A Study of the Information Practices of Afghan Newcomer Youth in the Contexts of Leisure and Settlement

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This exploratory, qualitative study examines the information seeking, sharing and use of young Afghan newcomers to Canada. Through in-depth interviews with seven youth, supplemented by key informant interviews and extensive participant observation, I examined the information practices of youth in the contexts of leisure and settlement. The findings point to the challenges youth faced in meeting their information needs, as well as the complexity, nuance and tension youth found in their leisure pursuits. Leisure was not a single, unified concept for newcomer youth, and the activities youth took part in included a wide range of pleasures, with some constraints and even contradictions as well. By offering a snapshot of the lives and information practices of a group of newcomer youth, this research makes a contribution to information studies research as it adds to the growing body of human information behaviour (HIB) literature regarding the information practices of immigrants and refugees. It documents the information practices and leisure of newcomers, focusing on two understudied groups - refugees and youth - but also uniquely situates these practices within the broader context of settlement. The contextualization of HIB research on immigrants and refugees is vital if we are to better understand newcomers’ lives and practices, as well as design and deliver services that meet their needs.
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1 Introduction

This study examined the settlement experiences, information practices and leisure of Afghan newcomer youth living in Toronto. Using qualitative methods such as participant observation and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with youth, settlement workers and other key informants, this exploratory research documented the lived experiences, information practices and enjoyable pursuits of youth during their first months and years in Canada. The settlement experiences of youth participants, including both the joys and challenges they experienced after migration, formed the backdrop of this study, an important context within which to examine their information practices and leisure.

Why did this study explore the information practices of newcomer youth in the contexts of leisure and settlement? In reviewing the literature on newcomer information practices and leisure, I discovered conceptual links between these topics; these are discussed in more detail below. In short, however, newcomer settlement, information and leisure became central sensitizing concepts for this research. With this conceptual interest, I set out to explore and better understand the effects of migration on the human information behaviour (HIB) of Afghan youth, and what role, if any, leisure could play in their settlement and information seeking, sharing and use.

This chapter provides more detail on the origins and development of this research by answering the following questions:

1. What was the rationale for this study? Or, put differently, what made newcomer settlement a relevant context within which to study human information behaviour?

2. What were the sensitizing concepts of the study, or the initial relationships among leisure, information and settlement found through surveying the literature?

3. What were the motivation, objectives and research questions for this study?

4. What is the significance of this research?
1.1 Research rationale

Though studies of migration have not been common in information behaviour research, this topic continues to be of growing significance in both local and global contexts. Almost half of Toronto’s residents were born abroad (Statistics Canada, 2013b) and this city has not been alone in experiencing unprecedented levels of migration: at the time of this study, over two hundred million individuals were living outside their country of birth (International Organization for Migration, 2013). Though migration is an important issue around the world, it has not been well-understood by information researchers, who have only recently begun to explore the practices and strategies of international migrants adapting to new informational environments. Information behaviour research has primarily focused on the HIB of individuals and groups in stable, static environments, not newcomers whose lives, practices and social networks are in flux. The body of HIB literature on immigrants and refugees, which is reviewed in Chapter 2, is mostly descriptive and exploratory in nature. The few emerging frameworks identified in this area have been limited to use in individual studies or the work of single researchers. This research domain, therefore, was ripe for the development of a single, overarching conceptual framework that could be employed not only across studies of the HIB of immigrants and refugees, but also to introduce relevant concepts from HIB migration research into related fields such as sociology and immigration studies.

1.2 Conceptual links guiding the study of information practices and leisure across settlement

In surveying the literatures on information practices and migration, the concept of leisure emerged, one with unique relevance to the settlement and information behaviour of newcomers. Though leisure can be defined as free-time, enjoyable pursuits that one engages in outside of work and other obligations, this concept involves more nuance and complexity than a single definition can allow. As with many human activities, leisure is one that can vary considerably, not only over time, but within and across cultures and societies, as well as between individuals. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the conceptual and empirical work relating to leisure, in particular that of immigrants and refugees (see sections 2.3.1 Defining leisure and 2.3.2 Newcomer leisure). Though this study required a basic operational definition of leisure as a
starting point, (i.e. free-time, enjoyable pursuits that one engages in outside of work and other obligations) this definition was treated as flexible: it evolved and was made richer throughout the study as it was informed by participants’ descriptions of activities they found enjoyable. These descriptions, explored in detail in Chapter 6, included a wide range of leisurely pursuits, such as prayer, sport, attending school and spending time with friends and family. As detailed in Chapters 6 and 7, youth’s conception of leisure was complex in that it managed to reconcile the tension between the seemingly opposing forces of enjoyment and obligation. These findings add to current and ongoing debates about the nature of leisure within the field of leisure studies research (Kleiber, Walker, & Mannell, 2011).

In addition to being a scholarly field in its own right, leisure has also become an emerging area within information studies, as researchers explore the rich informational environments of leisure pursuits such as hobby cooking (Hartel, 2007) and leisure reading (Ross, 1999). Searching for, using and sharing information in leisure contexts is central to understanding information behaviour more generally, as where and how people choose to spend their leisure time and energy can be a revealing insight into their lives, behaviours and habits. This lens is especially interesting when applied to immigrants, as (Dali, 2010) did in her study of reading by Russian newcomers in Toronto. By examining their reading practices, Dali was able to explore these activities’ influence on the cultural adaptation of her adult participants.

Information is not only relevant to newcomer settlement, therefore, as discussed above, but also to leisure. Leisure studies research highlights an additional connection, demonstrating the importance of leisure to newcomers. As leisure can mitigate stress, and support the wellbeing and coping of individuals and groups (Iwasaki, 2001), its benefits are especially important for newcomers, whose lives are in transition. As well, shared leisure can help to alleviate the social isolation experienced by many newcomers. Leisure activities also offer immigrants the opportunity to access new social networks and gain information that may be relevant to their settlement (Stodolska, Marcinkowski, & Yi-Kook, 2007). Leisure pursuits, including information-rich hobbies, can be central in the lives of newcomers and take on multiple roles; activities such as watching television, reading, gardening and cooking have been used by immigrants to maintain contact with their cultures of origin, as well as to learn about and integrate into their new homelands (Allison & Geiger, 1993).
Studying the leisure of newcomers offers insight into their settlement experiences and information practices. Following migration, newcomers must adapt to new structures and institutions, form new social networks and shift their practices to suit emerging needs. By studying the changes in leisure during settlement, we better understand the processes of adaptation, as barriers to settlement, such as social isolation, are also barriers to certain types of leisure among newcomers (Rublee & Shaw, 1991). In addition, research on reading among immigrants demonstrates that leisure reading may offer insight into the processes of cultural adaptation experienced by individual newcomers (Dali, 2010). Leisure reading, however, may also be set aside in favour of more urgent settlement goals, such as improving one’s English-language skills (Cuesta & Pearson, 1990). The resumption of activities that were initially put on hold after migration may therefore indicate the achievement of certain milestones of settlement and integration. In the absence of agreed-upon models of settlement, leisure could illuminate common stages and barriers in this process.

What became clear from the literature on leisure, information and settlement, was that there were possible relationships and links between these topics. In the development of this study, therefore, leisure, information and newcomer settlement became sensitizing concepts. These concepts were ones I brought into the study, and of which I remained mindful during the processes of data collection, analysis and writing. The preliminary conceptual links between these concepts – links that emerged from a review of the literature - were the following:

- leisure activities can influence newcomers’ experiences during settlement
- the circumstances and experiences of settlement, in turn, can also affect newcomer leisure
- information relevant to settlement may be shared within leisure settings
- newcomers’ transitions and experiences across settlement may be reflected in their information practices and leisure

As a result of these conceptual links, I determined that settlement could be a rich context within which to situate study of newcomers’ information practices and leisure. It should be noted that due to the exploratory nature of this study, the above statements were not treated as hypotheses; instead, they were simply kept in mind as potential conceptual links, ones that prompted this study’s rich and deep exploration of information and leisure in the settlement of newcomer youth. In so doing, this study has built upon the work of Dali (2010) to further
highlight the relevance of leisure as a lens to explore the information and settlement experiences of newcomers. The differences between this study and Dali’s (2010) work are apparent in a number of ways, however: first, in choosing to study newcomer youth instead of adults; second, in including leisure activities beyond reading; and third, in focusing on the concept of settlement – a broader term used in both academic and policy settings – instead of acculturation, which is used primarily by psychologists to refer to psychological processes of adaptation.

1.3 Study motivation, objectives and research questions

The motivation for this research came from my professional background in library service planning, where I became aware of the significant gaps in our understanding of the human information behaviour (HIB) of recent immigrants, as well as those of specific subgroups of newcomers, such as refugees and youth. It became difficult to plan and administer information service provision for newcomers without a clear vision of their information needs and preferences, or a sense of their settlement experiences. This study, therefore, grew from my desire to address these gaps with respect to one group, Afghan youth; this group was chosen in consultation with library outreach workers and settlement agencies, who noted their underutilization of library programs, their history of forced migration and the challenges they experienced following their arrival in Canada, such as family separation and high rates of poverty.

The goal in beginning this project was to unite research concerns relevant both to academics as well as to practitioners in information. My aim therefore was twofold: first, to make a contribution to HIB and immigration research by expanding the small base of empirical studies on newcomer youths’ information behaviour and providing a better foundation on which to encourage theory-building on this topic, and secondly, to better inform the creation of targeted library and settlement services for newcomer youth. The introduction of leisure as a concept relevant to both information behaviour and settlement was a secondary purpose of this research; leisure is an interesting and revealing lens through which researchers can better understand the use and flow of information among individuals and groups. The findings of this research therefore offer new insights into the HIB of youth who have experienced international migration.
The three objectives of this research, therefore, were:

- to address gaps in existing research by exploring a novel research area, specifically the information behaviour and leisure of an understudied population;
- to develop a preliminary conceptual framework to inform research at the intersection of information, leisure and settlement; and
- to gather knowledge to support program design and policy creation for an underserved and potentially vulnerable group.

To achieve these objectives, this project answered three research questions:

1. What challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience?
2. What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?
3. What do the leisure activities of Afghan newcomer youth reveal about their settlement experiences and information practices?

The approach taken to address these questions is outlined in detail in Chapter 3, while the main concepts of settlement, information practices and leisure are outlined and reviewed with the existing literature in Chapter 2.

1.4 Research significance

The relevance of migration and settlement as contexts of HIB research is paramount, not only to academic research but to local agencies, libraries and educators, as well as governments and policy makers. Settlement is a term used to refer to the transitional stage immigrants and refugees experience following migration (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012a). Caidi and Allard (2005) note the importance of information as a component of settlement as it influences not only newcomers’ access to employment and local services, but also their inclusion into society as a whole. Government agencies in Canada and around the world attempt to meet the informational needs of immigrants and refugees, yet we are witness to rising levels of settlement challenges such as unemployment and poverty among recent cohorts of immigrants (Reitz, 2001). Though millions of dollars are spent annually on referral, information and other support services for newcomers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008), there has been a
lack of empirical research on the information practices of newcomers or effective strategies to deliver information to various groups.

Information as a key component of settlement is vital to understand. The difficulties newcomers experience during their early months and years following migration not only shape their economic integration, but can greatly influence their mental health (Crooks, Hynie, Killian, Giesbrecht, & Castleden, 2011) and wellbeing. The implications of settlement challenges are felt not only at the individual level, but also within communities and the broader receiving society. By learning more about the HIB of immigrants and refugees, we can better inform policy decisions and service delivery to these groups, which has implications not only for government agencies, but also for libraries, educators and researchers.

1.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter briefly examined this study’s sensitizing concepts and the preliminary conceptual links among information practices and leisure across settlement. It highlighted the rationale and significance of this study, its objectives, and research questions. By exploring the HIB of newcomer youth and the use and flow of information in leisure settings, this study’s findings offer insight into this under-researched area and highlight leisure as a concept relevant for examining HIB in populations experiencing important life transitions that affect both their social and cultural worlds. The next chapter turns to a review of the relevant academic literature that formed the basis for this study.
2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter overview

The previous chapter explored the motivation for this study and outlined the basis for preliminary conceptual links at the intersection of information practices, leisure and migration. This chapter continues by reviewing the academic literature supporting the foundation of this study. As such, it examines relevant studies on Afghan settlement in Canada, and the information behaviour and leisure of immigrants and refugees.

This research addressed the following three research questions:

1. What challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience?

2. What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?

3. What do the leisure activities of Afghan newcomer youth reveal about their settlement experiences and information practices?

To answer these questions, the existing literature on migration and settlement was examined, with a specific focus on studies of Afghans in Canada, and youth and refugee settlement. Research on migration and settlement is discussed below as these processes – and their inherent challenges – form the larger context for this study and our understanding of the human information behaviour of immigrant and refugee youth. After exploring the context of settlement, the existing research on the human information behaviour (HIB) of immigrants and refugees was reviewed; a discussion of the trends and gaps in this small body of literature is provided below. The third body of literature included in this study was research on leisure and its relevance for immigrants and refugees: this topic is covered in the final section of this review.
2.2 Migration and settlement as a context for human information behaviour

2.2.1 Defining migration and settlement

Migration refers to the movement of individuals and groups across international borders. This study explored the experiences of immigrants and refugees, focusing on their lives following migration to Canada and the process of settlement. Settlement was a challenging term to define, as there are no definitive models, agreed-upon definitions or specific timelines for this process. In Canada, the term settlement is used to refer both to the first few years of a newcomer’s experiences following migration, as well as to the types of needs that immigrants and refugees face upon arrival (George, 2002; Mwarigha, 2002). The Canadian government provides funding to organizations called settlement agencies, which offer services free to newcomers in their first years in Canada, services such as information and referral, English-language instruction, and employment counseling. Settlement agencies employ multilingual information and referral specialists, or settlement workers, who assist immigrants and refugees. In the case of more recently-arrived groups such as Afghans, settlement workers typically share an ethno-linguistic background with the clients they serve, and may also be immigrants or refugees themselves.

Settlement is not the only term used to refer to the post-migration experiences of immigrants and refugees: immigration scholars from the field of sociology use the terms integration or assimilation. These terms have evolved over the years and were originally conflated; first conceived of as a one-way adaptation by which immigrants assimilated into the mainstream of receiving societies (Park & Burgess, 1921), integration has come to mean the two-way cultural or behavioural shift through which both the immigrant and the institutions of the host society adapt as a result of their exposure to one another across generations following migration (Gordon, 1964). As integration has no definitive definition or indicators (Castles et al., 2002), it is often measured by proxy, through the study of intermarriage between immigrant groups, residential segregation, and the socioeconomic status and earnings of immigrants (Rodríguez-García, 2006; Waters & Jiménez, 2005). Settlement, in contrast, is a term often used to refer to shorter-term processes of practical adjustment, including the search for housing, employment, healthcare and the acquisition or improvement of English language skills. The concept of settlement was introduced in information studies research by Caidi and Allard (2005), who first framed the information needs of newcomers in the context of settlement. Caidi and Allard
(2005) not only highlight the importance of information for the early stages of immigrant adaptation, but also in striving for broader acceptance and inclusion into society as a whole.

The above section examined the term settlement, while the next section provides an overview of Afghan, refugee and youth migration in Canada to contextualize the study of the information practices of these groups.

### 2.2.2 Afghan newcomer, refugee and youth settlement

This study explored the information practices and leisure of Afghan newcomers, a recently-arrived, young and growing community in Canada. Though tens of thousands of Afghans have settled in Canada in recent years, with over 23,000 arriving in the decade after 2002 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b), there is little research on their settlement experiences and none to date on their information needs or practices. The few existing studies and reports point to unique challenges and issues – including unmet settlement needs – among this group, in large part due to their experiences with forced migration. The majority of Afghans in Canada are or were refugees at some point due to decades of ongoing conflict in their homeland.

Toronto is home to the largest group of Afghans in Canada, where they are one of the most recently arrived and youngest newcomer groups in the city (Ornstein, 2006); according to the 2011 Census, almost half of Afghans in Toronto were under the age of 24 (Statistics Canada, 2013a). Toronto’s Afghans are extremely diverse, with many different ethnic, regional, linguistic and religious affiliations, past experiences and migration histories (Norquay, 2004). Afghan newcomers, and youth in particular, face significant barriers in their settlement: they experience low levels of education, high rates of early school leaving (Amir, 2009), unemployment and poverty, especially youth poverty (Ornstein, 2006). In addition to facing these settlement challenges, Afghan newcomers also encounter prejudice, hostility and discrimination due to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 (Hall & Huyskens, 2002; Khanlou, Koh, & Mill, 2008) and their status as Muslims (Omidian, 1996). According to a Toronto settlement agency, stress and trauma experienced by Afghan youth has led to unmet mental health needs among this group; this, in turn, has contributed to isolation, depression and an increase in the incidence of suicide (Soroor & Popal, 2005). The authors note that Afghan
youth are not only underserved by counseling services, but also by recreational and other youth services in Toronto (Soroor & Popal, 2005).

As the process of settlement is shaped by the circumstances of migration, it is important to highlight the experiences of two different groups relevant to my study: refugees and youth. Unlike immigrants, who migrate permanently and voluntarily, refugees are forced migrants who have fled their homeland as a result of persecution or war; as a result, the settlement of immigrants and refugees can vary substantially. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is someone with a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, political opinion, religion, nationality, or membership in a specific social group, who is outside their country of nationality and unable, or unwilling due to fear, to obtain the protection of that country (UNHCR, 2013b). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that over 10 million refugees have currently fled their country of citizenship (UNHCR, 2013a). Afghanistan is the largest source country for refugees worldwide, with close to 2.7 million living under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2012).

Refugees are one of the three categories of individuals accepted for permanent resettlement in Canada; the other two categories are sponsored family members and immigrants, a group comprised of skilled workers, entrepreneurs and investors. Approximately 9% of the newcomers admitted annually to Canada are refugees, and Canada has admitted over 120,000 refugees for permanent resettlement in the past five years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013). While some refugees are brought to Canada directly from refugee camps overseas as part of government-assisted resettlement programs, others arrive as in-land claimants, those who present themselves at a Canadian port of entry and ask for asylum.

Due to the nature of forced migration and the complex social realities confronting them in receiving societies, refugees’ settlement experiences are often more difficult than those of immigrants. Refugees in Canada are more likely than immigrants to experience poverty, unemployment and language barriers, hurdles to settlement and social integration (Yu, Ouellet, & Warmington, 2007). In addition, the mental health and counselling needs of refugees may be higher than those of immigrants due to the trauma of war and conflict experienced by refugees (Yu, et al., 2007).
The settlement experiences of refugees and other newcomers are shaped not only by the context of their migration, but also by the interplay of their individual characteristics, such as age, gender, education and English-language proficiency, and the circumstances and policies of the receiving society. While refugees face substantial barriers to settlement, additional challenges are faced by in-land claimants, individuals who land in Canada and make a refugee claim upon arriving. Unlike refugees selected abroad and sponsored by private groups or the government, in-land claimants do not arrive in Canada with permanent resident status, but instead must wait until a determination on the validity of their refugee claim is made. The challenges presented by this uncertainty are compounded by the fact that refugee claimants are not eligible to use most settlement services in Canada, such as counselling or English-language instruction (Yu, et al., 2007). This ineligibility creates a situation that can lead to marginalization during the claimant stage and barriers in future integration (Dauvergne, 2007).

As my study focused on Afghan newcomer youth, it is important to examine the topic of youth migration, as well as to define the term youth. Youth is a term that can vary between countries and cultures, and is often used to refer to both adolescents (ages 10 to 19) and young adults (Tyyskä, 2009). In non-Western countries, youth is a term that may include people as young as 5 or as old as 35 years of age (Tyyskä, 2009), while in Afghanistan, it is primarily defined by family status and can refer to someone of any age who has not yet married (Omidian, 1996).

Though youth development may follow specific trajectories within various societies, this development is disrupted by war and the displacement of forced migration. For instance, traditional structures and rituals used to mark the transition from youth to adulthood may not be possible for youth who have been separated from their families and communities by violence and political upheaval, leaving them in a permanent state of liminality (Tefferi, 2008). Young refugees may be forced to take on responsibilities beyond their years and outside of traditional societal norms, acting as breadwinners and caregivers for younger siblings and disabled or traumatized parents (Hart, 2008; Mann, 2008; Tefferi, 2008).

Though their experiences have not been as well documented as those of adult immigrants or school-age children, youth face significant challenges as part of migration. During settlement in Canada, newcomer youth may experience difficulties learning English, finding employment and coping with the stresses of adaptation and adolescent identity formation (Desai & Subramanian,
In addition, youth must adapt to an unfamiliar educational system, and may not be able to rely on the support or advice of their parents, who may be equally ill-at-ease with the local system and overwhelmed by their own search for employment. Youth must navigate the sometimes conflicting values of family and peers and adjust to different roles shaped by shifting family dynamics (Janzen & Ochocka, 2003). These many issues can be further complicated by the scars of emotional or physical trauma experienced by refugees before arriving in Canada, and the poverty, unemployment and racism experienced by some newcomers (Peera, 2003).

The above sections provided an overview of the meaning of newcomer settlement, and some of the circumstances facing specific groups such as youth migrants and refugees. This background information is relevant to establish the context for information seeking, sharing and use among newcomer groups. The following section examines the meaning of HIB research in the context of migration, highlighting relevant concepts before moving to a detailed review of existing information research on immigrants and refugees.

### 2.2.3 Studying information behaviour in the context of migration

What does it mean to study information behaviour in the context of migration? As recent decades have seen a shift from system-centered research to a focus on users (Dervin & Nilan, 1986), information researchers have become more interested in understanding the contextual nature of information seeking, sharing and use. Though definitions of the term context remain complex (Dervin, 1997), Vakkari, Savolainen and Dervin (1997) describe context as the conditions necessary to sufficiently understand the information behaviour under study (p. 9). Context is a vital component in studies of information across migration, as the behaviours of newcomers are shaped by their circumstances, social environments, cultural realities and the policies and institutions of the receiving society.

In a review of research on immigrant information practices, Caidi, Allard and Quirke (2010) note the utility of information practices as a conceptual basis for understanding the information behaviour of newcomers. Information practices are the seeking, sharing and use of information, activities that are situated within a set of social and contextual factors (Savolainen, 2008).
Savolainen (2008) refers to these practices as “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources such as television, newspapers, and the Internet”, (p. 2). Information practices explore the activities of individuals both within and outside of work settings and can include not only direct and active information-seeking, but also more passive and less-focused behaviour such as browsing on the Internet or chatting with friends or family (McKenzie, 2003).

Studies of immigrant and refugee migration challenge - and stretch - current conceptions of information practice, which have typically been considered as stable and habitual. Savolainen (2008) discusses information practices as established and habitual activities cultivated through routines such as reading a newspaper each morning; he explains that for this practice to exist as a habit, other structures, such as newspaper publishing and home delivery, must be in place. This example highlights the static nature of the settings in which information practices are usually studied and prompts the following questions when considering studies of settlement and migration: What constitutes habitual practice when individuals’ lives, cultural worlds and social networks are in a state of flux? How can information studies scholars understand and study the disruptions to one’s environment and habits caused by migration? These topics are ripe for study in the field of HIB, prompting us to ask: How do newcomers’ information practices shift as they undergo the changes of migration and settlement? How do immigrants and refugees begin to explore their new informational environments and establish new strategies, practices and habits as a result? Though these questions have yet to be answered, initial findings from the small body of research on immigrant information practices offer insight: the rest of this section reviews these studies, summarizing their conceptual frameworks and findings to offer a holistic picture of our understanding of HIB across migration to date.

Information studies research on newcomers can be divided into two distinct categories: Library and Information Science (LIS) practitioner literature and studies of immigrant HIB. The majority of work on newcomers conducted to date belongs to the first category and consists primarily of short descriptive studies by information professionals recounting the design and delivery of library programs to different newcomer populations (Caidi, et al., 2010). Though extremely useful in understanding the nature of library services offered to immigrants, refugees and other migrants, these articles’ focus on the institutional setting and summary of library services make them of limited use in understanding the HIB of immigrants and refugees more
generally. For this reason, these articles are not reviewed here, and the remainder of this section centers on the second category of studies: research on immigrant HIB.

Information studies research on immigrant and refugee HIB can be further subdivided into two categories: conceptual and empirical studies. The conceptual studies are few in number, yet important in that they introduce relevant theoretical framings for HIB migration research. The first, by Caidi and Allard (2005), examines the role of information in understanding newcomer settlement with the broader goal of social inclusion, while the second, by Srinivasan and Pyati (2007), explores the importance of multi-sited diasporic communities as locations of information behaviour research. A review of the field of immigrant HIB research, conducted by Caidi, Allard and Quirke (2010), also considers relevant concepts from information behaviour that can be applied to this topic. Caidi and Allard’s (2005) work is especially useful in considering the utility of information to recent immigrants and refugees, possible stages of settlement experienced by newcomers, as well as the barriers they face in navigating and understanding their new informational environments. The small number of conceptual studies is likely due to the relatively recent nature of information researchers’ interest in migration as a context of HIB, and will hopefully grow in future.

The second group of research studies on immigrant HIB is empirical in nature, offering many qualitative and some quantitative glimpses into the practices of newcomers. Table 2-1 summarizes this body of studies and provides a brief overview of each study’s findings. Three points are important to note: first, most of the research outlined below is exploratory in nature, which leads to a focus on qualitative methods and a reliance on small and convenience samples; second, specific groups, such as youth and refugees are underrepresented; and third, the theoretical and conceptual framings used in this body of work are a wide assortment of individual approaches with limited overlap, and do not form a cohesive arc or structure. More discussion of the nature of this literature – including gaps – is offered following Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Summary of empirical studies on the HIB of international migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (Year)</th>
<th>Population studied</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Theoretical/conceptual framework</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metoyer-Duran (1993)</td>
<td>Ethno-linguistic gatekeepers</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Gatekeeper model</td>
<td>- almost half of gatekeepers were born outside the US</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>- gatekeepers may have formal or informal</td>
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in American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Latino communities in California

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chu (1999)</td>
<td>Children of immigrants in US: Korean-American, Mexican-American, ages 9 - 29</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews; unclear whether open-ended or structured interview guide used</td>
<td>Information needs; children act as ICMs (immigrant child mediators), interpret for their parents; makes them influential in their families and broader communities - ICMs obtained information on a variety of topics: schools, medical services, home repairs, and recreation/travel - ICMs did not share all the information they found with their parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olden (1999)</td>
<td>Somali refugees in London, England</td>
<td>Ethnographic interviews</td>
<td>Information seeking - word-of-mouth found to be most effective way of communicating with Somalis; oral communication preferred - BBC considered most important source of unbiased information - Somali youth have diverse migration histories and family backgrounds - children’s access to information on life in UK can lead to power shifts between them and parents, especially with respect to discipline and punishment - children interpret for mothers in medical and other settings - Somali refugees do not make use of UK libraries - drawback of reliance on oral information is potential for misinformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo and Jameson (2000)</td>
<td>Female Pacific Island immigrants to New Zealand</td>
<td>Qualitative, one-on-one interviews</td>
<td>Knowledge-behaviour gap - participants preferred receiving information face-to-face - though participants preferred to receive information on cervical screening from co-ethnics, they did not want to have screening done by co-ethnic medical professionals for fear of gossip within their ethnic community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher, Durrance and Hinton (2004)</td>
<td>Library administrator, program coordinators, volunteers (n = 15)</td>
<td>Exploratory, qualitative, case study, interviews and observations</td>
<td>Information grounds - immigrants discover the library as a safe place, become aware of resources (library, community, Internet) that can benefit them, gain information literacy skills, find out how the library can help them and share this info with family and friends, learn to trust library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sanchez and Cunningham (2004)</td>
<td>Hispanic migrant farm workers</td>
<td>51 migrant workers and 8 staff</td>
<td>Mixed methods, including interviews and observations; exploratory</td>
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<tr>
<th>Jeong (2004)</th>
<th>Korean graduate students in US</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Qualitative; in-depth interviews, participant observation, including observations at church; analysis using grounded theory</th>
<th>Small world theory, gatekeepers and channel theory</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- students live on the margins of US society; lead lives with significant economic stress, language barriers, and don’t find ways out of this difficult situation during their stays in the US</td>
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<td>- poor English language skills lead students to isolate themselves, avoid situations where they would have to speak English</td>
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<td>- other Korean students are primary source of information</td>
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<tr>
<th>Courtright (2005)</th>
<th>Latin American newcomers in a small US city (6 from Mexico, one from Ecuador)</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Exploratory, semi-structured interviews</th>
<th>Social networks and social capital</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- health information seeking is often done through social networks (both strong and weak ties) and local institutions</td>
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<td>- quality of information received through social networks (esp. strong ties) was limited</td>
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<td>- serendipity often played a role in obtaining helpful health information</td>
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<td>- barriers to health information included unfamiliarity with local rules and health care system, language difficulties and low-income status</td>
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<td>- though some participants used the Internet, they didn’t use it for health info</td>
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<tr>
<th>Silvio (2006)</th>
<th>Sudanese youth in London, Ontario; now immigrants, previously refugees</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>Qualitative: focus group, semi-structured interviews; exploratory</th>
<th>Information-seeking</th>
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<tr>
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<td>- informal information-seeking is preferred over formal</td>
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<td>- family, friends, colleagues and neighbours are primary sources of information</td>
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<td>- youth are sceptical of information from radio, TV, Internet and other mass media</td>
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<td>- youth lacked information on educational opportunities, health, employment, how to deal with racism, and political information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Study Population</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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</table>
| Mehra and Papajohn     | International teaching assistants (TAs) at a graduate school in US                | 130                  | Quantitative survey, descriptive                                                                                                       | - TAs ranked e-mail first and phone second as preferred information gathering tool in US and for communication with home country  
- women write more letters than men  
- computer most commonly used for Internet browsing                                                                                          |
| Caidi and Macdonald    | Muslim post-secondary students in Toronto, Ontario                                | 120                  | Survey (n=120) and in-depth interviews (n=16)                                                                                           | - many participants had a keen interest in news and maintained strong transnational ties  
- participants’ information practices contribute to shaping their understanding of their place in Canadian society post 9/11  
- high level of sophistication found in participants’ practices regarding accessing multiple sources and making sense of the content and contexts of information |
| Shoham and Rabinovich  | Immigrants to Israel from Ethiopia and the Former Soviet Union                   | 319                  | Descriptive survey, quantitative analysis                                                                                              | - survey done of library users at 45 branches  
- library can contribute to integration and well-being of immigrants  
- public library tends to offer more resources for longer-settled immigrants rather than recently-arrived newcomers  
- more services offered to FSU immigrants than Ethiopian; FSU community is much larger than Ethiopian (more libraries offer books in Russian and employ Russian-speaking librarians than Amharic)  
- immigrants from the two groups used the library differently: FSU immigrants came to check out books, while Ethiopians came to study in the library and learn Hebrew |
| Shoham and Strauss     | North American immigrants to Israel                                               | 13                   | Qualitative, in-depth interviews; grounded theory                                                                                       | - major difficulties experienced related to information needs on banking, schooling, housing and health, and involved language barriers  
- friends and family were the most useful sources for overcoming these difficulties  
- satisfaction of information needs contributes to successful absorption into the receiving society                                                                                                  |
| Dali                   | Russian immigrants to Canada                                                      | 14                   | Surveys and in-depth interviews                                                                                                         | - leisure reading practices change with migration  
- leisure reading can be used to better understand immigrant acculturation                                                                                                                            |
| Audunson, Essmat, Aabo  | Immigrant and refugee women from                                                  | 9                    | Exploratory, qualitative interviews                                                                                                     | - those arriving alone experienced more difficulties than those arriving with family  
- the library was a haven, particularly in the |
| (2011) | Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan living in Norway, who are library users | social inclusion and high vs. low intensive meeting places | early days of settlement; not used as often after getting more established, and making friends; role of library changed across settlement  
- library was a safe and acceptable meeting place for newcomer women  
- respondents mistrusted co-ethnics (p.225)  
- library was place to meet Norwegians  
- multilingual collections seen as a sign of respect  
- movies and literature used to fight homesickness (p.225)  
- those with children used library to introduce them to their home country’s culture; cultural maintenance  
- library use supports integration |
| Komito (2011) | Filipino and Polish migrants living in Ireland | Interviews (ethnographic, social network analysis) | Social networks and social capital  
- migrants are frequent users of social media, mobile phones, texting and Skype  
- new technologies are used to coordinate social life, maintain contacts and obtain information  
- social networking sites are used to monitor friends |
| Lingel (2011) | immigrants in NYC | Qualitative: semi-structured interviews and participatory mapping | Information tactics  
- friends and the Internet were the primary sources of information  
- participants’ personal histories affected what they saw in their new neighbourhoods  
- wandering was a way participants became familiar with their new neighbourhoods |
| Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson and Qayyum (2013) | Refugees in New South Wales, Australia | Qualitative; semi-structured interviews and focus groups | Schatzkian practice lens: information literacy and practices considered as constituted in and by social relations  
- refugees move through three phases of settlement  
- refugees require assistance moving through unfamiliar Australian information landscape  
- early information concerns are with everyday living  
- visual and social forms of communication work best, especially in the early stages  
- not all info from co-ethnics was trusted (p. 132) |
| Nomura and Caidi (2013) | Japanese immigrant women living in Canada | Qualitative, semi-structured interviews and picture diaries | Literacy practices  
- the importance of the 'home' as the crucial site for heritage language literacy practices  
- Japanese immigrant mothers used a rich and varied set of literacy practices  
- participants valued the Japanese language and shared it with their children through speaking, reading stories and singing songs  
- preferred resources for supporting their children’s Japanese literacy practices were |
picture books in Japanese and daily conversation
- public library use was limited by difficulties searching for Japanese children’s books using Romanized letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lingel (in press)</th>
<th>Transnational migrants recently arrived to New York City</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>Qualitative, including conversational interviews, participatory mapping and wandering</th>
<th>Habits and wandering as lenses for exploring information practices</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- newcomers formed habits as a coping strategy to deal with feelings of disorientation: these habits involved various information practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- participants found wandering around their new city to be an enjoyable and useful way of learning about their new environment</td>
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</table>

In considering the findings of empirical studies on immigrant and refugee information practices as a whole, specific trends emerge. The majority of studies summarized above are qualitative, with many identifying themselves as exploratory in nature (i.e. Audunson, et al., 2011; Courtright, 2005; Fisher, Durrance, et al., 2004; Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004; Silvio, 2006). As we have not yet determined the relevant frameworks and variables shaping immigrant and refugee information behaviour, existing studies are mostly small and rely heavily on techniques such as in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus groups. A handful of studies also employ descriptive surveys to summarize newcomers’ practices and capture demographic variables of different groups under study (i.e. Mehra & Papajohn, 2007). While some studies focus on newcomers’ interactions with institutions, such as community technology centres and public libraries (Audunson, et al., 2011; Fisher, Durrance, et al., 2004; Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004), others focus on specific topics such as health information-seeking (Courtright, 2005; Sligo & Jameson, 2000). Very few studies explore the ways in which immigrants search for, use and share different types of information following migration, though recent examples are work by Lingel (2011, in press) who focused on urban newcomers to New York City, and Shoham and Strauss (2008) who explored information seeking, sharing and use among North American immigrants moving to Israel, as well as Dali’s (2010) focus on leisure reading by Russian immigrants to Toronto.

The majority of studies focus on immigrant adults, with a smaller minority exploring the circumstances, practices and concerns of refugees (Audunson, et al., 2011; Lloyd, et al., 2013; Olden, 1999; Silvio, 2006). Distinctions between immigration categories are vital to note if we are to understand the information practices of newcomers, as the circumstances of arrival,
policies and resources available to different groups of newcomers shape their information practices in important ways: the experiences of international students (Jeong, 2004; Mehra & Papajohn, 2007) and migrant workers (Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004) offer examples of this phenomenon. Refugees, in particular, are a group which may have vastly different needs in comparison to immigrants due to the involuntary nature and possibly traumatic circumstances of their migration. Some salient findings on the information practices of refugees to date include a preference for information from informal sources, such as friends, relatives and co-workers (Silvio, 2006), and a preference for oral information, delivered in person, over printed sources (Lloyd, et al., 2013; Olden, 1999), perhaps indicating the importance of trust and personal connections in the lives of forced migrants. The majority of studies listed above classify newcomers by nationality, with the exception of Caidi and Macdonald’s (2008) study of Muslim newcomers to Canada. This raises the interesting question as to whether or not grouping participants by nationality is the best way to understand their experiences; while nationality is the central category around which immigration systems are built, it is also possible that other categories, such as ethnic affiliations, linguistic or religious backgrounds are perhaps more meaningful to newcomers and their lived experiences of settlement. The inclusion of these aspects of newcomers’ lives, therefore, could offer rich insight into their experiences and practices following migration.

What is clear from the frameworks used in the studies noted above is that there is little conceptual cohesion in the existing empirical research on immigrant information practices. While some authors name the theoretical framework used in their studies explicitly, others’ conceptual groundings can be gleaned from their focus, for instance on information needs or practices. It is important to note that though empirical work on immigrants’ information behaviour has resulted in a handful of original models or frameworks, such as Metoyer-Duran’s (1993) typology of gatekeepers in various ethnic communities, or Mehra and Papajohn’s (2007) “culturally alien information environment”, these have yet to be adopted by other researchers in the field. What emerges instead is an assortment of theories, models and frameworks that have little overlap with one another. The field of immigrant information behaviour research, therefore, has yet to develop a common conceptual conversation, a bridge across which scholars can make their studies speak to one another.
A review of the existing literature on newcomers and information highlights other significant gaps, in particular with respect to research on specific subgroups of newcomers. In addition to the relevance of immigration category, as noted above, age is another factor that has not been well-explored in current HIB literature on immigrants and refugees. Only two studies to date focus on young people (Caidi & Macdonald, 2008; Chu, 1999). As both are oriented on specific topics – interpretation and mediation for adults in Chu’s study, and media use in Caidi and Macdonald’s – neither offers a holistic or more general picture of the information behaviour of young migrants during their settlement. As such, the experiences of youth throughout the transition of settlement remain a unique and understudied area in HIB research.

Technology is an integral part of modern migration, as documented in studies describing the Internet use of newcomers in various countries (Caidi & Macdonald, 2008; Komito, 2011; Lingel, 2011; Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Silvio, 2006). Social media use during migration and settlement has been less well-documented within Information Studies research, leading to a paucity of HIB research on these practices among newcomers, in particular how online tools and social media are used to maintain and establish social networks across migration and settlement; a notable exception is the excellent work by Komito (2011) in this area. Recent studies outside of the field of HIB, however, are beginning to examine the effect of ICTs on transnational communication practices among both migrants and non-migrants. Work in this area of migration studies includes both theoretical stances and empirical studies of the effects of technology on migrants. This research argues for a new conceptual framing of migrants as a result of technology, one that eliminates the defining of migrants simply as those who leave or experience ruptures in their experiences, but instead considers the continuity that the “connected migrant” (Diminescu, 2008, p. 565) builds in his or her social worlds using ICTs. These researchers argue that traditional, national borders and linkages have become virtually obsolete, replaced instead by transnational cosmopolitanism and the ubiquitous nature of ICTs (Nedelcu, 2012). In considering this research, however, it is important to note that the focus often remains on those whose mobility is fluid and unencumbered: Nedelcu’s work, for instance, focuses on skilled workers in the IT field, who she notes are particularly “able to shape the meaning of their own mobility and to build their own world” (Nedelcu, 2012, p. 1349). Refugees, by contrast, experience a different reality in which the existence – and exclusion – of national borders still
keenly exists, and access to technology may be limited. The experiences, ICT use and HIB of refugee newcomers, therefore, remains a richly contextual and understudied area.

In considering the relatively small scope of literature on immigrant HIB, a likely cause is the challenges inherent in conducting research with newcomers, in particular refugees (Olden, 1999). The small size of most studies and the reliance on convenience samples are two indications of the challenges researchers face in recruiting and gaining the trust of refugees (Audunson, et al., 2011; Lloyd, et al., 2013; Olden, 1999; Silvio, 2006); Audunson, Essmat, and Aabo (2011) note the particular difficulties they encountered in the recruitment of Afghan women for their study.

Though information behaviour research more broadly has become more sensitive over time to the importance of context in shaping practices of seeking, sharing and use, HIB research on immigrants has not often included detailed discussions of the contexts of migration and settlement. Olden’s (1999) brief study of refugees is an interesting exception, offering a snapshot of the broader societal factors and trends in Somali information practices and migration in the UK, while Fisher, Marcoux, et al’s (2004) study of migrant farm workers also provides relevant context on Mexican migration to the Pacific Northwest. Many of the studies summarized above, however, offer little background information on newcomers in their study, often excluding details such as the length of time since migration or whether participants migrated alone or with family members. In addition, HIB studies rarely document the settlement experiences of newcomers or the social, political or economic policies and practices of the receiving country: one exception is Caidi and Macdonald’s (2008) examination of the post-9/11 context facing young Muslim newcomers in Toronto. These absences make it difficult to properly contextualize findings and determine the key variables shaping newcomers’ information behaviour.

Examples of the theoretical richness and understanding that can be created through contextual studies of information behaviour are found in the work of Chatman. Her studies of the information behaviour of marginalized groups are especially relevant to our understanding of immigrant and refugee HIB, as newcomers may face similar types of exclusion. Chatman’s studies on groups such as female prisoners (1999), women living in a retirement community (1992), and janitors at a university (1990), offer readers a detailed and deep understanding of the worlds in which her participants lived, highlighting the structures and limitations these groups
faced in navigating their informational environments. Chatman discovered that feelings of mistrust and secrecy, including a reluctance to share information or reveal information needs that might make one’s position more vulnerable, were key components of the lived experiences of her participants; her exploration of information avoidance and her pioneering of the concept of information poverty make her work unique and rich. Chatman’s use of ethnography involved a commitment to longer-term engagement with participants in their social environments, enabling her to depict the contextual factors shaping their information behaviour. Ethnographic and long-term engagement with newcomers could yield similarly valuable findings with regard to immigrant HIB.

In order to provide a basis for this study on the information seeking, sharing and use of Afghan newcomer youth, the above sections of this literature review outlined many of the important contextual factors affecting our understanding of newcomer youth’s information practices, such as the nature of migration and settlement in Canada, the challenges facing newcomer youth and Afghans in particular, and the current state of knowledge regarding HIB research on international migrants. The final section of this review examines the realm of leisure, a sensitizing concept that is central to this study. The following section therefore explores the concept of leisure and reviews existing research on immigrant and refugee leisure.

2.3 Leisure in the context of migration and settlement

2.3.1 Defining leisure

Though leisure is a concept that can be difficult to define, it can be considered as pleasurable or beneficial activities that one freely chooses and undertakes in time away from work and other obligations. Time and attitude are the major components of modern definitions of leisure (Beaton & Funk, 2008). A definition based solely on time defines leisure as the residual time remaining after work and other obligations have been fulfilled (Parker, 1976); what is missing from this temporal conception of leisure, however, is the quality of time, or the attitude or feelings of the individual. Leisure is not simply the equivalent of free-time, but also contains elements of enjoyment, or benefit to the individual (Parker, 1976). Boredom, for instance, which
can occur in free-time, is not leisure. Leisure, then, requires a specific attitude or state of mind, as Parker notes, “with an emphasis on the quality of freedom” (1976, p. 18).

Definitions of leisure remain contested, however, for a variety of reasons. The conception of leisure as free from obligation raises the question as to whether any human activity can be completely free of all constraints. Rojek (2000) notes that freedom in this case can be seen to be relative. Leisure, while not completely free, “is time and space bound by more relaxed levels of compunction than other bounded spheres of human life” (Rojek, 2000, p. 124). Leisure scholars note that while definitive definitions of leisure remain elusive, the phenomenon can still be studied by using research techniques that target either the subjective or objective experiences of leisure (Kleiber, et al., 2011). While studying specific activities that are widely recognized as leisurely can be done using survey techniques, other, more subjective experiences could only be elicited through more qualitative, individual strategies, such as interviews (Kleiber, et al., 2011). The difficulty of defining leisure across cultures means that the latter approach is more appropriate in the study of newcomer leisure, as the experience can vary widely between not only individuals and groups, but also across cultures, and likely also across migration. The following section therefore highlights findings from existing leisure research on immigrants and refugees.

### 2.3.2 Newcomer leisure

Though few studies have explored the leisure of immigrants and refugees, the findings that emerge reveal much about the lives and settlement experiences of newcomers. Newcomer leisure tends to focus on activities that are lower-cost and more spontaneous, and time that is often spent either alone or with co-ethnics (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006; Yu & Berryman, 1996). These findings are perhaps not surprising when we consider the financial constraints and time stress facing many immigrants and refugees, as well as their possibly limited social networks and host-country language fluency. It should be noted that co-ethnic leisure is not always an option for newcomers, who may avoid others from their homeland due to differences in political orientation, culture, religion, language, period of migration, education or social class (Rublee & Shaw, 1991).
Leisure studies research documents the benefits of leisure and recreational pursuits\(^1\), many of which are relevant for newcomers. Leisure can support stress reduction and bolster mental health (Iwasaki, 2001; Iwasaki, Mackay, Maclavish, Ristock, & Bartlett, 2006), which is key for those experiencing difficulties during the settlement process. Leisure activities serve various purposes in the lives of individuals, including relaxation, socialization, and self-actualization, all of which can have important implications for newcomers adjusting to the realities of their lives following migration. Immigrants’ leisure may also involve cultural elements: a study of Chinese immigrant seniors found that participants watched local, English-language television news and other programs to improve their English skills and learn about their new homeland, while their Chinese-language media habits kept them in touch with their country and culture of origin (Allison & Geiger, 1993). The seniors in the study also engaged in other enjoyable hobbies that they included as leisure, such as cooking and growing traditional Chinese vegetables, that were links to their cultural backgrounds (Allison & Geiger, 1993).

Leisure and recreation are not only relevant for newcomers at the individual level, but these activities also have societal implications and can reflect deeper tensions, in particular in multicultural immigrant-receiving societies, such as Canada. Leisure pursuits and publicly provided recreation services are often debated and discussed in relation to multiculturalism, as different groups negotiate the use of public space and facilities. The rights of minority groups to take part in sports and recreation, for instance, while retaining aspects of their cultural or religious backgrounds such as religious dress or gender segregation, have been debated as issues of identity and standards for the societal accommodation of difference. Female-only swim programs in public pools, for instance, have been discussed with respect to Muslim immigrant women and girls (Poirier, Germain, & Billette, 2006; Taylor & Toohey, 2002), while religious dress as an issue in sport has been raised in Quebec with the banning of the hijab in girls’ soccer (Wyatt, 2007) and the turban in boys’ soccer (Shingler, 2013). How different groups are welcomed – or not welcomed – into sport, leisure and other cultural activities, therefore, can be considered a hallmark of a society’s multicultural identity and a potential measure of social equality.

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\(^1\) Recreation is a term that is similar to leisure, but is associated with publicly provided programs and venues for leisure activities. Historically, recreation was promoted by governments and social reformers in order to improve the moral character and health of citizens (i.e. “rational recreation” movement) (Bailey, 2007, p. 35)
integration of ethnic and cultural minorities. When we consider the effects that participation in recreation and leisure can have on cultural adaptation, stress reduction and the building of social networks for potentially isolated newcomers, however, the benefits of inclusion are apparent.

In addition to being an expression of cultural identity, leisure pursuits can also be information-rich sites that serve as hubs of information seeking, sharing and use. Though information has not yet been a central feature of studies on newcomer leisure to date, the potential for immigrant information seeking and sharing in leisure settings can be seen in work by Stodolska, Marcinkowski and Yi-Kook (2007). Their study found that Korean immigrants who spent their leisure time only with co-ethnics had lower incomes than those who had non-Korean leisure partners (Stodolska, et al., 2007), raising the possibility that leisure activities offered immigrants chances to broaden their social networks and gain potentially relevant information on a variety of topics. Though this study is unique in its discussion of leisure’s economic benefits to immigrants, it points to the role of social capital in leisure, a relationship also seen in work by other leisure scholars (Glover & Hemingway, 2005). It is apparent, therefore, that social capital formed in newcomer leisure is relevant to immigrant HIB, and could form an important basis for future studies of information in leisure settings.

Though leisure studies scholars are increasingly aware of the cultural specificity of leisure practices in countries around the world (Stebbins, 2013), there remains a dearth of knowledge on the effects of migration on the leisure of different groups. Findings from the handful of existing studies in this area point to the important role that leisure reading can play in helping newcomers adapt following migration (Dali, 2013), and the ways in which migration may shape newcomers’ understandings of leisure and familial obligation (Tirone & Shaw, 1997). Much remains unknown, however, about the role of leisure in the information practices and settlement experiences of immigrants and refugees. Areas that have yet to be explored include how individual newcomers may use leisure to connect with others following migration and build their social networks in their new homelands. Leisure pursuits that may be of particular interest to HIB researchers are information-rich activities, such as media consumption and reading, activities which may shed light on the information practices of newcomers following migration.
2.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter offered an overview of the relevant literature on immigrant and refugee HIB, settlement and leisure. In so doing, it drew upon literature from various fields, including information studies, leisure studies, immigration research and sociology. From the discussion of Afghan settlement in Toronto, it is clear that this recently-arrived group faces difficult settlement challenges, including poverty, unemployment and early-school leaving, however little research exists to document Afghan newcomers’ settlement experiences, information needs or practices across settlement. This gap is also matched by a dearth of research on immigrant and refugee HIB more generally, specifically for groups such as refugees and newcomer youth. These gaps are likely due to the myriad of challenges present in conducting qualitative research with youth and newcomers: these topics, as well as a detailed discussion of the methodological approach taken in this study, are the focus of the next chapter.
3 Methods

3.1 Chapter overview

The preceding chapter reviewed relevant literature from the fields of information behaviour, leisure studies and migration. This chapter moves to an examination of research design, and the strategies of data collection and analysis used in this study of the information practices and leisure of Afghan newcomer youth. In order to delve into the contexts of migration and leisure and to better understand how they shape the information behaviour of newcomers, an exploratory, qualitative approach was chosen for this study. This chapter documents the rationale for this choice of methods and examines the ways in which they were used, including the nature of my participant observation, interviews and engagement with Afghan communities in Toronto. As part of this discussion, my entry into the field is outlined, and my status as a cultural outsider is explored. The final portion of the chapter outlines the coding strategies and the data analysis techniques applied to interview transcripts and fieldnotes, and explores the iterative process of writing.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Exploratory, qualitative, ethnographic research

This project set out to answer three main research questions:

1) What challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience?
2) What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?
3) What do the leisure activities of Afghan newcomer youth reveal about their settlement experiences and information practices?

In order to best answer these exploratory questions, data were sought that would reflect the lived experiences of Afghan youth and illuminate the contexts in which their information behaviour
was situated. As a result, a qualitative, ethnographic research design was chosen for this study. Due to the dearth of research on the migration, leisure and information practices of newcomer youth, their experiences were explored in a detailed way using in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, triangulating these data sources using one-on-one interviews with Afghan settlement workers.

Qualitative research in information studies, as discussed in the previous chapter, has become more prominent with the shift from a dominant focus on information systems to a growing interest in individuals and groups of users. Though difficult to define, qualitative research is that which is multi-method, involving “an interpretive, naturalistic approach”, and collecting and using a variety of empirical data to describe “routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). The utility of qualitative research in documenting personal and lived experiences made it the most appropriate choice for this study.

In addition to being qualitative in nature, this study was also exploratory. Stebbins (2001) defines exploration in the social sciences as “a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life” (p. 3). Exploratory and qualitative approaches are especially appropriate to the study of understudied phenomena (Creswell, 1998; Stebbins, 2001) and topics in “which relevant variables have yet to be identified” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 57). The information practices and leisure of Afghan newcomer youth are indeed understudied; this lack of previous research would have made it difficult to select appropriate variables, frameworks and tools with which to conduct an explanatory or quantitative study.

This study not only included an exploratory, qualitative research design, but also involved the principles of ethnography to guide the collection and analysis of data. Ethnography enables a contextualized understanding of findings by including the surrounding cultural milieu and life circumstances of participants as part of the study’s data. Ethnographic research in information studies was pioneered by Elfreda Chatman, whose studies used participant observation and informal interviewing to explore the lives and information environments of various groups of people, ranging from janitors (1990), to women living in a retirement community (1992), to prisoners (1999). Chatman explains her choice of ethnography as “the best method for my work,
because data are collected in social settings that reveal reality as lived by members of those settings. As a result, ethnographic studies make known contextual meanings, cultural norms, and social interactions that are not possible with other methods.” (Chatman, 1992, p. 3) Context is vital in understanding the information behaviour of individuals and groups, in particular those with experiences different from the researcher’s own. As this study explores the lived experiences and information practices of recent immigrants and refugees to Canada, context is especially important as the environments shaping the settlement and informational strategies used by youth in my study are grounded in their lives as newcomers. The importance of context in this research, therefore, made ethnography integral to my project, resulting in long periods spent in the field, engaging with youth, cultivating relationships with key informants, and becoming familiar with the issues, agencies, and services involved in Afghan newcomer settlement in Toronto.

### 3.2.2 Ensuring trustworthiness

Many techniques are used to ensure the robust nature of data collected in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the concept of trustworthiness, describing it as consisting of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The first two, credibility and transferability, are discussed here, while dependability and confirmability are discussed in the final section (3.4 Data analysis, theme selection and writing). To support credibility, multiple sources of data collected through different techniques were triangulated. These sources included:

- secondary research on Afghan migration and settlement, human information behaviour and newcomer leisure (discussed in Chapter 2)
- participant observation at events by and for Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto
- interviews with Afghan newcomer youth
- interviews with settlement workers providing support, outreach and programming to Afghan newcomers

As the following sections discuss, this chapter examines the processes of data collection and analysis. In addition to offering readers insight into this study, this description can be used to further our understanding of the transferability of the study’s findings, or the extent to which
they can be generalized to other settings. While credibility can be evaluated within the bounds of this project, transferability, in contrast, can only be assessed by readers in comparison with other studies. My aim, therefore, is to offer enough detail with which this comparison can be made; additional detail on the research instruments is offered in the appendices, including the information and consent forms (Appendix A) and interview guides (Appendix B) while the findings are explored in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Entering the field

Ethnographic methods involve sustained involvement in various field settings, as researchers become familiar with the lives and cultural milieus of participants. I first entered the field in January 2009 by contacting local outreach workers, librarians and settlement agencies serving Afghan youth in Toronto. Through these initial meetings, I determined that youth were underutilizing library services, and therefore decided against conducting observation in library settings; I turned instead to settlement agencies to learn about Afghan migration to Toronto and their programs for Afghan youth. In this way, the development of my study’s research design became an iterative process, informed by my involvement in the field. I initially contacted two agencies, receiving no reply from one and an immediate reply from another, with the offer of an informal meeting the following day. I was warmly welcomed at the agency: two Afghan-Canadian staff members answered my questions, offered their thoughts on Afghan settlement in Toronto, and introduced me to their agency’s youth program director, who became one of my main contacts.

Over the following months, the youth program director invited me to events, and introduced me to Afghan youth, settlement workers and other key informants. On her invitation, I became a participant observer at these events over a period of two years. The events and my roles at each one were varied and included:
To be as transparent and ethical as possible in my engagement, I informally introduced myself to participants, both before and after each event, identifying myself as a doctoral student researching the settlement experiences of Afghan youth in Toronto.

Over time, I met Afghan youth and adults who were part of a range of groups and associations across the city, including settlement agencies, cultural organizations, volunteer groups, and student councils. I met and spoke informally with dozens of individual key informants at events, many of whom offered their thoughts on Afghan settlement and challenges facing youth in the city. These key informants included:

- Afghan newcomer youth
- longer-settled Afghan youth and adults
- Canadian-born youth of Afghan parents
- settlement workers
- researchers
- student leaders; and
- educators

Key informants and youth participants invited me to join their networks on social networking sites, and added me to listservs publicizing community events.
3.3.2 Insider vs. outsider status

As a non-Afghan, I am an outsider to the community in which I conducted my research. Though this status could be seen as a disadvantage by those unfamiliar with ethnography, ultimately, my position as a Canadian-born woman without ties to Afghanistan proved to be advantageous in a variety of ways. My status piqued the curiosity of my informants, who wondered how and why I had become interested in the topic; one key informant, an Afghan settlement worker, thanked me for taking an interest in Afghan newcomers and their experiences in Canada. By taking up the role of novice, I was accepted as unfamiliar with Afghan culture and with Islam, the religion of my participants, and the youth and key informants in my study took special care to explain their experiences to me. I was permitted to ask a wider range of questions than a cultural insider would have been, questions that would have been seen as strange or obvious to another Afghan (Omidian, 1996; Zulfacar, 1998), and was welcomed by participants who appeared to enjoy sharing their thoughts. As an outsider, I took on the role of a student or “active learner” rather than an “expert” (Creswell, 1998, p. 18).

In addition to being welcomed as an interested outsider, I also experienced the advantage of being unaffiliated with any specific Afghan ethnic or linguistic identity. Toronto’s diverse groups of Afghans, who come from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, sometimes experience fractured relations with one another (Norquay, 2004). My position as a non-Afghan, therefore, made it less likely that participants would feel alienated by internal community allegiances or issues.

3.3.3 Challenges in conducting participant observation

Three primary challenges emerged during the course of participant observation: the diffuse nature of Afghan settlement, limited access to personal settings, and work-life changes among key informants.

Afghan settlement across the city of Toronto is diffuse. While there are clusters of Afghan newcomers in areas across the city, there are no distinctive Afghan neighbourhoods. My interview participants lived in various neighbourhoods throughout Toronto, ranging from Thorncliffe Park, a neighbourhood just east of the downtown core popular among recent
immigrants, to Albion, an ethnically diverse neighbourhood in the northwest corner of the city. This diffuse settlement pattern made it difficult to select observation sites in which to experience Afghan newcomers’ spatial realities. While visiting sites suggested by key informants as popular among Afghans in the city, such as cafes, restaurants and parks, it was not possible to distinguish between Afghans and other newcomers in these settings.

In addition to this diffuse spatial pattern, I was also limited in the types of settings to which I had access. Though I was welcomed into public and institutional realms, I was not invited into anyone’s home to conduct observation in these types of personal settings. The difficulty of accessing more personal settings, however, offers insight into the challenges of conducting qualitative research with newcomers, in particular with refugee communities and youth, and is a primary reason why studies on these groups are so rare.

The third challenge in my fieldwork was the substantial changes key informants experienced with regard to their work and family lives throughout the course of my study. These individuals were central to my involvement with different institutions, programs and groups of youth, and continued to support my project over two years despite the transitions they were going through, including parental leaves and relocation to other cities for employment. In addition to changes key informants experienced at a personal level, there were also broader institutional shifts taking place in the settlement sector in Toronto from 2009 to 2011 that affected my data collection. This period was one of significant upheaval which saw the closing of one large Afghan-specific settlement agency, while other agencies saw staffing cuts and reduced budgets. The settlement workers with whom I spoke were all under stress during this period, and some programs were reduced as well. Despite these difficulties, settlement workers were supportive of my work and stayed as involved as their professional and personal circumstances allowed.

3.3.4 Interviews with settlement workers

Following initial fieldwork and attendance at community events, I began, in June 2009, to schedule one-on-one interviews with settlement workers. The purpose of these interviews was threefold: to learn more about settlement workers’ perspectives on the settlement challenges facing Afghan youth in Toronto; to gather their thoughts on gaps in existing programming and
outreach strategies appropriate to Afghan youth; and to get their input on information needs among this group and the types of information resources Afghan youth might consult. The data collected in these interviews relates to two of the three research questions in this project: the challenges and unmet needs experienced by Afghan newcomer youth, and the settlement-related information practices youth use following migration. Interviews with settlement workers offered background and context with regard to service provision to Afghan youth in Toronto, and supplemented the data I was receiving through participant observation, as well as the data I would obtain from youth interview participants - described in the next section below.

A total of five settlement workers were interviewed; three were recruited through settlement agencies, while two were referred through my professional network. The consent form and interview guide for these interviews are included as appendices (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The table below summarizes some of the characteristics of the settlement worker interview participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement workers</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Delivering youth programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Afghan-specific settlement agency</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Multiethnic settlement agency</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Afghan-specific settlement agency</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Multiethnic settlement agency (school settlement worker)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Multiethnic settlement agency (school settlement worker)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the settlement workers were Afghan themselves; some had arrived in Canada more than a decade earlier, as children or young adults, while one was much more recently arrived and had been in the country for just over two years. Four of the five interviews were conducted in the settlement worker’s office, while a fifth interview was conducted at a nearby coffee shop.
3.3.5 Interviews with youth

In order to seek in-depth information on the settlement experiences, information practices and leisure of young Afghans in Toronto, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven youth participants. To recruit youth, I contacted settlement workers, individual Afghans and student association leaders I had met as part of my project up to that point. These individuals were trusted intermediaries who put me in touch with youth, contacting me and providing the names, cell phone numbers or e-mail addresses of potential participants. Recruiting participants through trusted intermediaries proved to be the most appropriate strategy to reach Afghan youth; this was reiterated by key informants in my project as well as by existing studies on Afghan newcomers (Omidian, 1996; Zulfacar, 1998).

Youth interviews began in September 2010 and ended in February 2011. Each participant was interviewed twice to allow for in-depth discussion of their experiences without making each interview too long. Each interview ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes. All participants were interviewed individually, with the exception of two youth (Huma and Samira) who were roommates and wished to be interviewed together. When asked about this choice, Samira explained that Huma was familiar with her settlement experiences and challenges and that she would not have felt comfortable being interviewed by a stranger without Huma present.

The first interview focused on settlement experiences: participants were asked about their experiences since coming to Canada, challenges they faced during settlement, sources of support, and the ways in which they sought, used and shared information during this process. Initial questions were also asked about their leisure pursuits and their seeking, sharing and use of information during these activities; youth’s responses regarding leisure and information were probed in more detail in the second interview. The second interview guide, therefore, was tailored for each participant (for more detail, see interview guides in Appendix B).

Interviews were scheduled according to youth participants’ availability, and as a result, include a range of one to three weeks between the first and second interviews for most participants; the longest interval was seven weeks. Participants were interviewed at the location of their choice, which included coffee shops, public libraries and university campuses.
As part of the preparation for conducting interviews with youth, the issue of interpretation was addressed. Interpretation was initially considered as I, the sole interviewer, was not fluent in any Afghan languages and, in advance of establishing contact or meeting youth, it was unclear what level of English-language fluency they possessed. As a result, potential interpreters for Dari, Pashto and Uzbek were found and contacted. In addition to this preparation, the methodological implications of involving interpreters were also examined. Though there is little research on the effect that interpreters can have on data collection in the social sciences (Jentsch, 1998; Temple, 2002; Temple & Edwards, 2002; Temple & Young, 2004), existing studies note that there can be both positive and negative consequences. While the use of an interpreter may positively affect the interview by facilitating rapport (Jentsch, 1998), the quality of data collected could also be negatively influenced as the characteristics of the interpreter introduce new dynamics into the interview setting; for this reason, therefore, researchers are cautioned to consider the effect that the interpreter’s age, gender, dress, demeanor, personality, skills and training and level of familiarity with the participant may have on an interview (Edwards, 1998; Jentsch, 1998).

Ultimately, the level of English spoken by participants was more than sufficient to conduct our interviews without interpretation. All but one participant had had English-language instruction prior to arriving in Canada. At the time of our interviews, three participants were studying in post-secondary programs in English, while the others had graduated from English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) courses and had completed or were near completing their high school diplomas in regular English-language programs. In establishing contact with youth and scheduling the interviews, I was able to use these preliminary conversations to gauge their English-language fluency, both in speaking and listening comprehension; my previous work experience as an ESL instructor, which also involved the assessment students’ language abilities, was an asset in this process. Though interpretation was offered to all participants, it was declined by all youth, who expressed a preference to conduct the interviews in English. Only one participant, the most recently-arrived youth in this study, appeared from our initial phone conversation to potentially need interpretation. In this case, however, he insisted on English as the interview language as a useful opportunity to practice his skills with a native speaker, and his English-language skills in person were better than they had first appeared during our initial phone conversation. Issues of unfamiliar English-language vocabulary came up rarely in the interviews, therefore, and were easily resolved through the use of synonyms with which the participants were familiar.
3.3.6 Characteristics of youth interview participants

The following table summarizes some of the characteristics of the youth participants in this study; note that all names are pseudonyms chosen either by participants or by me:

### Table 3-3: Summary of characteristics of youth interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Countries lived in before Canada</th>
<th>Age at arrival</th>
<th>Time in Canada</th>
<th>Immigration Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghorashka</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pashto</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Afghanistan, India</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9 yrs</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdur Rahman</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Pashto-Dari</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8 yrs</td>
<td>Family class (father came first as refugee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalid</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dari (Tajik)</td>
<td>University student (mature student)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Pakistan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Uzbek</td>
<td>Adult school</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, other countries</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>&lt; 1yr</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dari</td>
<td>High school student</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samira</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dari</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Iran, USA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasir</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dari</td>
<td>High school student</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Pakistan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>Family class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six of the seven youth participants in this study had lived for an extended period outside Afghanistan; this finding is typical of Afghan newcomers to Canada as many have spent time in a third country seeking refuge. Two participants had come to Canada as refugee claimants, while all other participants had arrived either as independent applicants, or had been sponsored by relatives already living in Canada. Participants spoke a variety of languages as their mother tongue including Dari, Uzbek and Pashto, yet were fluent in many other languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Farsi, Russian and English due to time spent living and attending school outside of Afghanistan.
There is no fixed time period associated with the term newcomer, and participants in this study had lived in Canada for differing lengths of time. Some participants were more recently arrived than others: three youth had lived in Canada for less than two years, while others had been in Canada for up to 10 years. Though this study began with the search for participants who were more recently arrived, the recruitment criteria were ultimately broadened to those who had been in Canada for up to 10 years. This was done for two reasons: the first was to increase chances of recruitment, while the second was to include participants who could speak not only about their initial settlement experiences – all participants had vivid memories of their first days and weeks in the country – but also reflect on their trajectory of settlement across their first years in Canada.

Similar to the term newcomer, discussed above, youth is another category which lacks a firm definition. In Canada, the federal, provincial and municipal governments all use differing age criteria for their programs and services, with age ranges that vary between 12 and 30. In Afghanistan, youth is an even broader category, one that can be applied to an unmarried person of any age (Omidian, 1996). The youth interviewed for this study were between the ages of 12 and 22 upon arriving in Canada, and were between 18 and 28 at the time of our interviews. All participants were unmarried at the time of the study.

### 3.3.7 Amount and type of data collected

Over the course of this project, two types of data were collected: fieldnotes and interviews. The following table summarizes the amount of data collected in each category:

**Table 3-4: Summary of amount and type of data collected**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Resulting data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
<td>65 entries</td>
<td>115 handwritten pages, (7x9 inches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement worker interviews</td>
<td>5 interviews (30 to 45 mins each)</td>
<td>46 typed pages (8.5x11 inches), single-spaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth interviews</td>
<td>14 interviews (45 to 90 mins each)</td>
<td>302 typed pages (8.5x11 inches), single-spaced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fieldnotes were taken in the form of handwritten notes both during and after participant observation at community events and programs I attended. In most cases, notes were initially taken as “jottings” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), consisting of short phrases or keywords which were then written up into full notes. Notes taken during my participant observation were recorded in a single notebook.

A total of fourteen interviews were audio-recorded using a hand-held digital recorder: these included two formal settlement worker interviews and twelve interviews with youth participants. When audio-recording was not possible or was declined by the participant (as was the case with one youth), detailed hand-written notes were taken instead. Audio-recording was my preference, as it ensured accuracy and allowed me to create full transcripts of the interviews, but I always deferred to the wishes of participants. I personally transcribed all audio-recordings using NVivo8, adding interview notes typed in Word as additional NVivo files. All identifiable details, including the names of people, settlement agencies or schools, were removed from the transcripts to protect participants’ anonymity.

Though this project involved the collection and analysis of three sources of data – interviews with youth, settlement workers and participant observation – the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 rely primarily on the interviews conducted with youth. The reason for this is that this project’s three research questions were most directly answered by the interview data collected from youth participants. The settlement worker interviews and participant observation complemented these findings by adding additional context, illuminating both the background of settlement and service provision in Toronto, as well as many of the challenges facing members of the broader Afghan community and their families, including their Canadian-born children.

3.4 Data analysis, theme selection and writing

The processes of data analysis for this project were multifaceted and iterative, including the stages of coding, the selection of themes and multiple drafts of writing. To further support Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) aim of trustworthiness in qualitative research – in particular the aspects of dependability and confirmability – this section explores the ways in which the consistency of the inquiry process was ensured over time and that the data collected support my
findings. To do so, the coding process is described in detail below, and a full list of codes is included in the appendices (see Appendix C). In addition to this coding structure, the audit trail of this study includes fieldnotes, transcripts, and memos, all digitally archived in various stages as NVivo files. This audit trail not only charts all of the stages of the research, but also documents the decisions that were made regarding the data.

As the sole researcher and coder, I did not have confirmation from other researchers at that level, but received regular feedback from colleagues and mentors on emerging codes, trends and themes in the data. In addition to meeting weekly with other doctoral students conducting qualitative research to discuss data analysis and coding techniques, I also met with a research group held monthly by my supervisor, Dr. Nadia Caidi. As part of this research group, the coding in progress was presented, including detailed overviews of themes and the coding structure as it developed: this was documented in various forms including unfiltered lists of codes, summary tables showing grouped codes and the relationships between them, and sample excerpts of interview data to illustrate specific codes. Useful feedback and instruction was offered at these meetings by Dr. Caidi and the other doctoral students in attendance, many of whom were at a similar stage of their research. Dr. Jenna Hartel, a dissertation committee member and specialist on ethnographic methods in information studies, also met with me many times over the course of my data analysis to review codes, themes and writing samples – in particular Emerson, Fretz and Shaw’s (1995) analytic commentary units – to ensure that my procedures of analysis and writing were consistent and effective. As part of these meetings, she reviewed lists of codes and sample data – including transcripts, fieldnotes and memos – and offered valuable feedback and guidance on refining and presenting the findings. Coding procedures and the resulting lists of codes were also presented, probed and discussed at committee meetings with Dr. Caidi, Dr. Hartel and Dr. Lynne Howarth.

Throughout the research process, I reflected on my role in the research, my assumptions about participants, the research settings and my findings. While my identity undoubtedly shaped the settings to which I had access and therefore influenced the types of data I was able to collect, my role as a cultural outsider was clear to me, and I was careful to ensure that my assumptions were just as clear, and were not substituted as the basis for findings. In discussions with key informants and other advisors, as well as in personal writings, I reflected on the unanticipated themes emerging in my data – for instance the importance of religion in the lives of participants,
as a guiding force in both their relationships with others and as well as within their leisure activities. It became clear that despite having not made religion a central part of the interview guide, the importance of this topic to youth in my study emerged over and over; though not previously anticipated, I found that religion held a significant role in the lives of many youth and shaped many of their practices. Similarly, support was not found in my data for topics I had originally anticipated, for instance regarding the role of community gatekeepers in influencing the information behaviour and leisure of youth, or the role of religious institutions, such as mosques, in providing settlement support. In sum, prior assumptions were held in check and set aside in light of findings that emerged from the data.

3.4.1 Open coding

Data analysis began with the process of “open coding”, in keeping with the analysis strategies of Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995, p. 150), who advocate for a grounded theory approach in analyzing ethnographic data. As part of this process, all interview transcripts and fieldnote data were reviewed, line-by-line, and assigned initial codes in NVivo without regard to pre-existing labels or themes. These early codes were broad and varied and included both topics that were anticipated in my interview guides, such as settlement challenges, as well as those mentioned by participants but unanticipated in the research instruments, such as the importance of prayer (see Appendix B for interview guides).

Following the first rounds of open coding, all of the codes were reviewed and duplicate codes removed. All individual codes were then grouped under three broad themes, matching the major categories of the interview topics of leisure, information practices and settlement. All activities participants had mentioned in response to questions on leisure were coded as such; these included categories seen in existing literature (such as sports or spending time with friends) as well as those that emerged inductively, seen solely in this project (such as prayer as a form of leisure). The category of information practices was created to include all references to information seeking, information sharing, and information use, the three major components of this concept (Savolainen, 2008). Examples of this category included participants’ references to information they sought from a variety of sources relating to topics such as settlement and leisure, and instances in which they shared information with others, whether in person or via
other formats, such as through online media. Other references coded under information practices included discussions of library use, reading, Internet use, or use of other media and technologies such as ICTs. The category of settlement included reference to topics such as descriptions of settlement experiences, challenges encountered and any mention of settlement agencies or other supports used throughout the process. References that referred to multiple themes were included in each relevant category: one example is that of leisure reading, which was coded under both leisure and information practices.

3.4.2 Theme selection and focused coding

Following the process of open coding, three broad themes were chosen around which the ethnographic text was created (Emerson, et al., 1995). These three themes – settlement, information practices and leisure – were central guiding topics from the beginning of the research, pillars of the study on which the interview guides were structured. With these three themes in mind, all of the coded interview transcripts and fieldnotes were reviewed again as part of a process of “focused coding” (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 160), and all relevant excerpts were gathered into three documents. Through an early and iterative process of writing centred on salient excerpts of interview and fieldnote data, the themes were further refined into the following:

1. settlement experiences of Afghan youth

2. seeking, sharing and using information in the contexts of settlement and leisure

3. leisure practices of Afghan youth in Toronto

Data excerpts on religion were briefly considered for inclusion as their own findings chapter. Ultimately, however, upon subsequent reviews of the data, these excerpts were eventually split across the three original themes noted above, as they related to the settlement experiences, information practices or leisure pursuits of youth in this study.
3.4.3 Writing integrative memos and excerpt-commentary units

The process of refining the three themes noted above involved the writing of two types of documents: the first was “integrative memos” (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 162), in which I reflected on emerging findings and identified relationships between concepts. These were used in combination with data samples to create “excerpt-commentary units” (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 182). This strategy of writing was applied to give shape and meaning to an early and heavily descriptive summary of my findings: using this technique, revealing excerpts from interviews are highlighted, discussed and surrounded by relevant analytic insights and brief links to concerns in existing academic literature. Throughout the process of writing, I continually returned to the coded data, re-evaluating passages from interviews and my fieldnotes to ensure that they added analytic insight and were illustrative of the phenomena being discussed. Units that were found to be well-supported by data excerpts, and which contributed to the overall theme development, were retained, while weaker units, with less detailed or convincing support in the data and less analytic richness were removed. The findings of this study, presented in the next three chapters, are comprised of a series of excerpt-commentary units, in keeping with Emerson, Fretz and Shaw’s (1995) strategy for the analysis and presentation of ethnographic data. These three chapters match the three themes noted above: Chapter 4 examines the settlement experiences of Afghan youth, while Chapters 5 and 6 address youth’s information practices and leisure, respectively.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological basis of this study by presenting the study design, data collection and analysis procedures used in this research. It provided an overview of the research questions, the rationale for the study’s approach and methods, as well as outlining the nature and volume of the data collected, and the techniques used for both data collection and analysis. This chapter also documented challenges encountered during the processes of data collection, including the negotiation of access to specific research participants and settings, and the decisions made regarding language and interpretation. The coding procedures, data analysis and an overview of theme selection and writing processes used in this study were also discussed,
including the use of the excerpt-commentary unit writing strategy (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 182) for the analysis and presentation of findings.

The next chapter is the first of three findings chapters and answers the first research question, namely: what challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience? As such, it presents primarily descriptive data that is evocative of the lived experiences and practices of Afghan youth participants in this research. The first section of the chapter includes a brief profile of each youth interview participant, and a summary of their migration path to Canada. The rest of the chapter focuses on the various challenges youth experienced during the settlement process.
4 Exploring the settlement of Afghan youth in Toronto

4.1 Chapter overview

While the previous chapter outlined the research methods used in this study, including the strategies for data collection and analysis, this chapter turns to the research findings. The findings are presented across three chapters, with this first chapter addressing the study’s first research question: what challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience? In answering this question, the findings presented offer a glimpse of the lives and experiences of youth participants in the weeks and months after arriving in Canada. By offering a snapshot of the settlement experience, this chapter also serves to contextualize findings presented in later chapters, showing the circumstances that shape the information practices and leisure pursuits of youth.

4.2 Introducing the participants

Before presenting the settlement experiences of the youth participants in this study, a brief introduction to each interviewee is offered below. What is interesting to note is that the ages, migration paths, and family situations of youth in this study vary considerably, something that not only illustrates the deeply individual experiences of settlement, but also signals the heterogeneity of Afghan newcomers in Toronto. All names used below are pseudonyms chosen either by participants or myself.

4.2.1 Ghorashka

Ghorashka, the first interview participant in this study, is a 20 year old undergraduate student with a love of technology, travel and photography. Though she was born in Afghanistan, Ghorashka and her family moved one year later to India, where she lived for 10 years. As a
result of having lived and attended school in India, Ghorashka speaks Hindi in addition to Pashto and English. She came to Canada at age 11 with her immediate family: her sister, mother and father; her younger brother was born in Canada. Ghorashka and her family were first welcomed in Canada by her uncle and aunt, and lived with these relatives briefly while they looked for their own apartment. Her father, who had studied engineering in Russia, found a survival job upon arrival in Canada before going into business with relatives.

4.2.2 Abdur Rahman

Abdur Rahman is a 20 year old poet and sports enthusiast who arrived in Toronto 8 years ago. Though he came as a family-class immigrant with his mother and siblings, his family’s migration began when his father left Afghanistan as a refugee 12 years ago – four years prior to the rest of his family. Abdur Rahman remembers the four years he spent living apart from his father as difficult and lonely: though he understood his father’s reasons for leaving Afghanistan, he felt his absence keenly. Arriving in Canada as a 12-year old, directly from Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman was fascinated by his surroundings in Canada, but soon found his new life challenging, as he began school without speaking any English. Though he resisted settling in Toronto for many years, he now welcomes the important place Toronto has come to occupy in his life. Abdur Rahman speaks Pashto and Dari, as well as English. He is doing his undergraduate degree at a Toronto university.

4.2.3 Khalid

Khalid, at 28, is the oldest participant in this study, and has lived in Canada for 10 years. An athletic, soft-spoken young man, Khalid left Afghanistan as a young teenager and spent four years living in Pakistan before coming to Toronto with his parents and seven siblings. He speaks enthusiastically about the role that education has played in his life: denied access to school as a teen in Pakistan, he worked making carpets and studied English privately to improve his chances of migrating to Canada. Khalid is in a transitional phase of life, having recently returned to post-secondary education as a mature student, and trying to find a way to move beyond a recent professional disappointment regarding his first career choice, law enforcement. He is also
hoping to marry soon, having recently met and fallen in love with a young Afghan woman also pursuing her undergraduate at a university in Toronto. Khalid is Tajik, and speaks Dari and English.

### 4.2.4 Abdul

Abdul is 23 years old and has lived in Canada for 11 months. An Uzbek Afghan, fluent in Uzbek, Russian, Dari and English, he arrived alone as an independent applicant, first moving to Kitchener, Ontario, before settling in Toronto a few weeks later. Abdul enjoys playing soccer, and is an insightful and enthusiastic student of world religions and history, in addition to being an avid library user. He has moved between many different countries in recent years, but spent most of his life in Uzbekistan with his parents and siblings. He attends an adult school in Toronto while working as well, and hopes to pursue an undergraduate degree after finishing his diploma.

### 4.2.5 Samira

Samira is 18 years old and came to Canada alone two years ago. Though she was born in Herat, Afghanistan, she moved to Iran as a young child and lived there for over 10 years with her parents and siblings, before returning to Afghanistan as a teenager. She went to the United States on a student visa at age 15; when she realized she couldn’t extend her stay, she came to Canada to make a refugee claim. Samira recently graduated high school and gained Canadian permanent resident status after an uncertain two-year wait for a determination of her refugee claim. Bubbly and tenacious, Samira is currently studying English in order to pass a university entrance exam; her goal is to get an undergraduate degree and pursue a career in nursing. Samira works part-time and enjoys shopping, going out for dinner and watching movies. She currently lives with her friend Huma, who also took part in this study.
4.2.6 Huma

Huma is 18 years old and has lived in Canada for just under two years. Originally from Herat, Afghanistan, she moved to Pakistan as a child with her family and, similar to Samira, returned as a young teenager. Like Samira, she also left Afghanistan on a student visa at age 15 to complete a year of high school in the United States, but crossed the border into Canada to make a refugee claim. She was welcomed by Samira in Toronto, and the two young women are close friends and roommates. She is finishing her final year of high school and hoping to be accepted to university, where she plans to study life sciences and pursue a career in medicine. A private and very bright young woman, Huma loves to window-shop and watch movies with Samira, and enjoys reading about criminal investigations in Toronto newspapers.

4.2.7 Yasir

Yasir is 18 years old and came to Canada less than two years ago. Though originally from Kabul, Afghanistan, Yasir had lived in Pakistan for fourteen years with family, including his mother, maternal grandfather, older brother and two sisters; his father was killed in the war in Afghanistan. A thoughtful young man, Yasir loves to play soccer, swim, spend time with his friends and cook. He also enjoys singing, playing the drums, and spending time with his grandfather, age 74, with whom he shares a room. He spoke at length about the challenges his family faced while living in Pakistan, where bribery and harassment of Afghans was commonplace: he is grateful to be in Canada where these problems are not an issue. Yasir is currently in Grade 10, working to finish his high school education.

4.3 Settlement challenges

Youth experienced a variety of settlement challenges after arriving in Canada, discussed below, including culture shock and language barriers. One of the most challenging, however, was meeting their information needs, as the first section explores.
4.3.1 Difficulties in meeting information needs

Samira’s early weeks in Canada were characterized by pressing and unmet information needs. With frustration in her voice, she vividly recounted the confusion and helplessness she felt in her first weeks:

There's nobody to help me and I ask about, like, people in the shelter, what to do with my lawyer, they say "This is the wrong shelter, change your shelter". I'm like, I don't know where to go. I can't just go and sleep in the streets. And then they say "Okay, go to the internet and find the information". So I found so many informations. And when I found a lawyer, I didn't even know if this lawyer is good or no, or no good, I should trust him, no, I didn't know these things. (Samira)

What is interesting to note about this excerpt is both the disorientation and time pressure Samira describes, factors that reinforced one another and her difficulties in searching for useful information in her early days in Canada. As a refugee claimant, she had only a few weeks after arriving within which to find a lawyer and submit her claim, yet these first weeks were also clouded by confusion and stress as she simultaneously searched for temporary housing. Samira struggled alone to find the information she needed while living in a shelter for homeless youth, unsupported by settlement workers or other information and referral specialists.

Samira’s experiences while searching for a refugee lawyer using Google are clearly examples of the anxiety that can be caused by information overload (Case, 2008). While the vastness of the information she found was overwhelming, and she doubtlessly felt “lost, helpless, [and] confused” (Mellon, 1986, p. 162) as participants in past studies of information overload did, the stakes for Samira were much higher than in typical studies of information behaviour. While searching for resources in a university library (Mellon, 1986) or at work (Eppler & Mengis, 2004) can be stressful, the anxiety of possible deportation back to Afghanistan if her refugee claim was unsuccessful is clearly more pressing. This stress was compounded by the absence of a familiar context or sources of information or support such as family members or friends.

4.3.2 The effects of uncertain residency status

For participants in this study who migrated with uncertain legal status, such as Samira, this circumstance presented barriers to settlement. In discussing her recently-received Permanent
Resident (PR) status, a successful step she achieved after waiting two years as a refugee claimant, Samira’s laughter rang out in the café:

I can do more things now, like I can have a job, I don't have to apply for work permit, I can travel - anywhere except Afghanistan - I can get a credit card, and I'm more important. [laughs] […] when I didn't have my PR card, like I wanted to get a cell phone, I couldn't get it because I didn't have Canadian ID. I wanted to get a credit card, they wouldn't give me. Lots of problems. But now I can, it's good. [laughs] (Samira)

Though she jokes about being “important” now that she has permanent status, there appears to be an element of truth behind the humour as well, as being a refugee claimant made her feel as though she were a second-class citizen. Waiting for a determination of her refugee claim left Samira in a liminal, marginalized space with numerous barriers to the things she wanted to do, an experience common to refugee claimants (Dauvergne, 2007).

These experiences of exclusion were not only felt by youth after arriving in Canada, but in some cases also while living with insecure status abroad. Abdul, who lived in many different countries as an Afghan refugee, reflected on the challenges he faced:

…in countries where I used to live, I was, like, you know, not settled. […] if you plan, if you do this – buying a home and everything – finally, they just say you have to move because you're not from this country here. […] anyway, you're just feeling that you can lose what you found, just one second or one minutes, or one day, everything. So here, in Canada, I can be sure that I'm here for a long time, and I can plan for, I can think about my tomorrow. (Abdul)

Abdul’s comments show the barriers to settlement implicit in uncertain migration status, as he could have been asked to leave the country at any time and forced to abandon the life he had built for himself. Unable to think about the future, Abdul was forced to live day to day before coming to Canada. In this way, secure legal status, such as that provided by permanent residence or citizenship, is a foundation upon which everything else that makes up life is built. In both a practical and psychological sense, Abdul’s permanent resident status in Canada gives him the ability to become truly settled.
4.3.3 Cultural differences

In addition to the challenges discussed above, cultural differences experienced by youth after arriving in Canada represented another important barrier to settlement.

For some youth, such as Abdul, cultural adaptation centered on lifestyle differences and the perception of time, as he explains:

Canada is different, for example, in back home, peoples is spending, for example, money, they're thinking about one day. Not tomorrow, you know? They don't care about tomorrow, I don't know why. [...] if you came and arrived in Canada you have to start thinking about your week, month, how to spend money, and you have to think about even minutes, not spend for nothing, you know? And just use all the time [...] because if we compare with back home, life is flying, time is really flying in Canada. (Abdul)

What this excerpt shows is the shift in thinking Abdul underwent after arriving in Canada: instead of living moment to moment, as he had been accustomed to in Uzbekistan, he now had to plan and budget both his time and money to use them as efficiently as possible during the process of settlement.

Other cultural differences were more concretely related to specific issues, such as religious diversity or LGBT rights in Canada. Khalid, who had lived in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reflected:

The most challenging thing that I’ve faced is just trying to understand people, you know. Where we were living, most of the people were Muslim. But here there’s many types of people, people with different faiths, people with different beliefs, and it’s a free society. [laughs] For example the rights they have for gays and lesbians, you try to understand why, you know. There’s a lot of things here that weren’t in my country. (Khalid)

Khalid’s experiences show the myriad of differences newcomers must cope with after arriving in Canada. As he explains, his time in Afghanistan and Pakistan left him ill-prepared for the religious and social diversity in Canada. Interestingly, Khalid also notes that freedom was another aspect of life he needed to adapt to, as he had to become used to the free expression of those around him. He was not alone in citing his unfamiliarity with LGBT rights, as Samira also explains:

Even if I go back home, I see that [two Afghan men kissing one another on the cheek – a common custom], I feel weird. Cause I was here and I hear so many things. I remember when I was back home, I didn't know about these, like, lesbians and gay. Cause those
things are not in Afghanistan. Maybe there is, but we don't know about it. But here, a lot of people... (Samira)

Similar to Khalid, Samira also lacked an awareness of homosexuality before migrating to Canada. What is interesting about her comments, though, is that meeting gays and lesbians in Canada who were open about their sexual orientation has permanently changed Samira’s outlook on life. Even if she were to return to Afghanistan, she would bring this new awareness with her: her experiences in Canada have made her view Afghan customs differently.

While Samira and Khalid’s experiences can be seen as a form of culture shock during the settlement process, they could also be thought of as unmet information needs. It is unclear what – if any – information youth sought or received about life in Canada before arriving. Would offering newcomers more – or more specific – pre-migration information on issues such as LGBT rights in Canada make their transition less difficult once they arrive? While this could be done with immigrants such as Khalid, who waited four years in Pakistan while the Canadian government processed his application for residency in Canada, it would not be possible for refugees like Samira, whose migration to Canada was not as planned or anticipated. More research on the information practices of Afghan newcomers during the pre-migration stage could be useful in addressing these questions.

4.3.4 Language barriers and isolation

Language barriers in English caused significant settlement challenges for youth, in particular those with little or no prior knowledge of English before arriving in Canada. Abdur Rahman, who vividly remembered the experiences of his first days at school, recounts his disorientation:

It was very awkward for me because I didn’t know English at that time. When the teacher was speaking, I didn’t know what was going on. I remember the first day I had rice in my bag […] I found the microwave [in the cafeteria], but I was too shy to go stand in the line. I went, sat in a corner - I still remember the taste of the cold rice! That was just part of the experience, being shy and just, not many Afghans in that school - now there’s a lot in that area, but when I went there, not many. (Abdur Rahman)

A few things stand out in this excerpt: the first is the difficulties Abdur Rahman experienced as a result of language barriers in the classroom, while the second is the important role that co-ethnics can play in easing the transition and language barriers newcomer youth face. Abdur Rahman’s
comments reflect the isolation and loneliness he felt in being one of the only Afghans in his school, unable to communicate with those around him. The above excerpt implies that the ethnic make-up of the neighbourhood and school into which he was settling greatly shaped Abdur Rahman’s settlement experiences.

As he notes above, Abdur Rahman’s neighbourhood has undergone significant transitions over the past 8 years since he arrived, with an influx of Afghans. Though the challenges he experienced as a result of his isolation from other Afghans were difficult at the time, he explained later in our interview that these challenges did ultimately support his English-language skills, and that learning English would be especially difficult for Afghans arriving in the neighbourhood today:

I think if I came at this moment, at this time, it would be easy for me, especially if I came to Flemingdon area, and Thorncliffe, there’s a lot of Afghans. Especially my building is all Afghans there, so, yeah. But you wouldn't learn English - that would be a challenge. (Abdur Rahman)

Research on immigrant youth echoes Abdur Rahman’s experiences, noting that the more informal opportunities youth have to speak English, whether in the neighbourhood or in the hallways at school, the more their overall proficiency improves (Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, & Páez, 2008).

Though Abdur Rahman overcame his initial difficulties with English, eventually moving from an ESL classroom to regular high school classes and continuing on to university, it was a long and difficult process. As he explained in describing his progress through high school, “I always had - my English level was lower than my grade level. In Grade 11 I was still taking Grade 9 English.” Other youth, such as Samira, still struggled with the language. Though, unlike Abdur Rahman, she had had English-language instruction before arriving in Canada, Samira struggled to pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), a standardized English test required for entrance to university: “I’m doing TOEFL for three times, and I'm not getting a good mark, of course it makes me stressed out. …if I screw it [up] this time, I’m done. Yeah, I don’t know what I’m gonna do.” Despite having been exempted from ESL instruction in high school, passing all of her English classes, and graduating successfully, Samira still could not pass the TOEFL. As a result, she had to place her academic and professional goals on hold for the time being.
Research on immigrant youth in Canada highlights that acquisition of and fluency in English – in particular for academic study – is a multi-stage and often difficult process. Though youth may learn to speak English well within a few months or years after migration, it can take as long as seven years for them to become proficient at the deeper level required for academic study and success in school (Cummins, 1981). Language barriers, both in basic speaking skills in early settlement, and in written academic English in later years, therefore, represent a significant challenge in the settlement of newcomer youth.

4.3.5 Not wanting to migrate: “I always wanted to go back”

One settlement challenge faced by some youth in this study was that they had been unwilling migrants. As Abdur Rahman explained:

I really didn’t like anything, like you know I always wanted to go back. That was, that was my, like, thinking at that time, but I changed – I mean I learned to appreciate Toronto more now than I used to. And I think it’s something that is a gradual thing – it took me a lot of years. Took me 5, 6 years. (Abdur Rahman)

As this excerpt shows, Abdur Rahman, who did not make the decision to migrate, initially resented his new life in Canada. His adaptation, therefore, became a much more lengthy process, and only really began when he stopped resisting his new circumstances and eventually became fond of Toronto. This excerpt highlights the importance of the emotional factors influencing settlement. Refugees and others who did not make the decision to migrate, a group that can also include youth in immigrant families, may therefore need additional time to settle, as they first come to terms with their migration. This prolonged settlement experience has implications not only for academics trying to understand timelines and processes of adaptation, but also for service providers, educators and others who interact with newcomer youth who did not make the decision to migrate.
4.3.6 Family separation: “There’s nobody that you can talk to, and you miss your family a lot.”

Though youth experienced many challenges as part of the process of settlement in Canada, one of the most difficult and intense was the experience of loneliness, particularly for those who were separated from their family and friends, like Samira:

The first three or four months, it was really hard to be somewhere that you don't know anybody. There's nobody that you can talk to, and you miss your family a lot. [...] the most difficult thing was that I didn't have anybody to talk to. That was really hard. [...] Crying was good in that time. (Samira)

Samira had experienced multiple migrations in her life, seeking refuge with her family in Iran as a child and returning to Afghanistan years later. What the above excerpt shows, however, is that migration was made even more difficult by the separation from her family. For Samira, the enormous challenges she faced – such as finding housing and preparing her legal defense for her refugee claim – would have been easier to bear if she had had more personal support, particularly someone to confide in. This is telling, as it speaks to the emotional stresses of migration, in particular for youth navigating settlement alone. Even for youth who chose to migrate, and came to Canada as adults, as Abdul did, family separation remained difficult: “I'm missing my family, you know.”

It was not only youth who arrived in Canada alone who experienced family separation as a hardship of migration. Abdur Rahman found it difficult to be separated from his father for a period of four years, the time it took for him to make a refugee claim and then bring Abdur Rahman and the rest of his family to join him in Canada:

I was very lonely. [...] I hated those four years because he was away and we were very close and I was 8 when he left, right? He left for a reason, he had a reason - he wanted us to have a good education - but those four years were horrible, horrible, [laughs] horrible years. [...] And then, and then also like 5, 6 months in Canada and I was missing everybody back home, obviously. I had a little cousin at that time, my uncle’s son... I was missing him a lot. (Abdur Rahman)

Abdur Rahman’s experiences demonstrate that youth can experience multiple levels of grief throughout the processes of migration and settlement. Though his immediate family was reunited in Canada, Abdur Rahman’s family separation did not end. Instead, he began to grieve all over again, as he missed the family members he’d left behind, including cousins, uncles and
other relatives. This pain at the separation from extended family was echoed in Janzen and Ochocka’s (2003) study of immigrant youth settlement, a challenge the authors describe as two-fold: “not only did youth have to deal with the loss of leaving loved ones behind, they also could no longer rely on these important people for support” (p. 54). For youth experiencing separation from family members after migration, feelings of isolation and depression can result (Janzen & Ochocka, 2003).

4.3.7 Being young but with adult responsibilities

Samira and Huma, in particular, faced settlement challenges as a result of their status as youth with adult responsibilities. An excerpt from my fieldnotes captures this impression from our interviews:

I meet the young women in a north-Toronto neighbourhood strip mall, at a coffee shop they can walk to from their shared apartment. Though the days we meet are bitterly cold, both arrive complaining about the weather, yet wearing slight, fashionable jackets and no hats; they appear more concerned about their hairstyles than staying warm. They strike me as young and fully adult at the same time, teenagers with full responsibility over their own lives. In the brightly lit and loud coffee shop, we sit by a large window overlooking the parking lot and they begin to tell their stories right away.

Both young women had arrived in Canada alone at age 16, two years prior, without accompanying family members. As a result, they were teenagers, and our discussions showed their interest in shopping and spending time with friends, yet they also bore important responsibilities for their own housing, schooling and other concerns. They had successfully navigated the refugee claim process and achieved permanent resident status in Canada. Despite their accomplishments, however, their age and unaccompanied status had been a significant challenge. As they recounted a story about a friend, another young, unaccompanied Afghan, who had been in a car accident and was seriously injured, Huma explained: “she was in ICU for a week, and we had to get a lawyer for her and get these things for her. I couldn't do it because I was 17, I wasn't 18”. As a minor, Huma was unable to secure medical and legal forms and details required by her friend’s circumstances and had to find someone else to help her.

The specific challenges of age and legal status that Samira and Huma faced are not uncommon. Referred to in immigration literature as “unaccompanied minors”, these youth include anyone
under age 18 who migrates “without a parent or an adult who is legally responsible for their care” (Ali, Taraban, & Kaur Gill, 2003, p. 1). Unaccompanied minor youth primarily come from refugee backgrounds, and Afghan settlement workers interviewed for this project noted that they regularly encounter youth who have migrated alone. Confronted with violence, war, and ever stricter controls on migration, families unable to migrate together may decide to send their children abroad (Ali, et al., 2003). Precise statistics on this phenomenon are difficult to obtain, as in some cases youth are brought across international borders by adults posing as guardians. Researchers estimate, however, that the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Canada has been steadily increasing; approximately 1800 arrived in 2002, more than double the number in 2001 (Ali, et al., 2003, p. 22).

4.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter examined the settlement challenges youth experienced in their first months and years in Canada. The first portion of the chapter offered a brief introduction to the individual youth participants in this study. What emerged from this section was a snapshot of an extremely diverse group of newcomer youth, with different linguistic backgrounds, migration histories and family circumstances. While some participants were accompanied by their immediate families, other youth had arrived in Canada alone. Immigration categories and settlement experiences also varied among youth, as some participants were sponsored by their family members, while others had to navigate complicated legal processes as refugee claimants. Youth took different migration paths before arriving in Canada and some spent up to a decade living in intermediate countries of settlement such as Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, India and the United States; as a result, many youth had spent most of their lives outside of Afghanistan.

After introducing the participants, the chapter continued by answering the study’s first research question, namely: what challenges and unmet settlement needs to Afghan youth in Toronto experience? The data revealed youth’s difficulties in meeting information needs in their early days of settlement, a challenge which represented a major hurdle, in particular for those youth who had to make time-sensitive legal claims for refugee status. The effects of uncertain residency status were also an important barrier for youth who had to wait for a determination of
their claim, or who had experienced life as refugees abroad. Cultural differences were commonly experienced by youth, who had to adapt to new ways of thinking in Canada, in particular with respect to facets of life that were unfamiliar to them before they arrived, including LGBT rights. Language barriers were not only issues for youth who did not speak English prior to arriving, but were also challenges for advanced English-language learners struggling to succeed on standardized English exams required to gain acceptance to university. Other settlement challenges youth experienced included resentment of their new lives following forced migration, the pain of loneliness and grieving for family members left behind, and the unique challenges faced by unaccompanied minor youth balancing teenage life with adult responsibilities.

This chapter provided the contextual background to better understand and interpret youth’s information practices and leisure pursuits, which are described in detail in the next two chapters. By highlighting the challenging nature of migration and settlement, the heterogeneity of youth’s experiences and backgrounds, and their differing access to resources and support such as family and friends, this chapter illustrated many of the important factors that can shape and influence youth’s information practices and leisure pursuits.

The following chapter, Chapter 5, outlines the study’s findings with regard to youth’s information practices; it does so by describing youth’s use of personal information sources such as friends and family, as well as settlement workers, and both online and print media. Practices such as texting, reading, and the use of public libraries and social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube are also examined. Challenges and contextual factors influencing information behaviour are also discussed, including youth’s suspicion and mistrust of co-ethnic information sources, their withholding of information from family abroad, and the role of personality in shaping preferences for different sources.
5 Seeking, sharing and using information in the contexts of settlement and leisure

5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter explores the information practices of Afghan youth in the contexts of settlement and leisure. As such, it addresses the study’s second research question, namely: What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto? The data presented below, however, extend beyond the initial focus on settlement. Instead, they offer a more holistic picture of the information behaviour of youth participants in this study, and include findings relevant to youths’ leisure and other everyday activities.

In exploring the information practices of Afghan newcomer youth, this chapter draws on one-on-one interviews with participants and provides a description their habits regarding information seeking, sharing and use. The data highlight the wide range of information behaviours and sources used by youth, including consulting friends and family, settlement workers, as well as practices such as texting, reading, the use of public libraries, and social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook.

5.2 Information seeking and sharing during first months in Canada

5.2.1 Family and friends in Canada as key information sources

Most youth cited other individuals as their preferred information sources during their first months in Canada. For those who had family or friends in Canada, these people were key information sources youth consulted in their early settlement experiences. For youth such as Abdur Rahman, these individuals were instrumental in offering settlement information, as he explained in our interview:

My dad, relatives who were here, and teachers – these were the sources [of information] that I had, three primary sources [in the early days]. Now I have others, for example, if I
have questions on what courses to take, I have my other 3rd and 4th year students, Afghans, who are doing the same [program]. They have a lot of experience then, so I would ask them. […] Even if they’re younger, older, I don’t care, I tend to ask people with experience. I don’t want to go through what they went through. I just want to take advantage of their experience, right? (Abdur Rahman)

Abdur Rahman’s specific circumstances of arrival and settlement are important to consider in this case: arriving as a 12 year old unable to speak, read or write in English, it is easy to see why individuals such as parents and teachers were the primary sources of information for him during his early months in Canada. Unlike other participants in this study who arrived as older teens or young adults, in some cases without accompanying family members, Abdur Rahman’s life was centered on his family and school and he therefore met his information needs using these resources. Abdur Rahman’s reliance on his family and teachers supports the well-documented preference for other people as information sources (Case, 2008), in particular among recent immigrants (Courtright, 2005; Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004). This preference may be especially keen among the disorienting first weeks and months of settlement, where trusted family members or teachers are often newcomer youths’ sole supports during settlement (Janzen & Ochocka, 2003; Seat, 2003).

What is interesting to note about Abdur Rahman’s experiences is that while he relied on family members and teachers for information at first, the focus on these resources shifted over time as he began to rely more heavily on friends and classmates. The evolution of Abdur Rahman’s information sources is echoed in a study by Courtright (2005) which also found that newcomers consulted a broadening base of individuals over time as they settled. Though he is now fluent in English and has more specific and complex information needs regarding his university studies, Abdur Rahman still appears to prefer other individuals to online resources, choosing to consult upper-year students in his university program with direct experience on the matters at hand.

Abdul also relied on friends in Canada as information resources, though unlike Abdur Rahman, he did not have family members with him in Canada. Friends were an important source of information for Abdul in his early weeks and months of settlement, and valued their advice, as he explained:

…they [my friends] have experience, life experience, which can help me. I can see that people who is living here, […] they spend for this more time than me because they didn’t have experience. And this guy[s] who helped me with advice, they show me the best way,
to first visit good school, because don’t spend your time there, for example LINC$s$, you know [laughs] […] I don’t think you can learn English in LINC$s$. I decided to go to adult school because I needed the high school diploma, to go to university. (Abdul)

Both Abdul and Abdur Rahman sought out trusted friends who had experience: in Abdul’s case, with choosing English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes and obtaining professional credentials. Because his friends are fellow immigrants, Abdul trusted them because they could offer tips based not only on their own successes, but also their failures. What is interesting to note is that his friends’ perspective is trusted over that of the Canadian government: the LINC program Abdul refers to is Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, ESL classes provided to newcomers free of charge by the Canadian government. Though LINC is promoted by the government, Abdul quickly learns from his friends that visiting a “good school” and furthering his education in Canada is best done by avoiding these classes completely. While it is perhaps the case that Abdul’s friends had poor experiences with LINC, it is worth noting that there can be pitfalls in relying exclusively on one’s social network for information. Though Abdur Rahman and Abdul valued their friends’ experiences and advice, information behaviour research on newcomers suggests that relying on their social networks for information can result in information that is incomplete or of low quality (Courtright, 2005).

Overall, it appears that trust was a guiding principle for youth in this study in choosing human information sources, as Abdur Rahman and Abdul’s friends had recently been in similar situations and were seen as reliable, trustworthy and knowledgeable for this reason. In Abdur Rahman’s case, a shared cultural background also promoted trust, as he often sought advice from his fellow Afghan students. It is also possible that because of the high highschool drop-out rates among Toronto Afghans (Amir, 2009), that Afghan students at Abdur Rahman’s university were a smaller and more closely-knit group. Their status as first generation Canadians – whose parents did not likely have first-hand experience with Canadian universities – may also have contributed to their reliance on classmates over family members as information sources for questions about university programs and courses.
5.2.2 Keeping information from family back home

The information behaviour of youth in this study not only included revealing instances of information seeking during settlement, but also offered insight into decisions on information sharing. It became apparent from our interviews that youth who were not accompanied by other family members in Canada had difficult choices to make regarding what to share and what to keep from their family back home. Samira explains her decision to withhold information from her parents regarding her difficult settlement experiences:

16 years old, being in that situation, it's hard. I couldn't call my family that much because I didn't have the money. [...] I was not telling them about these things. I was like "I'm okay, I'm in an apartment, I live with my friend and I'm all happy, I go to school..." And then my dad was like happy and stuff. I didn’t tell them because I didn't want them to be worried about me. They couldn't do anything from Afghanistan. One day, if I go back home, I will start crying and tell [them] everything. Yeah. It was really hard. (Samira)

What is revealing about this excerpt is the difficult situation Samira describes: alone in Canada, she would have loved to reach out to her family and share the challenging experiences of her early weeks of settlement, but was torn between this and a desire to protect her parents from the problems she faced. Samira decides on the latter, and, in so doing, takes on a more adult role than her age might dictate, choosing to shield her parents from her challenges, including the fact that she was living in a homeless shelter, not in an apartment with a friend, as she told her father. What is interesting is that in saying that her family “couldn’t do anything from Afghanistan”, she appears to be referring to solving her immediate problems: her family could not find her an apartment, or a refugee lawyer; other types of support her parents could offer from afar were, in Samira’s estimation, simply not worth the pain it would cause for them to hear about her struggles.

As an unaccompanied minor, Samira was faced not only with difficult settlement challenges in making her refugee claim, but also in redetermining her relationship with family back home, including deciding what to withhold and what to reveal about her experiences. Youth’s selective withholding of information from parents and other family members was also found in a study by Chu (1999). In examining the role of immigrant youth who interpret for their families, Chu (1999) found that they often chose not to share information that they learned with their parents. The circumstances of migration, and in particular youth’s fluency in the language of the host society, had set up a power imbalance within families: in many cases, youth could exercise
control over information and had greater access to information than their parents. What is absent from Chu’s study, however, is an examination of the reasons behind or context within which youth chose to keep things from their parents. The findings of this study show that one reason could be a desire to spare parents from pain or worry. Unlike Chu’s (1999) participants, however, unaccompanied youth like Samira do not live with their parents; this family separation gives them even more control over the types of information they choose to share with – or withhold from – their parents.

5.2.3 Use of settlement services and mistrust of co-ethnics: “The fact that he’s Afghan and he knows my friends...”

Samira’s reluctance to share her settlement experiences with her family members back home was not the only instance of non-sharing found in this study. Though Huma, another young refugee claimant, had access to a settlement worker – information and referral specialists who work with newcomers – at her high school, she did not reveal her information needs to him:

I didn't feel, like, comfortable talking to him. And the fact that he's Afghan and he knows like my friends [...]. Because I had no problem talking with someone I didn't know, like who wouldn't go back to other people, telling them... (Huma)

What is interesting to note about this excerpt is not only Huma’s preference for speaking with unfamiliar people about her settlement information needs, but also her reluctance in consulting a fellow Afghan. Though this finding runs counter to the traditional assumption that co-ethnics are perceived as trusted information sources for newcomers, an assumption on which settlement services in Canada are often structured, it is one that is echoed by information studies research on immigrant women. Sligo and Jameson (2000) found that a fear of gossip among co-ethnics made Pacific Island immigrant women in their study less likely to seek cervical screening information from medical professionals within their ethnic community. Huma’s mistrust of the Afghan settlement worker at her school may also be linked to research on the information practices of refugees; Lloyd et al (2013) and Audunson et al (2011) found that refugee participants were mistrustful of others within their ethnic group. For those coming from circumstances of forced migration, ethnic conflict or civil war, in particular, mistrust may make refugees reluctant to reveal their information needs to others from their country of origin.
Mistrust among newcomers seeking information and referral services may also be fostered by the perception of ethnic favouritism within settlement services run by different Afghan groups. Khalid describes the negative impression some Afghans in Toronto had of one Afghan-specific settlement organization they suspected of engaging in this type of favouritism:

…in Afghanistan it happens right now, there's ethnicity thing going on, you know? […] Even when there's organization like that in Canada, sometimes they give the nice positions, to their own community. If the main guy [director of the organization] is Pashtun and everybody working there is Pashtun, then the Tajik guy will not go. […] I don't know that's what I heard from people, I never used their services before and I don't really know, but people told me that. (Khalid)

What is clear from Khalid’s comments is that the context of ethnic conflict in Afghanistan, where mistrust and competition between groups is widespread, in turn influences newcomers’ confidence in the delivery of settlement services in Canada. Though Khalid was unsure whether or not the settlement agency was biased, it appears Afghans discussed this possibility with one another, and even the perception of bias along ethnic lines could make newcomers mistrust or avoid a specific settlement organization. The context of Afghan migration and settlement, therefore, influences the information behaviour of newcomers, and contributes to the fragmented nature of the community in Toronto (Norquay, 2004).

5.2.4 Finding settlement services helpful and enjoyable

Though some youth had not used local settlement services, others were frequent users and found these agencies helpful during settlement. Huma, despite her negative impressions of her high school’s settlement worker, remained a frequent user of settlement services. She had used the services of one Afghan-specific settlement agency, in particular, obtaining translation assistance for her refugee claim documents (“I just went to them and they filled out that form for me, like translated my documents for me”), and had attended a financial literacy seminar there as well. Despite the usefulness of these services, however, Huma found the distance on public transit between her neighbourhood and the agency a significant barrier: “It was helpful, but it was so far away from us… like takes you 2 or 3 hours to get there and then come back, so that's why we just didn't want to go there.” Huma had also attended a summer program for Afghan youth held by a non-ethno-specific settlement agency in north Toronto, and found the Afghan settlement
worker who ran the program helpful: “She would give us information about scholarships and university programs, and that kind of useful things.”

Yasir, another youth participant in this study, was also a regular user of settlement services, as I captured in my fieldnotes:

Yasir was a frequent visitor to the settlement agency: he chose their offices as his preferred interview location, near his apartment building. He called out a hello, waving to the youth workers as he walked past on his way to the empty office where we held our interview. Sitting at the round program tables in the agency’s basement offices, flanked by bookshelves and under large fluorescent lights, Yasir’s face lit up as he leaned in, speaking enthusiastically about the two youth workers and programs, and smiling as he described the agency’s soccer team and skating program where he teaches younger kids. After our interview, he sauntered into the youth workers’ large shared office and sat on their couch, leaning back, and taking out his cellphone to text a friend.

Yasir’s experiences with the (non-ethno-specific) settlement agency he visited demonstrate the key role these services played in his life: besides offering him settlement assistance and a chance to play soccer, his favourite sport, Yasir had also found a way to support others as a teacher and mentor for younger children. Unlike Khalid, who had not used local settlement services, or Huma, who had used them but had to travel extensively to take part, Yasir’s settlement agency appeared to be almost an extension of his living room: somewhere close to home where he could hang out, meet friends, play games and sports, and visit with friendly and supportive staff. Yasir appeared quite comfortable consulting youth workers who were both Afghan and non-Afghan.

Comfort and enjoyment matter to youth using settlement services, and can be deciding factors in which programs to attend, as Huma explained:

...this one [settlement program] was fun cause we used to go to like India Bazaar and eat out. [...] Sometimes we had guest speakers and they would come and talk about some programs that are useful for youth, but I never went to any of them, because it's not fun. [laughs] (Huma)

Huma values enjoyment so highly that she is willing to sacrifice access to useful information along the way. Unlike past research, which shows that individuals may decide to avoid information because of its content, availability or perceived usefulness (Case, 2008), Huma’s comments show that the context in which information is encountered or made available may make youth more or less receptive to information seeking.
5.2.5 Preferring – or avoiding – personal resources during settlement

In exploring youth’s information practices, it became clear that they adopted different strategies of seeking and sharing during settlement, either preferring personal connections or avoiding them in favour of more anonymous sources. Huma’s approach, for instance, tended to bypass interpersonal sources in favour of more anonymous resources, as she outlined in a typical instance of information seeking described below:

I would go to someplace, they're like "Oh, you need this thing", then I would just ask them "How am I supposed to get this?" and they would help me. Like I wanted to get something from the drugstore, right? They were like "Well, you have to have your health card." And right when you got your PR [Permanent Resident] card they tell you right away that you need a SIN [Social Insurance] number. Usually I got it online, most of the help. I just typed in "health card Toronto" [into Google] and then checked out some websites. (Huma)

Huma’s strategy combined two sources and stages: first, through queries to individuals employed by local businesses or government agencies, she was able to highlight specific gaps in her settlement knowledge. With these gaps named and identified, she could then follow up with targeted online searches using these terms as keywords. Huma purposely avoided discussing her settlement challenges with others she knew, as she explained in our interview:

I don't want to talk about my problems with people. That's how I feel comfortable, just deal with them myself, don't tell - cause you know when you tell someone about your problems and then they ask, keep asking you about it [...]. So I just don't tell anybody... (Huma)

Huma’s independent and solitary style of coping is the direct opposite of the one used by Samira, who relied on those around her for information – primarily her school’s guidance counsellor, who had become a close friend and confidante: “til now, I talk to her, nobody else. She's a good listener. I love her so much, she's really nice.” Samira explained that she needed to speak about her problems with others:

I love to talk about my problems. You can't keep it [in] there, I'm gonna explode, if I keep it [in] there. (Samira)

These excerpts illustrate the ways in which personal orientations to information shape the information behaviour – and in particular the information seeking and sharing – of individuals. While Samira preferred interpersonal sources for settlement information and used these same
connections to find emotional support, Huma segmented her information seeking, choosing resources that were not connected to her personal life. Huma’s approach stands in contrast to that taken by other participants in this study, who overwhelmingly cited family, friends, teachers and other close individuals as their preferred information sources in their first months of settlement. Information behaviour research on newcomers echoes the importance of a trusted social network (Courtright, 2005; Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004): in Fisher’s study, over 70% of newcomers sought out trusted friends and other personal sources (Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004). Some newcomers’ experiences aligned with Huma’s, however, as 15% preferred online sources (Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004). What is clear from Huma and Samira’s comments above is that specific information resources and formats may not be preferred by or satisfy the needs of all newcomers, as some prefer anonymity while others seek personal support. This finding is echoed by Fisher et al.’s participants, who listed a lack of anonymity as one drawback of their preferred information resources, and lack of emotional support as another (Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004); unfortunately, the study does not elaborate on these critiques or specify which information sources were associated with each negative characteristic.

While the Internet did not appear to be a primary source of settlement information for youth in this study in their first months in Canada, some of this can be attributed to the age and circumstances of participants upon arrival. For Abdur Rahman, who arrived at age 12 and spoke no English, or Ghorashka, who arrived at 11 with her immediate family, these participants were not solely responsible for meeting their own information needs, and therefore relied heavily on their parents and other relatives in Canada. For Samira, who arrived alone, the Internet was used primarily only as a last resort when those around her – shelter staff, strangers – were unable to help (for more information on the informational challenges Samira experienced during settlement, see Chapter 4). It was only Huma, who appreciated the anonymity of the Internet, who mentioned using it as a primary resource for settlement information seeking in her first months in Canada.

The sections above describe the information practices of youth during their first weeks and months of settlement, including their reliance on family, friends and settlement services. The next section focuses on their information habits in relation to ICTs, beginning with their use of Facebook.
5.3 Facebook use among Afghan youth

5.3.1 Facebook “keeps you in touch with your family […] I love that”

Facebook was popular among participants in this study. Some mentioned the site as a useful tool in maintaining their transnational social networks, in particular for keeping in touch with family members abroad, as Abdur Rahman and Ghorashka explained:

I have a lot of family back home, in Kuwait, in Dubai, all around the place. Malaysia, I have a cousin in Malaysia, keeping in touch with them in Facebook is great. Everybody is on Facebook. Write on their wall, write a comment and everything. It keeps you in touch with your family, and that’s, I mean, I love that, I really like that. (Abdur Rahman)

I have both my mom’s and my dad’s parents in Holland and then I have my mom’s sister in Germany, […] and then I have people in London, Austria, like all these random countries. […] Cause like with Afghans, we’re everywhere. […] That’s what I love [about] Facebook - that’s one of the reasons where like, you can keep in touch, even though you’re far away, you don’t feel like that, cause you’re always updated on what people are doing. (Ghorashka)

A number of interesting points are raised by the excerpts cited above: the first is the diffuse pattern of migration youth’s families have experienced, as Abdur Rahman and Ghorashka have relatives living all over the world. This pattern is typical of refugee groups, as Afghans have sought refuge in a wide range of countries around the world. The second salient feature of the quotes above is that despite the vast distances between them and their relatives, Abdur Rahman and Ghorashka use Facebook to keep up to date and feel close to the events taking place in the lives of their extended family members. This closeness, facilitated by the use of social media, is echoed in studies of migrants by Komito (2011) and Komito and Bates (2011). In their examinations of Polish and Filipino migrants living in Ireland, the authors discovered that participants were heavy users of social media and other communication technologies, maintaining “transnational social links” with friends and family, and creating durable contacts (Komito & Bates, 2011, p. 294). The researchers found that social media use, in particular, enabled migrants’ continued participation in virtual communities, without the risk of these contacts falling away over time (Komito & Bates, 2011).
A third interesting feature of youth’s descriptions of their family ties on Facebook is the site’s popularity not only among Afghans abroad, but also within Afghanistan, or “back home” according to Abdur Rahman. Despite the challenges of infrastructure in Afghanistan, families still find ways to participate on social media and maintain contact with relatives abroad. The popularity of Facebook not just in Canada or Afghanistan, but in countries around the world from Holland to Pakistan, means that youth are able to use the social networking site to maintain broad transnational networks.

5.3.2 “I used to share a lot of things […] I don’t do that anymore”

Youth’s information practices, including decisions about whether or not to share information online, were sometimes shaped by fears around sites like Facebook. Abdur Rahman, who had previously been a prolific poster on Facebook, had recently become much more reserved, citing concerns about privacy and the rights to what a person posts:

I don't share too much on Facebook anymore because they store everything and it becomes their property. I don't want them to claim my poems and everything, you know what I mean? [...] my friends [are why I changed], they're like "Yo, take it easy on Facebook." I used to share a lot of things about Afghanistan, and I used to share my quotes and everything. I don't do that anymore. (Abdur Rahman)

What this excerpt shows is not only how deeply Abdur Rahman cares about the rights to what he posts, but also how his information practices had shifted in response to his friends’ warnings. Though he continues to use the site, he is now much more cautious and reserved in what he posts. Abdur Rahman is similar to youth participants in boyd and Marwick’s (2011) study, who expressed concern about their privacy on social media, a finding which stands in contrast to public perceptions of youth as unconcerned with privacy in these settings. boyd and Marwick’s (2011) participants also modified their behaviour to ensure maximum privacy and safety in their use of Facebook, finding ways encode their posts to make them intelligible only to their intended audiences.
5.3.3 Cultural heritage and posting in Pashto: “We should, like, be proud of our language, we shouldn’t just leave it behind”

Facebook use among Afghan youth is not only for communication with friends and family, but in the case of one participant, is also a place to demonstrate pride in her cultural and linguistic heritage. In describing that she sometimes chooses to write in Pashto, an Afghan language, Ghorashka explains:

Sometimes [when I post on Facebook] I try to include like Pashto in, cause just to, like just to make sure that other people that do speak Pashto, that they understand that we should, like, be proud of our language, we shouldn't just leave it behind. Like sometimes I'll have my status in Pashto, to like, I don't know, appreciate that I do know a language, and that it's something that not a lot of people speak. (Ghorashka)

Ghorashka’s comments show that posting in Pashto requires effort, and is therefore not a default activity, something she “tries to include” in a pointed way. This requires a written fluency in Pashto, something that is not common – not only in general, as Ghorashka notes above, but also among Afghan youth, according to key informants in this study. While some youth are fluent in Pashto, Dari, Uzbek, or one of the other languages spoken in Afghanistan, many cannot read or write in these language, especially if they were denied access to education during their time as refugees, or were educated in other languages abroad.

Ghorashka’s aim in posting her status in Pashto appears to be two-fold: to show both Afghans and non-Afghans online that she is fluent in the language and proud of her cultural background, but also to encourage other Afghans to maintain their linguistic heritage. Though her posts appear in a fairly public setting, they also communicate specifically with a smaller, more private audience, one for whom they were specifically crafted. This practice is similar to that of youth in boyd and Marwick’s (2011) study cited in the section above, in which youth encoded their posts on social networking sites using language or topics that only other specific groups (i.e. a subset of their friends, classmates, etc.) would understand. Ghorashka’s message goes beyond this level of communication, however, as it is not only embedded in the content of her posts – that which only other Pashto-speaking youth can decipher – but also in the format: the very fact that she is posting in Pashto is intended to both signal her difference and pride to others, as well as offer a message of encouragement to other Afghan youth to maintain their mother tongue. With these posts, she is actively resisting the dominance of English as the language used by Afghan youth online.
5.3.4 “They’re so concerned that if a girl has Facebook, there’s something wrong with her”

In discussing the use of Facebook with participants, it became clear that there were specific cultural meanings to this practice, in particular gender differences in the perception of users of the site. As Khalid explains how he and his friends judge the behaviour of young Afghan women, it appears that Facebook use is one important metric:

Some of them they're so concerned that if a girl has a Facebook, there's something wrong with her. I said, yeah, like, you will find good and bad, right? But it doesn't necessarily mean that a girl will have a Facebook and all of a sudden she's a bad girl, you know. (Khalid)

It is important to note that this discussion of Facebook was part of a larger topic, namely Khalid and his friends’ search for marriage partners, and their expectations that women remain virgins until marriage. For Khalid and his friends, a “bad girl” is a sexually active young woman. What is interesting about this excerpt is that the young men consider Afghan women’s Facebook use as a possible sign of sexual promiscuity, and therefore unsuitability for marriage. There was a clear double standard in place, however, as similar negative associations were not made for young men using the site.

While Khalid’s comments signal the gendered nature of Facebook use among Afghan youth, Samira and Huma offered more specific examples of behaviour among young Afghan women on Facebook that would be considered inappropriate, specifically, posting photos of themselves. When discussing whether or not they posted photos of themselves on the site, Samira and Huma were shocked, explaining:

Oh no. I never put my picture on Facebook. No. (Samira)

Back home, if somebody, like if a guy has your picture, it's like a big deal for your family, they're like "Oh my God"... Afghan families don't like it. For you not a problem. Your mom wouldn’t care if you put your pictures on Facebook, right? But in our country, like for Afghan people, it's a big deal for girls to put pictures up. And then the guy looks at it and they have it in their own computer. It's just like not a good thing. (Huma)
Even e-mailing pictures is deemed inappropriate, as Samira explained:

I can’t even send it [a picture of herself] to my aunt, cause my mom said “Don’t send it”, cause they have sons, right? So that’s why. (Samira)

Huma’s comments demonstrate that she considers this type of familial disapproval of sharing photos on Facebook to be culturally-bound: this is made clear when she notes that my mother would likely not feel the same way. What is interesting about Samira and Huma’s comments is that they do not find the sharing of photos not taboo in and of itself, but instead because of the potential of the male gaze, in particular the unintended (male) audience their photos might find. It is important to note that even sharing photos with male cousins, despite being relatives, was considered inappropriate. This may be due to the fact that cousins are perceived as preferred marriage partners in Afghan culture (Emadi, 2005) as marriage within an extended family network ensures trust and the maintenance of wealth within the family group (Smith, 2009). In deciding what to post – or what not to post – on Facebook, Huma and Samira not only consider local uses and viewers of their content, but transnational concerns, such as the implications for family members in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the effects their actions in Canada might have on their familial reputations.

Though Samira and Huma do not post photos of themselves on Facebook, other young Afghan women I met as part of this project did so, often posting selfies and other photos of themselves regularly online. It is unclear, therefore, the extent to which this practice is taboo among young Afghans in Canada. It is possible that different factors may influence this behaviour, including the location – and attitudes - of one’s extended family, and the length of time youth have lived in Canada. In a North American context, the practice of posting photos online is becoming increasingly common, in particular among youth: a study by the Pew Research Center (Duggan, 2013) reports that almost 80% of youth ages 18 to 29 post photos online, and that more women than men take part in this activity (p. 5).
5.4 YouTube for entertainment and education: “I’ve learned so much from YouTube”

Facebook was not the only social media site that was popular among participants in this study: youth also frequently mentioned their use of YouTube. Ghorashka used the site to watch television from time to time, as she explained in our interview:

So nowadays I stay up to like 4 or 3am […] I'm going on YouTube and like watching shows that I miss and stuff during the school year. Like right now I'm watching America's Next Top Model, for some reason. [laughs] Just catching up on like shows and stuff, cause they like put it back on YouTube. (Ghorashka)

Ghorashka was not the only participant to mention watching television on YouTube; Samira and Huma also used the site to watch episodes of shows such as American Idol. Ghorashka appeared to appreciate the convenience of YouTube: since she had recently finished writing her exams at the end of term, she had more time to watch television shows, in particular, watching multiple episodes each night on the site. Convenience was not the only factor, however, as participants explained that YouTube gave them access to television content that they would not have had otherwise. Ghorashka had difficulty getting to watch her family’s only television (“I never get to watch tv: we're like 5 people in the family and we only have one tv”), while Samira faced an even clearer barrier, noting “I don’t have a tv.”

Youth not only mentioned watching YouTube for entertainment, but also to find information, solve problems and learn new skills. Ghorashka explained that she often uses YouTube to learn new things, such as blogging, different techniques of applying makeup or styling her hair:

I learn how to [do hair and makeup] from YouTube. […] like say, for example, if I want to learn how to curl my hair or something, I'll just be like "curl", um, "how to do curly hair" and so many links pop up of like girls my age teaching how to do hair. It's so like nice to like actually see somebody else do it and like explaining in simple English. It's pretty cool. […] I actually sit there and I'm like okay, what are they doing, cause [if] I try to do it without looking at it, it never works. (Ghorashka)

Yeah, I always wanted to blog, but I don't really get the concept of blogging that much, like I guess I should go YouTube that today, how to blog [laughs]. (Ghorashka)

What is interesting about Ghorashka’s comments is not only the variety of skills she learns from YouTube tutorials, but also the features of these videos that she appreciates and finds helpful. She finds it motivating to see someone her own age teaching these tutorials, and perhaps feels
that the skills are more accessible for that reason. Ghorashka also mentions watching the videos simultaneously as she attempts a new technique on her own, learning both by watching and by doing, blending the information practice with other activities. Ghorashka also appears to appreciate the visual nature of YouTube tutorials, finding it helpful to learn by watching others. She was not the only participant to note this advantage of YouTube, as Khalid also found it useful:

I’m a person that I learn more when I actually see things compared when I actually read the book, you know. So when I see things, I learn more. [...] Right now, I'm working on my fire sprinkler licence. When I read the book, if I don't know what a fire pumping system is, I just go on YouTube. So rather than reading something and picturing something, I can actually see a video. [...] you got to be very patient to read the book and find out everything, right? I use YouTube like entertaining and at the same time educating myself. (Khalid)

Khalid’s comments show how integrated YouTube is in his everyday reading practices, supporting his nature as a visual learner. Instead of using it as an alternative to reading, Khalid uses YouTube as a supplementary tool, one he intersperses with reading to better support his learning goals. Though he notes the entertainment value of YouTube videos, he seems to be harnessing the enjoyable nature of viewing for educational aims, in this case, to help him study to achieve the goal of professional certification in a new field.

As noted above, Ghorashka uses keywords to search for YouTube videos, often with many resulting hits. She sifts through the findings, deciding which videos to watch, by making the following judgements:

Whichever's hair looks good! [laughs] Or like sometimes you have like bad quality videos, so like you can't really tell what they're doing. Nowadays, people that do YouTube videos, they always have like really nice HD cameras so I usually pick it on quality too, if it's good quality, I'll watch it. I have like a few people that I actually subscribe to, cause they're professionals and they have so many videos so I'll go to their YouTube channel and search if they did something on that. YouTube is really awesome. (Ghorashka)

Ghorashka uses a combination of visual criteria to choose which videos to watch and assess the value of the information being presented. When choosing videos on specific skills she is trying to learn, such as hairstyling, a quick picture of the presenter’s work – in this case, their own hairstyle – is enough to help her decide. What is unclear, however, is whether Ghorashka clicks through to watch a portion of each video before making her assessment, or if she can judge the
appearance solely on the video’s thumbnail image. What is evident is that expertise, whether demonstrated in a professional capacity in the content of the video or through video production techniques, is a guiding principle of Ghorashka’s decision-making. The “professionals” she subscribes to are a vetted list of favourite expert sources, including professional hairstylists or make-up artists whose videos she has enjoyed in the past.

Youth not only relied on YouTube to learn new skills, but also to solve problems and meet information needs in different areas of their lives, including health. Khalid used videos on the site to gather information on how to cope with recurring sinus infections, as he explained in our interview:

I went on YouTube and I gathered so much information, like what causes this, and how to prevent it. [...] YouTube - they show you the surgeries. I think the more you know about how something functions – it’s like you go to a mechanic and don’t know anything about your car, the mechanic can charge you a big bill. But if you have knowledge about cars, then you don’t accept what the mechanic tells you. [...] Yeah, the doctor has the knowledge, but the doctor’s just a human being. So I studied the sinus problem and I actually found ways how to help, you know. [...] So now it’s better, without doing any surgeries. (Khalid)

Khalid used the information he gathered from YouTube videos to solve his own health problem and democratize knowledge that otherwise would remain in the domain of trained experts such as medical doctors. Khalid appears to treat this process of informing himself as a responsibility, one that allows him to question and even refute the assertions of experts, and thereby gain power over his circumstances. After suffering numerous infections and losing faith in his doctor’s ability to solve his problem, Khalid began to research the sinus surgery his doctor had recommended he undergo. This research using videos on the site supported Khalid’s decision-making and helped him to discover alternative, preventative techniques he could employ instead. He even shared the information he learned on YouTube with a friend:

So I actually recommended this to my friend. He had the same problem. I saw, when you have a sinus infection, my cheeks, they used to get swollen. So I told him, when I look at him, “I’m not a doctor, [...] but when I’m seeing you, this is what you have” - I recommended him to [use a sinus rinse]. The other day I saw him, his cheeks were down, he’s like “Yeah, thanks for your help. Really, I can breathe better.” (Khalid)

What is interesting about this excerpt is the way in which Khalid applies the information he had learned from YouTube, recognizing his symptoms in others and recommending the treatments he
had found. The knowledge gained from his research on YouTube made Khalid confident in this diagnosis: (“this is what you have”).

Though Ghorashka and Khalid spoke highly of YouTube and were frequent viewers of the site, watching videos was not Ghorashka’s preferred method of learning, but instead a secondary tool:

I'm more of the like, learn myself and experiment type of person. So, even though I think YouTube is like, heaven, such a good site to learn things, and even though sometimes I would go there for help - for one of my projects I had to burn a DVD on like this special program, and I got all my help from YouTube. But usually I'm experimenting - it depends on how much time I have. If I'm doing it for fun, I'd rather experiment and like learn myself. (Ghorashka)

While Khalid’s love of YouTube stems from his visual learning style, Ghorashka prefers to learn by experimenting and tinkering, only resorting to YouTube and other information resources if she is under time pressure. This excerpt reveals a multi-tiered hierarchy of knowledge sources, but one in which the source chosen depends greatly on the context. For school assignments, Ghorashka does not have the luxury of time to experiment, and therefore chooses a faster – though less personally rewarding – route to learning a new skill. This implies that for leisure purposes, Ghorashka has more freedom to choose the learning technique that she most enjoys: experimentation or trial and error.

Though youth appeared to be frequent users of YouTube, their activities appeared to remain restricted to viewing content created by others, and therefore did not extend into commenting on others’ work or uploading their own videos, the forms of participatory media creation facilitated by the site (Chau, 2010). This is not unusual, because though YouTube can encourage youth to do more than passively consume content, relatively few youth are engaged enough with the site to create profiles, comment and contribute: according to a 2013 Pew Research Center report, only 7% of youth have an account with YouTube, while in comparison over 94% had a Facebook profile (Madden et al., 2013, p. 24).

5.5 Watching movies online

YouTube was not the only place that youth watched media: they also downloaded movies or streamed them online. Samira explained this practice, noting, “I go to the Internet and - I have
Farsi sites, I go there and watch movies.” When asked which sites she used, she explained that Iranproud (Figure 5-1) and Persianhub (Figure 5-2) were the “best sites” on which to watch or download Iranian films.

Figure 5-1: Screenshot of movies on Iranproud.com

Source: http://www.persianhub.tv/video

Samira described the process of visiting the site and browsing the film selection before choosing one to watch based primarily on the thumbnail image: “I see like, the title and the pictures, and the people who are playing... I like funny movies. When I see the picture is so funny, I watch it.”

Samira described her daily practice of watching films online in the following way:

I watch, like, a lot of movies, maybe like, four hours, five hours in a day. Not like in a row, I watch the movie and then I stop it, I go eat, pray, do something else and then I come back. Sometimes it’s on, and I do my things. I hear it and I feel happy, […] because it makes me feel like I am back home. Like I was watching with my family those movies, so when I watch it, I feel like I'm at home. […] I love it. If I don't watch it, I get sick. I swear to God. If I don't watch Farsi movie in one week, I will get some homesick. (Samira)

What Samira’s comments illustrate is the important role that media consumption can play in newcomers’ lives following migration. Samira sought out familiar films to watch online to help her cope with the challenges of migration and the loneliness and homesickness she felt while being separated from her family. By seeking out films online that she had watched with her family in Iran, Samira preserves her memories and feelings of family closeness across the distance and separation of migration. This daily practice, which she combined with other
activities, was done not only to experience the content of films, but also to cultivate the feelings that she associated with watching them.

Youth’s film preferences were shaped by their experiences of migration and the bonds they felt to different cultures and countries in which they had lived:

I’m watching Iranian movies, Farsi movies… Cause I was grew up there right? In Iran, so I like it. It’s kind of my country. (Samira)

I like it [Indian cinema] because I can feel like it’s the same kind of with Afghan people, right? Like when I watch American movies, the guy, they start like going out and the parents know about it, like I don’t feel any connections with that, cause it’s not the same for me. When I watch Indian [films], I can understand how the girl feels when the father sees her with a guy, right? That’s why I enjoy watching them. (Huma)

Finding themselves in a new cultural environments following migration, Huma and Samira sought out films that reflected their cultural orientations, values and customs. Though Huma did not note using films to fight homesickness, as Samira did, both young women appeared to find comfort after migration in culturally familiar media: in Huma’s case, the Bollywood films she watched while living in Pakistan. The finding that newcomers – and refugees in particular – use film and other leisure-time media to fight homesickness or cope with cultural difference was found in a recent study of public library use by women from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan living in Norway (Audunson, et al., 2011). While negotiating a new environment, language and culture, therefore, newcomers find comfort in familiar media.

5.6 Public library use: “I like to feel the peoples around me, they try to learn something”

Though public library use was mentioned by participants throughout this study, for most youth, this use was limited in nature. Yasir, for instance, sometimes used his local library’s computer, as he shared a computer with his siblings at home. Ghorashka, though enthusiastic about research and reading, found it inconvenient to wait for library materials: “I don’t go to the library anymore because you have to wait for like hours and like, days and stuff for your book to arrive, so I just buy them.”
For one participant, however, public library use was central to his information practices. Abdul was a frequent and enthusiastic user of libraries in this study, and chose his local neighbourhood branch as his preferred location for our first interview. He used the Toronto Reference Library (Figure 5-3) regularly and extensively: “I go three days a week and three to four hours, I will be there.” He preferred this branch to other locations: “More books in there.”

Figure 5-3: Toronto Reference Library


When asked what he enjoyed about the Toronto Reference Library and why it had become his favourite place to study and do research, Abdul explained:

I like to feel the peoples around me, they try to learn something. Because in my country, I saw peoples who was there very far from books, because there was war, and I hate this. [...] the place where no knowledge, no study, no books, they are poor, they are slaves [...]. So that's why I like to see - especially my peoples who is from like this - with books and
papers who are trying to learn something. That's why I'm going to Reference Library… [turns around, as though to look at other people] everywhere I look someone's studying and it's good. I'm enjoying that, you know? (Abdul)

This excerpt is interesting because it demonstrates the importance that libraries can hold for people who have migrated from war-torn countries in which education was not accessible to all. It is not simply the books at the Toronto Reference Library that Abdul values, or the quiet study space – though he enjoys those things too. Instead, what he truly loves is to be in a place of knowledge, surrounded by others learning. For Abdul, seeing others study symbolizes peace, circumstances which enable individuals to devote time to their own education. For Abdul, the act of reading or studying is a sign of freedom and the opposite of the material and intellectual poverty – the slavery to ideology and war, in particular – that had surrounded him in Afghanistan. The solidarity and joy he feels is heightened when he can study alongside others like him, “my peoples”, who have also come from places where learning was not accessible.

5.7 Reading

5.7.1 Leisure reading

Some participants described reading as a leisurely and enjoyable pursuit. Huma, for instance, explained her love of daily newspapers:

I read a lot of newspapers. Toronto Star, I like that, and [Toronto] Sun. I like reading about the crimes and stuff, who killed who and why and the police are talking. I just find it so interesting. And then I keep reading cause you know how it's in process and they tell you like new stuff about it every day, and I read my horoscope all the time and the comics. I read the whole thing, all the time. […] It's fun. [laughs] (Huma)

In addition to reading Toronto newspapers, Huma also enjoyed reading gossip and news about her favourite Bollywood celebrities who were familiar to her from her years spent living in Pakistan: “I read the stuff online about, you know, Indian celebrities and what they did.” Huma’s leisure reading habits represent an interesting hybrid of transnational and local information practices. Her sustained interest in Bollywood celebrities across the transitions of migration and settlement echo the findings of Jeong’s (2004) study on Korean graduate students living in the United States, who were also avid consumers of online news about Korean celebrities.
Leisure reading, however, was not universally embraced by all participants. While Huma enjoyed reading, other youth noted disliking it:

Reading is... uh... I'm not big on reading. [laughs] ...because I already have too much readings from school. I really don't want to read in my leisure time. [...] my [highschool English] teacher she gave me a book, the Kite Runner, and I really liked the book. And that got me a little bit into reading books in my free time, but not much. (Abdur Rahman)

No [I don't like reading]. Gives me a headache, I start reading, and I just don't like it. I feel like I'm studying, that's why. But when I like a book, I read it. I used to hate reading, like when I was in English class. And the teacher gave me a book [...] It was about, like, a young girl, she was in a family that they were selling her to a guy who's like 70 and that was really, really interesting for me. I couldn't stop reading, cause I wanted to see what's gonna happen. (Samira)

What is interesting about these excerpts is the somewhat contradictory relationship Abdur Rahman and Samira appear to have with leisure reading. While it is something they might otherwise enjoy, they explained that the pleasure of reading has been drained by its association with school. In virtually the same breath, however, both youth cite examples of novels they enjoyed reading for school. What appears to have made the difference for Abdur Rahman and Samira in these cases were the themes of the books their teachers suggested: the struggles of life in Afghanistan, in the case of Abdur Rahman, drew him into The Kite Runner, while the issue of forced marriage was intriguing to Samira in the novel she read. While leisure reading may be encouraged by tailoring selections of novels for youth, it is important to note that for Abdur Rahman at least, this activity was not sustained over time.

While some youth in this study were literate in English but not in their mother tongue, others were avid readers in multiple languages. Though Abdul could read in Farsi, Turkish or English, his preferred language for reading was Russian, as he explained:

Usually I use Russian books, [laughs] not English. It's very difficult in English for me because English is new. That's why I read Russian… Usually I'm choosing the book from my friends, [...] I found some Russian book store here, and some Russian friends who are helping me with books. Sometimes [I buy Russian books], yeah, if I have to buy one. Usually I'm going to Russian community - I have some friends, he was a professor at a Russian university. So I'm asking him sometimes because he has a lot of books in his home. (Abdul)
Abdul, who was educated in Russian in Uzbekistan, still prefers this language over all others for leisure reading. What is interesting about this is the way in which this language has led to friendships and an affiliation with other Russian-speakers and readers in Toronto, and his reliance on reading materials from these newfound friends and their book collections. Information studies research reflects the importance of reading to Russian immigrants in Toronto and the popularity of home library collections and the frequent use of public libraries among this population (Dali, 2004). Abdul’s experiences complement these findings by noting his reliance on his social network – other Russian-speakers in Toronto – as well as Russian-language community libraries as invaluable sources of leisure reading materials.

5.7.2 Reading and researching Islam

Reading about religion, and Islam in particular, emerged as a popular activity for some youth in this study. For Ghorashka and Abdul, this included reading the Koran as well as researching the origins and history of Islam. For Abdul the motivation for this research began almost a decade earlier, as a young teenager:

…when I was 14 maybe, I read the Koran and this, tried to accept everything because I was Muslim. But then I started thinking about "Why is come from Arabic language, not my language?" [laughs] But then I read something that Arab language was perfect, that's why. Why it's perfect? Why? [laughs] So I started to learn about this… (Abdul)

Ghorashka had also been learning about Islam for years, through independent reading and classes she had attended (“I used to go to Islamic classes, they used to happen on Sundays at my old middle school, so like I learned a lot there too”). Ghorashka combined what she had learned in these classes with online searching, using trusted resources – in particular, her teacher - to guide her, as she explained:

I'd hear something [at Islamic classes] and go online and search more about it myself. With stuff like that, different scholars have their own views on things. [The best websites are] probably like, those trustworthy ones - I forgot what the site was, but I got it from the teacher. I just usually get the sites through people, cause you can't trust everything on the Internet, right? […] Some sites can be biased. So you have to like, kind of, get it - hear it from somebody else, somebody that you trust that would know that the site is legit. (Ghorashka)
Though Ghorashka was not wholly trusting of information she found on the Internet, in particular with regard to controversial issues and conflicting information on Islam, she used recommendations from trusted individuals to help her select useful and “legitimate” sites. Her personal network, therefore, became a useful tool through which she could filter online content. In contrast, Abdul was less enthusiastic about the Internet, and preferred books instead, as he explained:

I'm more believing to the books because Internet is something which is every peoples try to describe their own opinion, their ideology. I don't like the Internet. I'm just chatting, watching movies sometimes, you know, but not taking information. [...] Books is more, better for this. You know who wrote it, you know where it was copied, and who was this guy. But sites, no. Even the official sites, you know, different countries can have their different ideology. (Abdul)

Abdul places his trust in books as he finds them more transparent as the authorship is clear and, from his perspective, the content is less likely to be based solely on opinion or ideology. His wariness of online sources leads him to consider the Internet purely as entertainment, not as a source of trustworthy information. Ghorashka and Abdul are not alone in finding the Internet a difficult place to obtain accurate and useful information on Islam: this was also reflected in Caidi and Macdonald’s (2008) study, as the Muslim youth in their study expressed similar challenges and frustration with online searches on Islam.

Youth’s searches for information on religion were motivated in different ways. For Abdul, learning about Islam was part of his interest in world events and religious conflicts between international powers:

…the thing is we are dying now, we are here, instead of to be our country. Peoples are in our country that are dying for nothing, for some lies. [laughs] You know? This is very complicated and that's why. [laughs] I want to learn why they're doing this. Why? How come these two religions [Judaism and Islam – in the Middle East] started fighting with each other, you know? So that's why I'm learning, why they are doing this. (Abdul)

For Ghorashka, in contrast, the desire to learn more about Islam came from her social network:

I think [the motivation came] through my circle of friends, somebody will say something, ask something and I don't know what that is and I'd go on, search it and then I find out more [...] my friend, she's talking - cause I'm Muslim right? So she's talking about Islam and like, I don't know much about it and so I recently started reading the Koran, like in translation and so I'm like, okay, I need to go read because it's my religion and I don't know much about it. (Ghorashka)
Though their motivations appear different, both Ghorashka and Abdul had a deeply personal connection to their search for information on Islam. Though Abdul is interested in world events and global conflict, he is also drawn to learn about the root causes of war to better understand his own forced migration and that of his family and friends (Abdul: “we are here, instead of to be in our country”). For Ghorashka, the motivation is similarly personal and grounded in her desire to rediscover or create her own identity as a Muslim. She contrasts her knowledge on Islam with that of her friends, whom she deems more knowledgeable. This perceived discrepancy – and her fear of embarrassment over it – is what spurs on her information-seeking. For Ghorashka, there appears to be a minimum acceptable level of knowledge that one should have as a Muslim, and she feels a responsibility, therefore, to learn more about her religion in order to attain it.

The meaning of personal information-seeking on religious topics has yet to be explored in information studies research. Existing work on information-seeking has focused on the activities of ministers and other professionals in relation to tasks such as writing sermons or making decisions regarding church leadership (Lambert, 2010; Michels, 2012; Wicks, 1999). It remains to be seen, therefore, what differences if any exist between more personally motivated searches for information on religion compared to those grounded in professional life.

5.8 Information-sharing on Islam

Once youth discovered information on Islam, they then decided whether or not to share this information with others. Some youth, such as Khalid, were active and enthusiastic sharers of information on Islam, as he explained in the following example:

[My friends] got ready to get engaged, but they were expecting that the girls they were gonna marry is gonna be [lowers voice to a whisper] virgins. But if you read the Koran, it says a virgin deserves a virgin, a non-virgin deserves a non-virgin. I sent those verses from my iPhone to all those guys and next time we had a meeting, we discussed it. [...] If I know something and I don’t share it with somebody, then one day God will ask me that “I gave you this knowledge, why didn’t you share it with other people?” (Khalid)

Unlike Khalid, however, Ghorashka was much more reluctant to share with her friends:

I don’t know, with religion I’m very personal, it’s just like, I myself am learning about it, slowly. I probably wouldn’t share it because I feel like people know more than me, so
even if I share they’d be like ‘Okay, did you just learn that now? Like, it’s so obvious.’ (Ghorashka)

These excerpts demonstrate an important factor influencing youths’ decision to share new-found information on Islam: the individual’s perception of their expertise on this topic relative to that of their friends. Khalid, who had recently begun researching and practicing his faith, was keen to educate his less-religious friends on Islam’s teachings, and saw this type of information-sharing as a new duty, one expected of him by God. In the excerpt included above, his information-sharing spans multiple conversations and modes – both in person and via text – and is supported by his research using the iKoran application for iPhone. He seems to relish the opportunity to provoke discussion and encourage his friends – other young Afghan men – to become more knowledgeable about Islam.

In contrast to Khalid’s active and enthusiastic sharing, Ghorashka is less motivated to share her new-found knowledge with friends because she feels like a relative novice on the subject. Unlike Khalid, she does not feel that her research on Islam is to be shared with others, but instead fears embarrassment for her perceived lack of expertise, and deems this topic “personal”. Her reluctance to share newfound information does not extend to topics other than Islam, as she describes her typical information practices in this way: “if it’s something else [not on Islam] then yeah, I’d let other people know […] like e-mailing it, like sending it to MSN.” Ghorashka’s lack of confidence with regard to her expertise on Islam is reflected in questions of identity discussed earlier in this chapter: she feels that as a Muslim, she should be better-informed on the teachings of Islam than those around her. What is unclear from Ghorashka’s experiences with her friends, however, is whether or not they are also Muslims, or perhaps non-Muslims who are familiar with and have read extensively on the history and practice of Islam.

5.9 Use of mobile phones

5.9.1 Phoning relatives back home

Though some participants used Facebook to keep in touch with relatives abroad, social media was not always the preferred method of contact. Samira and Huma used their mobile phones and phone cards, in particular the brand GoodCall, to reach their parents and siblings abroad: “I call
every other day, and it's like $5 [per card] for 20 minutes.” Because of this frequent contact, however, both young women struggled with the cost, as Huma explained: “It’s too much money”. As a result, they had to limit how long they could speak with their families, and choose between relatives each time, as Samira explained: “She [Huma] has one sister, I have five. So I don’t get to talk to all of them [each time].”

Samira and Huma appeared to prefer phones over other methods of contacting relatives abroad, such as chatting with them on the Internet. This was primarily due to limitations in infrastructure in Afghanistan, which made online methods frustrating, as they explained:

I do [chat online sometimes] too, but their Internet is like, the speed is so slow, like sometimes it doesn't load and stuff. So you just rather call them and just talk, quick talk, 5 minutes. (Huma)

[Using Skype], all you can say is "Do you hear me?" and they say "Do you hear me?" and that's it. [laughs] Not a great conversation. (Samira)

Neither Samira nor Huma had a landline in their apartment therefore both relied on their cell phones. They found their bills expensive and difficult to pay, however, as they explained, sighing:

I got a bill for $130 [last month]. I want to cancel it, but I can’t. I have to pay $400 [cancellation fee]... (Samira)

It’s frustrating, [sighs] paying the bills. You know how we get 200 [dollars on social assistance] you know, for all the basic needs for the month and then we have to pay $130 for our cell phone. I call my dad to send me money. [...] at the end of the month I have nothing and for them it’s a lot of money. (Huma)

Samira and Huma’s frustrations with their cell phone bills and contracts highlight an unmet information need regarding telecommunications rights in Canada. Despite relying on their phones daily and frequently finding unforeseen charges on their monthly statements, neither young woman knew how to dispute these charges or break their contracts. This may be a common settlement information need, as newcomers – in particular refugees, such as Huma and Samira – likely have little time or opportunity to research cell phone companies and regulations before arriving in Canada. Both young women needed to have phones to keep in touch with their families abroad and simply and grudgingly accepted high phone costs as a result, despite the financial hardship this entailed for them.
5.9.2 Texting

Samira and Huma were the only participants who described speaking on their cellphones; other participants relied exclusively on texting, as Abdur Rahman and Ghorashka explained:

No [I don’t phone people], it’s all texting. I got like a texting plan, so I get to text 2500 text messages, I haven’t been over yet, but, like I text a lot. It’s like MSN basically. I’m texting my friends [...] even with events, people just start texting you and it’s like a chain text. (Ghorashka)

Texting is huge! [laughs]. I text a lot of people, I mean, when I’m getting in contact with the [student] association here [at the university], I like to text because it’s a more personal thing, that you can read, instead of mass e-mail. I think it’s a better way of communicating than e-mail or Facebook. Texting has become big! Yeah, I’m getting a text right now! [laughs] (Abdur Rahman)

What is interesting about these excerpts is not only youths’ preference for texting, even citing the practice as “more personal” than other media, but the local nature of this activity. Youth such as Ghorashka and Abdur Rahman appeared to only text those who lived in the Toronto area, including classmates and friends, saving discussions with family abroad for social media sites. It is possible that the high cost of texting long-distance numbers from Canadian cell phones is an important factor, or perhaps this practice is simply part of the larger trend in among North American youth toward the use of cell phones for texting over talking (Lenhart, 2012).

5.10 Chapter conclusion

This chapter described the information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in the contexts of settlement and leisure. In so doing, it answered the study’s second research question: What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto? It went beyond this question and the specific focus on settlement, however, to offer a more holistic picture of the information behaviour of youth participants in this study. The findings presented in this chapter reveal that youth’s information practices can offer insight into their lives, their experiences and their cultural backgrounds.
The information practices described in this chapter included an evolution of information sources across the process of settlement, with youth initially relying more on family members, but shifting to others over time. As well, unaccompanied minor youth noted that they withheld information from family members back home, often to protect them from worry or concern. Afghan youth’s mistrust of co-ethnics in some circumstances highlights the complex relations and information practices of refugee groups and other newcomers who come from regions of conflict and civil war. This finding, in particular, calls into question the assumptions of some settlement programs and information service providers, including the ideas that co-ethnics are best suited to serve newcomers, or that they are always familiar and trusted information resources.

Youth’s information practices varied in many ways, due to their personalities and personal orientations to certain types of resources, as well as their diverse cultural backgrounds. The preference for media, such as films viewed online, for instance, highlighted the emotional connections and coping strategies these media can provide, as well as youth’s desire to maintain their links to the popular culture of intermediate countries of settlement, such as Iran and Pakistan. Youth’s search for cultural familiarity, stability and a connection to their pasts, therefore, can be seen in their use of media.

Participants’ use of Facebook and mobile phones to maintain transnational ties to family and friends abroad was seen, as well as the use of YouTube as a rich and deeply visual resource for both entertainment and learning. The description of youth’s public library use and reading practices – in particular leisure reading – also demonstrated their linguistic and cultural diversity, including one participant whose fluency in Russian made him a frequent user of private, public and community Russian-language library collections. In addition, some youth expressed a strong desire to learn more about Islam and to better understand the history and social context of this religion around the world, a desire that could be understood as part of a search for meaning and identity across migration and displacement. Youth were cautious about online resources when researching Islam, noting their potential for conflicting information and bias. When youth learned new information about Islam, their decision about whether or not to share this information was greatly influenced by their perception of their own expertise on this topic relative to those around them.
What became evident from this chapter was that by researching and describing the information practices of newcomer youth, deeper insights about their cultural backgrounds, migration histories, personalities and social worlds can emerge. These insights, in turn, can be used to better understand the roles and uses of information in the lives of immigrants and refugees.

The following chapter continues the presentation of findings from this study by focusing on the third research question and describing the activities youth found leisurely. These leisure activities included time spent with friends and family, mehmani – a ritual type of visiting done by Afghans, sports, prayer, writing poetry and attending school.
6 Exploring the leisure practices of Afghan newcomer youth

6.1 Chapter summary

The first two findings chapters introduced the youth participants in this study, examining both their settlement experiences and information practices during their first months and years in Canada. This chapter builds on these findings by adding the concept of leisure and addressing the third research question of the study (What do the leisure activities of Afghan newcomer youth reveal about their settlement experiences and information practices?). In order to answer this question, more fundamental questions are also addressed, namely: What does the leisure of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto look like? What types of activities do they engage in, and with whom? This chapter therefore describes the leisure of Afghan newcomer youth and offers insight into the depth and range of activities participants considered to be enjoyable, including spending time with friends and family, Mehmani (a ritual type of visiting involving food, tea and discussion), prayer, writing poetry, playing sports and attending school.

6.2 Defining and discussing leisure with youth

The working definition of leisure used in this study was free-time, enjoyable activities pursued in time away from school and work, one developed out of the existing literature on leisure (for a review of this literature see Chapter 2, section 2.3.1 Defining leisure). Though definitions of leisure remain contested, leisure studies scholars note that qualitative approaches, including the use of one-on-one interviews, can be a successful way of understanding the phenomenon of leisure more deeply, in particular more subjective and individual experiences (Kleiber, et al., 2011). Kleiber et al (2011) highlight the nuance needed in studies of leisure pursuits, as these pursuits can be studied as either subjective experiences or objective behaviours, depending on the approach and techniques used. Additional complexity rests in the fact that not only feelings and behaviours can be equated with leisure, but also entire settings as well (i.e. parks, parties, etc.) which can be treated more or less as spaces or containers within which leisure takes place (Kleiber, et al., 2011).
This study therefore relied on subjective experiences of leisure as defined by participants. As not all participants were familiar with the English term “leisure” - longer-settled youth such as Ghorashka, Abdur Rahman and Khalid were familiar with the word, while more recently-arrived youth were not – leisure was explained as things they did in their free-time that they enjoyed. It could be argued that leisure is a nuanced and contested term for native English speakers, immigrants and non-immigrants alike, one that would elicit different feelings, activities and scenarios depending on the respondent. Similarly, the group of youth interviewed for this study had equally rich and varied descriptions of their leisure, as detailed below throughout this chapter.

Though interviews were conducted in English, an equivalent translation for the term leisure suggested by key informants and youth during our interviews was “saahtiri”, a word which refers to fun or enjoyment in both Dari and Pashto. Though “saahtiri” was found to be the most commonly accepted equivalent in this study, one youth participant also suggested the alternate terms of “tafreeh” (meaning both “fun” and “recess” for children at school) and “seppport” (which translates as “sport”). Other participants were not as accepting of these words as equivalent to leisure, with one in particular dismissing “tafreeh” as inappropriate for adult activities and applying only to children. The equating of “sport” and “leisure” was also problematic as not all youth participants in this study shared in this enjoyment of sport, as this chapter details below. It should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this research to offer a definitive definition of the concept of leisure, or even to determine its meaning within Afghan culture. Instead, this study explored what leisure looked like for its youth participants, and therefore offers a snapshot of their experiences, with all of the complexity, nuances and contradictions they entail.

The remaining sections of this chapter examine youth’s descriptions of leisure. In their interviews, all participants spoke enthusiastically and at length about the wide range of activities they considered to be leisurely; it was the part of our discussions in which all participants blossomed. The responses ranged from activities that were unsurprising inclusions (i.e. spending time with friends), to those that were new to me (i.e. mehmani) or had not previously been anticipated as leisurely (i.e. prayer, doing school assignments). The following sections of this chapter describe the leisure pursuits youth mentioned enjoying beginning with spending time with friends.
6.3 Spending time with friends

One of the most commonly mentioned leisure activities youth described was spending time with friends, something that is echoed in leisure studies research (Larson, 2001). Youth participants mentioned engaging in a wide range of activities with friends, summarized in the following table:

Table 6-1: Summary of leisure activities with friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leisure activities with friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Going out to dinner (Abdur Rahman, Khalid, Huma, Samira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching movies – at home, friends’ place, or going out to movies (Samira, Huma, Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing soccer (Yasir, Abdul), playing sports (Ghorashka, Abdur Rahman), snowboarding (Khalid), bowling (Yasir)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going shopping (Yasir), spending time at the mall (Huma), window-shopping (Huma and Samira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to public library with friends to use the computer (Yasir)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to the gym (Yasir, Abdul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out (Huma, Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out for tea, coffee (Khalid, Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texting with friends (Samira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to the beach (Huma), to the Toronto Islands (Samira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching American Idol online (Samira and Huma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing things, debating (Abdul)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is interesting to note about this list of activities is not only the wide range of activities enjoyed by youth with their friends, but also that some activities – such as going out to dinner – were mentioned as enjoyable by more than one participant, while other activities were uniquely enjoyed by one youth, such as playing chess. This highlights the individual nature of leisure, as an enjoyable pursuit to one person is not necessarily leisurely to another.

One example of this individual orientation to specific activities is youth’s relationship with volunteer work. While Ghorashka found volunteering to be leisurely, as noted in the table above, Abdur Rahman did not. Instead, he contrasted this with his favourite leisure activities – playing sports and relaxing with friends:

I enjoy [volunteering with the Afghan community], but inside I feel obliged to do it. It's just a feeling within, you know... it is leisure, but not so much leisure. It’s like a feeling of responsibility [...] It’s different from playing sports, it's just for my own selfish – my own desire, yeah. It's your own desire, like chilling with friends. There's no responsibility, no stress, the only stress is that you gotta get time at home because otherwise your parents are going to get mad at you. (Abdur Rahman)

What is interesting to note about this excerpt is the nuanced and complex way in which Abdur Rahman defines leisure. An activity such as volunteering, which he admits to enjoying to some degree, is rendered less leisurely by his motivation to take part: he volunteers because he feels he owes it to his community. In contrast, something that is motivated purely by enjoyment, such as the joy of spending time with friends, is much more in keeping with Abdur Rahman’s definition of leisure. Spending time “chilling with friends” and playing sports are enjoyable because he freely chooses to take part in these activities for no purpose other than fun or, as he refers to it, his “own selfish [...] desire”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing Russian books from a friend</td>
<td>Abdul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to concerts</td>
<td>Huma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing chess</td>
<td>Abdul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing a poetry blog</td>
<td>Abdur Rahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering with an Afghan student association</td>
<td>Ghorashka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While leisure studies research has typically defined leisure in opposition to obligation, this relationship is in fact more nuanced than it first appears: Tirone and Pedlar’s (2005) study of leisure among youth from immigrant families found that the free choice of an activity was not always a prerequisite to leisure, while Stebbins’ work on obligation in leisure notes the existence of pleasant or “agreeable obligations” (Stebbins, 2005, p. 351) in some leisure activities. Though Abdur Rahman succinctly contrasts leisure and obligation in the excerpt above, a more nuanced relationship between duty and enjoyment emerges later in this chapter with respect to leisure, family, and religion (see 6.5 Mehmani and 6.6 Prayer for examples).

Though one of Abdur Rahman’s favourite leisure pursuits is spending time relaxing, watching movies and chatting with friends, finding space to do this at home can be challenging, as he explains:

…[leisure is] chilling with my friends […]. Most of the time [we meet at] Tim Horton's because we don't want to bother everybody because there’s like six of us. But if there's nobody at home, I invite them, just chill here. I'd love for them to come to my place and have some food, but... we don't have a house, it's just an apartment, so it's pretty hard. Most of the guys have apartments, so that's why we don't want to go into the house, we don't want to bother people. (Abdur Rahman)

What is interesting about this excerpt is the ways in which the circumstances of settlement shape Abdur Rahman’s leisure with friends. In the high-rise neighbourhood where he lives and where many of his friends – also newcomers – live, living space is limited. Many youth in this study mentioned their small or shared living space at home, where they often share bedrooms with siblings or other family members (in Yasir’s case, his grandfather). Abdur Rahman’s preference for leisure outside his home, therefore, is an important feature of the settlement experience for him and his friends as they balance their desire to hang out together yet avoid “bothering” other members of their families. Research on housing in Toronto notes that newcomers face high rents and low availability, in particular for apartments that can house larger families (Murdie & Teixeira, 2003). In addition to these constraints on rental apartments, home ownership is increasingly difficult for newcomers in Toronto, in particular those from refugee groups (Murdie & Teixeira, 2003). This circumstance may influence recent immigrants and refugees use of space at home for leisure pursuits, and may shape their time spent with family. The next section explores the relationship between leisure and time spent with family for newcomer youth in this study.
6.4 Spending time with family: “Time with them is the best leisure time”

In discussing their leisure, youth mentioned a variety of leisure pursuits involving their family members, summarized in the following chart:

Table 6-2: Summary of leisure activities involving family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leisure activities involving family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with family including grandfather (Yasir), sisters (Samira, Huma, Abdur Rahman), cousins, young nieces and nephews (Huma and Abdur Rahman), mother and father (Abdur Rahman, Khalid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking  (Abdur Rahman, Ghorashka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to the park (Ghorashka), picnicking (Ghorashka) or BBQing with relatives in Sunnybrook Park (Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having breakfast together (Abdur Rahman, Samira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking tea (Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching movies (Samira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling, visiting Niagara Falls (Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehmani² (Abdur Rahman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports, including going for bike rides (Ghorashka), swimming (Yasir)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in touch with relatives on Facebook (Abdur Rahman, Ghorashka)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Mehmani is a ritual visiting practice done in Afghanistan. For more detail, see the discussion of this activity in section 6.5. Mehmani.
What this chart demonstrates is the range of activities youth took part in with family, and the centrality of leisure time spent with family in their lives. Youth noted that time spent with younger relatives, including siblings, nieces and nephews, was especially important to them, as Abdur Rahman explained: “I have a little sister and nephew, so spending some time with them is the best leisure time, playing with them.” The great value placed on time with family was a cultural orientation, according to Khalid, who explained that for Afghans “your parents are really important, no matter how old they get, the family is really important. You stick with family.” His observations are echoed in studies of Muslim (Martin & Mason, 2004) and immigrant leisure (Tirone & Shaw, 1997), which both highlight the priority placed on leisure time spent with family. In their study of South Asian immigrant women and their families in Canada, Tirone and Shaw (1997) found that for participants, time with family was a foundational part of their leisure, so much so that they were uncomfortable with invitations they received to parties and other events which did not include their children. For the women in Tirone and Shaw’s study (1997), time with family, including children and other relatives, was central to their enjoyment and not perceived as obligation or stress, and reflected their upbringing in large and extended family networks.

Though the activities youth enjoyed with their families are listed in the chart above, the temporal aspect differed depending on the circumstances of youth’s migration. For those who came to Canada with their families, such as Abdur Rahman, Yasir, Khalid and Ghorashka, the activities they mentioned were present-day, while for those separated from their families abroad, such as Huma and Samira, they represented a snapshot of their lives and leisure before migration. As noted in Chapter 5 (section 5.5), since coming to Canada, Samira had recreated some of the leisure pursuits she had previously done with family, such as watching Iranian films, to cope with the pain of homesickness and family separation.
6.5 Mehmani

6.5.1 “The older men talk about Afghanistan and their youth”

A practice that some youth spoke about as part of their leisure time with family was mehmani. This practice, traditional in Afghanistan, is a type of ritual visiting in which families invite one another for food, tea and conversation, as Abdur Rahman explained:

> It’s [mehmani] a very Afghan thing, [...] it's been the Afghan culture since ages. And our parents thankfully have continued it over here. And hopefully we will do the same. [laughs] [...] So, like 5, 6 families come to our house, so noisy and everything, but I love it. It's very enjoyable. We eat, talk, usually the older men talk about Afghanistan and their youth. My father has lived here for 12 years, they barely talk about the 12 years they've lived here, it's always "In the 60s and 70s, I did this". (Abdur Rahman)

Two things stand out in Abdur Rahman’s description of mehmani: the first is that this is a form of leisure practiced in Afghanistan that has been transported to a new context in Canada. Despite all of the changes and upheaval his family has experienced, the tradition of mehmani has been upheld. Abdur Rahman’s comments signal the potential for leisure activities to serve as a cultural bridge for immigrant and refugee communities, supporting the continuation of cultural practices following migration and their transmission to a new generation. In this way, leisure activities can provide a form of cultural maintenance for newcomer groups.

The second feature of note in this excerpt is that storytelling as a form of social information sharing appears to be a key part of mehmani for Afghan youth and their older family members. Lloyd et al (2013) found that refugees used storytelling to share information with others during the settlement process, helping others to orient themselves and find useful resources. For Abdur Rahman’s family, however, it serves a different purpose, instead helping older family members reminisce about peaceful times in their lives before the trauma and upheaval of war and forced migration. Later in our interview, Abdur Rahman explained that his father and his father’s friends had been forced to interrupt their undergraduate studies when the war began, and now, years later, worked multiple minimum wage jobs in Canada, and despaired at the state of their homeland: it is for this reason that they preferred instead to remember a different, more promising time from their pasts. In addition to providing comfort and reliving better times, the older men’s storytelling also created a picture of Afghanistan for Abdur Rahman and his siblings, giving them a glimpse of a better time for the country they left behind.
6.5.2 Gendered nature of mehmani: “It’s like two different worlds”

Mehmani is a heavily gendered practice in Abdur Rahman’s family, as he explained:

…usually what happens in the mehmani, the women go to one side and the men go to the other side. That's what it is. And I usually sit with the men - for our family, we're in the living room, there's also a gap and everything. The men talk their own, the women talk, do their own thing. It's just a separate thing. It's like two different worlds. (Abdur Rahman)

According to leisure studies literature, this type of gender segregation in leisure is common in the context of Islam and is found in many Muslim societies (Martin & Mason, 2004). The conversations are not the only part of mehmani divided by gender: the preparation of food and other types of work involved in mehmani are also split along gendered lines, as Abdur Rahman described:

Well, usually the men eat separately from, and the women have their own thing, because usually the women feed their children and everything, so they have a bit more work to do. [...] there's 8 or 10 ladies and they're always helping each other out, so it's not a big burden. Yeah, so they'd bring it [in - the food and tea]. [...] Afghan men are a bit lazy, so you know, the food comes out on the table and all we do is just take the food and eat it. We're a bit spoon fed, but that's the culture. It's a good culture [laughs] especially when it comes to men. Yeah, I'm spoiled, [laughs] by my mom. (Abdur Rahman)

As noted earlier, Abdur Rahman enjoys mehmani: “I love it.” What makes this practice leisurely for him, however, is the work others do to prepare and serve food. The women in his immediate and extended family take care of the event, not only the food, but also caring for children; Abdur Rahman’s comment that “the women feed their children”, makes it clear that childcare at mehmani is the sole domain of mothers. His tone is sheepish and joking as he freely acknowledges that he is “spoiled” by the women in his family and that Afghan men are “lazy” at these events: he is aware that the division of labour in mehmani is not equal. It is unclear whether or not his mother or sisters find mehmani as enjoyable as he does, or whether the work involved in cooking, serving and clearing up afterwards makes these events less leisurely for them.

Another young man in this study, Yasir, found mehmani to be too much work to enjoy, as I noted in our interview:
He said that his family did mehmani in Pakistan and they continue to do it in Canada. When one or two families get together, they can usually meet at someone’s house or apartment, but when more families are involved, sometimes space is rented at a local hotel, though his family hasn’t done this. He thinks that mehmani get-togethers are boring and “a waste of money” and teases his mother about this. He says they’re a lot of work, as you have to cook and clean up after everyone, and guests often stay late, sometimes until 4am. (Notes from interview with Yasir)

Yasir explained earlier in our interview that he regularly helps his widowed mother with cooking and cleaning; unlike Abdur Rahman, this gives him a different perspective on the work involved in mehmani. Perhaps as a result, Yasir does not enjoy the practice, calling it “boring” and “a waste of money”. While Abdur Rahman cherishes the time he spends with his father and the other men in his family among the noise and bustle of five or six families, the structure and scale of the events appear to be much smaller for Yasir’s family, with only one or two families coming together. The size of these events may also influence the division of labour: as Abdur Rahman mentioned, the more families were in attendance, the more women there were to share in the work of cooking and cleaning up.

6.5.3 Mehmani: quality time, yet “kind of an obligation”

As noted above, the work involved in mehmani can hinder youth’s enjoyment of the experience. The balance between enjoyment and obligation can present another challenge in mehmani, as Abdur Rahman explains:

Sometimes it [mehmani] is kind of an obligation because "Oh, you know, they invited us, they invited us, I think it would be very polite for us to do it, otherwise they're gonna say, okay, how come they're not inviting". Sometimes, but that's not an issue. […] So maybe you could say that's a kind of an obligation, but it's just more quality time. Yeah, that's not a problem. (Abdur Rahman).

Though mehmani is not always an activity that is freely chosen by Afghan youth, as Abdur Rahman notes, his conception of leisure appears to be one that is nuanced, complex and does not treat enjoyment and commitment to others as oppositional. Similar to Stebbins’ (2005) work on the enjoyable aspects of obligations within leisure, Abdur Rahman is content to fulfill his social obligations in the context of leisurely pursuits, and these commitments do not overrule the enjoyable nature of mehmani. This finding is echoed in a study of youth in South Asian immigrant families, whose leisure was often structured by others and contained within extended
family networks, yet still deemed enjoyable by youth (Tirone & Pedlar, 2005). What is interesting to note here is the contradiction inherent in the obligation-enjoyment balance involved with mehmani. Though commitments to family can be an obligation, mehmani and the enjoyment involved cannot take place without them. In other words, though the network of obligations and relationships bound up this traditional practice are a potential constraint on leisure, it is also something which enables it in the first place: this becomes clear when we realize that mehmani was only practiced by youth in this study who had family in Canada - youth who arrived in Canada alone did not take part in mehmani. Familial obligations experienced by those newcomers with extended family in Canada could therefore be contrasted with the social isolation experienced by those who did not arrive with this network intact.

6.6 Prayer: a leisurely obligation

In discussing activities youth enjoyed, prayer emerged as a leisurely activity for some youth. Abdur Rahman discussed his feelings about prayer in our interviews, reflecting on his practice:

[While praying] you get relaxed and you’re thinking about different things - the times I really like a lot is when I’m praying. I pray, um, I pray 5 times a day, so those times are very important for me. [...] Yeah, it is [leisure]. I mean, it’s an obligation, of course, but for me it’s like, it’s become something that I do, it’s like, without it I’ll feel incomplete. (Abdur Rahman)

What is interesting about this excerpt is the complexity of Abdur Rahman’s relationship with prayer, as it appears to be simultaneously a form of leisure as well as an obligation. Though he is required by his religion to pray five times each day, he does not find this experience to be onerous, but instead finds joy and peace in those moments, referring to the sense of relaxation he feels when praying. Not only does he enjoy prayer, this activity also seems to be central to Abdur Rahman’s sense of self, a key part of his identity in the world – that he is a person who prays. In addition to being enjoyable and an obligation, therefore, prayer is also part of the foundation of who he is: “without it I’ll feel incomplete”. One can see echoes of the balance between obligation and enjoyment from the discussion of mehmani, earlier in this chapter, a complex notion of leisure which scholars are starting to explore (Stebbins, 2005).

Similar to Abdur Rahman, Samira also enjoys prayer, as she described in our interview together:
Yeah, of course [I enjoy prayer]. When I pray I talk to God, and I feel that somebody's hearing me, somebody who can, like, I can ask him for anything and he's there to help me. [...] When you are really sad, disappointed, homesick, you like to pray. Yeah, it feels really good. But when I don't do it, I feel bad. That's why I do it, to not feel bad. (Samira)

Samira speaks about prayer not only as something enjoyable, as Abdur Rahman did, but also as a support and comfort in difficult times. Samira’s interviews were rife with examples of the challenges she had experienced and overcome during her migration and settlement in Canada. Her early months in Canada were characterized by extreme loneliness, isolation from her family and immense challenges in finding information and support in Canada; in Chapter 4, some of the problems she faced as a young Afghan refugee arriving alone are discussed, while in Chapter 5, her reluctance to share her experiences with her family back home is outlined as way of protecting their feelings. Here, we see that Samira found a confidante in God, and that she was able to use prayer to comfort and support herself during her settlement. Similar to Abdur Rahman, she explains prayer both as something that feels good, but also as something that must be done in order to stave off feeling badly: while for Abdur Rahman, the consequences of not praying would be to feel incomplete, for Samira, it would be either sadness or perhaps guilt.

The informational aspects of Samira’s experience are rich and her conversations with God are echoed in recent information studies scholarship on the nature of information in religion and prayer in particular. Unlike Michels’s work (2012), however, which found that pastors seeking direction, information and guidance turned to prayer as part of their decision-making process, Samira prays both to have a conversational partner, someone who listens, and also to petition him for his support. This practice is more similar to Siracky’s (2013) study of prayer and informational practices of journaling, in which participants’ prayers were “intimate conversations” (p. 36) with God in which they shared their problems or worries. Siracky (2013) notes that this expands our notion of the information behaviour in prayer to include confiding and conversing instead of simply seeking information or guidance.

Though both Samira and Abdur Rahman note the enjoyable or leisurely aspects of prayer in their lives, this finding is mostly absent from the small body of research exploring religion or spirituality and leisure (Heintzman, 2000). Instead, the few studies that explore religion and leisure, in particular those on Muslims, situate religion and religious obligations as potential constraints on leisure (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). Martin and Mason (2004), in reflecting
on leisure and Islam, note that leisure may not be incompatible with prayer, and that both prayer and surrounding activities such as the socializing that can take place before and after group prayer, may indeed offer enjoyment and leisure. More empirical study on this topic would add greatly to our understanding of both the leisurely and informational aspects of prayer.

6.7 Poetry

Writing poetry was a favourite leisure pursuit for one participant in this study, Abdur Rahman. In our interview, he described the inspiration for his poems, which are often about Afghanistan:

...when I write about Afghanistan, it's usually something that's bothering me, something that's wrong, that's happening there. My poetry is not happy-happy all the time. So when I see some news or I - you know, all the corruptions that's happening in the country, it really bothers me a lot. [...] If people think that Afghanistan is in peace right now, they're wrong. Cause it is just a deception. [...] I am in touch with my cousins and relatives there, they're like "Leave us alone. We can do - we just want to do it ourselves." Because they've [US troops] been there for 12 years, but not much has happened. (Abdur Rahman)

What is intriguing about the excerpt above is the way in which Abdur Rahman’s information practices are an integral part of this leisure pursuit. Springing from his interest in international events, and especially from his links to and concern for Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman’s poetry is inspired by information he receives from a variety of sources. This information is not received passively in the form of news reports but is put into dialogue with other sources, such as trusted family members in Afghanistan; it is in this way that we see the critical lens Abdur Rahman applies to information on the reconstruction efforts and peace-making in particular, as he recognizes how locals’ accounts of their current circumstances differ from media portrayals. Though Abdur Rahman’s poetry is inspired by world events, it also appears to be an outlet for his thoughts and reactions to these events, a way to make sense of the world; as a result, his poetry could be considered both a product of, but also an extension of his information practices regarding current events in Afghanistan. His interest in world events is paralleled in a study by Caidi and Macdonald (2008), who also found that young immigrant Muslims in Toronto were keenly interested in world events, and that they both monitored news sources and maintained strong transnational ties to and sought information from family and friends abroad.
The multi-faceted information practices and emotional connection involved in Abdur Rahman’s poetry do not end with his information seeking, but also extend to his writing process as well:

...the ideas usually come at night, like 1 o’clock or 2 o’clock in the night, then I just write it down. Sometimes that feeling only stays there for two, three minutes. I think I have one poem, um, in here - in my notes, iPhone notes. In the morning when I get up, I read it again and I edit, fix it [on my laptop]. But the ideas come at night and it's just like, from nowhere, all of a sudden […] I'm distracted, I'm disturbed, and I just wanna write it down to get to let it release the feelings. [...] a lot of the times when I write poetry, when I'm writing the poems I'm crying when I'm writing the poems because it really hurts, right? (Abdur Rahman)

Two things are interesting to note about this excerpt: the first is Abdur Rahman’s use of technology in writing poetry. Waking up to a flash of inspiration, his iPhone is a convenient way to record these thoughts, while more thorough writing and fleshing out take place on his laptop the following day; different technologies suit the various stages of Abdur Rahman’s writing. The second noteworthy facet of this quote is the deeply emotional process writing involves for Abdur Rahman. It as though by ruminating and reflecting on events in Afghanistan – those gleaned from television news and conversations with family members back home – he needs to process his feelings through writing to achieve an emotional catharsis. Though leisure literature focuses most often on the elements of enjoyment and pleasure involved in leisure, for Abdur Rahman, sadness and pain are also part of his artistic journey. Thinking about Afghanistan may also hold a deeper psychological meaning for him, as he maintains his concern and care for the country of his birth.

Though he is a passionate poet, Abdur Rahman does not share his poetry with everyone, as he explains:

I share with my dad. My dad encouraged me a lot. [...] I wouldn't share it with youth who are not, like, passionate about Afghanistan - and I know my dad is. For people who are not, they're - you can see it from their behaviours and from the way they speak. So, it's very easy for me to distinguish as to who to show or who not to share it with. [I share it] electronically. E-mail, e-mail, not... I have some notes on Facebook, but those are the kind of poems that I'm kind of known for. [The people I want to share it with on Facebook], that's the people who I tag. (Abdur Rahman)

Two things are interesting about this excerpt: first, it illustrates Abdur Rahman’s specific criteria for information sharing regarding his poetry, while the second shows his preferred modes and methods for sharing. He carefully chooses among his friends by assessing whether or not the
themes of his poetry would resonate with them; if they care deeply about Afghanistan, he shares his writing with them. As for sharing his poems, Abdur Rahman has a nuanced relationship with privacy, becoming “known for” some poems among his friends (primarily through recent public performances at local events). For these more public poems, he was not as averse to sharing them with friends on Facebook, this despite his mistrust of the site, as discussed in Chapter 5 (“I don't share too much on Facebook anymore because they store everything and it becomes their property. I don't want them to claim my poems…”). What is implied is that for less well-known poems, Abdur Rahman is more reticent and prefers instead to use e-mail over social media, as a more private form of electronic communication.

Despite some caution and reluctance around sharing his poetry, Abdur Rahman had found a public forum for his writing, one with a small and targeted audience of other poets:

> We have a blog, we have good writers there, three, four writers. Those people are amazing and I always share my poems with them. Although they're living in different corners of the world, but we're so close because the poetry is what unites us, right? We don't even know each other, but we're always encouraging - if there's something in the poetry, in the structure, say “You know what if you try this” [...] it’s somewhere that I feel secure, somewhere that I get - my poetry gets nurtured. (Abdur Rahman)

By blogging his poetry along with a few other young poets around the world, Abdur Rahman has found a safe and supportive space in which his creativity and writing are encouraged. Through this site he exchanges feedback with other writers, and feels closeness despite their anonymity.

Abdur Rahman’s poetry, therefore, is not a simple leisure pursuit, but one that is rich with complex information practices, and multiple functions and meanings. Writing poetry is not only a form of creative expression and a way to release strong feelings about events in Afghanistan, but is also a demonstration of his pride in and connection to his cultural heritage, as he explains:

> I love poetry. And Afghan background, we have amazing poets, and poetry is something very common. Like, you know, when you're talking, especially when my dad and these guys, when they're talking they always bring poetry from different poets. [...] one of the lines [in my poem] was "Where all the fairy tales take place and love stories too", because Afghanistan is the place for love. So many love stories have happened there. And it's such a poetic place, a place of literature, a place - it has contributed a lot to literature and poetry. (Abdur Rahman)

For Abdur Rahman, poetry is not simply an act of creativity, or an enjoyable pastime, but also something that connects him to his family, his culture and the rich literary tradition of his
homeland. By becoming an Afghan poet, Abdur Rahman can share this identity beyond migration, an identity that can transcend the decades of war and conflict in Afghanistan, to speak about centuries of love and literature. Steeped in poetry by his family and friends, Abdur Rahman feels pride in what his country has given the world: Afghanistan is more than a battleground, but also a place of cultural riches. Poetry is much more than a tradition, however, as is clear from Abdur Rahman’s discussions with his father and other Afghan men in Toronto: this suggests that poetry may have a broader meaning within the Afghan community as a form of communication, a shared language, history and cultural point of reference. This love of poetry is common in Afghanistan, where poems are often memorized and recited as a form of entertainment (Emadi, 2005).

6.8 Sports and recreation

6.8.1 “I can’t live without soccer”

Sports and recreation were commonly mentioned leisure pursuits in this study. Youth’s passion for and commitment to sports was clear, as Abdur Rahman and Abdul both explain:

Sports, I love sports, I love cricket, I love soccer, I still play. I just came from the gym [laughs]. (Abdur Rahman)

…back home, every Saturday and Sunday I played soccer because I can’t live without soccer. (Abdul)

The frequent mention of sports as a favourite leisure pursuit indicates the important role it holds in the lives of youth. In addition to playing sports such as cricket and soccer, going to the gym to work out was also a leisurely pursuit for youth such as Khalid, Abdur Rahman and Abdul (some of whom arrived at our interviews coming directly from the gym, or received texts during our interviews from friends asking them to meet to play soccer). Another sport that youth mentioned in our interviews was *buzkashi* (see Figure 6-1), a traditional Afghan sport which Khalid described in the following way:

The most famous sport that is mostly played in northern Afghanistan is called *buzkashi*. They have a dead goat or a sheep and the idea is that you are on the horse and you grab that - the goat or the sheep is basically like a ball […] you take it from one point to another
point but at the same time these other people on horses they're trying to grab it from you. 
(Khalid)

Figure 6-1: Buzkashi player

Buzkashi was not only raised by youth in our interviews, but was also present in the form of a wall-sized tapestry depicting the sport hanging in an Afghan settlement agency I visited. Buzkashi, a word that translates literally as “goat grabbing”, is a traditional sport which originated in Mongolia and was used to train horses for combat (Emadi, 2005, p. 158).

What is interesting to note is that despite the popularity of soccer, cricket and buzkashi in Afghanistan – as well as another traditional pastime, kite-flying (Emadi, 2005) – only a few, namely soccer and cricket, were played by youth living in Canada. For Abdur Rahman, Abdul, and Yasir, soccer, in particular, was a lifeline, a passion that had been maintained across multiple
migrations in some cases. There are many possible reasons for this, including the inexpensive and accessible nature of soccer (Abdur Rahman: “anywhere we find free space, we just go and play”), and the sport’s popularity worldwide.

While sports and fitness were often mentioned as favourite activities by young men in this study, female participants were less engaged with sports. For Ghorashka, sport was something enjoyable, but unattainable due to her busy schedule and a lack of opportunities to take part: “No, I really like sports, it’s just that I don’t have time for it. And […] at our age, there’s not that many sports leagues that you can join.” Busy with her undergraduate studies, part-time work and volunteer activities, Ghorashka wished that she had more time to play sports. For other female participants in this study, however, there was a lack of interest, with Huma noting “I’m not into sports”, while Samira bluntly said “I hate going [to the gym].” As the next section explores, however, swimming was something both young women wished to learn.

6.8.2 Sport, leisure and Islam

For some youth participants, their participation in sport was linked to their religious beliefs and practices. Khalid explains his preference for sport as an alternative to other leisure pursuits which he notes are not permitted in Islam:

Since I became religious, I would go for like recreation to somewhere that doesn't have anything against my religion. Like, I wouldn't go to a bar, I wouldn't go to a nightclub. I, but I would love to go, for example, skiing, or skating, or watch a movie or things like that. (Khalid)

Samira and Huma also noted religion as a consideration when taking part in sport, explaining this context as the background to their desire to learn to swim in a women-only setting:

Yeah, [I would swim, if it were women-only], of course. Because I’m Muslim, right? So, otherwise no, it’s okay. But I’m Muslim. (Samira)

I heard they [YMCA] have like a pool for girls only, that’s why I wanted to go. (Huma)

It is noteworthy that religion can play an important role in youth’s decisions on which leisure activities and sports they will take part in. The importance of this factor varies based on a wide range of factors including youth’s individual personalities, their cultural background and their
interpretation of religious teachings. Interestingly, in interviews with other youth, Abdul noted that he found it relaxing to drink wine sometimes, while Ghorashka spoke enthusiastically about an Afghan student (mixed-gender) volleyball tournament that she had taken part in. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the wide-ranging practices of Muslim youth and their religious or cultural roots, however, it appears that for Samira and Huma at least, their thoughts on religion influenced their desire to learn to swim in a gender-segregated program and facility. This preference, though may vary between individual Muslims, it is consistent with the gender-segregation in sport common in Afghan society (Emadi, 2005), and also documented more generally in studies of Muslim sport and leisure (Martin & Mason, 2004). What is clear from this study is that Samira and Huma’s strong preference was for female-only programs, and their search for gender-segregated facilities for sport and recreation is a challenge shared by Muslim women in immigrant-receiving societies around the world (Taylor & Toohey, 2002; Zaman, 1997).

Khalid attributes his shift in leisure activities to his newfound religious identity. While this was a recent transition for Khalid, a study of Muslim immigrant leisure in the United States echoes his search for leisure activities compatible with his religious beliefs: participants in this study regularly considered religion in decisions on leisure, and sought out or adapted specific pursuits that were in line with their religious practices (Livengood & Stodolska, 2004). It is interesting to note that, similar to Khalid, participants in this study did not appear to perceive religious considerations as limiting or constraining to their leisure, and did not regret their non-participation in activities that would conflict with their beliefs (Livengood & Stodolska, 2004). To what extent the teachings of Islam actually prohibit specific leisure pursuits is a discussion beyond the scope of this study, however it is clear that individual participants’ perceptions of their religious duties and obligations can influence and shape their decisions about leisure.

### 6.8.3 Building new social networks through sport

For some youth, such as Abdul, sport was a way to connect with others following migration and build a new social network. As he explained in our interview:

I met a Turkish guy at the gym […] we speak in Turkish, you know, and he said “There’s a lot of Uzbek guys playing soccer here.” And he invited me to come. There’s some Uzbeks - I used to live there [in Uzbekistan] and we speak in the same language and I am Uzbek -
and they know some Uyghur guys - who’s from China, but they speak the same like me. Yeah, so I found these guys... Yes, my [Uzbek] friends, they helped me. [laughs] (Abdul)

For Abdul, who arrived in Canada without his family, sport offered an opportunity to bridge social barriers and isolation, and make connections in his new city. What is interesting about this excerpt is the cultural and ethnic diversity of Abdul’s new network: in his case, a shared cultural and linguistic background was more important than citizenship, as he connected not with other Afghans, but with Uzbeks, Turks and Uyghurs in Toronto. These new friends, found through sport, were instrumental for Abdul during his settlement period in the city.

6.9 Leisure and school

Youth participants often mentioned school in relation to leisure, both in opposition to enjoyment, but also as an enjoyable activity in and of itself. Some youth found it difficult to balance their leisure and free-time, and mentioned instances where they set aside enjoyable activities in order to be able to better concentrate on their studies:

We [Afghan student group] would organize events, or we'd go for dinners. Sometimes, last year especially, it got a bit too much, and then the time for study was reduced, so it gets very challenging at the end because then you’ve got to study a lot of material in the exam times [...]. So, yeah, so that was a problem. This year I'm trying not to do too much of that, uh, trying to have a balance, but it's pretty hard, pretty hard to focus and study. (Abdur Rahman)

I [stopped texting and] changed my numbers because I don't want - cause I couldn't study. Couldn't focus. [...] I just deactivated my Facebook too because I want to focus on my Grade 12 marks for now. (Huma)

Youth not only mentioned events and time spent on social media as enjoyable activities interfering with their studies, but also time spent visiting family abroad, as in Huma’s case:

Of course [I like visiting my family back home but] I don't wanna go when I have school and stuff. They're like "It's okay if you miss two weeks of school", but they're not the ones who are catching up with schoolwork, right? Cause I care about my grades [...]. I missed 45 days last semester and when I came back I had a lot of things to catch up with, right? [...] But like sometimes when I don't have anything to do, I would love to go. (Huma)

What these excerpts demonstrate is not only the oppositional nature of the relationship between leisure and school for some youth (“trying to have a balance”, or struggling to “focus” on
school), but also the priority youth in this study placed on education in their lives: when leisure came into conflict with their studies, they either gave up these forms of leisure or scaled back significantly. In Huma’s case, however, she made a qualification: she did not give up texting and social networking sites permanently, but simply “for now”, until she finishes high school and gains acceptance to university.

The importance of education in youth’s lives was raised again and again in our interviews. Abdur Rahman’s passion for education was linked to his aspirations for Afghanistan: “We all want - a lot of the Afghan youth at universities who are passionate about Afghanistan, their only dream is to have good education system in Afghanistan. I mean, what is a country without education? Like, you're a slave, you know? [...] Education is freedom.” Education was particularly vital for Huma and Samira, who cited opportunities for education as the main motivator behind their desire to leave Afghanistan, and the major occupation of their lives since migrating, as Samira stated: “All I think is about education, university, education, university [...] going back home, maybe I'll be a doctor and go there, work in a hospital.” Youth’s postponement of leisure to make room for their long-term goals is echoed in the findings of a study of transnational leisure among migrant workers (Stodolska & Santos, 2006). Stodolska and Santos’s (2006) research found that participants were willing to set aside their leisure today to prioritize goals such as saving money to build a house upon their return to Mexico, despite knowing that this might take years or even decades.

Youth in this study not only sought to balance their leisure and commitment to education, they also found enjoyment in school. Ghorashka enjoyed some of her assignments such as filming or reporting on local stories:

No, [covering stories is] actually fun for me. That’s why I like [school], that’s why I don’t mind being busy cause it’s things that I enjoy doing. (Ghorashka)

Similar to Ghorashka, Abdur Rahman also described school as leisurely, though he was more selective, noting that some school assignments were more enjoyable than others:

...studying not so much, but if I like something, for example if I get an assignment where I have to write like a poem or something, that's leisure for me, I'd do the assignment and I'd get a good mark in it too because I'm putting a lot of effort in it. So I consider those kinds of things leisure too, when compared, in comparison with maths or science. (Abdur Rahman)
The fact that youth found school – or some elements of it – to be enjoyable was a surprising finding, especially considering the operational definition of leisure chosen at the beginning of this study, i.e. pleasurable or beneficial activities that one freely chooses and undertakes in time away from work and other obligations. What is apparent is that for Ghorashka and Abdur Rahman, school assignments could align well with their existing leisure interests, and in these cases (using technology and reporting on events, for Ghorashka, and writing poetry, for Abdur Rahman), school work can be downright enjoyable. This point illustrates that for youth in this study, leisure is not in a dichotomous relationship with school or work, but instead is more fluid, relative, and dependent on the circumstances or context.

School was not only mentioned as fun because of the content of assignments or schoolwork, but also as a way of meeting friends and socializing. As Huma noted in our interview she was glad to start school shortly after arriving in Canada:

It was difficult for me at first days, right? [...] I had to go find my own lawyer and do like medical checkup, I didn't know anything about Toronto and stuff. I had to stay home, she was going to school, the other girl used to go to school. Staying home all the time was boring. And once I started school with her [Samira], it was like fun, actually. (Huma)

Huma was not the only participant to describe school as a haven from boredom. Yasir also found school enjoyable explaining that he’d be bored if he had a day off of school – like he is sometimes on the weekend; he truly enjoys school and is thankful that he has it each day. It is possible that for youth, in particular those more recently arrived in Canada, school offers opportunities to socialize and can be a vital activity for youth who are still in the process of building new social networks. This might be especially important for unaccompanied minors, who may be living entirely alone.

6.10 Dating: “in Islam we’re not allowed”

Youth in this study rarely mentioned dating as a leisure activity, but when they did, they did so while noting its taboo status in both Islam as well as in Afghan culture. Youth focused instead on engagement and marriage as future goals, as Abdur Rahman explains:
I don't [date] - no, uh... I don't know, that's kind of... because in Islam we're not allowed to have girlfriends and everything, so I can't have a girlfriend, but sometimes you do feel like [...] you wanna have somebody to share things with and everything. [...] But I wouldn't mind if I get engaged or something. (Abdur Rahman)

What is clear from Abdur Rahman’s comments is that though some parts of dating might be appealing to him, such as having close companionship, overall he is not comfortable with this practice because it is prohibited within Islam. Similarly, Khalid also noted his desire to become engaged as an alternative to dating:

It’s a little different with Afghan cultures, because in Islam, you can’t have anything before marriage, you can’t even touch the person, right? So it’s a little tough, different. That’s why I would like to get engaged with her first, so I’m going to see her mom tomorrow. That’s going to open up more doors for me so I can actually go into her family – but we’re talking on the phone right now. [...] in Afghan culture, they’re very narrow minded, if you’re talking on the phone and stuff, they don’t really like that. But to me, to understand a person is important. (Khalid)

It is interesting to note that though Khalid was observing what he noted was both a cultural and religious prohibition on dating, trying instead to secure an engagement, he was also violating traditional Afghan norms in the process. Khalid’s desire to get to know his prospective wife before becoming engaged, even breaking taboos by speaking to her on the phone, show that he was torn between Afghan traditions and modern practice. In Afghanistan, fathers are typically involved in meeting suitors for their daughters (Emadi, 2005), so it is unclear why Khalid was approaching his prospective mother-in-law instead: it is possible that the young woman’s father was deceased, or that Afghan traditions have been adapted in a Canadian setting.

It is unclear whether or not the other participants in this study also avoided dating, as this activity was not frequently mentioned by other youth. It is also uncertain to what extent Abdur Rahman and Khalid’s interpretation of Islam matches that of other participants, the broader norms of Afghan in Canada, or even other Canadian Muslim youth. What is apparent from the findings noted above, however, is that both Abdur Rahman and Khalid cited religion and culture as the reasons behind their avoidance of dating, and that both young men found this situation challenging. Both young men wanted companionship – or in Khalid’s case, also physical contact – and Abdur Rahman’s comments in particular show a certain type of loneliness he experienced. Having lived outside Afghanistan for almost a decade in Abdur Rahman’s case, and even longer
in Khalid’s, both young men were familiar with dating and were likely surrounded by classmates and co-workers who dated. Despite this, however, both were firm in their interpretation and maintenance of the cultural and religious norms to which they chose to adhere. Though this appears to be a somewhat challenging compromise for these young men, religious restrictions on leisure pursuits are not always seen as a constraint. A study on Muslim immigrants in the United States (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006) found that participants did not perceive this as a hardship, and were either glad to forgo activities and experiences that they saw as coming into conflict with their religious beliefs, or found ways to negotiate or modify their leisure to keep it appropriate to their beliefs.

6.11 Chapter conclusion

This third and final findings chapter offered an overview of the leisure pursuits of Afghan youth participants in this study. The picture of leisure that emerged was both rich and diverse, including a range of activities, partners and settings. What could be clearly seen from the findings presented in this chapter was that the nature of leisure was quite often subjective and deeply personal. While some youth enjoyed activities such as writing poetry, reading, participating in mehmani, or volunteering with the Afghan community, others did not find these pursuits leisurely. Despite these important differences between youth with respect to some activities, others pursuits were more commonly enjoyed and were popular among most participants, such as playing sports and spending time with friends. In fact, for many youth, sharing meals, drinking coffee or tea, watching movies or simply “hanging out” were made enjoyable in large part by engaging in these pursuits with others, including friends and family. Time spent with family, including younger and older siblings, parents, cousins and grandparents, was a key part of youth’s leisure, either as a current activity for those youth with family members in Canada, or one that was fondly remembered by youth who migrated alone. Leisure activities took on new meaning for youth separated from their family and friends, whether as a way to cope with homesickness and loneliness, or as an opportunity to seek out new social networks, for instance by finding new friends through sports teams.

Some of youth’s leisure pursuits reflected their links to Afghanistan and Afghan culture. For one participant, a passionate poet who counted the writing of poetry among his favourite leisure
pursuits, this pastime connected him to his family’s tradition of poetry and the proud history of Afghan poets. For this youth, the practice of writing poetry was also a transnational information practice, informed by international news reports and conversations with relatives abroad, and had become an outlet for his concerns and frustrations about war, corruption, displacement and poverty in Afghanistan.

Though buzkashi, a traditional sport in Afghanistan, was not present in the lives and leisure of youth in Canada, mehmani, a type of ritual visiting done between families, was practiced following migration. Mehmani, a deeply gendered practice, was an example of a leisure activity that had been continued not only after arriving in Canada, but also in intermediate countries of settlement, such as Pakistan. Mehmani provided opportunities for information sharing through storytelling, as youth listened to the experiences and memories of older relatives, who reminisced about their lives in Afghanistan. Though mehmani was practiced by some youth, it was only done by those with family in Canada: this finding makes clear that the maintenance of some customs – and the information and social capital shared in these settings – depends on the context of a broader cultural community following migration.

The most intriguing finding of this chapter was the complexity, nuance and tension youth found in their enjoyment. Youth noted prayer, mehmani and even schoolwork, which all involved elements of responsibility and obligation, as leisurely pursuits to some degree or another. The social aspect of school was especially enjoyable for some youth, who relished opportunities to see their friends, and would have found it burdensome to have had unlimited time at home. Youth found ways to reconcile their chosen leisure pursuits with their religious practices and beliefs, practices and beliefs which varied considerably between youth.

What is clear from this chapter is that leisure is not a single, unified concept for newcomer youth and that the activities participants enjoyed included a wide range of pleasures, constraints, and some contradictions as well. That youth found some activities both leisurely and obligatory, and were comfortable in reconciling this tension, is a finding worth exploring. In sum, leisure offers an intriguing way to explore the cultural practices of newcomers, their circumstances of migration, and their information practices during settlement, a finding that is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
The next chapter, Chapter 7, discusses this study’s unique findings, weaving together insights drawn from the three findings chapters and delving more deeply into their implications for current understandings of information practices and leisure in the lives of newcomers. The next chapter also presents this study’s original contributions, and puts them into dialogue with the concerns of the discipline of Information Studies, specifically human information behaviour (HIB) research.
7 Discussion

7.1 Chapter overview

This chapter builds on the findings presented in Chapters 4 – 6 by putting them into dialogue with the concerns of human information behaviour (HIB) research. The first section briefly reviews the study’s research questions and offers an overview of the findings, while the remaining sections discuss key concepts emerging from this research. These concepts represent this study’s original contributions and lay the groundwork for a preliminary conceptual framework linking information practices and leisure in the context of migration and settlement.

7.2 Summary of research questions and findings

This study addressed three main research questions:

1. What challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience?
2. What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?
3. What do the leisure activities of Afghan newcomer youth reveal about their settlement experiences and information practices?

Chapter 4, which addressed the first research question, introduced the participants and outlined the settlement experiences and challenges they had faced since coming to Canada. These challenges included:

- difficulties in meeting information needs;
- uncertainty caused by insecure legal status;
- adapting to cultural differences;
- language barriers and challenges associated with learning English;
• psychological barriers to settlement due to not having made the decision to migrate;

• family separation; and

• being an unaccompanied minor with adult responsibilities.

The descriptions of youth’s settlement experiences in Chapter 4 highlighted the challenging nature of settlement for many young newcomers. The findings from that chapter illustrated the importance of the broader context of migration and settlement, as factors such as youth’s migration paths, family status, immigration category, and the ethnic make-up of their neighbourhoods shaped youth’s experiences of settlement as well as their information needs during this process. By introducing the Afghan youth participants in this study and offering a glimpse of their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and challenges faced since coming to Canada, Chapter 4 set the stage for the following chapters by grounding them in the migration and settlement experiences of youth.

Chapter 5, which addressed the study’s second research question, documented the following information practices of Afghan newcomer youth:

• consulting family and friends in Canada during the early months of settlement;

• keeping information from family members back home;

• consulting settlement workers and using settlement programs;

• preferring – or avoiding – personal resources during settlement;

• using Facebook to keep in touch with family abroad;

• using Facebook to demonstrate cultural pride;

• avoiding Facebook because of privacy concerns or for cultural reasons;

• using YouTube for education or entertainment;

• watching movies online;
• using mobile phones to call relatives back home;

• texting;

• visiting public libraries;

• reading; and

• information-sharing on Islam.

Chapter 5 described intriguing information practices among youth in this study, such as their mistrust of some co-ethnic information sources during settlement, and their use of social media, such as Facebook, for the maintenance of transnational ties with Afghan family members abroad. Youth’s use of YouTube was similarly rich, involving information seeking and the learning of new skills on topics as diverse as technology, beauty, and health. Building on Chapter 4, the findings in Chapter 5 demonstrated the intersection of the factors influencing settlement and youth’s information practices, such as their reliance on family and friends, teachers and settlement workers, in particular in the early weeks and months after arrival. Longer-settled youth showed an evolution in their information practices, broadening their sources to include others beyond these initial networks, adding peers such as classmates and more online sources, including social networking sites, to their repertoire. The constraints that migration and settlement placed on some youth’s information seeking were reflected in the experiences of unaccompanied minor youth, who did not have family members with them in Canada to whom they could turn for information during the process of settlement. These youth also demonstrated a reluctance to share information with family members back home, in particular regarding challenges they had encountered during settlement. This phenomenon of secrecy, and its implications for our understanding of information practices of newcomers, is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 highlighted a desire among some youth to deepen their knowledge about Islam, and their reliance on a combination of books and carefully chosen websites to further this type of information seeking. Though practices such as leisure reading, research and library use were not popular among all participants, they were clearly important to certain youth, and were instances of the intersection of information practices and leisure pursuits.
This uniting of information practices and leisure extended beyond library use and reading, however, as media consumption, in particular the viewing of movies online, also represented a vital form of leisure for youth in this study, one that was also particularly information-rich. The findings in Chapter 5 therefore provided an introduction to the leisure pursuits of Afghan newcomer youth, which were discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6, this study’s third and final findings chapter, answered the third research question by outlining which activities youth in this study considered to be leisurely. These pursuits included the following:

- spending time with friends;
- spending time with family;
- taking part in mehmani, a form of ritual visiting;
- praying;
- writing poetry;
- playing sports; and
- going to school.

As the findings explored in Chapter 6 provided an overview of the leisure pursuits of Afghan youth participants in this study, the picture of leisure that emerged was both rich and diverse, and one that included a range of activities, partners and settings. What was clearly seen in the findings presented in this chapter was that the nature of leisure was quite often subjective and deeply personal. While some youth enjoyed activities such as writing poetry, reading, participating in mehmani, or volunteering with the Afghan community, others did not find these pursuits leisurely. Other pursuits, such as spending time with family or friends, were more widely enjoyed. Time spent with family, including younger and older siblings, parents, cousins and grandparents, was a key part of youth’s leisure, either as a current activity for those youth with family members in Canada, or one that was fondly remembered by youth who migrated alone. Leisure activities took on new meaning for youth separated from their family and friends,
whether as a way to cope with homesickness and loneliness, or as an opportunity to seek out new social networks, for instance by finding new friends through sports teams.

Some of youth’s leisure pursuits reflected their links to Afghanistan and Afghan culture. Mehmani, for instance, which was practiced by those youth with family in Canada, was one example. Another was the writing of poetry about themes and current events from Afghanistan, which was a favourite leisure pursuit of one participant. The informational components of these activities is interesting to note, as youth sought, shared and used information both for and within leisure settings: one instance in mehmani was information sharing involved in storytelling, as youth listened to the experiences and memories of older relatives, who reminisced about their lives in Afghanistan.

The most intriguing finding in Chapter 6 was the complexity, nuance and tension youth found in their enjoyment (this finding is discussed in greater detail below: see section 7.3.4 - Living with tension in leisure). Youth noted prayer, mehmani and even schoolwork, which all involved elements of responsibility and obligation, as leisurely pursuits to some degree or another. The social aspect of school was especially enjoyable for some youth, who relished opportunities to see their friends, and would have found it burdensome to have had unlimited time at home. Youth found ways to reconcile their chosen leisure pursuits with their religious practices and beliefs, practices and beliefs which varied considerably between youth.

What was clear from the findings presented in Chapter 6 was that leisure was not a single, unified concept for newcomer youth and that the activities participants enjoyed included a wide range of pleasures, with some constraints and even contradictions as well. As discussed in more detail below, youth found some activities both leisurely and obligatory, and were comfortable in reconciling this tension. In sum, leisure was found to be an intriguing way to explore the cultural practices of newcomers, their circumstances of migration, and their information practices during settlement, a finding that is discussed in more detail below.

The following sections of this chapter build on the findings summarized above by outlining a richer portrait of the ways in which settlement, leisure and information practices relate to and are shaped by one another. This broader discussion focuses on four key points, outlined below, and interweaves these points with links to existing literature and concerns in HIB research.
7.3 Preliminary conceptual groundwork: Understanding information practices and leisure across settlement

The findings of this study, summarized briefly above and discussed in detail in Chapters 4 – 6, form the basis for a new understanding of the information practices and leisure of newcomers during the process of settlement. These findings can be distilled into four key statements which represent the main contributions of this study and form a conceptual basis to guide future inquiry into the nature of HIB and leisure among newcomers. The four points, listed below, are each discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter:

1. Contextual factors of migration and settlement are important to understanding the information practices of newcomers. These factors are vital as migration and settlement greatly shape the leisure and information practices of newcomers. Circumstances of migration both enable and constrain specific leisure and information practices, and may make newcomers more – or less – willing or able to seek and share information for settlement purposes. HIB researchers should therefore consider moving from studying migration as a topic to treating it as a context of information behaviour.

2. Leisure activities can be a window to understanding HIB across migration and settlement, as well as the settlement process itself. Studies of newcomer leisure offer researchers revealing insights into the lived experiences, coping strategies and information practices of recent immigrants and refugees. Future work in this area could help to create a model of the settlement process.

3. Information sought and shared in leisure settings can influence immigrant settlement and adaptation, as newcomers encounter information and build new social networks through leisure pursuits. For this reason, information on leisure and recreation can be considered a settlement need.

4. Leisure in the lives of newcomers involves a complex relationship between enjoyment and obligation, one not represented in a simple dichotomy between these concepts as traditionally found in leisure studies research.

The following sections of this chapter delve into these four points and outline their links to existing research. The first section highlights the importance of context in understanding HIB and leisure across the transitions of migration and settlement.
7.3.1 Contextual factors shaping the HIB and leisure of newcomers

Migration is a rich and understudied context within HIB research. Though information practices are extremely relevant to our understanding of HIB across migration, they have traditionally been studied in static, stable contexts and populations. In contrast, the lives and experiences of immigrants and refugees are in flux before, during and after migration, and this instability can carry well into the settlement process. As a result, HIB research could broaden its theoretical and practical understandings of information practices among people across major life transitions, including the cultural and social upheaval caused by migration. Many questions emerge when thinking about HIB across these types of transitions, in particular when we consider the concept of information practice: for instance, what happens to the habits and routine practices of newcomers in their new environments?

Research in HIB has only begun to explore the informational strategies used by immigrants and refugees, and as a result this body of literature, reviewed in Chapter 2, is relatively small, exploratory and mostly descriptive in nature. Perhaps as a result of the recency of this research area, these studies represent individual attempts to map the terrain of newcomers’ information behaviour and are not bound to one another through a larger conceptual framework. Contextual factors, in particular those relevant to issues of migration and settlement, are largely absent from this research: many of the studies focus solely on the information needs of specific groups of newcomers and do not examine the larger context of migration and settlement in which these needs are situated. Making the shift to study migration as a context of HIB research – instead of as a topic – is paramount if we are to better understand immigrant and refugee information behaviour, and to be able to generalize from one situation to another. Researchers such as Olden (1999) offer glimpses of the larger environment in which participants’ information habits are formed: he discusses the context of Somali migration to the UK and describes some of the information environments familiar to these newcomers. These contextual understandings are helpful and more transferrable in their findings than larger, descriptive surveys such as the one by Mehra and Papajohn (2007) which document specific behaviours, such as e-mail and phone habits, unlinked to cultural background or any other contextual factors. If studies are to produce conceptual models that offer insight into HIB of immigrants, they need to include migration as a broader context for the behaviours they document. As HIB researchers take the nuanced circumstances of newcomers into greater view and consider the effects of cultural background,
family situation, time since migration, and migration category, patterns in the informational strategies of different groups of newcomers will emerge.

In addition, HIB research would be enriched by adding more detail on the individual circumstances of newcomers and the migration-related and other policies shaping their behaviours. Though this may make studies more exploratory and labour-intensive as researchers attempt to document areas such as newcomer leisure, employment or other relevant contexts in immigrant HIB, this is likely the only way to create frameworks that extend beyond descriptions of de-contextualized information practices and support conceptual links across work by multiple researchers. Though studies of specific institutions such as libraries or technology centres, as in work by Fisher and colleagues (Fisher, Durrance, et al., 2004; Fisher, Marcoux, et al., 2004) and Audunson, Essmat and Aabo (2011), produce findings relevant to those institutional frameworks, they do not include the individual users’ lived experiences as a context and completely exclude non-users of these programs and services. Studies unbound from these institutional links could offer unique insight on immigrant information behaviour not yet documented in existing research.

In moving from the study of immigrants and refugees as a topic to migration as a context of HIB, researchers would include more information about the circumstances that shape newcomers’ access to information. In this study, the experiences of unaccompanied minor participants are a unique example of this, as their migration status – as refugees and as young people without accompanying family members – shaped their information needs and access to resources in specific and interesting ways. Their tendency towards secrecy as a coping strategy, for instance, was grounded in their context of migration, as this finding was not seen in the experiences of youth who arrived with other family members. Similarly, a mistrust of co-ethnics emerged in some cases, a finding that is especially relevant for refugee groups (Audunson, et al., 2011; Rublee & Shaw, 1991).

While there are parallels to Chatman’s work, as secrecy and mistrust also characterized the vulnerable groups she studied, there are important distinctions that need to be made. Though the unaccompanied minors in this study were wary of seeking and sharing information in various circumstances, for instance in not revealing their immigration status to classmates at school or by keeping their settlement challenges secret from their parents, they differed from Chatman’s
participants in many key ways. Youth in this study were incredibly resilient and adaptable in their HIB, seeking and finding information from both expected and unexpected sources, including settlement workers, teachers, strangers on subway platforms and staff working at pharmacies. Though they were private, youth did not forgo information seeking on the basis of this privacy and instead found more anonymous ways of meeting their settlement information needs, such as by using the Internet, a resource that was not available to the retired women (Chatman, 1992) or female prisoners (Chatman, 1999) in Chatman’s studies. Another difference between the youth in this study and Chatman’s participants was the motivation for withholding information from those around them, specifically in the case of their families; it was done not out of fear or mistrust but out of a sense of kindness. Wishing to spare their parents’ feelings, youth were confident that the information and support they were giving up by withholding information were needs that they would – and could – meet elsewhere. This study’s findings reinforce Chatman’s work on the centrality of context in understanding the HIB of different individuals and groups: as youth participants, just like the women in Chatman’s studies, were influenced heavily by the family and social structures, policies and environments in which they lived. Unlike the themes of marginalization and fear in Chatman’s work, however, participants in this study appeared more connected and confident than the women in Chatman’s studies. Though youth in this study, especially the unaccompanied minor youth, faced significant barriers in their information seeking and sharing, these constraints did not seem to be characterized by the face-saving and normative behaviour seen in Chatman’s small worlds. This is perhaps due in large part to the fact that unaccompanied minor youth, in particular, were less linked to spatially-bounded, tightly knit social groups that shaped their information behaviour.

This is not to say that newcomers do not experience information poverty, or even that this concept may not be relevant to some – or perhaps many – Afghan newcomers living in Toronto. Conversations with youth participants and settlement workers in this study revealed many unmet information needs in the broader community; specific examples focused on youth who had not completed highschool and lacked information about employment opportunities, as well as parents of school-age children who lacked an understanding of the Ontario school system, the format and content of school report cards, or the expected norms of interacting with teachers and school officials. Future studies on issues of information access and unmet needs among Afghan newcomers would need to address these populations’ circumstances in more detail, in particular
taking into account the role of factors such as age, family status, English-language proficiency, employment status and education in shaping information practices.

Just as context shapes the information needs and information behaviour of newcomers, the context of migration also affects the types of leisure that newcomers can access. Migrating from one country to another involves barriers to leisure that newcomers encounter in the settlement process, such as stress and social isolation. Studies of newcomer leisure note that they tend to engage in pursuits that are lower-cost and more spontaneous, and that leisure time is often spent either alone, or with co-ethnics (Stodolska & Santos, 2006; Yu & Berryman, 1996), findings that are unsurprising if we consider the financial constraints and time stress facing newcomers. Newcomers who arrive with family members can take part in leisure pursuits with them, such as mehmani in the case of my study, while those arriving alone need to establish new networks of friends and leisure partners. Loneliness can be a feature of newcomers’ lives at this point, in particular those who have arrived alone, or who are unable to connect with others within their immigrant community. Co-ethnic leisure may not be an option for those newcomers who migrate to more ethnically homogenous locations, or avoid others immigrants from their homeland out of differences in political orientation, culture, religion, language, period of migration, education or social class (Rublee & Shaw, 1991). Those with insecure immigration status (Stodolska & Santos, 2006) face additional barriers to leisure, as they avoid spaces and places in which their status might be revealed.

By adding richness to the contextual understandings of migration and settlement, researchers can learn more about participants’ circumstances and the ways in which these influence their practices. An example from this study was the multiple migrations experienced by most youth participants, with the result that many became fluent in different languages such as Russian and Hindi. For those who spent extended periods of time abroad, their linguistic and cultural affiliations were shaped by these experiences: for one participant, his fluency in Russian made him connect with other Russian-speaking immigrants after migrating to Canada, borrowing books and cultivating bonds of friendship. Long periods spent living abroad were central to the lives of youth in this study and influenced their social networks, their linguistic preferences and media habits; these issues are discussed in more detail in the next section. What is clear from this first point and the discussion above, however, is that this study demonstrates the importance of contextual factors of migration and settlement in understanding the information practices,
leisure and lived experiences of newcomers. The next section moves to a discussion of leisure, in particular how leisure activities can bring into focus the HIB and settlement experiences of newcomers.

7.3.2 Leisure as a lens for understanding HIB and settlement

When participants in this study were asked about their leisure pursuits, their responses reflected their experiences of migration and settlement. Youth’s leisure had shifted substantially since migrating to Canada in important ways, for instance by leaving many members of their immediate or extended family behind. Existing research on newcomer leisure supports this finding, and highlights some of the ways in which the major life transitions following migration are seen in changes to newcomers’ leisure practices and social networks. Activities that newcomers used to enjoy before migration may be abandoned after arrival as they struggle with social isolation (Rublee & Shaw, 1991), or focus on practical goals such as learning English and therefore set aside activities such as leisure reading (Cuesta & Pearson, 1990). The resumption of specific leisure activities, therefore, may signal the achievement of other goals, such as the establishing of new social networks, or the emergence from a survival stage of settlement in which lack of time or high levels of stress sapped the resources normally used for leisure. Understanding when, how and why leisure activities change across migration, therefore, can offer important insights into the settlement and integration of newcomers. Dali’s (2010) work goes beyond this linking of leisure to settlement, and examines the ways in which leisure reading reflects and influences the psychological processes of acculturation experienced by newcomers. Dali (2010) found that while certain reading practices were retained across migration, others were not; her work highlights the centrality of leisure reading to immigrant adults and how these practices evolve across migration and settlement.

Linking an examination of leisure to newcomers’ experiences of settlement may be one useful way to understand the phases and stages of this transition. In this study, youth’s experiences of settlement were clearly reflected in their leisure. One original finding – one that could contribute to a future model of settlement – is the identification of the stage of “honeymoon leisure”. In this honeymoon phase in the weeks and months following arrival, newcomers embrace activities that they could not access before migration. Examples in this study included some youth’s
frequent texting, attendance at concerts and eating at restaurants in their first weeks and months after arriving. Though newcomers may initially and enthusiastically take part in these new activities, they ultimately abandon them as the day-to-day realities of life during settlement take hold. This finding echoes and extends the work of Hall and Huyskens (2002), who documented the leisure of two refugee women during their settlement in Australia; their participants spent their early weeks and months window-shopping and travelling by train, only to set these activities aside as they began to become more concerned with their finances and the responsibilities of their new lives, including school and work. By tracking these types of changes in leisure, phases relevant to our understanding of settlement may be identified. Determining phases of settlement would not only enrich academic work on migration, but would also support the policy makers and service providers attempting to meet the informational and other needs of newcomers.

The parallels between leisure and settlement are not simply evident in stages and transitions, but also in the barriers newcomers face, as barriers to leisure are simultaneously barriers to settlement. Leisure studies research highlights that newcomers experience barriers to leisure such as racism, lack of information about local opportunities and services (Vengris, 2006), uncertain legal status (Stodolska & Santos, 2006), and social isolation (Rublee & Shaw, 1991); each of these also creates significant barriers for settlement. Unmet information needs are a familiar settlement barrier for information studies researchers, and one that can have long-term implications that extend beyond settlement and affect social inclusion into the broader fabric of Canadian society (Caidi & Allard, 2005). An original contribution of this study, therefore, is that it demonstrates that the study of leisure can reveal much about newcomers’ information practices, including unmet information needs.

Another key finding of this study was the interesting and extensive overlap found between youth’s leisure pursuits and their information practices. What became apparent throughout the study was that some information practices – such as reading, watching movies or researching online – were simultaneously leisurely for youth, while many leisure pursuits – such as writing poetry or spending time on Facebook – had important informational components. A preliminary depiction of this overlap can be seen below in Figure 7-1:
Figure 7-1 Leisure and information activities of Afghan newcomer youth

Though the teasing out of distinctions between leisure and information practices is work that will extend far beyond this current study, Figure 7-1 illustrates youth’s activities as either leisurely, informational, or both. This preliminary diagram illustrates an important point that emerged from the findings of this study, namely that information practices and leisure are not separate phenomena, but instead overlap and are integrated with one another.

Though Figure 7-1 summarizes some of the study’s findings, it does not represent a model or illustrate predictive relationships between concepts or variables. This depiction instead raises important questions that emerge from this study, including: What makes an information practice leisurely? And what does it mean for a leisure activity to be characterized as informational or information-rich? While Hartel’s (2007) work on the informational nature of serious leisure activities provides one grounding with which to explore this question, this does not extend to less formalized or structured activities. Could activities that do not qualify as serious leisure, such as
watching television, be considered information-rich? And what (if anything) is informational or leisurely about the use of social media sites? These topics are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter as part of the avenues for future research. It is clear, however, that this study’s findings raise intriguing questions that would require additional empirical and conceptual work to answer.

In addition to raising these questions, Figure 7-1 also demonstrates that the boundaries between leisure activities and information practices are not only permeable, but also indistinct; though this nuance is not shown in the diagram, it can be found in the study’s findings. While some leisure activities described in this study were clearly informational in nature, such as reading, other activities, such as playing sports, also had informational qualities for some participants. For one participant in particular, sports teams were opportunities to seek out new social networks and settlement information following migration; this phenomenon, and the sharing of information relevant to settlement in leisure settings is discussed in more detail the next section. What is worth noting here, however, is that leisure pursuits may be more or less related to specific information practices, depending on the setting, and the participant’s experiences; more qualitative research would therefore be required to examine the subjective nature of leisure and its informational components for different individuals.

A second depiction of the findings that emerge from this study, seen below in Figure 7-2, highlights the relationship between youths’ leisure and information activities and their different cultural identities. While some activities that youth engaged in brought them closer to their country of origin, such as hearing older relatives’ stories about life in Afghanistan, others helped them to establish a sense of understanding about life in Canada, such as talking to Canadian-born co-workers. Youth also engaged in activities that supported identities and cultural affiliations beyond those linked to either Canada or Afghanistan: examples include participants’ preferences for Russian-language reading materials, or Iranian or Bollywood films. These activities linked youth to their experiences in intermediate countries of settlement: their identities, therefore, were connected not only to cultures and communities of Afghan or Canadian origin, but also to linguistic and cultural communities that were part of their own diverse migration histories. The following diagram, Figure 7-2, illustrates some of the ways in which youth’s leisure and information practices were connected to their diverse and changing identities:
Though this depiction is unable to capture the nuance and complexity of youth’s migration experiences, their relationship with diasporic communities or their transitioning identity in a new Canadian context, it does summarize two important conceptual points that emerge from this study: 1. migration and settlement influence the leisure and information practices of newcomers, and 2. youth’s leisurely and informational activities both enable and embody their multiple identities. Intriguing instances of these connections were discussed throughout the three findings chapters. One participant’s passion for poetry, for example, highlighted both his connection to Afghanistan – the subject of most of his poetry, and the source of a rich and proud literary history – as well as his adaptation of this practice for a new context: he wrote exclusively in English and had originally begun writing poetry to improve his English-language skills. In this
way, leisure and information practices of youth highlight the diverse cultural influences and identities at play.

Youth’s experiences of transnationalism and their ties to other places, communities and cultures are also present in the activities listed in Figure 7-2. Youth’s media consumption, described in detail in Chapter 5, revealed this study’s participants as a culturally hybrid group with media habits and transnational social networks shaped by their diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural affiliations, as well as their unique migration histories. Fluent in Dari, Pashto, Farsi, Russian, Urdu, Uzbek, Hindi and English, participants watched television and films online in multiple languages, often seeking out films from the countries in which they had lived before coming to Canada. For example, participants’ love of Indian or Iranian cinema came from deep bonds cultivated through long periods of exile in these countries due to war in Afghanistan. These cultural affiliations prompted youth to engage in transnational information practices, similar to Jeong’s (2004) Korean graduate students, such as seeking out articles and videos on these film cultures online while living half a world away. In this way, transnational information practices offered youth continuity and stability across the difficult transitions of migration, and link to their lives and leisure pursuits before migration. In addition the watching content online, Facebook and other forms of social media were also highly valued by youth. Facebook, in particular, was used by youth to maintain their broad transnational social networks and unite Afghan family members dispersed throughout the world. Similar to Komito’s (2011) participants in Ireland, youth in this study were frequent users of social media, keeping in touch and monitoring their relatives’ lives from afar. These practices help to foster “bonding capital” (Komito, 2011, p. 1084) by reinforcing ties within groups, something extremely relevant for immigrants and refugees living abroad and seeking support and connections from other members of their ethnic community.

The media and social media practices of youth are not the only interesting features included in Figure 7-2, but also their maintenance of ties to Afghan traditions such as mehmani. This activity, a traditional form of visiting and socializing in Afghanistan, was continued across migration and practiced in Canada by some participants (notably, only by those who did not migrate alone). The opportunity for mehmani to foster bonding social capital among Afghan youth in Toronto is clear, as this practice enables the sharing of stories and heritage language skills across generations. As noted above, however, the ability to tap into one’s ethno-cultural
community may be limited by a newcomer’s circumstances of migration. These limiting circumstances may include family status, as discussed above in relation to unaccompanied minor youth – none of whom took part in mehmani in Toronto – or social, political or cultural rifts within immigrant or refugee groups in the receiving society (Rublee & Shaw, 1991). It is therefore important to note that while Figure 7-2 highlights the maintenance of ties to Afghan culture and traditions, the circumstances of specific youth, including their family status, could greatly influence and constrain their ability to engage in these activities.

What the above section makes clear is that the exploration of newcomers’ enjoyable, free-time activities can provide researchers with insight into their lived experiences, information practices and complex cultural identities. By examining leisure, scholars can discover with whom newcomers prefer to spend their time with, what groups they join, what types of media they consume, and which transnational and local information practices they use following migration. The leisure pursuits of newcomer youth in this study not only reflected their settlement challenges, their migration path and their cultural preferences, but also included a wide range of informational activities that related to their daily lives and were also central to their identities and family networks. In addition, the conceptual links between identity, leisure and information outlined in Figure 7-2 can be extended beyond the context of migration and settlement to explore the experiences of non-migrant populations, for example the children and grandchildren of immigrants. The use of leisure pursuits and information practices to bond with a heritage culture can be seen in activities such as researching one’s family tree, or travelling to or learning the language of a parent or grandparent’s country of origin; more research on the nature of these activities, therefore, would broaden our current understanding of leisure and information in shaping various facets of individual and group identities.

In outlining the relevance of leisure for immigrants, specifically, the sections above have outlined the ways in which researchers from information studies, immigration and leisure studies can use leisure to learn more about newcomers’ HIB and their trajectory of adaptation during the settlement process. The following section examines a related finding: that information encountered in leisure settings can affect newcomers’ settlement.
7.3.3 Information encountered in leisure can influence settlement process

In addition to offering a window into HIB and settlement, as noted above, leisure can also affect the processes of settlement and adaptation. One way in which this takes place is through the seeking, sharing and use of information in leisure settings. As newcomers explore leisure pursuits following migration, they also encounter information that is relevant to their settlement, and adopt informational habits that affect their longer term adaptation.

Information-rich leisure activities, such as leisure-time media consumption, can support newcomers during settlement: in this study, one example included a youth participant who used film to cope with homesickness. By embracing familiar cultural content, whether in the form of books, films or online media, newcomers can ease their emotional transition and alleviate some of the stressful effects of migration, findings echoed in Audunson et al. (2011) and Dali (2010; 2013). In addition, leisure-time media use can also influence the trajectory of settlement by informing newcomers about the host society, or offering them a link to their pasts. These findings were also seen in Allison and Geiger’s (1993) study of Chinese immigrant seniors, in which participants encountered information during leisure that enhanced their understanding of their new cultural environments, and helped them to maintain ties to their country of origin. By watching American television and reading local newspapers, the seniors worked to improve their English-language skills and learn more about the customs and history of the United States, while their Chinese-language media consumption kept them in touch with the happenings and culture of their country of origin (Allison & Geiger, 1993). Similarly, Dali’s study of Russian immigrants in Toronto found that this group’s leisure reading practices affected their adaptation following migration; leisure reading in Russian helped them to maintain a sense of identity and allowed participants to better cope with the stresses of living in a new culture (Dali, 2010; Dali, 2013). Media use and reading can go beyond cultural maintenance and integration, therefore, and offer psychological links to a past identity, memories of family and friends left behind, and enjoyable experiences before migration.

Leisure settings not only offer newcomers the chance to enjoy themselves and ease some of the difficulties of migration, but also provide them with the opportunity to build new social networks or strengthen existing ties. As discussed above in relation to transnational social networks, the concept of social capital is also relevant here, as it is an integral part of information seeking,
sharing and use in leisure. Social capital is a resource embedded in one’s social network, one that can offer benefits and advantages to individuals (Lin, 2001), as is comprised of bonding social capital, discussed above, which promotes intergroup ties, and bridging social capital, in which group members establish connections with those outside their social group (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). Both bridging and bonding social capital are relevant to the study of immigrant information practices and leisure. Newcomers may use leisure to find new weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), a process that can be particularly important for newcomers, not only for those who have arrived alone and need to establish local friendships and acquaintances, but also for those who have come with family or other strong ties and need to diversify their networks. Leisure activities may offer newcomers opportunities to broaden their networks beyond co-ethnic ties, with resulting improvements in their access to information on a variety of topics, which can even lead to higher incomes (Stodolska, et al., 2007). While leisure activities with other ethnic groups and other members of the host society offer opportunities for the development of bridging social capital and for newcomers, in particular, to establish new networks, encounter information and learn more about the receiving society, leisure within one’s immigrant community can be used to foster bonding social capital. Leisure activities within one’s newcomer or ethnocultural community may provide opportunities to strengthen ties within a group and enable, for instance, the transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions to the second generation. An example from this study, as noted above, includes the practice of mehmani, in which youth spent time with family members and other Afghan families, and heard stories from older relatives’ lives before leaving Afghanistan.

Though information behaviour researchers have begun to explore the role of social capital as information seeking, sharing and use (Johnson, 2007), as well as in institutions such as public libraries (Johnson, 2010, 2012), this concept has yet to be examined in relation to information in leisure settings. There are many ways in which this discussion is integral to the concerns of HIB research, however. The concept of information grounds, for example, is one with specific relevance to information seeking and sharing in leisure. Though Fisher and her colleagues do not identify leisure as a factor shaping the creation or maintenance of different information grounds, their work on college students (Fisher & Naumer, 2006) notes that enjoyable pursuits formed around shared interests are the basis for some information grounds. Shared leisure pursuits, therefore, such as games, get-togethers and celebrations might offer opportunities to
build new social networks or encounter new information, therefore fostering information seeking, sharing and use. More research is needed to better define the extent to which leisure is involved in information grounds and can affect the availability and flow of information between individuals. Other related research gaps exist with respect to the multicultural nature of information grounds. Questions that remain to be explored include to what extent information grounds can exist among very diverse members, or whether a specific level of ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious homogeneity is required to facilitate trust, cohesion and information seeking and sharing.

Though information may be available to newcomers in leisure settings, informational barriers may prevent them from taking part in the first place: this is especially relevant in the case of public recreation programming. Though migration researchers have documented recreation as a settlement need (Lim, Lo, Siemiatycki, & Doucet, 2005), and though recreation activities are provided by governments to improve the health and well-being of the public, studies show that newcomers underutilize these programs (Taylor & Toohey, 2002; Vengris, 2006). This underutilization is an information problem to some extent, as newcomers not only lack information about the existence and location of public recreation opportunities, but also to information on childcare, transportation and subsidized membership fees, secondary factors that affect participation (Vengris, 2006). Newcomers’ lack of participation can lead to a perceived lack of interest, which, in turn, can result in the cancellation of programs, despite expressed demand for these same programs among recent immigrants (Taylor & Toohey, 2002). One aspect of the informational problem here is communication of culturally relevant information on programs and services: this information should be delivered in accessible ways through channels that newcomers consult and trust. The finding further reinforces Caidi and Allard’s (2005) discussion of information as key to newcomers’ settlement and inclusion in Canada.

The issues, questions and research gaps noted above not only reflect academic concerns regarding information seeking and sharing in leisure, but also have important public policy implications, as information is vital to settlement and many government agencies and other institutions are attempting to meet the informational needs of newcomers. If leisure and recreation can support settlement, help newcomers maintain their physical and mental health, and provide opportunities for them to build new social networks, these opportunities should be fostered: in turn, information on leisure could be considered a settlement need.
The following section turns from a discussion of information in leisure to explore the nuance and complexity of youth’s leisure, including the tension they are able to reconcile between enjoyment and obligation.

### 7.3.4 Living with tension in leisure

The operational definition of leisure used in this study, one which considered these activities as enjoyable and freely chosen in time away from school or work, did not match the complex depiction of leisure in participants’ lives. Instead, they described a more nuanced relationship with leisure, including not only activities they pursued just for enjoyment, but also those which could be partially leisurely, or even leisurely on some occasions but not on others. These findings support a social-psychological consideration of leisure which takes into account not only the activity and time spent, but also one’s attitude towards that activity (Beaton & Funk, 2008).

It is not only the individual, attitudinal aspects of leisure that were demonstrated in this study, but a deeper, more complex tension with leisure that participants were able to reconcile. Youth in this study spoke of activities such as prayer, schoolwork, volunteering or taking part in mehmani – an Afghan tradition of visiting other families – as leisurely in some ways, yet obligatory or associated with responsibility in others. This finding is consistent with the small body of existing research on immigrant leisure, which calls into question the concept of leisure as time free from all responsibility. In their study of South Asian immigrant women in Canada, Tirone and Shaw (1997) found that time spent with their children was integral to the very nature of leisure for participants. Unlike their Canadian friends and coworkers, these women did not seek out leisure time away from their families, and did not perceive leisure as only being possible in the absence of family responsibilities. In fact, participants were uncomfortable when invited to events by Canadian friends and coworkers when it was specified that these events were for adults only, as they wished to include their families. In a follow-up study, Tirone and Pedlar (2005) interviewed South Asian-Canadian youth to explore their conception of leisure, and found that they had a similarly nuanced definition. Unlike existing studies of youth leisure, in which freedom to choose an activity was perceived as central to the experience of leisure, youth in Tirone and Pedlar’s (2005) study often found leisurely experiences within a framework set by
Leisure studies research has not yet untangled the ways in which enjoyment and obligation can be bound up together in leisure pursuits. Leisure scholars have begun to consider, however, the ways in which obligation can be coexist with leisure: in particular, work by Stebbins (2000, 2005) has started to explore this relationship. Stebbins (2000) notes that relationship between obligation and leisure is as yet unclear, and can ultimately only be determined in an individual’s attitude toward an activity. He proposes that not all obligations are unpleasant by nature, and that “agreeable obligations” (Stebbins, 2005, p. 351), can indeed be compatible with leisurely pursuits. More research is needed, not only on the ways in which individuals can reconcile commitment and enjoyment, but also on the ways in which migration and cultural background can shape perceptions of obligation and commitment in leisure among newcomers. The ability to strike a balance between commitment and enjoyment may be universal or perhaps it is enhanced by the act of migration, in which an individual’s social networks, time-use and priorities shift in response to their new environments. What is clear from this study, however, is that elements of responsibility and obligation to others can coexist within leisure for newcomer youth and do not necessarily detract from the experience. Just as for youth in this study, Tirone and Shaw’s (1997) participants live with the tension of obligation and requirement in their leisure pursuits, and strike a balance between these aspects on the one hand and enjoyment on the other. More studies of the conception of leisure – including understandings of choice, responsibility and obligation – among different cultural groups would add considerably to the understanding of leisure both within and beyond the field of leisure studies.

7.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter discussed the relationship between leisure, information practices and settlement discovered in this study. It put the findings of this study into dialogue with the concerns and existing information behaviour, leisure studies and immigration research, and outlined four key points.
The first point noted that contextual factors of migration and settlement are important to understanding the information practices of newcomers. This study found that the settlement experiences of Afghan youth, including those of unaccompanied minor youth, were instrumental to understanding their leisure and information practices. Separated from their parents and other family members, unaccompanied youth had to rely on other information resources during their first weeks and months of settlement. The circumstances of migration therefore enabled and constrained specific leisure and information practices. Youth’s circumstances also influenced youth’s willingness to seek, share and use information: examples include participants’ use of secrecy, for instance by keeping information from their family members back home. Some youth were also mistrustful of co-ethnics, a finding that is common in other studies of the information practices of refugee groups, and Afghans in particular.

The second point highlighted the ways in which leisure activities can be a window to understanding HIB across migration and settlement, as well as the settlement process itself. The existence of “honeymoon leisure”, activities that youth embraced after arriving but later abandoned, indicates the potential for leisure to illustrate periods and stages along the process of settlement, and may lead to more studies that could use this as the groundwork for a model of the process. Youth’s leisure activities provided insight into their information practices and settlement experiences: an example included the watching of films online to cope with challenges such as homesickness and family separation. In this instance, as in many others, there was substantial overlap between leisure and information practices.

The third point noted that information sought and shared in leisure settings could influence immigrant settlement and adaptation. Leisure pursuits offered youth opportunities to build social capital: an example included participation in sports as a way to meet new people and rebuild social networks following migration. Information became available through these settings and networks; as a result of this important potential support for newcomers, information on leisure and recreation therefore could be considered a settlement need.

The fourth and final point highlighted the complexity of leisure in the lives of newcomer youth. Participants’ leisure did not represent a simple dichotomy between enjoyment and obligation, but instead seamlessly blended the two without apparent contradictions. Examples of “leisurely
obligations” included mehman and prayer, as youth both enjoyed, yet simultaneously felt constrained or obligated by these activities.

These four points lay the groundwork for the development of a future model of leisure and information practices in the context of migration. The statements each illustrate relational links between the three sensitizing concepts of this study: leisure, information practices and newcomer settlement. The following chapter notes the future research that would be necessary to extend these preliminary conceptual statements to create a full framework. In addition to noting the avenues for future research, the next chapter also outlines this study’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as its implications for policy-makers, practitioners, and HIB researchers.
8 Conclusion

8.1 Chapter overview

This final chapter builds on the discussion in the previous chapter by outlining the implications of this study for research in HIB, as well as for information professionals and policy makers. This chapter also highlights the strengths and weaknesses of this research, and offers insight into avenues for future research that would enhance academic understandings of the roles of information and leisure across major life transitions such as migration and settlement.

8.2 Summary of research objectives, research questions and preliminary conceptual framework

This first section of this chapter offers a brief summary of the objectives and questions that guided this research, and the resulting conceptual relationships discovered between information practices and leisure in the context of settlement.

The three objectives of this research were:

- to address gaps in existing research, by exploring a novel research area, specifically the information behaviour and leisure of an understudied population;
- to develop a preliminary conceptual framework to inform research at the intersection of information, leisure and settlement; and
- to gather knowledge to support program design and policy creation for an underserved and potentially vulnerable group.

To achieve these objectives, this project answered three research questions:

1. What challenges and unmet settlement needs do Afghan youth in Toronto experience?
2. What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?
3. What do the leisure activities of Afghan newcomer youth reveal about their settlement experiences and information practices?
The detailed findings in relation to each research question were outlined in Chapters 4 to 6, and summarized again in Chapter 7. The findings revealed the interrelated nature of leisure and information practices in the context of settlement, conceptual linkages that can be summarized in the following points:

- the study of information practices and leisure across settlement provides insight into the transition newcomers experience across settlement
- leisure activities can affect the process of settlement; conversely, settlement experiences also affect newcomer leisure
- information is shared within leisure settings, and this, in turn, can influence the settlement of newcomers
- settlement is a rich context in which to situate the study of information practices and leisure of newcomers

The above points are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. The next section discusses the implications of this research for policy-makers and practitioners in the fields of information, education and settlement service provision.

8.3 Implications for policy and practice

This study has many implications for policy-makers and practitioners, but the most important implication is the vital and as yet mostly unexplored potential of leisure in the lives of newcomers. As leisure and recreation can have positive effects by supporting physical health, mental health, reducing isolation and offering newcomers opportunities to rebuild their social networks and access useful information during settlement, those working in the fields of newcomer settlement and information provision would be well-served by considering the role of leisure activities in achieving their mandates. Newcomers experiencing the transitions of migration and settlement could be supported by opportunities for recreation and leisure; these opportunities, in turn, could be promoted by governments and other service providers through appropriate policies and programs targeting newcomers. Leisure and recreation can – and perhaps should – be considered settlement needs; information on leisure, therefore, forms an important part of the informational needs of newcomers following migration.
This study demonstrated the vast potential of leisure settings in fostering information access for newcomers on a variety of topics. Coming together for the purposes of leisure, newcomers may encounter information that supports them in other realms of their lives: this is especially important to consider with respect to youth, who may choose activities based solely on pleasure and may therefore not seek out other useful settings in which settlement information may be available. For those creating programs and services therefore, in particular information professionals and others trying to meet the informational needs of newcomers, leisure and recreation should be important considerations, and may provide opportunities for the seeking and sharing of information that may not otherwise take place.

Other key implications of this study relate to the importance of understanding the circumstances and backgrounds of specific groups of newcomers. The contexts of migration and settlement are vital to understand if programs and services are to be tailored to meet the needs of newcomers. Two examples from this study highlight this point: 1. some youth migrated without their parents or other accompanying family members, and 2. despite having a single country of origin – Afghanistan – youth had a broad range of experiences in terms of language, literacy and cultural affiliation.

The first instance, the fact that youth sometimes migrate without parents or guardians, means that policies, programs and services that target youth solely in the context of their families may exclude some potential users. The lack of reliable statistics on this phenomenon means that governments and other agencies may be unaware of the prevalence of minor youth living without guardians. If settlement agencies, schools or other organizations assume that all minor youth are cared for by adults, and supported with important tasks such as school registration, or finding information on healthcare, youth who are here alone may be overlooked and their needs left unmet. This is complicated by the fact – illustrated in this study’s findings – that unaccompanied minor youth may resist revealing their status with others, and may instead actively hide it.

The second example highlights the linguistic and cultural diversity that can be contained in a single newcomer community. This diversity stems in part from the varied migration paths youth – and in particular refugee youth – took in their migration to Canada. Living in intermediate countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Indian and Uzbekistan for long periods meant that youth were not always literate in their mother tongue, and sometimes were most comfortable reading and
writing in languages such as Urdu, Russian, English or Hindi. This means that statistics on youth’s country of origin, in this case Afghanistan, do not reflect the broad range of experiences that may make youth more comfortable with specific cultures or languages - and not necessarily those of Afghanistan. For program delivery, therefore, service providers must understand the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of youth in order to tailor programs in useful ways.

8.4 Strengths and weaknesses of this research

It is important to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of this research. A key strength of this study is that it adds novel findings on the role of context in the information seeking, sharing and use of participants, in particular the ways in which the experiences of migration shape and influence these practices. By examining information practices among migrant youth, this study extends HIB research beyond its usual focus on habits and practices formed in stable and static settings. Instead, this study shows a culturally diverse group of young newcomers – with varied migration histories and family circumstances – adapting to their new lives in Canada. This study’s focus on understudied populations, including newcomer youth and refugees in particular, is a major strength as it adds new voices and experiences to the field of HIB. In addition, this study introduces the lens of leisure as a revealing way to understand settlement and information practices, an approach that could be applied to studies of other groups in transition. This study’s findings also have relevance for researchers in leisure studies; by offering a description of the leisure of Afghan newcomer youth, this study explored leisure across the transition of migration, a topic of increasing importance within the field of leisure studies. The contribution of this research to immigration studies is its presentation of immigrant and refugee leisure as a novel approach with which to better understand the transitions and experiences of newcomers during settlement. By exploring youth’s leisure pursuits, researchers can gain insight into the social networks and cultural lives of newcomers.

The weaknesses of this research are grounded in the difficulties inherent in conducting research with newcomer populations. Limitations in access for participant observation kept the scope of this study within the public realm, and therefore could not include a study of leisure and information use in the private sphere such as homes or family life. In addition, the use of interviews with youth at a single stage of the settlement process mean that the interview data
collected from youth represent a snapshot of the lives of participants, and do not track the changes in their lives across the months and years following the end of the study. This is a limitation, in particular with respect to more recently-arrived youth as they, unlike the longer-settled participants, could not discuss their broader trajectory of settlement and the various adaptations they had experienced since arrival.

Another limitation of this study is the specificity of its context, as the findings are grounded in one specific geographic site, Toronto. The nature of Toronto as a large and ethnically diverse Canadian city, a hub of both immigrants and refugees, heavily influenced the experiences of participants. Researchers interested in understanding the phenomena of leisure and information practices of newcomers in smaller or rural centres, therefore, may find these contexts lead to different experiences for newcomers. The policies and programs that youth encountered in this study, for example multilingual settlement resources, would likely not be present in all Canadian municipalities. It is therefore important to note the influence of location in shaping the findings of this study.

8.5 Avenues for future research

Avenues for future research on information practices in the contexts of migration and leisure are rich and varied. This section outlines some of the areas of future study raised by the findings and discussion chapters of this study. These topics include identity, resilience and religion in the lives of newcomer youth, as well as unexplored aspects of information practices and leisure.

8.5.1 Identity

The information practices of newcomers in the context of leisure have intriguing implications for future research on the topic of identity. The findings of this study showed that youth engaged in both leisure and information practices as part of a search for meaning and identity following migration: researching Islam was one instance of the way in which youth tried to better understand their place in the world and current events. Other activities, such as writing poetry, were links to a cultural heritage, a sense of Afghan tradition, and a shared identity with other
poets, both past and present. The most intriguing instances of leisure and information practices as expressions of identity, however, were likely the media consumption habits of youth: despite multiple migrations, some participants continued to maintain their habits and preference for the film and literature of the societies in which they had lived. These leisurely pursuits, deeply informational in nature, were also emotional connections to people and places in their past: these connections were used by youth to maintain a sense of self and cope with homesickness. While the leisure practices of youth were linked to their Afghan identities and family traditions through practices such as mehmani, for others the affiliations were those that had influenced and shaped their own hybrid cultural identities, for instance to the literature and cinema of countries such as Iran, India and Russia. For some youth, this identification with cultures in which they had lived carried on after arriving in Canada and prompted youth to seek out connections to other cultural groups: one example was the friendships and book-borrowing habits of one participant with members of Toronto’s Russian community. Interestingly, though all youth participants in this study were Afghan by citizenship, it was through a discussion of their leisure and information practices that their diversity – both culturally and linguistically – became evident: it became clear that their leisure and information practices reflected their complex transnational ties and migration histories. Future studies could build on this finding by tracking shifts in practices and identity over time. Longitudinal research on the reading practices, media consumption and language preferences of newcomers, for instance, could help to create benchmarks of change over time; stages and transitions of settlement may become evident as commonly shared by newcomers. In this way, a model of settlement could be created, a contribution that would be central to the future of immigration studies research.

Questions and considerations to be addressed in future research on identity, information practices and leisure would therefore include: Do newcomers identify with the leisure activities of their cultures of origin and seek out ways to maintain them after migration, or do they prefer to adopt the culture and leisure of their new homelands? Alternately, do newcomers find hybrid identities that are expressed through their leisure preferences? Looking at the broader society, to what extent do the social conditions and policies of immigrant-receiving societies enable or constrain these choices? This question, in particular, can be linked to the provision of public recreation services in multicultural settings, discussed in Chapter 7: this area of study is relevant as the
negotiation of public space and the accommodation of difference in identity and cultural practices can be instances of inclusion or exclusion for newcomers.

A final important question on the information practices of newcomer youth relates to their use of social media, specifically: What does youth’s social media use reveal about their identities? As the findings from this study demonstrated, youth took particular care to style their online personas, crafted messages and images that would be deemed acceptable to family members back home, or asserted membership in cultural groups here in Canada: examples included self-censorship in the posting of photos, and the deliberate writing of posts in Afghan languages. Scholars studying youth and their use of online media have highlighted the ways in which identity can be enacted in these settings: Shade (2008), for instance, found that young women in her studies used social media to “reinforce or test new identities and perform” (p. 71), while Livingstone’s (2008) work on teens in the UK also found that social networking sites were key to their construction and expression of identity. Hogan (2010) builds on the work of Goffman (1959), whose understandings of identity performance were grounded in synchronous, face-to-face interactions; Hogan extends this to account for the curation of performance that takes place in the asynchronous environments of social networking sites like Facebook. In this way, Hogan (2010) modifies Goffman’s conception of a stage play into one of a curated exhibition, a notion that is perhaps more suited to online environments and the level of active control employed by users in designing and displaying their images. Future research could explore the performances of identity that are enacted by newcomer youth in their use of social media. Studies could also determine to what extent these practices are influenced by the processes of migration and settlement, or whether newcomer youth’s habits of online performance and curation are similar to those of other, non-migrant youth.

The above section explored avenues for future research related to the renegotiation of cultural identities that takes place across migration and settlement, both through and as a result of information practices and leisure pursuits. In this study, the cultural shifts – and cultural maintenance – youth experienced were reflected in their informational habits; a deeper exploration that focuses on one or more such practices, such as reading about Islam, or the use of social networking sites, could offer additional insight into the meaning of these activities to identity formation. The following section draws on another aspect of the lives of newcomers following migration: the concept of resilience.
8.5.2 Resilience

This study’s findings, in particular those on youth’s coping strategies following migration, highlight the important role of resilience in the lives of newcomers. Instead of feeling helpless and living in information poverty, youth in this study were incredibly resilient and adaptable in their HIB, seeking and finding information from both expected and unexpected sources, including family members, settlement workers, teachers, strangers and staff working in local stores and agencies. Though this study’s participants cannot be seen as representative of the broader community of Afghan newcomers in Toronto, as noted in Chapter 7, it is still interesting to note the ways in which their coping strategies helped them deal with the challenges they faced: youth were able to navigate informational barriers, find sources and secure the support they needed to make refugee claims, continue their education or manage their affairs without the presence of adults or other guardians. These findings, therefore, raise the following questions: what makes someone resilient in the face of adversity? And is there a way in which information practices or leisure could bolster coping and make individuals more resilient to challenges, change and other stressors in their lives? Can specific leisure pursuits help those experiencing sadness, stress and other forms of adversity? Findings from this current study point towards the important roles that social support, information access and leisure can play in helping newcomers adapt and cope with the challenges of migration and settlement. Examples from this study include the ways in which youth participants found comfort – and useful information – in their social networks, and also used their informational and leisure pursuits to ease homesickness and make sense of their experiences of displacement and migration.

Resilience is not only a topic relevant for psychologists and other researchers, but also for public policy-makers who strive to understand and meet the needs of individuals and groups such as resettled refugees. Recent policy-relevant research by scholars in Canadian settings (Simich, Roche, & Ayton, 2012) highlights the complexity of factors involved in resilience for forced migrants living in Toronto. In their study, Simich and colleagues (2012) emphasize the influence of a mixture of cultural, individual and societal factors in shaping the mental and physical health outcomes of newcomers. In particular, this approach highlights the social determinants of health, and the important role that social support can have on the resilience and health of individuals and
groups. A lens that considers the social determinants of health could be useful in framing future research on the information practices and leisure of newcomers, in particular to examine the quality of life and social networks of immigrants and refugees. In considering the role of information in this definition of health, the work of Caidi and Allard (2005) is especially relevant: when newcomers face informational barriers that limit their social support, access to services and involvement in their broader community, this has implications for society as a whole. Understanding and dismantling these barriers to both information and leisure could therefore be central to the facilitation of true social inclusion for newcomers.

8.5.3 Religion

In addition the topics of identity and resilience, discussed above, future research could also explore the role of religion in the lives of newcomers, including its relationship to their leisure and information practices. As the findings of this study show, youth’s interest in Islam motivated some of their information practices, while their interpretations of the religion also affected their leisure pursuits. While some youth’s leisure activities were tailored to suit their religious beliefs, it also became clear that these beliefs were filtered through the lens of culture: the preference for gender segregation in sport expressed by some participants, for example, was likely linked both to youth’s understandings of Islam, as well as to norms of gender segregation in leisure in Afghan society (Emadi, 2005). This prompts the broader question: What resources influence and guide Muslim newcomer youth’s understandings of the tenets of Islam? To what extent does this understanding shape their thoughts on which leisure activities are permissible, or even enjoyable? These questions have important informational components, and add to the intriguing information practices youth in this study demonstrated with respect to research and reading on the topic of religion. While researching and reading about Islam was a leisurely pursuit for some youth in this study, it was also simultaneously an intriguing element of their identity renegotiation after migration: reading about Islam was part of youth’s struggle to make sense of the world around them, including their experiences of war and displacement both in Afghanistan and abroad.

Questions for future research raised by this study with respect to religion therefore include: How do newcomers search for and understand information on religion and religious practices? In
which ways are individuals’ information practices shaped by their belief systems – whether those systems are formally part of specific religions or part of less-structured spiritual leanings? Are individuals’ worldviews or outlooks influenced by their adherence to different religious traditions? If so, do major world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism shape their practitioners views of information in different – or similar – ways? What about other religious or spiritual affiliations? How might the religious outlooks or information practices of longer-settled residents of a country compare to those of newcomers? Though these questions all highlight intriguing areas of future research, they all rest on a more fundamental question, central to future work on religion in HIB: What is the nature of information in religion? This question is central to the growing interest in HIB research on the place of religion in information behaviour. To date, however, studies of this nature have been primarily limited to the professional sphere, for instance by considering the practices of ministers (Lambert, 2010; Michels, 2012; Wicks, 1999). An expansion of the more personal side of concerns at the intersection of religion and information would be welcome, to build on the small body of existing research (Kari & Hartel, 2007; Siracky, 2013). Studies of this nature would extend information studies research on religion beyond the current focus on professional settings and enrich our understanding of information practices in the personal spiritual realm.

8.5.4 Questions on the nature of information practices and leisure

Additional topics of future research can be drawn from this study’s findings on the nature of information practices and leisure. Future studies could work to clarify the conceptual relationship between information and leisure, and answer the following overarching questions, namely: What is the nature of information in leisure? And what roles does leisure play in shaping the seeking, sharing and use of information?

The leisure pursuits of participants in this study included many informational activities, such as leisure reading, social networking and media consumption. These findings prompt us to consider what types of leisure activities could be considered to be “information-rich” and interesting sites of future studies of HIB. The work of Hartel (2007) on information in serious leisure pursuits, and that of Dali (2010; 2013) and Ross (1999) on the informational nature of leisure reading are
a good foundation on which to build, and expand to non-serious leisure, including the use of social networking sites and activities such as watching movies.

The overlap between leisure and information practices does not end with these topics, however, but could also extend to future work on the role of leisure on information access and flow in group settings. The findings on Afghan youth presented in this current study also support the idea that shared leisure activities and settings, such as get-togethers, celebrations, recreation programs and sports matches might offer opportunities to build new social networks or encounter new information, therefore fostering information seeking, sharing and use. Though existing frameworks in HIB research on group settings do not specifically consider leisure, its relevance can be seen in studies of interest-based group activities or information grounds among college students (Fisher & Naumer, 2006). One avenue of future research, therefore, could be to integrate leisure into current conceptions of information grounds to better understand certain social activities, or perhaps support the creation of new conceptual work in this area of information behaviour. In particular, the role of leisure in supporting newcomers’ information seeking and sharing could be investigated in different contexts, such as group recreation programs, church social activities, or activities taking place solely within immigrant communities. The current limits of information grounds could also be better explored to understand its potential application to multicultural settings, specifically to what extent information grounds can exist among very diverse members, or whether a specific level of ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious homogeneity is required to facilitate trust, cohesion and information seeking and sharing.

A final area of future study would be to further explore the balance between obligation and enjoyment in leisure, a balance with which youth participants in this study appeared to manage comfortably. What factors influence whether or not individuals can reconcile commitment and enjoyment? Do factors such as immigration status, family status and gender matter, and if so, to what extent? Is the ability to strike a balance between commitment and enjoyment universal? Or is it perhaps enhanced by the act of migration, in which an individual’s social networks, time-use and priorities shift in response to their new environments? Participants in this study, as well as immigrant women in Tirone and Shaw’s (1997) study seemed readily able to balance their own enjoyment with obligation and responsibility to others. More studies of the conception of leisure – including understandings of choice, responsibility and obligation – among different
cultural groups would add considerably to the understanding of leisure both within and beyond the field of leisure studies.

8.5.5 Methodological considerations for future work

Methodological considerations in these future studies include the use of longitudinal data collection strategies to examine elements of information practices which may shift over time and across life changes, for instance across the processes of migration and settlement. An interesting way to follow shifts over time would also include the use of cohorts of participants facing similar changes, such as recent retirees or a group of newly-arrived immigrants.

Once the relevance of specific variables have been established, large-scale, quantitative data collection strategies, such as the use of surveys, could offer insight into behaviours including ICT use, leisure pursuits and the use of different information sources. For more qualitatively oriented work, the use of diaries or journals could be useful tools to maintain the integrity of participants’ recall of their daily practices. As this section has outlined, the topics and methods that could be employed in future studies of information practices in the context of leisure are rich and varied.

8.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter offered final thoughts on this study of the information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in the contexts of leisure and settlement. It built on the discussion from the previous chapter by highlighting the study’s implications for HIB research, information professionals and policy-makers. In addition, it outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the study, and offered insight into avenues for future research on topics such as identity, resilience and religion that would enhance academic understandings of the roles of information and leisure across major life transitions such as migration and settlement.

The first chapter of this qualitative, exploratory study introduced the sensitizing concepts of this study – leisure, information practices and newcomer settlement – and offered a brief overview of the preliminary conceptual links among them. Chapter 1 also highlighted the rationale and
significance of this study, its objectives, and research questions. It noted that this study explored the HIB of newcomer youth and the use and flow of information in leisure settings, provided insight into this under-researched area and introduced leisure as a concept relevant for examining HIB in populations experiencing important life transitions that affect both their social and cultural worlds.

Chapter 2 offered an overview of the relevant literature on immigrant and refugee HIB, settlement and leisure. In so doing, it drew upon literature from various fields, including information studies, leisure studies, immigration research and sociology. From the discussion of Afghan settlement in Toronto, it became clear that this recently-arrived group faces difficult settlement challenges, including poverty, unemployment and early-school leaving. Important gaps existed in the literature, however, with regard to Afghan newcomers’ settlement experiences, information needs or practices across settlement. This gap was also matched by a dearth of research on immigrant and refugee HIB more generally, specifically for groups such as refugees and newcomer youth. It was noted that these gaps were likely due to the myriad of challenges present in conducting qualitative research with youth and newcomers.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodological basis of this study by presenting the study design, data collection and analysis procedures used in this research. It provided an overview of the research questions, the rationale for the study’s approach and methods, as well as outlining the nature and volume of the data collected, and the techniques used for both data collection and analysis. This chapter also documented challenges encountered during the processes of data collection, including the negotiation of access to specific research participants and settings, and the decisions made regarding language and interpretation. The coding procedures, data analysis and an overview of theme selection and writing processes used in this study were also discussed, including the use of the “excerpt-commentary unit” writing strategy (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 182) for the analysis and presentation of findings.

Chapter 4 examined the settlement challenges youth experienced in their first months and years in Canada. The first portion of the chapter offered a brief introduction to the individual youth participants in this study. What emerged from this section was a snapshot of an extremely diverse group of newcomer youth, with different linguistic backgrounds, migration histories and family circumstances. While some participants were accompanied by their immediate families,
other youth had arrived in Canada alone. Immigration categories and settlement experiences also varied among youth, as some participants were sponsored by their family members, while others had to navigate complicated legal processes as refugee claimants. Youth took different migration paths before arriving in Canada and some spent up to a decade living in intermediate countries of settlement such as Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, India and the United States; as a result, many youth had spent most of their lives outside of Afghanistan.

After introducing the participants, Chapter 4 continued by answering the study’s first research question, namely: what challenges and unmet settlement needs to Afghan youth in Toronto experience? The data revealed youth’s difficulties in meeting information needs in their early days of settlement, a challenge which represented a major hurdle, in particular for those youth who had to make time-sensitive legal claims for refugee status. The effects of uncertain residency status were also an important barrier for youth who had to wait for a determination of their claim, or who had experienced life as refugees abroad. Cultural differences were commonly experienced by youth, who had to adapt to new ways of thinking in Canada, in particular with respect to facets of life that were unfamiliar to them before they arrived, including LGBT rights. Language barriers were not only issues for youth who did not speak English prior to arriving, but were also challenges for advanced English-language learners struggling to succeed on standardized English exams required to gain acceptance to university. Other settlement challenges youth experienced included resentment of their new lives following forced migration, the pain of loneliness and grieving for family members left behind, and the unique challenges faced by unaccompanied minor youth balancing teenage life with adult responsibilities.

Chapter 4 provided the contextual background to better understand and interpret youth’s information practices and leisure pursuits. By highlighting the challenging nature of migration and settlement, the heterogeneity of youth’s experiences and backgrounds, and their differing access to resources and support such as family and friends, this chapter illustrated many of the important factors that can shape and influence youth’s information practices and leisure pursuits.

Chapter 5 described the information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in the contexts of settlement and leisure. In so doing, it answered the study’s second research question: What are the settlement-related information practices of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto? It went
beyond this question and the specific focus on settlement, however, to offer a more holistic picture of the information behaviour of youth participants in this study. The findings presented in this chapter reveal that youth’s information practices can offer insight into their lives, their experiences and their cultural backgrounds.

The information practices described in this chapter included an evolution of information sources across the process of settlement, with youth initially relying more on family members, but shifting to others over time. As well, unaccompanied minor youth noted that they withheld information from family members back home, often to protect them from worry or concern. Afghan youth’s mistrust of co-ethnics in some circumstances highlighted the complex relations and information practices of refugee groups and other newcomers who come from regions of conflict and civil war. This finding, in particular, called into question the assumptions of some settlement programs and information service providers, including the ideas that co-ethnics are best suited to serve newcomers, or that they are always familiar and trusted information resources.

Youth’s information practices varied in many ways, due to their personalities and personal orientations to certain types of resources, as well as their diverse cultural backgrounds. The preference for media, such as films viewed online, for instance, highlighted the emotional connections and coping strategies these media can provide, as well as youth’s desire to maintain their links to the popular culture of intermediate countries of settlement, such as Iran and Pakistan. Youth’s search for cultural familiarity, stability and a connection to their pasts, therefore, was seen in their use of media.

Participants’ use of Facebook and mobile phones to maintain transnational ties to family and friends abroad was seen, as well as the use of YouTube as a rich and deeply visual resource for both entertainment and learning. The description of youth’s public library use and reading practices – in particular leisure reading – also demonstrated their linguistic and cultural diversity, including one participant whose fluency in Russian made him a frequent user of private, public and community Russian-language library collections. In addition, some youth expressed a strong desire to learn more about Islam and to better understand the history and social context of this religion around the world, a desire that could be understood as part of a search for meaning and identity across migration and displacement. Youth were cautious about online resources when
researching Islam, noting their potential for conflicting information and bias. When youth learned new information about Islam, their decision about whether or not to share this information was greatly influenced by their perception of their own expertise on this topic relative to those around them.

What was evident in Chapter 5 was that by researching and describing the information practices of newcomer youth, deeper insights about their cultural backgrounds, migration histories, personalities and social worlds can emerge. These insights, in turn, can be used to better understand the roles and uses of information in the lives of immigrants and refugees.

Chapter 6, the third and final findings chapter, offered an overview of the leisure pursuits of Afghan youth participants in this study. The picture of leisure that emerged was both rich and diverse, including a range of activities, partners and settings. What was clear from the findings presented in that chapter was that the nature of leisure was often subjective and deeply personal. While some youth enjoyed activities such as writing poetry, reading, participating in mehmani, or volunteering with the Afghan community, others did not find these pursuits leisurely. Despite these important differences between youth with respect to some activities, other pursuits were more commonly enjoyed, and were popular among most participants such as playing sports and spending time with friends. In fact, for many youth, sharing meals, drinking coffee or tea, watching movies or simply “hanging out” were made enjoyable in large part by engaging in these pursuits with others, including friends and family. Time spent with family, including younger and older siblings, parents, cousins and grandparents, was a key part of youth’s leisure, either as a current activity for those youth with family members in Canada, or one that was fondly remembered by youth who migrated alone. Leisure activities took on new meaning for youth separated from their family and friends, whether as a way to cope with homesickness and loneliness, or as an opportunity to seek out new social networks, for instance, by finding new friends through sports teams.

Some of youth’s leisure pursuits reflected their links to Afghanistan and Afghan culture. For one participant, a passionate poet who counted writing of poetry as one of his favourite leisure pursuits, this pastime connected him to his family’s tradition of poetry and the proud history of Afghan poets. For this youth, the practice of writing poetry was also a transnational information practice, informed by international news reports and conversations with relatives abroad, and had
become an outlet for his concerns and frustrations about war, corruption, displacement and poverty in Afghanistan.

Though buzkashi, a traditional sport in Afghanistan, was not present in the lives and leisure of youth in Canada, mehmani, a type of ritual visiting done between families, was practiced following migration. Mehmani, a deeply gendered practice, was an example of a leisure activity that had been continued not only after arriving in Canada, but also in intermediate countries of settlement, such as Pakistan. Mehmani provided opportunities for information sharing through storytelling, as youth listened to the experiences and memories of older relatives, who reminisced about their lives in Afghanistan. Though mehmani was practiced by some youth, it was only done by those with family in Canada: this finding made clear that the maintenance of some customs – and the information and social capital shared in these settings – depends on the context of a broader cultural community following migration.

The most intriguing finding of this chapter was the complexity, nuance and tension youth found in their enjoyment. Youth noted prayer, mehmani and even schoolwork, which all involved elements of responsibility and obligation, as leisurely pursuits to some degree or another. The social aspect of school was especially enjoyable for some youth, who relished opportunities to see their friends, and would have found it burdensome to have had unlimited time at home. Youth found ways to reconcile their chosen leisure pursuits with their religious practices and beliefs, practices and beliefs which varied considerably between youth.

What was clear from the findings presented in Chapter 6 was that leisure is not a single, unified concept for newcomer youth and that the activities participants enjoyed included a wide range of pleasures, constraints, and some contradictions as well. That youth found some activities both leisurely and obligatory, and were comfortable in reconciling this tension, is a finding worth exploring. In sum, leisure offers an intriguing way to explore the cultural practices of newcomers, their circumstances of migration, and their information practices during settlement.

Chapter 7 built on and distilled the findings chapters into four conceptual statements, then linked each to existing literature, concepts and concerns in HIB research. The first point noted that contextual factors of migration and settlement are important to understanding the information practices of newcomers. This study found that the settlement experiences of Afghan youth, including those of unaccompanied minor youth, were instrumental to understanding their leisure
and information practices. Separated from their parents and other family members, unaccompanied youth had to rely on other information resources during their first weeks and months of settlement. The circumstances of migration therefore enabled and constrained specific leisure and information practices. Youth’s circumstances also influenced youth’s willingness to seek, share and use information: examples include participants’ use of secrecy, for instance by keeping information from their family members back home. Some youth were also mistrustful of co-ethnics, a finding that is common in other studies of the information practices of refugee groups, and Afghans in particular.

The second point presented in Chapter 7 highlighted the ways in which leisure activities can be a window to understanding HIB across migration and settlement, as well as the settlement process itself. The existence of “honeymoon leisure”, activities that youth embraced after arriving but later abandoned, indicates the potential for leisure to illustrate periods and stages along the process of settlement, and may lead to more studies that could use this as the groundwork for a model of the process. Youth’s leisure activities provided insight into their information practices and settlement experiences: an example included the watching of films online to cope with challenges such as homesickness and family separation. In this instance, as in many others, there was substantial overlap between leisure and information practices.

The third conceptual statement in Chapter 7 noted that information sought and shared in leisure settings could influence immigrant settlement and adaptation. Leisure pursuits offered youth opportunities to build social capital: an example included participation in sports as a way to meet new people and rebuild social networks following migration. Information became available through these settings and networks; as a result of this important potential support for newcomers, information on leisure and recreation therefore could be considered a settlement need. The fourth and final point highlighted the complexity of leisure in the lives of newcomer youth. Participants’ leisure did not represent a simple dichotomy between enjoyment and obligation, but instead seamlessly blended the two without apparent contradictions. Examples of “leisurely obligations” included mehmani and prayer, as youth both enjoyed, yet simultaneously felt constrained or obligated by these activities.
This dissertation offered a glimpse into the lives, settlement experiences, leisure and information practices of newcomer youth from Afghanistan. It not only demonstrated the diversity of youth’s backgrounds, but also highlighted the nuance and complexity in newcomer leisure. By presenting an exploratory look at the intersection of leisure and information practices, this study lays the groundwork for future research on the roles of leisure reading, social media, transnational information practices and cultural maintenance through leisure in the lives of newcomers.
References


Dali, K. (2010). *“The Psychosocial Portrait of Immigration through the Medium of Reading”: Leisure Reading and Its Role in the Lives of Russian-Speaking Immigrants in Toronto.* PhD, University of Toronto, Toronto.


Tyyskä, V. (2009). *Youth and society: The long and winding road:* Canadian Scholars’ Press.


Appendices

Appendix A – Information and Consent Forms

Note: Information and consent forms provided to participants were printed on University of Toronto letterhead

Information and Consent Form (Youth)

You are being asked to take part in a study that explores the settlement experiences of Afghan youth in Toronto. You have been selected to participate because you are Afghan, between the ages of 18 and 35, and have lived in Canada for less than 10 years.

This study will explore the settlement experiences of Afghan youth in Toronto, including their free-time pursuits and how they look for and share information about life in Canada. This project is part of my doctoral studies in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto.

If you choose to take part, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. Each interview will take about 45 to 90 minutes, depending on how much you would like to say. These interviews will take place at a location of your choice, such as your workplace, a café, or a public library. Interview questions will focus on your experiences since coming to Canada, as well as 1) the things you enjoy doing in your time away from school or work, and 2) the sources of information you use to find out about life in Canada.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. You can choose not to answer any of the interview questions. If you take part and then choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided will removed from the project.

If you agree, interviews will be audio-recorded to help me to remember the details of your answers. This is completely optional, and if you do not want the interview to be recorded, it will not be recorded.
The risk of taking part in this study is that you may be reminded of difficult settlement challenges you faced after arriving in Canada, or problems you faced before migrating. If this is the case, and you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can take a break or stop the interview. The benefit of this study is that you may enjoy discussing your free-time pursuits and reflecting on what you’ve achieved and how you’ve adjusted since coming to Canada. It is hoped that by getting your thoughts on the settlement experiences of Afghan youth, this study could help to influence the creation of settlement programs and other supports to assist youth. As a token of my appreciation, you will be given $20 at the end of each interview to thank you for your time.

The results of this study will be published as journal articles and presented at conferences. Your participation will be kept confidential. Your name and other identifying information will be known only to me and will not be included in presentations or written reports. If you would like to be invited to a presentation of the study’s results in Toronto, or receive a written summary of the findings, please give me your contact information.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the researchers:

Lisa Quirke
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
lisa.quirke@utoronto.ca
(416) 466-5725

Nadia Caidi
Professor
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
nadia.caidi@utoronto.ca
416-978-4664

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.
Consent to participate

- I agree to take part in this study and to participate in two interviews to discuss my settlement experiences, my free-time activities, and my sources of information on life in Canada
- The researcher has explained the study and I have had a chance to get answers to any questions I may have had
- I agree that the researcher can tape record our interview (OPTIONAL)
- I would like to hear about the findings of this study and be invited to a presentation and/or receive a written copy of the results (if yes, please provide your contact information)
Information and Consent Form (Settlement workers)

You are being asked to take part in a study about Afghan youth settlement in Toronto. For this research, in addition to interviewing Afghan youth about their settlement experiences, I am also seeking the participation of settlement workers working with youth to discuss their thoughts on service provision. You have been selected to participate because of your experience in working with newcomer youth through the settlement process.

This study will explore the settlement experiences, free-time pursuits and information seeking and sharing of Afghan youth in Toronto. This project is part of my doctoral studies in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto.

If you choose to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will take place at a location of your choice, such as your workplace, a café, or a public library. In this interview, you will be asked for your thoughts on the settlement needs of Afghan youth in Toronto, specifically, what programs you offer, what settlement, leisure and information needs are being met by current programs and which are left unmet due to gaps or difficulties in designing or delivering services for Afghan newcomer youth.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. You can choose not to answer any of the interview questions. If you take part and then choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided will be removed from the project.

If you agree, interviews will be audio-recorded to help me to remember the details of your answers. This is completely optional, and if you do not want the interview to be recorded, it will not be recorded.

There are no known risks or benefits to you in participating in this study.

The results of this study will be published as journal articles and presented at conferences. Your participation will be kept confidential. Your name, workplace and other identifying information will be known only to me and will not be included in presentations or written reports, unless you
choose otherwise. If you would like to be invited to a presentation of the study’s results in Toronto, or receive a written summary of the findings, please give me your contact information.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the researchers:

Lisa Quirke
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
lisa.quirke@utoronto.ca
(416) 466-5725

Nadia Caidi
Professor
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
nadia.caidi@utoronto.ca
416-978-4664

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Consent to Participate
- I agree to take part in this study and participate in an interview on settlement needs and services for Afghan youth
- The researcher has explained the study and I have had a chance to get answers to any questions I may have had
- I agree that the researcher can tape record our interview (OPTIONAL)
- I would like to hear about the findings of this study and be invited to a presentation and/or receive a written copy of the results (if yes, please provide your contact information)

__________________________________________
Name (please print): ____________________

__________________________________________
Signature: ____________________

__________________________________________
Date: ____________________
Appendix B – Interview Guides

Interview Guide – First interview (YOUTH)

Settlement

When did you come to Canada?

Did you come alone or with family?

What do you recall from your first few months/years living in Canada? What was it like for you living here?

What have you found to be the most challenging about moving to Canada?

What languages do you speak? Read? Write?

What language are you most comfortable in?

Did you speak English when you first came to Canada?

What is your first language? Do you speak this language at home (with parents, with siblings)? With friends?

What, if anything, was easier than you expected?

Who or what has helped you with your settlement in Canada?

What strengths do you have that helped you since you’ve come to Canada?

What do you like the most about living in Canada? What do you like the least?

What does it mean to you to be “settled” in Canada?

* What advice would you give someone who arrived in Canada today? *

Information-seeking
Who or where did you go to for information or advice when you first arrived in Canada? Has that changed in the months/years that you’ve lived here?

Did you go to the same person or place for information on different topics? For example, help with school, job searching, questions about health, etc?

Enjoyable, free-time activities

I have some questions about enjoyable, free-time activities, things that people do in their free-time.

Can you describe for me a typical day for you, and how do enjoyable, free-time activities fit in?

What does the word leisure mean to you? What about the word recreation?

Are there similar words in your mother tongue?

Have your free-time activities changed since you’ve come to Canada? How?

What were they like just after arriving? What are they like now? What do you think they’ll be like in the future?

What activities do you like most? Why?

Have you used any recreation programs or services since coming to Canada?

What would you change about your life/free-time if you could?

Are you ever bored?

Technology use

Tell me about your use of technology in your free time in a typical week. For example, think of last week: Did you text? Spend time online? Watch movies? Watch tv? Other things?

What do you enjoy / not enjoy about these activities?
Interview Guide – Follow-up interview (Youth)

NOTE: This is an example from one interview; questions in the second interview were tailored to answers provided in the first interview

Leisure

In the first interview, you told me about some of your leisure activities (doing research, drawing, volunteering with the student association, travelling, etc.). Can you think of any others?

If you suddenly had a day off – and didn’t have to work on assignments or go to work – what would you do with your day?

What if you had a week off?

What about if you had a month off?

Time of year

How does the time of year affect what you do in your free time?

Can you give me examples of some of the things you did last summer?

Do you have any plans for things you’ll do this summer?

Enjoyment

In some of the interviews, people have mentioned activities that they sometimes like doing, but other times don’t enjoy very much. One of the examples was Facebook: sometimes people enjoy going on Facebook, but other times they wish they didn’t – or didn’t have to. Can you think of anything like that, things that you sometimes enjoy, but other times may not like doing?

What makes an activity enjoyable some of the time, but not at other times?

There are differences between cultures, sometimes, in the way that people like to spend their time, and their favourite activities. You mentioned that before your family came to Canada, you spent a lot of your time with neighbours, playing outside – but that this changed when you
moved to Canada. Can you think of other things that Afghan newcomers might be used to, or might have enjoyed doing before moving to Canada?

Is spending time with family something enjoyable, or more of an obligation?

*Information seeking*

You mentioned that you like to research different topics. Can you think of the last time you did this? What did you research? Walk me through it…

Where did you get the idea for that topic?

Where was the first place you looked for information?

How much time did you spend researching the topic?

Did you take notes or write about what you learned?

You mentioned that you buy a lot of books. What kind of books? Where do you buy them?

*Information sharing*

Do you share anything that you learn through your hobbies with your friends?

Do you post what you’ve learned on Facebook? Twitter? Do you blog about it?

Do you keep your sketches, or show them to anyone?

*Recreation*

In the last interview you had a lot of good ideas about the things that Afghan youth might like in terms of programs – that they like to come when other people they know will be there, when they can use a computer, when activities are fun, etc.

Other than the tutoring program you mentioned, are there any other programs you think that should exist to help Afghan youth or their families?
Interview Guide (Settlement workers)

Can you please tell me, based on your experiences, what are the settlement needs of Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?

What are the settlement challenges facing Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto?

What do you view as major gaps in services for this group? Do these differ based on which part of the city one lives? What do you attribute these gaps in service to? What would you think would help to mitigate or solve some of these gaps in service? What strategies would be most effective in engaging Afghan newcomer youth in making the services work for them?

From your perspective, are there any challenges in designing and delivering settlement programs for Afghan newcomer youth?

What factors affect whether or not youth receive / seek settlement services?

What affects how much free time a young Afghan newcomer has? What affects how they spend that time?

Where do youth look for settlement information?

What are effective outreach strategies for newly arrived Afghan youth, to tell them about different supports, programs and services that are available? Are there outreach strategies that are ineffective to reach this group?
Appendix C – List of Interview Codes

The following chart is a full list of codes that emerged from the qualitative coding process. The list and numbers for this chart were drawn from NVivo8, the qualitative data analysis software used for this research.

In the left column of the table, the names of individual codes are provided, divided by subject headings (in bold). The middle column refers to the sources of data, or the number of individual interviews where this code was found. The right column, references, notes the total number of times a code occurred. For example, under the heading of leisure, the code “alcohol” – referring to the use of alcohol as part of leisure activities – was mentioned in four individual interviews, and noted nine times in total. High numbers in the sources column, therefore, mean that a topic was raised by more participants, while high numbers in the references column mean that a code was brought up more times overall. It can be inferred that when a code has high numbers in both columns, that this topic was raised frequently by many participants.

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