditions. Thus, the study conducted by Holleran and Waller (2003) helped explicate the deeper meaning of cultural factors that enhanced resilience through the use of a qualitative method of discovery, which provided understanding of resilience within the sociocultural context of the participants’ lives.

Cultural Framework of Resilience

The research body on resilience has been marked by a relatively minor but an increasing engagement in the concept of culture; however, theory-driven studies have been lacking in research designs. One of the main problems with empirically-focused studies is the neglect of social contexts. According to Luthar et al., (2000), cultural and social contexts stand at the apex of resilience, providing a lens from which to understand the concept of positive adaptation.

Studies that engage sociocultural contexts often involve specific groups, focusing on one element of culture (e.g., religion) using a qualitative methodology. The examination of specific cultural processes within qualitative designs has provided important insight regarding the way resilience is bound in cultural frames of reference. However, broadening cultural domains (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation) within studies would provide more knowledge about the influence of diverse internalized forms of culture on adaptation and facilitate understanding about how culture operates in the context of resilience.

A growing number of researchers who investigate culture have highlighted the importance of developing cultural models to inform research on both acculturation (e.g., Chirkov, 2009) and within the domain of resilience (e.g., Ungar, 2010) in which diverse manifestations of culture are included in a research framework (Arrington & Wilson, 2000). Although small scales studies often focus on cultural processes, the bulk of research has
focused solely on construals related to ethnicity, which may unintentionally contribute to the stratification of resilience by presenting cultural mechanisms as circumscribed within a unidimensional framework of culture. Inclusion of multiple forms of culture would not only provide more insight into a cultural model of resilience but add scope and depth to cultural mechanisms of resilience (Cohen, 2009).

Theoretical underpinnings of cultural aspects of resilience have been articulated well by Ungar (2010), who identified the way culture is implicated in positive adaptation. Ungar considered adversity to represent both intrapsychic and/or environmental conditions and identified resilience, within a cultural perspective to represent “…the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways” (Ungar, 2008, p. 225). Therefore, resilience from a cultural perspective points more to a systemic approach in which the individual navigates in tandem with the influence of larger systems such as family and community that engender cultural meaning. The important element of Ungar’s proposition is that pathways toward resilience are not culturally neutral prospects. Ungar highlighted the importance of considering the way in which individuals navigate toward resilience. Navigation is considered to reflect a process whereby individual actions are directed toward gaining resources to overcome adversity. He also emphasizes the multidimensional aspect of resilience in which individuals are influenced by systemic forces (e.g., family, community) as well as larger structures such as the government and legislative policies. Ungar (2010) explained that “Conceptually, it is a misnomer to talk of the resilient individual without also talking about the resilient environment that facilitates survival” (p. 405). Ungar’s concept of resilience provides important parameters for exploring cultural mechanisms as he highlights the shift in focus away from individual attribution models to a more dynamic concept that includes larger social systems.
Immigrant Resilience

Culture typically is moulded in social and relational terms; however, another element often overlooked is the relationship individuals have, sometimes unwittingly, with their physical environment. The geographic elements of culture can have particular sights, smells, sounds, climate, and architecture that convey historical markers and evoke thoughts, emotions, and meanings. The term attachment connotes different ideas but the most common derivative is associated with Bowlby’s ground breaking theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1982/1969) that indicates the importance of secure, close relationships in infancy as a critical way of engendering healthy social and emotional development. However, an offshoot of Bowlby’s ideas is the notion of place attachment (Morgan, 2010). The idea of emotional connection to a geographic area has been suggested as a process in which “A pattern of positively affected experience of place in childhood are generalised into an unconscious internal working mode of place which manifests subjectively as a long term positively affected bond to place known as place attachment” (Morgan, 2010, p. 11).

Bonding, whether in relation to geographic environment or other areas such as social or occupational life, highlights the diverse forms of loss and challenges that immigrants’ face in resettlement as well as the scope and depth of adjustment for newcomers.

Although there are few studies that identify specific parameters of immigrant resilience, Castro and Murray (2010) postulated that it involves “…positive adaptation to the stressors and challenges of migration, that is, an outcome that develops from persistent efforts at coping with the multiple and often chronic stressors encountered in a new environment” (p. 376). Furthermore, adaptation is shaped by integration into a new society which includes gaining cultural competencies, such as understanding social customs, acquiring language facility and new employment skills as well as establishing social networks. Gaining resources and developing competency in these areas facilitates positive
outcomes as immigrants navigate throughout their new sociocultural environment (Castro & Murray, 2010).

Coping with immigrant-related stressors has received little attention in the psychological literature (Yakushko, 2010) as research has been largely situated in deficit models of functioning. However, a number of important coping mechanisms have been identified that highlight the way immigrants respond to adversity effectively. In particular, studies have noted the significance of socioeconomic factors (Aycan & Berry, 1996), gaining language proficiency (Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2008; Padilla et al., 2008), coping through ethnic beliefs and values (Holleran & Waller, 2003), building social support (Birman & Tran, 2008; Padilla et al., 2008; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000), and religious engagement (e.g., Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, & Pargament, 2001; Holleran & Waller, 2003; Koenig, McCullough, Larson, 2001; Lee & Chan, 2009).

For example, Aycan and Berry (1996) found that improvement to one's socioeconomic standards increased a sense of competence and equality to others. The authors noted that positive employment-related experiences had a significant role in predicting psychological well-being and adaptation. Research has also suggested that language acquisition is associated with self-esteem (Padilla et al., 2008). A study by Jasinskaja-Lahti (2008) found that proficiency in language was the most significant predictor of socioeconomic and psychological adaptation.

Additionally, social support has been considered a critical aspect of immigrant coping by providing instrumental needs such as obtaining employment and managing language barriers (Padilla et al., 2008). Research has also indicated that social support is important to emotional functioning as studies have identified the way it reduces psychological distress during and after transition while also promoting psychological and physical well-being (Birman & Tran, 2008; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Although there is a growing body of research that indicates the way immigrants cope with stress, studies have yet to identify a
clear model of immigrant resilience. The lack of a coherent model calls for qualitative inquiry that can assess experiences, both adversity and related adaptive strategies, in order to develop a framework for understanding resilience in the lives of immigrants.

The application of resilience to the immigrant population is an emerging and promising area of research. Of particular importance, cultural forms of adaptation are considered to involve a complex set of processes that affect immigrant experiences on an individual, family, and community level (Castro & Murray, 2010). Immigrants often encounter chronic and multifaceted areas of adversity that include pre-immigration stressors (e.g., war, trauma, refugee conditions) and post-immigration factors such as chronic stressors related to adaptation (immigrant and non-immigrant specific) (Safdar & Lay, 2003), cultural changes, employment and language barriers, loss of socioeconomic status, and interpersonal distress such as prejudice and discrimination (Yakhnich, 2008). Research on immigrant coping has identified a number of areas that are important to address in relation to these forms of adversity such as social support, maintaining ethnic-based beliefs and values, and improvement in socioeconomic conditions.

The process of recovery is best understood from a contextual framework. For example, an immigrant may have fled their homeland due to persecution and not have family support in Canada as well as lack English language fluency or occupational skills. Whereas another individual may immigrate to improve their socioeconomic standing and have more resources such as educational, employment and language skills that increase their social and occupational functioning. Therefore, it is important to consider a systemic contextualized approach to understanding both adversity and positive adaptation. Societal/community factors are also important to consider such as discrimination and the availability of resources (Castro & Murray, 2010). In consideration of the multiple areas that could potentially affect immigrants, the attainment of positive adaptation is best viewed as a cumulative process that is not necessarily domain specific.
Quantitative methods often employ specific a priori measures of positive outcome that limit the way positive adaptation can be conceptualized. Examining positive adaptation using qualitative methodology allows for the possibility of novel concepts and dimensions to emerge that can capture meaningful aspects of life and a diverse range of contexts within the domains of the individual, family, and community (Castro & Murray, 2010, Ungar, 2010). The current study examines how immigrants define adversity and positive adaptation through a qualitative design that enables an in-depth understanding of culturally constructed experiences of immigrants’ lives.

**Terminology**

The following definitions provide a reference of key terminology that has been used in the literature review. The term acculturation was defined by Berry (e.g., 2008) as involving mutual cultural change in groups from cross-cultural contact. A comprehensive definition was illustrated by Chirkov (2009) who noted that it involves:

…a deliberate, reflective, and, for the most part, comparative cognitive activity of understanding the frame of references and meanings with regard to the world, others, and self that exist in one’s ‘home’ cultural community and which one has discovered in a new cultural community. This process emerges within the context of interactions, both physical and symbolic, with the members of the ‘home’ and new cultural communities (p. 94).

Chirkov’s view of acculturation underscores its complexity and reflective nature involving an examination of one’s own cultural worldview as well as the cultural frames of meaning within a new community.

The term adversity is defined as involving any intrapsychic or environmental conditions that threaten one’s ability to achieve adaptive outcomes (Ungar, 2010).

Adaptation has a number of possible definitions. For the purposes of this study, it is being defined as “Adjustment to environmental conditions: modification of an organism or its parts
that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The term positive adaptation suggests recovery from adversity in the current study and is defined as a contextual pattern of recovery in relation to adversity (Zautra et al., 2010) that supports development and attainment of goals (Kumpfer, 1999). The connection between adversity and positive adaptation indicates a process of resilience, which is defined as a fluid, dynamic process of recovery involving positive adaptation in relation to significant adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Ong, Bergeman, & Boker, 2009; Rutter, 1990; Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010). It reflects relatively positive outcomes in response to adverse experiences rather than a standard universal measurement (Rutter, 2007).

Cultural resilience is defined as “…the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways” (Ungar, 2008, p. 225). Thus, cultural resilience is viewed as a systemic approach in which an individual navigates toward recovery in tandem with the influence of larger systems such as family and community that engender cultural meaning.

Finally, immigrant resilience is defined by Castro and Murray (2010) as involving “…positive adaptation to the stressors and challenges of migration, that is, an outcome that develops from persistent efforts at coping with the multiple and often chronic stressors encountered in a new environment” (p. 376).

Defining the Conceptual Parameters of Resilience for this Study

Resilience has been defined as successful or positive adaptation in relation to significant adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Zautra et al., 2010). The current study builds on this general perspective of resilience within the context of cultural manifestations of immigrant adaptation. The limited examination of culture within models of
acculturation (e.g., Chirkov, 2009) and in relation to studies on resilience (Ungar, 2010) has necessitated an emergent, qualitative framework to flexibly identify the role and meaning of culture in relation to immigrant resilience.

Immigrants represent diverse cultural groups within which reside a range of cultural contexts that could be relevant to adversity and positive adaptation such as ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic status. These cultural contexts affect one’s relational patterns, norms, values and behaviours on an individual, familial, and community level. The exploration of multiple domains of culture is needed within an immigrant’s perspective of resilience to accurately assess the meaning of recovery. Furthermore, cultural socialization extends from early childhood and represents an ongoing influence in one’s life. Research on acculturation and culture in general typically investigate post-immigration factors; however, the current study aims to broaden the timeline of cultural influence to include past and present experiences.

The immigrant population requires specific consideration when identifying resilience because stressors and positive adaptation may be multi-determined. For example, immigrants sometimes encounter adversity in pre-immigration life that can affect adaptation (e.g., persecution, war, trauma, psychological distress). Additionally, post-immigration adversity has been noted to affect a number of life domains such as changes to cultural norms, chronic stress related to instrumental needs (e.g., language barriers, employment), interpersonal distress within and between one’s ethnic group; changes to family structure and social networks, and psychological distress (Castro & Murray, 2010; Yakhnich, 2008).

Therefore, positive adaptation is expected to address pre- and post-immigration domains that are contextualized in each immigrant’s resettlement experiences. Consequently, recovery is a unique process for immigrants as it may involve adjustment from traumatic experiences, new employment directions (e.g., career), changes in sociocultural norms, developing social networks, and dealing with loss of family and social
support. Positive adaptation may be defined variably by individuals such as comparing one’s past life (e.g., pre-immigration trauma, socioeconomic status) to the present and their ‘success’ may be defined in relation to pre-immigration experiences; either alleviating problems or gaining a perception of equivalency in regard to social status. Immigrants may also view positive adaptation more in terms of how they adapt specifically to conditions in a new environment; thus ‘success’ may relate to one’s ability to navigate toward different goals and expectations, highlighting the subjective nature of positive adaptation. The variable ways in which to conceive of positive adaptation suggests the need to contextualize individualized meanings of success from an immigrant’s perspective. In addition, adaptation is not considered an end-point of achievement but a dynamic process that can vary in domains of functioning (Rutter, 1999). Immigrants may achieve positive adaptation in one domain while struggling in another as resilience is not considered an all-encompassing state.

The intention of this study is to examine culture in immigrants who faced adversity and perceived themselves to have demonstrated recovery. More specifically, the study focuses on multiple domains of culture that affect the way immigrants adapt. Culture may include individual actions that lead to positive adaptation as well as contributions from larger systems such as family, community, and sociocultural contexts.

Although there are indications that the process of resilience contains mechanisms of culture (e.g., Chui, Donoghue, & Chenoweth, 2005; Holleran & Waller, 2003; Lee, 2005; Ungar, 2010), these studies are fractured and incomplete, lacking a cohesive structure in regard to a theory of culture. The current study broadens the notion of culture from Berry’s (1997) bicultural emphasis of adaptation to include many typologies such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion, which are considered significant domains of cultural identity (e.g., Cohen, 2009; Moodley, 2005).

Conclusions and Rationale
The immigrant population in Canada is an important area of psychological research because of the many obstacles that confront positive and affirming adaptation. Research in cross-cultural psychology has addressed cultural differences between groups, typically identifying broad aspects of ethnicity (Cohen, 2009), without revealing the meaning and significance of diverse constructions of culture embedded in the process of immigrant adaptation (Chirkov, 2009). Research within the domain of cultural psychology, which frequently focuses on cultural process, has largely overlooked immigrant groups (Mahalingam, 2006). This is surprising since immigration has been noted as a major life change, often resulting in multiple losses related to family, social, and community support networks (Ward & Styles, 2005).

A more complex view of culture would facilitate greater understanding about the way immigrants are affected by multiple constructions of cultural identity (Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Moodley, 2007). Cultural identity is a dynamic process that is not set or rigid but changeable according to personal worldviews, life experiences, and the sociocultural milieu (Ho, 1995). Bhatia and Ram (2004) highlighted that research on immigrants rarely considers the complexity of the cultural self in relation to sociocultural issues. Similarly, Coll et al. (1996) argued for the need to consider variables such as race, culture, ethnicity, and social stratification in regard to its impact on development. The dislocation of these social issues in research leaves out the complexity of an individual’s experience in relation to their environment (Cole, 2009; Moodley, 2007). The trend in research on immigrants has generally followed a quantitative framework that posits universal assumptions about human behaviour (Chirkov, 2009). Authors such as Van Oudenhoven et al. (2006) indicated the significance of contextualizing cultural mechanisms (e.g., language and customs) in immigrant research in order to identify specific factors of adaptation.

Similarly, the psychological literature on resilience has not provided a comprehensive understanding of the way in which culture contributes to wellness (Coll et al., 1996; Jordan,
2005). The literature in this area has been mired in debates about conceptual and methodological inconsistencies used across studies (Kaplan, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000). Moreover, the body of research on resilience has predominantly used a culturally-specific normative view of healthy functioning that is based on Western-philosophical beliefs (Castro & Murray, 2010). Harvey and Delfabbro (2004) suggested that a valuable direction for understanding resilience would be to gain first-hand experiences from people who appear to adapt well under stressful circumstances to enhance validity of standardized psychosocial measures and provide greater context of experiences, especially for individuals in marginalized groups.

The current study uses qualitative interviewing to identify the way first-generation adult immigrants are shaped by their cultural experiences and the meaning and role of culture during their process of adaptation to life in Canada. The study aims to address a number of gaps in the psychological literature. Firstly, the current study expands the focus of culture to encompass a range of cultural constructs that are meaningful to immigrants’ lives (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender). This examination aims to identify the way different domains of cultural socialization, value orientations, beliefs, and behavioural patterns affect pre- and post-immigration life. Research to date has typically focused on single cultural factors (i.e., primarily ethnicity) that do not account for the influence of multiple domains of culture within each individual. The predominant model of adaptation focuses on post-immigration life and indicates that the pre-eminent form of adaptation is bicultural in nature (e.g., Berry, 2001), often focusing on broad elements of ethnicity. This model suggests that the healthiest form of adaptation involves a reciprocal integration and interaction of one’s heritage culture with the dominant culture of the receiving society. However, a recent content and meta-analysis of acculturation research did not identify any significant findings (i.e., based on a calculation of an effect size) over a 22-year period (Yoon et al., 2010), which calls into question the validity of acculturation measures. One
possible reason for the lack of substantive findings is that social and cultural contexts are usually ignored; the context of immigrants' cultural lives is necessary when considering positive adaptation. Therefore, the second objective of this study is to consider context by identifying themes of cultural domains that affect adaptation, either positively and/or negatively, from the perspective of immigrants in both pre- and post-immigration experiences. Thirdly, the current study will attempt to develop a theory of the way many cultural domains affect immigrant resilience by identifying explicit cultural themes that shape recovery from the perspective of immigrants.

The focus of this research was to propose a theory that indicates positive adaptation in response to significant adversity. Models of resilience in the psychological literature do not specify one for immigrants. More information is required to understand how immigrants are affected, either negatively and/or positively, by pre- and post-immigration experiences and their conception of positive adaptation. Therefore the study aims to identify key themes of adversity and recovery from the perspective of immigrants leading to a theory of immigrant resilience in the context of culture.

It is important to note that immigrant resilience is considered a process that spans experiences of adversity to positive adaptation and recovery. The purpose of this study was to articulate a pattern of themes related to that process within multiple contexts of culture. Furthermore, this study was limited to representing aspects of adversity and resilience as a thematic focus rather than one that detailed the process of change; research on the process of change is considered an important but secondary research study. The current study instead proffered a constructivist grounded theoretical model that identified immigrant resilience within a cultural framework.
Chapter Two

Method

Qualitative Research

The use of a qualitative inquiry in this study facilitated an understanding of the complex processes related to culture and immigrant resettlement. While there are numerous theoretical paradigms and methods (e.g., constructivism, heuristics, hermeneutics, grounded theory) of qualitative inquiry from which to interpret phenomenon, most employ in-depth interviews as the primary way of eliciting subjective meaning and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The goal of qualitative approaches is to “…stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry…They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13).

A qualitative perspective provides the opportunity to understand the way in which ‘meaning’ is socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) highlight that research is an interactive process shaped by the researcher’s “personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (p. 9). Most forms of qualitative research acknowledge the importance of the researcher and participant’s influence on the research process. Explicating bias is important because research is not a value-free endeavour (West, 2001). For instance, Moustakas (1990) noted that inquiry, whether quantitative or qualitative, overlay’s value orientation within research; through subjective immersion into one’s investigation, he contended that “…one seeks to obtain qualitative depictions that are at the heart and depths of a person’s experience—deceptions of situations, events, conversations, relationships, feelings, thoughts, values, and beliefs” (p. 38). Moustakas’ approach conveys the significance of empathic understanding between researcher/participant as a way of gaining insight into a phenomenon (West, 2001).
The current study used core principles of constructivist grounded theory methodology (e.g., Charmaz, 2000, 2006) in data analysis. Similar to Moustakas (1990), the constructivist paradigm also emphasizes the need to be aware of the researcher and participant’s construction of meaning (Charmaz, 2000). The researcher’s use of the subjective in this study facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of immigrants’ cultural experiences in pre- and post-immigration life and their adjustment to life in Canada. In order to grasp a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher reflected on his own relationship to the topic of inquiry, which is outlined in the following section.

Reflexive Awareness: The Researcher’s Perspective within this Study

This study emerged from my interest in the way individuals derive meaning from culture. My curiosity grew from family narratives of immigration and resettlement that presented comparisons between ‘old world’ and ‘new world’ ideologies and lifestyles. Cultural attachments are an important part of life and provide context into the way individuals gain a sense of meaning and purpose. Stories about early immigration centred on sacrifice and how different family members formed a sense of community.

Despite similar ethnic and religious commonalities between family members, diverse cultural frameworks (e.g., socioeconomic, gender perspectives) were often reflected in the way individuals described their experiences. Out of these discussions emerged my strongly held belief that an examination of the ‘self’ must be embedded in the social and cultural context and include dynamic cultural ways of being. Thus, my own worldview has been shaped by my family history.

My research interests have focused on the way culture impacts on research. After reviewing family experiences, I became curious about how new generations of immigrants experience resettlement. There are few studies that consider culture in relation to resilience. While many studies point to individual characteristics or examine broad aspects of culture, I am interested in social and cultural processes on a more individual level. I believe that
immigrants provide a unique opportunity to explore this question, as they experience cultural transformation that comes to light during contrasts between pre- and post-immigration. This naturally promotes a reflexive examination of cultural identity.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as an alternative to quantitative research methods, which rely on *a priori* assumptions about a phenomenon. Glaser and Strauss delineated an approach that used inductive investigation to generate theory through comparative analysis of social units of meaning. In particular, they explained that “In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept” (p. 23).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued against the automatic use of a logico-deductive approach in research and suggested that both quantitative and qualitative methods need to be considered in relation to the nature of the question being proposed by the researcher. In particular, qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, seek to develop theory “…grounded in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people” (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007, p. 249).

A number of researchers have raised concerns about some basic assumptions embedded in traditional grounded theory. Specifically, grounded theory has been critiqued for being similarly structured towards positivist and objectivist ideology, positioning the researcher as impartial and seeking to discover factual data (Charmaz, 2000; Suddaby, 2006; West, 2001). In contrast, a constructivist approach to grounded theory views the interaction of the researcher and participant as a creation of meaning (Charmaz, 2000). The reaction against traditional forms of grounded theory has led researcher’s (e.g., Charmaz, 2005; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988; West, 2001) to argue for an ideological re-structuring of grounded theory.
Charmaz (2003) argued that grounded theory can bridge critical investigation from either a positivistic or an interpretative framework of inquiry. Charmaz stands against objectivistic forms of grounded theory that, under the pretences of scientific inquiry, result in “…dispassionate, objectivist accounts of their data and assume that by being objective observers that they will discover processes in an external world of their research participants that remains separate from themselves” (p. 500).

Charmaz’s (2000, 2003) perspective on grounded theory posits that “…the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 273). Furthermore, she underscores the need to attend further than presumptions about meaning by gathering “…beliefs and ideologies as well as situations and structures. By studying tacit meanings, we clarify, rather than challenge, respondents’ views about reality” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 275). According to Charmaz, a constructivist approach to grounded theory emphasizes the process in which individuals construct meaning and acknowledges multiple social realities rather than one external truth. The value of a constructivist paradigm is its emphasis on understanding the subjective meanings of an individualized perspective.

In particular, Charmaz (2006) highlighted the importance of eliciting participants’ interpretation of their experiences through in-depth inquiry using open-ended questions. The interview is considered an emergent and flexible process. The use of a constructivist grounded theory approach provides an organic account of immigrant’s experiences through introspection into the researcher as well as an interpretative, constructivist approach to the participant’s internal frame of reference. Furthermore, qualitative inquiry allows for in-depth, first-hand understanding of the complex processes of culture rather than relying on observer-based a priori assumptions. The use of qualitative interviews represents a shift towards knowledge that details the complexities of social and contextual realities of
participants’ experiences, which provided an opportunity to explicate the way cultural processes affect immigrants’ lives during their adaptation to Canada.

Research Participants

The study involved 18 first-generation immigrants of whom nine were male and nine were female. Individuals ranged in age from 25 to 50 years with a mean age of 36 years. At the time of the interviews, participants were living in Toronto from three to 20 years with a mean of seven. The relationship status of participants included the following: seven individuals identified as single; eight were in committed relationships of whom five had dependents living with them; two were divorced; and one participant was separated with children.

Research participants represented a variety of cultural constructs and identified broad and specific forms of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status, which included the following terminology: “middle class background”; “Catholic, female, factory worker”; “Latin American of European ancestry”; “traditional Chinese”; “Muslim, Sunni, Pashtoon”; “Brazilian, Portuguese, Indigenous”; “East Indian”; “Mexican, non-religious”; “South Asian”; “Latin American, the culture of the Aboriginals, the colonized Aboriginals, Catholic”; “Mexican, First Nation American”; “Indian, Punjabi, visible minority”; “religious, educated, middle income”; “middle upper class, Persian”; “Christian”; “multi-ethnic”; and two individuals who chose not to specify. Participants emigrated from diverse geographic regions, which included: East Africa; China, Eastern Europe; Southern Europe; Mexico; the Middle-East; South America; and South Asia.

Immigrant status upon arrival in Canada included the following: 10 designated themselves as landed immigrants; four were refugee claimants; two held study permits; one was a skilled worker; and one who had undocumented status. The majority of participants were Canadian citizens at the time of the interviews except for three individuals who remained refugee claimants and one participant was in the process of applying for
citizenship. Participants' socioeconomic status represented a diverse spectrum. For instance, household incomes ranged from less than $20,000 and upwards to $70,000 to $80,000 per annum. Education levels prior to immigration varied among immigrants: one participant had elementary school education, three participants held college diplomas, three had some university education, three participants earned a bachelor's degree; two had some post-graduate education; and six earned a master's degree. Table 1 summarizes participants' demographic information.

Criteria for inclusion in the study included the following: 1) resettlement occurred during adulthood (18 years and over); 2) participants were between the ages of 25 to 50 and had been living in Canada for at least two years; 3) participants had conversational fluency in English without the need of an interpreter; 4) participants experienced significant stressors related to resettlement in Canada; 5) participants perceived themselves to have adapted successfully to their significant resettlement stressors; 6) individuals whose culture influenced, negatively or positively, the way they cope/adapted to immigration and resettlement stressors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Years in Canada</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
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1 It is important to note that specific aspects of the demographic information have been altered and ranges have been provided (e.g., age) for the purposes of protecting the confidentiality of participants.
Entry Criteria for Resilience

All of the participants in this study met entry criteria for resilience. There have been relatively few psychological studies that have investigated immigrant resilience for adult populations and therefore, terminology and consensus about significant adversity and positive adaptation has been lacking. The current study has brought together research that identifies significant forms of adversity for immigrants in an effort to begin a formulation of adult resilience within the context of culture. The literature has offered important starting points for recognizing both significant adversity and positive adaptation.

Psychological research has indicated a number of areas of significant adversity including both pre-immigration stressors such as trauma (e.g., Birman & Tran, 2008) as well as post-immigration forms of adversity. An overview of stressors pertinent to immigrants was identified by Yakhnich (2008), who highlighted the following: changes to cultural norms; instrumental stress such as poor housing conditions and loss of status; interpersonal distress such as prejudice, discrimination and loneliness; changes to family structure (e.g., loss of family and network); and psychological stress.

A review of the psychological literature indicated a range of stressors in resettlement that overlap with Yakhnich’s (2008) domains as well as other areas. In particular, immigrants can face problems with physical health (Christopher, 2000), psychological distress (Beiser & Hou, 2006) and chronic everyday hassles (Safdar et al., 2003). Socioeconomic stressors have been well documented in research (Lipson, 1992) and include a number of related difficulties such as employment barriers (Reitz, 2002), discrimination with housing (Dion & Dion, 2001), problems with linguistic fluency (Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Padilla et al., 2008) and general economic hardship (Simich, Hamilton, & Baya, 2006). The psychological research has also identified stress associated with gender discrimination (Noh, Wu, Speechley, & Kaspar, 1992) as well as racial and ethnic discrimination (Noh & Kaspar, 2003). These areas of significant adversity provided structure for inclusion in this study. However, entry in
the study was also balanced by recognizing participants’ experiences of significant adversity during resettlement; given that there are no established and empirically tested defining criteria for immigrant resilience, the study sought a flexible approach to entry.

Immigrants who were interested in participation endorsed an overlapping range of problems in resettlement which typically occurred in post-immigration; however, a number of individuals also indicated pre-immigration stressors. It is important to note that immigrants perceived their experiences to represent significant forms of adversity from which they were able to adapt positively. Pre-immigration adversity involved the following experiences: discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, childhood labour and illiteracy, illness, trauma, political unrest and forced migration. Post-immigration stressors involved a wide range of adverse experiences and included 1) psychological distress associated with isolation and loneliness; 2) familial changes including divorce and separation; 3) linguistic changes that affected occupational and social functioning; 4) reduced social support including the loss of family and friends, loss of communal structure, loss of community and related support (e.g., mosque, church), and social exclusion; 5) racism and prejudice such as ethnic and racial devaluation and discrimination based on employment and/or language; 6) changes in socioeconomic status including loss of career, under- and unemployment, discrimination against credentials and professional experiences, reduced standard of living, financial stress/poverty, lack of familiarity with the Canadian labour market, and inadequate housing; and 7) loss of customs and traditions and differences in perceived value-orientations. The above examples provide a sampling of significant adversity. The Results section details all forms of adversity described by immigrants in this study.

In order to fulfill criteria for this study, immigrants who participated indicated that they perceived themselves as having overcome significant adversity by illustrating positive adaptation. The following is a sampling of the way in which participants characterized their recovery: 1) building relationships within one’s ethnic community; for example, by
participating in ethnocultural traditions and engaging in shared ethnic values, beliefs, practices; 2) retaining cultural attachments such as ethnic language; 3) developing interethnic relationships; for example, by affiliating with the larger community, social networking, and participating in cultural exchange; 4) adapting beliefs, practices, and lifestyles to accommodate the changes in the sociocultural environment; 5) accepting cultural changes and diversity; 6) socioeconomic forms of coping including the pursuit of education, English language skills, volunteering and restoring careers to adapt to the Canadian labour market; 7) employing cognitive strategies such as reframing struggles, perseverance, empathy; 8) drawing strength from role models; 9) growth through experiencing a more tolerant environment with respect to norms related to sexual orientation and gender; and 10) practicing religious and spiritual forms of coping such as prayer and involvement in one’s religious community.

Procedure

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the Toronto area through the use of posters (Appendix A) placed in libraries and community centres. Additionally, recruitment was attained through listservs, community agencies and at the University of Toronto. Individuals who contacted the investigator by telephone from a poster were screened by telephone (Appendix B), which clarified inclusion criteria, details about the purpose of the study and the process of involvement, including participant rights. Individuals who contacted the investigator by email through a listserv, were forwarded an information sheet/consent form (Appendix C) and a telephone screen was completed afterwards. The researcher followed a script about the purpose of the study and detailed the rights of participants as well as confidentiality and associated limits. Candidates who maintained interest and met criteria for inclusion were scheduled for an interview at the Counselling and Psychoeducational Clinic
at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Participants received $15 for their involvement.

The study used purposive sampling in order to gain a diversity of cultural groups, a balance between males and females and individuals who identified as having been resilient in their adaptation to life in Canada. Furthermore, the study sought individuals who regarded their culture to have influenced, either positively or negatively, their life and resettlement in Canada. Purposive sampling was considered necessary because of the lack of comprehensive understanding about the way a range of cultural socialization, beliefs, value orientations, and practices affect resettlement (e.g., Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Chirkov, 2009) and the lack of knowledge about immigrant resilience. Twenty-eight individuals contacted the researcher to inquire about participation. After reviewing the details of the information sheet, five participants requested time to think about involvement and did not re-contact the investigator. Three individuals were not included because they did not meet the inclusion criteria and one individual declined during the telephone screen. One interview was not included in the analysis because this individual did not describe positive adaptation in resettlement.

Inquiry Process

Each participant was interviewed on one occasion for one to two hours. The investigator provided an overview of the purpose of the research at the outset of the interview and also highlighted important points from the information sheet such as limits of confidentiality and participant’s rights. Participants were given the information sheet to read before the start of the interview. The information sheet included the following: the limits of confidentiality; voluntary nature of participation; potential risks of being interviewed; the right to decline conversation about any topic that may result in distress; and audiotape procedures. As well, participants were made aware that their interview data might be used for educational purposes and publication but that confidentiality and anonymity would be
maintained. The participants were asked to sign the information/consent form for participation. Following, the participant completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D). Before the beginning of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the procedure.

The interviewer asked participants to choose a pseudonym to help ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Afterwards, the interview began by the researcher asking about their interest in the study, the personal meaning of their culture, followed by a focus on the central question of the study, using open-ended interview prompts when necessary (Appendix E). The audiotaped interview was transcribed and the data has remained with the investigator. Audiotapes were erased after 30 days from each participant’s interview. After completion of the interview, participants could request a summary of the research findings and were encouraged to provide feedback.

**Interview**

The interview detailed each participant’s pre- and post-immigration experiences and focused on exploration of the central question: When you examine the different stressors you have had to deal with before and after immigrating to Canada, what aspects of your cultural experiences influenced you, either positively or negatively, in your adaptation to the Canadian culture?

In-depth interviewing helped to capture the process of pre- and post-immigration life. The interview included prompts that detailed each participant’s experience of being a first-generation immigrant and the corollary adjustment process in resettlement. The use of interview prompts helped to explore the way individuals conceptualized their culture in pre- and post-immigration life. The interview style was balanced between an informal approach and the use of focused interview prompts in an effort to allow each participant’s unique perspective to emerge while also maintaining attention to the central question. Each interview ended after the participant had the opportunity to tell their complete story, which
ranged from one to two hours. Afterwards, a summary of the main themes was provided to each person. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback to ensure that their narrative had been accurately portrayed as well as reflect on the main themes that had been identified from an amalgamation of all narratives to verify the development of a model. Feedback received by participants was incorporated into the data analysis. Additionally, one-third of the interviews were reviewed with the supervisor on this study to discuss data analysis and emerging themes.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis was a comprehensive process that evolved until there was sufficient understanding of the role of culture in immigrant adaptation and a saturation of themes from the interviews. The analysis involved several readings of the transcripts while noting initial impressions of the interviews to help guide a process of discovery. A diary was kept throughout the interviews in order to recall specific details of each participant’s narrative. This also provided a way to begin formulating ideas about the central question. Interview content was then imported into a qualitative database, NVivo (QSR International, 2002), to organize and further analyze information.

The data in this study was examined through the use of methodological principles of constructivist grounded theory (e.g., Charmaz 2000, 2003, 2006). In particular, the use of constant comparison provided a structure from which to understand and formulate relationships between and within each participant’s narrative. Constant comparison was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and involves coding information for defined groups and determining theoretical properties that link categories, which was detailed by Glaser (1992) in the following way:

The analyst codes incidents for categories and their properties and the theoretical codes that connect them. By the very act of conceptualising the data, we fix continuing attention on the underlying patterns involved in the incidents coded. Once
our attention is fixed on a category, we begin to examine and discover emergent properties about the category by constantly coding and analysing. Such categories and properties only conceptualize what we see, but with theoretical codes we form the connections between them which yield hypotheses—which in turn suggest how the incidents and categories thereof may be related to each other (p. 39).

The process of constant comparison helped to define and categorize data from the interviews throughout theory development. Constructivist grounded theory analysis based on Charmaz’s (2006) approach also indicated other important techniques of data analysis which were utilized in this study. Specifically, the initial stage of open coding included line-by-line selection of the smallest units of meaning; appropriate labels were identified to capture the expressed idea contained within the codes. After there were no more separate units of meaning, the next step of focused coding provided a more directed search of frequently arising earlier codes to explain larger sections of data.

Coding was an emergent process that continued to evolve through the comparison of categories to one another in order to develop higher level themes. Charmaz (2003) highlighted the importance of comprehensive comparisons to include individual to individual comparisons within each narrative at different points of time, micro evaluation of incidents (i.e., episode to episode), contrasting data with category and finally comparing category to category. The process of axial coding identified the relationships among lower level categories to higher order categories until a unifying and central dimension was explicated from the comparisons. Although, these stages of analysis are depicted in a linear manner, the process was guided by continual discovery that flowed between stages until there was a coherent understanding of a model.

Charmaz (2000) also stressed the value of memo writing which provided an intermediate, transitional step between coding and the final analysis. Specifically, she stated that “This step helps to spark our thinking and encourages us to look at our data and codes
in new ways...we elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that are subsumed under our codes” (p. 517). The transitional task of memo writing in developing the theory of Belonging was significant in exploring and elaborating on coded immigrant experiences in pre- and post-migration life. The creative process of memo writing involved comparison of individuals as well as higher level categories. The use of memo writing also facilitated new insights and relationships between codes by identifying in a concrete manner (i.e., writing) a deeper understanding of immigrant adaptation through reflexive questioning and re-examining assumptions. In the final six interviews, emerging themes and the researcher’s interest/ideas about immigrant adaptation were discussed with participants (i.e., theoretical sampling) to elaborate further on information gathered from earlier interviews until a saturation point was reached.

Theory constructed within a constructivist theoretical paradigm seeks to provide understanding about a given phenomenon rather than an explanation. Charmaz (2006) explained that theory building is based on interpretive processes that “…allow for indeterminacy rather than seeking causality and give priority to showing patterns and connections rather than to linear reasoning” (p. 126), which allows for multiple realities of construction. The current theory developed in the study emerged from lower level categories that included both experiences of adversity and positive adaptation. Mid-level themes that encompassed adversity and positive adaptation were explained by Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance. These two mid-level themes emerged from theoretical coding as processes that identified a relationship to the unifying theory Belonging, which was fundamental to the lower steps of the hierarchy of analysis and demonstrated the significance of pre- and post-immigration experiences.
Chapter Three
Organization and Presentation of the Research Results

This chapter provides an overview of the results. The research findings are discussed in detail over the following five chapters. Qualitative analysis revealed the following key themes and domains of culture: Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Religion. The key themes Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, Gender, and Sexual Orientation included both significant adversity that related to pre- and post-immigration life as well as positive adaptation that facilitated recovery in Canada. The key theme Religion revealed thematic areas that solely facilitated positive adaptation in Canada as participants did not identify any forms of adversity specific to religious beliefs and practices. The process of immigrant resilience explained by adversity and recovery was not necessarily linear or causal in nature; thus stressors did not always have overlapping responses and individuals did not always adapt well in all aspects of their lives. Participants discussed adversity in both pre- and post-immigration life and the way they overcame their hardships. Immigrants varied in terms of their cultural attachments as some individuals described stronger affiliation to specific domains of culture. For example, an immigrant may have identified with their religion or socioeconomic status rather than their ethnicity or gender. Therefore, adversity and recovery was unique to each immigrant and was contextualized by their pre- and post-immigration attachments and experiences.

Hierarchical analysis, based on constructivist grounded theory, indicated that participants’ process of resilience was represented by mid-level themes of Feeling Acceptance and Forming Attachments, which were embedded in all key themes as well as lower themes and categories. Qualitative analysis revealed that the overarching theme of Belonging both overlapped with and was defined by the process of immigrant resilience.

The mid-level theme Feeling Acceptance was evident in a number of important areas of adaptation. Immigrants discussed experiences that hindered acceptance in regard to
work life (e.g., employment-related discrimination), social life (e.g., differing sociocultural norms) as well as loneliness as a result of loss of their past family and social structures. Moreover, participants did not necessarily feel acceptance within their own ethnic background. Specifically, both female and self-identified gay participants described experiences of prejudice based on their gender and sexual identity respectively within their heritage culture. Another important aspect of acceptance involved participants’ approval of norms within the Canadian sociocultural environment when it differed from their homeland; a willingness to engage in social life was one aspect of increasing a perception of Belonging. Thus acceptance was identified by a duality of approval – perception of acceptance from the dominant culture and immigrants’ acceptance of the sociocultural environment – which appeared to contribute to gaining a stronger perception of Belonging in Canada. Feeling Acceptance was not considered an achieved endpoint but a perception that developed from experiences in immigrant adaptation and was explained by lower level themes and categories. In addition, participants’ narratives indicated differential acceptance in a range of cultural themes; thus, an individual may feel acceptance in one area of life but not in other ways, highlighting the contextual nature of adaptation.

The second mid-level theme Forming Attachments identified the significance of bonding and security (e.g., emotional, financial) in a number of ways. Individuals described difficulty coping with the loss of important attachments (e.g., family, community) in their homeland, which added to problems with adjustment. In addition, immigrants identified difficulty forming interpersonal attachments in Canada, which related to adjustment to different social customs and language. Other deleterious aspects of attachment involved loss of career identity and socioeconomic status that resulted in financial instability. Loss of family and support networks, problems with interpersonal adjustment, and loss of social standing contributed to overall distress such as feelings of loneliness, alienation and a sense of outsider status.
Immigrants identified the way cultural attachments increased their perception of connection to Canada and contributed to resilience. In particular, immigrants described the meaning of cultural forms of ethnic bonding, which was derived from commonalities in values, norms and socialization. Moreover, the development of an attachment to the Canadian sociocultural milieu was facilitated by bonding outside of one’s traditional ethnic background. Participants also discussed the significance of attachment in other areas of culture throughout the key themes. For example, a number of immigrants identified the importance of their socioeconomic lifestyle prior to immigration. Building a new career path and gaining financial stability appeared to increase attachment in Canada. Each participant revealed the significance of attachment through a range of areas of cultural contexts such as religious forms of affiliation, as well as a sense of attachment based on norms within the larger community. In particular, many female participants addressed the way the political culture and norms of equality led to increased attachment and Belonging in Canada. The process of developing cultural attachments occurred from experiences of adversity and recovery and was detailed throughout all levels of themes and categories. Participants did not describe an endpoint of attachment as it appeared to be best represented as variable in different cultural domains. The mid-level, axial themes Feeling Acceptance and Forming Attachments were expressed in immigrants’ positive adaptation to adversity and contributed to a perception of Belonging.

The overarching theme of Belonging represented a unifying construct of immigrants’ cultural narratives (see Figure 1).
Hierarchical analyses suggested that an increased sense of *Belonging* contributed to a perception of resilience in post-immigration adjustment. The overarching theme of *Belonging* involved more than a perception of connection to others; it also pointed to a transformation through which immigrants shifted from ‘outsider’ to ‘insider’ status by gaining a sense of identification with and inclusion in Canadian society. Individuals discussed periods of marginalization and a struggle to develop a perception of equal status; the need to be a contributing member of society was paramount for participants. The process of regarding oneself as part of the Canadian identity was multi-determined (e.g., employment opportunities, quality of social support, experiences of prejudice) and did not necessarily follow an upward trajectory. Individuals discussed intermittent periods throughout their resettlement in which they experienced alienation (e.g., cultural, social, and socioeconomic) that negatively affected their sense of being part of the Canadian cultural milieu. In contrast, participants noted the way *Belonging* was incrementally fostered within a range of cultural
domains and by a perception of acceptance and attachment. *Belonging* developed through experiences of adversity and positive adaptation and represented a unique process for each individual, largely dependent on pre- and post-immigration experiences. For example, individuals who had a strong attachment to their religion described the way it played an important role in the process of *Belonging* in Canada. Other participants who experienced alienation in their homeland as a result of their sexual orientation described a stronger sense of *Belonging* in Canada because of the greater latitude in social acceptance. Thus, *Belonging* was contextualized within each immigrant’s life history and affected by their experiences of adversity and positive adaptation in Canada.
Chapter Four

Ethnicity

The key theme, Ethnicity, elaborates and contextualizes the way in which diverse ethnocultural representations such as social dynamics, norms, values, and practices influence the process of immigrant adaptation. Immigrants contrasted their past ethnocultural way of life to their experiences in Canada. Grounded theory data analysis of the interviews revealed the significance of ethnicity and its role in providing a structure or cultural scaffolding from which participants’ derived meaning and related.

Participants defined their ethnocultural backgrounds in a range of ways; however, many immigrants described their heritage in terms of a sense of attachment to a group through which they shared a geographical location, language, and a distinct set of norms and practices. A number of individuals in this study identified their ethnic identity in categorical terms, offering broad definitions, which included: East African, East Indian, Fars, Mexican, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Russian and South Asian. Many participants used qualifying terminology such as the following: traditional Chinese; Latin-Brazilian; Latin American with European ancestry; Mexican and Native American. One participant provided more diffuse ethnic attachments, preferring multi-ethnic terminology. Specifically, the individual linked numerous geographic changes to their identification with multiple ethnicities from the following regions: the Middle-East, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The participant succinctly referred to their ethnic background as a “basket of different fruits.”

The following sections provide an analysis of specific ethnocultural and related interpersonal processes that affected immigrants’ adaptation to Canada.

Immigrants described both adverse circumstances related to their ethnicity and responses that facilitated recovery. In terms of adversity, one particularly difficult process of adjustment involved loss. Many immigrants identified the significance of family, friendships, work, and community networks. From an ethnocultural standpoint, those relationships and
attachments represented a loss of a cultural-relational lifestyle. In tandem with significant losses, immigrants identified their struggle to develop new interpersonal attachments and the challenge to become grounded culturally in the Canadian environment. Divisions between an immigrant’s ethnocultural heritage (e.g., norms) and sociocultural life in Canada appeared to decrease a sense of Belonging.

The process of recovery involved building an ethnocultural attachment to Canada that was facilitated by intra- and intercultural relationships. Participants illustrated various ways that they reconnect to their ethnocultural traditions through relationships, which helped them take root in a familiar way of life and ground themselves in a Canadian identity. In addition, immigrants also developed cross-cultural affiliations that not only provided a cultural-relational exchange but greater cultural facility in the Canadian culture and an increased perception of Belonging.

Higher order analyses of immigrant narratives reflected a process of Belonging that occurred through experiences of adversity and recovery. Important elements of Belonging were facilitated by enduring attachments (e.g., social, occupational, community). Another significant part of Belonging was facilitated by an acceptance of changes to one’s ethnocultural lifestyle and feeling accepted as an equal member by the dominant cultural group.

The following sections describe four main themes under the key theme Ethnicity, which are divided into adversity and positive adaptation. The two main themes under adversity include Ethnocultural Estrangement and Interethnic Detachment. The main themes that indicate positive adaptation and resilience include Intraethnic Attachments and Interethnic Attachments. It is important to highlight that the connection between these two main groupings is not necessarily a linear/cause-effect relationship. For example, many

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2 In the following sections and chapters, immigrants refer to the dominant cultural group as the ‘white’ and/or Canadian population.
participants were simultaneously impacted by other elements of culture such as religion, gender, socioeconomic factors, which affected their ethnocultural experiences and adaptation. The results identified relevant themes that indicate both adversity and recovery processes, but do not suggest causal relationships.

**Ethnocultural Estrangement**

The first main theme, Ethnocultural Estrangement, emerged as a significant form of adversity for participants. Specifically, immigrants discussed the impact of losing important ethnocultural aspects of their lives after immigration as well as challenges related to developing a cultural attachment and Belonging in Canada. Immigrants reported a perception of estrangement in Canada in response to the loss of their social network, the perceived differences in family structure and relationships, and the struggle to relate to differing ethnic-based values, norms, and practices. Two sub-themes elaborate on different aspects of Ethnocultural Estrangement, which include: Loss of Family and Social Network and Family Values (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Adversity: Ethnocultural Estrangement](image)

**Loss of Family and Social Network**

The first sub-theme highlights the meaning that is derived from ethnocultural forms of social networks. Specifically, participants indicated that social networks (e.g., primary and extended family, community) imparted core values and a process of connecting to others.
The loss of key family and social support often led to periods of loneliness and a feeling of being culturally disoriented in Canada.

Manuco discussed the way the loss of social support and related ethnocultural traditions impacted on his resettlement. His route to immigration as a political refugee involved an extensive journey in which he left his home in Peru and traversed through many countries without legal entry status. Manuco’s self-described traumatic journey was particularly problematic to his wife who contracted an illness that nearly ended her life. After living in the United States for a period of time, in poverty and with undocumented status, Manuco and his family applied to live in Canada as political refugees. Manuco’s resettlement in Canada was problematic due to his uncertain status as an asylum seeker as well as living in conditions of poverty. However, he emphasized the loss of family and the corollary ethnocultural traditions of life in Peru as being the most significant emotional stressor. Manuco explained the vital role that his family (i.e., primary and extended) played in his life: “Well, all the family at the table, everybody sings at the table, eating traditional food and talking, dancing. It’s very common...”

Immediate and extended family proximity was fundamental to Manuco’s social network and way of life in Peru. He noted the significance of family living together and the communal sentiments that represented instrumental aspects of his lifestyle. In Canada, Manuco did not have a robust social network and he provided an example of the way he and his family were affected by the changes to their social network:

…it was my daughter’s birthday. And she was very sad because there is no grandma around, no grandpa around, no cousins around, very silent. We tried to celebrate here with a trip to McDonald’s with hamburger and that’s it. So we cannot celebrate the way we do at home.

The result of Manuco’s loss of family and social network detracted from a perception of attachment to Canada. He noted the way those losses impacted on his daily life:
...I was doing good because I knew that I had an opportunity to get legal status in Canada. But on the other hand, it was very difficult because you were isolated, because we, back home, we are used to going to family and friends. We always have somebody close to us we can rely on. Like I said before, in Montreal at that time, we didn't have anybody, loneliness was difficult, it was hard to get used to the system, everything was difficult.

Anna also experienced emotional hardship related to the loss of her social network of family and friends and the loss of ethnocultural traditions and practices. Anna emigrated from Poland during a period of political unrest. She initially chose to resettle in a Polish area in Toronto where she could live close to other nationals after losing familial and social networks in her homeland. Anna recalled the closeness of her family bond and their gatherings in which ethnocultural traditions were celebrated in Poland:

My family and friends had many gatherings, dinners, celebrations [and have] lots of traditions which came from the Roman Catholic church like Christmas and we were close. We have special dinners with lots of very good food and we break bread, it is significant to us, like communion. And we break [bread] before this dinner with people...

The loss of her social network, instilled with ethnocultural tradition, initially detracted from Anna’s sense of connection to Canada. In particular, she described family gatherings to be a central element of her “Slavic” heritage. The loss of her family network created significant emotional distress:

...it’s a tradition to have gatherings during the weekend. We are going for lunch at somebody’s house, and somebody’s coming to our house for lunch. It’s a very strong bond between people in my culture. It was shocking for me here when I came here...

Anna’s excerpt highlights the loss of her relational attachments, which was facilitated by an ethnocultural social network and customs.
A number of participants like Manuco and Anna described a period of grief from the loss of their instrumental and affective social networks. These social systems represented a source of ethnic identity and emotional grounding that was difficult to replace in Canada as it conveyed important ethnocultural meaning to their lives.

**Family Values**

Immigrants reflected on the way their perception of differing family values from the dominant cultural group contributed to feelings of alienation and a lack of acceptance of cultural norms in Canada. Several participants noted that the loss of their family network heightened awareness of its centrality to their lives and represented an important aspect of their past ethnocultural lifestyle. In particular, participants discussed the role of parental and extended family as a way of being connected to their ethnocultural values. The loss of family and related ethnocultural values represented a significant form of adversity.

The process of resettlement for Manuco involved a struggle to preserve his ethnocultural family values. Specifically, Manuco was concerned about not being able to raise his child in a Peruvian family-relational style (i.e., communalism) due to the strong influence of the dominant cultural group, whose values he perceived to be divergent from his own:

…in our case, our culture is very conservative. We are used to being close to family and when you take your daughter or your son to a daycare, they are giving another culture to your son. In a way, they are teaching your kids to learn and to understand and to respect another culture, a Canadian culture. But it’s not that culture that you want to teach to your son or to your daughter, right?

Manuco’s concern related to his daughter losing and replacing the family’s ethnocultural conservative values with those of the dominant cultural group. In the following excerpt he relays a conversation with his daughter that demonstrates vigilance to preserve his Peruvian ethnocultural and family values as well as his discomfort with specific family-
related norms (i.e., elder care) in Canada. Specifically, Manuco noted that his daughter questioned why elderly family members live in retirement homes and he explained “We always try to tell her that’s not our style of living. So we need to respect our grandparents.”

Manuco elaborated on his ethnocultural perspective and expressed the importance of families remaining together through old age or living in close proximity; caring for one’s elderly parents is attached to the notion of respect, which he referred to as an important cultural-familial value. Thus, placing parents in a home would be untenable from his ethnocultural perspective:

Most of the grandparents are in station [nursing] homes [in Canada] alone, and you need to pay somebody to look after them. You don't see that back home; you respect the old people. I’m not saying that people here in Canada don’t respect the older people… back home it’s a must; it’s the children’s responsibility…

The difference in perceived family values decreased Manuco’s sense of Belonging in Canada.

Zizo offered an analogous ethnocultural perspective on family values vis-à-vis elder care. He immigrated to Canada by himself from the Middle-East with the aim of enhancing his career in finance. Zizo experienced internal conflict after leaving his elderly parents. He explained that, based on his ethnocultural perspective, adult children hold caretaking responsibility for their parents. Alongside these concerns, Zizo’s first year in Canada was particularly distressful. He reflected on having no viable job opportunities and isolation; Zizo noted that he had been living in an office within an industrial complex that left him alone much of the time. His living arrangements, combined with an inability to care for his parents or contact them regularly, resulted in significant subjective distress.

Zizo offers the following sentiments about his differing family values from the dominant cultural group in Canada and the internal conflict that ensued as a result of leaving his parents behind:
Culture and faith and background are very important because in our culture we have
to care for them. We don’t send them to an elderly house, we don’t…they stay with
us. We look after them because they looked after us when we are kids.

Zizo’s comment about care for elderly in Canada illustrates the way his ethnocultural ethos
differs in perception from the dominant cultural group. Firstly, he views himself to be failing
familial obligations as he is not currently attending to his elderly parents’ care taking needs.
Secondly, he denotes a value-based schism with those whom he views as part of the
dominant ethnocultural group.

Richa posed a similar concern about family values that she perceived to be common
in Canada. She emigrated with her family in late-adolescence from India. Her parents’
decision to immigrate to Canada was based on providing educational and career
opportunities for their children. Richa described her ethnic background as South Asian,
which included an attachment to the geographic region as well as her Islamic religious
roots. Her perspective about family values is similar to many immigrants in this study, who
noted the way parental care takes place directly by family members, which is considered
to symbolize an important value orientation. Often, immigrants like Richa expressed a
sense of disbelief and lack of acceptance about ethnocultural practices that they perceived
to be routine in Canada:

The other thing that I would say about my culture, which I want to hold onto, is my
value system and my religion, and the values you give to children and they expect
from them…You won’t find anybody in our country, or even people living here from
my background who would leave their parents on their own! It would hardly happen,
it would hardly happen, no group homes there, like no nursing homes back home,
there is no concept, even the hospitals, you wouldn’t see old people there.

The contrast in ethnocultural traditions created a perception of emotional distance and
separateness from the dominant cultural group. Participants’ narratives highlight the
perceived gap between their familial values and those in the Canadian society, which was primarily reflected through elderly care. Perceived differences in values signified an ethnocultural disconnect during the transition to the sociocultural milieu in Canada.

**Summary of Ethnocultural Estrangement**

The main theme Ethnocultural Estrangement represented loss and cultural disorientation that ensued in post-migration life. Participants noted the significance of their past social networks, which represented a larger family and a sense of community. Qualitative analysis indicated that relationships were pivotal to one’s connection to ethnicity. Specifically, social networks were bound in ethnocultural values and norms that provided a sense of interpersonal affiliation. The loss of family and social networks increased immigrants’ social and cultural estrangement in Canada. In addition, the disparity in ethnocultural values and norms, identified in the form of elder care, hindered a perception of emotional attachment to Canada for a number of participants and decreased feelings of acceptance of cultural mores.

**Interethnic Detachment**

The second main theme, Interethnic Detachment, identified ethnocultural factors that hindered the development of close relationships. Participants discussed a number of forms of alienation that made it difficult to build interpersonal attachments. Moreover, immigrants reported significant incidents in which they did not perceive acceptance from the dominant cultural group based on experiences of racism, which further engendered a sense of outsider status. As a result of difficulties in the formation of interpersonal ties with the broader community, immigrants struggled to gain a perception of Belonging in Canada. There are five sub-themes under Interethnic Detachment, which include: Racism; Interpersonal Alienation; Language Barriers; Structured Relations; and Community Alienation (see Figure 3).
Racism

The first sub-theme, Racism, emerged as a relevant experience of the preponderance of visible minority immigrants in this study. Several participants encountered racism that targeted their ethnocultural minority and immigrant status. Individuals expounded on incidents in which they were characterized as inherently less capable and valuable by comparison to the cultural majority. Immigrants described both direct forms of racism as well as indirect experiences in both social and occupational settings. Experiences of racism engendered feelings of interpersonal isolation and cultural rejection and significantly detracted from a sense of inclusion and Belonging.

Harris immigrated to Canada from Afghanistan for political asylum in his late adolescence with his family. He recalled early experiences as a new immigrant and noted the way he was bullied and ostracized by his peers, which centred on racial and ethnic differences (e.g., values):

I noticed there were racial things. Let's say because I had dark hair and dark skin, like when I was in school. The school I was attending, it was very much in terms of culture and values, and everything, it was different, everybody was looking at me,
and I had a lot to contribute but I was feeling shy. The whole attention was on my face.

Furthermore, Harris experienced direct forms of racism in his peer group:

Well, I was talking to people and I noticed that they were not listening and ignoring me, making fun of me, laughing at me. One of them was telling me “paki” even though I am Persian. They were calling me “paki” and even when I was talking in English they were laughing at my English as well because of my accent. So I felt very alienated.

Similarly, Richa described a number of incidents of racial prejudice. In one particularly upsetting episode, she was scolded and demeaned in public by a postal worker:

…some people do make racial comments…I had to take a subway one day and I was very much scared that I would get lost…I approached a postman and asked him, “Excuse me, can you tell me where the northbound subway is?” He stood there and looked at me and said, “How long have you been here?” And I said, “It has been two years.” And he said “That’s why. I can see that you people don’t have manners and never learn how to approach a stranger.” I said, “Excuse me, I did not get that.” “You need to say pllleeease, can I ask you a question” and I said, “I am sorry if I offended you, but please can I ask you that question?”

Richa’s excerpt highlights the ridicule she faced that targeted her ethnocultural background and racial minority status. The incident represented a heightened point of exclusion from Canadian society. Additionally, Richa denoted the significance of being ostracized by a Canadian official. In the following excerpts, she elaborated on the meaning of this event to her:

That offended me so badly. So badly. It was a racial comment because it was “You people will never have manners.” He said “you” and it was so painful to hear. And, I felt he was saying, “You people are of colour.” He made it so clear and I felt very
offended. And surprisingly, he was sitting next to me on the subway and he was so kind and gentle to all white people like saying “Hello, hi” and I felt completely excluded. It doesn’t make any difference in my life but it does offend you when you are coming to a country that is supposed to be multicultural, it doesn't make you feel part of a country. Where is the diversity? If all of us are immigrants or were immigrants at some point, then we should all have the right to feel comfortable in this place.

The notion of Canada as representing tolerance and respect for diverse groups was questioned by many racial minority participants who noted a schism between the political policy of multiculturalism and the day-to-day reality of their lives. For example, Tricia, who emigrated from Nigeria by herself to attend university, outlined more subtle forms of racial prejudice:

Yes, what you look like, trust me…you sit in class and you’re prejudged already. There have been times when I sit in a class, and nobody would sit by me. There have been times where you go for a workshop and already you’re being categorized, just because. And I can’t change my skin. I haven’t even spoken a word, so you don’t know what my accent sounds like. But the moment you see my color, it’s like, okay, immediately people put you in a different category.

Tricia’s depiction of social exclusion delimited her perception of Belonging, as she emphasized in the following quotes:

Here, you come and it's like, nobody's says a word. What is wrong with me? Is it because, you know, you’re isolated. You start judging yourself…and then I realize that, okay, this is part of racism… It’s like feeling that you don’t belong. You go to a place and there's a feeling that you don't really belong…
Tricia experiences highlighted the isolating and stigmatizing effects of racial prejudice. Isolation from the dominant-cultural group, as evidenced by several other participants, invoked feelings of alienation from society.

Participants like Harris, Trisha, and Richa emphasized the way racial bias led to alienation through devaluation of skills and stereotyping. These experiences engendered a perception of a lack of acceptance from the cultural majority and detracted from Belonging.

Interpersonal Alienation

The second sub-theme under the main theme Interpersonal Detachment identified the way in which an individual’s semblance of their ethnocultural identity was expressed as a relational process. Specifically, immigrants described their ethnicity as being a shared experience that provided meaning to their beliefs, values, and practices. Consequently, a major challenge to positive adaptation and integration involved the development of interpersonal relationships and attachments within a new cultural milieu.

Participants reported difficulties gaining a sense of emotional closeness and attachment to others. Immigrants were also affected by not having a social history that is grounded in Canada such as ties to family and the community. Paola immigrated to Canada from Columbia with her husband to experience another cultural environment and to challenge herself both personally and professionally (e.g., career opportunities). Paola reported a difficult transition to life in Canada and described interpersonal alienation.

Paola identified a number of major challenges in her initial adjustment period such as re-establishing her career. The development of an interpersonal network was also problematic. For instance, Paola described her past social network and its interpersonal cultural expressions as symbols of her Columbian ethnic identity. She explained the way in which her interpersonal network in Columbia was attached to her sense of ethnocultural identity:
…I never created a social network on purpose. It was something that was a given. It was given to me by my family, by my school, my friends of friends, and it was a natural social environment. And you carry your history with you and your background. And because you share exactly the same things and have been in exactly the same places, it's very easy to communicate...And here it's not like that, or it wasn't like that at the time.

Without those interpersonal attachments and related ethnocultural identity, Paola described an interpersonal cultural ‘drift’ in Canada in which she did not feel connected to others:

Yes, I was nobody. Honestly, that's how I felt. Nobody knew me...when you grow up in a place, and you say, “Yes, I went to this school,” or, "I was living in that city", you have something to connect. Nothing with my past connected to anybody this way. So it was kind of like, how can I connect with anybody if we don't share the same background and if we don't share the same things? And so, how are you going to recognize me, and how am I going to recognize you? So it was kind of like, how am I going to make something of myself if I don't know who I am in this society? I don't know. I am whatever I am. I didn't have any background to share that with.

Paola’s insights demonstrate the way contrasting ethnocultural points of reference play a role in detracting from the development of ethnocultural attachments. Although Paola was able to establish relationships over time with diverse ethnic groups, she found her early period of resettlement to be emotionally isolating and lonely.

Several participants like Tricia described her perception of interpersonal exclusion based on a perception of ethnocultural differences to the dominant cultural group. Tricia characterized her ethnicity as a “patrilineal” community that is socially organized and communal in nature. Tricia articulated her struggle to achieve a sense of Belonging in Canada as a result of differing interpersonal norms:
It was very difficult because here you come to class, the same people you meet in class, they don’t smile at you, they didn’t even talk to you, and you were wondering what was wrong with them, you know? But it's different because back home when white people come home, they are all around, we are all over them, you know? ...Because our system is more communal. When you come, for instance, if you go, we will automatically, naturally we make friends.

Tricia indicated that an individualistic interpersonal style played a role in her alienation as she pointed to the way she was excluded socially by her peers. Her struggle to integrate socially because of these differences was also compounded by the loss of direct support from her family:

The loneliness was very intense in the first three years. You’re far away from your family, far away from your friends. My mom had to call me every weekend because I needed somebody to talk to all the time and my friends would have to call me.

Gianni also indicated the way in which he experienced alienation from differing interpersonal norms in Canada. He immigrated to Canada from Brazil by himself to build a new career and integrate into a diverse cultural community. Gianni also desired a strong social network as he was close to his siblings and had a supportive social network in his homeland. He had overcome a number of significant stressors after immigrating to Canada such as divorce early in his resettlement. Gianni recalled that he eventually found emotional balance by developing strong social ties within the broader South American community; however, he had problems integrating with the Canadian born population due to a perception of differing interpersonal norms. In particular, Gianni described a perceived lack of emotional expression and openness (i.e., expression of feelings) from the dominant cultural group, which increased his sense of alienation:

No, it’s very hard. And sincerely, you feel a loss of expression of yourself. We Latin Americans, I get my doubts. My friends, I can cry in front of them. It’s not a shame or
Gianni believed that his style of relating to others would not be considered an acceptable form of expression in regard to the norms of the dominant cultural group. Consequently, Gianni experienced greater isolation that prompted him to develop interpersonal relationships to South Americans, even though his desire was to integrate more diversely in other ethnic communities. The struggle to relate to others permeated a number of participants’ stories of post-immigration life, which presented significant challenges to developing a perception of Belonging.

**Language Barriers**

The third sub-theme, Language Barriers, illustrated the way culture is intrinsically tied to communication. Cultural forms of communication contributed to many participants’ trajectory of adaptation. Individuals demarcated the way in which language and paralanguage (i.e., non-verbal communication) detracted from positive adjustment and inhibited a sense of intercultural connectedness. There were two categories under the sub-theme Language Barriers that detailed problems related to interpersonal attachment, which include: Body Language and Ethnocultural Communication.

*Body language.* The first category, Body Language, elicited the way paralanguage, expressed through proximity, demeanour, and other forms of comportment negatively affected pathways to Belonging. Body Language highlighted a link between communication and emotional attachment. Specifically, several participants reflected on times in which they felt emotionally disengaged from interpersonal relations as a result of differing styles of culturally expressed demeanour. For example, Paola described her initial assessment of Canadians as “cold.” Her experiences were rooted in different physical expressions of connectedness, as she stated:
My perception of Canada at the beginning and of Canadians was like, if you go to a place and you’re gathering, everybody talks and drinks, nobody dances. It’s very cold. It takes a while for someone to give you a hug, and you don’t know when someone is really your friend right away.

Correspondingly, Gianni expressed frustration with the lack of emotional connectedness to his peers, which he attributed to a relational style of interpersonal coldness in Canada. Gianni pointed to differences in social customs in Canada that deter emotional expression: “And it’s not just gestures, there’s so many non-verbal rules that nobody knows. For example, even with shaking hands. I shake hands and we hug people. Here we say that it’s sexual harassment. It’s like, ‘Don’t touch me!’” Gianni contrasted his emotional disconnection in Canada to the ease of physical and emotional synergy within his South American compatriots that connoted kinship: “In South America, we hug people when they come and when they leave, if you know the person more than one time. And kiss them on the cheek. And sincerely, [in Canada] you feel a loss of expression of yourself.” His experiences led to a lack of emotional attachment to the dominant cultural group in Canada.

Gianni expressed in the following excerpt a desire to connect with others through physical affection but found that social conventions in Canada inhibited his form of emotional expression and closeness:

… and [if] nobody will teach you [the rules here], how do you learn? …having people saying, "I don’t want to hold your hand," or "What are you doing?" …It really puts you down and sometimes you have to learn to be more distant. Even with some South Americans, we are not allowed shaking hands or not even touching…

Similarly, Paris depicted emotional disengagement that was prompted by a form of paralanguage. Paris’ immigration story is marked by a history of prejudice and life threatening incidents in Mexico. He entered Canada, at first with undocumented status and later sought asylum to escape threats that pertained to his sexual orientation. Paris
explained that the political context in Canada, where he has a perception of personal safety, allowed him to begin healing the emotional scars of the past and integrate into the community on a level that was not possible in his homeland.

However, Paris noted significant stressors during resettlement such as poverty, transient housing conditions, and an emotional disconnection within his interpersonal relationships. Paris offered the following reflection about his cultural-relational style: “For example, in my relationship, me as a Mexican guy, we are more warm in our relationship. We like to hug. Yes, not like all the time, but we love to express our feelings.” He contrasted ethno-relational differences in Canada that was sometimes marked by affective disconnection:

No, they’re really selfish. Like, they don’t want you to spend your time with them. They want their space, and that is good because I like to give space. But sometimes, it’s very difficult. Sometimes it is too much space, or sometimes when they want it…And maybe with that point, it was the barrier for my adaptation in my relationship.

Body Language exemplified some of the adverse interpersonal conditions that participants encountered during resettlement. Interpersonal barriers were marked by nonverbal communication that presented cultural-relational challenges to positive adaptation and Belonging.

*Ethnocultural communication.* The second category illustrated the way verbal communication and its intrinsic cultural meaning presented challenges to forming interpersonal attachments. Positive acculturation often required translation of unfamiliar social exchanges that were bound in cultural codes; deciphering these interpersonal dynamics often proved to be a source of frustration that left new immigrants feeling like symbolic ‘outsiders’ in Canada.

In particular, participants reported a period in which they struggled to gain English language facility. The process of developing a broad comprehension of English and its
cultural subtext was marked by a period in which deeper, cultural-relational meaning lacked emotional connection to others. As a result, many participants characterized a period in which they felt a lack of cultural-relational attachment to members of their community.

Joseph immigrated to Canada from India by himself to increase his career opportunities as well as experience a new cultural environment. Ethnocultural language and style of communication was especially important to Joseph. In a brief but illustrative excerpt, he noted a difference in percussiveness when communicating within his ethnic group by comparison to his interactions with individuals from the dominant Canadian culture. In the following portion of transcript he contended that communication in Hindi exhibited a boisterous and emotionally-laden style within his generation of peers: “We'll be chatting and stuff. It's like an open house. Everything is loud. In fact, the way people talk here is very quiet.” Joseph’s point highlighted the way linguistic expression is punctuated by cultural style. Adjustment to a new form of cultural expression often led participants to feel restricted in expressiveness.

Many participants also described difficulties in comprehension of finer points of meaning in the English language. This was particularly relevant to Paola as she noted her close attachment to the Spanish language in which she experienced satisfaction in self-expression. Her process of gaining comprehension in English was marked by periods of frustration when she wanted to connect to others more deeply:

I speak English and I'm able now to make some jokes in English or whatever. But I don’t have a lot of words for one word. And sometimes I take things literally when they’re not literal. There’s an irony that I’m not getting or there’s a second intention that I’m not getting. And so there’s this language barrier that once you overcome the first barrier, which is accent and making yourself understood, then you have the other barrier, which is idioms and all this second attempt of language which I am still struggling with…
The essence of Paola’s effort is to transcend the depths of cultural communication, which involved a transition from a linguistic parallel process to one that is intersected by culturally-relevant meaning.

For instance, Paola explained the way the Spanish language provides deeper meaning and acts as a conduit to her South American cultural roots. Paola cited the way humour, a cultural-relational dynamic, was a primary form of connection to peers in her ethnic group:

You know, humour is a very cultural thing…And you know how to read the other and you know when one is serious and one is playing…If there was a Canadian and he or she couldn't read if I was joking or not, the irony… because it's very subtle in Spanish. You don't change your expression; you're just saying it as if you were serious and it’s a joke. But if you’re of the same culture, you totally understand that it’s a joke. But here you wouldn’t understand because it comes from a different structure, a different grammar structure or a different language structure.

Paola’s example highlights the way language facilitates cultural relational meaning. In addition, her quote demonstrates the way ethnic language can provide a depth of connection to others.

Newness with English delimited the link of sharing one’s emotional world as Paola described a conversation with her friend and the sense of restoration when connecting to individuals in Spanish: “I have two friends. Sometimes one of them just calls me and says, “Damn, I’m missing Spanish,” and I say, “Me, too.”

Other participants like Paris indicated a perception of greater emotional distance from peers as a result of his struggle to articulate deeper sentiments. He confirmed the way this was particularly challenging in his expression of emotional nuance:

…And maybe with that point, it [English] was the barrier for my adaptation in my relationship. Sometimes I want to tell a Canadian guy all I want but sometimes it’s
difficult to find the right word, to find the word that makes him feel what I want to say, because there is a really big difference between Spanish and English. For example, "love" in English is love for a friend, love for your partner, love for your mother. But in Spanish, we have a higher degree for words what describes every level of your love. “Te quiero”, “Te amo”, “Te estimo”, “Te aprecio”, “Me caes bien.” Everyone has a label. But in English, there’s just love.

The barrier of communicating in a new language went beyond fluency for several participants. Deeper cultural meaning was often characterized as being attached to linguistic exchanges. Participants like Paris noted frustration in the loss of meaningful and emotionally laden ethnocultural connection. The loss of regular communication in one’s heritage language presented a challenge for participants’ attachments and interpersonal adaptation to life in Canada.

*Structured Relations*

Many participants identified a diverging structure in interpersonal relationships when comparing norms in their ethnocultural background to those in Canada. Individuals reported awkwardness in embracing nuanced forms of interpersonal behaviour, which hindered forming closer relationships. Specifically, participants pointed to a more rigid and formal nature of interactions among their Canadian peers. Paola provided an example of this phenomenon:

It’s like you go for a coffee but then you don’t know if you can call or not. It’s very structured. There’s a lot of rules in the relations and how relations work. You have to call before going somewhere, you have to make an appointment before this, everything has to be planned and you have to take into account certain things. In Latin America you just take for granted some things.
Paola’s excerpt illustrates the way she felt encumbered by the structure and formality of relationships. Furthermore, she contrasts her relationships in Columbia in which she characterized greater spontaneity:

Oh, you meet someone and you can call them the next day. “Remember me?”… But here, people may be dying to go out or dying to connect, but they’re shy. It’s more outgoing [in Columbia]. It’s a fast pace. Meeting people is not a problem in Latin America, not a problem. It’s very easy.

Paola opined that rigid interpersonal boundaries prevent people from acting on their desire for connection to others. Thus, Paola surmised that more rigid rules governing interactions produce emotional distance and act as a barrier to creating friendships. Paola suggests that interpersonal codes that are informed by cultural norms take time to decipher as she stated: “Yes, because they have boundaries. You have to learn how to read people.”

Other participants also discussed the way in which social conventions in Canada reduced connectedness to others and led to alienation. For example, Joseph argued that there was a greater degree of interpersonal spontaneity in his homeland: “In India, it is interesting, we are extremely friendly people. Even if we know them for just a couple of hours, we’ll invite them to our home, and have a coffee or tea with them.” In Canada, Joseph said that greater formality and emotional distance existed within peer relationships: “You know, I talk to someone and say ‘Hi’ where I grew up; people talk, actually, but here, if you say ‘Hi’ and you talk to someone, then they pull back.”

Gianni described a formality within interpersonal relationships that was marked by “political correctness.” He perceived rigidity in interpersonal relationships because of concern about offending others, which created a sense of disconnection between ethnic groups:

Not that we don’t want it [interethnic relationships], because we are learning to do that here in Canada because everything here…there’s a banality. If you do this,
there's a law. Everything is so bureaucratical in our society…there are the rules. The rules are trying to make things work. But too many rules make people not be themselves…

Differing social rules and style of interaction was perceived as less spontaneous and formal in manner by comparison to a number of immigrants’ past ethnocultural experiences. Formality in terms of relationship convention proved to be a way of distancing a number of immigrants from interpersonal closeness.

Community Alienation

The fifth and final sub-theme, Community Alienation, detailed the way immigrants felt disconnected to a perception of community. Manuco explains the way ethnocultural sentiments are ascribed in social interactions that bind community members together. In the following remarks, Manuco elaborated on the vital connection between the individual and the community:

I remember that my sister, for about four years already, she has been trying to convince my father to go to the United States to live with her. And my parents don’t want to because they say, “hey you go to the supermarket and you don’t have anybody to talk to. You buy your food and that’s it.”

Manuco’s example demonstrated the link between Peruvian cultural values and bonding within the community.

For a number of immigrants such as Manuco, relationships are conceived as being broader than the family unit and extend to neighbours and community. Manuco further elaborated on his relational style of collectivism in which connections to community members (i.e., neighbours) are critical:

Our culture is different traditionally in that you worry a lot. You worry a lot for everything and you are very interested in building a good relationship with neighbours, to live like a family, even though they’re not members of your family, it’s
very important for us to feel like a family. That’s our unit as a family. And here you feel like a stranger.

The ‘individual’ as inferred by Manuco, is part of an interrelated network of relationships that provided security and a sense of Belonging. Secure attachment for Manuco was bound in having a perception of community. This loss of interconnected relationships proved to be a barrier to Manuco’s interpersonal adjustment to life in Canada as he illustrated in the following quote:

I've been living for more than one year in this apartment, and I don't see who is living in the other house. You don't have that connection, you know? Probably some neighbourhoods, they have that connection. But most of them, you know, they don't have that connection. So even friends and even neighbours are close to you. But here you don't see that. That is something else that I miss. I get used to it now, let's say the first few years in Canada was something really difficult to understand, why people don't help each other, you know?

Similarly, Joseph described a sense of alienation from his community in Canada. He noted a sharp contrast in his upbringing in which there were greater ties to the community in India: “And even when you live there [India] you always know who they [neighbours] are. Here, they don't even know their neighbours...But there, you know the whole neighbourhood.” Joseph surmised that a sense of interpersonal connection in his community in India was facilitated by ethnocultural traditions, as he explained:

…like, Diwali, it’s a Hindu festival and an open house. All the neighbours are welcome, even if we know them for a few days, they’ll come. It’s still going on in India...They'll bring the gifts and we'll bring the gifts and exchange the gifts, we'll be chatting and stuff. It's like an open house.

Joseph said that without close community ties he struggled with low mood: “…when I was alone here, I was so depressed, so stressed out, I was in shock…”
Anna shared a comparable perspective to Joseph and characterized interpersonal norms in Canada as being distinctly different from her self-described “Slavic” roots:

In Polish culture, we are very warm people... For example, if you live in the building you know lots of people from the building...and if an old person doesn't have family, when I bake the cake I share with her. In Canada, it's very rare. You live in the one building and you hardly know the people.

Many participants like Anna commented on feeling a perception of disconnection to the community, which engendered isolation. Disconnect from the community appeared to increase a sense of estrangement from the Canadian cultural environment and appeared to detract from Belonging.

**Summary of Interethnic Detachment**

Immigrants described a number of significant challenges to forming ethnic attachments in post-immigration life. Qualitative analysis reflected the importance of familial and social roots, which immigrants struggled to overcome in gaining a perception of Belonging. Building social connections with community members often involved an adjustment to cultural-relational norms such as communal versus individualistic forms of attachment.

Ethnocultural forms of rejection such as racism increased estrangement and fostered divide between visible minority immigrants and the cultural majority. Other types of social and emotional distancing were intrinsic in the subtext of communication, which revealed a culturally-laden process, rather than being a matter of mere fluency. Immigrants also divulged a lack of connection to their community; in particular, individuals commented on a cultural-relational structure that prized privacy, formality, and independence rather than closer social ties with more diffuse boundaries between the individual/family and the larger community.
The following sections reflect participants’ approaches to coping with ethnocultural loss and alienation. Immigrants’ navigation toward resilience was developed by socio-emotional attachments such as participating in ethnocultural traditions as well as engaging with others who shared ethnic-related beliefs, values, and practices. In addition, individuals broadened their ethnocultural experiences with others from different cultural backgrounds, which also appeared to facilitate interpersonal attachments and a sense of Belonging in Canada. Specifically, the key theme Ethnicity included two main themes of positive adaptation, which included Intraethnic Attachments and Interethnic Relationships. Although these two main themes have a relationship to the previously detailed main themes, Ethnocultural Estrangement and Intercultural Detachment, immigrant narratives did not indicate a direct or linear relationship between them. In addition, qualitative analysis suggests that individuals were simultaneously affected by multiple and intersecting aspects of their cultural lives and identity such as gender, socioeconomics, and sexual orientation, which is discussed in later chapters.

**Intraethnic Attachments**

The main theme Intraethnic Attachments illustrated ethnocultural aspects of resilience. Specifically, qualitative analysis revealed a process through which individuals rebuilt a sense of their past ethnocultural lifestyle in Canada. The reconstruction of ethnocultural traditions and social patterns involved a re-engagement of activities (e.g., through festivals, traditional food, literature, internet, socializing) that embodied culture. Additionally, participants reflected on the importance of prizing aspects of their ethnocultural worldview (i.e., pride), as well as developing relationships with immigrants of similar ethnic backgrounds. Four sub-themes emerged that feature the process of ethnocultural grounding, which included: Ethnocultural Traditions; Cultural Roots of Language; Ethnocultural Pride; and Community Affiliation (see Figure 4). These sub-themes provide
examples of the way individuals adapted positively to their environment and were able to embody a perception of *Belonging* in Canada.

*Intraethnic Attachments*

- Ethnocultural Traditions
- Cultural Roots of Language
- Ethnocultural Pride
- Community Affiliation
- Cultural Embodiment
- Empathy

Figure 4. Positive Adaptation: Intraethnic Attachments

*Ethnocultural Traditions*

This first sub-theme highlights the way individuals reconnected to important elements of their past environment and related ethnocultural lifestyle, which appeared to provide continuity between their homeland and Canada. The transmission of ethnocultural customs and social practices facilitated a stronger bond to life in Canada and buffered participants against a range of hardships associated with resettlement.

Participants elaborated on the positive effects of symbolic facets of their ethnocultural heritage. In particular, traditional food served to transmit a vital link in which to channel one’s ethnocultural past. Rose immigrated to Canada with her husband and children to provide a better future for her children. Rose was a researcher and her husband was a university professor. They chose to live in a neighbourhood in Toronto that was specifically based on the availability of Iranian food. Rose described the significance of food in forging a connection to her heritage:

...our foods are special...In Iran, we have so many delicious food and traditional ones. One hundred years, two hundred, one thousand years, it's traditional for thousands of years.
Rose articulated the symbolic aspect of food vis-à-vis ethnic grounding in Canada:

> It’s very familiar for us…actually, we can see that we are not very far from our culture, our home[land]. Even if we are in other culture, still we have remained…we have maintained some of our traditional culture.

Food acted as a representation of ethnic heritage and transferred a familiarity of ethnocultural attachment to the Canadian landscape. Many participants like Rose illustrated the way ethnocultural symbols contributed to an emotional grounding to their lives in Canada.

Richa also discussed the value of food as a symbolic gesture that helped her maintain ethnocultural grounding in Canada. She described a seemingly routine activity – making chapattis – from which she gained a direct link to her upbringing and heritage culture:

> ...Because I know how to cook [laughter]! I learned to cook and it is a skill. I can make chapattis at a much higher speed than a computer can work [laughter]. I can cook 10 chapattis in 10 minutes. It is so easy for me because this is what I grew up with. I learned these things from my mom and I learned to cook and it makes me feel comfortable, it makes me feel connected to my culture.

Richa’s excerpt indicates her emotional connection to a seemingly straight-forward task. The activity of making food appears to bolster self-esteem and links to past ethnocultural family traditions as well as represents a continuance of her cultural life.

Richa explained the way in which she has carried forward her ethnocultural practices to her children. The derivative of food preparation is an engenderment of emotional comfort and continuity of ethnocultural identity:

> Something in me gives me a sense that I still have power or I am still holding onto my values and culture this way by expressing myself to my habits back home and cooking. I am continuing my culture and it makes me feel comfortable. I am not
losing a sense of myself. Right now, I’m alone, my kids can eat anything. I am not required to cook for my children. I can buy fast food from outside, I can do anything I want, I am on my own now and still I prefer to cook my own food. This is because I am used to it and I enjoy that and I want my kids to be in touch with the culture I belong to even though they were born here.

Richa’s excerpt highlighted a concerted effort to remain connected to the past and bridge those traditions to her children’s lives. She indicated a sense of comfort and security in retaining and expressing her ethnocultural heritage, which also points to the significance of seemingly inconspicuous routine tasks in grounding oneself in a new sociocultural environment.

Cultural engagement was upheld through a number of symbolic pathways. Simone offered her personal account of the way in which ethnocultural gestures were transmitted by her family. She was forced to leave her home in Iran due to concern for her safety in regard to religious persecution. Simone arrived in Canada as a refugee. She described significant distress when Canadian immigration officials initially placed Simone in a detention centre. Afterward, she lived in a government housing facility and had no social contacts in Canada. She recalled that period in her resettlement as marked by fear, loss, and mourning of her family and culture as well as loneliness. However, Simone’s limited contact with her family provided emotional comfort and stability through culturally-based allegories in poetry that emphasized affection and unity in their relationship:

This is the poetry that my dad has been sending me. It is from a famous poet in my country, it expresses a certain…they are missing me in some of them and it also expresses the meaning of home…[tears] I can’t really talk about this now but it is from a very famous person, that he had chosen specifically just to express their caring and their love; that everything is going to be okay.
The metaphors contained within the poetry provided Simone with emotional strength. Transmission of ethnocultural parables was also facilitated through video taped messages, which made cultural transmission more robust. For instance, Simone highlighted the utility of technology in remaining close to her past ethnocultural environment:

And they [family] are recording me short movies and they are sending it me, the New Year festival to keep me included. Our New Year is two weeks and it is in March. They are just trying to inform me about what is happening and also share, if they have my favourite food or my favourite flower, they cannot send it to me, it is sharing how you are feeling any kind of way that you can...

In the above excerpt, the emotional connection between Simone and her family is centred on an important festival that provided her with a sense of connection to family and culture.

Participants like Simone, Richa, and Rose detailed the importance of remaining close to family and corollary ethnocultural traditions embedded in their relationships. Remaining connected to ethnocultural ways of life appeared to foster a sense of grounding in Canada and helped immigrants cope with deleterious aspects of post-immigration life such as loss, loneliness, and isolation.

*Cultural Roots of Language*

The use of ethnic language provided immigrants with a forum in which to re-engage with their ethnocultural lifestyle and experience ethnocultural familiarity in Canada. Qualitative analysis revealed that participants gained a perception of cultural validation and feelings of acceptance through social engagements. Specifically, communication helped to forge bonds and represented an ethnocultural link to the past (i.e., homeland), which appeared to be an important part of developing community affiliation and a deeper perception of *Belonging*. Two categories demonstrated the impact of language on *Belonging*, which included: Cultural Embodiment and Empathy.
Cultural embodiment. The first category, Cultural Embodiment, reflected the positive effects of maintaining communication in one’s ethnic language. In particular, the usage of ethnocultural language personified and perpetuated a sense of connection to identity. Participants detailed ways their heritage language represented aspects of their ethnocultural lives and sense of community. Mummu emigrated from Pakistan with his wife, children and parents to escape the escalation in violence in his country as a result of war. Mummu described a strong affection for his heritage language and succinctly expressed the significance of having a demonstrable connection to his cultural roots: “It is important, the language, yes it is very important that I retain that and also I want my children to retain their language; it is a connection to our past.”

Similarly, Zizo revealed the way the Arabic language and its usage with close associates embodied his Middle-Eastern culture and provided a perception of affiliation to others:

Oh yes, I have friends from many cultures and multi-backgrounds. But Middle-Eastern because I still like to speak it, speak the language, listen to music…I feel comfortable, I feel like I am still home, I still have connections, I feel related, I belong and I haven’t forgotten my roots, my background or my language.

Zizo’s excerpt highlights the association between maintaining his cultural roots and Belonging in Canada. The perpetuation of his ethnic language and its link to his heritage helped to provide emotional grounding and positive adjustment through an ethnolinguistic exchange.

Zizo elaborated on the way his engagement in Arabic acts as a cultural adhesive that fostered interrelatedness to other members of his community in Canada, as he explained:

Language is like the mother for everything for us. We communicate. Some people have lost the language. I have friends in Canada who are half European and half
Arabic but they don’t speak the language. They sit with us, they listen but they don’t understand a word but they still want to be with us.

Other participants such as Joseph discussed the significance of maintaining his cultural background through language. Firstly, he noted a sense of pride in his East Indian identity that is embedded in language: “You have your background and you have to be proud of who you are….and even though we are taught in English, my father said, ‘Never, ever forget your roots. Always learn Hindi and always speak in Hindi.’”

Secondly, Joseph identified the way lyrical allegories in Hindi music facilitated strength through an embodiment of his ethnic identity:

When I listened to some Hindi music, most of them have some kind of meaning in it…some music is like food for your soul. It brings so much meaning, so much… I don’t know, I couldn’t explain it very well in English, but it gives me so much energy for my soul every time I listen to some songs.

Moreover, lyrical content proved to be a powerful way for Joseph to reflect on problems during resettlement, as he stated: “…because language means so much. If you say something in Hindi, it makes so much sense. If I fall down [spiritually] or something like that, and if I listen to Hindi music, it gives me so much energy to survive.” Not only does ethnic language provide Joseph with an embodiment of his cultural past, it also appeared to buffer against negative mood states by giving him a sense of vitality and resilience.

Marina immigrated to Canada from Russia with her husband. She noted that her husband, who is of African descent, was not able to renew his visa there, which prompted them to come to Canada. Marina discussed the significance of her ethnic language. She echoed Joseph’s sentiments about the way music and its cultural meaning enhanced her mood. Marina also discussed the role of her ethnic language as a buffer against stress related to prejudice in her workplace. For instance, she recalled incidents of poor treatment by management and a highly critical attitude toward her English language skills, which she
perceived to be related to a general devaluation of her cultural background. Although Marina was initially upset, she reflected on the strong attachment and pride in her Russian heritage. Marina’s response to her detractors involved a novel reaction to prejudice and discrimination:

I came home [from work] and I don't know if I was aware of it or not but I went to the library and took out Russian music. I brought it home and I just listened to it. And I listened to it and I said, "I'm proud of who I am. I don't really want to get sick about it because if it's not my language, maybe people will find something else. Maybe I'm not thin enough, maybe I'm not different enough."

Despite the prejudice that Marina encountered, she described a transformative moment in which Russian music evoked feelings of pride in her cultural heritage: “Even in Canada, when I listen to music, it makes me feel proud of who I am. I am proud of my language...how beautiful my language is and I’m part of it.” Marina’s excerpt pointed to the way language, through music, embodied a sense of pride in her ethnocultural history as well as refracted prejudice and bolstered resilience.

Manuco expressed the way his cultural heritage is embodied through the Spanish language. One aspect of Belonging for Manuco was remaining connected to his Spanish culture, as he expressed concern about the loss of his cultural heritage through generational changes: “I know many Spanish people who have children and those children don’t speak Spanish at all. They value more English and then they forget their culture.” Manuco implied that to eschew one’s ethnic background (e.g., loss of ethnic language) is akin to losing an important part of identity. For example, he described the connection between his ethnic language and Peruvian culture as well as the value and pride of representing his ethnocultural self in Canada:

[It is] Really important, you know. I see it this way: I go to the washroom and I see my face in the mirror, I am dark skinned, I look like a Latino and I don’t need to
remind myself with all these [physical] characteristics and not to be able to speak Spanish. And my daughter, she is Latina; if she goes outside, I expect her to speak Spanish, to show the world, to show this country that she is part of this country but she is Latina and she is able to keep her roots. That is the only way that you show how you keep your culture.

Manuco illustrated the way the Spanish language plays a pivotal role in remaining close to his Peruvian identity. His perception of Belonging appears to be bolstered by an attachment to his cultural heritage. The embodiment of culture through language was important to many individuals. The use of one’s ethnic language provided a social kinship, bolstered pride during times of stress, and gave individuals a sense of stability in their new homeland.

**Empathy.** The second category, Empathy, illustrated the way immigrants’ garnered emotional support through intracultural communication. A number of participants explained the way language facilitated a strong connection to their peers. Zizo informed about the importance of utilizing the Arabic language and the empathy that is conveyed through shared cultural meaning:

…we still preserve it [Arabic], we haven’t lost touch. The feeling, the taste of the language, the jokes and the funny things we say, if you are born here, you wouldn’t understand it. But the comments we make, we have a common past, history, culture.

Zizo’s excerpt identified the way specific ethnocultural sentiments are expressed through language, which is achieved through a shared knowledge and lived experience of an ethnocultural lifestyle and history.

Harris referred to the way his ethnic language engendered Belonging in Canada through empathy. He explained that being around others who spoke Pashto gave him a sense that someone could appreciate his ethnocultural perspective, which provided emotional security:
I think it is important. When see someone speaks my language I think I have my own country [in Canada]. In a city like Toronto, I feel like home, I have my own people; I have somebody who knows the way of my life and my culture. It gives me sort of patience, it gives me a sort of energy, and an understanding, like “You know what, I am not alone now.” If something happens tomorrow in this country, if nobody else understands me, somebody will understand me.

Harris’ excerpt also points to his perception of cultural validation and a feeling of acceptance in the act of sharing his ethnocultural heritage. His early years in Canada were marred by racism and cultural alienation; sharing his ethnocultural heritage after moving to Toronto with others from his heritage community appeared to counterbalance his early experiences. In particular, he was able to share cultural elements of his past, feel acceptance, and gain a sense that he belonged to the community.

Similarly, Joseph described the significance of sharing his ethnocultural experiences in post-migration life. Without the opportunity to engage in a culturally familiar lifestyle, Joseph recalled disconnection from his new community and the psychological impact:

…so I lost contact and I lost touch with my culture because I found that I was adapting to other people’s culture. So I was alienating my own culture. So when I go there, I feel connected; I feel the connection there and I like it. It makes me happy actually and the depression goes away.

Joseph excerpt conveys the importance of being culturally attached to others and the resilience that is derived from a cultural connection to others.

In the following quote, Joseph elaborates on the way empathy was conveyed through immersion in East Indian culture and language in Canada. In particular, he indicated the way ethnic language provided a sense of closeness to others, who are able to grasp culturally enriched experiences:
Yes, because when I meet them, they would always talk, “Oh, did you watch this latest Bollywood music or film?” And we started to talk about all these movies or speak in our language and also what is happening here, what is going on in the society right now and what the next function was coming up. So I started to connect in the culture way.”

Joseph’s view highlighted the significance of sharing experiences and retaining ethnocultural language in Canada. In particular, he underscored the role of language in forging emotional bonds and increased a perception of relatedness.

Participants also revealed the way their ethnic language helped to establish a sense of Belonging in Canada. In particular, the use of ethnic language personified aspects of their heritage culture and provided a firm emotional grounding in Canada. Often, communication in one’s ethnic language engendered a sense of empathy through which immigrants felt grounded in their new environment. The use of language provided both a tangible and affective connection to ethnic identity through which participants formed an attachment to Canada.

Ethnocultural Pride

The third sub-theme under Intraethnic Attachments elaborated on the function of pride in bolstering positive adaptation during resettlement. Pride in ethnocultural identity validated immigrants in their heritage beliefs and practices. Additionally, ethnic pride also gave participants a sense of value. For example, Rose expressed pride in the accomplishments of other individuals from the Iranian community in Canada. She highlighted that achievements are symbolically shared by individuals from the same background, which created a sense of satisfaction and value that her ethnocultural group has contributed to the community:

…if an Iranian person gets a promotion, gets a good job here, it can be good for every Iranian here. It’s an honour for other Iranians…a candidate of the Liberal Party
from Richmond Hill got elected here for the first time... So it's really an honour for us.

It would be very helpful for other Iranian individuals here.

Rose’s excerpt highlighted her interrelated perspective as she explained that an accomplishment by one individual bestowed pride in her ethnic group. Her illustration also points to a perception of Belonging to the larger community through ties to the political establishment and upward mobility (e.g., job promotions). Rose comments suggest that she views her culture as being more accepted (e.g., elected member representing a community) and feels a sense of inclusion in Canada, rather than being an outsider.

Zizo commented on the way pride in his ethnocultural history prompted him to remain close to his traditions in Canada:

Our culture, I am proud of the customs we have, the traditions.....Now we are having a feast [i.e., festival of Eid]. This is something I keep even though I am living in the West, I still try to keep it and enjoy it because most of my friends we celebrate and salute each other...as a way of connecting to the culture. To the past. Who created the past? Our ancestors. They tried to create a better life for themselves and their kids and we have the customs, the culture, the traditions, the language, the dances the music, the food, everything.

Maintenance of these traditions in Canada engendered Belonging for Zizo as it also gave him a sense of contribution and connection to the community:

I am proud that in Canada they have this sense that each community is trying to preserve its culture and to show to other people. Preserve its culture and mix it with the Canadian or North American but at the same time, show them what you have so that they will enjoy it and they understand you more.

Zizo shared a sense of pride in his ethnocultural traditions as well as the importance of living in an environment that accepts and promotes diverse ethnocultural norms. His perception of cultural openness appeared to increase attachment to life in Canada.
Grace also noted the way pride in her ethnocultural identity facilitated positive adjustment to life in Canada. She entered Canada as a landed immigrant with her husband and child. Her decision to leave China was facilitated by an interest in expanding her cultural frame of reference and career opportunities. She defined herself as being “traditional Chinese” and offered the following description: “…we were partly educated culturally; we want to become a person who will be useful towards society and other people.”

Grace explained that her values are steeped in communal and communist principles in which “Parents, and also school, we all have that kind of burden to serve society and people…” Thus, Grace’s ethnocultural frame of reference strongly encourages group unity in which a significant emphasis is placed on serving the group above and beyond individual needs as she explained, “Actually I was a very good student in school and they [parents] were proud of me, because in China, people…the very important thing is that you do something good and you will add to your family, give your family pride.”

Pride and a sense of duty based on her communal beliefs facilitated a sense of agency for Grace, who developed, along with a group of friends, a community program in Toronto to assist other Chinese immigrants with housing, work, and social support:

…we built a community association. We deal with all the people who come from that city. We developed it... when we were in China, we studied English together and we thought, "We need that."

Grace discussed the impact of her community agency, which provided her a place to celebrate ethnic traditions (i.e., New Year’s) as well as increase a perception of social grounding in Canada:

Yes, that's very important for me because you're kind of a family when you move here, even though we don't really know each other for so long, because of the situation, we are all new here. So we are very proud. So there's the support. And
every year, even the New Year or like moon festival, the most important Chinese festival. We always gather with other friends.

Ethnocultural pride assisted participants in viewing their heritage as important to the cultural fabric of Canada and prompted individuals like Grace to take initiative and positively affect her process of adjustment and resilience.

Community Affiliation

The fourth and final sub-theme under Intraethnic Attachments highlighted immigrants’ social and emotional connection to their community. Participants reported on ways they gained an ethnocultural sense of Belonging through instrumental and affective support from their community. For example, Anna described the importance of ethnic affiliation in her early years in Canada: “Yes, sure, our [Slavic] network, of course, it gives you a feeling of belonging to some group of people; you need that if you are in a new place…”

Harris identified the value of social and emotional connectedness to the community by contrasting two environments in which he lived after leaving Afghanistan. Harris fled his homeland in Afghanistan with his family as a teenager because of war. Harris initially lived in South Asia for a few years and described a positive adjustment to life there, noting a perception of ethnocultural affiliation, as he explained “Oh yes, South Asia is fine because it is an Asian culture and it is similar almost to our culture...in terms of cultural value, it is kind of similar.” Harris believed that similarity in ethnocultural values in South Asia facilitated a positive transition in that country.

By contrast, his initial resettlement in Eastern Canada was particularly distressful. Harris denoted a sense of alienation in Canada for a number of reasons such as prejudice and racism, difficulty maintaining his Muslim faith (e.g., no place of worship, lack of access to halal food), and a lack of ethnocultural kinship to his peers:
…they couldn’t have changed their ideas and they couldn’t acknowledge me, their
behaviour was okay but they didn’t accept me because of the way I am dressing, so
sometimes I used to dress the way I did in South Asia and Afghanistan. It wasn’t
acceptable, they don’t like the way I looked, it was part of my culture. And when I
would wear jeans like this, they were laughing and I thought, what am I supposed to
do?

Rejection by his peers and lack of acceptance of his ethnocultural lifestyle led to
estrangement and a period of depression, which culminated in an attempt of suicide. Harris
explained that his troubles integrating related to a lack of social affiliation. Consequently, his
family moved to Toronto in hopes of developing stronger community ties and a diverse
environment that would be more accepting of their ethnocultural values and practices. Harris
highlighted the following changes in his life after moving to Toronto:

…there are also Afghans here, we are not feeling alienated, we are not feeling like a
stranger here. We are with our own people. We would talk about our culture, the way
it was in Afghanistan and we would talk about how the world culture is different from
our culture.

Although Harris acknowledged different values from the dominant cultural group, he was
able to find people with whom he shared a similar ethnocultural perspective, which led to
greater security and fostered positive adaptation and Belonging through community
attachments.

Social kinship for Harris and many immigrants contributed to positive integration by
buffering against stressors such as cultural alienation. Individuals noted the way
relationships were imbued in cultural meaning from which familiar social customs could be
expressed. Individuals found solace in shared immigration narratives, ethnocultural
familiarity in a new land, and hope in regard to overcoming resettlement hardships.

*Summary of Intraethnic Attachments*
Immigrants in this study indicated a range of constructive responses and conditions that enhanced their social and emotional connection to their ethnic community in Canada. For instance, several participants emphasized the importance of transcultural ties to their homeland. The maintenance of a cultural-relational bond with family and development of friendships emerged as avenues of emotional strength.

Additionally, several participants highlighted the way ties to their ethnocultural community in Canada helped foster a connection to their cultural roots and traditions. Involvement with members of one’s ethnic heritage offered a social bond involving shared cultural perspectives that was grounded in a familiar ethnocultural context. Immigrant narratives suggested that these close attachments provided a greater sense of acceptance for their heritage, which validated their cultural perspective. The ability to maintain a connection to one’s ethnocultural past and re-engage in familiar traditions in Canada offered a sense of grounding in their new environment.

**Interethnic Relationships**

The fourth and final main theme, Interethnic Relationships, demonstrated a process by which ethnic forms of interchange contributed to resilience. Specifically, qualitative analysis revealed the value of developing relationships outside of one’s conventional ethnocultural frame of reference. Several participants elaborated on their diverse ethnic relationships, which facilitated reciprocal ethnocultural influences. Individuals also disclosed the significance of living in a multicultural environment. In particular, immigrants detailed the way ethnic diversity and the large immigrant population in their surrounding environment generated a perception of *Belonging*. Three sub-themes emerged that illustrated the impact of interethnic relationships, which included: Reshaping Interethnic Ties; Exploring & Adapting Traditions; and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion (see Figure 5).
Reshaping Interethnic Ties

The first sub-theme illustrated the way a few participants embedded aspects of their ethnocultural heritage (i.e., interpersonal norms) into their social life in Canada. The positive benefits of influencing their social network in a cultural-relational manner resulted in a greater sense of affiliation. For instance, Paola reported on the way she reconstructed past elements of her Columbian ethnocultural norms within her network of friends. She described a seemingly routine activity such as cooking and its role in fostering a sense of community that represented a familiar cultural-relational style of her past:

In my home or my culture, it’s more like, you eat at home and once in a while you go out and eat something...So I love cooking and I love bringing people and having people around and cooking for people...that's something that I brought with me, the whole idea of community and shared community. We don’t have to be together all of the time, but we have to have the certainty that we can count on each other and that’s something that I taught my friends, “Okay, so we count on each other. Nobody has any family here, but at least if something happens, everybody has to know people’s numbers and what to do.”

Paola’s excerpt highlights the link between her cultural-relational style with others which provides a sense of grounding and emotional security. In addition, she described her efforts to make a unique ethnocultural contribution to her social network. She emphasized the way
she constructed a sense of spontaneity in her social group, which she considered to be distinctly Columbian:

So I love it when a friend calls me at 3 a.m. and asks, “Can I come to your place?” and I say, “Sure.” So those are things that for me that is very South American. Or there are Canadian friends who just drop by without calling before, and that’s something that is part of my culture. You don’t need to call and say, “Can I visit you?” You just go and show up. And my friends feel enough trust to do that. So it’s pretty funny.

Paola highlights the importance of having close bonds with others that have a similar structure to her cultural-relational style which creates a sense of interethnic affiliation.

Paola also described her friendships as a surrogate family; thus, her effort to create a close network of support provided Paola with emotional security:

Yes, yes, because I think that one of the worst things, and I think it’s not only a cultural thing, I think it’s a human thing... loneliness is not cool. Not having anybody to talk to is not cool, and you have to have some people around you that you can take for granted. But you don’t need to call every day, but you know that you can count on them, like your parents, you know? It’s like they’re always there.

Similarly, Juan illustrated the way in which elements of his ethnocultural perspective influenced his social bonds. He emigrated from Mexico by himself to expand his career opportunities, experience a new culture, and live in an environment in which he was more comfortable in regard to his gay identity. The context of his ethnocultural past lifestyle is necessary to consider in his process of positive adjustment. Although he had a close relationship to his family, Juan was not comfortable living an openly gay lifestyle in Mexico, as he stated: “Here in Canada, being who I am...I can be openly gay and say, ‘I’m gay,’ or if I hold hands with my partner on the street, that gives me more confidence as a person.” Additionally, Juan conceptualized his demonstrable affection within his friendships as being
uniquely Mexican; in Canada, he was able to develop close social ties that accommodated his gay lifestyle and his Mexican heritage.

Juan perceived his social network to be a vital extension of his family, which facilitated positive adaptation. One of the ways in which Juan felt comfortable interpersonally was through sharing important aspects of his ethnocultural lifestyle within his friendships:

Well, I try to make it similar [to Mexico], even if it is not. Let’s say, as I’m talking about different cultures, like I found here in Canada. You Canadians never drop by even at your friend’s house without making an appointment. You always have to say, “Okay, can I come now?” We don’t do that [in Mexico]. And I always tell my friends here, and they do it now. With my two good friends, they just knock on my door.

“Hey, here I am,” which I love. I really love it.

Juan described the way he incorporated his ethnocultural pattern of socializing into his social network. In particular, he modified a more structured and formal form of interacting into one that is more spontaneous and family-oriented:

Oh yeah, I’m very open [with friends]. You are at home [at my place]. That’s the way we are in our culture. And if we have a guest, we try to make them feel very comfortable. And I like that with my friendships. You don’t have to make an appointment for things like that….so, this is what I am as a Mexican person. I want you to be like that in some ways, like dropping by at home or when they are [at my] home, they can open the fridge... Now I try to make them more similar the way we relate to each other as a friend.

Immigrants such as Juan and Paola described the significance of recreating ethnocultural social and familial bonds in relationships, which appeared to increase feelings of closeness similar to a surrogate family. Positive adaptation occurred through enactment of past ethnic forms of social bonding, which appeared to be a way of garnering emotional and social attachments.
Exploring and Adapting Traditions

A few individuals reflected on the way in which their ethnocultural traditions and frame of reference were modified in response to their pre- and post-immigration life experiences. Immigrants’ adjustment of their ethnocultural lifestyle was conceptualized as a form of constructive response to the challenges presented in post-immigration life. For instance, Manuco described his change in perspective in the following way:

I understood that because if I’m going to live here, I had better understand and adapt to that system. Canada is not going to adapt to my culture. I am the one who needs to adapt to Canada’s culture, if you want to be part of this country.

Manuco perceived a need to balance his own traditions and accept aspects of the Canadian culture as he explained his intention to “…help my daughter to keep our roots from back home, at the same time teaching her to understand this culture the way that I understand [it] now.”

Changes to one’s ethnocultural traditions ranged in degree between each participant and was affected by their particular circumstances. For example, Harris divulged the way his ethnocultural frame of reference and traditions changed in relation to the political context of his life in Afghanistan. Harris left his homeland with his family as a political refugee because of war. One of his goals of resettlement, to become involved in politics and affect positive change for other immigrants, emerged from his experiences of living through war. Canada’s political and military involvement in Afghanistan was particularly important to Harris, which inspired him to help his community:

…[to] get an education and be part of this society; my goal is to get a job in this country and be in parliament and find a good job, get an M.A. and go to parliament or something; that is what my dream is.
As a result of war and a transition to life in Canada, Harris described the way he and other immigrants in his community accepted and merged aspects of their ethnocultural lifestyle to constructively adapt to life in Canada and reach personal goals:

I changed in a way, let say, I used to pray five times a day in a mosque [in Afghanistan], now I am going just Friday. I have other things to do and in the meantime, I see other Afghan guys, they are focusing on their studies and focusing on what to do for this society and trying to overcome and do education and be part of this society.

Harris’ excerpt emphasized the process by which pre- and post-immigration experiences affected his ethnocultural practices. The changes to his lifestyle represented a process of adaptation that served both his personal goal to help others in his homeland as well as increase his potential in developing a career and successfully integrating in Canada.

Other participants like Anna shared stories about the way her ethnocultural perspective diversified in Canada. The context of Anna’s pre-immigration life underscored the background to her cultural inquisitiveness. She elaborated on the way her family history had been affected by the Second World War. In particular, Anna detailed the loss of their rights as citizens and the confiscation of their belongings when members of her family were forced into concentration camps:

And they lost everything, and they were doing quite well before the Second World War, and my mother had quite a good life, and after the war, they lost everything. And other thing, psychologically, you’re used to that, that you can have good life, you can be wealthy, and after a while, after the second war, they got nothing. And they were coming back to the city with nothing… That way, it gives you a completely different perspective for life.
Anna surmised that her familial history of trauma and loss as well as intellectual curiosity engendered from her parents enhanced an openness and interest in other religions. Her life in Canada led to new explorations:

Yes, I was, but I wasn’t practising [Catholicism] a lot… Because I was exploring different beliefs in Canada and I discovered yoga and I discovered Buddhism. Some of my friends became Buddhists and she was from a Roman Catholic family and I started studying… going to some lectures at the University of Toronto about Buddhism. And I started doubting if this [Catholicism] is the one way to find the meaning of life and asking questions in many ways, and I went away to explore those questions.

Moreover, Anna’s ethnocultural changes helped her cope with significant stressors like divorce and underemployment:

Yes, without yoga, I wouldn’t survive crises in my life…Yes, through breathing and the movement and meditation is a very, very powerful tool… It’s opened my mind, generally speaking, an acceptance for every culture, which I was thinking I had [acceptance] before, but not in this level which I have now…Yes, I accept before I came here, sure, I consider myself an open-minded person…

Anna’s excerpt emphasized the deepening of her openness to and acceptance of diverse ethnic practices and perspectives in Canada. In particular, her utilization of yoga appeared to ameliorate adverse conditions in post-immigration life. Changes in ethnocultural traditions and perspective demonstrated the way ethnicity is an evolving and contextually determined concept, which is shaped by pre- and post-immigration experiences.

*Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion*

A number of immigrants in this study elaborated on the way in which ethnocultural diversity in Toronto communities facilitated a perception of *Belonging*. For example, Paola discussed the way she connected to other Canadians that had emigrated from Eastern
provinces in Canada, which helped her adapt positively to a new environment. She noted a particular comfort with immigrants as she stated, “…from the beginning, it was easier for me to relate to these people that were immigrants. Even though they were Canadian, they come from a different Canadian culture. But it was easy for me to relate to them.” Paola elaborated on the meaning of connecting to other immigrants: “I was in love with the diversity and especially with Toronto, I was like, ‘okay, I can belong here because I don’t feel so different.’ I feel that I am part of a crowd, and I like that.” An environment of ethnic diversity helped Paola gain a sense of connection and attachment to the community.

Similarly, Geronimo expressed the significance of living in an ethnically diverse environment. He immigrated to Canada from Brazil by himself because of negative attitudes that he experienced towards gay identity as well as interest in finding new social and career opportunities. Geronimo expressed the importance of living in a diverse society in Canada and its impact on his sense of inclusion:

I can’t live in Canada that has no immigrants; I would feel very alienated. I would be lost. If there are no temples, no people with different cultures, I’m lost. So I think that living in Toronto, it is multicultural, there are different people and it makes me feel grounded.

Geronimo’s excerpt suggests that an environment of diversity increases a perception of Belonging as he can envision himself as part of the main.

Several participants such as Richa described empathic relationships with other immigrants who had experienced similar problems adjusting to life in Canada. Richa talked about the difficult times she faced such as discrimination related to wearing her traditional clothing and the lack of employment opportunities, which she believed to be related to racism. Richa characterized the way she was able to harness negative perceptions and a lack of acceptance, which enabled positive adaptation by giving meaning to her struggle:
I realized that I need to get frustrated these eight years. I need to work hard and differently and it is not unusual for most people who come from elsewhere to be in the position that I was in. It is common and I am not the only one who is in this situation that feels things are unfair here. Every other person who is an immigrant from elsewhere has the similar issues and second language problems so that helped me to realize what I was experiencing was normal.

Richa perceived her adverse experiences in Canada to have played a role in her trajectory towards positive adaptation. She also noted the way empathy from others, who have been through analogous circumstances, normalized her feelings during times of stress and self-doubt in her ability. Sharing her experiences of hardship with other immigrants appeared to contribute emotional strength for Richa to achieve her goals and perceive herself as Belonging in the community, despite experiences of alienation from the dominant cultural group.

Mummu also expressed the value of living in a diverse ethnic community and considered diversity in Toronto to be a factor in engendering Belonging:

Yes, I wanted more diversity, I am very comfortable with diversity I am very comfortable when I came here and there were many different groups. It was very good for me. Toronto is like a melting pot and it is very easy to blend into the city. If I go to Montreal, I felt that I was an outsider. Even in Ottawa I felt like an outsider because it is not diverse like Toronto, you can see many different communities.

Mummu reflected on the way differing ethnic groups contributed to his perception of inclusion. The notion of ‘insider status’ by a number of immigrants was reportedly more fluid because of ethnocultural diversity in the environment. Immigrant narratives suggested that Belonging was facilitated by a community of differing ethnic backgrounds from which they derived interrelatedness and empathy.

Summary of Interethnic Relationships
Participants detailed the way their interethnic relationships and community diversity contributed to positive adjustment. A number of participants shared their process of developing relationships and a connection to their community. In particular, a few individuals influenced their social network and imputed cultural-relational aspects of the ethnocultural heritage within them. The ability to regain aspects of their past ethnocultural way of life appeared to help a number of individuals achieve a sense of affiliation in Canada. Participants’ strong emotional bonds often personified their family and sociocultural lifestyle prior to immigration.

Immigrants in this study also emphasized the way their ethnocultural perspective changed through a culmination of pre- and post-immigration experiences. Involvement with a range of ethnic groups fostered personal growth and positive adaptation. Changes to ethnocultural practices were important to a number of participants’ process of positive adjustment. Finally, a number of individuals highlighted the way community diversity prompted them to feel a perception of acceptance. Life in a diverse ethnic climate facilitated empathy through interaction with other immigrants who have had similar resettlement experiences.
Chapter Five
Socioeconomic Status

The key theme Socioeconomic Status pertained to social and economic beliefs, values, and lifestyle that were relevant to immigrant resilience. Participants discussed a range of socioeconomic hardships that beset them early in post-immigration life. Although problems with socioeconomic adaptation varied thematically, qualitative analyses revealed the significance of loss of and/or lower status and power in Canada by comparison to immigrants past socioeconomic lifestyle. Loss of status was represented by a relative decrease in social standing; whereas, power was represented by the perception of control immigrants had over deleterious circumstances as well as a perception of being hindered to effect change (e.g., low status, occupational/skill based prejudice). Taken together, many immigrants perceived themselves to have stigmatized status and a sense of being an outsider in relation to negative socioeconomic factors.

The first main theme, entitled Loss of Status and Power, revealed a link between lowered socioeconomic status and immigrants' feelings of inefficacy, alienation, and a sense of detachment from the sociocultural environment in Canada. Loss of status and power emerged as obstacles to forming an attachment to life in Canada as many immigrants had strong identities in relation to their career and past lifestyles. Additionally, participants often did not perceive acceptance from the cultural majority and struggled to gain a perception of Belonging.

The second main theme, Reclaiming Status and Power, emerged as a critical series of actions that increased participants' ability to effectively alter their socioeconomic circumstances. Immigrants described their recovery from loss of socioeconomic status and changes to their occupational life, which increased a perception of emotional and financial stability. For example, many immigrants in this study identified ways in which they were able to gain traction in building on their previous careers or adapting to environmental differences
in the job market and finding new career pathways. Language skills emerged as one form of adaptation that assisted a number of participants in finding employment and becoming financially stable. In addition, a few participants reflected on ways that they coped with prejudice (e.g., building a social network) and stigmatized status as an immigrant. The two main themes identify significant adversity and positive adaptation in relation to participants’ experiences of Socioeconomic Status.

The culmination of a struggle to cope with low socioeconomic status involved a process that led to stability, security, and stronger occupational contentment. A number of immigrants described the importance of making a contribution to their community and the significance of being an active participant in the workforce. Qualitative analysis revealed the way in which adaptive mechanisms within the socioeconomic domain enmeshed immigrants into the community and led to a greater perception of Belonging.

Loss of Status and Power

The first main theme, Loss of Status and Power, reflected a difficult period of transition in Canada that was marked by financial and occupational instability as well as a lower standard of living. The struggle to develop a secure foundation was particularly challenging because many immigrants had minimal social ties from which to draw support. In addition, several participants described prejudice and discrimination, which raised issues of unequal status as well as lack of acceptance of qualifications and work/life experience. A number of participants expressed emotional distress (e.g., periods of depression, anxiety) as a result of the changes to their socioeconomic status (i.e., lower status) and noted difficulty effecting change. Five sub-themes illustrated issues related to the main theme Loss of Status and Power: Standard of Living; Under- and Unemployment; Difficulties Communicating; Racial Stereotyping; and Immigrant Devaluation (see Figure 6).
Many immigrants in this study reflected on their social and economic lifestyle in pre- and post-immigration. The first sub-theme, Standard of Living, delineated the loss of social status and associated lifestyle changes. Differences in standard of living resulted in emotional distress, loss of self-esteem, and difficulty forming a positive attachment to the community.

For example, Mummu emphasized the way socioeconomic changes resulted in emotional distress after immigrating to Canada. His family was particularly affected by the precipitous decline in their standard of living:

I was worried, anxious and obviously, the standard of living back in Pakistan was different. I had a car and a full-time maid, we didn’t have to wash our own dishes or wash our own clothes. I had to go to the washing room in the basement so it was a big change. My wife didn’t like it over here, she wanted to go back. If I had not insisted, she would have gone back and my children didn’t like it over here they wanted to go back.

Mummu’s excerpt highlights the distress his family faced in relation to their lower status in Canada.

A decline in socioeconomic status often alienated participants from Canadian society. The struggle to accept the loss of the past and the reality of one’s present
socioeconomic level led a few immigrants like Mummu to consider returning to their homeland. The early years of his post-immigration life involved both shock and feelings of depression as he and his family attempted to acclimatize to a different standard of living:

We were very depressed at the beginning, we did not have the same living standards and the comfort that we had over here. So over here, as I said, there were financial worries, and it was depressing for my family.

Simone described a similar experience to Mummu. After she left her homeland in Iran, Simone described significant changes to her socioeconomic lifestyle as a refugee receiving social assistance in Canada:

And you cannot afford to have the lifestyle you have back at home. I always try to have a healthy lifestyle but maintaining a healthy lifestyle on a limited amount of money is extremely hard. Back in my country I wasn’t even doing groceries, they would deliver groceries. I had a cleaning lady and didn’t have to worry about unwashed dishes…It was totally the opposite. [In Canada] I had to learn to go to Chinatown [for groceries] and try all this, I couldn’t afford things….it was extremely hard.

Changes to her standard of living in Canada created new challenges such as finding ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle despite less financial means. Immigrants like Mummu and Simone faced significant changes to their social standing, which represented significant adversity and contributed to feelings of estrangement in Canada.

*Under- and Unemployment*

The second sub-theme identified adversity related to under- and unemployment and related issues of poverty and social isolation. A number of immigrants had minimal social resources from which to draw support, lack of familiarity with the Canadian job market, difficulty transferring professional skills, and emotional distress from lack of certainty about
job prospects. These forms of adversity appeared to be part of an immigrant culture of stigmatization and devaluation.

For example, Richa described multiple changes associated with lower socioeconomic status such as the loss of her past career, unemployment, and financial stressors in Canada:

It was insecurity, feeling insecure about my financial situation, about the job situation, we did not know even if my husband finished if he would find a job, and feeling insecurity in regards to my whole existence, in terms of who I am. Do I belong to this culture; will I ever fit in and be accepted? And all these kind of thoughts made me so, so depressed. And the answer was “No, no, no” for each question. That was what I was seeing at that point. It was so obvious that I wouldn’t fit in here.

Richa’s excerpt highlights the way struggles with employment and related financial stress engender a sense of alienation. Employment appeared to be an essential aspect of citizenship and highlighted the way she did not perceive acceptance by the cultural majority.

Zizo described his early years in Canada when he did not have any job prospects; his financial problems increased and Zizo became concerned about survival in Canada, which was particularly upsetting to him given his secure position as an international banker in Syria. Zizo described a period of despair and accepted a sales job that was not suited to his professional qualifications and experience. Zizo began to lose confidence and described a general sense of disorientation: “If you are an immigrant, imagine, if you don't have any [business] contacts, if you don’t know where to go, if you are taking the wrong bus, east instead of west, and miss your [sales] appointment, it was confusing.” Zizo’s struggle was complicated by his lack of familiarity with his environment, unsuitable work, and lack of social/occupational contacts from which to draw support.

His attempts to build an occupational and social network through ethnocultural organizations in his community were rebuffed, as he indicated, “They are useless. All of
them. If you go to ask for assistance, they will say, ‘check the website’ or ‘talk to that organization’, they don’t offer that much help.” Zizo characterized his life as being unstable in regard to unsuitable work and financial distress as well as social isolation. His excerpt also pointed to difficulty effecting change in his circumstances without social support or contacts.

Paola described a connection to her past socioeconomic lifestyle from a different perspective. In her circumstances, she was employed as a researcher and worked within impoverished communities. Paola’s connection to her career, as was the case with many other immigrants, represented an important part of identity. In Canada she had to come to terms with the daunting task of developing a new career without a social network: “Here, I had to build that [a career] from scratch. I had no reference network, and even if I did, all that counts is what you do in life. Well, that was my perception at that point.”

Paola’s loss of her career and identity, as well as the pressure to build a new one, led to emotional distress and isolation. In particular, she attempted to protect her family from the struggles she faced, which effectively blocked off emotional support:

Yes, basically I got depressed, and I didn’t want to show that I was depressed because my mother would call and I didn’t want her to worry about me, so I was just like, “I’m doing okay.” And I didn’t want my sister to worry about me, so I was “doing okay”.

Paola’s loss of attachment to her gratifying career and identity represented a shift from making a contribution as a researcher to a mindset in Canada that involved meeting basic needs and survival. Resettlement resulted in uncertainty about her career identity and sense of social disconnection:

…well, it was the hardest depression of my life; I had never been like that before. I was pushing myself to… I was missing my…yes, work for me was very nurturing. I worked in what I loved, and there was an emotional meaning. I identified with my
work, I loved my work, and so I left that. Doing research and being a teacher, I loved that.

As a result of the loss of her career and its meaning to her identity, Paola questioned whether she had made the right decision to immigrate: “I was alone. And I felt that there was no hope. It was like, okay, should I go back or should I stay and try?” Lack of work opportunities and related financial instability as well as issues related to poverty contributed to emotional distress and lack of attachment to occupational life in Canada.

**Difficulties Communicating**

The third sub-theme, Difficulties Communicating, identified struggles with fluency and its relationship to socioeconomic issues. Specifically, qualitative analysis indicated a connection between language fluency and sovereignty over one’s life. A few participants described occupational stress (e.g., difficulties finding employment) and problems coping in a new environment (e.g., using transportation, accessing medical care). Participants informed about the loss of self-esteem and low mood that accompanied problems with communication as well as a sense of detachment from the community.

Carmo was born in Portugal and arrived in Canada with her husband with undocumented status. Her initial goal was to find employment, develop a career in nursing, and to start a family. Carmo shared the way her life was negatively affected by language barriers in resettlement. Her inability to communicate in English resulted in limited employment opportunities such as long hours of factory work and pay below minimum wage. Although she was managing to care for her instrumental needs, Carmo elaborated on the way language barriers complicated other areas of her life. For instance, she described being vulnerable without language skills and experienced uncertainty about her rights to medical care. Carmo was reliant on other people who took advantage of her lack of English fluency. For example, Carmo recalled a time when she miscarried and urgently needed medical assistance but was concerned about asking for help because: “…they scared me
more. They tell us…we can’t go in the hospital, we can’t go out, we can’t do nothing…And I was so scared. My God, I can’t go to doctor…I was worried about being sent back [to Portugal].” Lack of English proficiency created insecurity and fear as well as jeopardized her health. Carmo and other immigrants’ narratives informed about the significance of language in navigating a new sociocultural environment and feelings of lack of efficacy related to an inability to communicate in English. In addition, being part of a lower socioeconomic stigmatized group often was accompanied by other problems such as access to health and a sense of not being entitled to assert one’s needs.

Marina underscored the value she placed on being an active participant in her community through dedication to her career. In particular, she was proud of her contribution to society in the field of health care in Russia. Her job provided a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. After immigrating to Canada, Marina felt a loss of efficacy as she became completely reliant on her husband and could not work because of the English language barrier. The pressure she experienced to learn English contributed to feelings of depression:

I got sad, I got depressed, and I got physically…I was not able to pick it up one day from there. I just couldn't. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I went to the doctor, and I was diagnosed with depression. And all these words [learning English] was like making no sense…

Participants like Manuco also informed about the correlation between his language difficulties and resultant adaptation stress. Initially, Manuco immigrated to a French speaking city in Canada with his family and experienced language as a significant barrier to basic survival:

I was sad but sad because I couldn’t give enough to my family. [I was] Frustrated in a way because I couldn’t do anything more. Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t. There were many things that made me want to do something better for my family, but it stopped me from doing something for my family. And basically it was the language.
Difficulty with communication led to stress and engendered feelings of powerlessness as he struggled with French language fluency. Manuco also discussed his problems finding employment as a result of the language barrier, which necessitated social assistance:

But because I was on welfare and I always appreciate the help from someone but sometimes it’s not enough, you know? …We want to work; we want to get a job. But sometimes we are not able to communicate. So if you don’t know the languages, either English or French, it’s very difficult to get a job. So for that, it wasn’t enough money to buy enough food.

Manuco expressed his desire to be part of the community and have a sense of occupational purpose.

Participants such as Manuco, Marina and Carmo illustrated the challenge of adapting to life in Canada without English language fluency and its relationship to socioeconomic status. Qualitative analysis indicated that the struggle with fluency represented a barrier over self-determination and left many participants feeling a perception of disconnection to their communities.

**Racial Stereotyping**

The fourth sub-theme, Racial Stereotyping, identified incidents in which immigrants felt devalued based on racial prejudice. In particular, two participants described racial stereotyping regarding occupational worth and employment discrimination. These experiences left visible minority immigrants with a feeling of devaluation by the Canadian born population and a sense of alienation. For instance, Juan relayed one of many incidents in which he encountered negative stereotypes about South American immigrants:

One day we were having supper with two of my friends and people he knows. So one guy passed by outside the restaurant and somebody said, “I know him, he’s from Latin America and he worked as a waiter.” And the other person said, “Oh yeah, he
looks like a waiter” because he looked Latino. So when he said that, [I said] “Okay, he’s Latino, he has to be a waiter, he cannot be something else more. Do you know what I mean?” So when he said that, I said, “I want you to apologize for what you said in front of everybody,” because it really annoyed me that he’s saying, “Oh, he’s Latino, he cannot be more than a waiter.” …that’s the person I am.

Juan’s encounter of prejudicial attitudes offered insight into the way these characterizations position immigrants as devalued members of society and as being separate from the dominant cultural group.

Richa conceptualized her struggle for employment to be related to a race-based devaluation of her skills. In particular, she found herself being shut out of all forms of employment, “Because of my colour. I applied for daycares jobs, tons of daycare around the city and I had experience working in daycare when I first came ...” Richa described tireless efforts to find employment to help her family meet basic living needs while her husband attended university. In the following excerpt, she highlighted her vigilance in seeking employment at a local convenience store and the ensuing reaction by the shopkeeper:

…I said [to him] that “you never called me. [He replied] Because we hired someone else.” And I said, “How could you do that, you were not looking for someone with experience. Did the person have experience? Why did you hire them over me when I was the first applicant?” And he did not have an answer to that. And that was again, it was painful for me to take that. I think it is awful.

Richa’s employment struggle led to feelings of anger and a sense of powerlessness over her circumstances. She revealed in her interview feelings of insecurity and frustration with being rebuffed from many jobs despite her teaching qualifications and university degree from her homeland. Racist attitudes highlighted occupational inequality and a lack of acceptance from the cultural majority.

*Immigrant Devaluation*
The fifth and final sub-theme under the main theme Loss of Status and Power detailed participants encounters with prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes. Participants identified situations in which they perceived themselves as devalued based on their immigrant status. In particular, they experienced a lack of openness about their cultural life experiences and perspective as well as disregard for their professional qualifications, which negatively affected a perception of Belonging.

Juan reported situations in which he experienced cultural bias and his struggle to build a career despite his qualifications (e.g., university degree, work experience). Juan noted incidents of immigrant-related prejudice and discrimination. In particular, he described the way his foreign accent set him apart at work, as he stated, “…I found that the people, the customers, treat the employees on the basis of your language skills…They were more bossy.” Juan’s experience of differential treatment based on his accent intensified his sense of separateness from the linguistic majority (i.e., Canadian born nationals). He felt stigmatized by his accent and identified a number of discriminatory incidents. Juan recalled one situation in which he felt denigrated by a customer:

At the end of the day, we would put everything away, all the bread and everything, and I remember once, this guy came and I put away the bread he wanted. And I said, “Sorry, but I put it away; we have to close the store.” And he called me a “houseboy.” After that, I didn’t want to have any more jobs in a store. I didn’t want to. Language-based prejudice represented a unique immigrant phenomenon that contributed to Juan’s feelings of devaluation at work. These types of incidents highlight disrespectful and alienating experiences, which many immigrants faced in their occupational life. Being in a position of lower status also appeared to hinder the development of a career in Canada.

Participants such as Anna described limited career opportunities as she settled for lower paying employment in the early period of her immigrant history. Her experiences indicated both a loss of status by comparison to her life in Poland as well as feelings of
inefficacy as she struggled to overcome prejudicial barriers to her career goals. For instance, Anna reminisced about her aspirations in rebuilding her career. Anna’s optimism gave way to disillusionment when she realized that her skills and master’s degree from a Polish university were not valued in the employment market. Anna recalled the difficulty she faced in transitioning her career in Canada, as she said “…even if you evaluate my diploma, yes, they accept my master’s degree but I couldn’t sell this here in Canada. Because I didn’t have connections…and I was new here and I didn’t speak fluent English at the beginning.”

Moreover, Anna also felt that her immigrant status made it difficult to find meaningful work due to prejudicial attitudes:

You come here and you were the lowest of the low, you know? I was naïve, I was looking for a job in the museum and it was quite impossible to get it. And I was doing stupid jobs…selling things or something that you didn’t do in your country. But you’re an educated, open-minded person, and after a while, your English wasn’t so bad. And you couldn’t break the barriers to enter to the...amazing Canadian society and this middle class...this society is very closed.

Anna’s experiences illustrated common obstacles for a number of immigrants who had academic and professional qualifications but encountered ‘closed’ mindsets. Similarly, Paola described negative attitudes towards immigrants that indicated a lower status and disregard for foreign credentials:

And it was pretty shocking that this country would accept people on the basis of their education and once they come here, they just don’t give them any value; If I said I had a master’s, they would say, “Oh, but it’s a Colombian master’s.” And I was like, “What does that mean?” …There was a lot of prejudice; I did not feel accepted and I was being ignored and rejected by the community; and you don’t feel welcome and you don’t feel like you belong.
Paola’s excerpt highlighted her feelings of lack of acceptance from the cultural majority. Her experiences indicated a dismissive and rejecting attitude that contributed to significant adversity, which was prevalent for many participants in this study.

Summary of Loss of Status and Power

The main theme Loss of Status and Power revealed significant obstacles to immigrant adaptation. Participants discussed an immigrant culture in which they were relegated to a lower status and experienced a lower standard of living. Individuals in this study also struggled to effect change over their circumstance and experienced financial and emotional insecurity. Difficulty finding employment as well as under-employment and prejudicial attitudes hindered the development of an attachment to life in Canada from a socioeconomic perspective. Qualitative analysis suggested that participants who experienced discrimination and prejudice had a lower perception of acceptance from the cultural majority. Many individuals described a difficult occupational adjustment that often entailed a new beginning in terms of their career trajectory. Qualitative analysis revealed that immigrants experienced attitudes of devaluation in regard to their past work skills and knowledge, which was a barrier to integration and Belonging.

Reclaiming Status and Power

The second main theme, Reclaiming Status and Power, illustrated the way socioeconomic factors are positively affected by a culmination of changes that increase immigrants’ sense of efficacy, career satisfaction, feelings of worth, and attachment to the community. The ability to communicate in English represented one vital link to improvement in career development as well as familiarity with the Canadian sociocultural environment. In addition, individuals in this study described various strategies to adapt and improve their socioeconomic level through higher education, skill-based training, and changing careers. Immigrants also discussed cognitive strategies to cope with immigrant-related prejudice.
Qualitative analysis revealed the importance of holding satisfying positions of employment, not merely from an economic standpoint, but as a way of perceiving oneself to be an integral part of the community. For instance, Geronimo explained the meaning of employment: “...my immigration situation...I was not allowed to work, it is not my nature because I was very independent in Brazil. I had my job, I had my apartment, and suddenly I'm stuck in like a ghost [in Toronto].” Geronimo underscored the value and meaning of work as he described a life of ‘non-existence’ without employment. Moreover, Geronimo expressed the significance of being able to have a sense of power over his life as he reflected: “The problem was immigration because of my lack of control, right? I had no control because everything was on their hands, like, timing, because I was not able to work. When I got back to work, everything was fine.”

Other participants such as Joseph identified the importance of being a contributing member of society (e.g., working) as part of his fundamental need of citizenship:

Yes, because I want to be a citizen. I want to be a good citizen, so I want to contribute to my field, to Canadian society, so having a good job, and I also have to pay tax, so that’s a good thing, to pay my bills, so that’s the most important thing, to have a good job and to have a good life.

The value and significance of building a perception of connectedness to Canada was developed through an occupational identity and sense of worth, which appeared to serve a vital link to Belonging as immigrants experienced a fuller meaning of citizenship. The main theme Reclaiming Status and Power included two sub-themes of positive adaptation: Career Pathways and Coping with Prejudice (see Figure 7).
Coping with Prejudice

Coping with Prejudice

Language Skills

Language Skills

Career Pathways

Language Skills

Education

Restoring Careers

Achieving Equivalency

Figure 7. Positive Adaptation: Reclaiming Status and Power

Career Pathways

The sub-theme Career Pathways identified a number of ways in which immigrants were able to effect change and create career opportunities, which had a positive effect on social status and sense of being an active participant in the community. Career Pathways involved four categories, which included: Language Skills; Education; Restoring Careers; and Achieving Equivalency.

Language skills. A number of participants did not have significant exposure to the English language prior to their immigration. Difficulty with communication initially led to feelings of isolation and was a hindrance to employment. Most of the participants indicated that developing English language skills was one way of gaining a sense of efficacy over their life in Canada and an important step toward occupational stability.

Participants who initially described linguistic-related setbacks such as Manuco stressed the significance of English fluency: “The language was a great barrier. You can't do many things if you haven't learned the language. And that is the problem…” Manuco also pointed out that his employment prospects became attainable after his English language proficiency increased, as he said, “we got to one point that allowed us to get a job without any problem…And I think that was the turning point. After you are able to communicate
properly, it works. Yes, things get easier for you.” Manuco’s transition into financial and occupational security was a noteworthy aspect of his positive adjustment to life in Canada.

Carmo worked for many years during her upbringing in Portugal in a factory and had few educational opportunities. Upon arrival to Canada, she was employed in a factory with low pay; however, alongside her factory work, she pursued a career in nursing, which had been a lifelong dream. Carmo provided an example of the way in which English language fluency led to furthering her career opportunities:

The language was the first thing. And I think because I don’t have almost no school and I came here without English, I think I improved... when my English starts improving, I went to college and I took several courses…. and then I took a nurse’s assistant’s course. I finished a few years ago.

Carmo spent many years in Canada working in factories; however, her determination to learn English led to her attainment of work in health care. Her desire to help others came from personal loss as she experienced multiple miscarriages as well as illness early in her life as a result of depression and factory labour as a child. For a couple of participants like Carmo and Manuco, the development of language skills was a foundational need in meeting occupational objectives and creating a sense of fulfillment.

*Education.* Another important pathway toward socioeconomic stability was identified by the category Education. Learning new skills that targeted the Canadian labour market highlighted an important action by immigrants to gain a perception of control over their career path and adapt positively.

Manuco discussed his emerging career that began with enrolment in college. Manuco and his wife’s effort to learn new work skills assisted them with finding gainful employment:

I finished all my courses, all my upgrading courses with good marks and he [the instructor] was one good example of people who really believed in me...we came to
Toronto and we finished college here. Both of us [Manuco and his wife]. And it feels good, you know? It feels good because now you remember those people who thought that we couldn’t do it, and now we finally did it.

Achieving success through education was significant to Manuco and his family as they lived through many years of poverty and geographic changes in Canada. His new career in the field of computer technology gave Manuco a perception of emotional and financial security as well as efficacy over his life in Canada.

Rose encountered formidable occupational setbacks and described her dejection after realizing that she would not be able to continue her career as a researcher. She planned a new career path through higher education and reflected on positive cognitive changes: “I don’t have any bad impressions anymore here. That’s why. The bad impressions that I came with at first, I don’t have them. I don’t have those problems right now.” Rose explained that she had to reconceptualise her career aspirations and decided to build on her knowledge in economics and study at college to develop a new career:

I’m more consistent to the situation; I’m more targeted in what I’m doing…I hadn’t decided yet to go get another diploma. Maybe it was a lower level for me at that time.

I thought that, because I have my master’s degree…But now, I think it’s really important for me to get that [education in Canada]. And I feel more confident with that diploma to apply for other jobs.

Although her education level was higher in Iran, Rose realized that she would need a new course of action to find work. Her excerpt highlighted the value of education in providing more confidence as well as a diploma that could increase work opportunities and stabilize herself and her family financially.

Zizo attended university in Canada to build on his background in international banking: “I was running from Scarborough to Mississauga for appointments and downtown, and then at night, I would go back to Atkinson, to York University to go to night school.” Zizo
was eventually able to get a job interview through a contact at school, which led to full-time employment. In the following excerpt, he described the benefit of being part of a university social and academic network:

In a way, I wanted to study computers science, it was dream. I love computers but my background is banking and finance, so I joined a computer science degree and I spent a year-and-a-half doing computer science. So I started to know the culture, the people, sitting with friends, meeting with groups.

Zizo’s experiences at school provided him with knowledge about the labour market as well as a network of friends who assisted him in beginning his career in Canada. Prior to university, he had struggled meet his instrumental needs. Education was one important way for immigrants to gain a sense of efficacy over their career path by developing professional skills, legitimacy in the labour force, as well as a network from which to find employment.

Restoring careers. A couple of participants were able to resume their careers in Canada, which represented an important perception of equal status and feeling of efficacy over one’s life. Qualitative analysis revealed a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment through re-establishing a past career, which facilitated an attachment to the community and a perception of being valued in the community.

Harris worked as an interpreter when he was a refugee prior to immigrating to Canada. He was able to find work in Canada as an interpreter after a number of years through volunteer work and developing a social network. His job provided financial stability to his family, a sense of pride and contribution to his community. Harris considered himself a cultural ambassador to fellow Afghan nationals as well as gave him a sense of value and connection to his community in Canada:

…If I wasn’t able to speak my language, who would give me a job here? One,
I share the same value with Afghans and if they ask me anything about immigration, I know. It made me feel more pride, and again that value of respect for my culture and respect for my language helped me.

Zizo was able to resume his career in international banking, which gave him a sense of value as he noted “…I am catching up. I will do it; I did well, jumping from one position to another. People respect success.” Furthermore, Zizo discussed the way in which his career represented a change in his status as he perceived a greater perception of acceptance:

My turning point was three years after joining the bank. When I finished my license. That moment, yes, I would say “I’m adjusting and I see somebody rewarding me and I am being treated equal.”...now, they started to ask me. “This position is there, we have an opening, would you be interested?” Rather than, “I am looking for an opportunity and I hear that you have an opening.” Now they ask me.

Zizo reflected on the connection between his perception of equality and positive adaptation and sense of value/respect from others as a member of society. He and other participants such as Harris illustrated the importance of being prized and valued in terms of status, which appeared to bolster a sense of attachment to their community.

*Achieving equivalency.* The final category of Career Pathways identified a struggle to attain a rewarding career in Canada that was equivalent to the past in terms of socioeconomic status and fulfillment. A number of immigrants re-conceptualized their career goals in Canada and entered different occupations in which they could bridge their professional skills and experiences. For instance, Geronimo identified the need to change careers as his past employment in marketing was predicated on deep cultural knowledge and a high level of linguistic fluency:

…I started to realize that it was going to take longer for my English to be good. My job in Brazil was dependent on communication and language and marketing. And here, if I were to have a job, I would have to write English with no mistakes.
Geronimo’s level of English fluency and his need to adapt to a different sociocultural context prohibited him from continuing his career. He responded to this challenge by altering his career choice: “I can apply what I learn and what I know in Brazil in the field of health. It depends on the job that I get.” Geronimo was able to secure employment, which required use of the Portuguese language rather than English. He found fulfillment in his new position in the field of mental health: “And after I got a job in the field, it was very healthy helping other people, right? Things started to make sense for me even though I didn’t stop to like marketing, I think counselling is important.” Thus, Geronimo considered his occupational adaptation successful through an amalgamation of sustained determination and a shift in his occupational identity, which resulted in meaningful employment for him.

Mummu reflected on his initial struggle to find a job that reflected his high level of professional qualifications. He noted labour market differences that made it difficult to translate his knowledge as a project manager for a multinational company in Pakistan to a commensurate job in Canada as Mummu indicated: “I knew how to do financial analysis and I knew about engineering too, some of the projects were engineering related. So I had to be an “all arounder” to be in project management [in Pakistan].”

In Canada, Mummu had difficulty securing similar work because he found that many employers were looking for specific set of skills that he could not always accommodate and explained that “…I might not have had the exact fit but I had the skills in multiple areas, which developed from my work in Pakistan. It is just part of the environment there; you need to know many things to survive.” However, Mummu was determined to rebuild a new and equivalent career that he held in Pakistan. He earned his way up from a telemarketing position to management through patience, hard work, and a mentorship program in his company:

One of the senior directors is my mentor so he mentored me to find a job at my level. He understood that I have my MBA and I have so much experience and that I
shouldn’t be where I was and he helped me to develop a network with different directors in finance. Eventually there was an opening and I already knew someone there and went through the interview process and got the job and there were eight people who were competing with me and I was the only non-white, non-Canadian person with non-Canadian experience and I got the job.

Mummu’s ability to use his professional qualifications and regain a commensurate career to his position in Pakistan resulted in positive adaptation for him and his family. In particular, he reflected on closer ties with his family, more interaction with and availability for his children, and increased social opportunities, which appeared to help with his overall attachment to the community:

…when I got this job with regular hours, things changed. I was around them [children] more and I was able to afford a car and take them around, show them the city, if my kids want to go to Wonderland, I can afford to take them and it made a difference. And also, I was able to make friends also. If you are living in continuously poor conditions it is hard to make friends. You are not able to go out, to go to a restaurant; you cannot do these things with them. So, it really changes your life when you have job stress such as long hours, it is isolating.

Changes in socioeconomic status such as reconstructing one’s career confer a sense of empowerment as well as improvement in family and social functioning.

Other participants such as Anna reported on the way a meaningful career can facilitate a sense of satisfaction, positive adaptation, and can help form an attachment to the Canadian sociocultural environment. Anna recalled her early years in Canada in which she struggled to develop a career. After coming to the conclusion that she could not have a career as a historian and museum curator, Anna creatively engaged in a new career. She was able to bridge her artistic interests/skills and knowledge of computers to become a website designer. The ability to effect change and participate in a meaningful way in the
Canadian labour market was essential to Anna in feeling that she was a valued and contributing member of Canadian society:

When I got this job, things started changing. I started belonging to this society and I feel it was the job… I was a graphic designer there and I feel okay. I was entering into Canadian society; I can say it that way. I feel that I’m more belonging to this country, to this society.

Participants such as Anna, Mummu and Geronimo provided insight into the value and meaning of building new occupations. Many immigrants experienced marginalization in the workforce. The ability to positively adapt through a range of Career Pathways helped to ameliorate alienation by building a perception of equality, satisfaction, and Belonging.

Coping with Prejudice

The main theme Reclaiming Status and Power included a second sub-theme, Coping with Prejudice. Qualitative analysis identified a range of strategies that helped immigrants cope effectively with prejudice related to socioeconomic issues. For example, immigrants discussed the constructive effects of cognitive strategies (e.g., reframing struggle), social support and networking, as well as gaining a better understanding of the culture of the Canadian labour force. Coping with Prejudice highlighted ways in which individuals were able to gain a perception of control over their circumstances and overcome occupational forms of alienation and stagnation. A couple of participants also illustrated personal growth stemming from deleterious incidents of prejudice.

For instance, Richa indicated her cognitive strategy of using deleterious events as a stepping stone to achieve occupational and educational goals. In the following excerpt, Richa conjectured about her internal process that underscored the way negative setbacks (e.g., prejudice) prompted internal fortitude:

Interesting, yeah there were certain incidents that planted the seed of change. When immigrants come here they are vulnerable. They are. They don’t know anything so
people can abuse them and misuse them in certain ways such as hiring, underpaying and stuff like that, there are few people who would be assertive enough to in the beginning to stand up for themselves…

Richa conveyed the way early experiences of maltreatment were contained in the process of positive adaptation and integration as she resolved to stand up for her rights. In the following quote, Richa discussed the significance of past setbacks:

It took me a while, there were several different things that helped me to adapt. There were several experiences I went through which were kind of stressful that left a lesson for me that if this happens to me next time, I’m not going to act the way I did before. And the job was one of those experiences which taught me that I should never ever let others to abuse my rights.

Richa’s lived experiences invoked strength as she detailed her struggle to develop personal growth, which is evident by her confidence:

I feel much more comfortable here talking with everyone. Actually much less resistant than before, resistant to talking to people, resistant to initiating conversation, you know. I used to get scared that I would speak and that I wouldn’t be able to speak that well or look bad and would sit at the back of the class at my university. That happened to me for a couple of terms and that stayed with me. I would say that I didn’t have a lot of confidence and gained it over time.

Richa’s narrative exemplified the process of immigrant resilience. Her excerpts highlight a series of events that led to greater confidence and emotional grounding in Canada. Specifically, her internal ‘voice’ gained prominence through a decision to challenge stereotypes.

Tricia also detailed her determination to build a career despite experiences of prejudice:
Yes, I used to think initially, it’s very sad when people kind of say things that are mean, but now, I am rarely bothered, I am not bothered by my accent, if my own people say something negative about me or someone else, white or black, I don’t care, I know what I want. I think there are good people here in the system and I look out for those people.

Although she encountered social alienation (e.g., racism) early in post-immigration, Tricia worked hard to build a supportive community of friends to achieve her educational and career goals. Over time, Tricia became immersed in the Canadian cultural milieu (e.g., volunteering, studying at university, employment related networking) and developed a social and occupational grounding. She also emphasized her focused and determined attitude to achieve her educational goals and was accepted into post-graduate studies:

I think right now, I understand Canadians better, I have a network and I kind of know who I am now and what I want. And really understanding myself and what I want to get from this society. I have become stable. I think getting into the programs (post-graduate studies) I know what I want…I think there are good people here in the system and I look out for those people.

Other participants such as Joseph experienced problems with steady employment. He initially worked in a factory and was unemployed for a period of time. Joseph’s work life in his homeland had never been a concern and he believed that his professional qualifications would lead to steady employment in Canada. Joseph reflected on the devaluation of his professional skills in Canada:

But here, they don't value my education or my experience; they just say I don’t have Canadian experience. What is Canadian experience?...Then I realized that what is going on to me and others [immigrants] is not fair. And I was very disappointed and I thought I wanted to go back.
Joseph’s experiences of prejudice significantly hindered his ability to find work. After developing a sense of community in Canada, his social contacts were helpful to him finding steady employment, which contributed to a perception of grounding in Canada:

So after I made some introduction from a few of my friends, they kind of guided me where to go and what to do and where to look for jobs. So I found the hidden job market and everything, how to apply, how to approach employers and how to polish up my résumé…. So I ended up getting a job.

Joseph’s social network was key to coping with prejudice in the labour market. Through social networks, he gained insight into the cultural aspects of the Canadian labour force, which led to employment, financial and emotional security.

Many immigrants such as Joseph, Richa and Tricia’s post-immigration experiences of prejudice and devaluation of their professional qualifications did not detract from their determination to achieve educational and occupational goals. Cognitive reframing of prejudice as well as networking and gaining sociocultural fluency in the labour market facilitated positive adaptation and a sense of Belonging.

**Summary of Reclaiming Status and Power**

Qualitative analysis identified a gap between many immigrants’ pre- and post-immigration lifestyles in terms of socioeconomic power and status. In particular, immigrants revealed a decline in financial stability as well as social standing, which decreased a sense of financial and emotional security. Participants discussed the challenges they faced in terms of devaluation (i.e., lack of acceptance) of their professional qualifications and skills, which was an important part of their cultural identity. Qualitative analysis indicated that many immigrants perceived estrangement from the community in terms of their low standard of living and social standing as well as barriers to work opportunities.

The main theme Reclaiming Status and Power identified a number of actions that pointed to resilient mechanisms in response to socioeconomic challenges. For instance,
participants reflected on the use of education (e.g., increased language fluency, higher education to increase opportunity) and specific training to adjust to the Canadian labour market. The development of meaningful and stable occupations often led to deeper engagement and attachment in the community. A few participants discussed the importance of control (i.e., power to effect change) and concomitant changes to their social standing. Qualitative analysis indicated that greater control and social standing engendered a stronger attachment to the community and enhanced a perception of Belonging.
Chapter Six

Gender

The key theme Gender identified the effects of gender socialization and norms in pre- and post-immigration life. Specifically, female immigrants reflected on a number of differences in gender-cultural dynamics such as differing socialization (e.g., role expectations), rights (e.g., equality), and norms in Canada. Female participants primarily reported a markedly greater perception of equality (e.g., expanded career opportunities) by comparison to their homeland. However, gender forms of equality and norms in Canada (e.g., working outside the home, division of domestic labour, child care responsibilities) had negative implications for several women and their partners. These changes often led to increased stress for women, familial conflict, and in a few cases, dissolution of marital relationships.

Female participants also discussed mechanisms of resilience that led to positive adaptation. Specifically, several participants discussed the context of past familial relationships (i.e., role models) that provided a foundation upon which they developed internal strength. A number of women described progressive attitudes in family and experiences of other female family members overcoming adversity; those experiences led to core beliefs about their capacity to succeed and increased their sense of self-worth. In addition, female participants described the importance of gender norm differences in Canada. The opportunity to achieve their goals in an environment of greater equality was pivotal to fostering positive adaptation.

The key theme Gender is divided into two main themes; each main theme explored female participants’ gender relationships in their homeland and their experiences in Canada. The first main theme, Contextual Stressors, focuses on adversity in regard to female gender roles and norms that hindered positive adaptation. The second main theme, Equal Frameworks, identifies mechanisms of resilience related to gender socialization in pre-
immigration life and the positive effects of societal norms in Canada. It is important to point out that this chapter does not discuss gender norms from a male immigrant’s perspective as men in this study did not identify gender-related issues.

**Contextual Stressors**

The first main theme, Contextual Stressors, illustrated the way female immigrants were affected by the context of gendered forms of socialization and norms in their homeland and in post-immigration life. Female participants highlighted the significance of both periods in their life in relation to shaping their adaptation in Canada. Specifically, women identified environmental conditions in pre-immigration life (e.g., inequality) that were distressing and barriers to their development; these experiences provided important context to their struggles in Canada and were significant to resilience.

After immigration, several female participants reported on the way past social and gender norms in their homeland carried forward into the relationship dynamics with their partners in Canada, leading to distress and difficulties with adaptation. Two sub-themes elaborated on contextual factors in immigrant women’s heritage culture and associated problems in Canada: Gender Inequality and Power Dynamics (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8. Adversity: Contextual Stressors](image)

**Gender Inequality**

The first sub-theme under Contextual Stressors, Gender Inequality, reflected gender-related adversity (i.e., prejudice and discrimination) that many female participants faced in their homeland. Women discussed imbalances of power in relation to men, prejudice and
discrimination, and inequity that was perpetuated by a separation of female and male roles. Qualitative analysis indicated the significance of these experiences in post-immigration life.

For example, stories of resilience in post-immigration life had undertones of struggle from the past, which fostered a desire to achieve goals in Canada. For instance, Carmo was forced to leave school in her childhood and had to cook and clean for her family at the age of 10. She recalled an incident in which she received serious burns from a boiling pot and required long-term medical attention. Carmo relayed a story with heightened emotion as she noted that a nurse would visit throughout the week as well as help Carmo with cleaning duties: “She used to come to my house and... [tears] she don’t have to [on weekends], but she used to come Saturdays and Sundays to my house to help me to clean my things and put a new bandage, everything new.” This experience was pivotal for her as she felt empathy and care. In Carmo’s post-immigration life, she became a nurse practitioner, which was directly linked to her childhood experiences. Memories of the past provided the context in which many immigrants felt greater \textit{Belonging} in Canada as they perceived more openness and gender equality.

Several participants identified the way traditional gender socialization relegated women to care giving roles (e.g., cooking, responsibility for domestic chores). Female participants characterized their lived experiences of inequity as demoralizing and detrimental to their growth.

For example, Paola elaborated on her experiences in Columbia. She described barriers to career advancement and illustrated the way gender cultural norms and roles of her homeland objectified women, which was evident in the workplace:

One of the things that I remember that was difficult at the time was that you have to overcome the barrier that you’re a woman...for people to respect you and not see you as like a woman. There’s this misperception of women; they’re pretty, and they’re supposed to look pretty, and that's it. So you have to overcome that, and
obviously in an academic setting, it’s very much what happens there…the culture is very macho our culture.

Although she remained proud of her ethnic cultural heritage, Paola elaborated on the prevalent gender-based discrimination in her culture:

If anything, my whole experience [immigrating] made me be proud of my culture, and made me more aware of social justice and discrimination and things within my own culture that are really bad, like, gender-wise, for example. The differentiation of genders and gender discrimination and things like that…

In contrast, Paola noted the way the gender-social environment in Canada helped her feel accepted and an equal member of society:

… it’s not only in an academic setting but everyone here is the same and you’re treated the same, and you’re expected to do the same. Both of you, men and women, wash the dishes, take care of the babies, and blah, blah. So you see men walking kids on the street, things that you don’t see in Latin America.

Richa described the way female cultural life (e.g., activities of daily living, interpersonal interactions) in her homeland was controlled by males: “When I went to school and everything, I was raised as a woman and have to obey the men or to follow what they say. Those were the rules of society.” Richa further explained the way she was affected by an environment of control in which females were subjugated to rules that delimited social experiences outside the home as she reported a life of restrictions reserved for females:

Not having too much contact [with males], even with my female friends. Not hanging out with them at all because I had these restrictions. I never visited their house. I would never talk about boys or anything, something which you feel at that age.

Being forced to conform to gender roles was an immense pressure for Richa who acknowledged the way she internalized family and societal rules by restricting her activities:
And girls would be talking about boys and I wouldn’t have participated in that. It was me who was responsible for these values. I would intentionally not take part in such conversations although I had desire, and thought, “Oh that’s cool, I should be listening to that [music].”

Richa explained that she internalized gender norms as a means of providing safety from being an outcast and fear of repercussions by male family members. Specifically, she noted the threat of alienation for not adhering to gender norms in her homeland:

...you would be amazed to discover how gender roles are different in our society. Women are not even liked if they are working outside [the home], if they are getting jobs...I was so scared [about talking to boys] even if I am not, even if there is nothing on my part but [if] someone just says my name and says that he spoke to me or something, I would be shivering with fear that, what’s going to happen to me? What are my brothers going to do to me? Probably they wouldn’t even listen to me, they would think it might be true. It is not a trust issue. This is how the frame of mind was, so definitely, it would be an issue.

Social gender norms and the fear of consequences enforced Richa’s lack of equal status, truncating and sequestering her participation in society beyond rigid roles and customs.

Carmo contrasted the way traditional gender roles in her homeland in Portugal controlled and limited her options such as continuing in school as she was relegated to specific gender roles: “And these things for girls, like, the father has to be the boss until they’re married...when they’re married, they’re going to have another boss: it’s their husband...It was hard on that aspect.” In terms of educational opportunities, she described fewer opportunities by comparison to male peers:

...he [father] thinks he was doing the best for me but it was not the best. When I was young, when it was time to go to school, I cannot go to school, I have to stay home to learn how to cook, how to clean and how to iron because girls have to stay home.
That was a big, big problem for me. Because the culture…when I was sixteen I start to get depressed. I had Bell's Palsy in my face because I was so nervous.

Carmo’s life was significantly hindered by strict gender roles. Her limited education had implications for work as she was not able to read or write and initially spent many years in a factory, until deciding to go to school in Canada.

All of the women in this study described varying degrees of inequality in their gender socialization. Furthermore, female immigrants indicated a period of stress in their family and partner relationships after immigration. A number of women in this study described problems related to changes in gender socialization and norms; in particular, female participants indicated the way in which their family and partner relationships in Canada carried their customary gender norms and role expectations, which is discussed in the following section.

Power Dynamics

The second sub-theme Power Dynamics reflected the changing dynamics in family gender norms after immigrating to Canada. In particular, a couple of female participants highlighted a rupture in their cultural-gender norms and roles in post-immigration Canada. Although female immigrants described greater equality in terms of gender norms in Canada as well as expanded career opportunities, they also shared stories about personal distress and inter-familial conflict.

For instance, Anna encountered distress in her marital relationship after immigrating to Canada. Her experiences related to power dynamics with her husband. Anna emphasized the way her husband and his family with whom they had shared housing, had expectations that she maintain an allegiance to traditional gender roles. Anna struggled with the expectations and explained the ensuing rupture in her relationship:

And finally, this marriage stopped working because for me I was so close in this relationship and I didn't feel comfortable after a while...his family was a very
traditional family...like you are the woman taking care of husband, this kind of thing. I didn't like it anymore.

Anna began to refute traditional gender roles through an internal comparative process within Canada that challenged her past experiences as she reported:

Yes, yes, part of that, yes, sure, it [gender norms in Canada] influenced me...[I was] exploring different cultures, not all of them. It opens your mind and it gives you more perspective...That you can be a woman and I can have more freedom and I can explore life. I don’t need to feel like a servant for men in the marriage. And it doesn’t matter how old you are. There’s always something to explore and Canada is great for that. It's not easy but... and you have freedom, you have incredible freedom here.

Anna emphasized a sense of greater “freedom” in Canada to explore her own interests, which created personal growth and a connectedness to society.

Furthermore, Anna’s experiences highlighted the way past gendered forms of culture are relevant to adaptation in Canada. Qualitative analysis indicated a process through which Anna and other female participants renegotiate aspects of their gender-cultural identity in Canada and form a perception of Belonging.

Paola reported similar experiences to Anna. She reflected on the significance of living in the Canadian cultural milieu as a facilitator of greater gender equity. As a result of changes to the gender-cultural environment, Paola described ensuing conflict with her husband, who did not embrace an abrogation of traditional gender roles:

I think that what happened is that the one thing was gender. Our gender roles were very much the production of our social roles back home. So he was the man, I was the woman, I took care of the house, he wouldn’t. He wouldn’t help in the kitchen or with the cooking or anything like that. And he was more like... yes, I was in charge of all the logistics of the house, just one example.
The division of household labour was one expression of the power dynamic between Paola and her husband, who wanted to maintain traditional gender roles in Canada. Paola described a growing detachment in her marriage that was prompted by her desire to express greater equity in their marriage:

…I think he didn’t change culturally. He was just reproducing the same culture and trying to live the same life as we were living there. For me things had changed so much and then we had to repair our relationship if we wanted to move on because we had to change our roles, we had to share more, we had to… it was another type of couplehood because at the same time, he doesn’t have his friends, I don’t have my friends, we had each other. So how are we going to support each other? So that shift didn’t happen so we grew apart.

Immigration to Canada shifted gender power dynamics for several participants like Anna and Paola. Exposure to differing gender-cultural norms in Canada led to changes in relationships, which resulted in partner-related stress and conflict but ultimately led to greater opportunities for personal growth and Belonging.

*Summary of Contextual Stressors*

Female immigrants described the relevance of their gender socialization and norms in their pre-immigration life. Past experiences were primarily associated with gender power imbalances and inequality by comparison to the Canadian sociocultural environment. Hardships related to gender inequality appeared to be pertinent to women in post-immigrant life as they described a process of detachment from gender norms and role expectations. For instance, female immigrants indicated stress in their family and partner relationships as a result of changing gender dynamics in Canada (e.g., role changes in their marriage). Recognizing and altering gender inequality once they had immigrated to Canada resulted in a process of reconsidering roles in Canada which ultimately increased a stronger sense of
*Belonging.* The process of positive adaptation, however, was not a direct trajectory as a couple of women described setbacks such as dissolution of their relationships.

*Equal Frameworks*

The second and final main theme, Equal Frameworks, illustrated the significance of both pre- and post-immigration experiences that contributed to positive adaptation and a sense of *Belonging* in Canada. Firstly, the term Equal Frameworks referenced several participants’ depictions of their pre-immigration family role models who lived beyond traditional female gender roles and norms and fostered their development and self-worth.

Secondly, Equal Frameworks also referenced post-migration where many participants experienced a gender culture of greater equality, which offered a broader range of opportunities (e.g., career) and feelings of acceptance. Positive role models and an empowering environment in Canada also appeared to be interrelated as a number of women were able to access and act on the values internalized from their role models.

Two sub-themes elucidated the way in which past and present factors contributed to positive adaptation: Role Models and Gender Roles and Norms (see Figure 9).

![Figure 9. Positive Adaptation: Equal Frameworks](image)

*Role Models*

The first sub-theme Role Models detailed the way immigrant women gained an important source of strength from their familial environment that helped to transform their experiences in Canada. For instance, many of the female participants acknowledged the importance of role models in their family, who facilitated inner strength despite contending
with limited opportunities. Tricia explained the way her family history inspired her. Specifically, women in her family had a history of challenging traditional gender roles as she commented on her grandmother’s life experiences:

She had to fight for it. She could tell you some of the stories. She really had to fight, even to become a Christian, in a white man’s church, it was a big issue. She told us all these stories, and sending her daughters to school was a big issue. Even though traditionally you were allowed to but it was still patriarchal, right. So she was focusing on her children that they should go to school. That was a priority. And you could see that other people [in her community] really didn’t agree with what she was doing, but she took advantage of that [opportunity].

Tricia gleaned valuable lessons from her grandmother’s path such as persevering with her own beliefs and values which helped her to assert her own interests beyond traditional gender norms.

Consequently, Tricia was able to use her grandmother’s narrative as a model and develop an independent life course. Rather than getting married, Tricia continued her education and noted the way her grandmother had been a source of influence. Tricia struggled against the prevailing pressure of male dominance in her community:

The man wants to control somebody; he wants to fulfill his dreams in life, but not you.

So that is something that I don't really like about my culture. Young women are not given the small opportunity to become what they really want to become in this life. People give their dreams to them [men], you know?

Tricia elaborated on the value of role models during her early development: “Yes, for me I would say that the women in my tribe are very, very strong. And they are very educated and hard-working, so I think that had an impact.” Female role models contributed to Tricia’s determination to resist marriage despite peer pressure and continue building her education and dreams in Canada:
…in my culture women who never get married, it’s a very big stigma. Right now, most of my friends are married with kids, and they keep wondering what I’m still doing going to school, and they think it’s a waste of time. Okay, that’s fine. My time will come, but I have to follow my dreams. I have to follow my natural goals.

Tricia immigrated to Canada and maintained her focus of achieving educational and career goals which stemmed from a family environment that encouraged female independence. In Canada, Tricia faced struggles to adapt but was able to gain strength from her past role models as well as from women in Canada: “…what I found was the strength that the women in my family had or have, and the strengths that women here have. You can see that sometimes they share their stories, their struggles; they’ve been through similar to us.” Thus, role models in Tricia’s life, both in her family and women she has met in Canada, facilitated inner strength to overcome adversity in pre- and post-immigration life.

Richa also expounded on familial role models that have transformed her life. In particular, she noted her mother’s personal sacrifice and its impact on her. In particular Richa described her mother’s determination and resilience in the face of formidable circumstances:

Yes, I would say there is a gender aspect, my mom, she raised us because my father was away a lot, moving and transferring, and my mom, she was a powerful woman. I can’t even imagine how she was doing it. She was a full-time teacher, helping my grandfather run his business. She was in charge. And she was so strong, she was so strong and she raised six children. I don’t know how she did it, I can’t imagine.

Moreover, Richa pointed to her mother’s ability to withstand stress and cope effectively as an internal guide during her own struggles post-migration. For example, Richa recalled periods in which she contended with significant stress, without help from her husband. Richa described her determination to succeed in times of distress:
It is something I knew that I had to do if I wanted to accomplish some of my goals. I would have to make sacrifices; that is why I never looked to him [husband], even knowing that I would be alone, I knew I would be responsible to take care of the kids.

Richa’s early life experiences were important in providing a framework of inner strength. In particular, her mother set an example for dealing with hardship and being independent and determined, regardless of gender boundaries.

Paola described the way her parental role models provided a belief that she could attain her career goals, which engendered determination to achieve academically despite the obstacles associated with being female (i.e., inequity). Paola noted the contrast between her parental role models and an environment in her homeland of subservient roles to men:

My perception, basically, because my parents were very liberal, and very… my perception is that I have the opportunity as a guy and that I was the same, yes. But socially, it wasn’t the case. When I went to school and everything…women have to obey the men or to follow what they say; those were the rules of society.

Paola’s family environment helped her assert educational aspirations, which led to postgraduate school and a position as a researcher in her homeland as well as a positive career transition in Canada.

Many of the female participants’ narratives illustrated the way role models in their developmental years contributed to beliefs about themselves that posited a sense of inner strength. Internal strength gathered from their lived experiences appeared to contribute to resilience in the face of hardships during the process of positive adaptation to life in Canada. 

**Gender Roles and Norms**

The second sub-theme under the main theme Equal Frameworks, Gender Roles and Norms, illustrated the way Canadian gender roles and norms contributed to positive adaptation in Canada for women. A few participants described the sociocultural environment as empowering to their growth (e.g., career opportunities). Female immigrants indicated
greater latitude and acceptance in a range of role expectations and more openness in terms of acting outside of traditional gender boundaries (e.g., single mother) as well as asserting their needs. Overall, qualitative analysis suggested that greater equality in gender norms increased a sense of worth for women and fostered acceptance and attachment to Canadian society.

After moving to Canada with her husband, Carmo identified more with the gender-cultural milieu which provided greater equitability between genders. She highlighted the significance of basic human rights, which was not afforded to her as a child: “Yes because I think humans' rights was different in here. People have rights… I don't have all the rights [in Portugal]…but I could see people here have rights, they could speak about their problems and everything…”

Carmo’s process of personal growth began with difficult experiences in her early years:

Before I came, I was different, I think different; people in my days, my parents and everyone, teach me different. And I think it was not right the way our culture was [in Portugal]. Before, all the time, I was sick because they were not human. They think humans don't have rights.

Carmo perceived Canada as a place where she could have more opportunity. In particular, an important goal was to get a school-based education and work in health care. Carmo recalled tearfully an experience in which a nurse cared for her during a time that she was sick as a young child. This was a touchstone event in her life as it represented one of the few times she felt that someone cared about her well-being. The differing gender environment in Canada led to positive changes in Carmo’s life as she was able to attend school and fulfill her dream:

I went to school here; I know I'm not one hundred percent [in English], but I think I could speak something. I take an extra fifteen courses because my dream was to be
a nurse since I’m very young. But I never went to school. Over here I think now I start doing what I want to do.

Carmo’s life changed significantly after immigrating to an environment that proffered greater rights and opportunities for women.

Richa indicated the way gender norms positively affected her life in Canada. After separating from her husband as a result of a number of stressors related to post-migration adjustment, Richa lived with her children. She explained that being alone as a woman in her homeland would not have been an option for her due to restrictive gender-cultural norms:

I can appreciate it [gender norms] more now than when I came. I am so glad now because I know no one is saying, “Why is she living alone, why is she doing this?” I know other women taking care of kids that are single, it is not that unusual in this society; it makes me comfortable to know that this is accepted here. My own culture would not say it is okay, not at all.

Richa illustrated the way gender norms in Canada fostered acceptance as a single parent. Moreover, she explained the way in which her choice to be single led to personal growth. In the following quote, Richa discussed her process of resilience that began with hardships in her marriage and eventually yielded a personal resolve to thrive:

I had to consider many things [when she separated from her husband]. For example, my husband’s family would not have appreciated it at all, that I would be living here alone. But I did it for my own future and for my children and I don’t care about what they think…And I think it was living here, it strengthened me as a person, and all kind of experiences that I have gone through helped me to emerge as a person who is not as weak as I was before.

In addition, Richa explained the importance of living in an environment that is tolerant of diverse lifestyles, which directly contributed to a perception of Belonging in Canada:
This society was so nurturing in that respect. I have seen women living on their own, single moms still working if they have kids, still managing, that gives me so much strength. Just knowing it is acceptable here. If I was in my hometown, I know it would be impossible, for a woman to live alone if she has kids. There are so many safety risks there. There are so many risks involved, you can’t believe.

The sociocultural environment had a profound impact on gender issues for many women. Several participants like Paola contrasted pre- and post-immigration experiences and the importance of the environment in fostering equality. In addition, Paola highlighted the way early role models in her life helped to set an internalized sense of equality, which she was able to act on in Canada:

…my parents definitely set an equal framework so that hasn’t changed. I always felt that. But now it’s more real [in Canada]. For example, I’m just going to be very concrete. When I was living in Columbia...we went to parties and when we got together, women would take care of the kids in the kitchen and men would be outside drinking. And even though I knew that I didn’t like that, because I didn’t grow up with those rules in my house, those were the social rules, so I adapted to them. And I was the one who cooked at home, and I just adapted to those roles because those were the extended society roles. And then when I came here, then I was able to say, “No, no, no, we divide things and it has to be an equal share of things.”

Paola highlighted the way in which gender norms in Canada bolstered personal growth, giving her opportunity to “…enact them [equal rights] here.” Furthermore, she also illustrated the way the diversity in Canada provided her with a perception of Belonging through a wider range of acceptable cultural norms, as she stated:

Yes, the same with gender, the same with environment, the same with everything, that I was able to do it here. And I think that Canada, or for me Toronto… my
perception of Toronto is that this is a town where I could become whatever I wanted because it’s such a hybrid culture as well, that everybody fits. Participants like Paola, Richa and Carmo illustrated the way the gender-cultural environment in Canada facilitated growth. In particular, gender norms and roles were described as cultivating potential and building an attachment through an environment of greater equality.

**Summary of Equal Frameworks**

Qualitative analysis revealed that a number of women experienced lower status related to gender inequality in their homeland by comparison to Canada. The main theme, Equal Frameworks, identified a process of change in which female immigrants developed an attachment to the Canadian sociocultural environment. Individuals identified a range of experiences from childhood to the present that contributed to their growth and ability to cope with adversity. Specifically, many participants shared the way their family provided a framework of positive gender role models that often challenged traditional gender norms.

Moreover, gender norms in Canada empowered women through a perception greater autonomy in role expectations. New opportunities increased several women’s perception of acceptance through more progressive gender norms and a perception of substantive differences in human rights. Despite initial setbacks in resettlement within a few women’s marital relationships, many women illustrated a sense of *Belonging* as they benefited from a wider range of rights and equality.
Chapter Seven

Sexual Orientation

The key theme Sexual Orientation elaborated on the way immigrants’ sexual orientation and identity is affected by cultural socialization and societal norms. A few male immigrants contrasted the sociocultural norms between their homeland and Canada. In particular, participants reflected on systemic prejudice and discrimination in their homeland towards gay identity. Concomitantly, male immigrants suppressed their affective and sexual attractions in order to live congruently to expectations and norms in their homeland. Immigrants who discussed sexual orientation as a factor in their adjustment perceived Canada as a place that was more accepting, which enabled them to express a vital aspect of their authentic ‘self’ (i.e., gay orientation and identity). In addition, tolerance and freedom of expression of gay identity appeared to facilitate a stronger bond to their community.

Paris offered a depiction of his post-immigration life as he described the importance of living in an environment free of harassment, which created a perception of Belonging in his adopted homeland:

For me, Canada is a big opportunity for learning about myself, because my learning is adapting day-by-day here in Canada. This is how Canada can help me. Being a person who I want, without discrimination, without prejudice... I love this country because I have respect here.

Paris’ need for “respect” and value was important to his cultural attachment to Canada. The sociocultural environment in Canada, as illustrated by Paris, provided the opportunity for participants to develop and express their authentic identity.

Self-Congruence

The process of resilience is reflected by two interrelated periods. The first stage involved pre-migration hardship which individuals described as a forced dispossession of gay identity in an invalidating environment. The second period, after immigration, was
identified as an adaptive process of ownership of one’s sexual identity that appeared to increase a sense of identification with and inclusion in Canada. One main theme Self-Congruence emerged under Sexual Orientation (see Figure 10), which described pre- and post-immigration life. Self-Congruence is explained by two sub-themes: Invisibility and Openness of Identity.

![Tree Diagram]

Figure 10. Adversity and Positive Adaptation: Self-Congruence

**Invisibility**

All of the participants who self-identified their sexual orientation as “gay” regarded themselves as ‘outsiders’ in their homeland. Individuals elaborated on the way conventional social mores and devaluation of gay identity contributed to disowning of their sexual orientation. The sub-theme Invisibility illustrates the way participants and their families acted to keep their sexual identity concealed.

Participants like Juan described close familial ties during his upbringing; however, despite secure familial relationships, he concealed his gay identity. Juan conjectured that his parents were aware of his sexual orientation even though it was never discussed openly:

> I always say that mother and father, they always know when they have a gay child. They never asked me anything, they never talked…No, in my family, we never talked about it, we never did…Anyway, I think that’s one of the reasons I wanted to leave my home town since I was a child.

Juan’s sentiments highlight shame about gay identity. Although he did not experience direct discrimination, his sexual orientation was never revealed to his family due to a non-receptive
atmosphere. Consequently, Juan experienced a displacement of this major cultural construction of himself. In addition, he detailed the way sociocultural life was categorized toward heterosexual couplehood:

I would say, in general, it could be traditional, yes, I would say. Yes, in our culture, it’s like… traditionally, women do the household, and the men do different things. It used to be like that but not anymore in Mexico really. The wife and the husband, they both work now. It’s not like… everybody has to work. But I think as a child, when I grew up with my mother, it was more like, yes, the males go out and work, and the wife stays at the home.

Juan’s desire to live beyond traditional borders (i.e., heterosexual orientation) forged his decision to immigrate with the aim of expressing his sexual identity openly:

…I always dreamed about living outside. I would say…I’m gay. So I think this part of being gay, I was to leave the home town, even though my family wasn’t…as I said, my father wasn’t the macho type or I wasn’t flamboyant or whatever. I wanted to live outside.

Geronimo identified a sense of estrangement to his ethnocultural environment in Brazil as he described prevailing attitudes of discrimination: “Oh yes against gays, it’s getting so horrible. Why did I have to be gay, right?” The pressure of being outside of a heterosexual orientation led many participants like Geronimo to depressive episodes:

Yes, and as I grew, I had a very strong depression. I was fourteen or fifteen; people at school started saying, "He’s gay" and stuff. And I started to close myself to my father and people at home. People tried to talk to me. I was not healing. So I was totally upset. So then I suffered from depression. I had to go see a psychologist…

Geronimo’s experiences demonstrated the way prevailing attitudes suppressed gay identity through social exclusion. Despite efforts to discuss his struggle at home, Geronimo’s father preferred to keep it concealed: “When I told him [father]…he said, ‘You are not [gay].’
He was very supportive though he denied I was...Because I was suffering because of what people were saying at school, right?"

Years later, Geronimo moved to a major urban centre where he lived more openly but continued to conceal his sexual orientation from his family:

Even though my city was much more open...but when I went to the Gay Pride parade there in 2000, there was about maybe one thousand people maximum. And I was trying to hide myself from the camera because if I was on TV, my mother would see me because I was not open to her.

Although Geronimo shared a close relationship with his mother, in adulthood he continued to keep his identity invisible due to the shame associated with his sexual orientation.

All of the participants described a process in which they receded emotionally and socially in response to a rejecting environment in which prevailing attitudes devalued their sexual orientation. Geronimo explained the way societal attitudes upheld an archetype of a rigid heterosexual masculinity that excluded him from feeling accepted in his homeland. In response, Geronimo sought refuge in Canada:

I always wanted to live abroad. It was something that I always wanted to do. The South American culture is very oppressive in terms of everything. Everybody likes samba, everybody likes carnival, everybody likes soccer, right? Different, why are you different? Everybody has to be the same; it's the way that I felt. And everybody has to be heterosexual and there was not much space for difference.

Paris also underscored prevailing attitudes in his community that kept his sexuality invisible:

They don't accept any kind of difference with my style of life. For example, being gay, they don't accept me as a gay man, so everyone wants to grow up in a conservative way; just grow and get your job, get your family, get married with a woman, have a lot of children, sons. That is the way of thinking that way. It is the best way.
Paris explained that he did not fit the prevailing masculine typology and consequently suffered physical and psychological torment as he described ongoing abuse at school from his teachers and peers:

Yes, my whole life. It was really horrible. Some of them tried to force me to have oral sex with them. Sometimes I run to home. When I couldn’t pay my bus to come back home [from school], they would follow me. And sometimes I’d leave the bus, when I pay my fare to take the bus because they started to bother me on the bus. And to avoid it, I had to walk home.

Despite Paris’ experiences of torment over the years, the topic was never discussed in his family and remained a silenced aspect of his life. Moreover, Paris feared the repercussions of being open about his sexual orientation to close members of his family:

…the first thing that came to my mind was if I told my mom, my mom would probably beat me…it was my fear at that age. And how would she react having a…it's a bad word in Mexico, in Spanish, it's joto. It’s a really bad word; it describes you as homosexual. “How could we have a joto in our family?” For that reason I keep it secret. So in my mind, I'll always be joto.

Paris’ shame regarding his sexual orientation restricted overt acknowledgement of his status in his family and his experiences resulted in a form of social and emotional estrangement in his homeland. Systemic prejudice and discrimination led immigrants like Paris to seek a new beginning in Canada. Thus, the process of resilience began with significant adversity in one’s homeland. Constructive conditions in Canada, discussed in the next section, elucidate the way the sociocultural environment can facilitate personal growth and positive adjustment.

Openness of Identity

All of the male immigrants who identified their sexual orientation as gay characterized the sociocultural environment in Canada to be more tolerant of diversity by
comparison to their homeland. Individuals pointed out cultural diversity in the population, which increased their perception of wider ranging social norms. Additionally, participants also noted that physical proximity from their homeland and family reduced pressure to conform to heterosexual norms. As a result of these factors, individuals reported greater comfort in living an openly gay lifestyle, which was congruent to their sexual orientation.

Geronimo explained the way he felt connected to the cultural diversity in Canada and the way it fostered a perception of inclusion:

I just felt at home. The moment the airplane landed and I was coming, I arrived, I just felt, “Oh my God, that’s it.” It’s not something I could explain in terms of words. I just felt comfortable with everything, like, the social interactions…I just have a feeling of being at home and different.

Geronimo contrasted the sociocultural milieu in Canada to his homeland in Brazil. The social environment in Canada provided him with the opportunity to live in a more authentic way in relation to his gay identity, rather than suppressing aspects of it that was characteristic of his life in Brazil:

I feel happier because Brazil was very oppressive in terms of culture. Here I can be myself, whatever culture, whatever identity...if I want to go to the Gay Pride this weekend or if I want to go to the spiritual group next week...this is what it is to be Canadian, it is very fluid and national identity in terms of...it's a mix of everything.

Geronimo’s experiences in Canada point to his perception of acceptance in the cultural environment. As a result of his comfort in living a more authentic way, Geronimo described his sense of congruence to his gay identity:

Here, I’m totally out with my partner’s family….I have a really good relationship with my partner’s family, so I’m very open to them. So we go as a couple to Christmas and stuff, and as a team. I just feel like I have a family that I can be very open with them…I feel at home totally, I have my dog, I walk, I talk to the neighbours, I feel
like...I have my partner, I just think the way I want. So I feel very comfortable. I feel at home.

Geronimo’s excerpt indicates his openness about his lifestyle, which appeared to be diametrically opposite to his life in Brazil. In Canada, he describes seemingly routine family activities that carry important meaning of normalcy and a life without pretence.

The political environment in Canada was relevant to sexual orientation and provided other participants like Paris with a sense of safety in his day-to-day life. In Mexico, he reported incidents in which he was targeted by gang members because of his sexual orientation. Canada offered Paris the opportunity to live without concern for his safety:

Now I can cope with my problems. I was afraid about my privacy there [Mexico].

People don’t care about what I am doing [in Canada]. And I love that. I don’t care what the people are doing. As well, they don’t care what I’m doing, I like that.

The ability to live an openly gay life was significant for Paris. In the following excerpt, he emphasizes the way his life is currently marked by everyday pressures (e.g., appointments, hectic schedule) rather than thoughts about his sexual orientation and the need to protect himself; defocusing on his sexual orientation exemplifies his perception of normalcy, as he embraces the routine of fast-paced city life and a positive adjustment to Canada:

Yes, my own expression. Now I can go to some coffee, get a date, read a good book, go to the public library, if I want to talk to somebody, I do it. If I don’t want to, I don’t do it. And I like that. And I like to live my life fast here, running from here, taking the subway…

Similarly, Juan noted the positive impact of living consistently to his inner experiences of gay identity. This contrasted to his life in Mexico where he had to suppress his gay identity:
If I don’t feel who I am [in Mexico], I cannot express the way I am. I just don’t feel that I am in the right place. So after three days [of visiting family], I just want to leave. Usually when I go there, I stay there five days only.

After immigrating to Canada, Juan’s ability to live without pretext helped increase his confidence and facilitated an inner strength:

Yes, it gave me a lot of confidence, especially here. Here in Canada, being who I am, even though I don’t go to gay bars...But being who I am, that I can be openly gay and say, “I’m gay,” or if I hold hands with my partner on the street, that gives me more confidence as a person.

Participants like Juan, Paris and Geronimo offered examples that highlighted the role of the social environment in facilitating positive adaptation to life in Canada and an associated perception of Belonging. Specifically, their narratives informed the way the social milieu in pre- and post-immigration both hinder and foster individual growth and are relevant to sexual orientation. The opportunity to live congruently to one’s cultural identity appeared to improve mental health and life satisfaction through which a sense of Belonging was derived in Canada.

Summary of Self-Congruence

A number of male immigrants identified issues related to sexual orientation and identity in pre- and post-immigration. A few individuals reflected on socio-development experiences and culture-based norms that negatively influenced their lives pre-immigration. Specifically, participants perceived familial and culture-based attitudes towards gay identity to be a hindrance to their growth and offered examples about the way their sexuality was silenced over the course of their upbringing. After immigrating to Canada, participants perceived greater latitude in norms due to a multiplicity of cultures and ethnic backgrounds in Toronto. In addition, individuals experienced the political climate in Canada to be tolerant of diversity. Thus, Canada offered a perception of safety and a place where individuals
could live congruently to their inner experiences, which fostered a sense of *Belonging* to their adopted homeland.
Chapter Eight

Religion

The key theme, Religion, represented a significant marker of cultural identity for many of the immigrants in this study. The terms religion and spirituality were used synonymously by participants and referred to a higher power that involved a system of beliefs, values, and practices. Immigrant narratives revealed the multifunctional nature of religion that contributed to positive adaptation in response to adversity.

Participants’ depiction of religion and spirituality were unique because of the focus on religion in positive terms, rather than representing any significant form of adversity. For example, individuals asserted the way religious and spiritual life offered hope in times of despair and alienation. Places of worship forged a direct link to a perception of community Belonging by offering a gathering place (e.g., church, mosque) and a social network from which to draw support. A few participants also demonstrated flexibility in their religious and spiritual attachments; altering both religious practice and religious ideology met their adaptation needs in the Canadian context.

Moreover, these forms of positive adaptation were responses to a range of difficulties in resettlement such as chronic daily stressors (e.g., loneliness, impact of poverty, alienation). Participants also sought refuge in religious beliefs and values in response to thematic stressors already presented in the Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status sections such as occupational forms of estrangement and prejudice related to ethnic background. Participants described praying as a means to cope with varied forms of adversity, to accept one’s difficult circumstances, and as a way of seeking patience in times of struggle.

Immigrants primarily discussed their religious and spiritual involvement as forms of resilience (e.g., coping); therefore, the following themes focus on positive aspects of adaptation. Three main themes emerged under Religion, which included: Prayer; Social Networking; and Adapting Practices. These themes identify ways in which religious and
spiritual beliefs, values, and practices forged stronger interpersonal connections and strengthened a perception of acceptance, which ultimately increased a perception of Belonging.

**Prayer**

Religious dedication provided a key outlet from which participants could buffer significant stressors related to resettlement. The first main theme, Prayer, involved a dialogue both to a higher power and through religious/spiritual readings. Connection to religious and spiritual elements facilitated a sense of hope as well as acceptance of resettlement circumstances that appeared to be beyond one’s control. In addition, immigrants revealed the way religious and spiritual attachments to a higher power generated both emotional and physical strength in the face of stressors. Three sub-themes emerged under the main theme Prayer, which include: Emotional Strength; Physical Strength; and Acceptance of Self and Others (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11. Positive Adaptation: Prayer](image)

**Emotional Strength**

The first sub-theme, Emotional Strength, highlights a connection between prayer and emotional security and balance. Many participants described a link between their relationship to a higher power and its contribution to emotional fortitude. Carmo provided an example of the way in which her religious discourse garnered solace in difficult circumstances. Carmo had undocumented status in Canada, which resulted in fear of authority figures due to the possibility of deportation. She also described her early years in
Canada as particularly distressing because of multiple miscarriages. Carmo recalled the way her relationship to a higher power provided emotional security during stressful times:

For me praying is talking to God and telling him things…I tell him thank you for the good things he give to me and ask him to help with the other things. Like, the [immigration] papers…it's okay but I am not accepting it [deportation]. He [God] makes me more strong. But my praying is like talking to him. I tell him all the things he gives to me.

Other participants reflected on the way they were sustained emotionally through a dialogue with a higher power. Mummu provided an example of the way his appeal to a higher power helped him cope with underemployment during his early years in Canada. Although his emotional distress was increased by socioeconomic struggles, his relationship to a higher power helped Mummu gain emotional certitude, as he explained:

Yes, and I would also pray and it would give me patience. I would have faith in God and everything would work out. One of the main principles in my religion, whatever you get, it is from God, even your income or your salary…So I had faith that he is the one who dropped me over here and my application could have been rejected but it didn't and I have faith in him, I came here because he wanted me to be here.

Similarly, Richa explained the way her petition to a higher power strengthened her emotionally. In the following example, she discussed the sense of hope that comes from prayer:

...something that may be a miracle for you, for example, maybe you applied to a job months ago, maybe you will get a call. So, I used to do that and it was so helpful…it gave me so much peace of mind. At the time I was given the offer of admission [to university], it was so unbelievable. Not only that, my husband got a job and it wasn’t that bad and we were able to manage our finances much better. We came out of that low, low, low life in a better position where we were able to actually visualize and
rationally come to a conclusion what we are going to do. It definitely helped me so, so, much, I cannot tell you. It gave me some confidence in me.

Richa delineated the connection between prayer and the positive changes in her life (e.g., admission to university). She also noted the confidence and emotional clarity that was engendered by her piety. Prayer provided a number of immigrants with emotional strength from which they were able to feel grounded and hopeful during times of significant adversity.

**Physical Strength**

The second sub-theme Physical Strength explicated the way meditative practices contributed to a positive health state. A few individuals cited medical problems that they perceived to be associated with their resettlement experiences. Meditation provided an outlet in which participants returned to physical homeostasis. Specifically, Grace detailed a period of chronic stress and physical illness in which she contracted double pneumonia. She surmised that her health problems were directly linked to the changes in her life as a result of immigration. In particular, she talked about being overwhelmed by establishing a new career and caring for her son full-time without assistance from her husband or extended family in China. In an effort to manage these stressors Grace began practicing yoga:

I have done yoga for many years. After I was sick, I started to pay attention… when I was alone, my husband was not here…it keeps your mind quiet and your body is not violent. It's a very good thing.

Marina also found that meditation enhanced her ability to manage chronic stress related to resettlement to Canada. Marina talked about the way changes in her occupational and sociocultural life adversely affected her, such as the stress of communicating in a new language, unfamiliarity with the environment, and developing a new career, as she stated:

I got sad, I got depressed, and I got physically ill, I was not able to pick up one day from there. I was just... I just couldn't. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I went to the doctor, and I was diagnosed with depression.
Marina found that meditation helped to regain her strength through yogic practice: “With connection to your soul, when you sleep and meditate, you are joined from some part of energy which is higher than you, and you know and feel it, and it gives you strength.”

Similarly, Joseph indicated the way yoga fostered physical strength during times of acculturative stress. In the following excerpt, he emphasized the physical benefits of meditation: “Yes, I learned it back home, yes. Yoga connects your body, mind, soul, everything and it strengthens your bones, muscles, which is good, too. It helped me stay fit and healthy and connected, spiritually, too…connected to yourself.” Joseph was guided by his spiritual practice during times of distress; the practice of yoga appeared to have benefits to both his mind and body. Similarly, other participants also highlighted the way in which spiritual practice refracted physical illness and contributed to a perception of control during chronic stress and significant adversity.

**Acceptance of Self and Others**

The third sub-theme, Acceptance of Self and Others, indicated the way religious beliefs promoted self-compassion and empathy from a higher power. Specifically, participants described a dialogue to a higher power that provided a perception of acceptance of problems, which appeared to be beyond their control, and thus, difficult to overcome.

For instance, Richa elaborated on the way her religious beliefs buffered against prejudice and discrimination. In response to racism, she sought acceptance through a dialogue with a higher power, which was an important step in effectively healing her emotional distress in response to interpersonal alienation: “…In one of the verses that I like the most, you ask God for his help, to make you feel better, to make you feel worth, to make you feel that he accepts you no matter who you are and to give you prosperity…”

Richa’s sense of acceptance from a higher power generated a cognitive shift in which she no longer sought external approval from others. Instead Richa looked inward for
acceptance through her connection to a higher power, which also bolstered emotional strength:

Things don’t start changing for you, it starts from inside. I think for me, the process of change has to come from me. I need to change my view of the world; the world will not change for me. Something which helped me was reciting the Koran, and that strengthened me as a person.

Grace described problems merging aspects of her past ethnic identity in Canada. She indicated that the cultural diversity in Canada was diametrically opposite to her self-described ethnic homogenous town in China. Grace found that her Taoist and yogic philosophy contributed to her openness and acceptance of differing cultural groups:

…And also you can accept yourself and accept others. Because different cultures and different people come from different places and different religions. Here I think in Toronto, it’s very obvious. You have very different people… before I would judge basically all others. But that’s not the way to deal with people other than yourself. So you must be flexible to accept others and then when you accept others, you feel good too. Taoism and yogic philosophy both teach us oneness. All is one, and we are part of all. In yoga, we stay universal, and everybody can connect with each other, by breath everyone can connect with each other. It is not who is better.

Grace’s view highlighted the way her spiritual beliefs facilitated a mental transition to overcome differences in ethnocultural changes through acceptance of others.

Marina also shared the way her spiritual beliefs generated empathy and acceptance of the cultural diversity in Canada. Marina’s spiritual and individual philosophy posited an inherent connectedness to others:

…all of religion is like brothers and sisters in my opinion. And when you go somewhere like North York, most are from one culture but there are so many differences in them…one day we can go to an Anglican church, they are good
Christians, and when you go there, these people have the same energy and soon you connect with these people, all of them. So it's much easier. It's much easier because you understand that you are all the same, the same part of the chakra teaches about the same feelings…

Geronimo discussed the way he gained a sense of acceptance through his spiritual group. In particular, the group’s non-judgmental approach vis-à-vis his sexual orientation helped Geronimo feel acceptance of an integral part of his identity:

…they talk about moral principles and they are accepting of homosexuality, they are accepting in terms of this kind of thing. And I just felt accepted there and I had a really good connection with the whole group, and the fact I was going there every week really helped me to keep my balance. Even though it was a very stressful moment, if I didn't have them, I don't know what would have been, probably going back to a major depression, like what happened when I was a teenager.

The spiritual group ensconced him in an environment of Belonging, which he believed to be a buffer against depression. This was a significant contrast to Geronimo's experiences as an adolescent in Brazil where he felt ostracized and a lack of inclusion. Acceptance appeared to be a significant factor in helping immigrants gain a perception of Belonging in Canada and provided a way to cope with significant forms of adversity in post-immigration life.

Summary of Prayer

Prayer represented an important form of emotional grounding in Canada. Immigrants described the role of prayer in providing emotional and physical stability. In addition, qualitative analyses indicated that having a relationship to a higher power gave several immigrants a sense of control over deleterious circumstances. Religious and spiritual attachments also appeared to increase internal strength and provide an outlet to feel accepted.

Social Networking
One significant adjustment for immigrants was the loss of family and friendships. Re-establishing interpersonal support emerged as a critical aspect of positive adjustment. Individuals in this study who allied with religious and spiritual affiliations often found a secure foundation upon which to integrate socially and develop attachments to their community. Participants derived support in instrumental ways (e.g., assistance with employment, finances) through affiliation with their religious and spiritual groups. Additionally, participants reflected on the way their interpersonal life offered emotional support. Two sub-themes emerged under the main theme Social Networking, which included: Instrumental Support and Affective Support (see Figure 12).

![Figure 12. Positive Adaptation: Social Networking](image)

**Instrumental Support**

A number of participants reflected on the way religious affiliation facilitated assistance with daily needs and sociocultural familiarity that was helpful to positive integration. Mummu outlined the values associated with his religious denomination that prompted charity, as he stated, “Islam is based on five principles: belief in God, fasting, prayers, pilgrimage, and charity…” Charitable attitudes at Mummu’s mosque led to friendships, empathy in relation to resettlement stress, and help with basic needs:

…”It was easy to meet people in our community. If you go to the mosque, you meet people and then you can make very good friends. And a lot of people are immigrants so they can understand the hardship that we were going through and they would give
us rights to the mosque or if you need any help with the groceries, they would invite you along to drive you. And I am that doing that for others now.

Mummu carried forward the help provided to him and reflected on the personal satisfaction of his own involvement in charitable work. Specifically, Mummu’s work as a volunteer teacher at a local library conferred benefits to his students but also offered a connectedness to others, as he explained, “It satisfied me that I am helping others and that I am doing something for the community. It is something that is important to me. It is something I learned from my mother, my parents and religion…” Thus, religious doctrines in Islam engendered a sense of connection to others through charitable work. Mummu also received help managing daily tasks and learned new cultural skills. His involvement as a volunteer teacher facilitated an attachment to his community.

Joseph described the value of interpersonal support at his temple, which improved his mood and decreasing isolation:

Yes, going to temple is fun because at the same time, they always have food, and they always have a dance program going on and always some pageants going on, some kind of singing going on. It's always, people are happy, they're not depressed. And people are nice. At the same time, we socialize with people there, and it's nice.

Joseph explained the way interpersonal contact engendered empathy through an emotional connection with others in his temple, as he explained that he would, “…just talk them, get some guidance and friendship and understanding.”

Other participants such as Grace found instrumental support through her involvement with the church. Although she was not Christian, Grace explained her openness to learning about other religious perspectives, which was based on her yogic philosophy:

Yes, tapping into universalism. In yoga when you do meditation, you connect to your universal self…I have friends actually who come from different backgrounds…First I
learned the Bible from two Canadian persons, and they teach Bible for Christianity. They came to my house every week. We discussed Christianity for two years…

The benefits of learning about a new religion led to improved facility in English and increased cultural fluency, as she stated, “For me, the truly important thing is I want to learn English and I want to know how people live here... it became a very important part, so I want to learn…” Grace’s involvement in bible study provided her with a better understanding of the cultural environment as well as gave her greater confidence communicating in English.

Instrumental support offered help with basic needs and garnered greater knowledge about and connection to the larger community from which individuals gained a perception of competence in their new sociocultural environment.

**Affective Support**

The second sub-theme under Social Networking, Affective Support, reflected the way religious institutions and social ties provided immigrants with a sense of emotional grounding and attachments to life in Canada. For example, Joseph detailed a period of estrangement during his resettlement in which he was not able to find work. He described the invaluable network at temple, providing him with employment ideas and empathy regarding his struggles:

Yes, they can help me out a bit because basically I wanted to do more networking as well, maybe they can help me job-wise as to where to go. I got a little bit of help from them such as work and also more connected to God. And they [friends] guide me, “Okay, I was like you and I was depressed too, but I come to temple and met some nice people, do meditation, and don’t stress out.”

Harris described a parallel experience to Joseph of gaining emotional support through religious affiliation. He noted the importance of sharing his beliefs with others, which fostered positive feelings and a sense of community:
In the mosque, when I went there, I noticed so many Muslim people are there, Persians, and we just talked, after three months I am hearing the sound of the prayer, “Allah Akbar” and it gave me good feelings, a relief. It is relief that I am hearing the name of Allah. That means that my God’s name is heard here and there are people protecting my God….I have the same people here who are like me and sharing the same God. I was socializing as well.

Not all participants initially denoted positive experiences from re-establishing religious ties. Tricia encountered a schism between her experience of church in East Africa and services in Canada. The sentiments at church in East Africa were inextricably tied to a philosophy of communalism; church mirrored the values of her community. After immigrating to Canada, Tricia found that church often lacked a communal spirit:

The church has been a struggle. For me, I don’t think I’ve really gotten into one I felt I belonged to. You go to church and nobody cares about you. You walk in and then you walk out. I’ve been to black churches and it’s the same thing. It’s the same thing. So individualistic.

However, Tricia later found support from a church at her university that extended a more personal approach to its congregation, which offered affective support:

The only church that I’ve gotten into is the church on campus; I think because it is a student church, so the priests there are professors, so they know the needs of students…They ask why you come here, where you are staying, how you are coping, and how school is. After church they ask you all these questions, so you know that somebody will call you at home, you know that somebody is there.

Tricia’s excerpt demonstrated the way the minister’s empathic personal approach made her feel connected and part of the community. Affective support derived through religious affiliation proved to be a significant aspect of emotional grounding in Canada and advanced a perception of community for several participants.
Summary of Social Network

Immigrants reflected on the buffering effects of religious and spiritual affiliation in Canada. Qualitative analysis of immigrants' religious and spiritual attachments indicated the way in which those associations mirrored an extended family, providing both instrumental and affective forms of support. Individuals in this study received practical assistance with basic needs, familiarity with the sociocultural environment, and a secure foundation of support. In addition, participants appeared to benefit from an emotional sense of grounding though empathic relationships that demonstrated a sense of caring.

Adapting Practices

The third and final main theme, Adapting Practices, identified actions such as modifying religious and spiritual practices to cope with environmental demands. Moreover, participants also explored new religious and spiritual perspectives as a form of personal growth. Changes to religious and spiritual practices ranged in degrees from a reduction in prayer to pursuing new religious pathways. Adapting religious and spiritual practices contributed to positive adaptation and is detailed in two sub-themes: Personal Growth and Aspirations (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Positive Adaptation: Adapting Practices

Personal Growth

Individuals who adapted their religious and spiritual observances reflected on a process of internal growth that was driven by varied pre- and post-migration contextual
factors. Changes to religious and spiritual life represented a fulfillment of personal needs that positively affected life in Canada.

Carmo recalled a pre-immigration tradition that involved a rote recital of prayers in church, which she considered devoid of personal meaning. Moreover, she recalled times in which her caregivers would be physically aggressive when she would not conform to a strict adherence to liturgy. After immigrating to Canada, her change in religious observance was encouraged by greater openness to pursue her individualized attachment to a higher power. Carmo described a pious discourse to a higher power that provided her with guidance and a sense of spiritual growth, as she stated:

I go to church to pray and meditate what is helpful to me… My praying is not like my parents taught me, pray like “Santa Maria” I don’t do the things they teach me how to pray, because we have to pray so many, many things. But they say this from the mouth. They don’t think what they are saying but they think they should pray long hours with this. For me praying is talking to God and tell him things and it’s different.

Carmo’s form of prayer changed into a personal dialogue in which she felt empathy from a higher power. She opined that her relationship to God led to important changes during her resettlement: “He answered me like giving me my son. I think I am never going to have a son because I had the miscarriages. He gave me him.” Carmo’s excerpt underscored her deepened relationship to a higher power during times of stress in post-immigration life.

Anna described her change in religious practice and perspective in post-immigration life. She was raised Catholic and continues to maintain an attachment to Catholicism; however, Anna believed that her religion did not connote optimism that was vital to her emotional stability in a new land. Anna discussed her views on Catholicism:

…Because [in the] Roman Catholic Church you are punished. You are a sinner, everything you do, [there is] lots of guilt in this sense. And if you go to the church and look at the faces of people, they are sad people, not happiness there.
Anna contrasted these experiences to her impression of Eastern spiritual practices:

...when I meet Buddhist people, it was in The University of Toronto, at some performance from Nepal or Tibet...And it was such a light inside them, and they were very happy people inside, and it makes me think why they have this feeling of happiness inside them. Why are they like that? And that way, and after someone introduced me to yoga, I start exploring Hindu philosophy...

Anna discovered that Eastern spiritual concepts and meditative practices facilitated new insights and ways of buffering against the challenges of integrating into a new society:

The first thing to understand is that there’s not only one way of thinking about life, about persons and life. And the philosophy is more optimistic than philosophy which I grew up with...you need lots of optimism...The stress of change to survive here.

Anna highlighted different needs in adaptation, most notably the need for optimism in facing hardship.

Similarly, Grace added to her Taoist principles in order to effectively deal with stressful social and cultural changes in Canada. Grace explained the way she drew from yogic philosophy to garner strength as a new immigrant:

...later on I took a yoga class to exercise and learn their philosophy. It's really about humanity: the body, mind and soul. Naturally, I feel I found a way, no matter whatever happens now, you can support yourself... you can keep your spirit stable because life is always changing. For immigrants it's a big change. My job changed and the health problems...even if you live here, everybody has their problems. Your spirit can be stable... and you can handle everything.

Grace’s excerpt highlights the way religious and spiritual ideas impact on emotional stability and led to personal growth.

She also described an affiliation to Christianity and the way in which her study of biblical scripture led to personal growth through transformative religious ideas:
…and sometimes I go to church. And when I go down, they can uplift me. I learn that there is mercy and to forgive others. This kind of principle I really like. It’s spiritual. And it also helps me deal with life when something happens, you have to forgive others… I have that experience. And so when I read the bible, it can really help me to dig out of that situation.

Grace emphasized the way her amalgamation of a number of religious doctrines transformed her ability to empathize with others and contributed to a greater working knowledge of the Canadian sociocultural environment. Furthermore, Grace shares an openness and acceptance of different ideologies that helped her attach to the community. Other participants such as Anna and Carmo detailed the way their religious and spiritual practices gave them strength and contributed to personal growth, which aided them during times of significant adversity.

Aspirations

The sub-theme Aspirations emerged as an important element of constructive adaptation. Two immigrants in this study described new directions to their life pursuits (e.g., academic initiatives, career goals) that were advanced by changes to their religious practices. The context of each participant’s post-immigration life illustrated the reasons for amending aspects of their religious and spiritual practices.

Harris described the way he modified his religious observance as a result of his life experiences. The context of Harris’ immigration story is important in this regard. He left his homeland because of war and found work in Canada as an interpreter. His job was particularly inspiring to him because he was able to give a voice to other Afghans. Harris spoke with pride about the way he has helped others, which bolstered a desire to become involved in politics and represent his community. Although Harris’ faith had not changed, he perceived a reduction of time in the mosque as being acceptable, as he explained:
…the point is that I have changed too. I changed in a way, let say, I used to pray five times a day in a mosque, now I am going just Friday. I have other things to do and in the meantime, I see other Afghan people, they are focusing on their studies and focusing on what to do for this society and trying to overcome and do education and be part of this society. This is what I do, get an education and be part of this society.

Harris adapted his religious practices to focus on a political career, which was borne out of painful life experiences. Harris also touched on his desire to become integrated into the Canadian environment and follow his aspirations.

Tricia described an analogous mindset of foregoing time in prayer to develop her career aspirations. In order to understand Tricia’s change in church attendance, it is necessary to gain a perspective of her past experiences in East Africa. Specifically, Tricia contended that her church in East Africa maintained a form of oppression by expecting numerous hours of prayer each week. After immigrating to Canada, Tricia described the way she gained a new perspective on prayer and piety:

Yes, I believe in God more. I don't spend hours and hours praying like I would pray back home. They tell you that you should pray at least three hours a day. And you should always...if you don't go to church, you feel guilty. But here, sometimes my friends call me and they ask if I'm going to church, and I say I have schoolwork to do. You know what? The way God is portrayed to us in East Africa is different from what is done here, and this is the same God that the “white” man brought. It's the same person. And they're bred differently to suit them.

In the following excerpt, Tricia also construed that routine church practices in East Africa act as a hindrance to productivity by expecting church-goers to spend excessive time in prayer. After immigrating to Canada, she concluded that reaching her academic and career goals would necessitate changes to church attendance:
So why can’t we also serve God so that our life will become more progressive? If you spend three hours praying...typically you have eight active hours in a day, how many hours are you left with? Five hours. And these five hours, you do work, you take your lunch, you take your break, you chat with friends. So productively, how many hours do you spend doing things that are productive? So I told my friends, no, it’s wrong, it’s wrong. And we come home [to East Africa] and we think things should turn around...they wouldn’t. You go to church here in an hour, they will preach, they will pray, they will do worship, they will do everything in an hour, and everybody’s out.

Immigrants such as Harris and Tricia altered their religious observance as a result of developing a new perspective and life goals that were derived from a combination of pre- and post-immigration experiences. They also illustrated the way changes to religious practices facilitated growth and positive adaptation to life in Canada.

Summary of Adapting Practices

The main theme Adapting Practices emerged as a contributing factor to positive adaptation for several immigrants in this study. Qualitative analysis indicated that engagement in religious and spiritual practices strengthened achievement of goals, reduced emotional distress, and provided balance, which appeared to foster greater attachments and perception of connection to Canada. Individuals provided insight into the way their connection to a higher power supported them during stressful times. Changes to religious practices illustrated flexibility of practice to accommodate environmental conditions. In particular, a few participants described an engagement in religion that attended to their internal needs in response to external stressors. Specifically, immigrants identified the way religion and spirituality balanced their emotions and offered optimism. Moreover, a couple of participants identified their shift in religious practice (i.e., a reduction) to accommodate goals such as career and academic achievement, which helped them achieve positive adaptation to differing environmental demands.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion of Results

The first goal of this study involved an examination of first-generation immigrants’ cultural experiences which was addressed through the use of a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. The current study identified five key cultural typologies: Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Religion. The second goal of this study examined the way cultural forms of socialization, value orientations, beliefs, and practices affected immigrants’ resettlement. Constructivist grounded theory analysis of participant narratives suggested that immigrants were influenced by cultural factors in the process of resilience. Additionally, data analysis revealed that this process was shaped by pre- and post-immigration experiences. Thematic aspects of adversity and positive adaptation are illustrated in Figure 14; a summary of all thematic findings including categories is listed in Appendix F.
The key theme Ethnicity revealed both significant adversity and positive adaptation related to pre- and post-immigration experiences. Aspects of adversity involved ethnocultural estrangement as well as intercultural detachment. Immigrants’ perception of estrangement stemmed from feelings of loss of their past cultural-relational lifestyle and difficulties bonding to the Canadian sociocultural environment. In particular, immigrants reported that loss – not merely the physical absence of family, friends and community
support – occurred in a cultural way of relating to others, which was imbued with a cultural relational sensibility such as sharing similar values and forms of bonding (e.g., through ethnic language, traditions, festivals). The loss of one’s cultural-relational experience appeared to involve a process of accepting a differential sociocultural framework as well as developing interpersonal attachments.

Positive adaptation in regard to ethnicity was identified through developing intraethnic attachments as well as building connections outside of one’s ethnocultural group. The ethnocultural context was important in illustrating the meaning of cultural forms of support. In particular, immigrants coped through reconstructing their ethnocultural lifestyle by ethnic forms of bonding (e.g., ethnic language, customs). Reconstituting important aspects of identity provided immigrants with a sense of empathy and grounding in the Canadian environment, which fostered an attachment through a perception of community affiliation. Immigrants identified the way social forms of connection and support from outside their traditional ethnic community increased their sense of attachment in Canada. Moreover, participants described a reciprocal process of influence in their interethnic social network, which acted as a surrogate family in some instances and intertwined ethnic forms of bonding. Immigrants’ sense of interrelatedness to a range of ethnic groups appeared to contribute to feeling accepted and being connected to their community.

The key theme Socioeconomic Status revealed adversity related to the loss of status and power and attempts to counter those experiences. A number of immigrants described an experience of lower status and a sense of reduced power or ability to affect change after immigration. In addition, perceptions of prejudice contributed to feelings of rejection (underemployment) and a lack of acceptance. Loss of status and power appeared to represent a form of alienation from the cultural majority in which immigrants perceived themselves to have stigmatized status. Immigrants indicated mechanisms of resilience through a number of changes. For instance, participants adapted through English language acquisition, higher
education, skills training, and modifying careers to adjust to the labour market. Consequently, immigrants reported a greater sense of self-efficacy and worth as well as satisfaction.

The key theme Gender revealed the centrality of gender socialization and identity in the process of immigrant resettlement. Specifically, female participants reflected on the context of pre- and post-immigration experiences and environmental conditions that played instrumental roles in their adaptation to life in Canada. Many female participants contrasted the sociocultural environments in their homeland and in Canada. One common sentiment was that gender norms in Canada offered greater equality by comparison to their homeland. In particular, female participants experienced greater limitations in their homeland such as reduced educational and career opportunities and more subservient roles to males. Female participants explained the way cultural diversity in Canada contributed to personal growth such as engendering career opportunities as well as a sense of greater rights and equality. A few participants noted that their family environment in their homeland did not reflect the prevailing gender inequality in the larger society. For example, immigrant women described positive role models in their family that fostered strength; these experiences appeared to bolster a sense of inner strength and ameliorated significant adversity in post-immigration life.

The key theme Sexual Orientation was discussed as a primary aspect of cultural identity by a relatively small number of participants. Immigrants discussed the way their sexual orientation contributed to pre-immigration stressors. Specifically, prejudice toward sexual orientation diminished a sense of Belonging to one’s homeland as immigrants shared complicated feelings in which they disavowed aspects of ethnicity and associated representations of masculinity but remained connected to other aspects of their culture (e.g., language, interpersonal forms of bonding). Contextual analysis of pre-immigration experiences identified that cultural attachment is multidimensional. As a result of negative
attitudes toward their sexual orientation and homonegative experiences, participants had concealed their sexual identity and preferred a strategy of invisibility in regard to a significant aspect of their cultural attachment and identity.

Canada offered all of these individuals a greater perception of safety and respect in living an openly gay lifestyle, which appeared to increase a sense of connection to the sociocultural environment and contributed to positive adaptation. Despite many challenges of resettlement, immigrants described a sense of validation from a perception of greater tolerance in regard to their sexual orientation. Participants also indicated that the diversity of ethnocultural backgrounds in Toronto increased their sense of acceptance in regard to their sexual orientation, which engendered openness of their authentic self (i.e., gay identity). The opportunity to bond to an authentic aspect of identity appeared to increase a sense of Belonging in Canada through greater acceptance and tolerance.

The key theme Religion solely contributed to positive adaptation for immigrants. Religion and spirituality was demarcated as a significant aspect of socialization and cultural identity for many immigrants in this study. Participants described the function of their relationship to religious and spiritual life as a way of coping with hardship during resettlement. Specifically, immigrants described prayer as an important source of both physical and emotional fortitude. Several immigrants informed about a cognitive shift in which they gained acceptance and meaning of their struggle as well as acceptance of others through a relationship to a higher power. Furthermore, religious and spiritual practice appeared to foster a sense of interrelatedness to others. Religious institutions also provided a forum to carry out shared cultural/religious practices and offered social support, which increased a sense of community affiliation.

The existing literature has not specified important cultural contributions to immigrant resilience. Therefore, the third and final goal of this study was to examine immigrants who perceived themselves as resilient and identify the way in which culture affects their
experiences of recovery. The study revealed that the recovery process was embedded in both pre- and post-immigration adversity and was facilitated by stronger cultural and interpersonal attachments as well as feelings of acceptance in Canada. Specifically, constructivist grounded theory analysis suggested that mid-level themes, identified as Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance, contributed to a perception of Belonging.

Forming Attachments was indicated by the action of developing interpersonal bonds, a sense of security (e.g., emotional and financial), as well as connecting to specific domains of culture that were individually relevant within the context of participants’ lives. Each immigrant had differential cultural attachments that were affected by pre- and post-immigration experiences. For instance, individuals may have been more affiliated to religious life, socioeconomic status, or their gender identity. Therefore, forming meaningful attachments in Canada varied in relation to an immigrant’s specific needs.

Qualitative analysis revealed problems with attachment in a range of cultural, social and occupational conditions associated with adversity. Participants highlighted interpersonal difficulties with attachment as well as pervasive forms of prejudice related to their immigrant status, visible minority status, and lack of regard for their professional skills. Difficulties forming attachments are identified in the following collection of quotes by a number of participants:

I was talking to people and I noticed that they were not listening and ignoring me, making fun of me. One of them was telling me “Paki.” …you don’t feel welcome and you don’t feel like you belong; The church has been a struggle. For me, I don’t think I’ve really gotten into one I felt I belonged to. You go to church and nobody cares about you; I’ve been living for more than one year in this apartment, and I don’t see who is living in the other house. You don’t have that connection, you know?; It was extremely stressful…I found that I was good for nothing, nobody was hiring me.
These experiences appeared to detract from a sense of Belonging and highlighted a few of many examples of the way immigrants lacked a feeling of emotional and interpersonal grounding.

Qualitative analysis indicated that Forming Attachments was contextually bound in an immigrant’s particular cultural attachment needs. For instance, individuals who identified as gay were affected more by human rights pre-immigration and described a greater sense of equality and tolerance in Canada; the sociocultural environment post-immigration facilitated emotional security and attachment to their community. Other participants who identified with their socioeconomic status pre-immigration appeared to be more focused on achieving social status and validation of their professional skills. Developing attachments through cultural means, whether it was through sexual identity, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or religion, appeared to be a process that arose from both adversity and positive adaptation. One critical element of cultural attachment was gaining social support, which fostered a stronger connection to one’s community. The following group of quotes highlights the way in which immigrants expressed the meaning of their attachment to life in Canada:

I gained my freedom. I might not have all of the material things that I had back home…but I feel like I am part of a society that respects you for who you are; I can’t live in Canada that has no immigrants, I would feel very alienated…it is multicultural…it makes me feel grounded; I can be the same person, I can keep my culture, my roots, you know, at the same time, I understood that all I needed to do was learn the new culture, to be part of the new culture; And we started to talk, speak in our language…connect in the culture way; I am proud of the customs we have, the traditions….Now we are having a feast [i.e., festival of Eid] …as a way of connecting to the culture; My turning point was three years after joining the bank.
When I finished my license. That moment, yes, I would say “I’m adjusting and I see somebody rewarding me and I am being treated equal.”

Forming Attachments was fostered by a sense of acceptance and tolerance of diverse ethnocultural traditions in Canada. Immigrants also described the act of interpersonal and cultural engagement through maintaining one’s heritage (e.g., language, festivals), which appeared to increase attachment to Canada. Other important attachments related to access to employment; increasing one’s socioeconomic standing conveyed a sense of equality and acceptance for a number of participants.

An adjoining mid-level axial theme to Forming Attachments was Feeling Acceptance. Qualitative analysis suggested that two mid-level themes occurred in tandem in terms of having relational and interactive qualities. The mid-level theme Feeling Acceptance was identified by approval and tolerance. Qualitative analysis revealed reciprocal forms of validation, both from an immigrants’ perspective toward cultural differences and being accepted by others. Problems with gaining a perception of acceptance arose from experiences of cultural, social, and occupational alienation. The following collection of quotes highlights instances that detracted from Feelings of Acceptance:

You come here and you were the lowest of the low, you know?; And it was pretty shocking that this country would accept people on the basis of their education and once they come here, they just don’t give them any value; If I said I had a master’s, they would say, “Oh, but it’s a Colombian master’s.”; There was a lot of prejudice; I did not feel accepted and I was being ignored and rejected by the community…and you don’t feel welcome and you don’t feel like you belong; That offended me so badly…It was a racial comment I would say because it was “You people will never have manners.” …and it was so painful to hear.

The development of Belonging was inhibited by sentiments that indicated devaluation of an immigrant’s cultural background. Experiences of marginalization were common for most
individuals in this study. Higher order analysis revealed that immigrants’ development of acceptance was multi-determined. For instance, participants noted the way in which ethnocultural engagement (e.g., through religious institutions, ethnic language) and social relationships increased validation of their cultural background. Acceptance was also derived from intercultural relationships that fostered a sense of interrelatedness beyond cultural differences. Immigrants’ perception of acceptance increased through attainment of better socioeconomic conditions and status. Environmental conditions also impacted on acceptance through exposure to the larger socio-political environment which included norms and attitudes of equality. Immigrants elaborated on the process of accepting differences in their new environment (e.g., diverse ethnocultural groups, differing norms) and the way in which the environment provided acceptance in the following collection of quotes from a range of participants:

- It’s opened my mind [Canada], an acceptance for every culture; what makes you adapt to a place is kind of recognizing that you have a culture, recognizing that the other has a culture, but moving beyond the culture and understanding that beyond all things, you’re human and they’re human, and we probably have the same experiences; you must be flexible to accept others and then when you accept others, you feel good, too; I know other women taking care of kids that are single, it is not that unusual in this society, it makes me comfortable to know this is accepted here…;
- I don’t have to hide I’m gay…that made me feel more outgoing, a more open person.

Thus, Belonging was facilitated by a reciprocal process in which immigrants needed to be valued and accepted as equal members of society as well as being receptive to differences in their sociocultural environment in Canada.

The mid-level themes, Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance, appeared to contribute to the overarching construct of Belonging. Immigrants expressed a stronger perception of Belonging in differing domains of culture. Overall, individuals in this study
expressed many areas of attachment, acceptance and a sense of Belonging that was contextualized and multi-determined. For example, one individual may have identified greater connection to socioeconomic conditions of adjustment while attending less to religious or gender forms of Belonging. Thus, a perception of affiliation was contextually grounded within each participant’s worldview, cultural socialization, beliefs, value orientations and practices.

The notion of Belonging represents a process of attachment to a personalized sense of Canadian identity. Individuals in this study also reflected on the way the sociocultural milieu helped to shape their attachment to Canada. Participants described an incremental process from which they gained a sense of Belonging to Canadian society. For instance, individuals shared stories about improvements in their career and socioeconomic status, the positive effects of gender equality and freedom to express one’s sexual orientation and live more authentically. These changes illustrated the way diverse cultural factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, gender roles and norms) and concomitant environmental conditions increased a perception of insider status and Belonging to a Canadian identity:

When I got this job, things started changing. I started belonging to this society and I feel it was the job…I was entering into Canadian society; And I think that was the turning point; I feel comfortable, I feel like I am still home, I still have connections, I feel related, I belong and I haven't forgotten my roots, my background or my language; [a] network…it gives you feeling of belonging to some group of people; I never feel in Canada that I have to give up my culture or food or anything that was special to me….I was in love with the diversity and especially with Toronto, I was like, “okay, I can belong here because I don’t feel so different.” I feel that I am part of a crowd;

The construct of Belonging appeared to be facilitated through feelings of acceptance and significant cultural and relational attachments in Canada and represented the way
immigrants described resilience. Qualitative analysis suggested that attachment and acceptance evolved from significant adversity, in both pre- and post-immigration, and were borne out of diverse cultural forms of positive adaptation in resettlement. The following Discussion section situates the major findings within the existing psychological literature.
Chapter Ten

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the way multiple representations of culture affect immigrant adaptation in the context of perceived resilience. Research on immigrant populations has largely been contained to studies on acculturation. The prevailing model of acculturation by Berry (1980, 1997, 2001) identifies the value of a bicultural strategy of integration (i.e., circumscribed within a broad ethnocultural framework). However, research on acculturation has been criticized for de-contextualizing immigrant experiences and not elucidating the way mechanisms of culture function in the process of adaptation (Chirkov, 2009). Resilience theory is a flexible construct that can be applied to different areas of adaptation (Masten, 2001) such as the immigrant population. In addition, contextualizing immigrant resilience within distinct forms of culture, beyond an acculturation framework, provides an opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of the way immigrants overcome significant adversity (Castro & Murray, 2010).

The current study interviewed 18 adult immigrants who perceived themselves to have adapted well to significant adversity in the context of pre- and post-immigration life. The use of a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection allowed for in-depth exploration of immigrant’s experiences and cultural processes that affected their adaptation. The discussion includes two major contributions of this study. This first major contribution identifies the theory of Belonging and its related mid-level themes, Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance. The second major contribution indicates contextual factors that were significant to immigrant adaptation. Strengths and limitations of the current research are then discussed, followed by implications for clinical practice and future research directions.

*Cultural Constructions of Immigrant Resilience and the Theory of Belonging*
The first major contribution of this study is the theory of *Belonging*. The theory developed from a constructivist analysis of immigrant narratives of resilience within a framework of multiple domains of culture. The theory of *Belonging* identified the way cultural forms of socialization, beliefs, values, practices, and norms affected immigrant adaptation both negatively and positively. Qualitative data analysis revealed five major cultural domains that contributed to immigrant resilience and included the following key themes: Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Religion. Qualitative analysis elicited thematic markers within the key themes of adversity and positive adaptation; immigrants’ descriptions of resilience illustrated the significance of developing cultural attachments and feelings of acceptance, which were integral aspects of the recovery process and shaped the notion of *Belonging*. For instance, immigrants revealed the way in which they developed a range of attachments (e.g., intra- and interculturally, sense of community) as well as felt a connection to the larger sociocultural environment. Immigrants identified the importance of feeling acceptance by others and their own process of accepting a new sociocultural environment. Collectively, constructivist analysis identified the way in which lower order categories and themes within the domains of culture, as well as mid-level themes Forming Attachments and Feeling Acceptance affected a perception of *Belonging* in Canada. The construct of *Belonging* in the current study overlapped with immigrant narratives of resilience within the context of diverse forms of culture. Thus, the theory of *Belonging* can be traced down the hierarchy to lower order categories that was shaped by immigrants’ narratives of resilience and involved an additive process of attachment and acceptance.

The notion of belonging has been demarcated as a fundamental motivational need by Baumeister and Leary (1995) who postulated that it represents an evolutionary process of human survival. Additionally, they theorized, based on an analysis of related psychological research, that belonging satisfies an innate drive to develop and maintain
intimate and stable interpersonal bonds. The construct of belonging, as representing an adaptive form of human functioning, has gained support from a number of psychological theorists and researchers (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2010; DeWall, Maner, & Rouby, 2009; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). The theory of belonging proposed by Baumeister and Leary (1995) parallels the central struggle between adversity and positive adaptation in resettlement. Specifically, qualitative analysis revealed that developing relationships was significant to immigrants’ experiences of resilience. However, the overarching theme of Belonging had connotative meaning for immigrants as it was culturally construed within the process of interpersonal bonding. Moreover, immigrants’ perception of Belonging was affected by their sense of cultural attachments and reciprocated acceptance; the conditions of Belonging were not only set within emotional closeness and empathy on an individual level but involved a sense of attachment to the community and larger sociocultural environment. Indeed, Baumeister and Leary opined that mutual caring is an essential aspect of belonging and highlighted that it is part of all cultural environments: “The need to belong should therefore be found to some degree in all humans in all cultures, although one would expect there to be individual differences in strength and intensity, as well as individual variations…” (p. 499).

Another relevant aspect of the overarching theme of Belonging involved a process in which immigrants gained a sense of insider status and ownership of their Canadian identity. The notion of feeling part of the sociocultural main was often reflected by an individualized struggle toward affecting change in one’s life as well as building cultural attachments and feeling acceptance. Immigrants revealed many hardships such as social and emotional isolation as well as prejudice and loss of socioeconomic status. In addition, loneliness was often compounded by multiple losses, such as familial and social support and cultural changes (e.g., relational forms of bonding) following their transition to Canada. Immigrant resilience involved emotional, social, and occupational grounding; the enactment of cultural
beliefs, values, and practices has been considered a socially encoded way of facilitating belonging (Baumeister, 2005; Baumeister, Brewer, Tice, & Twenge, 2007; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In the current study, gaining a perception of interrelatedness to others and feeling of inclusion in Canada appeared to emerge from the interplay between adversity and positive adaptation. Although there are relatively few studies that directly assess the link between belonging and resilience, research by Baskin (2004, 2010) examined the theory of belonging proffered by Baumeister and Leary (1995) and its relationship to resilience. Specifically, Baskin’s research tested whether a sense of belonging moderated peer acceptance and deleterious outcomes such as academic achievement, depression and loneliness in an ethnically diverse school. The findings suggested that when exposed to low peer acceptance (external ratings), those who perceived high belongingness (self-report) in other areas of their life (e.g., through outside peer, sibling, partner relationships, community and adult relationships) were not significantly affected by low peer acceptance; that is they did not suffer from loneliness unlike those who perceived low belongingness. Thus, the perception of belonging helped individuals to withstand (or be resilient to) rejection by their peers such that they sustained less negative impact than those who did not perceive belonging. These findings represent another dimension of the relationship between belonging and resilience. The findings of the current study focused predominantly on the development of Belonging through the process of resilience whereby participants described a sense of Belonging as a marker of positive adaptation to adversity. Additionally, Baskin’s research suggests that a sense of belonging (once perceived) also contributes to a greater ability to withstand or recover from new stressors. Extrapolating from Baskin’s study, it is possible that immigrants’ development of Belonging also buffered against further adversity (e.g., prejudice and other immigration-related stressors) by bolstering internal coping resources through increased self-esteem and security.
In fact, belonging has been found to have constructive effects on psychological functioning; this supports the results of the current study that suggested *Belonging* is linked to immigrant resilience. For example, research has found that a sense of belonging buffers against depression (McLaren & Challis, 2009; Sargent, Williams, Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, & Hoyle, 2002) and is associated with improved mental health and well-being (Bailey & McLaren, 2005; Caxaj & Berman, 2010). Although there have been few empirical studies to date that address the way belonging affects immigrant adaptation, a related study conducted by Watt and Badger (2009) investigated the effects of belonging on homesickness. The authors asserted that individuals who relocate experience a loss of their social network which lowered a sense of belonging and thus increased homesickness. Watt and Badger found a significant relationship between the need to belong and homesickness. Interestingly, the authors also found that a sense of acceptance facilitated belonging. In particular, participants who perceived themselves to be accepted in their community had less homesickness. Similarly, the current study identified the way a loss of one’s social network contributed to adaptation stress. In addition, struggles with acceptance and cultural attachment were related to *Belonging* as immigrants revealed the significance of being accepted and accepting sociocultural changes as well as an interrelated importance of forming cultural attachments in the process of *Belonging*.

**Forming Attachments**

The current study found that interpersonal attachments, often developed through cultural mechanisms of bonding, had an impact on immigrants’ sense of *Belonging*. The role between secure and enduring interpersonal attachment and healthy functioning was postulated by Bowlby (1982/1969) in his foundational psychological theory. His ideas were further articulated in a wave of research by attachment theorists (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Sroufe & Waters, 1977), which demonstrated the essential need for social and emotional security with others through the formation of close relationships. Other
theorists such as Kohut (1977) also regarded interrelatedness as being vital to human development and survival. For immigrants in the present study, social bonding provided an important way of creating a sense of interrelatedness to others and the community; adapting in Canada involved a balance between connecting to one’s cultural way of attaching to society as well as a conduit to bonding with others (e.g., through customs, language, food, community). The development of close interpersonal relationships appeared to build a sense of acceptance of the sociocultural environment. Additionally, many participants extended their social contacts to interethnic groups in which they exchanged cultural beliefs, values, and practices and developed strong relational bonds. Social support has been found to positively affect mental health (Birman & Tran, 2008); participants in the current study also noted that social support led to stronger emotional attachments as well as a sense of acceptance through close interpersonal bonds. Consistent with attachment theory that posits the significance of interpersonal closeness, the model of Belonging appears to be relevant to the notion that developing strong interpersonal bonds is an important component of resilience which was facilitated by many domains of culture.

Immigrants in the study revealed the way their cultural attachments affected their sense of Belonging beyond intra- and inter-ethnic forms of bonding and support. Cultural attachments were also linked to one’s perception of Belonging to the community and sociocultural environment. For example, a number of female participants contrasted more latitude in gender rules and norms in Canada by comparison to their homeland. They described Canadian women as having social and career opportunities and pursuits outside of the family environment. The perception of greater rights and equality fostered a stronger attachment and sense of Belonging in Canada.

Another important aspect of developing attachments that was less focused on by immigrants in the current study is the way in which relationships in Canada served to convey important forms of cultural learning that can facilitate sociocultural adeptness. Facility in
sociocultural life has been described as the ability to understand and accommodate novel cultural changes (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Kurman and Ronen-Eilon (2004) found that immigrants' lack of understanding of social knowledge resulted in negative sociocultural adaptation and contributed to problems with adjustment. The ability of immigrants in the current study to form close and sustained relationships likely would have facilitated better navigation of differing relational/cultural norms, which in turn would be expected to facilitate positive adaptation and Belonging. For example, learning English improved communication and appeared to be pivotal in both social and occupational life. This is consistent with research demonstrating that acquisition of the dominant culture's language increases social support as well as improves sociocultural learning and adaptation (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Additionally, it is surmised that knowledge of sociocultural norms would facilitate other functional needs such as employment opportunities as well as increase closer inter-ethnic bonds.

**Feeling Acceptance**

The second mid-level theme, Feeling Acceptance, identified the significance of reciprocated acceptance. Qualitative analysis revealed that participants' experiences of resilience involved their adjustment to and approval of relational-cultural norms, values and a differing sociocultural lifestyle; in tandem, immigrants also described the importance of feeling accepted by others and the detrimental impact of social exclusion. In particular, prejudice and discrimination and devaluation (e.g., professional skills) engendered social and occupational exclusion, leaving many immigrants with a sense of outsider status. This finding is consistent with a study by DeWall et al. (2009) who demonstrated that exclusion can interfere with social belonging. In particular, they conducted a series of experiments and found that threat to social exclusion results in active coping in the form of searching for social acceptance. This may be explained by the fact that positive social relationships are integral to healthy functioning (Kurzban & Leary, 2001).
Immigrants in the current study appeared to gain a sense of acceptance from both intra- and interethnic attachments, which also provided social support. In addition, other areas of acceptance were identified such as increases in social standing through establishment of better employment. The larger socio-political milieu appeared to contribute to acceptance by offering a greater perception of equality and tolerance for cultural diversity. An aggregation of approval affected immigrants’ perception of Belonging.

The need for mutual caring and concern has been described as an important element of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is possible that developing close relational ties with others facilitated mutual caring for immigrants, which may have buffered negative experiences such as prejudice and devaluation. However, the process of acceptance appeared to be affected by a range of factors such as increased social ties, cultural forms of bonding, career development, and larger sociocultural norms (e.g., gender equality). Thus, feeling acceptance related to many areas of functioning in post-immigration life and was facilitated by forming close interpersonal relationships, which may have increased a sense of being valued and interrelated.

Social inclusion has been suggested as an important component of self-esteem (Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001). Leary et al. (2001) argued that social acceptance theory acts as a social barometer from which individuals estimate their interpersonal positioning. In social acceptance theory, one’s sense of self-esteem is affected by a perception of relational devaluation, which creates lower self-esteem. Moreover, social inclusion has been described as vital to positive mental health because well-being is affected by the way in which people are treated and perceived by others (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). The findings in the current study also suggest that individuals can be negatively affected by their perception of acceptance, or lack thereof, as immigrants detailed the value of being viewed as an equal member of society, which appeared to foster a sense of Belonging.

*Cultural Constructions of Belonging in Context*
The second major contribution of this study identified contextual factors that affected immigrants’ resettlement. Qualitative interviewing revealed that resilience in post-immigration life was context-dependent and meaningful based on early life experiences, socialization, cultural values, as well as adversity in pre- and post-immigration. The first section examines the context of many forms of culture in immigrant resilience and Belonging, followed by the context of pre- and post-immigration experiences.

Contextual Factors of Many Forms of Culture

Psychological research on immigrants often focuses on broad markers of ethnicity without attending to internalized forms of cultural identity. The current study highlighted that individual identity involves attachments to multiple cultures, which departs from acculturation research that often investigates meta-cultural patterns. The notion of many forms of culture suggests that there is considerable in-group heterogeneity as well as intra-individual cultural domains that are relevant to immigrant adaptation.

Research on acculturation such as Berry’s model (1980, 1997, 2001) suggests that bicultural integration, which involves an amalgamation of one’s ethnocultural lifestyle with the culture of the dominant group in the receiving society, is generally the healthiest form of adaptation. However, research on acculturation has been critiqued because it does not identify individual cultural processes (Chirkov, 2009) and measures used to assess acculturative strategies often fail to account for in-group heterogeneity (Salant & Lauderdale, 2003). The current study identified that the context of multiple domains of culture are important to consider in regard to adaptation. Specifically, immigrants described the way a range of cultural attachments and feelings of acceptance were tied to different aspects of their internalized cultural identity.

The process of resilience involved different forms of adversity and positive adaptation that were context dependent rather than being contained to ethnicity. Therefore, the context of immigrants’ experiences needs to be considered in relation to their
particularized cultural adjustment in Canada. The notion of internalized culture was identified by Ho (1995), who argued that individuals hold many cultural influences simultaneously. In addition, Yi and Shorter-Gooden (1999) outlined a constructivist narrative perspective of identity and argued that there are numerous aspects of cultural distinctiveness such as age, gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation. Yi and Shorter-Gooden explained that a constructivist approach “…seeks to understand human behaviour as constructions determined by the social contexts such as culture, history, and linguistic conventions. It moves away from the traditional understanding of knowledge as objective truths firmly grounded in decontextualized empirical observations” (p.18). The qualitative interview process and analysis in the current study was useful in deriving rich and diverse cultural constructs of immigrants.

A number of contemporary theorists and researchers have also proposed more complex formulations of cultural socialization and identity and suggest that individuals hold multiple and intersecting forms of socially constructed characteristics (Cole, 2009; Mahalingam, 2006; Moodley, 2007; Robinson, 1999). The current findings identified the challenge of integrating many important aspects of one’s internalized cultures rather than viewing integration or adaptation from a broad-based cultural perspective. Immigrants in the study described complicated and diverse aspects of their cultural transformation. For instance, an immigrant may have developed career success (i.e., increase in socioeconomic status) but may have struggled with aspects of their ethnicity (e.g., loss of family, changes in ethnocultural lifestyle). Therefore, in considering adaptation, one needs to look at the way individuals formulate their cultural ‘self’ and elements which are most significant to their adaptation. Drawing attention to many types of culture not only increases our understanding about culture and how individuals are affected by complex and diverse aspects of their identities (Cohen, 2009), it also contributes to understanding the greater hardships that stigmatized immigrants face both in their homeland and in Canada.
Relational and Contextual Factors of Pre- and Post-Immigration

The psychological research has often failed to identify the way pre-immigration factors can contribute to immigrant adaptation. The current study highlighted the link between immigrants’ prior cultural lifestyle and their process of cultural attachment in resettlement. There are few studies that attend to both pre- and post-immigration cultural environments as most studies on immigrants attend to factors related to resettlement (Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2010). However, pre-immigration life is important to consider because cultural beliefs, attitudes, and norms can play a role in cultural adjustment. For instance, a study by Lim (1997) indicated that traditional gender roles in pre-immigration were affected by immigrants’ exposure to cultural differences in the receiving society. Specifically, the study indicated that female immigrants challenged patriarchal attitudes and norms in their marital relationships and expected greater equality in post-immigration. Although the challenges to their roles were limited by religious and ethnocultural sentiments, the study emphasized the importance of attending to the pre-immigration context such as gender socialization and cultural roles within different domains of culture. Lim’s study also highlights the way individuals are affected by differing ecological contexts (e.g., family system) and by the larger sociocultural environment, which both contains and places social pressure of established societal norms on individual functioning.

In the current study, immigrants discussed the way their pre-immigration experiences related directly to their conception of positive adaptation and sense of Belonging. For example, male immigrants who identified with gay sexual orientation discussed significant experiences in pre-immigration that highlighted the meaning of the sociocultural context in Canada and its relationship to Belonging. Specifically, gay immigrants primarily faced a sense of devaluation toward their sexual orientation in by family and the larger sociocultural environment through homonegative attitudes in pre-immigration. As a result of their experiences, these participants described a complicated attachment to their ethnic
background. For example, they described rejecting certain aspects of their heritage culture that contained heterosexual forms of exclusion, while embracing other aspects such as ethnic language and cultural-relational forms of bonding. Consequently, immigrants' internalized cultural attachments ranged from being accepted in some regard while being rejected in other areas (e.g., sexual orientation). Gay participants identified the negative impact of social rejection in their homeland, which reduced their sense of belonging in their homeland and increased their perception of belonging in Canada. Therefore, the context of one’s cultural attachments is important to consider in regard to positive adaptation.

Prejudice and discrimination, whether in pre- or post-immigration, is a pervasive problem for minority and stigmatized groups (e.g., racial, ethnic) and can have negative effects such as occupational, economic and political disadvantage (Crocker & Major, 1989). Social exclusion has also been linked to acculturative stress for immigrants (Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Tartakovsky, 2007) and can hinder a sense of belonging (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which assumes a preference for one’s group, research on immigrants and models of acculturation primarily presume a strong affiliation with one’s cultural background. However, preference for one’s ethnic group is complicated by other important aspects of cultural identity. In particular, immigrants in the current study (i.e., gay men) noted the way social exclusion and intolerance towards gay identity in their ethnic group/homeland disrupted their connection to their authentic self. Individuals who identified themselves as gay indicated a lack of acceptance of their sexual orientation and consequently immigrated to Canada. In conclusion, the context of immigrants’ pre-immigration experiences highlights that cultural adjustment to Canada is a complex process and that immigrants do not always embrace all aspects of their cultural heritage.

Individuals who experienced ostracisation in their homeland appeared to be more embracing of the diversity within the Canadian cultural environment. In addition, the
perception of greater tolerance and equality within Canada appeared to enhance a sense of *Belonging*. Research on perceived social support suggests that it plays a significant role for individuals who are confronted with stressful life events (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996). In particular, there is robust empirical evidence in the psychological literature that identifies the positive effects of social support in reducing psychological distress for immigrants (Adelman, 1988). Additionally, a study by Bartoshuk (2008) examined the role of social support in gay men and indicated that it had a significant buffering effect against homonegative experiences and internalized homophobia.

The current study included a small number of participants who identified with gay sexual orientation. Although homophobic attitudes exist in Canadian society, participants did not discuss these experiences. It is possible that immigrants’ perception of greater social support in Canada buffered them against perceiving negative attitudes or perhaps immigrants did not view or experience negative encounters with homophobia. The small sample of self-identified gay immigrants likely limited a range of experiences of homophobia in the current study. However, it is possible that close social support in Canada may have buffered immigrants in the current sample from negative experiences. It is important to consider that the more stigmatized an individual, the greater they would be affected by norms in their homeland and in Canada in terms of *Belonging*, which should be explored further.

*Strengths and Limitations*

The intent of this study was to investigate adversity and adaptive responses within the context of diverse cultural influences. The examination of culture in psychological studies has often been synonymous with issues that relate to ethnicity (Cohen, 2009). The omission of diverse forms of cultural socialization and identity such as gender, socioeconomics, sexual orientation, and religion parallels the reality of diverse cultural constructs that are held within each individual. The limited understanding about the way
culture affects resilience (Ungar, 2003) and the lack of conceptualization of immigrant resilience indicated a need to utilize qualitative methodology. A constructivist grounded theory approach facilitated a conceptual understanding of culture within the context of immigrant resilience based on lived experiences rather than predetermined hypotheses and assumptions.

The use of subjective accounts of immigrant adaptation provided a unique opportunity to gain insight into important areas of adaptation for immigrants. In-depth qualitative interviews and constructivist grounded theory analysis identified a model of culture in relation to resilience, which has been lacking in the psychological literature. Qualitative analysis facilitated an understanding about the complex ways in which culture influences immigrants during their adaptation to life in Canada.

Qualitative interviews aided in the development of a contextualized understanding of immigrants’ lives in both pre- and post-immigration. The context of each immigrant’s adaptation experiences provided deeper meaning into their lives and contributed to a more robust understanding of the role of culture in facilitating resilience.

The current study significantly broadened the conceptualization of positive adaptation for immigrants by highlighting multiple aspects of cultural socialization and identity that influence adaptation. The context of multiple forms of cultural identity provided a more systematic and comprehensive account of immigrant resilience, which could be beneficial to psychotherapy with immigrant populations.

Limitations

Although the findings of this study indicate that many forms of culture contribute to immigrant resilience, there are a number of limitations to consider. Firstly, the recruitment selection criteria and operationalization of resilience is a limitation of this study. The study selected immigrants who identified with the concept of resilience based on the researcher’s parameters. The study may have excluded people who were potentially resilient but did not
meet the study criteria or defined resilience in a different way. Consequently, the use of pre-selected criteria limited the way in which resilience was conceptualized. In addition, participants relied on memory and reflected from their current vantage point, which may have influenced their perception of adaptation. Furthermore, the stressors and adaptive responses may have differed in intensity between immigrants. It is likely that the individuals in the study represented a range in degree of adversity and adaptive responses.

Secondly, this study relied on a convenience sample. Consequently, participants had an expressed interest in discussing culture as well as identified its importance in their process of adaptation, which may have resulted in a biased sample. Immigrants also mainly lived in Toronto, one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, which appeared to facilitate positive adaptation and limits the results. Furthermore, researcher subjectivity also limits generalization of the findings. Objective truth is an elusive prospect. The use of a constructivist grounded approach involves interpretation from both parties. Therefore, the findings in this study represent a blending of subjectivities that form a starting point for understanding immigrant resilience rather than a generalization about the greater immigrant population.

Thirdly, this study was not able to capture the dynamic process of resilience as it evolved. Rather immigrants’ depictions of resilience and Belonging were snapshots within a process, which limited a more detailed and fluid conception of adaptation.

Fourthly, personality characteristics were not included in the final analysis. Although themes related to personality were identified such as open-mindedness and agency, inclusion of these themes was considered beyond the scope of this study. Given that participants identified personal characteristics as an important contribution to their process of adaptation it may be fruitful to investigate the way culture and personality interact in relation to adaptation in future research.
Finally, the study has begun to understand the significance of multiple forms of culture as well as the way it intersects with different contexts such as pre- and post-immigration experiences and systemic factors (e.g., individual, family, community, socio-political); however, the downside of identifying these important areas of influence in one study was the reduced specificity within each cultural domain. Although important aspects of cultural socialization, beliefs, and values were identified, the study did not uniformly explicate the nuances, both positively and negatively, within each area of culture. Notwithstanding these limitations, the results do have important clinical implications and considerations for future research.

**Clinical Implications**

The model of *Belonging* provides an important way to conceptualize immigrant adaptation. Immigrants faced a range of stressors during pre- and post-immigration. It is important for therapists to consider pre-immigration stressors that may contribute to current problems with adaptation. In particular, stigmatized populations (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, and disability) may have experienced unique hardships that are relevant to resettlement. In addition, therapists need to consider a range of adversity factors in post-immigration life such as alienation and loneliness, loss of family and social support, economic instability, and significant cultural adjustments. The current study found that building cultural attachments relevant to the context of an immigrant’s life contributes to positive adaptation. In addition, feeling acceptance and accepting the cultural context in Canada can be important to the process of resilience. Therefore, it would be helpful for therapists to examine specific challenges with forming attachments and developing acceptance within the Canadian cultural environment. The therapeutic relationship also represents a good opportunity to build an interpersonal attachment (Greenberg & Watson, 2006) and provide an environment of acceptance consistent with the basic tenets of
humanistic therapy, which involve empathy, genuineness and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961).

There are a number of functional aspects that a therapist might consider. For instance, social support was described as an important aspect of resilience by immigrants in the current study. Therapists would benefit immigrant clients by assessing their degree of social support and identifying ways to develop a network, both through intra- and intercultural attachments. The need for financial stability and career development was described by immigrants in the current study as important to their adaptation, which was often derived through social networks, English language facility, educational and professional skill development. Referrals to appropriate resources could be considered.

Another important clinical implication relates to the range of cultural forms of socialization and identities that are involved in adaptation such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender and socioeconomic status. The model of Belonging indicates multiple and intersecting ways in which immigrants can develop an attachment to Canada. The focus on therapy has primarily considered ethnicity without identifying other forms of cultural identity (Moodley, 2000). Segmenting individuals based on ethnicity misses other important issues such as gender roles and expectations and other components of power (e.g., socioeconomics) that often affect immigrants' lives. The results indicate the need for a personalized approach to counselling immigrants rather than a focus on singular issues.

**Future Research**

This study has begun to develop a model of culture within the notion of immigrant resilience. Although there is preliminary understanding about the way many forms of culture affect adaptation, these cultural domains need to be fully excavated; this could include important contextual factors such as pre-immigration cultural socialization and different systems (e.g., individual, family, community, socio-political level) that potentially would affect the process of resilience. Future research could focus on building greater knowledge about
each cultural domain (e.g., gender, sexual orientation) with particular emphasis on stigmatized groups who often encounter greater hardship in pre- and post-immigration life.

In light of the fact that racial minorities in Canada perceive more prejudice than non-visible minorities, future research on Belonging would be enhanced by conducting a comparative study between different markers of immigrant identity such as racial minority status and immigrants who are either less visible or consider themselves to be part of the cultural majority (e.g., British-born immigrants). A comparative study might be valuable in understanding the way in which Belonging is affected by perceived cultural distance from the dominant cultural group as well as perceived acceptance from the dominant cultural group.

Future research endeavours should further examine the relationship between resilience and Belonging. Replication of the current findings with other forms of data collection and analysis (e.g., qualitative and quantitative measures) across different populations would be beneficial. Research could also build on the model of Belonging by investigating the process of change within immigrant resilience and clarifying the way individuals are affected at important turning points in their adaptation. It would be important to consider pre-immigration life more closely as well as following individuals’ post-immigration to understand whether specific factors within timelines affect the construct of Belonging. The current study required participants to have been in Canada for a minimum of two years. The mean number of years of post-immigration for the research participants was seven. Future research could compare a range of number of years in Canada through a cross-sectional design and examine if time related factors affect Belonging such as greater facility with the English language as well as changes in cultural identity from greater exposure to the Canadian cultural environment.
References


we study it, when we investigate acculturation? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(2), 94-105.


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Appendix A
Recruitment Poster

RESEARCH STUDY: IMMIGRATION TO CANADA AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

THIS STUDY SEEKS WOMEN & MEN FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS:

- PEOPLE WHO IMMIGRATED TO CANADA IN THEIR ADULTHOOD (OVER 18) AND ARE CURRENTLY BETWEEN THE AGES OF 25-50
- PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN LIVING IN CANADA FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS
- PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED STRESS RELATED TO IMMIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT SUCH AS CULTURAL CHANGES, JOB & LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES, DISCRIMINATION, LONELINESS/ISOLATION, ETC.
- PEOPLE WHO HAVE FOUND WAYS TO COPE/ADAPT WELL TO THEIR STRESS RELATED TO IMMIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT
- PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT CULTURE HAS NEGATIVELY AND/OR POSITIVELY INFLUENCED THE WAY THEY ADAPT WITH IMMIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT TO LIFE IN CANADA

SHARE YOUR VIEWS...

HOW HAS YOUR CULTURE PLAYED A PART IN YOUR IMMIGRATION STORY?

THIS STUDY IS INTERESTED IN THE WAY YOUR CULTURAL BELIEFS, VALUES, & PRACTICES; RELIGIOUS/SPiritual LIFE; ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE; GENDER; SOCIAL CLASS; AND HISTORY HAVE SHAPED YOUR LIFE.

PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY, CONFIDENTIAL AND ANONYMous. PARTICIPATION WILL INVOLVE ONE INTERVIEW LASTING BETWEEN 1 – 2 HOURS. PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE $15. FOR MORE INFORMATION, WITH NO OBLIGATION TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CALL [TELEPHONE & EMAIL INFORMATION]
Appendix B
Telephone Screen

The voicemail message provided details about the study and requested potential participants to leave a confidential message.

Once contact had been made, the researcher described his association with the university as a doctoral student in the department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at OISE/UT and that the research is for his dissertation. The following details were discussed with the prospective participant:

Inclusion Criteria:

This study aims to explore your cultural experiences and resilience during resettlement in Canada. The conversation reviewed the following information to ensure that the potential participant meets inclusion criteria:

- Did you immigrate to Canada in adulthood (after age 18)?
- How long have you been living in Canada (at least two years)?
- Did you experience stressors related to immigration and resettlement such as problems with adjustment, prejudice/discrimination, work/employment barriers, language barriers, etc.
- Did you adapt/cope well to resettlement problems
- Do you think that your cultural experiences have influenced – either positively or negatively – the way that you cope/adapt with immigration and resettlement to life in Canada?

The Interview Process:

The study will involve one interview lasting between 1 to 2 hours. You will receive $15 for your involvement, which you will be able to keep whether you decide to end the interview earlier or decide you don’t want your transcript used in the study at a later date. Before the interview begins, you will be asked to complete a demographic form as well as read and sign, if you are in agreement, an information/consent form to participate in this study. You will be asked to choose a different name for yourself at the beginning of the interview to keep your information anonymous and confidential. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed within 30 days of your participation, at which time, the audiotapes will be erased and the transcripts will be kept in a locked place with the researcher. Dr. Roy Moodley (supervisor) and I will be the only persons to have access to the transcriptions.

The interview will ask the central question: When you examine the different stressors that you have had to deal with before and after immigrating to Canada, what aspects of your cultural experiences influenced you, either positively or negatively, in adapting to the Canadian culture?
Appendix B, continued

Together we will explore this question; your experiences will be the major spotlight of the interview, and at times, I will use the pre-arranged questions to help us maintain focus on the central question of the study.

Once the interview is completed, I will offer to send you a copy of the transcripts and/or a summary of the interview. As well, you will be offered a summary of the findings from the study and encouraged to provide feedback. You will not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to end the interview at any point in time and remove your information from the study by the end of our interview.

Limits of Confidentiality:

There are a few circumstances in which I am legally required to not maintain confidentiality. These situations include: if you report that you are going to harm yourself or someone else; if you report that a person under the age of 16 has been harmed such as physically, sexually or emotionally; if courts subpoena records; and if you report sexual abuse by a regulated health professional. Other than these situations, your interview will remain completely confidential and anonymous.

Potential Risks:

One potential risk to participating in the interview is that you may find discussing past events emotionally upsetting or uncomfortable. In the event that you do not want to talk about an upsetting topic, you have the right to change the topic. Furthermore, if you would like support as a result of participation in the interview, I will provide you with a referral to counselling.

If the potential participant remains interested in the study, an interview will be arranged, either at the OISE Psychoeducational Clinic or at a location that is most suitable to the participant.
Appendix C
Information and Consent Form

Investigator: Michael Goldman, Ph.D. (candidate)
Supervisor: Dr. Roy Moodley

My name is Michael Goldman and I am a doctoral student in the department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at OISE/University of Toronto. I am conducting a research study on first generation immigrants. Specifically, I am interviewing people who think they have cope/adapted well to different stressful circumstances (e.g., immigration circumstances, changes in cultural environments, language barriers, under- and unemployment, changes in socioeconomic status, prejudice, discrimination, loneliness/isolation) when moving to Canada. In particular, I would like to know if aspects of your cultural experiences influenced you –either negatively or positively – in adapting to the Canadian culture. I intend on interviewing between 12 to 20 women and men for my study. This research could be valuable to mental health practitioners counselling immigrants who are dealing with stressful resettlement circumstances and/or contribute to psychological research on immigrants and their experiences of adjustment.

This study is seeking the following:

- Individuals who immigrated to Canada in adulthood (over age 18) and are currently between the ages of 25-50
- Individuals who have been living in Canada for at least two years
- Individuals who experienced stress related to immigration and resettlement
- Individuals who found a way to cope/adapt well to their stress
- Individuals whose cultural influences and experiences have contributed to their adaptation, either positively or negatively.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be invited to participate in one interview that will last between 1 to 2 hours. You will receive $15 for your involvement, which you will be able to keep whether you decide to end the interview earlier or decide you don’t want your transcript used in the study at a later date. Before beginning the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic form as well as sign, if you are in agreement, the consent section of this form. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. The audiotapes will be erased within 30 days of the interview. All information from the interviews (audiotapes and transcripts) will be kept confidential and remain in a secure and locked filing cabinet with the researcher. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym for the interview to keep your identity anonymous. In the interview, you will be asked questions related to your experiences of being an immigrant in Canada and discuss both the stressful times and ways you have coped/adapted. After the interview is completed, I will offer you a copy of the transcripts and a summary of the main themes; feedback from you regarding the interview and the themes is optional. Additionally, you will be able to request a summary of the findings from the study.
DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time, decline to answer any question, and even withdraw from the study without any negative consequences to yourself. In addition, you will have up to six weeks from the time of your interview to withdraw any or all of your information. The information you provide will remain confidential and no one will know that you participated in this study. In addition, all personal details that may identify you will not be used either verbally in discussions and seminars or in any written form that the research may take (e.g., publication).

LIMITS OF CONFIDENTIALITY

There are a few circumstances in which I am legally required to not maintain confidentiality. These situations include: if you report that you are going to harm yourself or someone else; if you report that a person under the age of 16 has been harmed such as physically, sexually or emotionally; if courts subpoena records; and if you report sexual abuse by a regulated health care professional. Other than these situations, your interview will remain completely confidential and anonymous.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS AND BENEFITS TO MY PARTICIPATION?

One potential risk to participating in the interview is that you may find discussing past events emotionally distressing or uncomfortable. In the event that you do not want to talk about a distressing topic, you have the right to change the topic. Furthermore, if you would like support as a result of participation in the interview, I will provide you with a referral to counselling.

Participation in this research project may also have benefits:

- The information from the study may provide researchers and counsellors with a greater understanding about the way in which immigrants adjust to a new society
- The information you share may provide further insight into the way cultural beliefs and practices are involved in adaptation for immigrants.

Involvement in this study has no influence on your legal status as an immigrant. Therefore, if you do not have secure citizenship, participation in this study cannot assist or influence your immigration process or legal status.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION AFTER I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY?

All of the information collected as a result of your participation in this study will remain strictly confidential. The data collected over the course of this research study may be used for publication in journals or books, and/or for public presentations, but your identity (as mentioned above) will not be revealed. The data will be retained for a period of seven years with the principal researcher, Michael Goldman, and will be kept in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet with the researcher. It will be accessible only to the principal investigator and his supervisor, Dr. Roy Moodley.

A copy of the results of this research will be available to you if you are interested. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Ethics Review Office by e-mail (ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or call (416) 946-3273.
Appendix C, continued

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:

I have read the information letter and agree to participate in this study.

Name: ______________________ ______________________
First Name Last name

Signature: ______________________

Date: ______/_______/_______
Day Month Year
Appendix D
Demographic Form

PARTICIPANT’S FIRST NAME: __________________________________________

PARTICIPANT’S LAST NAME: __________________________________________

PSEUDONYM/NAMES USED IN STUDY: __________________________________

GENDER: □ MALE □ FEMALE

WHERE WERE YOU BORN? _____________________________________________

CITY/TOWN/VILLAGE ________________________________________________

COUNTRY __________________________________________________________

DATE OF BIRTH: _______ _______ _______

DAY MONTH YEAR

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP STATUS?

□ SINGLE □ MARRIED □ DIVORCED □ SEPARATED □ WIDOWED □ COMMON-LAW

DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN? □ YES □ NO IF YES HOW MANY? _______

DO ALL OF YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS LISTED ABOVE LIVE WITH YOU? □ YES □ NO

IF NOT, WHERE DO THEY LIVE: _________________________________________

__________________________________________

DO OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS (E.G. PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS) LIVE WITH YOU?

PLEASE LIST: _________________________________________________________
Appendix D, continued

WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION?

☐ NO SCHOOLING  ☐ SOME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  ☐ COMPLETED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

☐ SOME HIGH SCHOOL  ☐ COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL  ☐ SOME COLLEGE/TECHNICAL SCHOOL

☐ COMPLETED COLLEGE  ☐ SOME UNIVERSITY  ☐ COMPLETED UNIVERSITY (BACHELORS DEGREE)

☐ SOME POST-GRADUATE SCHOOL  ☐ MASTER’S DEGREE  ☐ DOCTORAL DEGREE ENROLLED

☐ COMPLETED DOCTORAL DEGREE

LEVEL OF INCOME AND WORK EXPERIENCE:

☐ LESS THAN $20 000  ☐ 20 001 - 30 000  ☐ 30 001 - 40 000  ☐ 40 001 - 50 000  ☐ 50 001 - 60 000

☐ 60 001 - 70 000  ☐ 70 001 - 80 000  ☐ 80 001 - 90 000  ☐ 90 001 - 100 000  ☐ 100 001 +

WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME, IF DIFFERENT THAN LISTED ABOVE: __________________________

WHAT WAS YOUR JOB IN YOUR COUNTRY OF BIRTH? __________________________

WHAT IS YOUR JOB IN CANADA? __________________________

CULTURE:

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CULTURAL/ETHNIC/RACIAL BACKGROUND?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix D, continued

WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION (IF ANY): ____________________________________________

FAMILY BACKGROUND:

PLEASE LIST THE INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM YOU GREW UP:

MOTHER:    YES         NO    FATHER:    YES         NO

DO YOU HAVE SIBLINGS?    YES         NO

IF YES, HOW MANY BROTHERS: __________    HOW MANY SISTERS: __________

WHERE DO YOUR PARENTS LIVE? ___________________________   ___________________
MOTHER          FATHER

WHAT ARE THEIR HIGHEST LEVELS OF EDUCATION? _______________   _______________
MOTHER          FATHER

WHAT ARE THEIR JOBS? ___________________________   __________________________
MOTHER          FATHER

WHERE DO YOUR SIBLINGS LIVE (CITY/COUNTRY)?

BROTHER(S): ________________________________________________

SISTER(S): ________________________________________________

IMMIGRATION-RELATED INFORMATION:

WHEN DID YOU LEAVE YOUR HOME COUNTRY? _______ _______ _________
DAY     MONTH     YEAR

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU LEFT YOUR HOME COUNTRY? ________
AGE

DID YOU COME DIRECTLY TO CANADA?    YES         NO
Appendix D, continued

IF YOU DID NOT COME DIRECTLY TO CANADA, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING 4 QUESTIONS:

1. WHERE DID YOU LIVE (COUNTRY): _____________________________

2. HOW LONG DID YOU STAY THERE? ________________
   MONTH(S)       YEAR(S)

3. WHEN DID YOU ARRIVE IN CANADA? ___ ___    ___ ___
   DAY         MONTH         YEAR

4. WHAT AGE DID YOU ARRIVE IN CANADA? ___________

WHAT WAS YOUR IMMIGRATION STATUS WHEN YOU FIRST CAME TO CANADA?

☐ LANDED IMMIGRANT
☐ REFUGEE
☐ FAMILY CLASS – SPONSORED BY PERMANENT RESIDENT
☐ FAMILY STUDY PERMIT
☐ SKILLED WORKER
☐ LIVE-IN CAREGIVER
☐ UNDOCUMENTED

IF NOT LISTED, PLEASE DESCRIBE: __________________________________________

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT CITIZENSHIP STATUS?

☐ CANADIAN CITIZEN
☐ LANDED IMMIGRANT
☐ REFUGEE
☐ FAMILY CLASS – SPONSORED BY PERMANENT RESIDENT
☐ FAMILY STUDY PERMIT
☐ SKILLED WORKER
☐ LIVE-IN CAREGIVER
☐ UNDOCUMENTED

IF NOT LISTED, PLEASE DESCRIBE: __________________________________________

LANGUAGE:

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST LANGUAGE/MOTHER TONGUE? __________________________

WHAT OTHER LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK: ___________________________________
Appendix E
Interview Prompts:

What made you interested in this study?

Why did you choose to immigrate to Canada?

I am interested in knowing about your cultural influences/background/experiences.

What are the differences/similarities between your cultural influences/experiences and the Canadian culture?

Cultural prompts: beliefs, values, practices, personal/family values; social customs, ethnic norms, gender role/norms; religion; socioeconomic life, environment.

Central Question:
When you examine the different stressors you have had to deal with before and after immigrating to Canada, what aspects of your cultural experiences influenced you, either positively or negatively, in adapting to the Canadian culture?

What major setbacks/problems did you experience related to immigration and resettlement?

Adversity prompts: Pre-immigration stressors such as trauma and refugee status. Post-immigration stressors: cultural changes (beliefs, values, practices), prejudice/discrimination; socioeconomic changes, under- and unemployment; language barriers; isolation/loneliness, psychological/physical stress.

How did you cope/adapt to major setbacks/problems?

Prompts for Coping/Adapting Well: What were some of the important ways that you adapted to these stressors? Any adjustments related to culture such as beliefs, values, practices, gender norms, religion, work/career/school, family and social networks, community, etc.
Appendix F
Thematic Summary

Thematic summary of the five key themes: Ethnicity; Socioeconomic Status; Gender; Sexual Orientation; and Religion.

Key Theme: **Ethnicity**

**Adversity: Main Themes:** Ethnocultural Estrangement and Interethnic Detachment.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Ethnocultural Estrangement: Loss of Family and Social Network and Family Values.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Interethnic Detachment: Racism; Interpersonal Alienation; Language Barriers; Structured Relations; and Community Alienation.
*Categories* of sub-theme Language Barriers: Body Language and Ethnocultural Communication.

**Positive Adaptation/Adaptive Conditions: Main Themes:** Intraethnic Attachments and Interethnic Relationships.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Intraethnic Attachments: Ethnocultural Traditions; Cultural Roots of Language; Ethnocultural Pride; and Community Affiliation.
*Categories* of sub-theme Cultural Roots of Language: Cultural Embodiment and Empathy.
*Sub-themes* of the main theme Interethnic Relationships: Reshaping Interethnic Ties; Exploring & Adapting Traditions; and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion.

Key Theme: **Socioeconomic Status**

**Adversity: Main Theme:** Loss of Status and Power.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Loss of Status and Power: Standard of Living; Under- and Unemployment; Difficulties Communicating; Racial Stereotyping; and Immigrant Devaluation

**Positive Adaptation/Adaptive Conditions:** Main Theme: Reclaiming Status and Power.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Reclaiming Status and Power: Career Pathways and Coping with Prejudice.
*Categories* within sub-theme Career Pathways: Language Skills; Education; Restoring Careers; and Achieving Equivalency.

Key Theme: **Gender**

**Adversity:** Main Theme: Contextual Stressors.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Contextual Stressors: Gender Inequality and Power Dynamics

**Positive Adaptation/Adaptive Conditions:** Main Theme: Equal Frameworks.
*Sub-themes* of main theme Equal Frameworks: Role Models and Gender Roles and Norms.

Key Theme: **Sexual Orientation**

**Main Theme:** Self-Congruence

**Adversity:** *Sub-theme* of main theme Self-Congruence: Invisibility.
Appendix F, continued

**Positive Adaptation/Adaptive Conditions**: Sub-theme of main theme Self-Congruence: Openness of Identity.

Key Theme: Religion:

**Positive Adaptation/Adaptive Conditions**: Main Themes: Prayer; Social Networking; and Adapting Practices.

Sub-themes of main theme Prayer: Emotional Strength; Physical Strength; and Acceptance of Self and Others.

Sub-themes of main theme Social Networking: Instrumental Support and Affective Support.

Sub-themes of main theme Adapting Practices: Personal Growth and Aspirations.