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# Understanding the Adjustment Experiences of Recent Muslim Immigrant Youth

Sharlini Yogasingam

*The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor

Jason Brown

*The University of Western Ontario*

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## Abstract

Immigration is currently a hot-button issue in Canada. With the negative attitudes regarding Islamic cultures, Muslim immigrants to Canada may be most at risk of experiencing discrimination. Guided by the bi-dimensional frameworks of acculturation and cultural identity, this qualitative study aimed to understand the adjustment experience for Muslim immigrant adolescents. Data was collected through one-hour, semi-structured interviews with six Muslim adolescent youth between the ages of 16 and 20, who were living in Canada for up to five years. Participants were recruited through local community agencies, a post-secondary institution and residential neighbourhood advertisements. Data was transcribed and thematic analysis was used to identify themes that described the experience of Muslim newcomer adolescents. The results of this study add to the scant body of literature that currently exists, as well as present a deeper understanding of Muslim youth by describing the experience of this often misunderstood and vulnerable group from their own perspective.

## Keywords

adolescents, Muslim immigrants, acculturation, cultural identity

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

Immigration is a controversial issue. Many opinions abound surrounding the 25,000 Syrian refugees that have settled in Canada over the last year with the support of Prime Minister Trudeau (Ipsos, 2015; CBC, 2015; ). After the 2015 Paris terrorist attack, an Ipsos (2015) poll showed that 60% of Canadians were opposed to the government's plan of resettling these refugees. A majority cited security concerns as the reason for disapproval, with 75% of respondents concerned about a similar terrorist attack occurring in Canada (Ipsos, 2015). Reminiscent of the aftermath of the events of 9/11 in the United States (Pew Forum, 2011; Rousseau, Hassan, Moreau, & Thombs, 2011), there has been a spike in hate crimes committed against Muslim Canadians and those thought to be Muslim since the attacks (CBC, 2015; National Council of Canadian Muslims, 2017).

Muslims are the fastest growing immigrant population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011) and one that is most vulnerable to discrimination (Stuart & Ward, 2011). It is important to understand the needs and experiences of this group in order to encourage successful integration into Canadian society, thus promoting positive psychological well-being. Much of the literature on the Muslim immigrant experience is from European and American perspectives; in comparison, very little Canadian research exists on the topic and even less on the experiences of adolescents who are Muslim immigrants. This study aimed to address this gap in the literature. This is a qualitative study, informed by the bi-dimensional models of acculturation and cultural identity proposed by Berry (1980) and Phinney (1990) respectively. The purpose of this study was to explore the adjustment experience of Muslim youth who had immigrated to Canada within the past five years.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The dearth of literature surrounding the adolescent Muslim immigrant experience is concerning because research shows that this is a vulnerable population at risk for experiencing discrimination which can lead to poor psychological and sociocultural

outcomes (Güngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013; Closson, Waterhouse, Darwich, & Hymel, 2013; Stuart, & Ward, 2011). Much of the existing literature comes from Europe or the United States of America; the results of these studies are not necessarily reflective of a Canadian population. European countries and the U.S. have unique issues regarding geographic size and dominant cultures that do not apply to Canada. In order for results to be applicable in Canada, research must be done in a Canadian context.

This study aims to add to the small, but growing body of research regarding the experiences of Muslim adolescent immigrants. Specifically, this study aims to provide an appropriate description of the acculturation experience and impact of cultural identity for Muslim adolescent immigrants from the perspectives of members of this population themselves. With the continuing influx of Muslim immigrants to Canada and the current climate of hostility toward Muslim individuals, it is important to understand the needs of this often-misrepresented population in order to prevent marginalization or separation of this group, which research suggests results in the poorest outcomes for both immigrants and immigrant-receiving societies (Berry, 2006; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

## 1.2 Context

### *Historical Context*

As a settler society, Canada has a long history of immigration, beginning with the French and British explorers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century that established the first settlements and colonies (Driedger & Burnet, 2011). The next mass migration to Canada occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Gold Rush and settlement of the West (Driedger & Burnet, 2011). Until, the 1970s, immigrants to Canada were primarily of European decent, mainly English and French, and were expected to assimilate to either English or French culture depending on where they settled (Driedger & Burnet, 2011; Dewing 2013). Restrictive legislations had been enacted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to implicitly and explicitly inhibit non-European immigration such as the Chinese Immigration Act (currently known as the Chinese Exclusion Act) and Continuous Journey Regulation that restricted Chinese and Indian immigration to Canada (Driedger & Burnet, 2011; Dewing,

2013).

Discriminatory legislation and practices that favoured the English resulted in significant resentment from the French, Aboriginal and ethnic minority communities in Canada. With Quebec nationalism on the rise, then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1961 to address the inequalities between the French and English and make recommendations for federal policies that would promote equality and partnership between the two cultures (Driedger & Burnet, 2011; Dewing, 2013). The focus of the Commission was later expanded to include recommendations for other ethnic groups within Canada. The recommendations of the Commission encouraged integration rather than assimilation of diverse ethnic groups, forming the basis for the policy of multiculturalism that Canada would later be known for.

Multiculturalism is defined as the presence of individuals from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and is considered integral to Canadian identity (Driedger & Burnet, 2011). P.R. Magosci proclaims in *The Encyclopedia of Canada's People* (1999) that multiculturalism defines Canadians and our place in the world. Indeed, since its inception, Canada has been a multicultural country consisting of English, French, First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures.

Following the recommendations of the Commission, the legislation that prohibited non-European immigration was amended in the late 1960s opening the door for a massive influx of individuals from all over the world, mainly Asia and Africa (Driedger & Burnet, 2011). In 1971, the government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau implemented the official policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism that promoted and protected diversity and integration of all cultures equally (Driedger & Burnet, 2011; Dewing, 2013). These policies were supported in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that was enacted in 1982 and later became law with the Canadian Multicultural Act in 1988, making Canada the first country in the world to adopt an official policy of multiculturalism (Driedger & Burnet, 2011; Dewing, 2013). These policies and legislation have resulted in Canada having one of the highest per capita immigration rates



in the Western world, with one in five Canadians being foreign born (Dolin & Young, 2004; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016).

### *Muslims in Canada*

According to Statistics Canada (2011), there are over 1 million individuals in Canada who identify as Muslim, comprising 3.2% of the Canadian population. This makes Islam the second largest religion in Canada following Christianity. The largest sources of Muslim immigrants are Pakistan, India, Iran, Lebanon and other countries in the Arab league (Statistics Canada, 2011). The vast majority of foreign-born individuals in Canada reside in Ontario with approximately 3.6 million immigrants, which is 53.3% of the immigrant population; 4.3% of this population identifies as Muslim (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Reasons for migration vary, with many Muslim immigrants coming to Canada for higher education, employment, family reunification and, of course, security from volatile political conflicts and persecution (Statistics Canada, 2011). Canada has been a refuge for Muslims fleeing conflict for a number of years. The Lebanese Civil War brought one of the first waves of Muslim refugees to Canada in the 1980s (Census Canada, 2001). In the 1990s, Canada continued to provide refuge for Muslims fleeing the Somali Civil War and the Bosnian War following the break-up of Yugoslavia (Census Canada, 2001).

Following the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and the more recent attacks in Europe, attitudes toward Muslims in Canada have become increasingly negative (IPSOS, 2015; Pew, 2011). American discourse surrounding Muslim immigration has also infiltrated the Canadian consciousness, with many Canadians reporting safety and security concerns regarding Muslims despite the fact that Canada has had comparatively very few incidences of terrorist attacks by radical Islamists (IPSOS, 2015; Pew, 2011). Media portrayals of Muslims have been unfavourable, often depicting Muslims as dangerous terrorists, resulting in Muslim-Canadians being subjected to public scrutiny and xenophobic attacks (Shaheen, 2003; Copey, Dack, Littler & Feldman, 2013; Awan 2014). The current political climate surrounding the conflicts in the Middle East that has resulted in the Syrian refugee crisis

has once again put Muslim-Canadians under public surveillance. There has been a global trend among Western countries of growing support for far right-wing ideologies, demonstrated by events such as “Brexit” in which the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump which both tapped into anti-immigrant, particularly Anti-Muslim immigrant, sentiments (Oxenham, 2016; Copsey, Dack, Littler & Feldman, 2013). The Canadian government’s decision to resettle 25, 000 Syrian refugees was controversial with many Canadians expressing disapproval of accepting Muslim refugees (IPSOS, 2015). In this context, it is apparent that Muslim immigrants to Canada will face some difficulty in adapting to what can potentially be a hostile environment.

### 1.2.1 Negative experiences reported by Muslim adolescents:

Many problems can arise during the adjustment process. Language barriers, conflicting cultural values and discrimination can result in psychological distress, referred to as acculturative stress (Berry & Kim, 1988). Adolescent immigrants in particular are adversely affected by acculturative stress; this stress can lead to maladaptive psychological outcomes as well as identity confusion (Closson, Waterhouse, Darwich, & Hymel, 2013). However, a strong cultural identity may protect against the effects of acculturative stress (Hilario, Vo, Johnson, & Saewyc, 2014; Yoo & Lee, 2008).

## 1.3 Contribution of the Proposed Research:

This research adds to the existing literature on Muslim acculturation from a Canadian perspective and uncovers needs that are unique to this new generation of immigrants compared to those who have come before them. It may lead to further research of this group, which is much needed. With the current negative perceptions surrounding Muslims, the results of this research promotes awareness of this population in a non-stereotypical context that will help prevent the marginalization of this group.

Knowledge gained in this study can help inform the development of newcomer integration programs by policy makers, institutions and community agencies. These results should encourage policy makers to address the needs of this group, as well as encourage and assist this population to pursue an acculturation strategy of integration.

The results of this research provide support for the existing policies and programs of immigration and multiculturalism that have been implemented in Canada, highlighting the importance of cultural maintenance and integration.

Results can be useful for developing programs that assist in the maintenance of one's heritage culture, such as free or affordable language classes, as well as initiatives that encourage cross-cultural exposure, such as public events that promote the celebration of different cultures. Results also provide support for the effectiveness of existing integration programs that could lead to increased funding of these initiatives.

The present study describes the experiences of Muslim immigrant youth in a medium-sized city in central Canada, thereby providing counselors with a better understanding of this demographic that could be useful in counseling practice. These results can increase the cultural competency of counselors. Given the large number of incoming Muslim immigrants, many of them children and adolescents, it is more important than ever to understand their needs and support initiatives for integration.

## Chapter 2

This chapter reviews scholarly literature about the adjustment experiences of Muslim youth who have immigrated to Western countries. The first section describes two models that provide some direction for the study, including acculturation and cultural identity. The second section follows with a review of the relevant literature concerning those topics as well as the significance of religiosity for Muslim youth and navigation between two cultures are presented.

### 2 Conceptual Framework

The works of John Berry (1980) and Jean Phinney (1990), were consulted to inform questions posed to the youth about their adjustment experiences. These models include the bi-dimensional Models of Acculturation and Cultural Identity. Berry (1980) proposed that there are two dimensions that underlie the mode of acculturation adopted by immigrants. Berry's (1980) model operates on the response to two questions that assess an individual's links to both their culture of origin and the society of settlement: 1) Is it desirable to maintain heritage culture? 2) Is it desirable to have positive relations with other members of the host society? (Berry, 1980). The mode of integration is defined as affirmative answers to both questions. Negative answers to both questions define marginalization. An affirmative answer to the first question and negative to the second will result in separation while the reverse will result in assimilation. Phinney's (1990) model of cultural identity is conceptualized by two dimensions: 1) the individual's identity related to their culture of origin and 2) the identity related to the society of settlement. The two cultures are not mutually exclusive in this model. An individual can identify with one culture more than the other, identify with both cultures equally or identify with neither culture (Phinney, 1990). In this study, interview questions regarding the participant's adjustment experiences were informed by these models.

## 2.1 Berry's Model of Acculturation

### *History*

The work of Robert Park (1924) has influenced many theories of immigrant integration. He proposed that when different groups make contact, they go through a series of phases referred to as the *race relations cycle*. At first contact, conflict can occur as the groups are competitive with each other. Over time, the groups move through the *interpenetration and fusion* phase, which results in assimilation (Park & Burgess, 1924). Park believed that assimilation was unavoidable in industrial nations as he believed that the importance of race and ethnicity would be diminished as a nation moved toward modernization. He felt that in a democratic and industrial society, individuals would be judged rationally based on merit (Park & Burgess, 1924).

Expanding on Park's work, Milton M. Gordon posited his own theory of assimilation for immigrants to the United States. In his book *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (1964), Gordon presented a model of assimilation that specifies the distinct dimensions of this process. He proposed that assimilation takes place in seven stages: acculturation, structural, marital, identity, attitude reception, behaviour reception, and civic with a main emphasis on acculturation and structural assimilation. During acculturation, immigrants begin to adopt the aspects of daily life associated with their host society including language, clothing, religious beliefs, norms and values (Gordon, 1964). Structural assimilation involves the entrance of the newcomer into the social structures of the host society, beginning with public institutions (i.e. schools, employment) followed by integration into clubs and relationships with members of the host society. Gordon (1964) believed that once an individual moved through the first two stages, the following stages would occur naturally and inevitably.

### *Development and Application*

In contrast to Park's (1924) and Gordon's (1964) unidirectional models of integration, Berry (1980) proposed a bi-dimensional model of acculturation that was

dependent on the connection one has to the heritage culture and the culture of the host society. Berry (1980) believed that acculturation orientations were related to two main issues: the level of commitment one has to the culture of origin and the level of involvement that one seeks with the host society. The intersection of these two issues results in four acculturation strategies. Integration occurs when newcomers have a high degree of commitment to their heritage culture as well as a desire to interact with members of their host society. Assimilation occurs when newcomers prefer to interact with their host society rather than maintain their heritage culture. When immigrants prefer to interact with members of their own culture rather than the host society, they choose an orientation of separation. Marginalization occurs when there is neither a desire nor opportunity to maintain the culture of origin or interact with the host society.

Research suggests that integration results in the most positive outcomes for both the host society and newcomers, while marginalization and separation have been associated with both internalizing and externalizing problems (Berry et al., 2006; Kunst & Sam, 2013). Berry's (1980) model has been influential in the field of acculturation research and has provided the framework for many studies that followed. His research has been replicated and results have been consistent with his bi-dimensional model of acculturation (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Phinney et al., 2001). Results of the studies based on this model have led to policies and programs that increase the well-being of members of multicultural societies (Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

## 2.2 Phinney's Model of Cultural Identity

### *History*

Much of the research on cultural identity formation in adolescents has been influenced by Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of developmental stages and in particular his theory of identity versus role confusion, followed by James Marcia's identity status theory (1966). Erikson (1968) posited that during adolescence, individuals go through a period of exploration and experimentation that results in an achieved identity.

Adolescents are given more independence during this stage and begin to develop a strong

commitment to ideals, friendships and causes (Erikson, 1968). If they are unable to move through this stage successfully, they will experience role confusion and distress (Erikson, 1968).

Influenced by Erikson's identity theory, Marcia (1966) conducted a study involving semi-structured interviews of 86 college students in an effort to better understand identity formation. In contrast to Erikson's dichotomous theory, Marcia (1966) found that adolescent identity formation is determined by the degree of exploration and commitment to an identity in a number of domains in the adolescent's life. He proposed four identity statuses: *Identity Diffusion*, *Identity Foreclosure*, *Identity Moratorium*, and *Identity Achievement* (Marcia, 1966). Marcia considered two variables that determine an established identity: *commitment* or *affirmation* (for example, to an occupation, ideology, or religion) and *crisis* (the period in which an adolescent reevaluates previously held beliefs and values) (Marcia, 1966). Marcia's concept of identity crisis being a key aspect in identity formation has been supported in subsequent studies of cultural identity.

### *Development*

Following the work of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966), Phinney formulated one of the first models of cultural identity development centering on the dimensions of exploration and commitment (Phinney, 1989; Roberts et al., 1999). Phinney (1990) originally proposed three stages of cultural identity development. *Unexamined ethnicity* is the first stage that occurs during childhood in which the individual does not give much thought to their culture or ethnicity; this is similar to Marcia's diffuse status. The second stage is *ethnic identity search* which occurs at the beginning of adolescence. During this stage, adolescents begin to question their previously held beliefs and values associated with their ethnicity. This stage is related to Erikson's identity versus role confusion stage and Marcia's moratorium status. The Final stage is *achieved ethnic identity*, in which a stable and secure sense of self is established; this stage is similar to Marcia's (1966) identity achievement and Erikson's (1968) achieved identity.

Phinney and colleagues (Roberts et al., 1999) later re-examined this theory with a large sample of adolescents. Their conclusions combined the findings of Marcia (1966) and Erikson (1968) in that two interrelated yet distinct dimensions in the development of cultural identity were found: *affirmation* or the commitment to the individual's culture of origin and *exploration* during which time the adolescent experiments with new experiences.

### *Application*

Research in other areas of identity formation, such as occupational, educational and relational identity, have reported similar findings to those found in the works of Phinney and colleagues (Sabatier, 2008; Michalek & Rostowska, 2014; Forthun, Montgomery & Bell, 2006). Phinney's (1990) model is one of the most influential in the field of cultural identity research, informing numerous studies. Recently, research in cultural identity formation has focused on examining the developmental pathways of commitment and exploration as independent dimensions. In a longitudinal study of over 400 African American, Latino American and European adolescents, French, Seidman, LaRue and Aber, (2006) found that commitment to one's culture begins to increase at the start of early adolescence before reaching a plateau in mid-adolescence which is consistent with Phinney's model of cultural identity development.

## 2.3 Background

Current research has highlighted negative public attitudes regarding Muslim immigrants (Rousseau, Hassan, Moreau, & Thombs, 2011; Closson, Waterhouse, Darwich, & Hymel, 2013; Ipsos, 2015; Pew Forum, 2011; GÜngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013). Research has also shown that Muslim immigrants are often perceived less favourably by members of the host country in comparison to immigrants from other cultures (Kunst, & Sam, 2013). Islamic culture has been criticised as being incompatible with Western society and a threat to Western values (Saeed, 2007; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; GÜngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013). Needless to say, Muslim immigrants to Canada are at risk of experiencing discrimination and the detrimental effects that come along with it (Closson, Waterhouse, Darwich, &



Hymel, 2013; Güngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013; Stuart, & Ward, 2011).

Studies show that discrimination leads to poor psychological outcomes, particularly for adolescents, as this is a key time in psychological development (Closson, Waterhouse, Darwich, & Hymel, 2013). Cultural identity, which encompasses racial, ethnic and religious identity, has been shown to play a protective role against acculturative stress (Closson, Waterhouse, Darwich, & Hymel, 2013), however discrimination can hinder positive cultural identity development for adolescents (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). Research shows that integration, the maintenance of the heritage culture as well as the host culture, leads to the most favourable psychological outcomes, while assimilation, separation and marginalization are progressively detrimental (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Studies suggest that an unfriendly host country leads immigrants to adopt the more maladaptive acculturation strategies (Kunst, & Sam, 2013).

## 2.4 Literature Review

### *Search Method:*

Relevant studies and articles were identified by searching the following bibliographic databases and sources: MEDLINE, Ovid (1946-2016); The Cochrane Library, Ovid; PsycINFO, ProQuest (1806-2016); PsycARTICLES, ProQuest (1894-2016); ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (1997-2016); Ethnic NewsWatch, ProQuest (1959-2016); Index Islamicus, ProQuest (1906-2016); Social Services Abstracts, ProQuest (1979-2016). The following search strategy was developed by the researcher for the ProQuest interface and was modified accordingly for use in the OVID interface: (TI,AB(teen\* OR adolescent\* OR youth\* OR emerging adult\*) AND TI,AB(immigrant\* or refugee\* or newcomer\*) AND TI,AB(muslim or islam\*) AND TI,AB((cultur\* or ethnic or religious or rac\*) and (identity or identification))) OR (TI,AB(teen\* OR adolescent\* OR youth\* OR emerging adult\*) AND TI,AB(immigrant\* or refugee\*) AND TI,AB(muslim or islam\*) AND TI,AB(accultur\*)). Searches were

limited to 2000 until 2016 and yielded 237 results which were screened at the title and abstract level for relevance, 49 were included in this literature review.

### 2.4.1 Cultural Identity

Varying definitions of cultural identity exist in the literature. However it is generally agreed upon that cultural identity refers to the psychological connection between one's culture and one's self or the ethnic component of one's social identity (Phinney, 1990; Wan & Chew, 2013). It is a self-defined concept that signifies one's commitment to the values, practices and beliefs of the culture that one subscribes membership to (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Cultural identity is considered to be a dynamic complex mixture of processes, such as decision-making and self-evaluation, through which people assert their culture of origin (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1990; Weinreich 1988). Many scholars consider adolescence to be a critical stage in cultural identity development as it is during this stage of development that individuals begin to recognize and understand that they belong to a cultural group (Phinney, 1989, Cross, 1991).

Cultural identity can be composed of ethnic identity, culture of origin, national identity, language, religious identity and the identity supported by the larger society (Britto & Amer, 2007). Several components have been emphasized in the literature pertaining to the development and importance of cultural identity. Feelings of belonging, a sense of shared values and attitudes, as well as the attitudes towards one's culture have been found to be key components in the development of cultural identity (Phinney, 1980). In a review of the research on cultural identity formation, Phinney and Ong (2007) found that the level of commitment that one has towards the practices, beliefs, and values of their cultural group will determine the strength of their cultural identity. Güngör and colleagues (2013) found similar results in their study of Muslim youth across Europe.

### 2.4.2 Acculturation

Acculturation is defined as the process of cultural and psychological change that results from contact between different cultures (Berry, 1980). Psychological change refers to changes in attitude towards social behaviours, cultural identities and the process of acculturation (Phinney, 1990; Berry, 2006). Cultural change refers to changes in a

cultural group's norms, customs and political life (Berry, 2006). Berry (1980) proposed that there are four strategies of acculturation that immigrants can choose from when adapting to a new culture. The choice depends on the individual's willingness to maintain their culture of origin and the willingness to participate in the society of settlement. Those who choose to maintain their culture of origin, but also embrace interaction with the settled society will orient towards a strategy of *integration*. Maintenance of culture of origin and avoidance of interaction with the settled society defines the *separation* strategy. Those who embrace involvement with the settled society and express little interest in maintaining their culture of origin will adopt an *assimilation* strategy. The last strategy, *marginalization* is adopted when neither cultural maintenance nor interaction with the settled society is sought. Often, those who are marginalized have little choice in which acculturation strategy they can adopt (Berry, 2005).

Research suggests that integration is the most frequent acculturation strategy among immigrants (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). This strategy has also been found to be associated with the most positive psychological and sociocultural outcomes for both immigrants and the immigrant-receiving society (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Marginalization and to a lesser extent, separation has been shown to produce the least favourable psychological and sociocultural outcomes (Kunst & Sam, 2013; Berry & Sabatier, 2010). It is important to note the imperative role that the host country plays in determining the acculturation strategies adopted by immigrants (Kunst & Sam, 2013; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). While many immigrant-receiving societies prefer newcomers to choose integration as their acculturation strategy, other societies promote assimilation as the acculturation strategy (Barrette, Bourhis, Personnaz & Personnaz, 2004; Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi & Schmidt, 2009). In their study examining the influence of acculturation expectations of both the host society and ethnic community on an adolescent's choice of acculturation strategy, Kunst and Sam (2013) found that the settled society overwhelmingly directs immigrants from Islamic cultures to assimilate. Studies have found that even in multicultural societies that prefer integration for new immigrants, those from Islamic cultures are expected to assimilate more so than any other immigrant culture (Kunst & Sam, 2013; Safdar, Dupuis, Lewis, El-Geledi, & Bourhis, 2008). This discrepancy

between the acculturation pressures of the settlement society and new immigrants can lead to negative psychological outcomes (Pfafferott & Brown, 2006).

In order to maintain a harmonious, multicultural society, researchers must determine ways to minimize acculturative stress for new immigrants. As cultural identity plays a protective role against acculturative stress, understanding how a positive cultural identity can be developed, strengthened and maintained is one way in which acculturative stress can be minimized.

### 2.4.3 Influences on cultural identity and acculturation

There are a number of domains that influence the development of cultural identity and acculturation experiences. Aside from personal characteristics, research has shown that peers, family, community and national contexts such as policies toward immigration and multiculturalism as well as level of diversity have a significant influence on both cultural identity and acculturation (Supple, Ghazarian, Frabutt, Plunkett, & Sands, 2006).

#### *Family*

As family is often the first point of socialization, research has focused on the importance of the contribution of the family toward the development of cultural identity and acculturation strategies. Each member of the family makes significant contributions to the quality of life of the family unit as a whole; the effects of these contributions are especially pronounced during adolescence in immigrant families (Sabatier, 2008; Vatz Laaroussi, 2001). A number of studies have shown that the acculturation strategies of individual family members can interact with each other, influencing the development of cultural identity and the choice of acculturation orientation (Sabatier & Berry, 2008; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Sam & Virta, 2003).

Parents, in particular, are crucial in the development of an adolescent's cultural identity and acculturation orientation (Sabatier, 2008). Their endorsement of the heritage culture and level of adaptation impact the transmission of cultural competency and by extension cultural identity (Costigan & Dokis, 2006). Parents are in a position to assist their children in understanding how they should expect to be treated as non-members of

the dominant society and strategies on how to respond to this treatment (Flanagan, Syvertsen, Gill, Gallay & Cumsille, 2009). While most research concludes that both mothers and fathers transmit cultural values across generations, findings are mixed as to the specific contribution of each parent and the level of impact on the adolescent's cultural identity. Phinney and colleagues (2001) found in their study of the impact of parental ethnic socialization on adolescent cultural identity that there was no significant association between the two. In contrast, Quintana and colleagues (2000) reported a positive association between parental ethnic socialization and cultural identity achievement. More recently, Supple, Ghazarian, Frabutt, Plunkett, and Sands (2006) found that parental ethnic socialization was related to exploration, however cultural commitment had no relation to parental ethnic socialization. Finally, in a French study examining the cultural identity of second-generation adolescents and their parents, Sabatier (2008) found that mothers took a more active role in endorsing the heritage culture through conversations on cultural topics as well as increasing exposure to cultural activities, while fathers were more likely to promote a sense for pragmatically adapting to the national culture.

### *Peers*

As schools are places where children spend the majority of their days interacting with members of the host society, it is another main area for socialization for immigrant youth. High schools offer immigrant adolescents the opportunity to encounter and engage with a broader range of cultures compared to elementary schools where student populations are drawn primarily from the local geographic area (Sabatier, 2008). Adolescents become aware of their cultural diversity during this transition; which can have both positive and negative outcomes (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Gfellner & Armstrong, 2013).

Research indicates that the effects of the ethnic composition of a high school on cultural identity and acculturation vary. A diverse student population can result in increased cultural affirmation especially for those from a cultural group that may have a lower status in the larger society. Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) found that in the case of

Latino American adolescents, attending a diverse high school resulted in feelings of pride related to their cultural group membership. This was likely due to the fact that in a multicultural setting, adolescents begin to recognize the distinctiveness of different cultures and those who belong to a group that is somewhat marginalized are often put in the position to defend their culture (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Other studies have found that high ethnic homogeneity in high schools results in the maintenance of cultural language and behaviours. However awareness of cultural and intergroup issues is diminished as can be seen in studies examining Indigenous students who tend to live in isolated environments (Sabatier, 2008; Kvermo & Heyerdahl, 2004; Gfellner & Armstrong, 2013).

Social interaction with members and non-members of an adolescent's cultural group have been associated with cultural identity. Phinney and colleagues (2001) reported that association with members from the adolescent's own cultural group was more likely to predict cultural identity than parental cultural socialization. Smith & Schneider (2000) observed in their study of inter-ethnic friendships among Canadian adolescents that adolescents preferred same-culture friends as they were perceived to be more supportive and accepting than inter-culture friendships. It is clear that school attendance provides opportunities for acculturation, but results are mixed on whether a heterogeneous environment is more conducive to an integrative acculturation strategy for Muslim adolescents. School environments often reflect the larger society and the conflicts within it (Sabatier, 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). The experiences of immigrant students are similar to those immigrants in the larger society (Sabatier, 2008). Given the current political climate, Muslim adolescent students are faced with discrimination and ostracism which can lead to marginalization or separation from the wider society (Berry et al., 2006).

### *Perceived Discrimination*

Discrimination has a particularly damaging effect on adolescent immigrants, resulting in poor psychological and sociocultural outcomes (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). Muslim adolescents are particularly susceptible to discrimination. Closson,

Waterhouse, Darwich, and Hymel (2013) found that Muslim adolescents in Canada reported the most discrimination compared to other cultural groups. Similarly, Ajrouch (2004) investigated the challenges faced by Muslim adolescents in the United States and found that many of the adolescents experienced discrimination daily from both their communities and school.

Perceived discrimination is considered by Phinney (1989) to be a life event that drives the awareness of one's culture as well as the relationships between different cultural groups. However, results of the research on the relationship between perceived discrimination and cultural identity are contradictory. Phinney (1990) reported that the development of a strong cultural identity can be hindered by the negative attitudes and perceptions of the dominant society towards the ethnic minority group. However, Greene, Way, and Pahl (2006) observed that a strong cultural identity can mediate the effects of perceived discrimination. Alternatively, Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2009) reported that rejection from the majority group can push immigrants away from identifying with the larger society, essentially disengaging from it. This finding was supported in other studies examining Muslim immigrant acculturation (Berry et al, 2006; Bourhis et al., 1997). In a study on Muslim acculturation in Western Europe, Güngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard (2013) found that Muslim adolescents may respond to the discrimination they face with a reactive religious identity. In other words, they may assert their religion more strongly and reciprocate negative attitudes toward the dominant society. This supports Branscombe's Rejection-Identification model in which the rejection of the dominant group results in increased identification with one's own cultural group (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999).

Research on the effect of gender on perceived discrimination has produced varied findings. Some studies suggest that female adolescent Muslims are less likely to be targeted as dangerous or as terrorists compared to Muslim males, making it easier for Muslim females to integrate into the larger society (Hilario et al., 2014; Sirin, Bikmenb, Mira, Finec, Zaalc & Katsiaficsa, 2008). However, other studies note that for many Muslim girls, clothing and other visual identifiers such as the hijab, increased the likelihood of discrimination compared to Muslim boys (Hutnik & Street, 2009; Ajrouch,

2004). For many of these adolescents, discrimination is related to their place in society. It is apparent that for both male and female Muslim adolescents, discrimination has a significant impact on the feelings of belongingness that are integral in developing an integrative acculturation orientation.

#### 2.4.4 Religiosity

A review by Duderija (2007) exploring identity construction in the context of being a member of a minority religious group suggests that for many Muslim adolescents, religious identity plays a crucial role in acculturation and cultural identity. Sirin et al. (2004) reported religiosity being the main variable contributing to strong Muslim identification. Religion is a source of meaning making and support for many immigrant adolescents as it provides an opportunity for the continuation of cultural practices (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). For this reason, the acculturative experience is centered around religion for Muslim adolescent immigrants. Sarglou, Delpierre and Dernell (2004) found that religiosity was positively associated with other-focused values and negatively associated with self-focused values across cultures, which is congruent with the collectivist cultures prevalent in Muslim societies. These findings were replicated by Meuleman and Billiet (2011) and Güngör et al. (2013) in their studies of religious acculturation across cultures.

Parents play a major role in the transmission of Islamic religious practices to their children. Güngör and colleagues (2013) reported that the more the parents were enmeshed within their religious community, the stronger the adolescent identified with the religion and culture. In this study, Turkish Belgians showed stronger commitment to their cultural identity if they had been socialized in childhood to Islamic religious practices by their parents.

Acculturation processes are vital in the transmission of religion. Güngör et al. (2013) observed that the religious socialization that occurred in childhood was mediated by the individual's acculturation orientation. In countries where the institutional recognition of minority religions is lacking, such as in Germany, stricter forms of religiosity were prevalent resulting in separation and marginalization of minority



religious groups (Güngör, 2013; Duderija, 2007). Whereas, in other more integrated countries, less strict forms of religiosity prevail.

For Muslim immigrant adolescents negotiating identities in a multicultural society, religious identification serves a protective function against the effects of perceived discrimination and acculturative stress. Religious identification transcends the boundaries of race, language and ethnicity and as a result provides adolescents with a group membership, which promotes a sense of belonging. This is especially true if the dominant society is seen as discriminatory (Duderija, 2007). Peek's (2005) study on religious identity formation found that major events such as the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 results in religious identity becoming central to the individual's self-concept.

#### 2.4.5 Navigating cultures

Identity negotiation for immigrant adolescents involves navigating between different cultures, their heritage culture as well as the dominant culture of the host country (Berry, 2005). Berry (1990) considered successful adaptation in terms of the identification toward both the new culture and culture of origin, or bicultural living. For Muslim immigrants in Western countries, this process can be complex due to the current negative perceptions of Muslims that are prevalent in these countries (Goforth, 2014). Arab Americans who strongly and openly identified as Muslim reported more experiences of discrimination than Arab Christians (Awad, 2010).

In Mir's (2011) study of American identity formation of Muslim American women, participants reported that American citizenship is White and Christian/secular and requires assimilation, which conflicts with the desire to maintain their cultural identities. Participants expressed the feeling that American society requires Muslims and other minorities to be invisible or disguise themselves with less religious or cultural attire. Duderija (2007) refers to this as the process of de-ethnicization. Many studies report that Muslim adolescents struggle with the desire to maintain their cultural heritage while also trying to fit in with the larger society (Sirin et al., 2008; Hutnik & Street, 2009; Mir, 2011). Sirin and Fine (2007) suggest that distress can occur when Muslim

adolescents feel that their cultural identities are under attack by the dominant culture. They argue that Muslim adolescents are in a complex situation in which they are being threatened by the dominant culture while simultaneously being considered a threat by the dominant culture. They found that the effects of this predicament were more pronounced in boys than girls. Although Muslim girls report that they struggle with reconciling their identities and perfecting the balance between the two, they report feeling that they are either failing at being American or are not being good enough Muslim women (Mir, 2011). The boys felt the full weight of this conflict, resulting in feelings of longing for their ancestral homeland. Sirin and Fine's (2007) study notes that this discrimination and conflict tends to lead to their politicization.

In numerous studies across countries, while Muslim immigrant youth overwhelmingly prefer an integration orientation, they feel more committed to their ethnic group than the dominant group (Sirin et al., 2008; Berry et al., 2006; Barrette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). In Sirin's (2008) study, Muslim youth were able to incorporate both their cultural and national identities effectively by engaging in the social and cultural activities of both domains. Muslim identity did not come at the expense of American identity. Several studies suggest that a bicultural orientation is most conducive to greater life satisfaction, mental health and psychological adjustment (Berry et al., 2006; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Goforth, 2014).

#### *Summary and Relevance to Present Study*

Research surrounding the adaptation of Muslim youth places a considerable emphasis on the perceived incompatibility of Islamic and Western cultures and the difficulties in reconciling multiple identities. The development of cultural identity and acculturation orientations for Muslim youth is influenced by a number of domains. The most influential sources are family and peers, with parental ethnic socialization and same-ethnic peers being a powerful predictor of a strong cultural identity. Additionally, a separation orientation can be detrimental for both the host society and newcomers. Perceived discrimination can also hinder integration efforts by Muslim adolescents as

well as the development of a healthy cultural identity.

Muslim adolescents, particularly males, may react to perceived discrimination from the host society by actively shunning participation with the majority culture, forming negative views towards the host society and asserting their cultural identity in extreme ways that can lead to radicalization. It is clear that religion plays a central role in the development of cultural identity and acculturation orientation for a large number of Muslim adolescents. In fact strong religious identification can mediate the effects of discrimination, which may explain why those who experience discrimination prefer to adopt an acculturation orientation of separation.

The difficulties faced by Muslim adolescents in navigating between two cultures are well documented. Many adolescents struggle with the challenges of maintaining their culture, which is often seen by the larger society as oppressive and conflicting with Western values, and fitting in with the larger society, which is seen by the cultural group as hedonistic and incompatible with Islamic values. However, there is little information on the potential solutions to these issues. The present study takes a strengths-based perspective in exploring the adjustment experiences of newcomer Muslim youth.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Methodology

This qualitative study explored the adjustment experiences of newcomer Muslim youth in a mid-sized southwest Ontario city. Participants were recruited from a local community agency, post-secondary institution and residential neighbourhoods using poster advertisements. Participants were asked to discuss their immigration experiences and attitudes towards the two cultures they lived between. Thematic analysis of the interview content uncovered themes, which captured the essence of their experiences. The study protocol received institutional ethics board approval.

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative design to describe the adjustment experiences of newcomer Muslim youth. This design used the collected statements of the participants to form a composite description that captured the essence of the adjustment experience (Creswell, Hanson, Plano-Clark & Morales, 2007).

A qualitative design was chosen because it allowed for the experiences to be described from the perspectives of the individuals themselves through their firsthand accounts. This design allowed for a deep and rich description of the phenomenon of adjustment. As this is a relatively new and growing area of research, a qualitative approach allowed for exploration of these new areas to provide a foundation for further research. The purpose of this study was to explore the adjustment experiences of Muslim youth who had immigrated to Canada within the past five years.

#### 3.2 Participants

The convenience sample for this study included six participants. All were between 16 and 21 years of age, identified as Muslim and had immigrated to Canada within the past five years. This age range was chosen because individuals over the age of 16 and under the age of 21 who had immigrated anytime within the previous 5 years could

provide an ‘adolescent’ perspective (World Health Organization, 2015). This age range and residency limit also ensured that participants had the memories of their lives in their countries of origin as well as the immigration process. Participants were required to have a basic understanding of English, but fluency was not necessary. Finally, this population was deemed to be capable of understanding the risks and benefits associated with participation in research (Health Canada, 2015).

### 3.3 Instrumentation

#### 3.3.1 Demographic Questions

The survey, developed by the author, consisted of seven items to collect demographic information from the participants including age, gender, country of origin, ethnic composition of current neighborhood and length of time in Canada. This survey was administered at the start of the interview and took approximately five minutes to complete. The collected demographic information provided some context for the participant’s experience.

#### 3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

This survey was developed by the researcher and consisted of 15 open-ended questions that encouraged participants to describe their adjustment experience, how they felt about their own and others expectations of them as well as their sense of identity. Administration of interview questions lasted approximately 45 minutes.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Recruitment posters were posted throughout local community agencies, in the author’s neighborhood and a post-secondary institution. Those interested in participating in the study emailed the researcher to arrange a time to meet, using the email address provided on the recruitment posters. Email addresses were only used to schedule interview times and were deleted once meeting times were arranged. No third-party requests for interview were taken. At the start of each interview, the researcher ensured that each participant understood participation was voluntary, that no one would know

whether they did or did not participate and that there would be no negative consequences should they decide not to participate.

Once a suitable time was arranged, the participants met with the researcher at a mutually agreeable private meeting room at different community locations (e.g. public library, school). Participants were given a letter of information prior to the start of the interview. This letter contained information describing the study, the role of the participant, potential risks and benefits of participation and confidentiality. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification and when agreeable to proceed, signed the consent form. All who attended a meeting with the researcher agreed to participate. All agreed to be audiotaped.

As there may have been participants who had fled war or persecution, or who had experienced a traumatic migration process, interview questions were designed to be broad and allowed the participant to express or omit whatever details they chose in order to minimize the potential for emotional distress. The interviewer was conscious of signs of distress from the participant and was prepared to modify interview questions to minimize emotional distress or end the interview if necessary. Participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. In addition, resources for external supports such as counselling services were provided to all participants. Once the interviews were complete, the interviewer spent 10 minutes debriefing the participants about how the results would be used and answered any questions they had.

A reflective journal was kept to note any thoughts or feelings that arose during the research process and a narrative based on it is presented in Chapter 4. The journal helped maintain consciousness of bias and allowed reflection on and evaluation of the research journey.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The procedure for data reduction was based on the process provided by Creswell (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark & Morales, 2007). First, audio recordings of the

interviews were transcribed in order to organize and prepare the data for analysis. Second, the transcripts were read through to gain a general understanding of the content and its significance. Third, significant portions of the text were highlighted and assigned a one to two-word code. The codes and their corresponding quotes were then reviewed to clarify any meaningful connections between them. Finally, the codes were grouped together to construct themes. Examples of quotes and codes are listed in the appendix.

### *Trustworthiness*

In this study trustworthiness was promoted through the use of several procedures including an audit trail, reflective journal and the use of direct quotes from participants. The audit trail documents the research study from start to finish, this transparency allows readers to judge the entire research process. The researcher also used a reflective journal in an effort to remain self-aware of any biases or changes in beliefs and values during the research process. Quotes taken directly from the participants were used in the written results of the study to increase confidence in its findings.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Results

This chapter provides a description of the themes that emerged through data analysis of the transcripts from semi-structured interviews. It begins with a brief description of the participants and concludes with a personal reflection of the researcher's experiences conducting this research.

Six Muslim immigrant youth participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews, sharing their experiences of adjusting to Canadian society. Participants were recruited through poster advertisements in community agencies, residential neighborhoods and a post-secondary institution. There were an equal number of males and females ranging in age from 16 to 20. Several participants were from Middle Eastern countries (Iraq, Syria, Qatar) and one was from South Asia (Bangladesh). The length of time in Canada ranged from seven weeks to three years. Demographic information of participants is provided in Table 1.



Participant	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Languages Spoken at Home	Length of Time in Canada	Ethnic Composition of Current Neighbourhood	Reason for Immigrating
1	19	Female	Iraq	Arabic	3 years	Mixed Canadian/Arab	Iraq war
2	16	Female	Iraq	Arabic	2 years	White Canadian	Better education
3	16	Female	Syria	Arabic & English	10 months	Canadian - Mixed ethnicities	Syrian War
4	20	Male	Syria	English	7 weeks	International Students (Swedish, Chinese, Nigerian, Kenyan)	Higher education
5	16	Male	Bangladesh	Bengali	2 years	Mixed ethnicities immigrants and Canadian mixed	Better job for father
6	18	Male	Qatar - Ethnically Jordanian/Palestinian	English & Arabic	1 year	Canadian, Arab, Chinese	Higher education

Table 1: Participant demographic information

## 4.1 Themes

Five themes emerged from the interview data to describe the adjustment experience of Muslim youth. The themes included: choice to preserve heritage culture and religion; relating to peers; belonging to host culture; racism, discrimination and challenges to adjustment and resilience, growth and hope.

### 4.1.1 Choice to preserve heritage culture and religion.

In this theme, participants described aspects of their heritage culture that they were missing and hoped to maintain in Canada as well as aspects of their culture they were eager to dismiss. Responses fell under three subthemes: community, family obligation and religion.

Participants described the sense of community and relatedness inherent in collectivist Islamic cultures, with a strong emphasis on respect and safety.

*“A lot of people around you and they help you and things like that. The neighborhood is always noisy and you can always feel that there’s people. There are a lot of people who respect you and save you, like they don’t know you but they will save you and protect you.”* (Participant two)

*“When you want to pray as a group you can find someone that you pray with as a group, you feel like, kind of the brotherhood like in a religious way more than a friendship and solidarity but sometimes because as a religious someone that help you that you’re not doing this thing alone.”* (Participant six)

Negative aspects of the collectivist cultures such as less freedom to express alternative opinions and consequences of going against the grain were also acknowledged.

*“The conservatives are dominant in some areas but you can find some others that-like people who are open minded people...but all other types are discriminated and every type is discriminating the other and nobody like each other actually. In our culture people think that themselves, by themselves are the best at everything and they are better than everyone and all of that... You don’t accept others. You just discriminate others, judge about others, fight others and that’s the thing I didn’t like about my culture...you are not free to say what you think. You must be like, let’s say a sheep in the group and accept everything as it is. If you say something else, you’ll be discriminated, you’ll be hated.”* (Participant six)

The importance of family and family duty was common as a major value of their heritage cultures that they would continue to maintain despite the notion that these values were in contrast with the individualistic values of Canadian society.

*“Respect the family, family is everything. I mean when you are married or you have children you have to remember your father and your mother. Those two people who educate you, spend much of their life and time and money on you so you can’t be an adult and be like “ugh, they are trash now”. Respect your family...not like the Western society like the individual become a team and he just separate from his family and he have another life and I forget anything about my mother and father, not all but this is maybe one of the common tradition here.” (Participant four)*

*“Like for example if my mom were like “you’re not allowed to do this”, Ok I don’t do it. But here I see they are arguing, they sometimes say bad stuff to their parents, for me, ah, no...,like respecting the old people.” (Participant one)*

Concern for one’s homeland and its citizens were particularly salient for those who fled war zones. A strong desire to return or help their country of origin demonstrated that it was never far from their thoughts.

*“I keep reading about Iraqi news, like the stuff that is happening there, I’m still getting upset about Syria and Iraq. But when I hear something more about Iraq, I get so upset about it more...my family like we can’t celebrate anything. Not because we don’t want, you just feel like you can’t-because what happened there it just its terrible.” (Participant one)*

*“I can’t go to Syria, now or after, I have to study. But like, Syria is still in my heart. Maybe I will help the Syrians” (Participant three)*

*“I feel like what has happened in Iraq, like the war in Iraq, I still love it I don’t just forget it and become like a new person. I want to be a new person, but not with my culture.” (Participant two)*

Religious attachment varied from little involvement with organized religion while maintaining a personal belief system congruent with Islamic values to intensive involvement in Islam-specific activities such as membership in Islamic organizations, religious mentoring and mosque attendance. Religion and culture were thought to be separate entities not to be confused with each other, while some participants felt a strong

attachment to both culture and religion, others felt more attachment to one over the other. Religion was considered by all participants to be something personal and intimate between oneself and God; other beliefs should be respected and more focus should be on the similarities between religions rather than the differences.

*“What’s more important to me is to be more attached to religion and to understand what is religion actually...So what I really care about is to understand Islam, to be attached to Islam more than culture...Because a lot of people will mix what is Arabic culture and what’s religion” (Participant six)*

*“It’s a religion between you and God and you’re allowed to do whatever you want in this faith, so this is the way how I raised...None of the people around you should say you’re wrong or you’re right or like because someone is a Christian you’re not going to talk to him– like some stuff is different with their religion or my religion it’s just no point for me, like all of these religions its one God so all of them are the same, just asking guys for peace and to love each other.” (Participant one)*

#### 4.1.2 Relating to peers.

In this theme participants described their issues relating to people of the same age both inside and outside of their cultural groups. Interactions with peers mainly occurred in the context of a school environment. Shared values and experiences were identified as primary qualifications for developing close relationships with peers regardless of cultural background. Although these young Muslim immigrants did not go out of their way to seek out or avoid friendships with peers in specific cultural groups, they reported particular difficulties relating to members of the same cultural group as well as Canadian-born peers.

For members within the cultural group, a mismatch in value systems could result in conflict and alienation. Within-culture relationships were problematic if members held differing views regarding the extent to which one should assimilate into Western culture. Those members who displayed the more negative aspects of their culture of origin such as conservatism, judgment about others’ commitment to Islam and gossip were avoided.

*“I hear people say “if you’re Muslim then you have to wear hijab, you’re not allowed to wear this stuff in the school” or they’re not going to say anything*

*to you, they're just going to look at you from the feet to the hair and for me I really hate this, I don't like it... I make some Iraqi friends, but most of them I get in trouble with. So like every group and any events, like no, sorry, I don't want to go there... the Arabs that I get friends with, they cause a lot of problems for me, a lot of problems which, like, hurt me a lot. I'm finally like "ok, that's it I don't want it anymore".*" (Participant one)

*"Especially with sometimes people from my culture, I found that sometimes it is hard to communicate with them, it's hard to adapt with them. Because I didn't like that culture when I was in there."* (Participant six)

It was difficult to relate to Canadian-born peers due to a lack of shared values, differences in perspectives and differing priorities. Muslim newcomer youth felt that Canadian-born peers could not identify with immigrants, and that there was a general lack of interest on their part to understand their experiences.

*"When you tell them like this happened to me, ok and they're like, "ok...so what?". Like they don't get the problem actually, they don't get the reason behind this. They see this thing is silly or sometimes if they see this things as unrealistic, like here I get the impression that they don't understand what I mean."* (Participant six)

Participants reported compatibility particularly with other immigrants from various cultural backgrounds. They were more likely to find shared values among other newcomers, particularly those from collectivist cultures. More importantly, they felt that this was a group that could truly empathize with their experience of being new to Canada, making them feel less like outsiders. An added advantage to these kinds of friendships was the support and help they offered each other in the adaptation process, particularly with improving their English, while still exposing themselves to different cultures.

*"My best friend, she's Spanish and we're really really really different, like totally different. We have different religion, culture but some stuff, like she's real religious and I'm religious too, so we kind of share some of the stuff...She understands what I mean, for example like when I tell her that I can't wear this dress its too short for me, she'll understand it, but if I tell a white person that I can't wear this, they're like "what the heck? It's warm, you should wear it".*" (Participant one)

*"Mostly Arabic people, not many Canadian people, but people from other cultures like a Korean people, Pakistani people and we always get our*

*English going, we don't speak Arabic and not speak other languages, we speak English to learn better.” (Participant two)*

*“I join a club where you meet people from different countries and you can like share ideas, point of view and improve your English.” (Participant four)*

#### 4.1.3 Belonging to host culture.

In this theme, participants described their feelings toward their new country and culture including efforts to fit in with Canadian society, appreciating the value of diversity and the importance of support from members of the host society.

For all participants, fitting in and being accepted into Canadian society was of paramount importance.

*“This is one the most important things I have to achieve here because once you are involved in the society then you have a good connection with other people it is something normal.” (Participant four)*

Interacting as much as possible with Canadians, native-born or otherwise, was considered to be the best way to learn more about Canadian customs and traditions. Participants described modeling their behavior based on what they would see other Canadians doing in order to better fit in.

*“I interact with Canadian and non-Canadian people every day so I can just see them and what they are doing exactly and I can be like them.” (Participant four)*

*“It's a lot of important. To learn like, how do they live, how do they talk to people so I can learn how to talk to them. And how to be outgoing and stuff.” (Participant five)*

Being able to communicate in English was seen as the greatest obstacle to fitting in successfully. The better their English was, the easier it was to adapt.

*“My English, I didn't learn English from Iraq or Syria, I didn't know any English. But when I came here they taught me to learn English and I very, like get it right away, so I felt like it was easy for me. I really get going with that.” (Participant two).*

Participants reported frustration with not being able to effectively communicate their thoughts in English and frequently being misunderstood.

*It is something normal, maybe definitely not for me, like sometimes I want to express something however I can't. I just try to soften my language and my accent maybe this is the most problem in communication...It's like sometimes you want to express something and like your words cannot help you."*

(Participant four)

Participants acknowledged that to fit in it was necessary to make an effort. They felt the need to push themselves outside of their comfort zones if they wanted to successfully adapt. After they pushed themselves to be in the company of Canadians their main strategy for getting to know people was to just be themselves.

*"When I first came. I tried to push myself to make Canadian friends and because there were no Arabic people. I began to push myself and talk to them and even though my English was broken, I tried to explain to them and they love me and I love them and we get it easy."* (Participant two)

*"I remember the first day of school, I felt lost and really scared. I remember only the first hour, but no after that I'm used to it. But for me, I can't get sad, like after an hour."* (Participant one)

The diversity was highly valued and viewed by many as the greatest draw for moving to Canada. They enjoyed hearing different perspectives and learning about different cultures.

*"I mean if you want to stick with your cultural group then you can stay in your country. Why you are coming here if you just want to close the doors."* (Participant four)

*"One of the reasons why I wanted to come to Canada was to be exposed to different cultures. When you get exposed to more cultures, you're exposed to more societies more people, to more minds, you'll learn more."* (Participant six)

Canadian identity was not seen as an exclusive concept. Participants felt that they would not have to give up their attachment to their heritage to be considered "Canadian".

*“We’re all Canadian and we’re all from different cultures. Asians, Middle Easterns, Whites, like all, all cultures and we are friends. We understand each other like yeah, I feel at home.” (Participant six)*

*“I can be both [Bengali and Canadian], I don’t have to choose, that’s why I like here.” (Participant five)*

Support from members of the host culture was integral in making young Muslim immigrants feel welcome and accepted.

*“They did everything for me. I never felt like I came from a different culture or that I’m new, I felt like I’m with them. Everyone welcomed me and then they taught me everything in the school. And the students were very nice to me and I didn’t have any problems with them.” (Participant two)*

*“Everybody help me, everybody stand next to me. Everybody was with me especially when I had a lot of troubles, a lot of problems, everybody was next to me, without discrimination. Here, my friends, they are with me, they know the truth, even what I am, they accept me for what I am and what I’m doing. Here, I feel that’s my home...Like I was a stranger for 17 years and now I’m home.” (Participant six)*

*“I think because of the people who are around me and the support that I got in the school. Yeah, all these have helped me to get better.” (Participant one)*

#### 4.1.4 Racism, Discrimination and Challenges to adjustment.

In this theme, participants described the challenges they faced, including incidences of discrimination and stereotypes, the effects of the media portrayal of Muslims and general difficulties with Canadian laws and customs.

Incidents of racism and discrimination were rarely experienced. When they did occur they were usually in the form of jokes relating to radical Islamic terrorists.

*“When I don’t eat pork for example because like I can’t eat pork so sometimes your friend, they don’t mean it, but they’ll say something like “oh you are ISIS”. (Participant six)*

*“When they hear you are Muslim, they just think you are ISIS and I’m just like “seriously?” (Participant one)*

Speaking non-English languages in public could put young Muslim immigrants on the receiving end of a verbal attack.



*“I remember one of the times on the bus, I was speaking with my father on the phone, I speak with him in Arabic because he don't know English and an old lady started shouting at me and told me to speak in English.” (Participant six)*

Participants expressed their frustration with stereotypes and generalizations they faced. They wanted to be treated as individuals and not be held accountable for the actions of a minority of individuals within their culture.

*“One of the most problems we have is generalization. When I see a person who is Muslim or who is coming from the Middle East and he is bad, please don't say that all those people are bad, I mean like maybe 1% or let's say 1 per thousand or 1 per ten thousand are bad but you can't say that all of them are bad people.” (Participant four)*

*“Sometimes they know, like you found people who are kind of afraid to sit with you, especially once they find out you are a Muslim, some of them will be like kind of afraid to be open to you.” (Participant six)*

Participants spoke of the misconceptions surrounding Muslim countries and the inaccuracies of the perception of Islamic culture in Western countries.

*“Many people think that the immigrants are a bad people or who live in the stone ages or something like that. No, we have electricity, we have water we have mobile phones, we have big malls. I mean we don't live on Mars” (Participant four)*

Biased Western media was blamed for the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions of Muslims that resulted in negative attitudes toward Muslim immigrants and divisions between cultural groups.

*“I never see like, this is Christian, this is Muslim or whatever it was, we just live together. And contrary to the media try to show us. Usually we go to mosques, and we love each other. It was a really stable life. We don't have such a like hate or the tendency to kill or something like that. I can say that we are living in a modern environment not like the media try to show us as Syrian. They just show you a tiny minority of crazy people for me I don't believe that they are Muslims and they try to bombard you with those shows, news.” (Participant four)*

*“I don't blame them, because lately what they see in the TVs. Like if I was in their place I may do the same thing. You never know. But when I see those*

*stuff on TV I'm always like "ok but you know me, you know, obviously in my face I'm not that, I'm not a bad person." It's okay to be afraid but those kind of people, those extremist can be in any belief, any religion, even if you are atheist, you can be extremist." (Participant six)*

Other challenges young Muslim immigrants faced while adapting to Canadian society were understanding the rules and regulations to be able to access the services available to them.

*"I faced some problems regarding the Canadian laws, like the medical insurance and things relating to legal papers, like papers to just –documents, because if someone knows it previously they can help me and I can just ask and ask and ask, is this true, is this false, is this good? I have to spend more time on preparing those things." (Participant four)*

Navigating Canadian politeness was also considered a challenge that could lead to embarrassing situations.

*"Like the tradition here, they're always saying things like "excuse me, sorry" things like that when lining up. I mean some things that is related to cultural differences. It's like small things but they have a very effective role" (Participant four)*

*"Like sometimes you might be rude to them, but you don't know because you came from a different background that you don't have anything knowledge about. So those moments can be kind of embarrassing" (Participant six)*

#### 4.1.5 Resilience, growth and hope.

In this theme participants spoke about how they overcame their fears and the obstacles they faced in their adjustment process, how successful they have been in adapting and their hopes for their future in Canada.

Participants felt confident that they could change the negative perception of Muslim immigrants by being upstanding citizens who contributed positively to society.

*"Respect the others. Show the people like those who come from the Middle East or have Muslim or Arab as the media try to spread those crazy ideas, that's it. When you show the others how you are educated, polite, good by this way you obligate them to change their views, at minimum about you maybe not to all, however if you are good yeah, you can show them that you are a really good person." (Participant four)*

*“when they admit to me that that’s what they fear, I just telling them the truth. What happened actually, but the truth. And that’s the best thing I can do. I can’t force anyone to love me or hate me. I do my best to show me, who I am.”* (Participant six)

Participants were generally surprised at how well they were adjusting to Canadian society and were noticing positive changes in themselves.

*“I feel like my personality is changing, even my mom she can feel that, which is good for me...this year in the school, I’ve done a lot of stuff there, getting involved in many events. Actually I never thought that I would do this one day, but I feel like, if I do this once, I’m okay to do it over and over. I was a really shy person, but now I’ve gone up on stage many times, participate in many stuff, so I feel like I’m getting better, some stuff is getting better in my personality”*

English acquisition was a source of pride and considered an indicator of successful adaptation.

*“I been here for two years and I’m surprised with myself that I learned a lot of English until now and I’m hoping I’ll get better and better.”* (Participant two)

*“I was myself and I was brave to speak and that’s helped me very much. Like when I came, I didn’t speak very well but now I can understand everything and I can speak.”* (Participant three)

Canada was viewed as a place with many opportunities and participants felt they could achieve things here they would not have been able to achieve in their home countries. All had high educational and career ambitions with a philanthropic focus.

*“I wish that I can build myself here. Just make my dream true and help or benefit not only Canada but the world too. To make people’s lives kind of better. That I want to do creative things, like make devices and leave a legacy like, what’s your dream you can do whatever you want.”* (Participant six)

*“I want to be graduating, finishing school and be a pharmacist. I want to raise a lot of money to the children who have cancer or the children who lose their parents, like kind of in Iraq, I want to raise a lot of money just to help them. And if I have the opportunity to give one or build something for them to live here and have good future for them, I would like to do that. I even have some ideas, like if I got my own pharmacy I would make one day a week for*

*the people who don't have the money to buy medicine I can kind of give it to them for free or something like that.” (Participant one)*

There was a strong emphasis on the power of hope and positivity to overcome difficult times.

*“I do find some hard time, but like I'm kind of a positive person, like things happen for a reason, this is good, yes.” (Participant one)*

*“To hope. Still have hope, whatever happens, because sometimes, most of the time, life is not fair. Especially if you are a good person and you have dreams, life will treat you bad to prepare for you dream, to know what your dream is. Life will test you with the harsh stuff, with everything, but you should really have hope and you have dream and purpose for your life. If you have those three, you will be undefeatable.” (Participant six)*

In summary, Muslim immigrant youth were determined to preserve aspects of their heritage that they held dear such as the importance of community, family and religion. They preferred to form friendships with other newcomers from diverse backgrounds as opposed to Canadian-born or same-culture peers. They felt they had more in common with this population in regards to values and experiences. Participants described their efforts and desires to fit in with the larger society including interacting with settled Canadians and improving their English to near fluency. Some participants reported incidents of racism and discrimination, but rather than blame the individuals perpetrating these abuses, they pinpointed the media as a particularly destructive force in the portrayal of Muslims worldwide. Participants described their surprise at how successful they have been so far in adapting to a new country; English acquisition was considered a particular point of pride. Youth also described their hopes for their futures in Canada, with many participants aspiring to make significant contributions to the larger society.

### **Personal Reflection**

It was a pleasant experience hearing the stories and perspectives of the participants in this study, however it was difficult to remain objective while conducting the interviews. As the child of Sri Lankan immigrants as well as being the partner to a Syrian-Canadian Muslim, I could not help but relate the experiences of these participants to those of my parents and my fiancé's family. I was struck by the similarities in how they chose to interact with and adapt to Canadian society. With the widespread use of the internet and globalization connecting people across the world, I expected these participants to have an easier time adapting as they would have a better idea of what they were entering into compared to my parents who had immigrated 40 years earlier. My parents were part of the first wave of non-white immigrants to Canada following the amendments in the immigration regulations. The Canada they were entering into was much different than the incredibly diverse and tolerant society we are known for today. However, upon reflection I can see that the hostile environment they were entering can be considered similar to the general hostility currently directed toward Muslim immigrants in Western countries.

My parents experienced their share of racism and discrimination, which influenced how they raised us to interact with Canadian society. They were always conscious of the public perception and stereotypes surrounding South Asian immigrants and they did their best to protect us from dealing with the negative experiences they were familiar with. We were told to close all of our doors and stay out of the kitchen while my mother was cooking so that we would not be teased for smelling like curry. We were spoken to in English at home so that we would not be teased for having funny accents. We had to be well-behaved and non-confrontational in public because we did not want to give Sri Lankans a bad name. It was clear that we were not only representing ourselves, but our culture as a whole, a sentiment which was shared by many of the participants I spoke to. I remember being frustrated by this burden and envious of my European-Canadian friends who seemed to be viewed as individuals and were not saddled with the responsibility of being the spokesperson for their culture.

My parents were concerned that my siblings and I would be immersed in a society that would constantly be trying to make us feel inferior, so they compensated by instilling

us with cultural pride. For most of my life, Sri Lanka was embroiled in a brutal civil war between the majority Sinhalese government and minority Tamil rebels and as members of the Tamil minority, my family was unable to return to Sri Lanka once they had settled in Canada. As a result of this, the only connection my siblings and I had to our ancestral homeland was the stories told to us by our parents and the cultural traditions they attempted to continue in Canada. They felt it was important for us know the history and accomplishments of our people, because we would not be learning this anywhere else. Religion was infused in our daily lives and we were taught Hindu mythology and the traditional customs of Tamil Sri Lankans.

Growing up in Winnipeg, I was one of many first-generation Canadians and this cultural diversity was embraced and celebrated with city-wide events like Folklorama which offered members of ethnic communities the opportunity to share and celebrate their heritage with others. As a result of this upbringing, I consider myself to hold a bicultural identity, having equal affection for both Canadian and Sri Lankan culture. I have never felt that Canadian society has pressured me to choose one over the other and I was curious to see if this was a perception shared by new immigrants, particularly those who would be adapting to a country in which they were perceived negatively.

When I became involved with my fiancé during the early stages of the Syrian Civil War, I could not help but notice the parallels between his experience and my own. We were both born and raised in Canada, but still had strong ties to our heritage due to our parents commitment to ingraining us with cultural knowledge and pride. He had never even been to Syria, but the pain of seeing his motherland being destroyed from within was all too familiar. More than anything, it was the pain of knowing that we were being robbed of the opportunity to nurture this part of our identity that connected us to our respective cultures. We would never be able to go back to these places and experience them as our parents had, the scars of civil war would forever change them. Through my association with my fiancé and his family, I have had the pleasure of engaging in the positive aspects of their culture that are often overlooked or ignored by the general public. These are much the same aspects that many of the participants spoke of preserving in Canada and I can understand why it is so important to them. I had the

opportunity to learn about the experiences of my Syrian in-laws and others like them through their own words, alerting me to my own biases and preconceived notions about this population and effectively changing them. It was this process that inspired the conception of this research study.

I was not sure how my own identity as a Sri Lankan-Canadian researcher would impact the data collection process. It is well known that researchers can face some resistance with minority populations, especially if the researchers are members of the dominant society. As someone who walks the line between minority and majority cultures, I was uncertain of how I would be received by the participants. Would I be considered an outsider in the same way as a European-Canadian researcher or would my status as a visible minority from a similar cultural background have any significance? Many of the participants did ask why I was doing this research, giving me the opportunity to explain my background and relationship to the Syrian community. There would be a noticeable change in their demeanor after hearing this explanation; they seemed to become more at ease. They may have initially been suspicious as to the purpose of this study, fearing that their responses would be taken out of context in an attempt to paint Muslim immigrants in an unfavorable light. However, after hearing that my objective was the complete opposite, they seemed more comfortable opening up about their experiences, possibly feeling that I was someone who could somewhat relate to them, albeit through the experiences of my parents and in-laws.

My goal with this research was to promote a deeper understanding of this population that could help dispel the prejudicial attitudes toward this group. I am a strong believer in the success of Canada's multicultural policy and consider myself proof of the effectiveness of integration. I am hopeful that newcomers to Canada, Muslim or otherwise, will find similar success in adapting to Canadian society without having to compromise their cultural identity.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Discussion

The Muslim youth in this study described their desire to adapt into Canadian society while still maintaining aspects of their heritage culture. They did not feel as though they were obligated to denounce any part of themselves or their heritage to feel accepted into Canadian society. For some it was the religious aspect of their culture they hoped to maintain, while for others it was the traits common to most collectivist cultures (community-minded, family oriented, respect for others) that they hoped to maintain and found to be the biggest challenge in adapting to Canada as an individualistic culture.

Participants were eager to engage with Canadian culture and highly valued the multiculturalism they encountered. They had high hopes for their futures, taking advantage of the opportunities available to them in Canada that were not available in their home countries. They wanted to become people that would make positive contributions to society. In general, they maintained positive and optimistic attitudes regarding the adjustment process. They were realistic in understanding that it would not necessarily be a smooth process and there would be difficulties ahead of them. However they felt that they had proved themselves so far to be strong and determined enough to overcome any obstacles in the adaptation process.

Incidents of racism and discrimination were rare, but when they occurred participants did not take it personally. They were aware of the reputation that Muslims hold in Western countries. They were also hopeful that by being themselves and showing others that they were 'good people' that they would be able to dispel negative stereotypes.

#### 5.1 Cultural Identity

Participants had some difficulty conceptualizing cultural identity. National identity, linguistic identity, namely Arab, and religious identity were used interchangeably when discussing culture; all of these identities seemed to combine to inform their cultural identity. Like Phinney and Ong (2007) suggest, the level of



commitment one had toward the beliefs and practices of their heritage culture determined how strong their cultural identity was. Although few of the participants actively engaged in their cultural practices since arriving in Canada, this did not reflect their level of attachment to their culture of origin. Cultural practices were not as important as the values and beliefs that are predominant in that culture, which is what most participants identified with and hoped to maintain in Canada. As they are still in the early stages of adapting to a new country, their main priority was to learn as much as possible about Canadian norms and customs in order to better fit in.

## 5.2 Acculturation

Consistent with the current literature (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006), the acculturation strategy of integration was the overwhelmingly popular choice among these youth. Some participants reported difficulties with relating to peers within and outside of their cultural groups, suggesting they would lean more toward the strategies of assimilation and separation respectively. However, despite these challenges, they still preferred to adopt an integration strategy and made attempts to be involved with both cultures.

Canadian society was regarded as conducive to an integration strategy. Canada was viewed as a place that facilitates and encourages the preservation of diverse cultures. None felt any expectations or pressure by the host society to assimilate or minimize their attachment to their heritage culture. They described feeling incredibly welcomed by their host country and expressed that the help and support they received from settled Canadians upon their arrival was integral in making them feel like they belonged.

## 5.3 Influences on Acculturation and Cultural Identity

### *Family*

The influence of the family was modest for these participants and not quite as pronounced as the literature would suggest (Sabatier & Berry, 2008; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Sam & Virta, 2003). Differences between family members in the ease of adaptation were acknowledged, with younger members adapting much quicker and with less

apparent effort than older members. Older siblings would take on the responsibility of supporting and guiding their younger siblings through the adjustment process. Mothers were described as having more difficulty adapting to Canada, but this did not have any apparent effect on the rest of the family.

Parents were viewed as supportive figures that were encouraging of their children exploring Canadian culture. Participants did not feel pressured by their families into maintaining their culture of origin but they did so of their own volition because of their affection for their culture. For most participants, the practices and values of their origin culture were automatic, as they had been immersed in culturally homogenous societies for most of their lives in which conformity was preferred or in some cases demanded by threats of punishment for diverging from the norm. Canada, being a culturally pluralistic society offered the freedom of choice in how one expressed their identity and in which cultural differences were much more apparent. Participants had the opportunity here to compare and contrast aspects of their culture with others. They had the power to choose which aspects they wished to preserve and which to let go and seemed to enjoy this privilege as they negotiated between the two cultures.

### *Peers*

Interacting with Canadians was the most popular strategy for adjusting to Canadian society. Most interactions between young Muslim newcomers and settled Canadians were facilitated through the school system. However joining social clubs and attending events held by local community organizations were also considered a good way to meet others and participate in Canadian society. All participants had been placed in culturally diverse classrooms with other newcomers from non-English speaking countries.

Inconsistent with the literature, participants did not form friendships based on shared cultural background (Smith & Schneider, 2000). They chose friends based on shared values, interests and experiences, which they were more likely to find among other immigrant youth regardless of cultural background. The participants felt they had more in common with peers who were at a similar stage of acculturation than those who

just shared their cultural background. They felt mutual support in the adjustment process with this group while avoiding the conflicts that are common among within-cultural group friendships. Participants enjoyed being exposed to different cultures, which they felt was reflective of the greater Canadian society. It was believed that if they could successfully adapt within their school, then they would be successful in adapting to the larger society.

### *Perceived Discrimination*

Reports of racism and discrimination in Canada were rare, possibly due to a limited amount of interaction with the larger society. Some participants reported having not had any negative experiences and some had reported experiencing more discrimination in their home countries. Experiences in Canada were largely positive while negative experiences were rationalized and dismissed as outliers. Participants may have been hesitant to discuss negative experiences with a Canadian researcher for fear of seeming ungrateful to their host society (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). It is possible that given the current public perception of Muslims, participants may have been cautious in their responses in hopes of not adding to this negative reputation (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Those who experienced racist comments described them as jokes directed at them relating to Islamic terrorists. The sources were usually friends or acquaintances and participants did not regard them to be malicious. These incidents were considered to be more irritating than hurtful.

There was a noted difference in the reactions to discrimination by the larger society between these first-generation Muslim immigrants and second-generation immigrants in the literature. Second-generation Muslim immigrants experience psychologically adverse effects when faced with racism and discrimination (Berry et al, 2006; Bourhis et al., 1997). They perceive themselves to be members of the larger society and do not see themselves as “other”, as such they expect all of the rights and respect that citizenship affords. However, if this membership is not recognized by the larger society, their sense of belonging and identity is negatively impacted, forcing them to question their allegiances (Güngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013). This can explain

why we are seeing many disenfranchised second-generation Muslim youth across Europe and the United States succumbing to radical ideologies (Güngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013). In contrast, these first-generation participants were prepared to face discrimination in Canada given the current global political climate. They were aware of the unfavourable media representations of Muslims and were understanding of how a prejudice against them could be developed. They felt that meddling governments aiming to divide Muslims and the West for their own political gains were manipulating the public. Their response to discrimination was to not take it personally and to show others that Muslims were not a threat by being 'good people'. Believing that the negative perception of Muslims is due to ignorance rather than malice can be viewed as a possible defense mechanism. Ignorance is more easily remedied by increased exposure and positive interactions with Muslims who behave in ways that reflect Canadian values, contradicting the commonly held beliefs of Islam being antithetical to Western societies. In this way, they feel they have some control, at least on a micro level, to affect change in Canadian attitudes and behaviors toward people like themselves. This attitude helps them to remain optimistic about being able to successfully acculturate to Canadian society, which was the primary goal for all participants.

## 5.4 Religiosity

Religious identification did not play as significant of a role for these young Muslim immigrants as the literature had suggested (Duderija, 2007; Sirin et al., 2004). Some participants considered culture and religion to be mutually exclusive, preferring one to the other, while others considered the two to be synonymous and subscribed to more flexible interpretations of Islam. Those who felt a stronger attachment to their religious identity described the sense of belonging that religious membership provided. Particularly during religious observations like Ramadan, being surrounded by other practicing Muslims was preferred. Participants felt that only those who were also fasting, or had done so in the past, could truly understand the spiritual significance of this practice. During these times, other Muslims were regarded as sources of support and empathy that non-Muslims could not provide. Being able to share this experience also promoted solidarity between members.

Those participants who were more flexible in their interpretation of Islam found that other more conservative members of the religion were not always respectful of these views. They felt they were judged negatively for not strictly adhering to Islamic rules and would frequently have their faith questioned. These types of interactions caused some participants to avoid forming relationships with peers of the same cultural group and pushed them further away from religious identification.

## 5.5 Navigating Cultures

Previous research suggests that Muslim adolescents have difficulty maintaining their heritage culture while trying to fit in to their new society (Sirin et al., 2008; Hutnik & Street, 2009; Mir 2011). Participants in this study did not report the same difficulties. This could be because they were not long removed from their home countries so the threat of losing their culture was not as prominent as the desire to fit in at this stage of the adaptation process. The urge to adapt as efficiently as possible was particularly pronounced among participants who had arrived less than one year ago as noted by their strong desire to lose their accents and improve their English. Language acquisition is often regarded as a measurement for successful adaptation (Kunst & Sam, 2013). Those who pick up the language quickly are considered more likely to be afforded opportunities leading to advancement in the larger society.

As the current literature suggests, adolescent Muslim immigrants preferred to adopt an integration strategy and made efforts to participate in Canadian society (Berry et al., 2006; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Goforth, 2014). They did not feel it was necessary to engage in cultural activities to maintain their culture. Their cultural identity was seen as something inherent within them and not something that could be lost. Contradictory to the binary model of cultural identity, participants did not feel that the development of a Canadian identity would come at the expense of their heritage, offering support for multidimensional models of cultural identity development (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998).

## 5.6 Relevance to Counselling Practice

The results of this study can be useful in promoting the use of multicultural counselling, thereby increasing the multicultural competency of practitioners. Multicultural counselling is becoming increasingly necessary as the world continues to move towards globalization and cross-cultural interactions become inevitable. Culture-Infused Counselling (CIC) (Arthur & Collins, 2005) operates under the premise that all counselling is cross-cultural counselling therefore it is necessary to be culturally competent in all areas of therapeutic practice. CIC emphasizes three domains: cultural awareness of the self, which encourages counselors to be aware of their own values, biases and preconceived notions; cultural awareness of the other, which is the understanding of a client's background and perspective; and the establishment of a culturally sensitive therapeutic alliance (Arthur & Collins, 2005).

The results of this study should encourage counselors to reflect on their assumptions and biases surrounding this population, paying particular attention to the influence of the media on these perceptions. These results can also be used to promote a deeper understanding about this particular population and their primary areas of need. Counsellors must recognize that although some Muslim youth may outwardly express Canadian identities and values, they may still hold firm to the traditions and values of their collectivist culture. Counsellors should be cognizant of this when considering interventions that are mainly used in individualistic populations.

The involvement of Muslim immigrant youth in Canadian cultural activities should not be viewed as a devaluation of their commitment to their heritage culture. Instead this desire to be engaged with the dominant society should be regarded as an extension to their cultural identity. Such involvement should be facilitated and encouraged by counsellors, as it is a crucial component to the integration process. Counsellors should also be aware of and appreciate the pressure that Muslim youth feel to positively represent their culture. This pressure can be a result of expectations placed on them by the larger society or expectations they have placed on themselves. While this can act as a protective factor against the adverse effects of discriminations, it can also be a tremendous burden to bear especially in this current environment in which Muslims are

under intense scrutiny by the public. Counsellors should attempt to understand the psychological implications of not being treated as an individual in an individualistic country.

Counselors should acknowledge the importance placed on English language acquisition by Muslim immigrant youth. Obtaining fluency in English is seen as proof of successful adaptation. It should be noted that for many youth, the inability to communicate in English acts as a major barrier in developing relationships with Canadian-born peers compromising the integration process. One of the main reasons Muslim immigrant youth were drawn to friendships with other immigrant peers was the opportunity to practice their English with each other without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. English acquisition can go a long way in helping Muslim immigrant youth feel included in the larger society.

Although the participants in this study claimed to be unfazed by the prejudicial attitudes and behaviors directed toward them, it is likely that these incidents are more hurtful than they were willing to admit. Counsellors should be aware that persistent microaggressions can lead to adverse psychological effects, but Muslim youth may be resistant to disclosing their true feelings regarding these incidents. These participants demonstrated that the current research regarding young Muslim immigrants may not be entirely generalizable in a Canadian context. It is important for counselors to examine their previous knowledge about this group through a Canadian lens when considering applicability to Muslim newcomers in Canada.

## 5.7 Implications for Policies and Programs

The results of this study suggest that the current policies and programs in place to help immigrants integrate into Canadian society were well received by Muslim immigrant adolescents in London. Participants felt well supported and welcomed because of the help they received from Canadian agencies and organizations upon their arrival.

Programs facilitating interactions between Canadian-born youth and immigrant Muslim youth would be useful in enhancing understanding and empathy between the two groups. These interactions could also help with English language acquisition which many participants reported being a large barrier in being able to relate to their peers.

## 5.8 Limitations

The small sample size and narrow demographic of this study is a primary limitation. As Muslims are not a monolithic group and come from various countries around the world, ideally participants would have been from a wider range of backgrounds from across London. The results of this research will not be applicable to Muslim adolescent immigrants outside of London. Interviews were conducted in English, limiting the sample to only those who could communicate in English as a second language. The nuances and richness of expression possible in one's native language were likely missed as participants attempted to translate their thoughts into newly-acquired English.

Responses of participants may have been affected by the fact that the researcher was a member of Canadian society. Some participants may have felt uncomfortable speaking critically or negatively about Canada to a born Canadian, although this may have been mediated by the researcher's status as a visible minority from a similar collectivist culture.

## 5.9 Future Research

This research adds to the scant body of literature relating to the acculturation experiences of young Muslim immigrants in Canada, however it is limited by its small sample size and only applicable to those who participated. Future research should focus on the experiences of the young Muslim immigrants throughout Canada from a wide range of backgrounds to be able to assess the needs of the population that are unique to the area they have settled in. The city in which they lived was seen as particularly supportive for Muslim immigrants, likely due to its sizeable Middle Eastern population in comparison to less diverse cities, requiring the development of programs addressing their



needs (Statistics Canada, 2013). The experience of Muslim immigrants in less or more culturally diverse cities in Canada is likely to be vastly different.

Future research should also be conducted at various stages in the acculturation process. The responses in this study were largely positive, but participants were in the early stages of adaptation, possibly resembling something similar to a “honeymoon phase”, in which excitement and motivation to be involved with a new culture is high and negative experiences are easily brushed off (Winkleman, 1994). It is possible that the positivity expressed by most participants will dissipate as they spend more time in Canada and gain more exposure to different aspects of Canadian society; they may undergo significant changes in the years to come as they continue to adapt and it is important to understand their changing needs as they go through this process.

## 5.10 Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that Muslim adolescent immigrants are able and prefer to adopt an integration strategy of acculturation. They are able to maintain the aspects of their heritage culture that are important to them, while placing equal importance in participating in Canadian society. They are resilient and optimistic about their future in the early stages of acculturation; which is encouraging for local policy makers and program coordinators to know that their efforts are effective. This study uncovered that more support could be provided in facilitating interactions with other Canadians and improving communication in English.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



# **PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON MUSLIM IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study exploring the experiences of adolescent Muslim immigrants in London

If you are:

Muslim adolescents between the ages of 16 and 19 years old who have immigrated to Canada within the last 5 years, you are invited to participate!

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to:  
Meet with me for an interview to discuss your experience as a young Muslim immigrant in London and the impact of your cultural identity

Your participation would involve 1 session,

which will be about 60 minutes long.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,

please contact:

Sharlini Yogasingam

Faculty of Education

Email: [████████@uwo.ca](mailto:████████@uwo.ca)

Version Date: 29/11/2015

## Appendix B: Participant Demographic Questions

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. How old are you?
2. What gender do you identify as?
3. What is your country of origin?
4. What language(s) do you speak at home?
5. Are you a practicing Muslim?
6. How long have you lived in Canada?
7. What is the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood you live in now?
8. What brought you to Canada?

## Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe your culture of origin?
2. How involved are you with aspects of your culture?
3. How often do you hang out with people outside of your cultural group?
4. How important is your culture of origin to you?
5. How important is it to you to be involved with Canadian society?
6. Do you feel like you have opportunities to interact with people outside of your cultural group?
7. How comfortable are you with interacting with people outside of your cultural group?
8. Do you feel like you are free to perform your cultural practices here?

9. How much do you relate to the people your age that were born in Canada?
10. Can you think of a time where you felt you were being treated unfairly because of your cultural background?
11. Can you think of a time where you felt like you fit in with a group outside of your cultural group?
12. How welcome did you feel when you arrived in Canada?
13. How welcome do you feel now?
14. If you could give advice to another young, Muslim immigrant, what would it be?
15. If you were in charge of things, what would you do to help other young Muslim immigrants adapt to Canada?

## Appendix D: Data Analysis Codes

### Legend

Participant One

Participant Two

Participant Three

Participant Four

Participant Five

Participant Six

Meaning Unit	Code
I remember more about Syria and like my childhood. Like I know all the places. Yeah, but like, after I traveled to here, I feel like I'm missing Iraq more than I'm missing Syria. And I don't know really the reason why	Homesickness
Its' a lot of important. I feel like what has happened in Iraq, like the war in Iraq, I still love it I don't just forget it and become like a new person. I want to be a new person, but not with my culture.	Love for home
I keep reading about Iraqi news, like the stuff that is happening there, I'm still getting upset about Syria and Iraq. But when I hear something more about Iraq, I get so upset about it more. But I feel like both of them, they're my country,	Concern
it's very important. Like I can't go to Syria, now or after, I have to study. But like, Syria is still in my heart. Maybe I will help the Syrians	Home Love



<p>Well, for my parents, whatever I ask, they give me and they never get angry with me. They let me go with my friends. Sometimes my father send me to night school to get better in the subjects and it was a happy life.</p>	<p>Happy Life</p>
<p>When I was living at home, when I was living in Qatar, I was always discriminated because I'm not a citizen there. Or like for example in Jordan, because my mother is Palestinian and not like first class Jordanian kind of. Those kinds of moments, I don't find them here, I didn't find that people have that thinking here</p>	<p>Home hate</p>
<p>My culture, kind of a little conservative, complicated kind of a little bit How do I mean by complicated? The conservatives are dominant in some areas but you can find some others that-like people who are open minded people who are moderate people who still stick with old tradition, new tradition, who's not stick with anything but all other types are discriminated and every type is discriminating the other and nobody like each other actually</p>	<p>Discrimination</p>
<p>in our culture people think that themselves, by themselves are the best at everything and they are better than everyone and all of that. they think that you are always right and that you are best and the thing is everyone is wrong and you're not giving a chance to every person to live in their own way, you're just a judgmental person. You're judging others and you think your way is better. You don't accept others. You just discriminate others, judge about others, fight others and that's the thing I didn't like about my culture</p>	<p>supremacy</p>
<p>if you said your opinion about something, you are not free to say what you think. You must be like, let's say a sheep in the group and accept everything as it is. If you say something else, you'll be discriminated, you'll be hated,</p>	<p>No Freedom</p>

<p>Not a lot to me. To me personally, I did not adapt to my culture back home, I didn't like it back home. I always knew I was like criticizing my culture, I didn't actually like it. So when I came here I didn't find it hard to adapt because I was not attached to that culture</p>	<p>Negative culture</p>
<p>a lot of people around you and they help you and things like that</p>	<p>Helpful</p>
<p>The neighbourhood is always noisy and you can always feel that there's people. And there are a lot of, how do you say, people that are speaking a lot so that you can feel confident with speaking with each other</p>	<p>Community</p>
<p>there are a lot of people who respect you and save you, like they don't know you but they will save you and protect you.</p>	<p>Protection</p>
<p>It happens like every month. I miss my school, I miss my friends, like I always stuck with my friends back home. Yeah, I wish I could just go see them but like everything will get worse</p>	<p>Return</p>
<p>sometimes people pretend like they are something they are not. It's kind of – it's really complicated, right now. It's for safety and for not getting discriminated against.</p>	<p>Fake</p>
<p>I had a lot of experiences in my life, like I've seen many stuff in my life sometimes I think I'm tough but then I hear a song or something reminds me of it and I start to cry. Like I thought that it's not bothering me at all but no, I still have a need to get it out.</p>	<p>Flashbacks</p>

<p>when you want to pray as a group you can find someone that you pray with as a group, you feel like, kind of the brotherhood like in a religious way more than a friendship and solidarity but sometimes because as a religious someone that help you that you're not doing this thing alone. No, but you feel more comfortable doing this thing</p>	<p>brotherhood</p>
<p>my family like we can't celebrate anything. Not because we don't want, you just feel like you can't-because what happened there it just its terrible</p>	<p>Grief</p>
<p>back home, it was very beautiful, but because of the war it is mostly gone</p>	<p>War Effects</p>
<p>maybe they will have a native English tongue and speak Arabic with an accent..Their traditions will be affected by the Canadian customs and traditions and then maybe my grandsons will be Canadian purely.</p>	<p>Future generations</p>
<p>I want-they have to make relations with their cousins, uncles, aunts so they have to learn Arabic . I don't want to enforce it like it has to be this crazy language but just the basic things</p>	<p>Family Connection</p>
<p>Respect the family, family is everything. I mean when you are married or you have children you have to remember your father and your mother. Those two people who educate you, spend much of their life and time and money on you so you can't be an adult and be like "ugh, they are trash now". Respect your family</p>	<p>Respect family</p>

<p>Thank god we have social media. Facebook, what's app and so on so I can call them and communicate with them when I feel I have to do that. Now I'm 20 years old so it's obvious I can't depend on my mother and my father forever, it's a good opportunity to be alone maybe, I have to be independent. Of course I miss them but life will continue it will not stop on me because I miss my mother or miss my father or whatever.</p>	<p>Connection to family</p>
<p>I'm the oldest. It's hard. Sometimes my mom will tell me like you have to tell your younger siblings like you have to teach them how to get going in life...I always knew I had the responsibility to teach my younger siblings.</p>	<p>Responsibility</p>
<p>for the religion, it's something between you and God and your belief in it...Well for my family, we're really open, like we're kind of different from the muslims, like for example being a muslim, it's a religion between you and God and you're allowed to do whatever you want in this faith, so this is the way how I raised</p>	<p>Personal Beliefs</p>
<p>none of the people around you should say you're wrong or you're right or like because someone is a Christian you're not going to talk to him or to her cuz like they're wrong or – like some stuff is different with their religion or my religion it's just no point for me, like all of these religions its one God so all of them are the same, just asking guys for peace and to love each other.</p>	<p>Love</p>
<p>It comes up once in a while, especially with this stuff going on in Iraq and watching the news, especially what happened before in the last three weeks, it just kills me from the inside</p>	<p>Heartache</p>
<p>My parents put me in a mosque to learn Quran and things like that and to learn my religion too</p>	<p>Religious education</p>

<p>no I don't go to mosque til now. Maybe I don't have time, maybe I'm not such interested because like in order to practice religion you can just practice it anywhere, it's not just specific to mosques and you just came here to live and have a good life.</p>	<p>Religious Practice</p>
<p>We gather money for orphans, we do like a Islam awareness week, where we explain and talk about islam to people. We do give sometimes lessons about Islam. We do dawa, dawa is, to people who want to convert and want to know more, know stuff about Islam... we will sit with him and talk to him to explain why you want to convert and can help him in anything. Or someone who like came in Islam new, we can explain to him and talk to him and like teach him how to change, like help him to adapt and change. And we take care of like for example the refugee crisis, the refugee who came to Canada, we take care of them, we gather donations and donate- we take care of any refugee who wants anything in the group and like mostly social activities...We do sometimes other stuff like we take care of in university for example because there are a lot of Muslims that need prayer rooms and to make more social specials like in the case of Ramadan</p>	<p>Religious involvement</p>
<p>. It involves that somewhere that you feel comfortable in, that you don't feel like youre weird or that youre the only one who's doing it, but you feel like you're doing something everyone else is doing around you. And for example like you find people who truly understand, because like he's going, that person, he or her going through the stuff that you are going through, like for example fasting. Like for example in Canada you have lots of friends , they know how you suffer and everything, but still they rarely know really what you feel compared to someone who is actually fasting. You really need to find someone who is really fasting to know what that really means</p>	<p>Islamic Mood</p>

<p>building more mosques and kind of make stuff easier for muslims like stuff for praying for example or easier work for who's fasting. Those stuff. And do like helping section for like religious stuff, not only Muslims, Muslims and any other religion too. And like those stuff. Like stuff that really kind of take care of Muslims and help muslims with what they want to do as religious.</p>	<p>Religious help</p>
<p>what's more important to me is to be more attached to religion and to understand what is religion actually. What is Islam. Because it's easy that they get affected by media and tv or by people who are discriminating, especially if they don't understand Islam. So what I really care about is to understand Islam, to be attached to Islam more than culture. But from my culture and to learn from culture and divide what's my culture and religion. Because a lot of people will mix what is Arabic culture and what's religion</p>	<p>Attachment to Islam</p>
<p>Best of the family, usually not like the Western society but like the individual become a team and he just separate from his family and he have another life and I forget anything about my mother and father, not all but this is maybe one of the common tradition here.</p>	<p>Different values</p>
<p>Like for example if my mom were like "you're not allowed to do this", Ok I don't do it. But here I see they are arguing, they sometimes say bad stuff to their parents, for me, ah, no...,like respecting the old people.</p>	<p>Respect elders</p>
<p>I wish to be involved with some [clubs/groups] but some people I don't like to get involved with them. I don't like-in the beginning, I make some Iraqi friends, but most of them I get in trouble with and I'm pretty sure the reason wasn't from me, maybe like I said something wrong, but like I couldn't be with them.</p>	<p>Conflicts</p>
<p>So like every group and any events, like no, sorry, I don't want to go there.</p>	<p>Avoidance</p>

<p>raising children here is totally different than raised in Syrian or Iraqi culture. Like for me, I love the way of how I was raised than here, even if it was tough, but I kind of feel that I am a good kid at home</p>	<p>Upbringing differences</p>
<p>my best friends, she's Spanish and we're really really really different, like totally different.</p>	<p>Friend</p>
<p>We have different religion, culture but some stuff, like she's real religious and I'm religious too, so we kind of share some of the stuff.</p>	<p>Common ground</p>
<p>I don't really have that much friends, she's the only one that I talk to. Um, it's hard for me to...I don't know how to say it, but it's not hard like I don't really, I love to talk to people a lot, but it's hard to get so in touch with them. I got a lot of experience only with Arabs, I don't know with Canadians yet. Like the people who work with me, like for example in the school, I can't be friends with them. We're totally different. Like some of them go to the right and some of them go to the left, we can't get together</p>	<p>Difficulty bonding</p>

<p>the arabs that I get friends with, they cause a lot of problems for me, a lot of problems which, like, hurt me a lot.</p>	<p>Hurt</p>
<p>I'm finally like "ok, that's it I don't want it anymore".</p>	<p>Fed Up</p>
<p>Sometimes I feel, like they have different thoughts that, I don't want to say Muslims or Arabs, than the people who arrived to new to Canada.</p>	<p>Think Differently</p>
<p>as soon as a little story makes me cry or get like "aww that's so sad" but sometimes for them they're just laughing and that's it or they don't care about it. Some stuff likes it's really little but, it doesn't deserve to even care about it, they make it like it's a bigger problem. Maybe because I've seen a lot of troubles in my life</p>	<p>Strange perspective</p>
<p>and I'm the only one in the class who's paying attention like "oh I want to see what's going to happen" and by the end, like they showed after 10 years how they become, some of them become professors in the university and like i was crying for this and they're like "miss, when is this going to be finished, this is taking forever".</p>	<p>Can't relate</p>



<p>Yeah like she [best friend] understands what I mean, for example like when I tell her that I can't wear this dress its too short for me, she'll understand it, but if I tell a white person that I can't wear this, they're like [makes face] "what the heck? It's warm, you should wear it"</p>	<p>Shared values</p>
<p>I have only one friend, he's Canadian, he's nice, but we're not really like "friends". We used to talk a lot during the school and he's my best friend's boyfriend so they kind of use me as a bridge between them. So that's how we become friends, but I guess he's like my best friend.</p>	<p>Canadian friends</p>
<p>I don't a lot, like I try my best to get with them, and get easy with them, I try my best. Its hard, but when I try a lot of times it will be easier.</p>	<p>Persistence</p>
<p>I think we are like the same. Like normally I would easily get easy with them and outgoing. Because I don't think if they were in Canada for a long time it would matter.</p>	<p>Similarities</p>
<p>If they are my friend they will be like my best friend.</p>	<p>No Difference</p>
<p>Especially with sometimes people from my culture, I found that sometimes it is hard to communicate with them, it's hard to adapt with them. Because I didn't like that culture when I was in there.</p>	<p>Alienated</p>
<p>The friends that I have they don't go really with the culture. The only similar thing that relates to us in culture is that we are Muslims but everything else we're not going with that culture actually.</p>	<p>Non-cultural</p>

<p>. Great people, I love them they love me. They , my best friends are non Muslims I'm happy that I know them</p>	<p>Friends</p>
<p>when I don't find them like they really understand like for example found, not excuses but he asks so, for example when you tell them like this happened to me, ok and they're like, "ok...so what?". Like they don't get the problem actually, they don't get the reason behind this. they see this thing is silly or sometimes if they see this things as unrealistic, like here I get the impression that they don't understand what I mean. Or for example when he don't show that he care, yeah he'll listen but like because he must listen not because he wants to listen, like he's not interested in listening for experience</p>	<p>Don't understand</p>
<p>To be respectful and to be always with me if I have a happy times or a sad ties and I would be with them too. Make nothing secret and would never tell my secrets.</p>	<p>Friendship</p>
<p>When I first came here I had a lot of, I was afraid, I felt like I would never get easy going with people but when I tried to talk to them and they tried to talk to me I saw that they were really nice</p>	<p>Relationships</p>
<p>Because I try to help them with adjusting and when I help them, I was like them some day and I feel how they feel and I'm trying to push them like I pushed my self I push them to try new experiences so that they can get comfortable with the communication and their speaking</p>	<p>Encourage</p>

<p>When I join a club I don't like-my theory is not where are they come from, but what is the activity, what are they doing? They are arabs or not, who cares?</p>	<p>Activity</p>
<p>I have two classmates who come from the Middle East, not from my country, I can't see like I interact with them better than the other people, for me they are, even if they are from the middle East for me they are like the other students in my class</p>	<p>Same</p>
<p>here for example for the school I see many people doing that like they're putting their legs on the desk, like if you're in the theatre watching you suddenly see, like, feet behind you. Like for me, this is disrespectful.</p>	<p>Disrespect</p>
<p>what I'm telling you you're listening but some people are like "what is she talking about, she's not even a muslim"</p>	<p>Doubters</p>
<p>I hear people say "if you're muslim then you have to wear hijab, you're not allowed to wear this stuff in the school" or they're not going to say anything to you, they're just going to look at you from the feet to the hair and for me I really hate this, I don't like it</p>	<p>judgments</p>
<p>Mostly Arabic people, not many Canadian people, but people from other cultures like a Korean people, Pakistani people and we always get our English going, we don't speak Arabic and not speak other languages, we speak English to learn better.</p>	<p>Practice</p>

<p>I join a club where you meet people from different countries and you can like share ideas, point of view and improve your English.</p>	<p>English support</p>
<p>Only one kid in the school, but I don't know if that's because of where am I'm from or not. But he was so bad to me, like really really bad.... I feel like he hates me, with how he behaves, like how he's looking at me, he's like "uh" or when we're playing and he hit the ball at me.</p>	<p>Hated</p>
<p>But I don't know if it's because of my background, because he has a lot of friends who are Arabic and and their Muslims. So I'm not sure, maybe he doesn't like me for me just who I am. I don't know but some people they are saying "no he's racist, because you're a muslim he doesn't like you. But I don't really believe it,</p>	<p>Uncertain discrimination</p>
<p>many people think that the immigrants are a bad people or who live in the stone ages or something like that. No, we have electricity, we have water we have mobile phones, we have big malls. I mean we don't live on Mars. When they bring him to a big mall, he told them "yeah we have something like this" and they get amazed, "oh guys, we have this, we don't live in a tent or a camps or something like that. I mean all of us now we live in the 21st century. I mean maybe there are many differences of course but I mean we are not living in the middle ages or maybe before.</p>	<p>Stereotypes</p>
<p>When you are dealing with people you can just show them who you are by your actions with them and you can probably change their views. Because one of the most problems we have is generalization. When I see a person who is Muslim or who is coming from the Middle East and he is bad, please don't say that all those people are bad, I mean like maybe 1% or let's say 1 per thousand or 1 per ten thousand are bad but you can't say that all of them are bad people. Sometimes that's a really problem -around the globe and the media is responsible for this. They just show you a tiny minority of crazy people for me I don't believe that they are Muslims and they try to bombard you with those shows, news</p>	<p>Generalizations</p>

<p>sometimes they know, like you found people who are kind of afraid to sit with you, especially once they find out you are a muslim, some of them will be like kind of afraid to be open to you, but that's rarely happened.</p>	<p>Afraid</p>
<p>like I remember one of the times on the bus, I was speaking with my father on the phone, I speak with him in Arabic because he don't know English and an old lady started shouting at me and told me to speak in English</p>	<p>English only</p>
<p>, "yeah but you guys are Muslims, you don't accept others, you're muslims you don't care about others, you don't love others.</p>	<p>Prejudice</p>
<p>when I don't eat pork for example cuz like I can't eat pork so sometimes your friend, they don't mean it, but they'll say something like "oh you are ISIS".</p>	<p>ISIS</p>

<p>When they hear you are muslim, they just think you are ISIS and I'm just like "seriously?"</p>	<p>Terrorist</p>
<p>when you want to sit and talk with people, you know them, they trust in you and they're happy that they know you, after two days when they know you are muslim they'll be more offish with you and afraid to talk with you. SO like those kind of moments that happen, not a lot, its rarely but it happens and sometimes you feel like "mmm why?"</p>	<p>Treatment</p>
<p>Why, when it comes to Islam or because I'm a Muslim you treat me this way? But if its someone else from another religion you try to help him.</p>	<p>Unfair</p>
<p>Muslims have been through a lot of religious war. Before in Europe, in medieval days, Christianity had the same wars. And before that happened with many religions, with Jewish before Christianity in the Middle East. It happened all the time. There was a time for everybody. And now it's time for Muslims to be through this.</p>	<p>History</p>
<p>Soon, I don't think it will change. It will change yeah, but I'm not sure if it will change soon. Especially after what happened with Brexit and what happened about Trump uprising and all of that.</p>	<p>Global change</p>
<p>All of those have been more dividing and there are some people trying to hold back and get people more together than divided and there's kind of a war happening between the both sides, one who wants us to be one and one who wants to divide us.</p>	<p>Division</p>
<p>you can find a lot of people who are coming from eastern, or the Middle East, eastern side of Asia, you'll find them discriminating against people who are white and European by their always as racist or they're always this, but they are not. Or you'll find someone discriminated against because he's Asian or something or for one, that he's jewish. So that happens to many people. So I can't take this to not mean fit</p>	<p>Universal</p>

<p>I never see like, this is Christian, this is Muslim or whatever it was, we just live together. And contrary to the media try to show us. Usually we go to mosques, and we love each other. It was a really stable life. We don't have such a like hate or the tendency to kill or something like that.</p>	Stable
<p>I can say that we are living in a modern environment not like the media try to show us as Syrian.</p>	Media portrayal
<p>There's a lot of bias and discrimination. Now like when you open any channel they are not credible maybe in different percentages but the media does not tell you the truth they just make you- they just show you to see what they want you to see and the other part are hidden.</p>	Media Agendas
<p>I don't blame them, because lately what they see in the TVs. Like if I was in their place I may do the same thing. You never know. But when I when I see those stuff on tv I'm always like "ok but you know me, you know, obviously in my face I'm not that, I'm not a bad person." It's okay to be afraid but those kind of people, those extremist can be in any belief, any religion, even if you are atheist, you can be extremist.</p>	Media influence
<p>before you listen to the media about islam, listen to the media in general. Media especially in those days they focus on negative stuff, they need more news. And one of the things that's trending right now is Islamic terrorism</p>	Dealing with Media

<p>My fears was, to not get English and to get really low marks and that no one would love me and be friends with me</p>	<p>Fears</p>
<p>the only thing that is really bothering me is that when I come here, when you're applying to get work they're asking you for experience and at the same time they're not giving you the opportunity to get that experience. Like what should you do, some people are lying in their resume and they're putting stuff that's not right. So they force you to lie to get a job. For me, I've never done this, I was just lucky to get this job</p>	<p>Frustration</p>
<p>You have to get your mother to teach you how to cook, because for me at the beginning, yeah I don't like the food here, even the Mediterranean restaurant, their food is awful, so many times I called my mom and ask "so how to prepare this?"</p>	<p>Bad food</p>
<p>Maybe the weather? One of them. The educational system maybe it's a little different but not a big problem but it is something I have to be concerned with it. Like the tradition here, they're always saying things like "excuse me, sorry" things like that when lining up. I mean some things that is related to cultural differences. It's like small things but they have a very effective role</p>	<p>Challenges</p>
<p>I faced some problems regarding the Canadian laws, like the medical insurance and things relating to legal papers, like papers to just – documents, because if someone knows it previously they can help me and I can just ask and ask and ask, is this true, is this false, is this good? I have to spend more time on preparing those things</p>	<p>Problems</p>



<p>I'm still learning, and yes sometimes I do make mistakes but Mistakes like, hand movements, the way that you speak, your volume, the words that you use, the style of speaking. Like sometimes you might be rude to them, but you don't know because you came from a different background that you don't have anything knowledge about. So those moments can be kind of embarrassing</p>	<p>Mistakes</p>
<p>It's a lot of important. To learn like, how do they live, how do they talk to people so I can learn how to talk to them. And how to be outgoing and stuff.</p>	<p>Fit in</p>
<p>there are a lot of things happening in the library and the community centre. I'm volunteering here</p>	<p>Involvement</p>
<p>However when it comes to different cultures, yeah maybe you notice many differences. Of course you have to try to become familiar with the new tradition here because most of the people familiar with it...you live in Canada you have to be familiar with the people there, what they like what they don't like.</p>	<p>Learn Traditions</p>
<p>if they see something different from what is familiar or what they used to see maybe they get, not angry or upset but maybe they just become familiar with you so I have to keep up with what I see here like the culture and tradition</p>	<p>Keep Up</p>

<p>I try as much as I can to become part of the society here.</p>	<p>Society member</p>
<p>I participate in Christmas, I really love Christmas here. I enjoy the parties that they do here, like how the shops [gestures decorating] have all the colours around and songs and Santa around! I really love this.</p>	<p>Canadian Traditions</p>
<p>I remember only the first hour, but no after that I'm used to it. But for me, I can't get sad, like after an hour, like I don't have difficulties with the place that I'm living in</p>	<p>Adaptation</p>
<p>, for my mom, I know that when we move to a different house, it takes her like a month to get used to it, but for me, no I get used to the person or the place that I'm living in really easily.</p>	<p>Family Difference</p>

I pushed myself hard and I didn't think of anything, just education and to make my family proud of me	Push
my younger sister after me, I tell her to push herself and not to be sad but she is shy and not really easy going so I'm trying really hard to push her and my really younger sister she is just easy going, like she just went to school the first day and then she has a lot of friends, because like she was little	Sibling difference
No. It doesn't matter to me.	Apathy
The first time I will be shy, but then it's okay, I'll be comfortable with them	Shy
just to be yourself	Be Yourself
It's happy too. I have ALL my family here. All my aunts and my grandmother and my father are here	Family
my life here is the same as my life in Syria	Same life

<p>I join a club where you meet people from different countries and you can like share ideas, point of view and improve your English. Also in my class, we have people from different cultures. I see it like if I can be a successful student in my class then I can maybe in the future, I can be successful in my practical life. So the same environment here is like the same environment outside.</p>	Practice
<p>this is one the most important things I have to achieve here because once you are involved in the society then you have a good connection with other people it is something normal.</p>	Connection
<p>I will have a job here for the future and a good family here so you have to keep in mind you have to be accepting of their traditions and what they think and become a part of you.</p>	Acceptance
<p>I interact with Canadian and non-Canadian people every day so I can just see them and what they are doing exactly and I can be like them</p>	Model
<p>From the airport I had three people who are from my program who are the one who are supposed to support me or help me if I have any problem here. They came to the Toronto airport and they bring me here to London. Also two of my friends here arrived before me for two or three weeks so they know many details like regarding the bank account, telephone lines, IDs and some other papers</p>	Adjustment help

<p>I get familiar with the London, its traditions how the city works, it's most important places, the education system here how they process their general life.</p>	<p>Familiar</p>
<p>My accent. Maybe I'll join more clubs, have more Canadian-not Canadian, have more friends, get integrated with the environment and ensure that I work the right way.</p>	<p>Integration</p>
<p>Everybody help me, everybody stand next to me. Everybody was with me especially when I had a lot of troubles, a lot of problems, everybody was next to me, without discrimination. Here, my friends, they are with me, they know the truth, even what I am, they accept me for what I am and what I'm doing. Here, I feel that's my home.</p>	<p>Loved</p>
<p>They know I'm new, and they welcomed me and they stood next to me and they helped me a lot so here I felt welcome.</p>	<p>Belong</p>
<p>Now, I feel really welcome, I feel home. Really this is what Canada is called, home. Like I was a stranger for 17 years and now I'm home</p>	<p>Home</p>

<p>See everything as objective, as objectively and understand others and talk with people. Don't take judges from the first look or from one thing, know people, get sit with people, understand others and know what they are. And accept that you've found a different way of life.</p>	<p>Objectivity</p>
<p>when I first came. I tried to push myself to make Canadian friends and because there were no Arabic people</p>	<p>Challenge</p>
<p>I began to push myself and talk to them and even though my English was broken, I tried to explain to them and they love me and I love them and we get it easy.</p>	<p>Success</p>
<p>I think because of the people who are around me and the support that I got in the school. Yeah, all these have helped me to get better.</p>	<p>Support</p>

<p>they did everything for me. I never felt like I came from a different culture or that I'm new, I felt like I'm with them.</p>	<p>Belong</p>
<p>Everyone welcomed me and they then they taught me, they taught me everything in the school. And the students were very nice to me and I didn't have any problems with them.</p>	<p>Welcome</p>
<p>Don't be shy when you talk to people and get more easy for yourself . go push themselves and talk to people and not be shy so they can be popular with the others</p>	<p>Outgoing</p>
<p>Oh very much, okay in the airport there were many soldiers and they say like "welcome welcome" and then they helped us, like there was a translator for us and they gave us jackets because it was snow and then they drive us to the hotel</p>	<p>Grand Welcome</p>
<p>- I remember the first day of school, I felt lost and really scared.</p>	<p>Scaerd</p>

When we came to Canada it was not like with the Syrians who are coming. Like I heard that really, they're living the good life here, they're given money, they're given houses.	Different Treatment
people should communicate, people should really try to push themselves to communicate between peoples. And really communicate and work hard it will make life easy and you will be happy.	Communication
I can be both [Bengali and Canadian], I don't have to choose, that's why I like here.	Bicultural
It didn't take long. I get on easy with them [Canadians]. My English, I didn't learn English from Iraq or Syria, I didn't know any English. But when I came here they taught me to learn English and I very, like get it right away, so I felt like it was easy for me. I really get going with that.	English
It is something normal, maybe definitely not for me, like sometimes I want to express something however I can't because as I told you it has only been seven weeks. I just try to soften my language and my accent maybe this is the most problem in communication...It's like sometimes you want to express something and like your words cannot help you	Can't Communicate
Just respect the others, you tell because Canada is like an immigrant country so you will face with people from different cultural backgrounds and opinions, you just have to respect all the opinions and views and do what you think is right unless it hurts the others. So respect the others and be good and the community will be good with you also.	Respect others
Just respect the new culture that you're going to live in. You can't force people to believe what you're believing. And if you have any good ideas or good advice just say it, if it's not then don't say it.	Respect host
I've shared my story many many times with others and the reaction that I got some people are crying and I'm like "why they are crying, I don't get it" Maybe because I was young, I was 16. But I now know, like totally different. If I just say a story I start to cry	Affected



<p>I took a lot of classes in English back home so I have good English. When the person who talks to me is like [makes confused face]. Like “what’s your name?” and I’m looking at him like “I don’t know what you mean” and someone else will be like “he’s asking you, what’s your name” and “can I shake your hand?” and I’m like “huh?” I don’t know what that means! And they’re like “what the heck is going on? You don’t know what he’s telling you?” So only in the first hour I was lost in the school and you know nothing, people talk to me and I’m like “hmm?” I don’t know what they mean, they’re like “how are you” and I’m like “mmhmm”.</p>	<p>Miscommunication</p>
<p>actually I’m excited, I want to try this. One of the reasons why I wanted to come to Canada was to be exposed to different cultures.</p>	<p>Reason to move</p>
<p>I wish that I can build myself here. Just make my dream true and help or benefit not only Canada but the world too. to make people’s lives kind of better. that I want to do creative things, like make devices and leave a legacy like, what’s your dream you can do whatever you want.</p>	<p>Dreams</p>
<p>To hope. Still have hope, whatever happens, because sometimes, most of the time, life is not fair. Especially if you are a good person and you have dreams, life will treat you bad to prepare for you dream, to know what your dream is. Life will test you with the harsh stuff, with everything, but you should really have hope and you have dream and purpose for your life. if you have those three, you will be undefeatable.</p>	<p>Hope</p>
<p>My hopes is to get a good grade in high school to go to university. Study really hard to become a doctor and graduating and have a good job. Be proud of myself and my family will be proud of me.</p>	<p>Goals</p>
<p>I want to be graduating, finishing school and be a pharmacist.</p>	<p>Career goals</p>

<p>I want to raise a lot of money to the children who have cancer or the children who lose their parents, like kind of in Iraq, I want to raise a lot of money just to help them. And if I have the opportunity to give one or build something for them to live here and have good future for them, I would like to do that. I even have some ideas, like if I got my own pharmacy I would make one day a week for the people who don't have the money to buy medicine I can kind of give it to them for free or something like that</p>	Philanthropy
<p>years I hope I will be a successful engineer with a good vision and experience after that maybe I'll work, maybe I'll start my masters degree however I just plan to be successful.</p>	Career success
<p>I want to go to medical school. I want to do heart surgeon. When I was little I want to be a doctor</p>	Goal
<p>it is impossible that everything will happen as you expect regardless of your background, religion or anything as a normal person here or any spot in the world. It is impossible that everything will happen as you want to be.</p>	Unpredictable
<p>respect the others. Show the people like those who come from the Middle East or have Muslim or Arab as the media try to spread those crazy ideas, that's it</p>	Advocate
<p>when you show the others how you are educated, polite, good by this way you obligate them to change their views, at minimum about you maybe not to all, however if you are good yeah, you can show them that you are a really good person.</p>	Change views
<p>I didn't feel like I'm discriminated against actually, I feel like now I'm free to be what I want to be.</p>	Free
<p>when they admit to me that that's what they fear to, I just telling them the truth. What happened actually, but the truth. And that's the best thing I can do. I can't force anyone to love me or hate me. I do my best to show me, who I am.</p>	Truth

I been here for two years and I'm surprised with myself that I learned a lot of English until now and I'm hoping I'll get better and better	Impress
I was myself and I was brave to speak and that's helped me very much. Like when I came, I didn't speak very well but now I can understand everything and I can speak	Brave
I feel like my personality is changing, even my mom she can feel that, which is good for me...this year in the school, I've done a lot of stuff there, getting involved in many events	Positive Changes
I speak my stories into the camera, so most of the people, they know my story. Like we did something, it's called poetry, you write, I have done this once, I was on the stage and I was reading and suddenly I was crying in front of everyone.	Share
Actually I never thought that I would do this one day, but I feel like, if I do this once, I'm okay to do it over and over.	Surprise
I was a really shy person, but now I've gone up on stage many times, participate in many stuff, so I feel like I'm getting better, some stuff is getting better in my personality	Growth
I do find some hard time, but like I'm kind of a positive person, like things happen for a reason, this is good, yes.	Positivity
It's important to me, not just Canadian society, but with any society, because when you get exposed to more cultures, you're exposed to more societies more people, to more minds, you'll learn more	Cultural exposure
You don't have all the whole knowledge you need others, to learn from their experiences, to learn from them. To know like kind of how to act, how to deal, how's life going. Not in your own perspective only, but to see other perspectives, other ways of life.	perspectives

I mean if you want to stick with your cultural group then you can stay in your country. Why you are coming here if you just want to close the doors	Value diversity
Most of the people I meet them now are from Arabic culture especially here and like from China, so they are good people good friends. I mean the culture and the diversity it's not a problem for me	Diversity
we're all Canadian and we're all from different cultures. Asians, Middle Easterns, Whites, like all, all cultures and we are friends. We understand each other like yeah, I feel at home.	All Canadian
I want them to know about my culture. To learn from not only my culture but from other cultures, to learn from the mistakes that people did because of my culture.	Exposure
its Canada actually, they just try to be good with all cultures and all religions. What I think about Canada also is really beautiful nature, cold weather, maple tree and a good future for me.	Canada
there are many things I have to discover in the upcoming weeks, months. But yeah, to sum up, Canada is a really beautiful country many cultural differences here, however all the people live together and respect each other and just live.	Harmony
I'm gonna teach them their country and their culture. And their religion too. And teach them the way that Canadians and other cultures too...I want them to know about their country and how in their country they help each other and things like that, like they have to respect each other. There's a lot of things in Iraq that are like we all have to respect	Cultural knowledge
they invite all these women from different cultures and they made them together for a party and they can get to know what cultures they are from.	Multicultural exposure

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Sharlini Yogasingam

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

2005-2009 B.Sc.

The University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
2010-2012 B.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2015-2017 M.A.

**Related Work Experience:** Research Assistant  
The University of Ottawa  
2010-2012

Research Assistant  
The Cochrane Collaboration  
2012-2016

### Publications:

Chen, I., Aggarwal, S., Petko, J., Rader, T., Tavender, E., Yogasingam, S. (2015). A rapid scoping review update for the World Health Organisation: Non-clinical interventions for reducing unnecessary caesarean section. World Health Organisation.