NARRATIVES IN ADOLESCENT IMMIGRATION
UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS IN SELF-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

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DEDICATION

To my father, who unknowingly changed the course of my life and shaped who I am today. To my mother, the most courageous and resilient person I know; to my sister, whose wisdom beyond her years I admire, and to my dearest abuela (bis bis) and abuelo who are now gone but who have shaped my identity by being a constant reminder of how I should live my life.

My grandmother’s stories of my childhood and her desire to hear the stories of my own children through long distance telephone conversations have provoked in me a deep curiosity about the human experience. I now find myself taking up the storyteller’s torch and embracing the opportunity to share the stories of my childhood and to explore the rich tapestry of the lives of others.
Although immigrants may have positive, neutral, or negative experiences of immigration, some noted scholars of intercultural communication have emphasized the pain that might occur with relocation:

"Perhaps one of the most significant and painful separations of all can be experienced by an immigrant who grew up in one culture and has moved to another culture" (Kim, 1979 p. 435).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the years, many individuals have shared their immigration stories with me. It is these life stories that inspired me to do this research. In particular, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the five individuals who opened their hearts to me and provided the most comprehensive accounts of their immigration experiences. Without their stories, this thesis would not have been possible.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Matthew Heinz, my thesis supervisor, for his guidance, encouragement and patience. And I would like to thank Zhenyi Li, and Phillip Vannini for their advice and editorial suggestions.

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And finally, but most importantly, I am most grateful to my mother for remembering with me.
Abstract

This thesis examines immigrants’ acculturation with a specific focus on adolescents and the development of their self-identity overtime as immigrants in Canada. Adolescence is already a period of change and transition; when it happens in concurrence with the immigrant experience there is another dimension at play. Narrative inquiry was used to find meaning in five personal stories of immigrants. Their stories are a valuable collection of information with insight into the personal, family and societal factors for immigrant adolescence and their identity formation. The findings are limited due to the subjectivity of acculturation and data analysis along with the size and scope of the respondents. Moving forward, an expanded range of interviewees and collaborative partnerships with other scholars and institutions would continue to yield valuable data in this important field.

Keywords: Adolescence, Self-identity, Immigration, Narrative Inquiry, Intercultural Communication
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INTRODUCTION

The person who was raised in one culture and who moves to another may experience “one of the most significant and painful separations” of the human condition (Kim, 1979, p. 435). Adolescent immigrants could have experienced double pain because of the dramatic changes in a particular period of time in their lives. Being an adolescent, a person may have already found himself or herself between childhood and adulthood—at a stage in life when developmental influences related to biology and personality as well as numerous socio-economic and cultural factors. Being an immigrant at the same time, an adolescent experience more challenges due to physical, social and economic environmental changes in a different culture (Howard, 2000). Nevertheless, many young people, along with their parents emigrate due to personal choice, economic necessity, or persecution. In 2005, for example, 190 million people, 3% of the world’s population, lived outside their country of birth (United Nations Population Division). In 2006, 1 in 5 Canadians were foreign–born. According to the Canadian census, this was the highest ratio in 75 years (2006 Census- Statistics Canada). This mixing of cultures has had a profound effect on the life experiences of immigrants, which is particularly relevant to adolescents. Therefore, my research question was two-fold: (1) how has being an adolescent influenced the development of the self-identity of immigrants to Canada? and (2) what are the barriers to self-identity development in adolescent immigrants? Such questions were not asked; nor do the voices of adolescent immigrants’ often presented. Hence, I wanted to emphasize how the adolescent immigrants’ voices are presented in contemporary literature before I address further on my research questions.
Prelude: Immigrant Youth Voices

To go over adolescent immigrant stories in contemporary literature, I only had to go as far as my living room bookcase and pull down some of my favourites because I have been reading narratives of youthful immigrants since I myself was an adolescent immigrant many years ago. I remember reading Anne Frank’s story as a teenager and how it resonated with me. Perhaps it was the fact that Anne was my age when she received the precious diary, in which she wrote about the atrocities she was witnessing until she was 15. I, too, had a diary in which I wrote about my life as a 13 year old in a new land. Not to say that my life was anything like that which Anne was experiencing, but in a way, I felt like Anne. The fear she felt by the Nazi is not comparable to the fear I felt going to school for the first time in a new country, or attempting to be independent by wanting to get groceries on my own, knowing I would have to speak to the teller. Fear is fear. Due to her poignant, moving words it made me realize my own personal strength. If she could endure the atrocities of the Holocaust, I could surely manage being an adolescent immigrant. She wrote, “It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart” (Anne Frank, July 15, 1944). I wrote Anne’s touching words on the inside page of the first diary that I kept in Canada. They kept me sane.

Eva Hoffman’s Lost in Translation is a story of her emigration from Poland to Canada when she was 13 years old and her sister, Alina, was 9. Her words are painful but honest and it is that honesty that resonates in the immigrant stories I heard. She describes the sounds, the colours and the smells in her new “home.” She remembers friends that she left behind and how she found her new school friends to be so different. She recounts the details of her uncomfortable adolescence – especially the difficulties of overcoming the language barrier— “I’ve found myself
among a strange tribe of adolescents“(p. 131). She stresses her Judaism (as did two of my other participants) as her religion was a way to unite with others once in Canada and to feel a bond. But she also describes her sadness as being Jewish was the primary reason for her having to leave Europe. Just like the participants in my thesis, Eva and her sister were both very strong minded and highly motivated to achieve their educational ambitions. They are now both highly educated as Eva received her PhD from Harvard and Alina completed her PhD at Queen’s University. “I too am goaded on by the forked whip of ambition and fear, and I derive a strange strength—a ferocity, a puissance—from the sense of my responsibility, the sense that survival is in my own hands” (p. 157).

In The Rice Room by Ben Fong-Torres, he explains how his Chinese parents could not speak English and, even as a child, he had to translate for them. Although he was born in the United States, he “looked” Chinese and was discriminated against because he had grown up in Chinatown at his parents’ insistency. He felt culturally trapped as he felt torn between two worlds and although he was a U.S. citizen by birth, he had to conform to Chinese ways. The stress of having to assist in the family restaurant business rather than have the opportunity to socialize with other kids left numerous wounds in his psyche.

This left a deep impression on me. Did I go through this too? Did we all? All Canadians, in fact, while belonging to a particular cultural group by birth also belong to larger diverse cultural group—that of being an immigrant. Canadian society is a complex blend of many cultures that, like the participants in my research, is going through its own adolescence. This transitional state makes it harder in some ways for a newcomer to formulate a personal/cultural identity and to embrace what it is to be Canadian. Not only is it a two-way personal journey – from the inside out and from the outside in— but also both the internal and the external
environments are moving targets. Some of the difficulty of dealing with these complexities is reflected in sense of alienation reflected in the participants’ stories.

**Research Question and Purpose of Study**

This thesis aims to explore adolescent immigrants’ self-identity development in Canada. The research questions are: (1) how has being an adolescent influenced the development of the self-identity of immigrants to Canada? And (2) What are the barriers to self-identity development in adolescent immigrants? In particular, I planned to investigate on accounts of the lived experiences of five immigrants who came to Canada as adolescents and who have now lived here for over 20 years. The focus of this thesis is on their stories.

The reason to investigate on the long-term experience of an immigrant is because an acculturation process includes that person’s struggle to achieve acceptance by a new culture while concurrently attempting to develop feelings of self-identity and a sense of nationalism – both take time. Many researchers have explored the connections between the search for self-identity, the experiences of immigration and the need to adapt to new multicultural settings by applying a variety of theoretical frameworks and using many types of methodological strategies (e.g., Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001; de Fina, 2003). The findings to date suggest that the experience of immigration is both multi-faceted and varied. Therefore, to study on the formation process of an immigrant’s sense of self-identity from adolescence to adulthood, I would select those immigrants who came to Canada as adolescents and who have now lived here for over 20 years.
The reason to collect life stories is because I cannot speak for all immigrants and I felt that some valuable insights might be gained by examining those of the five individuals with . Meanwhile, my own immigration experience during adolescent period may have some commonalities and differences to compare. We could have shared stories of our struggles with making education and employment choices as well as those related to the building and maintenance of new relationships. And, most importantly we could have shared the idea of what it means to be “Canadian”. Using my own immigration experience as a backdrop, I strived to gain some useful insights by weaving together the threads of my research participants’ immigration experiences.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigration

The early 21st century is an exciting time for immigration research in Canada given that there is a steady influx of people from around the world. Canada admitted 280,636 immigrants in 2010, and it is expected that by 2031, one in three persons living in Canada will be a member of a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2010). Immigrants – those who leave voluntarily for social and/or economic reasons, and refugees – those who leave to escape persecution, are different in numerous ways. Yet they share many of the same feelings of loss. For both immigrants and refugees it is often a difficult process because such a decision often introduces a marked disconnect from familiar social institutions and cultural practices, a separation from family members, and isolation from the available sources of support in the new homeland (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

In most cases, too, the entry into a new country is accompanied by an abrupt need for acculturation. Acculturation can be loosely defined as “the process of cultural change and adaptation that occurs when individuals from different cultures come into contact” (Gibson, 2001, p. 19), and the cultural interaction between immigrants and the new host country (Berry, 2003; Castro, 2003). Acculturation evolves from the interaction between a host country’s reception of a new immigrant and that person’s perception of that host country. In cases where the norms of the new culture differ markedly from those of the old, acculturation can be a difficult process.

In addition to acculturation, self-identity often becomes a critical issue—especially for young immigrants. The term “identity” has been used in diverse ways and can reflect numerous concepts (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). It is often inextricably intertwined with cultural, ethnic,
and national identity. When a person emigrates, they must adopt certain aspects of the new host culture in order to fit in with the new environment (Berry, 1997). Many immigrants adopt a negative attitude towards the host country that lasts for decades (Phinney, 2003). Issues which can become stressors and cause resentment toward the need for acculturation involve such matters as: the complications of migration, adjustments to a new environment, poor housing, and evolving attitudes towards the host country.

All of these issues are viewed against a background comprised of the political status of one's home country, the strength of family relations and religious beliefs, and the immigrant’s overall financial status. Some theorists have claimed that the loss of one’s social structure and culture can produce such negative responses (Goldstein, Wampler, & Wise, 1997; Payne et al., 1999), while others have claimed that it is the secondary losses (loss of familiar routines, emotional ties or financial security), which accompany the initial loss of homeland that ultimately cause the negative and long term conditions that interfere with the immigrant family’s adaptation to a new living environment. Nevertheless, the immigrants my research is based on stated that, after over 20 years in their new homeland, the gains outweighed their losses.

The Acculturative Stress Model, which was developed by Berry in the 1970s and is designed to measure the immigrant’s “response to life events rooted in intercultural contact” (Berry, 2006, p. 43), and the theoretical concept of Cultural Homelessness as defined in 1999 by Vivero and Jenkins served as the key perspectives for my research. Cultural homelessness affects individuals who feel a lack of cultural or ethnic group membership. Hence, they experience an emotional detachment and a need for a cultural home that does not materialize. In other words, they “live in a framework that may include experiences, feelings, and thoughts that do not belong to any specific cultural reference group” (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). Cultural homelessness
involves both negative and positive aspects of this individuality with negative feelings being rooted in not belonging to any specific group, feeling alone, and in being personally rejected. There can be a sense that one will always be a part of a minority. The positive feelings stem from a sense of being different yet at the same time, feeling accepted by the larger majority group, possibly due to good language skills or the development of a specialized social group.

**Adolescent Experiences**

Although identity is an important issue from adolescence to adulthood (Kroger, 2000), identity issues are most significant for adolescents and young adults (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (cited in Cole, Cole & Lightfoot, 2005) stated that a person’s identity, which stems from social group belonging, forms during adolescence. Because of this, when a young person is socially excluded due to an inability to speak the common language or being culturally different, that person can suffer from identity confusion during what Erikson believes to be “the most important personality forming stage before adulthood.” When a person is unable to form social groups, that person may carry negative feelings into adulthood. According to Erikson, adolescence is a critical time for young people for they either develop the ability to form intimate relationships or they come to consider themselves as being irrevocably secluded from any meaningful social group.

**Immigrant Adolescents**

Young Yun Kim’s Intercultural Identity Theory (Kim, 1974, 1992, 1995) and Communication Acculturation Theory (Kim, 1977, 1988) have been used as a basis for determining how the unique barriers encountered by adolescent immigrants influence their personal identity development over time. Acculturation, which is a process that has positive or
neutral outcomes, can also have negative consequences for immigrants of all ages (Hovey, 2000). Yet immigrant adolescents and young adults are uniquely challenged because they find it necessary to create a new cultural identity, which includes elements of the traditions of the unfamiliar receiving culture, while concurrently addressing the “normal” personal identity issues, which characterize this developmental period (Schwartz, 2005). As a result, the ‘side effects’ of acculturation and the related struggle to find a personal identity may be the most severe for adolescents and young adults.

The search for self-identity is of particular importance for young immigrants who must consider marked differences between their personal values, behaviours and cultural norms and those of their receiving culture, which now predominate. Hence, they may come to question their own self-identity (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Phinney, 2003). They desperately want to be accepted, as most adolescents do, and because they typically come into contact with the host culture sooner than their parents and in all likelihood, more intensely, they find it vitally necessary to “fit in” and conform to the ways of the host culture.

This is where an uncomfortable dichotomy may develop. Immigrant youths come to feel torn between their desire to fit in with their peers and their desire to meet their parents ‘expectations’ (Tyyskä, 2003b and 2006). This adjustment period can be long and particularly arduous for adolescents because they tend to relate to members of their own group who, in turn, tend to be less tolerant and more liberal in their expression of hostility toward anything they perceive as different or strange (Tatum, 1997). Immigration could also create tension between family members as parents struggle with the need to provide for their children and fulfill their promise of a better life. This relentless drive for success in the eyes of their children may create feelings of failure, stress and remorse for immigrant parents (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco,
Such negativity can lead to further isolation for their children because long working hours make the parents less accessible and psychologically bereft.
METHOD

Drawing from narrative inquiry, my research used a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the adolescent immigrant’s life experiences, and therefore come to see their world from that perspective. The goal of this narrative inquiry was to reach a valid approximation of the meaning of such an individual’s experiences or as Riessman (1993) proposed, “what life means at the moment of telling” (p. 52). I was able to gather this information by noting their hesitations and capturing the subtle nuances in the descriptions of their most personal moments. I utilized this research framework as a means by which to learn about and ultimately share the heart of an adolescent immigrant’s growth experience over time.

Narrative research is the study of stories. “Simply stated, narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). I chose narrative research because it is one of the best means by which to gain an understanding of the dynamics of personal stories, life experiences, and the identity of the storyteller. Czarniawska (2004) stated that the primary goal is not to discover whether a narrator’s account is an accurate reflection of actual events, but to understand the meanings people attach to those events (p. 479).

Qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual response variations (Patton, 1990), and so I drew upon data collected through biographical, narrative, and open-ended question interviews that allowed the participants to share their unique and descriptive stories and that revealed their lived experiences as immigrants. Anthropologists call this the emic perspective (Harris, 1976) and having a background in cultural anthropology, I used this perspective during my interviews as I believe that individuals are best understood if given the opportunity to describe situations and feeling in their own words. By listening and
understanding the messages contained in their narratives, I was able to make a connection with 
the stories told, which ultimately allowed me to share the participant’s very personal 

experiences.

I also used my emic understanding of group communication to express sentiments, to 
establish a rapport, to ask difficult questions, and to communicate the importance of the 
participants to my research. I felt empowered by this and allowed the participants of my 
research to feel the same through the telling of their stories. Qualitative research allowed me to 
do that. I heard the changes in their tone of voice, noted when their voices cracked, and waited 
for the silences to pass as the emotions of a particular event were recalled. My participants were 
recruited through a letter of invitation and referrals from personal networks of the local 
immigrant population. They were selected based on specific criteria: (1) must have immigrated 
to Canada in their adolescence – 12 to 18 years of age; and (2) must have lived in Canada for a 
minimum of 20 years. Hence, this contains the stories of five adults who came to Canada as 
adolescents at least 20 years ago. Whether one relies on written notes or a tape recorder is a 
matter of personal preference, however, I used both. Patton advises that a tape recorder is 
"indispensable" in this type of research (1990, p. 348), while Lincoln and Guba "do not 
recommend recording except for unusual reasons" (1985, p. 241); Lincoln and Guba believe that 
recording devices are intrusive and that there is a significant possibility of technical failure, 
whereas I believe that they are advantageous because I can capture more information – data, 
voice tone and inflections, etc. – than if I were attempting to take notes. By using this method, I 
was able to focus on each participant’s reactions and message without concern for missing the 
subtle details of the shared experience.
I used semi-structured interviews. Because the questions were prepared in advance, I was better able to focus the various themes of the interview and appear to be more competent during the interview. It also allows the participants the freedom to express their views in their own words. As a researcher, I want to understand the respondent’s unique point of view rather than make generalizations about their behaviour. As a result, my goal of building rapport with the participants and making them feel comfortable during the interview was achieved with ease because I tried to make the interviews as much like a friendly conversation as possible. I prepared a set of open-ended questions, and guidelines (or general topics) to be explored during the interviews, to ensure that, while there was some consistency in the response topics, the response possibilities were not predetermined. These interview guidelines ensured that the interview time was used efficiently; that the interviewing of multiple subjects was more methodical and complete, and that the interactions remained focused. In keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research designs, interview guidelines can be modified over time to focus the interviewer’s attention on newly-discovered areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions found to be unproductive with respect to the research goals (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). At times, it was inevitable that these unstructured conversations became productively side-tracked, even with the two interviews that were done via Skype. This happened naturally during the interviews, and I had to rephrase the questions to blend the conversation flow into the interview purpose. It was then that I was glad to have my notes as I often said “You said a moment ago . . . can you tell me more?” Following these new paths of discovery provided me with an opportunity to identify new ways of seeing the respondent and gaining a broader understanding of the topic at hand. Hence, it was fortunate that throughout my research, I had used a tape-recorder, and a Skype recording device as well as notes and later transcribed them as
part of my data collection. When it came to the write up, the participants chose their own pseudonyms as I wanted a name that was culturally appropriate. In order to assure reliability in my data, procedures described by Bodgan and Biklen (2003) were used when analyzing the interviews. Units of meaning were assigned to the patterns and themes found in the content of the participants' answers. Coding, as a method for inductive analysis of qualitative research helps assure that changes in voice, silence, repeated statements, behavioral change and other actions can be used as signifiers of meaning. From my interviews, I was able to create themes based on questions which were framed around specific personal experiences during certain events. The respondent’s comments, feelings, thoughts and actions during these moments were then interpreted using Bodgan and Biklen methods. By matching the content with other responses, my analysis discovered patterns based on voice tone, moments of silence, the use of similar words and phrases, non-verbal behaviour and physical responses. From these noticeable variants during the interviews, I was able to create categories. My goal was to extract reliable data about self-identity development from the personal narratives of individuals who had made the transition into adolescents as a new immigrant to Canada. The interviews provided the information while the categorization and coding helped me detect units of meaning that provide valuable insight into the factors that effected their identity formation.

**Interview Questions**

The information I collected focused on the immigrants’ personal stories about their lives in Canada over the last 20 or so years. The interview focused on their experiences with education, culture, marriage, employment choices, and their overall feelings toward becoming “Canadian”. (See Appendix A for interview questions asked.)
Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of their data, meaning that the important themes develop out of the researchers’ “careful examination of the data” (Patton, 1990). This process requires creativity as it can be a challenge to place the raw data in logical categories to be examined and then to find ways to appropriately interpret and communicate the results to others. When conducting my qualitative analysis, I asked myself reflective questions to help me recognize developing patterns in the responses: (1) What are the patterns and common themes that have emerged? (2) Were there any significant deviations from these patterns? (3) What were the most interesting stories that emerged from the responses? and (4) Do any of these findings suggest that additional data may need to be collected? The voices of the participants ought to be prominent in any qualitative report (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To this end, at the end of each interview, I made short notes about each experience. These notes included observations about the participants' nonverbal behaviours and physical responses to the questions asked. After my research interviews were completed, I began my data analysis by transcribing the interviews and reviewing the responses. As a narrative research inquirer, one must spend countless hours reading transcribed interviews and documenting field notes in order to gain the ability to produce a synoptic account of textual data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommend reading data over several times in order to develop a coding scheme that would be continually be added to, collapsed, and refined as the study progresses. In this way, I developed a set of categories that allowed me to organize the data. I
then coded the data according to the themes emerging from within the interview notes. I did this in a chronological order of interviews so as to include each theme as well as “other” experiences not common in all narratives. The goal was to create evocative, multi-faceted categories, which ultimately formed a preliminary framework for analysis. Patterns within these themes emerged that ultimately led me to a deeper understanding of the experiences being shared.
FINDINGS

This section presents the life stories of five individuals who left their home country to immigrate to Canada during their adolescence – Daniela, Juan Jose, Nazanin, Tina and Alexander. These are their stories.

Daniela’s Story

When Daniela and I had first discussed doing the interview she happily agreed. Yet when I met her and asked her to sign the consent form, she said, “I will answer anything, but don’t make me cry” (September 10, 2012). Her comment led me to believe that there were some unresolved issues, and perhaps sad memories, which I had unconsciously tapped into by merely asking about her immigration experience.

Daniela had just turned 12 when her parents held a family meeting and told her that she, her older brother and two older sisters were moving to Canada. As a Communist country, Nicaragua’s education system was corrupt, and Daniela’s parents were not members of the social or political groups that would guarantee a safe educational environment for their children. Leaving was the only option. Although they were younger, Daniela’s parents had no knowledge of English, and because they were not “risk takers.” Daniela was shocked at her parent’s decision to leave. She described her family’s dilemma as follows: “We were not part of anything. We were having a lot of problems and they were looking for our future.”

Daniela’s first and most influential struggle was with the English language. So in Grade 8, a translator was assigned to assist her in class.
I didn’t even know what, Hi, was. It was horrible. It was a nightmare. It was a bad experience because when she was sick I was there by myself. I didn’t know anyone and didn’t know what was going on. I felt lost.

She speaks about her transition to her new culture as being frustrating because she felt as though she was “the weird one who everyone looked at.”

However, when she attended high school a few years later, everything changed. Here because she was able to find Spanish speaking people of her own age to befriend she lost the need to speak English. Hence, she didn’t speak English at school or at home, and even now in her thirties, you can hear a slight accent that she regrets not doing something about. “I never lost my accent. I didn’t have to talk in English. It was completely Spanish. It was comfortable to speak Spanish. We were all going through the same. We were the same age, same culture, same language.” Daniela’s choice to speak only in her mother tongue came at a price as her having a Spanish accent made her feel as if she only belonged with her Spanish-speaking friends.

Although the cultural aspects of being in a different country during adolescence was challenging for her, there was something else that she clearly remembers not understanding. Freedom.

Daniela described “freedom” as having a choice to undermine the influence of her parents and elders. This was a new concept for her because, in Nicaragua, the influence of one’s elders, especially that of one’s parents was much stronger. She struggled to understand why young people would want to leave home at 16 or why they would smoke or drink. “They are not allowed to do it in Nicaragua. Young people can’t move out. It’s crazy.” She remembers the conflict she had with her parents due to this. She wanted to make these decisions as a
“Canadian,” but her parents would object. She felt trapped as she didn’t know who to listen to. She wanted to make friends that understood her, but she also wanted to obey her parents.

Daniela does not regret her struggles as an adolescent in Canada, and she doesn’t regret her parents’ decision to move from Nicaragua. She has made many “Canadian” friends and has had romantic relationships with other “Canadians” as well. However, when asked if she feels “Canadian” she said laughingly, “If you keep asking me maybe I will feel Canadian. We don’t belong. We are not from here and we are not from there. We just don’t have an identity. We are aliens.”

Juan Jose’s Story

Juan Jose and I were introduced by a mutual colleague and although I was aware that English wasn’t his first language, I didn’t know his story. Juan Jose had a calm and engaging way of speaking that made it comfortable to dig in and probe his immigration experience.

After 3 long years in Costa Rica trying to escape war, Juan Jose’s family landed at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport, and claimed refugee status when he was 12. In those days (the late 80’s), he said, “You could land at Pearson and say, ‘I’m a refugee.’ And they would do all the paperwork” (September 24, 2012). He remembers the long wait, the translator who helped his family, and seeing people from India for the first time. It was an easy way to leave a difficult situation, he recalls.

As Juan Jose spoke English when he came to Canada, he didn’t struggle with the language in school, but he did find it difficult to fit into a school that wasn’t private or Christian based. He tried to make conversation with the other kids but felt as though “everyone was immature compared to my previous classmates that I had grown up with.” He didn’t struggle
with the language per se; it was his life experience as an adolescent immigrant that made him stand out from his classmates. “I had a completely different outlook in life and being 12, I already had major experiences in life that kids here [in Canada] don’t necessarily go through or understand.”

Even after Juan Jose had reached high school he still did not feel part of the crowd, and he wanted to attend what he called an “immigrant school” as opposed to an “all-white” school. “There were many Latinos there and I felt more at ease and protected.” He also began the citizenship process. He was happy to become a Canadian citizen and even told a classmate of Portuguese decent about getting sworn in that day. He remembers his classmate laughing at him and saying, “You are not Canadian yet.” Juan Jose felt ashamed for thinking that being sworn in would be sufficient to make him be Canadian. “As a teenager you want to be part of the group and being an immigrant you are already excluded. You want to be just a regular kid so the identity crisis begins right away.”

Juan Jose clearly recalls a story about having to figure out how to get off the bus as he didn’t know that he had to step down for the door to open. He also shared a story about having to walk 3-4 kilometers to buy groceries and return the same way with the loaded bags. This was special for him as all the new families that knew each other lived nearby and joined in the grocery store trip. “It was like 15 people walking up the road making lots of noise, talking and carrying grocery bags.”

Nevertheless, after 25 years of living in Canada, Juan Jose still doesn’t feel that he is a true Canadian. “I feel more secure in my standing as a person. But I am still an immigrant and will always be an immigrant.” He still feels more comfortable with other immigrants and shared
with me that most of his friends are immigrants themselves. But in some ways he feels Canadian too. He has a certain pride to the national anthem and recalls the citizenship ceremony vividly as one of his proudest moments as a new Canadian. Juan Jose has travelled at length. And, ironically, it was when he visited South Korea that he was known as Juan Jose from Canada. As he said, “I found my Canadianess in Asia.”

Nazanin’s Story

When I first met Nazanin a year ago, I immediately knew that we would get along. She is a strong-minded woman, whose vibrant personality and appearance are a combination of my aunt and my mother. To my surprise, it wasn’t until I was searching for more participants to interview that she volunteered. Although I knew she wasn’t Canadian born, I wasn’t aware that she had immigrated as a teenager, and so I looked forward to this interview as I was intrigued to find out more about someone who I thought I already knew.

Nazanin left Iran at the age of 14. Her family was fleeing the revolution and her parents were uncertain of what the future held for Nazanin and her brother in Iran. She remembers buying winter clothes, feeling anxious, and crying as well as having “a gut feeling” that she would never return to Iran. Nazanin’s family is Baha’i and as a member of this community in Iran, youth are deprived of the opportunity to pursue a higher education there. This is the reason why her parents were focused on finding a good education and future opportunities for their children outside of Iran.

Much of my interview with Nazanin revolved around the topic of education. No matter what I asked her, she would have an example that focused on her educational experience. I could
see that it was her goal to be successful not only to please her parents and ensure that their money wasn’t wasted, but also for her own personal growth.

When we discussed the struggle she faced as an adolescent immigrant, she shared two stories about her very expensive private school in Vancouver. She desperately wanted to learn chemistry and thought that in Canada, she would have this opportunity. Unfortunately, she was disappointed because even though her parents had spent their savings on her private school education, there still was no chemistry class for her to take. Nazanin remembers feeling confused and saying to her mother, “*That school has no structure and no chemistry class. You have wasted your money*” (November 28, 2012). Although Nazanin felt “amazingly” safe in Canada, there was much prejudice at the school. As she recalled, “*My brother and I would walk down the hallway and I could hear the whispers about us. I felt like an anomaly.*” Shortly after hearing her complaints her mother decided it was time to intervene and sent Nazanin and her brother to a public school.

The prejudices didn’t stop there, however. As she recalled, “*The prejudices I experienced came from other minority groups, interestingly enough.*” On one occasion in Grade 11, when Nazanin arose from her seat, a boy who she described as being “*darker skin and weird towards us*” left a dead mouse on her chair. “*It was scary but maddening more than scary. I then realized this was crazy place.*”

The most difficult aspect for her during these days was loneliness. She so wanted to fit in and couldn’t understand why she was such an outsider. Even though these experiences were difficult for Nazanin, she remembers her mother’s words of encouragement and her belief that
one must look inside one’s self and not be concerned with what others think of you. As her mother advised, “There’s always going to be people like that.”

Nazanin also took solace in her relationship with her brother who helped her adjust during those difficult years. She remembers candidly joking about the day that they would become Canadian citizens and singing “my future native land” (instead of my home and native land). On the day of the ceremony, Nazanin said, “He and I looked at each other because it was finally our native land.” Nazanin felt Canadian then and feels Canadian now. She attributes this feeling to the support that she has had over the years. “I think without my mom-the relationship I had with my mother and father-if I hadn’t had that—or my brother-I would not have survived.” She also felt Canadian when she travelled. When Nazanin visited Israel, for example, she felt Canadian due to the respect and warm welcome that Canadians receive when abroad. Since she had immigrated in her formative years, she believes that she didn’t come to fit the mold of what a young Persian girl should be. As she explained, “I was mouthy and opinionated and independent. I couldn’t conform.”

Tina’s Story

Tina was introduced to me by a friend/colleague who is also an immigrant to Canada. She was candid and direct in her answers and although this interview was conducted via Skype, I felt as though I was actually there with her.

Tina’s parents were divorced, and her father left the Philippines to live in Canada. She also had an uncle and an aunt who lived in New Brunswick, so when her father decided to sponsor Tina, her younger sister and her older brother, she felt as though such a move had been in the works for a long while and she welcomed the decision to leave. Tina was born in the
Philippines and she explained that since her early education had been in English, both she and her parents wanted to continue her schooling in Canada. Because of this, language wasn’t a concern for her. “The school system is Americanized and I was educated in English so I didn’t have a language problem when I came to Canada” (March 18, 2013). Although language wasn’t a struggle for her, getting used to the education system was.

Tina was 17 when she left the Philippines. She had already completed high school by age 15, as it is the norm there, and she was now in her 2nd year of University. Upon her arrival in Canada, however, she was assessed, and due to her age, she was told to complete two years of high school. She was disappointed by this and the expectation of fast tracking through the system because she was knowledgeable in English was taken away by having to conform to a new school system because she was an immigrant. She said, “I felt that I was behind even though I was only 17.” Being an immigrant and having to become accustomed to a different school system affected her decision regarding her post-secondary studies. Hence, she decided to enter a short College program “to finish as soon as I can.” I could sense the frustration in her voice as she shared this memory with me, as the failure to have her credentials recognized had forced her to “start from scratch.” She complained, “It’s as if whatever you did didn’t really count. It’s discrimination.”

Aside from her education struggles, Tina vividly remembers how happy she felt once she arrived in Canada. “I remember the clean, fresh air. The people were nice and everything was bigger. It was all very exciting.” She had to sacrifice being with her mother, but being accompanied by her siblings helped her become accustomed to life in Canada. Yet, even now when discussing what it means to be Canadian, she remembers not having any friends for a long while. Hence, Tina’s answers reflected a painful mixture of contradictory feelings.
Even though Tina completed her schooling in Canada and has worked here for several years, she still feels that because she wasn’t actually born in Canada, she can’t consider herself to be truly Canadian. She did, however; mention that:

*Canada is a mix of cultures, too. So I guess that’s being Canadian. It’s a hodgepodge of multiculturalism, which means being Canadian too. I guess. But I don’t think I can say [that] I am Canadian. When people always see me they go, “Where are you from?” That’s always a reminder that I am not from here. “Where are you from?” I don’t look Canadian; I am not white, and then when I talk I have an accent."

Tina has never had an intimate relationship with another person from her mother culture. She is now married to an immigrant from another country. She shared with me that she doesn’t feel comfortable speaking her mother tongue to her daughter and that she speaks English to her as she has been in Canada for so long that it feels more natural to speak in English.

**Alexander’s Story**

Aside from Nazanin, Alexander was the participant who disclosed the most during his interview. He was very open and willing to share experiences of his adolescence and adulthood that were at times painful, but were in his view, rewarding nonetheless.

“On August 21st, 1968, Russia invaded Czechoslovakia” (March 24, 2013). This was how Alexander began his immigration story. After fleeing to Vienna the very next day in response to his mother’s command, “We are leaving tomorrow, pack your bags”, his mother went to the Canadian embassy and was told that they had two weeks to prepare to leave for Canada. His family landed in Montreal in March of 1969 with their nerves running high and $20 in their pockets.
Alexander had a particular recollection of the $20 because it was used to buy groceries. He went with his father and they identified the items by looking at the pictures on the boxes because they didn’t speak or read any English. He was amazed at how much $20 could buy. His first impression, which was due in part to the availability of everyday necessities such as toilet paper, was that of an easy life compared to “the old country.” Nevertheless, Alexander’s recollection of his immigration was that he initially found the language to be a struggle because being in Montreal he had to learn French as well as English. Nonetheless, both Alexander and his sister were quick learners and picked up both languages easily and they soon became the “guidance force of English in everyday situations for my parents.” He also remembers being:

. . . mixed up in being in a new country and going through puberty. There’s already enough pressure and confusion going through puberty never mind, trying to connect with girls without speaking the language and having those feelings. Being an adolescent in those years was confusing for me.

Alexander’s parents had high expectations of him and wanted him to obtain a University degree. Because he enjoyed math and excelled at it, he decided to pursue a career in engineering. Although he had only taken Grade 7 mathematics in Czechoslovakia, he was able to take Grade 10 mathematics in Canada because the teaching of mathematics in the European education system had been so much “better”. He recalls being told to take a mathematics exam and having to take another one a week later and then another one a week after that. He gladly did this as he enjoyed the challenge. At first, he did not know the reason for the series of exams. But later on he came to the realization that he was competing in a city-wide mathematics competition. Due to his background, his approach to life was to “study hard, graduate and get a job.” He shared his
work ethic with me as follows: “I got out of school on May 5th, which was a Friday, and on May 8th, which was a Monday, I started working and have been working ever since.”

Alexander’s first job was summer work in New York and it had a marked influence on his quest for self-identity for it was in New York that he met his late wife with whom he shared a religious affiliation, of Judaism but not country of origin. He happily recalled attempting to develop a relationship with her in his new-found Canadian “broken English”. His sense of “Canadianness” was further defined as he was traveling by bus back to Montreal and saw a familiar skyline. As he recalled, “I remember vividly, even to this day that feeling of being at home.”

Today, he has no emotional ties to “the old country” because his cultural heritage is Jewish. As he said, “The Holocaust, you know that story, and they were not kind to my type and so there was no love lost after we came to Canada.” Because of these feelings, he did not speak to his children in his mother tongue and focused instead on the English aspect of their upbringing. While he is no longer connected to the Slovakian community in his hometown, he has a large multi-ethnic family in Canada as he has an adopted daughter whose birth parents are Chilean. He has close ties with them (the birth parents) as they have also moved to Canada and have married other immigrants.

Alexander described his immigrating to Canada as “the best thing that’s ever happened to him.” And although he considers himself to be truly Canadian, he also considers himself to be Jewish. He happily declared that in Canada, “You don’t have to drink beer and play hockey to be Canadian. We are like the United Nations—all kinds of colours and accents. That’s what it means to be Canadian.”
DISCUSSION

My results support previous research on immigration and the acculturation process, reinforcing the multi-faceted experiences of newcomers and different modes of adaption to the host country.

Following the waves of migration to North America, theories were developed in order to analyze their settlement and acculturation. The goal was to provide models and the framework for the study of successful adaptation strategies and negative stress factors. Although the immigrant experience is diverse and varies from individual to individual, theories like Young Yum Kim’s Intercultural Identity Theory (1974, 1992, 1995) and Communication Acculturation Theory (1977, 1988) highlight the primary forces that directly impact acculturation. As an immigrant navigates through a new geographical, social and cultural space, their personal communication in the language of the host society forms a co-relationship with the level of their adaptation. The information collected from my interviews further supports this theory because language proficiency and education were key determinants in shaping my respondents experience as a newcomer to Canada (see data). For my thesis, the goal was to narrow down this approach and analyze the transition of immigrant youths from adolescence to young adulthood. Using Kim’s models, I was searching for barriers to self-identity formation among individuals who were searching for a sense of belonging in their new surroundings while at the same time undergoing normal personal changes associated with age. The data I collected contributes to Intercultural Communication scholarship by providing insight into the association of identity formation in relation to family and friends, integrated with acculturation and learning what it means to be ‘Canadian’. Additional challenges are incorporated into this process when
immigrant youth are radicalized and experience ‘othering’ when they do not embody or adhere to the construct of Canadianess’ (Shaheen, 2006, p. 7).

There is an imagined community of the French and British as signifiers of Canadianess and this means that immigrants whose primary language is not English or French and whose body/skin color does not fit these pre-existing categories, often feel on the “outsiders” and on the margins of being Canadian. The standard question of ‘where are you from?’ that many non-European immigrants receive is an example of these racial, cultural and linguistic ideas. My thesis explores this reality in the context of identity formation among adolescents and provides critical insight into the two fold process of ‘fitting in’ as a teenager and ‘fitting in’ as a Canadian. The narrative inquiry of my interviews facilitated a dialogue with my respondents that appeared to have a therapeutic effect and revealed some unresolved issues regarding their experience as immigrants. Sharing and communicating these personal stories proved effective as a learning model for my respondents and myself, indicating its practical application when dealing with immigrant’s recollection of their youth. Providing the space and opportunity for them to discuss their challenges as both immigrants and adolescents could help with their acculturation. My research shows the need for government policy and settlement services to address identity formation in immigrant youth and the effectiveness of dialogue as a strategy to improve adaptation to the host society.

**Similarities and Differences – Are we so different after all?**

My participant’s stories were quite similar in many ways but varied in others. All five of the participants shared with their parents a need for personal safety and a higher education as the main reason for coming to Canada. Although most of them found the main barrier to feeling
truly Canadian to be lack of language, which inhibited their ability to make friends, they all overcame this difficulty. Although not all of the five participants made English-speaking friends, through their persistence and dedication they ultimately developed some meaningful relationships, and came to feel a certain degree of national pride. For them learning and feeling comfortable speaking English was a way to communicate and to fit into the mainstream culture. Education was a focus and a driving force to achieve higher levels of social status for Juan Jose, Nazanin, Tina and Alexander. And although all of them experienced prejudices and discrimination, they remained focused on their goals to not only do well and stand out, but also to fulfill their own higher education ambitions. Alexander and Tina both “lost” a year of schooling due to the difference in the education systems but still managed to achieve higher education degrees and fulfill their academic ambitions in spite of feeling frustrated at times with the Canadian immigration requirements.

Learning the language and obtaining a higher education, however, were not the only means by which the study participants came to feel Canadian. For example, Juan Jose and Nazanin felt Canadian when they heard the national anthem for it gave them a sense of belonging, national identity and pride. A shared religion was another aspect that gave them focus and helped them “fit into” a community and eventually make friends. Travel abroad heightened their sense of individuality and “Canadianness” as well. For Alexander, who is older and has been in Canada for a much longer period, perhaps it was merely time that made him feel at home once more. Or it may merely be the feeling of being more at home and comfortable with himself that made him feel Canadian. For both Nazanin and Alexander, returning to their homelands was not an option because they both had determined mothers who had knocked on the doors of Canada’s embassies to gain protection and better opportunities for their families.
While I learned from all of my interviews, I feel that I was given a new perspective on what being Canadian truly means when I spoke to Tina. The very fact that she wasn’t born in Canada is what defines her identity. She didn’t see herself as being in the minority; she saw herself as being like everyone else—an immigrant. Similarly, Juan Jose and Alexander found their identities as “true” immigrants when they overcame such difficulties as the weather and those related to such everyday tasks as grocery shopping and riding a bus. In spite of these difficulties, none of them expressed regret at their parents’ decision. And while some of the study participants were too young to have had a say in the decision to emigrate, they all seemed to appreciate the sacrifices made by their elders.

Nevertheless, all of my study participants experienced painful difficulties with building close ties with their peers (even figuring out the opposite sex in a new language presented unique challenges), but this aspect of my study proved to be a valuable source of information because exploring the different levels of intimacy—acquaintances, casual friends, and close friends (intimate)—is an effective way of coming to understand the acculturation process of an immigrant (Kim, 1979, p. 445). All five of the participants have developed different levels of relationships with English-speaking people, including marriage; however, they all shared an instant connection and easiness in being with other immigrants, in any level of their relationships.

Still, there is often a hesitation when I ask “old” immigrants (20 years or more in Canada) if they feel Canadian. And the answers are mixed. It is as though nobody wants to offend their memories of the past and everyone is unsure of how truly “Canadian” one can be if not born in Canada. I am inspired by these stories and by my own “Canadianness” as Juan Jose would call it. While this may be the end of my thesis, it is not the end of the immigrant stories.
Re-Discovering my own Experience

Listening to their stories and sharing in their recollections allowed me to re-discover my own immigration experience and gain a fresh perspective on my own identity. For example, I ultimately sought out details of my father’s refugee status claim of which I had been previously unaware. My parents’ story and those of my study participant’s parents were similar. I came to realize, too, that Uruguay wasn’t the happy place of my 12-year-old memories. Juan Jose’s words resonated with me as well as I don’t feel any need to be Canadian. Feeling and being Canadian are different. Juan Jose and I both know that we are Canadian because we are concerned with the same political, economic and social issues as are other Canadians, but as he said; we will always feel like immigrants. There’s still something inside me that only immigrants can understand. It is like a hidden code that automatically clicks in when you find out someone is an immigrant. Like Daniela, Juan Jose, Alexander and Nazanin’s parents I am focused on gaining a sound education, and I want the same for my children. Like my parents, I will do whatever it takes to ensure that my children have the best opportunities in life, a higher education and safety. It is my belief that these goals are shared by all parents, and if it means leaving your native land in search of greater possibilities, then that’s what needs to happen. I am especially moved by the personal drive and focus reflected in Alexander’s story. His determination to not waste time, and to keep pushing forward even after the hard struggles of his youth, is truly inspirational.
My Immigration Story

When my father left Uruguay in 1986, he left my mother, my sister and I in our ancestral homeland. As my mother explained, “We wanted better opportunities for you and your sister. We wanted a better life without the political and economic insecurity” (Tenenbaum, 2013, Feb. 23). For two years, my father worked at menial jobs cleaning buildings and working in a factory that manufactured mechanical parts. Finally, when I was 12 years old, my mother, my 6-year old sister and I were granted political asylum/refugee status and permission to leave under the family reunification act. So we packed our dearest belongings, and gave everything else that we could not bring with us away. We then said goodbye to everything and everyone we had ever known.

Now 25 years later, when I think back on that day, my only memories come from the pictures that my grandparents and uncles took at the airport as we said goodbye. I didn’t quite understand what was happening at the time, but as the years passed, it became quite clear to me that we were never going back. I was fortunate in that we settled well, but a feeling of profound emptiness remains. For upon leaving Uruguay, my world changed dramatically and many of life’s celebrations lost their meaning. Birthday parties were no longer shared with one’s extended family; summer gatherings didn’t have the same rich flavour. Holidays were not only celebrated in the “wrong” seasons but also they became senseless as there was no one with whom to celebrate. However, I was able to make friends fairly quickly because my parents supported my studies and I learned English quickly. Also, because I was a bit of a jock, the language of sport and competition carried me through even if my English was poor.

In our homeland, my parents had been educators. However, they couldn’t teach in Canada without Canadian certifications. So my father began to take correspondence courses to get his teaching equivalency. After some time, he began to teach art and mathematics at the
elementary school level. My mother also strived to upgrade her education. After taking the necessary courses, she was admitted to university and completed an undergraduate degree. She took more than a full time load as well as summer courses to complete a four-year degree in three years. She then went on to earn numerous other degrees and is now a doctoral candidate. My sister completed a degree in philosophy and then began working as a research analyst. She is now pursuing more schooling in hopes of starting a graduate program in social work. As for me, after travelling broadly and finding reflections of myself in the life experiences of many, have come to realize that my role is to share my love for other cultures and to serve as an English as a Second language educator, community liaison and intercultural communicator.

With my husband and two children, I live a comfortable life. But there isn’t a day that goes by that I wonder what life would have been if we had remained in Uruguay. After my dad’s passing eleven years ago, and the passing of both my grandparents, I realize that only my sister, my mother and I remain. And while I have always resented my father’s decision to leave our homeland, in retrospect his decision has given me a love of travel, a cultural sensitivity and a chance to build a family in a safe country, which is full of opportunities not only for me, but also for my children. For these blessings, I cannot be angry with him.

The writing of this thesis has been a somewhat therapeutic way to re-discover my past. I have now been living in Canada for two-thirds of my life and although I can’t say that I consider it “home”, when I go abroad, it is Canada that I miss. My connections to the country of my birth come out of the shadows of the past, but my everyday reality lies in Canada. I have returned to Uruguay a couple of times since my emigration 25 years ago, but I have always felt like a tourist. The fact that I have adopted Canadian ways is revealed in my language and mannerisms. With the help of my children, who are lovers of all things geographic, we have extensively explored
“where mom was born,” and I have promised that we will all visit Uruguay one day. Our discussions have allowed me to share the unique aspects of my native language as well as those of my native culture and customs with my children. This experience has given me hope that someday —although it will be emotionally painful—I will return with them to the place of my birth and to the source of those early memories, which will be still forever engraved on my heart.

**Limitations**

Since no scholarly inquiry can be entirely objective, it is important to maximize the methodology of the research and account for potential variables. This section will discuss some of the factors that have impacted my research and had an influence on the collection or interpretation of the data. The goal is to address any assumptions about the research and ensure that the methodology has been critically examined. The goal of my thesis was to better understand acculturation for adolescents who underwent the natural changes associated with age along with the challenges of being a newly arrived immigrant to Canada. As a cognitive process, acculturation often implies the acquisition of norms from a dominant cultural model and overlooks an individual’s ability to operate within the concepts of multiple cultural models. Furthermore, it is a very complex, multi-dimensional process that can be difficult to assess. The family unit often has the most influence on adolescents during acculturation; fostering development, inter-dependence, obligations and attachment to heritage culture (Costigan, 2011). Hence, my attempts to understand the occurrence of cultural transmission and the use of coping strategies are limited by the multiple layers and the depth of acculturation within each individual and their family set.

Other challenges presented during my research were in relation to the sample respondents and the interpretation of data. A larger pool of interviews encompassing a broader range of
respondents would have expanded my data accumulation and addressed certain variables. With more time and resources, new categories could have been established based on country of origin, the cities where each respondent faced adolescence as a newcomer and whether they were first or second generation immigrants. Although there is tendency to emphasize quantity, narrative inquiry is an effective tool in the search for meaning as it provides rich and detailed data. It also allows for the respondents to see themselves as co-collaborators in the research. After a coding methodology was used to interpret the data, I was able to gather valuable insights into adolescence and immigration, a process that was not without its limitations. Interviews can be influenced by the views of the inquirer, the types of questions asked, the language used and their disposition. For as the gatekeeper to the interviews and the primary interpreter of the data, my role in this process must be recognized. Furthermore, there is a difference between directly experiencing a personal event and re-telling this story in later period. Individuals are prone to bias as a natural way of either conforming or defending truths. Issues of credibility, honesty and validity must be taken into considering in any type of interview (Talja, 1999). I have acknowledged these limitations but also put forward some potential solutions and methods for reducing their impact in a later section of this paper.

**Future Studies**

Recent demographic shifts caused by immigration have increased the need for academic disciplines to expand our understanding of acculturation. My research was designed to focus on this process when it is specifically combined with an individual’s transition into adolescence. The goal was to contribute knowledge to this field using narrative inquiry and based on my results, it is clear that more studies on this dynamic would continue to produce valuable insights. Some recommendations for further studies would include an expansion of my work by
increasing the number of respondents and extending the interviews over a longer period of time. With more resources, the research could target specific countries of origin and regions of settlement across Canada in order to understand how these factors might impact acculturation and adolescence. Additional variables like the family model and the impact of relationships with parents and grandparents, along with the influence of the surrounding community could all be addressed. Considering the wide range of individual differences and the complexity of their experiences, a continued and expanded study would help accumulate more data for analysis. It would allow for qualitative methods that produce descriptive information to be combined with quantitative methods that provide numerical support.

An effective way to accomplish future studies in this area would be to form partnerships with other students, faculty members and institutions engaged in similar research. Working as a team, focus groups and fieldwork with specific research targets could be carried out across a broader range of respondents. Given the increased importance involving issues of immigration, acculturation and adolescence, this type of collaborative effort of inquiry would most certainly produce substantial results. As a promising area of study, the data collected could be used to better understand the positive behaviors that assist in the acculturation process, along with the negative factors that add stress to adolescence newcomers. This type of information could be used for a wide range of policy making decisions regarding immigration at the municipal and national level. It could also provide support for professionals and institutions that work directly with individuals and families who are adapting to their host country. The ultimate goal is contributing research that is supportive to this type of transition and the acculturation process. An achievement that is beneficial to newly arrived immigrants and to Canadian society as a whole.
CONCLUSION

This thesis examines immigrants’ acculturation with a specific focus on adolescents and the development of their self-identity overtime as immigrants in Canada. The research findings echo key literature and theories on immigrants’ acculturation by acknowledging the multi-faceted experiences and different modes of adaptation of long-term immigrants who came to Canada as adolescents. The research method appears effective and the five stories are valuable findings. I also find this research is therapeutic for myself to reflect on my own adolescent immigration experiences and self-identity development.
APPENDIX
GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name: _____________________________________________

Country of birth: __________________________________________

Age at immigration: __________________

Current age: __________________________

- Using as many details as you can remember, tell me about your immigration experience.

- Did you (or family members) know anyone when you first arrived? Yes ☐ No ☐
  - If so, who? ___________________________

- Did you have a say about leaving your country? Yes ☐ No ☐
  If not, do you wish you had? Yes ☐ No ☐
  How does/did that make you feel?

- What struggles did you have when you first arrived to Canada?

- What is one of your first recollections as an immigrant? How did you feel?

- Can you tell me about a time when you first immigrated to Canada when you did something or felt Canadian?

- Why do you think the incident you mentioned made you feel Canadian?

- Has your immigration experience affected your education decisions? Yes ☐ No ☐

- How has your immigration affected your employment choices?
- Have your romantic relationship choices been from your same country?  Yes □  No □
  (If married) Did you marry an English speaking, Canadian born person?

- (If children) Do you speak your mother tongue to your children?  Yes □  No □
  Do you think this is influenced by your immigration experience?

- What do you think are the challenges that adolescent immigrants face in their immigration experience?

- What do you remember being the most difficult aspect of being an adolescent immigrant?
  Can you share a positive memory?
  What about a difficult one?

- How do you feel now about your/family immigration decision?  Yes □  No □
  Do you regret it?

- After 20 years of living in Canada, do you feel (consider) Canadian?  Yes □  No □
  If so, what does that mean to you?
  If not, why not?
References


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