A Thematic Analysis of Perceptions of Adversity, Protective Factors, and Competence among Colombian Immigrant Youth in Canada

by

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ABSTRACT

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Using an ecological framework, this study investigated how the resilience-related concepts of competence, adversity, and protective factors were defined by Colombian immigrant youth living in Canada. Ten Colombian immigrant youth, aged 14 to 19 years, were interviewed about their perceptions of ‘doing well’, the main challenges they experienced after arriving in Canada, and the factors that helped them overcome their major challenges. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze the youth’s responses. Youth described how familism played a central role in the perceptions of competence and doing well. It was also found that the main challenges that were reported were general experiences of immigration and the difficulties of adapting into the new cultural environment and not to cultural discrepancies or clashes of values and beliefs. These youth talked about a range of protective factors, which included meaningful relationships (i.e., family, peers, God), individual factors (i.e., coping strategies, change in mindset, personal qualities, previous experiences, setting goals, and language brokering) and environmental factors (i.e., media, school environment, extracurricular activities, and community).
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Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a shift in the study of at-risk populations and psychological development. Previous researchers focused on identifying factors that increased the vulnerability for childhood problems such as school failure, juvenile crime, and attempted and actual suicide among youth (Garmezy, 1983). However, during the 1970’s, a number of researchers (Garmezy, 1971; Murphy, 1974; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982) explored the onset of psychopathology in younger populations and found that some individuals from at-risk backgrounds were thriving whereas others were not. Driven by the desire to understand why some children seemed to cope better with adversity than others in similar circumstances, developmental psychologists started to focus on the study of factors that promoted the health and well-being of these populations (i.e., Masten, 2001) and began to explore resilience in children and youth. The concept of resilience refers to the process through which individuals achieve positive adaption in spite of serious threats or exposure to adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Ungar et al., 2008).

Based on this conceptualization, two main criteria need to be present for individuals to be deemed resilient. First, individuals are exposed to a significant threat to development (i.e., poverty, child maltreatment, developmental challenges, etc.), and second, individuals need to achieve positive outcomes despite exposure to such adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Although this conceptualization has been prevalent within the study of resilience, it has been challenged due to its overemphasis on individual capacities as the main precursors of resilience (Ungar et al., 2008). The view of resilience as a personal trait is limiting as it implies that those children and youth who
are unable to overcome adversity lack the capacities necessary to do so (Wright & Masten, 2006).

In an attempt to address the overemphasis on individual capacities, resilience researchers began to pay greater attention to the identification of environmental and social factors that mitigate the effects of adversity (protective factors), as well as the ways in which such mitigation happens. This conceptual shift has encouraged the adoption of an ecological approach to the study of resilience which recognizes that there is a reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environments (Este & Ngo, 2011) and that specific groups exposed to diverse types of adversity adapt differently and perceive different factors as health-enhancing when dealing with stressors (Wright & Masten, 2006). Furthermore, investigations that follow this approach have yielded a better understanding of the effects that various contexts such as the family, the school, the neighbourhood, the community and culture have on the development of at-risk children and youth (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong et al., 2007). Using an ecological perspective, resilience has been re-defined as not only the individual’s capacity to overcome adversity but also the capacity of that individual’s environment to provide access to health-enhancing resources in meaningful ways (Ungar, 2006; Ungar et al., 2008).

The most recent wave of research on resilience encompasses a greater sensitivity to one specific context: the culture that influences the development of at-risk children. Although there is consensus about children having basic needs that are similar across cultural contexts, researchers agree that definitions of appropriate child development, adversity, and health-enhancing resources may vary dramatically based on the cultural
beliefs of the communities in which young individuals live (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Furthermore, as Wright and Masten (2006) stated, certain culturally specific traditions, beliefs, or support systems may serve as protective factors for individuals experiencing adversity within a specific culture. For example, Boyden and Mann (2005) reported that unaccompanied Somali boys in exile in Canada were highly resilient despite the hardships they had experienced. Their coping strategies were attributed to being accustomed to long periods of separation from their families due to their cultural traditions. In Somalia, young boys take part in a pastoral nomadic experience which involves being sent away to tend herds. This is considered an important practice to teach boys to be self-sufficient and autonomous and to acquire status in their communities. Within the Somalian cultural context, long periods of separations from family members are perceived not as deprivation and loss but as contributing to the process maturation of young boys. Adversity, then, and the skills and resources needed to achieve positive outcomes, are perceived differently depending on the cultural context in which they occur, and the values of the people belonging to that specific society. Consequently, Ungar et al. (2007) stressed that to better understand the process of resilience, appropriate development (positive outcomes), adversity, and health enhancing resources need to be culturally meaningful for those at risk.

This study attempted to understand the culturally relevant definitions of adversity, health enhancing resources, and positive outcomes for Colombian Canadian immigrant youth using an ecological perspective. Although overcoming adversity through the use of meaningful resources have been found to be relevant among a variety of populations, how resilience is viewed and the factors that predict it are likely to vary across different
cultures (Ungar et al., 2008). It is relevant to investigate the resilience of Latino immigrant youth because they are affected by a myriad of challenges that threaten their development. Latino American youth are more likely to be negatively stereotyped, culturally devalued, and socioeconomically disadvantaged relative to non-Hispanic Whites or other immigrants (Spencer-Rodgers & Collins, 2006). They have been shown to be negatively affected by their minority status, discrimination, alienation from schools, economic hardship, difficulty understanding English, and their parents’ unfamiliarity with the education system (Vega Vargas-Reighley, 2005).

Despite the great potential for Latino populations to encounter high levels of adversity, research on resilience of Latin American immigrants is scarce (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011; Vega Vargas-Reighly, 2005). Of the current literature that exists, the vast majority has been conducted within the United States. Although valuable, these studies may not reflect the unique context of Canadian immigrants. Furthermore, since resilience research on Latino populations has primarily examined different groups of immigrants from South and Central America as a homogeneous population (Vega Vargas-Reighly, 2005), there is a lack of understanding of potential country of origin and ethno-cultural variations. Therefore, this study will focus on the Colombian population, rather than on the larger group of Latinos living in Canada.

This literature review will first focus on the main concepts related to resilience, including the definition and discussions of adversity, protective factors, and positive outcomes. Placing resilience in a cultural context, I will begin with an overview of the Latin American culture, with a specific focus on the Colombian culture. Next, I will discuss immigration issues in Canada, and how the Latino and Colombian immigrant
families have adjusted and settled in Canada. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on Latinos and Colombians living in Canada, and thus, I will primarily rely on findings on adversity and protective factors that have been associated with Latinos populations in the United States. Lastly, I will discuss the present study.

**Positive Outcomes and Resilience**

In relation to positive outcomes, the most common assumption driving conceptualizations of resilience is that development follows a constant trajectory and that youth are to follow such trajectory in order to achieve positive outcomes. In most cases, good outcomes have been judged based on the achievement of developmental benchmarks, the performance of competence, and the acquisition of salient developmental tasks (Masten, 2001). Other researchers have assumed that the absence of psychopathology and negative behaviours such as avoidance of drug use or delinquency, could be considered a reflection of positive outcomes (Conrad & Hammen, 1993). Due to the variation in assumptions about what is considered to be ‘good’ or ‘ok,’ it has been difficult for researchers to reach consensus about what the positive outcomes are and to develop a universal criteria of positive development is a complex issue (Masten, 2001).

According to Hoffman (2001) and Ungar (2005a), one important limitation in relation to the study of resilience is that the definition of positive outcomes has tended to be based on Westernized families, which is based on normative, white, middle class values. This may be partly because most of the researchers who work on child development and well-being are from the United States and Europe (Boyden & Mann, 2005). According to Ogbu (1981), competence represents an ability to perform culturally specific tasks and appropriate functioning depends on the acquisition of competencies
required by any given culture or society. Competence, then, is defined differently in different populations due to the varying cultural values that govern their behaviours. For example, Western societies place high value on academic achievement, and a child will be deemed resilient if, despite high levels of adversity he or she finished high school and obtain a university degree. However, other cultures may place higher values on other activities which will be considered maladaptive as seen through a Western lens. For example, McAdam-Crips, Aptekar, and Kironyo (2005) recounted the story of a young child from Nairobi who washed people’s cars as a form of income to help support his mother and his siblings after their father abandoned them. Out of concern for the future of this child, the researcher offered to pay for his education. When the mother received the money she felt that there were more pressing needs, such as paying rent, so she used it to ensure that the family had a roof over their heads and the boy continued to wash cars for extra income. If this child was assessed based on the Western idea that academic achievement leads to resilient behaviour, he will not be viewed as resilient. However, his ability to find some income to help his mother showed great resourcefulness and competence despite the adversity he had endured.

Another limitation in regards to the study of resilience is that the conceptualizations of positive outcomes have been criticized as illustrative of values held by those in an authority position (Ungar, 2005). The classification of a child as resilient might depend on whether or not the child engages in socially and culturally acceptable behaviours such as compliance. For example, in previous research, internal locus of control was found to be related with behaviour associated with resilience. However, it has also been reported that internal locus of control could be associated with undesirable
social behaviours (Ungar, 2005). This is because internality could also be reflected in rebellious behaviour on the part of the child, due to a sense of empowerment to defy an established set of rules. In this case, the higher degree of agency shown by children who rebelled might be a sign of resilience, rather than higher levels of compliance from those who felt unable to create change. If resilience conceptualizations only reflect what adults in authority value as socially accepted, then many children who showed greater agency to overcome a system they perceived as oppressive might be excluded from such classification. In this way, the concept of resilience is tied to normative judgements of particular behaviours (Kaplan, 1999) which can obscure the legitimate efforts of children to cope and succeed when they fall outside of such norm.

These limitations are important to consider especially when understanding the resilience of immigrant youth populations. It needs to be acknowledged that the current value laden definitions of healthy functioning may not be in line with the perceptions of competence that immigrant youth from various cultural backgrounds hold. Since identifying youth that achieve unexpected positive outcomes is a central part of the resilience research, greater caution in identifying what is considered to be positive outcomes is necessary. The study of resilience in immigrant youth needs to be sensitive to the unique contexts that affect their development and adaptation, as well as the cultural influences that affect their perceptions of positive development. Furthermore, the opportunities for exploration of diverse meanings of positive development need to be provided, rather than the imposition of Westernized ideas onto culturally and contextually diverse populations.
Adversity, Risk, and Resilience

Threats to appropriate development have been conceptualized in the resilience literature in relation to adversity and risk. Adversity refers to the experience of events and circumstances that interfere with the achievement of healthy development, the satisfaction of basic needs, or the accomplishment of age-appropriate tasks (Daniel, 2010; Sandler, 2001; Wright & Masten, 2006). According to Sandler (2001), these interferences often lead to elevated levels of stress since they impede the accomplishment of essential competencies needed to function properly in society. Adversity has often been operationally defined as incidents of physical or sexual abuse, loss or bereavement, growing up in an environment of neglect, divorce, and socio-economic disadvantages (Daniel, 2010). Other, various normative stressors such as relocation, absence of a mother, illness and punishment have also been investigated as sources of adversity (Gilgun, 1996).

The concept of ‘risk’ on the other hand refers to predictors of undesirable developmental outcomes or to variables that increase the likelihood of psychopathology (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Masten, 2001). Risk is a term that is applied to a group, rather than to specific individuals, and to identify their probability of developing adaptational difficulties (Daniel, 2010; Wright & Masten, 2006). Definitions of risk imply weighing the chances of negative outcomes for the future and not all persons who are considered to be at-risk will experience adverse outcomes (Gilgun, 1996). Operationally, risk has been defined in a wide variety of ways which reveal the lack of universality in its terminology. Some researchers have used measures of socioeconomic status (SES), whereas others have used the number of negative past life events such as instances of community trauma,
low birth weight, divorce, and the presence of abuse (Masten, 2006). Other more extreme conditions, such as armed conflict, mass murders, famine and mass displacement, have also been used as definitions of risks experienced by young people (Boyden & Mann, 2005). With various life situations affecting at risk populations, the understanding of threats to appropriate development is complex and multifaceted.

Three main characteristics of risk factors have made conceptualization of risk complex (Ungar, 2003). The first characteristic is that risks have been found to co-occur. In early studies of resilience, risks were examined individually, but it was later acknowledged that risks tend to occur in clusters rather than in isolation (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). For example, researchers in the Rochester Longitudinal Study found that a multiple-risk index that included 10 risk factors (psychological functioning of the mother, family SES, minority status, interaction style, family support, life events, and family size) was better in predicting IQ and socio-emotional competence than any one single risk factor alone (Greenberg, Coie, Lengua, & Pinderhughes, 1999). In addition to the clustering effect, another characteristic that complicates the conceptualization of risk is that they have an accumulative effect. Specifically, the greater the number of risks an individual experiences, the greater his or her vulnerability is to the onset of negative developmental outcomes. This was illustrated by Liaw and Brooks-Gunn (1994) when after testing the effects of 13 risk factors on young children’s IQ scores, the number of risk factors increased as the IQ scores decreased and the incidence of behavioural problems increased. Finally, the third complication is that some are considered to be continuous, bipolar dimensions that have positive and negative ends. For example, a factor such as parenting is considered a positive factor if parents provide warmth and a
stable environment for their children. However, it could also be a risk factor if parents are harsh and abusive. In this case, low risk in a risk gradient indicates high assets, and vice versa (Masten, 2001). The complexity of risk factors, inherent in their multifaceted definition, has made it difficult for researchers to be consistent across studies when identifying the risks that are relevant to the populations they study. This lack of consistency in defining adverse conditions complicates the task of comparing and interpreting findings across studies (Kaufman, Cook, Arny, Jones, & Pittinsky, 1994; Luthar, 1999; Luthar et al., 2000).

The complexity is exacerbated by the fact that children and youth in different contexts (e.g., socially, culturally, economically, and politically) conceptualize and experience adverse conditions in different ways. More specifically, culture provides individuals with a frame of reference from which to judge human transactions in their social environment (Slavin, Rainer, McCreary, & Gowda, 1991). Although there are events that are considered to be adverse across many cultures (i.e., death of a loved one, chronic illness, physical violence), Sheck (1996) stated that cultural beliefs about adversity and risk influence individuals’ concepts about their causes, consequences, and the appropriate ways of overcoming adverse conditions. Thus, events are stressful only when the person experiencing it perceives it as straining his or her current resources (Slavin et al., 1991). This view is in accordance with the cognitive perspective that people are most likely disturbed by their interpretations of events, rather than by the event itself (Sheck, 1996). According to these premises, culture provides the basis for individuals to make sense of and define adverse conditions. Diverse cultural values then lead to conceptualizations of risk and adversity that vary in accordance with the cultural
framework with which such adverse conditions are evaluated. For example, for a Cambodian female teenage refugee, being asked out on a date by a young man may be perceived as a threatening event because it deviates from her cultural traditions of courtship. It is important then to have a greater understanding of conceptualizations of adversity and risk by members of diverse cultural backgrounds (Slavin, et al., 1991). According to Ungar (2005a), researchers have not been effective in understanding individual’s own culturally determined indicators of resilience. Therefore, conceptualizations of resilience for minority groups and groups from various cultures need to be established by allowing spaces where they can voice their perceptions of it. Therefore, in order to make judgments about the resilience pathways of Colombian immigrant youth in Canada, their own contextually meaningful understanding of risk needs to be explored, taking into account their cultural background and current context.

Health Enhancing Resources and Resilience

According to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), resilient individuals appear to have retained important resources which represent basic protective systems in human development. It has been proposed that there is a set of factors which influences adolescents’ ability to succeed amidst risk, aiding in the achievement of positive developmental outcomes. Jessor, Van den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa and Turbin (1995) explained that the relationship between protective factors and risk is linear and positive when protection is low or absent, and is attenuated when protection is high. Thus, they serve as moderators between risk and negative developmental outcomes. Rak and Petterson (2001) stated that protective factors can be classified into three different categories. The first category encompasses factors that can be found within the individual
and they include characteristics such as greater ability to solve problems, having an optimistic view of life, being proactive, alert, and autonomous, and a tendency to seek novel experiences. Second, factors can be categorized as family qualities and these include types of parenting strategies, the availability of extended family, the amount of siblings in the family, and their socioeconomic status. Factors found in an individual’s environment represent the third category and they include good teachers or coaches, the availability of after school programs, and living in a good neighbourhood. However, due to the variability in conceptualizations of protective factors, researchers have not agreed upon a universal set of protective factors which are applicable to all at risk youth.

The relationships between protective and risks have also been categorized. Some researchers have proposed three ways in which protective factors interact with risks to facilitate coping with adversity (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Rak & Patterson, 2001; Ungar, 2004a). First, protective factors could be understood through a compensatory model when they act to neutralize the risk of exposure. In this case, elements such as availability of extended family or a supportive school environment serves to mitigate the presence of adversity. Second, a challenge model can be used to understand protective factors that enhance competence. In these cases, the risk is often manageable such as family disruption or a significant lost and dealing with the negative experiences allows children to learn how to cope with similar situations in the future. Finally, a conditional model postulates that personal characteristics, such as temperament and optimism, can modulate the impact of risk.

Although researchers have attempted to conceptualize and classify protective factors, current definitions are not straightforward. In fact, it has been challenging to
reach consensus in regards to the operationalization of protective factors (Jessor et al., 1995). One main reason is that protective factors are multifaceted. For instance, there are cases when factors conceptualized as risk have protective qualities for certain individuals. Ungar and Teram (2000) found that the most vulnerable individuals accessed the same health resources as their more stereotypically resilient counterparts (self-esteem, competence, meaningful involvement with their communities, and attachment to others) through their delinquent behaviours. Thus, engaging in delinquent acts were, in their case, what provided protection against mental health issues. Another aspect that complicates the conceptualization of protective factors is the existence of protection has most commonly been viewed as opposite to the presence of risk, and in some cases protection has been defined as merely the absence of risk variables. This is problematic because it could be logically possible to encounter high protection in the presence of high risk, as in the case of an adolescent who is committed to school but prefers the company of antisocial friends (Jessor et al. 1995). It is possible that the lack of consensus in defining what factors provide protection to at-risk individuals is that they may function in alternative ways for different age groups (Windle, 1999) and for individuals in different social and cultural contexts (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Ungar 2005a).

Similar to risk and adversity, culture plays an important role in determining the coping resources and the relevance of health enhancing resources for individuals in adverse situations (Sheck, 2005). Based on an ecological framework, resilience is understood as the outcome from negotiations between at-risk individuals and their environments for health enhancing resources (Ungar, 2004b). Health enhancing resources and protective factors are multidimensional predictors of health outcomes which are
unique to each context and which are identified by individuals as compensating for self-defined risks (Ungar, 2004a). Due to the variability of relevant protective factors based on the context in which individuals develop, universal sets of protective factors are difficult to identify. In fact, they should be understood as culturally and contextually distinct. According to Slavin et al. (1991), cultural beliefs dictate the proper way of handling a stressful or adverse situation in a variety of ways. Cultural traditions determine specific family roles which influences who in the family is in charge of taking action to solve the problem. Furthermore, cultural beliefs about what needs to be accepted by fate affect the individual’s appraisals of coping options, whereas the degree to which members of an ethnic group have internalized stereotypes about their own group influence individual’s evaluation of own efficacy when overcoming adversity.

Culture differences also lead to varying definitions of social resources. For example, African Americans define family more broadly than Caucasians, in order to include extended family members. Religious beliefs tied to culture may also contribute to coping resources through the inclusion of rituals that aid in overcoming adversity and through the exclusion of responses that deemed immoral or impious (e.g., using alcohol, getting angry, asking other outside the family for help). Tolerance to diversity in the research of resilience provides opportunities for at risk populations to express the factors they perceive as most helpful in dealing with adversity based on their own personal experiences and cultural context.

**Latin American Culture**

To better understand the resilience pathways of at-risk populations, culture and context need to be taken into account. It is imperative to provide a description of the
cultural background characteristic of Latin American immigrants, and more specifically of Colombian immigrants. Colombian are part of a cultural group called “Latino” which encompasses individuals who have Latin-American or Spanish-speaking descent. This specific ethnic group is highly diverse and Latinos differ, not only in national origin and history, but also in the social aspects which shape age, gender, and class relationships. Although this group is highly heterogeneous, there is a set of specific values which are believed to apply to Latinos in general. These include familism, high regards for success, and respeto.

For Latinos, family is central. The term familism has been used to refer to the belief that family, which includes extended family members, comes before one’s own needs (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). Researchers have found that the family cohesion and the interconnectedness inherent in familism contribute to better physical, emotional and educational well-being among Latino children and adolescents (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010). Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) reported that Latinos considered family members to be an important source of companionship, support, and help, and often elders are seen as dependent on the younger generations. An example is a young Colombian girl who stated that the memories of her family in Colombia increased her sense of family loyalty and prevented her from hurting herself. Although this strong family ties usually increase Latinos’ well-being, the interconnectedness among family members also has been associated with feelings of loss and grief when extended family had been left behind in the home country (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011).
In addition to placing high importance on the family, Latin Americans have been found to have high regards for success. For example, Latino populations living in the United States have reported to have strong beliefs about the role of education in achieving success, to have strong work ethics, and to have an intense desire to succeed (Hill & Torres, 2010). Furthermore, Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001) reported that approximately 90% of Latino parents in their sample wanted their children to attend university. Despite Latino’s high regard towards education and success, they have been found to lag behind others in the United States. In fact, only 64% of Latinos between 18 and 24 years old had completed high school (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000). It has been proposed that this paradox stems from the great emphasis on the role of the family in U.S. education system, paired with a lack of culturally sensitive strategies to engage Latino families in the process, and the barriers faced by Latino parents such as the lack of language skills and lack of familiarity with the system (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Finally, respeto is a term used to refer to the cultural values of obedience and respect, and it represents the emphasis that Latinos placed on being considerate of adults and refraining from interrupting or arguing (Delagado-Gaitan, 1994). Qualitative studies which have explored the cultural values of Latinos have found that Mexican and Puerto Rican mothers value obedience and respect more than Western values such as independence and autonomy (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Furthermore, as part of being respectful, courtesy and decorum is also required when relating to other individuals of a particular age, sex, and social status. This attitude is considered important for maintaining harmony within the nuclear and extended family.
Familism, desire for success, and respeto are highly regarded values by the majority of the Latino population. However, Smokowski and Bacallao (2011) stated that Latinos are a heterogeneous group and its aggregation into one ethnic group leads us to overlook the important differences. For example, when investigating educational attainment levels in various Hispanic sub-cultural groups residing in the United States, Chapa and Valencia (1993) found that Mexican Americans had the lowest levels of academic achievement when compared to other Hispanic groups. Furthermore, it has been found that Puerto Rican populations residing in the United States experienced the lowest socioeconomic status among the major Latino groups, whereas Cubans experienced the highest levels. Puerto Ricans specifically, are US citizens and have free mobility between their home country and the mainland. This is a privilege that few Latino immigrants have in the United States. Among other differences, the reasons for migrating also vary depending on the country of origin. Although individuals from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba and Mexico migrate in search of better financial situations, Latinos who migrate from Central and South America are often fleeing violence, civil wars, social turmoil, and political violence (Guarnicca, 1997). Due to their within-group diversity, sub-groups should be studied separately in order to explore whether the characteristics found in the overall group are relevant to the different types of Latinos.

**Colombian culture.** Colombia has a population of about 45 million people (Departamento Administrativo de Estadisticas [National Administrative Department of Statistics], 2010) and it is the third largest country in Latin America. Based on World Bank standards (World Bank, 2011), Colombia is considered to be a lower middle
income country with a gross domestic product (GDP) of $235,836 million and a GDP growth of 0.8 in 2009. In 2003, the unemployment rate was calculated to be about 18% in urban areas, where three quarters of the population lived (Berube, 2005) and about 26% of Colombian families received less than a minimum monthly wage (about $170 USD) (Duque, Klevens, & Ramirez, 2003). Colombian society is highly stratified and it has a wide gap between the most financially vulnerable and the most fortunate. In 2001, nearly two-thirds of the population were living below the poverty line whereas the top 20% earned 60% of the national income (Beurube, 2005). The social security system in Colombia is relatively new and provides health care, pension, social security, and death benefits. However, this system has been inadequately applied to their country members. Specifically, at the beginning of the 21st century, only 16% of the population was being covered by social insurance, and social assistance benefits were not provided to those in the poorest segments of the population. This left those more vulnerable to rely on nongovernmental organizations to supplement the limited government support (Marquez & Broadfield, 2011).

The official language spoken in Colombia is Spanish, which was imposed during the Colonial period by the Spanish conquerors. Families in Colombia are organized based on a patriarchal framework in which the father is the head of the household and the mother is responsible for child rearing and homemaking. Colombian families usually have an extended kin group with whom they interact regularly. They generally live close to each other in urban areas, or on the same land or estate in rural locations. Parents encourage their children to behave properly and to have high regard for their elders. Furthermore, children are encouraged to be obedient and to conform to social
expectations, to follow religious devotions, and to nurture moral values and respect. Higher education is considered necessary to achieve professional goals and to contribute to the progress and prosperity of the country. Therefore, upper and middle class children are usually enrolled in elementary school at age four or five and attend school until the completion of secondary school which makes them qualified to attend university. Although attending university is highly regarded, the educational system reinforces social stratification, since only the middle and upper classes can afford school fees (Marquez & Broadfield, 2011). In fact, about 11% of children between 6 and 15 do not attend elementary or secondary school (World Bank, 2011).

**Immigration in Canada**

To better understand Colombian immigrants living in Canada, it is necessary to describe the host country’s immigration context. Demographically, Canada is ethnically and culturally diverse, with three main groups making up the population: the Aboriginal people, the colonizing groups (English and French), and the immigrants (Salehi, 2010). Although Canada has been an immigrant receiving country since the 1900’s, preferential entry rights were given to those arriving from European countries in the early decades of the immigrant movement. During this time, the Canadian government enforced a policy of “aggressive assimilation” which reflected the belief that the best chance to succeed in Canada was to learn English and to adopt European customs (Asnova, 2008). It was not until the 1960’s, when political and social movements such as the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, struggles with the Aboriginals, the growth of women’s movement and feminist discourse on ‘diversity politics’, and a greater number of immigrants from places other than Europe, resulted in significant changes in the immigration policy in Canada (Brooks,
Therefore, with the introduction of the declaration of the Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, and the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, cultural pluralism and tolerance for immigrant diversity were acknowledged as fundamental to the Canadian identity.

This greater emphasis on multiculturalism has led Canada to become the country with the second highest immigrant population in the world. Immigration in Canada guarantees an annual increase in population and a sufficient number of workers to meet labour market needs (Este & Ngo, 2011). Because immigration is considered to be an important source of population in Canada, around 250,000 immigrants are allowed into the country annually (Asanova, 2008). It is estimated that approximately 60,000 of these newcomers are children and youth under 18 years old (Statistics Canada, 2006).

According to the 2006 Census, one in five recent immigrants are children under the age of 14, and 15% are youth aged 15-24. Furthermore, it has been reported that most immigrant youth in Canada come from places such as Asia and the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East, and South and Central America (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Greater multiculturalism within the Canadian context has also meant that assisting minorities to fulfill their sociocultural needs and promoting diversity is a top priority (Soler Urzua, 2010). This assistance has been reflected in the establishment of many not-for-profit agencies across Canada, which have the purpose of responding to the needs of immigrant populations. Furthermore, there are almost 1,000 immigrant serving agencies (ISA’s), which provide targeted services and programs specifically immigrant and refugee children and youth (Chuang & Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, 2009).
Even though Canada is officially a multicultural nation and provides extensive services for newcomers, immigrant families still undergo a process of adaptation which leads to particular challenges. For example, linguistic and cultural barriers are a significant problem for immigrant youth who are in the process of understanding school routines, educational rights and responsibilities, and school customs. Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) stated that young immigrants who arrive without English take about 2 to 3 years to acquire interpersonal communication skills, and 5 to 7 years to acquire the necessary cognitive and language proficiency needed for content base learning. Therefore, youth who immigrate at an older age may face greater difficulty in succeeding in school. In fact, Watt and Roessingh (2001) who tracked 540 students for whom English was their second language (ESL) in one Calgary school, found that 74% of the students in their sample dropped out before graduation. This is similar to other studies on school dropout rates which found that 74% of ESL students failed to complete high school (Derwing, Decorby, Ichikawa, & Jamieson 1999; Watt & Roessing, 1994, 2001).

It has also been found that immigrant families tend to be poorer than their Canadian-born families. Salehi (2010) stated that immigrants who have been in Canada for less than ten years are more likely to live in lower-income families than immigrants who have been in the country for longer. In 2006, 48% of children of recent immigrants and 41% of children of all immigrants were living in poverty in Canada (Campaign 2000, 2010). Furthermore, in their interviews of stakeholders who had come into contact with immigrant youth, Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) found that family poverty was a significant issue for many new immigrants. They found that many parents were underemployed or held multiple entry level jobs because they lacked marketable skills,
competence in English, and recognized credentials. Similarly, Ornstein (2006) stated that despite the fact that most immigrants are highly trained in their native countries, Canadian born groups tended to have better jobs, higher family incomes, and lower rates of poverty. Although poverty is considered to be the most potent factor that places children and youth at risk, Beiser, Hou, Hyman, and Tousignant (2002) found that it does not necessarily have a negative effect on the mental health of children of immigrant families. In fact, children of immigrant families living in poverty in their study showed fewer emotional and behavioural problems than their Canadian-born counterparts and they attributed this to the central role that families played in the lives of immigrants.

In addition to these challenges, issues related to a sense of belonging and family conflicts due to the adaptation process have also been found. Chien, George, and Armstrong (2002) found that both men and women reported experiencing bullying or violence in school due to their race, accent, religion or the way they dress. These experiences made it difficult for immigrant youth to fit in into the host society and to socialize with peers. Furthermore, greater difficulty in developing social networks outside their ethnic group leads to a greater sense of isolation, exclusion, and discrimination (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). In relation to their families, conflicts can be created due to the greater intergenerational gap. Since young immigrants adapt more rapidly to their new environment, they are often torn in terms of their identity and caught between two cultures with conflicting value systems.

**Latin American immigrants.** Latin Americans in Canada are one of the largest non-European ethnic groups and they account for about 1% of the total population. According to Statistics Canada (2007), in 2001, the biggest Latin American immigrant
groups were Mexicans (15%), Chilean (14%), Salvadorians (11%), Peruvians (7%), and Colombians (6%). It has also been reported that Latino immigrant populations tend to grow faster than the overall population and to be a relatively young population. For instance, between 1996 and 2001, the Latin American population rose 32% compared to the 4% increase the rest of the population experienced in the same period of time. In addition, 29% of Latin Americans in 2001 were under the age of 15, compared to 19% in the overall population, and 18% of Latin Americans were between the ages of 15 and 24, compared to only 13% in the overall population (Statistics Canada, 2007).

For education, Statistics Canada (2007) reported that young people of Latin American origin were more likely than young Canadians to be attending school. In 2001, 67% of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 reported to be enrolled in a full time educational program compared to 57% of Canadians in the same age group. This is in sharp contrast with data collected in the United States which revealed that the Latino population are underrepresented in secondary and post secondary education (Vega Vargas-Reighley, 2005).

For employment levels however, Latino American immigrants do not seem to fare so well. According to Harvey and Houle (2006), recent Latin American immigrants, along with Canada’s First nations, Canadian-born Blacks, recent immigrants from West Asia, Middle East and Africa, can be considered among the most economically underprivileged groups. Statistics Canada (2007) reported that Latinos between the ages of 15 and 44 had lower levels of employment (62%) than the rest of the Canadian population (68%). In addition, the unemployment rates among Latino American immigrants were found to be higher (10%) than the rest of the population (7%), with
those between the ages of 15 and 24 showing higher rates than the rest of Latinos. Perhaps the fact that more young Latino immigrants were enrolled in full time education makes them less likely to be employed.

Even though a large percentage of Latin American immigrants in Canada were found to hold a job in 2001 (90%), they generally had lower incomes than the national average. In 2000, the average income for those of Latin American origin (15 and over) was $22,500 which is almost $7,500 less than the average income of the overall population. In the same year, it was found that Latinos were more likely than the rest of the population to live under Canada’s low-income cut offs. In fact, 32% of children of Latin American descent (under 15 years old) lived in low income households compared to only 19% of all Canadians. A possible reason for a high rate of working poor among Latino American immigrants is that this population was found to be overrepresented in low paying jobs (14% compared to 7% in the overall population) and underrepresented in positions of management that usually provide higher incomes (6% compared to 10% in the overall population) (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Although there is a lack of resilience research on Latinos families in Canada, research conducted in the United States has shown that there are a number of risk factors that have been associated with Latin American populations. Visible minority immigrants, such as those from Latin American descent, have more challenges adapting to Western cultures due to the significant differences between their culture of origin and the host cultures (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011, Vega Vargas-Reighley, 2005). Additionally, according to Chapman and Perreira (2005), Latino youth face multiple threats to their well-being such as poor school outcomes, discrimination, family related struggles, and
poverty. There have been reports that Mexican Americans had more stressful academic experiences than did Anglo students and that they perceived being ridiculed when speaking English, having a poor report card, and being sent to the principal’s office as significant stressors (Vega Vargas-Reighley, 2005). In addition, school policies and procedures which are not sensitive to cultural diversity, paired with low expectations from teachers and school officials are considered to be significant barriers to success (Shetgiri, Kataoka, Ryan, Askew, Chung, & Schuster, 2009). Researchers have acknowledged that immigrant students experience discrimination within the school environment (Chapman & Perreira, 2005), an event that can be novel for Latinos arriving from racially homogenous countries (Romero & Roberts, 2003), and thus may not know how to cope with discrimination. Some Latino youth view their adjustment process as more difficult when they experienced continuous corrective feedback and discrimination and also perceived marked differences in physical appearance when compared to the dominant population (Smokowski and Bacallao, 2011). Language difficulties also represent a possible risk and they have been associated with incidences of self-derogation and frequent belittling remarks made by teachers, as well as with more serious problems such as increased levels of drug use and more frequent delinquent behaviour (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011).

Latino populations in the United States have been found to be more vulnerable to family conflicts due to the intergenerational gap between parents and children (Chapman & Perreira, 2005). Younger Latinos may adopt the host cultures customs and values faster than their elders, which may lead to strained family relationships if the new ways are considered to conflict with their heritage culture’s values and customs (Szapocznik &
Williams, 2000). Thus, conflicts may arise due to contrasting perceptions of the immigration experiences Latino parents and children have. Parents often make the decision to immigrate recognizing the potential stressors they will face but view this opportunity as positive for the well-being of the family. Children, on the other hand rarely take part in the decision making process and this often causes them to feel less positive about the challenges of making new friends, learning a new language and to navigate a new culture (Chapman & Perreira, 2005; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). Furthermore, due to the great importance of family to Latinos, separations and reunifications caused by the immigration process can sometimes be problematic. In fact, it has been reported that lengthy family separations, when one of the parents immigrated first, resulted in significant changes in family roles and contributed to significant stress pre- and post-immigration (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011).

Latino youth often appraise leaving relatives and extended family behind as significantly stressful (Vega Vargas-Reighley, 2011). These problems seem to be aggravated by the lack of financial resources that Latino families often experience due to the parents’ inability to acquire well-paying jobs that are not physically exhausting and emotionally stressful (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011)

In addition to these risk factors, another layer of adversity is added for immigrant youth when their developmental stage is taken into consideration. Immigrant youth also undergo major systemic changes related to puberty and adolescent development (Vega Vargas-Reighley, 2005). These include not only biological changes, but also psychological and sociocultural. One important aspect of adolescent development is identity formation, and it is during this time that individuals start thinking about
themselves, who they are, how others perceive them, and their future direction (Tartakovsky, 2009). According to Tartakovsky, identity formation represents a difficult task for immigrant youth because they need to explore multiple identities related to their country of origin and their receiving country. At the same time, Salehi (2010) stated that issues of identity formation become associated with feelings of belonging to the larger society, and these may be difficult to attain in a multicultural and pluralistic society. In addition, adolescents are able to think more abstractly about what it means to be part of their ethnic group and how others perceive them, becoming more aware of prejudice and stereotypes that others may hold about them (Tartakovsky, 2009). When prejudice exists, there is greater pressure for immigrant youth to adopt the host culture’s values. This, in turn, could also increase the levels of conflict with their parents, who want their children to hold on to their culture of origin, and adolescents, who may be more attracted to the adoption of Western values.

For protective factors, research in the resilience field has found certain aspects associated with the well-being of at-risk Latino populations living in the United States. For example, cultural values such as respeto and familismo are considered important health enhancing resources for Latino youth. Respeto has been associated with greater deference to parental authority which precludes risk-taking behaviour, and more cooperation, which enhances family relationships (Chapman & Perreira, 2005). According to some researchers, family loyalty, family obligation, and family cohesion inherent in familism appear to improve the physical and emotional health, and educational well-being of adolescents (Bird, Canino, Davies, Zhang, Ramirez, & Lahey, 2001; Hill, Bush & Roosa, 2003). In relation to academic achievement, Vega-Vargas
Reighly (2005) reported that having teacher support, peer instrumental support, and parent motivational support were significant contributions to high achievement among Mexican American high school students. In addition, having positive relationships with at least one caring adult, having clear communications of high expectations, and having the opportunity to participate meaningfully in family activities also served as protective factors for high achieving Latinos at risk (Shetgiri et al., 2009; Vega-Vargas Reighly, 2005). However, not just having a strong connection to the culture of origin has been associated with protection for Latino immigrant youth. High-achieving, low-income, Hispanic students were found to identify with both middle-class American values and their own ethnic group’s values (Chapman & Perreira, 2009; Vega Vargas-Reighly, 2005).

It has been proposed that there is great value for an individual to maintain his or her culture-of-origin while developing a positive relationship with the host culture (Feliciano, 2001). This process is defined as integration, or biculturalism. According to some researchers, ethnic minority individuals who become bicultural have better physical and psychological health than those who abandon completely their culture of origin in favour of the host culture, or those who reject the host culture and retain solely their culture of origin (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Vega Vargas-Reighley (2010) stated that being bicultural is an appropriate strategy to cope with discrimination as it allows a person to function adequately in the dominant culture while providing a psychological safety net at home where a person could reaffirm his or her esteem when threatened by discriminatory attitudes. Furthermore, Buriel, Calzada, and Vasquez (1998)
argued that the cognitive integration required for biculturalism may help students in their academic performance.

It is important to acknowledge that Latinos’ adjustment could differ based on the context of the host country. Most research about Latinos has been conducted in the United States, where this population is rapidly growing. Over 14% of the population in United States was reported to be of Latino decent in 2005 (Tamis-LeMonda, 2010). This is in sharp contrast to the proportion of Latinos in Canada (1% of the total population) (Statistics Canada, 2007). Furthermore, the long history of Latino immigration in the United States has led to many generations of Latinos born in the United States. According to Tamis-LeMonda (2010), children of immigrant families have very different experiences than those of whose parents were born in the United States. Since most Latino immigrants in Canada are recent immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2007) it is possible that their experiences are markedly different than those reported by later generations of Latinos living in the United States. It is imperative then to conduct research that focuses on Latinos living in other countries in order to have a better understanding of the factors that affect their adjustment.

**Colombian immigrants.** Colombians differ mostly from other Latin American immigrants in their motivations to leave their homeland. For this specific group, the main factors for mobilization are safety, political, and economic reasons. Colombia is plagued with violence due to a 40 year-old armed conflict and a persistent drug trade. The fear of generalized violence and threats to personal or family safety are strong ‘push’ factors for many Colombian immigrants. Conflicts between the Revolutionary Armed Forced of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP, a major guerrilla group), the government, and the
paramilitary groups have been the source of major human rights violations. Since the 1990’s, civilians have been converted into military targets by guerrilla and paramilitary groups. Violations of human rights such as massacres, selective homicide, torture, disappearance, forced recruitment, and sexual violence, became deliberate strategies to terrorize the population and to undermine their support to the ‘enemy.’ Kidnappings and extortions have also been exercised as a means to fund their illegal activities. Although Colombians are internally displaced into the urban centers due to violence and lack of personal safety, many others sought refuge in neighbouring countries like Canada (Da, 2002). According to Karatnycky (2001), there were 1.2 million Colombian refugees by the end of the 1990’s, and this number is likely to have increased in the last decade. Between 1996 and 2003, it was estimated that 1.6 million Colombians left the country and did not return home (Garay Salamanca & Rodriguez Castillo, 2005).

During 2001, 12,860 Colombians applied for political asylum in countries outside South America, including 1,627 in Canada (Da, 2002). Although Canada was never a popular destination for Colombians, about 7,000 Colombian immigrants arrived between 1996 and 2001 (Immigration Encyclopedia, 2011), and by end of the year 2003, it was estimated by the UNHCR that were about 6,700 asylum seekers in Canada. That year, Canada was one of the largest recipients of resettled Colombian refugees, along with the United States. This specific immigrant population has been found to be highly educated and fairly young, with 36% of the refugee claimants in 2002 being 24 years old or younger. In 2006, Colombians comprised 0.6% of the immigrant population in Canada (Beurube, 2005). Since the Colombian population in Canada is still very recent information about their process of adaptation and resilience is very limited. Therefore,
little is known about their experiences, the process they undergo to achieve success or the risks that are most relevant for them. Due to the lack of specific information about Colombian immigrants in Canada, it is important to use qualitative and exploratory studies in relation to this specific population so that insight into their experiences can be obtained.

**Present Study**

In an attempt to define resilience related concepts (risks, protective factors, and positive outcomes), and to understand the resilience pathways of Colombian immigrant youth in Canada, the present study uses an ecological framework. Within this framework, the emergence of culturally and contextually meaningful definitions of resilience are considered necessary in order to better understand health enhancing processes. Based on this premise, this study will explore the following questions: (1) How do Colombian immigrant youth living in Canada define competence based on their cultural and social context? (2) What risks and adversities are the most relevant for Colombian immigrant youth?; and (3) What are perceived as protective factors for these youth?

**Method**

**Participants**

Ten Colombian immigrant youth (5 females), between the ages of 14 and 19 years of age ($M$ age = 16.6 years; $SD = 1.7$), were interviewed for this study. The participants were recruited from Mississauga ($n = 5$), Toronto ($n = 2$), Guelph ($n = 2$), and Kitchener ($n = 1$). For youth to participate in this study, they needed to fulfill the following criteria: (1) youth had to be born in Colombia; (2) be in high school; (3) have immigrated to Canada within the last 5 years; and (4) have immigrated with at least one parent or a legal
Two youth reported to be in grade 9, two in grade 10, two in grade 11, three in grade 12, and one in grade 12 plus. Average length of residency in Canada was four years ($M = 51.3$ months; $SD = 21.9$). Four youth stated that they had lived in the United States before arriving to Canada and only one reported to have previously lived in Chile and Costa Rica. Of all the participants, six stated that they immigrated as refugees, and four reported to have arrived to Canada with the status of permanent resident. Six youth reported to have immigrated with their mother only, whereas four reported to have immigrated with both their mother and their father. Nine participants reported to be fluent in English. Youth were attributed pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality.

**Procedure**

Approval for the procedures and interviews was obtained through the internal ethics review committee of the University of Guelph (See Appendix A). A poster describing the study was distributed to various settlement agencies across the Greater Toronto Area and the Niagara Region and other Southern Ontario cities via e-mail (see Appendix B). In addition, a Facebook page outlining the purpose of the study, the criteria to participate, and the main researcher’s contact information was created in order to advertise the study. The main researcher also attended a university information session at a settlement agency directed at parents of high school students in Mississauga where she distributed information advertising the study.

A snowball recruitment strategy was also used. Youth who participated in the study were asked, to share with the permission of the potential participant, the e-mail address of friends or family members who fulfilled the recruitment criteria and who could potentially participate in the study. An e-mail was sent out to these individuals (see
Appendix C) informing them about the study and requesting their consent. Some youth were recruited through friends of the researcher. It is acknowledged that a convenience sample is not an ideal recruitment strategy however, it was very effective when recruiting from a difficult to reach population such as Colombian immigrant youth. Most of the youth (n = 6) were recruited through personal networks.

Youth who were interested in participating contacted the researcher via email or the telephone. If contacted by e-mail, the researcher replied with an e-mail message setting up a time for the screening call (Appendix D). Question regarding the youth’s place of birth, their grade, the length of time they have lived in Canada, and who they immigrated with, were included in this screening interview. After the youth agreed to participate, a package containing a consent form (see Appendix E), background questionnaire (see Appendix F), and an acculturation scale (see Appendix G), was mailed. These were provided in both English and Spanish. For youth under the age of 18, a parent or guardian was also required to read and sign the consent form. A follow up phone call was made to ensure that the youth received the mailed package and to set up a date and a time for the interview. At the time of the interview, the signed consent form, the completed background questionnaire and acculturation scale were collected. The interviews took place in the participants’ homes, and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim (average interview length = 59.3 minutes; range = 30 to 85 minutes; SD = 22.2). Youth were given the choice to complete the interview in either English or Spanish since the researcher is fluent in both languages. Although only one of the participants reported having poor English skills, five of the youth chose to be interviewed in Spanish.
Interviews completed in Spanish were transcribed in Spanish and analyzed as such. Participants were given $10 as a token of appreciation for their participation.

**Background questionnaire and acculturation scale.** The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic information about the participants and their families. Each participant completed the questionnaire that included questions regarding their age, gender, employment status, grade in school, the date they arrived into the country, immigration status, and who they immigrated with. One question about language fluency (in regards to both Spanish and English) was also asked. An open ended question asking youth to list their top three challenges in immigrating to Canada was also included.

**Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were used in the present study since according to Warren (2002), qualitative interviews allow for the discussion of varying perspectives, the description of processes, and the articulation of various interpretations of social experiences. This method allows for researchers to explore factors that underlie the participants’ answers such as their reasons, feelings, and beliefs in regards to the success, risks, and protective factors (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). This specific approach of interviewing relied on a set of questions to guide the conversation. These set of questions served only as a guide, as the researcher was able to explore new directions that arose during the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher disclosed information regarding her own cultural background which contributed to create a connection with the participants and to increase their sense of comfort in sharing their experiences about immigration (Braun & Clarke, 2002).

The interview guide (see Appendix H) started with a few questions related to their immigration process and their country of origin. Following this, a discussion about
differences perceived between the Colombian and the Canadian culture were explored. Interview questions such as “Do you consider the Colombian and the Canadian cultures different and why?” and “Do you think that you act differently here than when you were in Colombia and why?” were included. In the next section of the interview, participants had the opportunity to define ‘doing-well’. Rather than imposing definitions of positive outcomes in culturally diverse communities, participants were asked, “What does it mean to ‘do well’ at your age?”, “How would you describe a young Colombian/Canadian who is doing well?”, “Do you consider that you are doing well?” and “Why?” to allow ample space for the discussion of contextually meaningful definitions of positive outcomes within this population. The next section was related to the challenges that participants have faced when moving into Canada. The researcher asked the participants to describe the three most significant challenges he or she has faced. For each of the challenges mentioned, a time frame of when it occurred was established to gain a greater sense of the immigration process. Participants were also asked to explain how these specific challenges affected their ability to ‘do well’ as an immigrant. They were also asked about the coping strategies that they used to deal with each challenge and the factors and individuals that helped them the most during this situation.

**Qualitative methodology and analysis.** In the study of resilience, qualitative methods address the lack of cultural sensitivity in the understanding of resilience processes that occur in different sociocultural contexts. Qualitative methods are well suited for resilience research because they allow for the discovery of unnamed processes. They provide broad descriptions that are contextually bounded, and they elicit minority ‘voices’ which account for unique definitions of positive outcomes (Ungar, 2003). This
method allows a forum in which individuals can define relevant risks and protective factors based on their own social locations. The present study used a phenomenological approach to examine how Colombian immigrant youth defined doing well, and to understand their experiences of relevant risks and adversities and health enhancing resources. This approach focuses on the interpretation of meanings individuals make of their lives and their experiences (Benavides, 2012).

Thematic analysis was used for youth’s responses. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is considered to be a flexible and useful research tool for two reasons. First, thematic analysis is compatible with many theoretical frameworks which makes it suitable for the present study. Second, thematic analysis can potentially provide rich, detailed and complex accounts of the data while being a relatively easy and quick method to use. Thematic analysis renders itself useful for summarizing key features of a large body of data and for highlighting similarities and differences across the data set.

Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data” (p. 79). They provide a useful guide to do thematic analysis which was used to analyze the data obtained for this study. The first step involved the familiarization of the researcher with the data. This was done through the process of transcription, by reading and re-reading the data, and by writing down an informal list of initial ideas. The second step involved the generation of initial codes for each question. At this phase, the researcher coded common features of the data systematically across the entire data set and started combining data which were relevant to each code. The process of ‘in vivo’ coding or using terms and phrases to develop codes (Crockett, Brown, Iturbide, Russel, & Wilkinson-Lee, 2003) was utilized
during this phase. For the purpose of this analysis, single words, as well as sentences were counted as a code as long as the youth’s response was related to the same topic.

The third step involved combining codes into potential themes and gathering all the data relevant to a specific theme. Fourth, the researcher reviewed the themes created, in order to check if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and to the entire data set. Finally, names and definitions were drafted for each theme. Ongoing analysis and refinement of each theme continued as the researcher composed the description of the main findings. Once the themes were established, analyzed data were reviewed by a member of the Colombian immigrant community who provided feedback in regard to the relevance of the analysis and who served as another objectivity check. After analysis was completed the following three coding systems were developed: (1) definitions of doing well, (2) personal challenges for Colombian immigrant youth, and (3) health enhancing resources for Colombian immigrant youth. Refer to Tables 1 to 3 for the coding systems and definitions.

**Results**

Through the thematic analysis of the Colombian youth’s responses it was found that both cultural beliefs and context influenced the youth’s perceptions of resilience related concepts. The results were divided into three sections which include the Colombian youth’s definitions of doing well, then major challenges after immigration, and the resources they found to be helpful when overcoming such challenges.

**Youth’s Definitions of ‘Doing Well’**

Youth were asked to describe what doing well meant for them at the time of the interview. Some youth defined doing well as having their most essential needs fulfilled.
Others made reference to personal indicators that signified doing well, as well as indicators that signified doing well in the family, social, and school contexts. Table 1 provides a summary of these categories.

**Fulfilling essential needs.** Some youth (3 youth) stated that doing well meant having their most basic needs fulfilled, including having good health, being able to attend school and having a family they could rely on. For example, Jennifer claimed; “Doing well means that I am not worried and that those around me are also not worried... That we don’t go without food, a place to live, or clothing.” The youth acknowledged that, although there were other things that they wanted, having access to their necessities had greater important in determining their wellness.

**Personal indicators of ‘doing well’.** All of the youth referred to individual factors in their definitions of doing well. More specifically, four youth stated that “working hard” was important. For these youth, doing well meant that they were putting their greatest effort into achieving a desired goal. For example, Jorge claimed that doing well meant; “...to always know what I want to do in life, and don’t just say “oh I just want to do this” but work hard at it right? If you want something you have to go and do it.” Also, it was expressed that in order to do well it was also important to “not to give up” and to keep trying harder at achieving their goals. Based on these accounts, the youth’s ability to achieve what they wanted depended on the amount of effort they invested into achieving these personal goals.

Another individual factor that youth perceived as an important part of doing well was employment. Two youth stated that having a job would lead them to do better. Employment was seen by Sebastian as an avenue to be independent and “not [have] to
ask [his] parents for money” to cover personal expenses (i.e., going out with friends, etc). To do well then, it was necessary not only to work hard for what the youth wanted but also to be self-reliant in their efforts to achieve their goals.

Other youth defined doing well based on their ability to take more chances and to find a balance between different areas of their lives. Juliana expressed that for her, doing well meant that she was willing to take more risks. She recognized that there had been opportunities she did not pursue that could have led to better possibilities for her future career. She claimed:

Last year my parents saw an advertisement on the paper from an agency that was looking for kids to act on a commercial. It said that no experience was needed and my parents encouraged me to audition. I ended up not going, and now I believe I should have gone, at least to learn what it is like to be in an audition.

Juliana perceived that taking chances could have expanded her experiences and knowledge about her social world. These types of opportunities could have led her to learn skills that may be valuable in the future.

For Laura, on the other hand, it was her ability to find a balance between all her responsibilities that indicated her level of doing well. She expressed that although it was very important for her to do well in school, it was also important to make sure that she had time for her family and for church.

...for me doing well is that I have time for school, family, and church. So, obviously I go to school every day. I also make sure that I have time for the things that I am involved within my church. I go to my youth group and I help out with the younger youth group and I make sure I follow those commitments that I have
made. And with my family, I think that the more I get involved in school they might feel that I am pushing them aside, so I make sure that go with them if they want to do something.

In this particular case, doing well did not represent a specific achievement, but rather being able to successfully balance the various aspects of her life.

An additional personal factor that was included in the youth’s definitions of ‘doing well’ was being helpful to others. For three youth, giving back to others, sharing what they had and knew, and volunteering, were signs of wellness. For Adriana, it was imperative that she not only focused on her needs, but also on others. She explained:

I also need to be focused on helping others because my parents are really keen on helping people. They are always saying ‘help someone in need’. So for me to do well I need to be selfless, and if I know I am helping people, if I know I am doing what I can for someone then I feel I am doing well.

For this youth in particular, her parents’ insistence in helping others led her to believe that it was imperative to think of others’ well being in order to experience personal wellness.

**Family context.** All of the youth talked about aspects of family life that were necessary to define themselves as doing well. These included: (1) high levels of interconnectedness, (2) being helpful with parents and other family members, and (3) being respectful.

**Interconnectedness.** Youth expressed that doing well in their families involved the establishment of a deep connection among family members, socially engaging with the family, the maintenance of the family’s unity, and the maintenance of a harmonious
family environment. Specifically, three youth reported that it was important to not only have a good relationship with all family members, but also to develop a deep connection with their parents. Having this connection meant that there was an open relationship between parents and youth in which there were “no secrets”. For example, Jorge also alluded to the importance of this deep connection by stating,

Doing well is being able to say not just that I am a son, or that my dad is my dad, but that my dad is my friend. I want them to be involved in my world... There are times when you can say ‘they are my family’, but you may go home and not even say ‘hi’ to them. That’s not a family, that’s just people who live with you. So yeah, doing well is being bonded.

Furthermore, the youth also considered that doing well in their families meant that they were making a conscious effort to spend time and to communicate with their family members. Participating in family events where youth were able to have meaningful conversations with both their nuclear (parents and siblings) and extended (uncles, aunts, and cousins) family members were considered essential. For example, Laura expressed that she did not want to feel like she was “abandoning [her] family” and so she made the effort to attend family reunions. Communication was expressed to be a vehicle to ensure the appropriate level of social engagement with family members. Fernando expressed that he “talked a lot with [his] parents” otherwise they might think he “was angry with them.” The need to talk with family members was also expressed by Laura who stated that doing well involved listening to and talking with her sister. She stated that she even would stop what she was doing at the moment (i.e., school work) “if [her sister] wants to talk about some problems, or if she just wants to talk”.

The concept of maintaining unity and harmony was also a salient point in defining ‘doing well’ in one’s family. Staying together and united was perceived as a strength that needed to be preserved and this could only be attained by maintaining harmony among family members. “Not fighting with my parents” (Viviana) and avoiding withholding communications among family members was reported as part of maintaining such harmony.

**Helping parents and family members.** Providing emotional and instrumental help to both parents and extended family members was also discussed. Fernando explained that for him, it was important to ‘be there’ for his family. He stated,

You have to be there for your family. What if my mom loses her job and I am not around to help her out? Or my sister, what if she needs help and I don’t talk to her often to find out? I have to be there to help. It is better to receive help from your own family than from a friend.

For this youth, ‘being there’ involved maintaining close contact with his family and providing the necessary help whenever it was required. In particular, Jennifer explained her helping role in the family with an analogy of team work. She explained,

Well, we are a small family. It is just my mom, my brother, and I. So, we have to support each other and work as a team. I have to contribute whatever I can so we can be successful. For example, if we have to purchase something and we need to communicate with other people my mom would act as the brain, she is the one who plans out what we are doing. I would do the listening and understanding of what is being said, so I can translate for her, and my brother, who is better at
speaking English, would do all the talking. That’s good team work. That for me is doing well in my family.

Some of the youth also mentioned that helping parents by “doing chores” was also evidence of being successful (3 youth). These chores included activities that the parent might find helpful at a specific moment. Adriana explicitly stated that her chores usually included doing the dishes or helping her mom with the cooking. Helping her parents was necessary because it was a way to show her appreciation for what they do for her. She stated, “they do so much for me, I can help by doing the dishes or cooking the rice so my mom does not have to rush after work to do it.”

**Being respectful.** Two youth made reference to ‘being respectful’ to parents. For example, Fabio explained that it was important for him to “respect [his] parents and follow the rules”. For him, being respectful to parents served as a way to return to his parents for all the benefits they have provided and it was important because,

They are the ones that gave me life and they are the ones giving me all these options and opportunities. By coming to Canada, they are giving me the chance to do well because there are many more options here.

**Social context.** All of the youth described essential factors that they considered to be part of their definitions of doing well within their social context. These included: (1) high levels of interconnectedness with friends, (2) providing advice to friends, and (3) being genuine.

**Interconnectedness.** It was important for the majority of the youth (9 youth) to have a deep connection with their friends. Having friends with whom they could not only have fun and enjoy similar activities, but also who they could trust and develop
meaningful relationships with was important. A friendship was perceived to be based on the premise of “getting along.” This involved “not fighting,” understanding and accepting friends as they are, spending time with their friends, maintaining close contact, and not allowing arguments interfere with their friendships.

A sense of permanence and harmony was reflected in the youth’s descriptions of social contexts. The youth stressed that it was necessary to have friends who were “truthful and loyal,” who would “have [their] backs,” and whom they knew would “always be there.” It was similarly important to carefully choose friends who were not a “bad influence” and whom would lead them into the “wrong path.” Laura expressed that she felt she was doing well within her social context because “[she] started going to the [church’s youth group] and that’s a new group of friends... they are good friends... that’s a good source of friends.” Her perception of wellness stemmed from her ability to find good quality friends. In some of the cases, youth referred to their friends as being a “second family” to whom they could bring their problems and issues when family members were unavailable. Thus, it was important to choose their friends well. For example, Fernando expressed that it was very difficult for peers to enter into his close circle of friends because he viewed friends as part of his own family. Reaching this depth of connection was easier with other Latino or Colombian friends.

**Giving advice.** Similar to the importance of having friends, youth found it necessary to also care for their friends’ well-being. This was mainly achieved by advising friends to do the right thing. For example, Jorge said, “If they are doing something wrong, then you should be like, ‘hey yo, you shouldn’t do that’”. Adriana also made
reference to this by expressing that giving advice for her represented a way to help her friends “get on the right path.” This was important for her because,

“I don’t want to see them give up their life. I don’t want to see them fall down, because they are my friends. So, the best I can do is be there for them and help them back up if anything goes wrong.”

**Being genuine.** For Laura, ‘doing well’ involved being able to be herself around her friends. She explained that during early adolescence, she struggled with establishing her identity and getting to know herself. This hindered her ability to develop meaningful friendships. She attributed her recent improvement in her social life to her greater understanding of who she was which, in turn, allowed others to see her real persona. She stated,

“Before I didn’t have that many friends, and I feel is because I was not really being myself. But now, that I am being myself and I know who I am, I am better with my peers when I am being myself. If I am myself they like me for who I am...”

**School context.** All of the youth talked about specific aspects related to the school context that were necessary to define themselves as doing well. For the youth, doing well in school included: (1) having a good academic performance, (2) socializing with peers at school, and (3) being involved in school related activities.

**Good academic performance.** An important aspect was attaining good academic performance. This involved completing school work and trying one’s best in order to achieve good grades. It was perceived that having good grades would eventually allow youth to attend post-secondary schools, which was an important long-term goal for most
of the sample (7 youth). Youth reported that in order to academically achieve it was important to work hard, complete homework, pay attention in class, and make an effort to understand class material. In Ontario, students are graded based on average percentages. Most of these youth defined good grades as above 80% average (an A average). Sebastian, for example said, “Right now I don’t think I am doing well in school, because my average is between 70 and 75%. I need to improve that.”

Attaining good grades was also viewed as an obligation to their parents. Some youth felt they had a moral duty to their parents to “get an education.” Viviana, whose dad had immigrated to Canada 10 years before her, explained: “I need to do well in school so I can attend university because that’s one of the reasons why my dad came here and stayed alone for so long. So, I want to make my parents happy, and I also want to feel happy about it”. For example, Fernando stated that his success was an opportunity to give back to his family. He expressed, “If I am able to get an education and be successful my family would benefit from it. My mom, my dad, my sister, her husband and my new nephew would be the most benefited.” Similarly, some youth reported that they had to gain a post-secondary education either because their parents were able to attain a post-secondary education in very precarious situations in Colombia so they should be able to do it in Canada, or because they were never able to do so, despite their desire to attend university. In most of the cases, youth’s reasons to achieve a good academic performance were related to their desire to honour their parents’ sacrifices, to give back to their families, and to make them proud of their accomplishments.

**Socializing with peers.** It was perceived that in order to do well in school, it was also important to strike a balance, and to ensure that social relations within school setting
were established and maintained. Seven youth expressed that it was important to not only focus on the academic aspect of school but also to “meet new people” and “get along” with peers at school. For example, Jorge expressed, “...you have to be able to control your time, and be able to have some friend time, and also school time. You don’t want to just slack off and do nothing at school.” The youth viewed these friendships within school as an important source of enjoyment, company, and particularly help. Furthermore, youth stated that their socialization with peers could lead to alternative ways of learning. Juan for example expressed that socializing was important because “You get to know even more things... instead of just learning from your books you could learn from other people.” Only Fernando expressed that, in addition to socializing with his peers, it was important to socialize with his teachers. He stated that there were “cool teachers” and he sometimes “[enjoyed] talking to [them].” For him, his teachers were more than just the person who stands in front of the class to teach and he explained that ‘they are people too and so [he liked] to talk to them and ask them how their day was.”

**Getting involved.** Three youth talked about being engaged in non-academic activities as part of their definition of doing well in school. The youth stated that in addition to performing well academically, volunteering and getting involved in activities such as student council, chaplaincy, sports, and clubs were other indicators of doing well. This involvement was viewed by the youth as fulfilling particular roles. Juan for example, viewed ‘getting involved’ was a good motivator to attend school. He expressed, “If you are only doing your work you won’t be as interested, there will be more reasons for you to go to school if you do other things and stay active.” For Fabio on the other hand, getting involved in non-academic activities represented an alternative source of
learning, growth, and friendships. He explained, “...it gives you the chance to learn other new things. Like when you do sports, you get to make new friends and meet people with the same interests. You also get to express your talent.”

**Youth’s Major Challenges**

Colombian youth were asked to describe their top three challenges when they arrived in Canada. They were also asked to explain why it was perceived as a challenge, and how stressful it was for them at the time. A wide range of challenges were mentioned and these were all related to the youth’s process of adaptation. Challenges were classified into the following themes: (1) re-establishment, (2) language, (3) climate adjustment, (4) making new friends, (5) cultural differences, (6) financial issues, (7) school environment and system, (8) family related challenges, and (9) undefined immigrant status. Table 2 provides a summary of all the challenges reported by the youth.

**Re-establishment.** Through their responses, all of the youth described difficult situations that were related to the process of creating a new life in Canada (10 youth). This process was reported to be stressful when the youth first moved into the country, but it became easier to manage as the youth adapted. For some youth the experience of re-establishment made them feel like becoming ‘more Canadian’ and many stated that the move to the new country was like a “rebirthing” process. For example, Jorge expressed:

I was starting over brand new. A new page kind of thing. You knew places back home. You knew how to get there and all that stuff. So is like starting all over again while learning a new language. You are born again. You have to learn their language. You have to meet new people. You have to get used to the new climate.
Thus, this rebirthing process included challenges related to having to rebuild aspects of daily living that they had already established in Colombia. This adjustment process was perceived to be further complicated by the fact that they had to learn a new language and that many aspects of their environment were drastically different (i.e., climate, school environment, culture).

**Language.** Learning the new language, English, was perceived as a significant challenge by six youth. The remaining youth who did not report language as a challenge had previously lived in the United States and had learned the language before arriving into Canada. Of the youth who experienced learning English as a challenge, three found it to be highly stressful, whereas the rest viewed it as a manageable difficulty that they had to overcome. Some youth described instances when the lack of English language skills led them to experience some degree of distress and made them “feel stupid” and “embarrassed.” This embarrassment was reported to be caused by having to ask others (i.e., peers, teachers, adults in the community) to repeat what they said, having peers laugh at their mistakes, or not understanding what was being said to them. Although some youth talked about this embarrassment as part of their challenge of learning the new language, most youth reported that the lack of English language skills was perceived as a barrier in developing new peer relations and having a good school performance.

**Peers relations.** Making new friends and getting to know new people was perceived as taking longer because the youth would have to learn the language before they were able to establish new friendships (3 youth). The lack of English language skills was perceived as an obstacle. Jorge recalled an incident when trying to communicate with a new peer was made even more difficult due to his limited English,
I was trying to talk to a girl ... and I didn’t know any English... So in Google, [I was] writing in Spanish then translating it and saying it to her, but obviously because Google doesn’t translate very well I ended up saying something else. So, I got a slap. I don’t even remember what I said. Yeah, she got offended.

School performance. Some youth found that the language barrier also created major challenges when trying to fulfill school duties. Just as the lack of language exacerbated the process of making new friends it also made it more difficult for youth to perform well academically. Youth described the challenge of understanding the class content, completing school assignments, and to attain good grades. For example, Jorge expressed,

When I came here I was just learning English. I went to French, and I went to Math, and all that stuff, and I was just like staring at the board... It was really tough because I wanted to be able to do, to try to do homework, but I didn’t understand anything.

For Sebastian in particular, learning the new language while also trying to maintain a high average in school was highly stressful due to his parents’ expectations for him to do well academically. In these descriptions, youth expressed their frustration of trying to succeed at school with limited language skills and abilities.

In addition to finding it difficult to academically excel while learning the language, some youth expressed that they were unable to ask for help at home in order to complete their school work because their parents also lacked the appropriate language skills (2 youth). Juliana stated, “For example, with Math homework. If there was an English word that my parents didn’t know they would be like ‘what does this mean? I
don’t know’’. She then would be unable to rely on her parents for assistance. Viviana also said that it was difficult for her not being able to find help at home. She said, “We speak Spanish at home, I have spoken Spanish all my life, but at school is only English. When I had homework for example, there was nobody at home that could help me; that was difficult.” Thus, the family members’ limited language and social understanding of the school system resulted in the youth’s inabilities to effectively access important sources of help. This, in turn, made it more challenging to achieve their academic goals.

**Climate adjustment.** Five youth in this sample explained that adapting to the extreme Canadian winter was one of their main challenges. The youth found the new climate “strange” and “always changing”, and different to the “25 or 27 degrees [Celsius]” they were used to when they lived in Colombia. Even youth who had previously lived in the United States also expressed that getting used to the Canadian weather was difficult. For example, Fabio said, “in Florida is hot, all year, very hot, and then coming here is hot two months at a time.” Thus the Canadian winter was perceived as more extreme and different to what the youth were familiar to, taking them a significant amount of time to get accustomed to it. The difference in climate led youth to experience unknown and uncomfortable situations and to having them to learn new sets of behaviours and strategies that would help them adapt.

The cold weather was also viewed as a barrier to their desires to exploring their surroundings. For example Viviana said:

I remember the first time that we went out [in the winter]. We couldn’t walk more than a block... we wore only a light jacket and it was very cold outside and we
had to come back home, we couldn’t go further. We wanted to go out and walk around to see what was out there, we couldn’t. It was too cold.

Although this participant and her family had the desire to explore their new environment their lack of experience in managing the cold temperatures prevented them from engaging in such exploration. For some of the youth going outside had become a challenge to the extent that engaging in outdoor activities was seen as a burdensome task. Thus, their social life was hindered. For example, Sebastian said,

It affected me because, to be honest, I did not like to do any winter sports. For example, to socialize, a lot of people go out in the winter, go snowboarding and all that. I instead, I wanted to stay at home because it was warmer. I did not want to go outside, who wants to go out in such cold weather? At the beginning it was a barrier socially.

Although the Canadian winter was described as a challenging experience, only two youth (Adriana and Sebastian) qualified it as highly stressful. Others viewed it as a learning process and described it as ‘manageable’ once they adapted to the extreme cold temperatures. Furthermore, Fabio expressed that experiencing the cold weather made him feel ‘more Canadian’.

**Making new friends.** Four youth talked about the difficulties of finding new friends when they first arrived to Canada. Most expressed that they felt that their peers were ‘very different’ from themselves and that made it more difficult to fit in and to establish new friendships. Only Laura expressed that it was difficult to fit in with others because her family immigrated in the middle of the school year and ‘cliques’ had already been created. For example, Laura explained,
It is really never easy to leave your country, especially because the people are so different. So, at first it was a challenge meeting new people, until I learned that there are a lot of Colombian people. So I got along with them really fast. He expressed he had an easier time making new friends when he met peers with the same cultural background and found it difficult to feel comfortable around his mainstream peers (non-Colombian peers). Other youth also expressed that they felt that it was difficult to find things that they had in common with others or that they were unable to be themselves around Canadian peers. Cultural differences in these cases led to discrepancies in preferences, dislikes, and beliefs, which, in turn, made the process of creating new friendships even more complex. The difficulty to fit in led to some youth feeling “lonely”, unable to relate to others, and internalizing the challenge as a problem within themselves. Only two youth (Laura and Juliana) referred to their challenge of making new friends as stressful. They expressed that the situation caused them anxiety due to the uncertainty of being liked by peers; and sadness, due to the lack of friendships. The other youth talked about the challenge as a milestone that they needed to overcome. Although it was difficult at first, they knew the challenge would resolve itself with time. **Cultural differences.** Four youth talked about differences in culture as one of their prominent challenges. Within this category, difficulties were classified into: (1) ethnic disparities and inclusion and (2) discrepancies with Canadian culture. **Ethnic disparities and inclusion.** Four youth referred to the diversity of cultures in Canada as one of their main challenges. Fabio, for example, expressed, Toronto is very multicultural. There are people who have their own culture and they bring it in. So, you get involved with, for example, Jamaican Carabana in the
summer. You see a lot of that around, the Europeans and the Latin people here
and there... So, you are not just involved in your own culture.

Compared to their Colombian experience, the Canadian environment seemed very
heterogeneous and understanding the beliefs and behaviours of individuals from different
cultural backgrounds was perceived as a challenge. None of the youth referred to this
challenge as highly stressful, rather, they viewed it as a learning experience. Viviana
expressed that her challenge stemmed from having to learn about the different customs
and behaviours of others. She said, “The first time that I saw a lady with her head
covered, I was like ‘What is that?’ I did not know about that custom and I had to learn
about that.” Viviana also discussed the differences in cultural behaviours and customs as
a part of the challenge.

It was also their way of thinking. For instance, I have had the opportunity to meet
Afghan people and they are supposed to marry within their own. As a Colombian
I am like, ‘no, that’s not right’. That’s something you need to respect, I just can’t
imagine myself doing that.

For these youth, the cultural diversity they found in Canada was an unfamiliar experience
and an additional factor they had to get more knowledgeable about. In many cases, the
various cultural beliefs and practices contrasted with their own views which limit their
social interactions with certain groups. For example, Jennifer said,

There are Afghan guys who are *machistas* (a man who thinks of women as
inferior) and I think is because of their culture...That was a shock for me. I would
say ‘no, you need to do this the other way’ and they would not even pay attention
to me because I was a woman. I would then try to spend as much time with my 

*Latino* friends.

In some instances, the discrepancies in behaviours and beliefs also occurred within Latino groups. Jennifer further described the rivalries she had observed between her Colombian and Mexican peers, “With the Mexican people, even though they were also Latinos, sometimes there were fights because of rivalries over who is better than whom... They would come and bug the Colombians and would end up in fights.” Although socializing with other *Latino* peers was perceived as easier than socializing with peers from completely different cultural backgrounds, differences among them would sometimes lead to rivalries, and ultimately aggression. This participant expressed that the possibility of aggression towards herself made this challenge highly stressful.

Another issue that was referred to as part of cultural discrepancies was experiencing racism. Only Fernando talked about experiencing racism as one of his main and very stressful challenges. He said:

People were spreading rumours, and not only about me, about other people too. It made me angry. Normally people here don’t use violence, I mean, I have never seen that people say ‘oh, I am going to fight you because you are white’ or ‘I am going to fight you because you are black.’ I have not seen that yet, but they do use their words and the say racist jokes and stuff like that.

The discrimination this youth refers to, although not physically damaging, was emotionally demoralizing and perceived to be caused by their difference in cultural backgrounds.
**Canadian culture.** These challenges relate to the youth’s perceptions of the Canadian culture as very different from their own. Three youth expressed that they found that people living in Canada behave in different ways than people in Colombia. They found it challenging to understand these new social patterns in order to socialize with others. Only Fernando referred to managing these differences as highly stressful. When referring to his Canadian peers, he said;

The girls are very different; the boys are too. So, it is difficult to find out what they like and what they don’t like. Their jokes, their parties, or dating... It is different with them, like when we go out and stuff... They are different.

One main difference that was mentioned was in relation to the level of friendliness Canadians showed to each other. Viviana expressed that getting used to the Canadian culture was difficult for her because “people are very closed off, is like their culture… is like people are bottled in their own lives.” When she was asked why she found this difficult, she responded; “Because I was used to talking to my neighbours, going outside and being like ‘hi, how are you, this and that’ and here people are not so friendly...It is different than in Colombia”. Similarly, Sebastian expressed: “It is very different, they are very cold...” For these youth, this lack of friendliness or coldness was viewed as a barrier when trying to socialize with members of the Canadian culture and establishing relationships.

Additional perceived differences were related to the greater degree of freedom that Canadian youth have compared to youth in Colombia. For Jennifer, this was reflected in the personal freedom that homosexual youth have to express their sexual
identity and preferences in Canada. She expressed that the openness of this topic was not as open in her home country and that it took her some time to be comfortable with it.

For Fernando, this greater degree of freedom was found in their Canadian peers’ parent-child relations. He said,

When you have a girlfriend in Colombia, you have to be introduced to the parents... Here it is very different. The Canadian girlfriends that I have had are like, we say hi to her parents and then we rush to the next room to watch TV. It is like ‘let’s get out of here I don’t want to hang out with my parents’... it is very different.

This participant specifically found that the role that parents play in adolescent dating differed significantly as. He expected to be formally introduced to his girlfriend’s parents and spend time with them like in Colombia. These differences in customs, values, and behaviours made it more complicated for Colombian youth to engage in typical adolescent activities with Canadian peers.

Financial issues. Three youth in this sample referred to their family’s financial situation as difficult. Of these youth, most viewed their financial struggles as manageable and only Laura referred to it as highly stressful. All of these youth arrived as refugees, and this type of status, are often found to be more likely experience low-income and poverty than other immigrant groups. These youth who reported having financial issues also reported having parents who lacked the appropriate language skills often needed for high paying jobs. Specifically, youth reported that either their parents were unemployed, or had jobs that were low paying positions (e.g., factory worker, childcare provider). These youth mentioned that the first few months after they arrived were the most
challenging due to the lack of financial resources. This was perceived as preventing youth from accessing not only what they perceived as their basic needs, but also what they defined as less essential needs or “wants.” In relation to basic needs, Adriana referred to having a difficult time “affording daily necessities because [her] parents were out of work.” She recounted what happened when they first arrived into Canada as follows:

I guess when we came here we had to live in a shelter for a month, and then it was one room for the four of us. So, I had to adjust to being with them all the time ... we had to share the shower... They had breakfast, lunch, and dinner for us, but then, sometimes we wouldn’t like what they were serving so. That hit my mom hard; because she was so used to cooking.

Their lack of financial resources made it difficult for this participant’s families to afford an adequate living space and food, leading them to rely on charity to meet their basic needs. This support, although helpful, prevented them from doing everyday activities that they enjoyed and were accustomed to.

However, even when youth were receiving social assistance and were able to have more control over how to meet their basic necessities, acquiring all that they needed was still perceived as a challenge. For example, Juan’s father was unable to find immediate work, which meant that they were not able to fully furnish their apartment, more specifically acquiring beds, and ensuring they had enough to eat and drink.

Beyond difficulties in fulfilling basic needs, youth also talked about ‘wants’ or things that they would have liked to attain but were unable to. For example, Juan said; “I used to roller blade in Colombia. We just couldn’t find a way to get me into rollerblading again, and there is hockey, or professional skating. But it costs a lot.” This lack of access
to sports was challenging since it prevented him from engaging in activities that he considered enjoyable and meaningful. Being financially restricted from engaging in social activities also limited their ‘social status’ with their peers. Adriana made reference to this when she stated,

I wouldn’t be able to, for example get new clothes. It was hard; I just had to use what I had... Obviously I wanted to fit in. So, sometimes it was hard. I was in grade 7 at the time so at that age you want to fit in a little bit.

For this youth, being able to purchase the appropriate pieces of clothing would have allowed her to fit in and feel more accepted by her peers. The living arrangements also created some challenges for youth to engage in peer activities. Laura, who lives in a basement with her two parents and her younger sister explained,

I still live in a basement. It’s pretty big but I don’t like sharing rooms with my sister. I don’t feel like it is [the same with] other people...With group projects, I do bring people over, but it is always better when you work at other people’s house cause there is more room and stuff...

Although she acknowledged that her home was adequate, she felt limited as she compared her situations with her peers.

School environment and system. Two youth (Jennifer and Fernando) mentioned issues related to their school as their main challenge. Both youth qualified their school related challenges as highly stressful. A common theme that was found was that the school systems in Canada were different from their previous experiences. Jennifer, whose family immigrated initially to Quebec, expressed that she perceived the secondary education to be longer than in Colombia. She explained that in Quebec, immigrant
students have to take a few years of only French, finish high school after that, and then attend the Cègeb (General and Vocational College) in order to attend university.

Another difficulty mentioned was the lack of consistency between the courses they took in the previous school system and the school system in Ontario. For example, Fernando expressed his frustration with “lost time” when he arrived from the United Stated to Canada. He said,

I had about 25 credits when I arrived here, and everything got cut down to half because it was not the same. So, I saw that as a challenge because you have already achieved something and they only take half as valid. I mean, that’s difficult because you want to move on from what you have already learned. The challenge with these inconsistencies is that these youth felt penalized because the schools systems they were navigating did not acknowledge student’s previous achievements.

**Family related challenges.** Through their responses, two youth in this sample described difficulties related to their parents or extended families. Challenges in this overarching category were classified into four subthemes: (1) Lack of parental knowledge, (2) language brokering, (3) parental monitoring, and (4) missing family members.

**Lack of parental knowledge.** Adriana referred to communicating with her parents about school as one of her main challenges. Her difficulties stemmed from her parents’ unfamiliarity with the school systems in Canada, and it was complicated to explain to them the rationale for her course selections and her performance in school. As she illustrated,
Now that I am in grade 11, the courses are more unique, because I want to get into Media Studies... I am taking Photography and my parents are like, ‘What do you need that for?’ So I have to explain that it is for this kind of program, but they don’t really understand how I can do something with that. So is just like the struggle. These are the courses that I need to be able to get into the program so I have to constantly remind them. My dad would be like, ‘Why aren’t you taking Math?’, or ‘Oh you don’t have Math this semester?’ So, I have to explain that this is how the system works. I’m constantly explaining it to them.

Courses such as Photography, or Communications Technology, are not traditionally offered in Colombia’s secondary schools. The youth felt that her parents were expecting her school experience to be same as in Colombia so constantly ‘reminding’ them of how the system works was frustrating and stressful.

In addition to being difficult for her parents to understand this new school system, her parents’ limited English knowledge further complicated her task of explaining how the system works. She said:

For example Photoshop. I don’t know how to say that in Spanish... like Journalism and Public Relations. I don’t know how to say that in Spanish. So, they don’t really get it when I try to translate it to them. So missing the language makes it even harder to communicate what I am trying to do.

She further explained that her communication difficulties with her parents were only in the area of school and that although sometimes “there was one or two words [she] won’t know how to say in Spanish,” it did not represent a barrier in maintaining constant parent-child communication on other topics. However, she continues to ‘constantly
explain’ to them her school choices because she wanted their support and approval in whatever choice she made. She considered herself as a ‘family oriented’ person and so she perceived this ‘constant explaining’ as necessary.

Language brokering. This category relates to the challenge that youth experienced when they had to serve as interpreters for parents who lacked the English skills necessary to engage in some daily activities. Only Adriana referred to being an interpreter as problematic when having to translate school related issues to her parents. She explained,

Sometimes, in parent teacher interviews, they wouldn’t really understand. They would, but very little. Usually they can’t understand at all what the teacher is trying to communicate. So, I would always have to be there. It is kind of stressful for them not to be able to know what’s going on. When they only get half of it, they don’t feel as comfortable with it. It is mostly that.

Although this was not a highly stressful situation for the youth, she expressed that being a language broker at times represented an additional duty for her. She made reference to times when she needed to translate for her mother, who was taking computer courses, as if this was a job for her. She stated,

My mom comes to me for her school and I feel like I am a constant teacher. So I have a part time job as a teacher at home. That’s how I feel. I always have to explain to her this and that, and at first when we got here, she was very keen on learning English, and my mom would make me study with her, my mom would make me teach her. It wasn’t that it was too stressful, but it was just that I had to constantly work with them.
In this case, the participant talks about the role reversal that is typical in instances of language brokering. She became her mother’s teacher, and she felt that this new task was challenging, but not stressful. It represented an additional responsibility that required constant work and effort.

**Parental monitoring.** Adriana also talked about the degree of supervision that was exercised by the parents as challenging. She explained that her parents wanted to know where she was going and who she was going with, and needed to meet all her friends before she went out with them. She perceived that the amount of supervision exercised by her parents is caused by the cultural weariness and unfamiliarity of her peers’ beliefs and customs. She stated that her parents did not want her to “mix up with the wrong crowd.” Although not stressful, introducing all her friends to her parents became bothersome. The main reason why this meet-and-greet process was perceived as troublesome was because it is foreign for most of her friends since they were not used to having to meet their friends’ parents as a pre-requisite for going out.

**Missing family.** For Juliana missing her extended family in Colombia was one of her main challenges. She was very close to her maternal grandparents before moving to Canada and leaving them behind was a sad situation.

It was difficult because my grandparents, from my mother’s side, we were always very close. So, I missed them, they were special. My grandpa sometimes took my sister and I out to buy stuff. We used to go to this ice cream shop where he would always buy us ice cream. He used to buy us colouring books and all that. I miss that. Because my dad’s parents used to live in Bogota, and we used to live in Cali,
we didn’t really get to see them. So, it wasn’t as difficult to be away from, but separating from my mother’s parents was.

As this example illustrates, this participant had developed a relationship to her maternal grandparents due to their proximity in location and the activities that they shared. Her grandfather in particular provided this participant and her sister with a great source of companionship that ended when the family. Although this challenge was not qualified as highly stressful, it did cause this youth a great deal of sadness.

**Immigrant status in process.** Only Laura talked about not having a defined immigrant status as a main challenge. Laura and her family arrived to Canada as refugees about two years before the interview. Until recently, individuals asking for political asylum upon landing or at the border were given permission to stay in the country while they waited to be officially accepted as refugees. Official refugee status is granted after applicants successfully prove to a judge that they are in need of protection. At the time of interview, Laura’s family was still waiting to be notified of the date they would appear before the judge. For this youth, the main difficulties were related to the uncertainty for the future. The following segment illustrates these feelings, she said: “It is the whole fact that I am not a resident. We still live in a basement, and I don’t know for sure if I am going to be here. It’s probably going to affect university, I am not sure.” Laura’s uncertainty projected to her unstable future and whether her life in Canada was permanent. She also linked her lack of residence status with the fact that she was “still living in a basement.” Therefore, she was not only unsure of what her near future held for her, but she was also living a disadvantaged present.
She further stated that while her immigrant status was being processed she was unable to have access to valued opportunities. She said,

There is this cool program, the ‘Explore’ program, and I think it’s free, but you need to be a resident so I can’t do it. And there are several others … like for example, my school is going to go to Guatemala to build a house and to help build a wall for “Walls of Hope”. I really wanted to go, and they wanted me to go. They need people who speak Spanish, but I can’t leave the country. Yeah, things that I would like to do that I really can’t.

Engaging in activities such as the Explore program, which is an intense French course offered over the summer in Montreal, QC, would enhance the participant’s educational experiences and could even add an asset to her future professional development. This opportunity, as well as others, placed Laura at a greater disadvantage as compared to her immigrant group. Although she did not refer to this challenge as highly stressful, she did mention that it could become more stressful in the near future when she applies to university.

**Youth’s Major Health Enhancing Resources**

Youth were asked to describe the strategies that they used to overcome their challenges and what factors were the most helpful to them. Their responses were classified into three overarching categories: (1) social factors, (2) individual factors, and (3) community factors. See Table 3 for a summary of the health enhancing resources.

**Social resources.** Youth discussed how they managed their challenges. All of the youth talked about the instrumental support they received from three social groups: (1) friends, (2) family, and (3) God.
**Friends.** All of the youth viewed friends as instrumental when dealing with difficulties related to learning a new language, making new friends, getting re-established, adapting to the climate, having limited financial resources, adapting to the school environment and system, and adapting to cultural differences. Mainly, friends were perceived as important sources of information, support, comfort, and happiness. Furthermore, youth made reference to the different roles that English-speaking and Spanish-speaking friends played in their adjustment.

Friends were reported to provide useful information that allowed youth to better manage their unfamiliarity with the new climate and the new school environment. For example, Fabio expressed that his friends were very helpful because they “…gave [him] step by step information of how to deal with the cold weather since they have been here longer than [he had].” Furthermore, friends also encouraged youth to practice winter activities and sports, which, in turn, led them to enjoy the Canadian winter. Similarly, Jennifer perceived that her peers were useful sources of information when learning to navigate the new school system. They answered questions and provided clarification about how the school system worked in Canada.

Youth also perceived peers and friends as important sources of support. This was specially the case for youth who were dealing with difficult financial situations (2 youth). One way of support was shown was through the provision of needed material resources. For example, Juan talked about an instance when their family friends were particularly supportive. He said:

...there were friends that helped us get food and furniture... It was kind of relieving some stress because we didn’t have good beds, and we weren’t very
comfortable as well. We needed food too. Yeah, that helped us to feel more comfortable.

Peers, on the other hand, were reported to be mainly a source of emotional support. Fernando, for example, expressed that his old friends from Colombia helped him relieve his stress and anxiety about his difficulties with school. According to this youth, his friend “never let him down, he would always cheer [him] up when [he] was sad and not one day passed without asking [him] how [he] was doing. He would give me strength to keep going.”

Friends also lessened the discomfort and distress experienced by some of the youth. For example, some friends were supportive by making them feel more comfortable, happier to be in Canada, and hopeful about the future. As Jorge said,

...It made it a bit easier and even though I didn’t know what they were saying most of the time, I still hang out with the people, right? Yeah, it wasn’t that hard because once you have friends you are like, ‘ok, I like it’. For this youth, his situation started to be less difficult once he was able to establish new friendships. Similarly, Fernando viewed his friends as a source of happiness and joy when he was dealing with racism. For him, spending time with friends allowed him to focus on more positive aspects of his life.

It was also expressed that English-speaking native Canadians and Spanish-speaking friends played different instrumental roles in the youth’s process of adjustment. One way in which socially interacting with English-speaking native Canadians was helpful was in allowing the youth to practice their newly acquired English skills. They
stated that talking to friends led them to learn new words, getting informal correction when they made mistakes, and improving their pronunciation. As Jorge said:

You are going to be practicing the language. You are going to be using it. And the teachers help and everything but it is different once you are out of school. At the end of the school day there wasn’t anybody else, so I had to find friends to be able to practice. They would say, ‘Oh, you are supposed to say this’, or ‘That’s not the way that you say it.’ So they correct you. They are not going be like ‘This is your homework’. You kind of joke about it, and be cool.

This youth in particular viewed this engagement as a more relaxed way to learn the new language. Thus, having mainstream friends was perceived as allowing the youth to better deal with the challenge of adapting to the Canadian culture. For Fernando, in particular, dating a Canadian girl allowed him to develop a better understanding of the Canadian values and beliefs.

Spanish-speaking friends were also perceived as instrumental in overcoming difficulties related to their lack of language skills, however, they played a different role. They were reported to serve as language brokers which contributed to lessening the stress and anxiety caused by having limited English knowledge. For example, Juliana said,

Thank goodness there were two Spanish girls at school… It was not as hard because they would translate for me... The second day of school, after I met them, was a lot better. I knew they were going to be there and that helped me to be more calm.

It was also stated that the youth were first attracted to their Colombian peers due to their commonalities in culture, and they, in turn, facilitated the transition of the youth
into the social milieu and made it easier to get to know others and establish a group of friends. Other Colombian peers also contributed to making the youth feel more comfortable in their new surroundings.

**Family.** Six youth considered their family to be extremely helpful when dealing with challenges such as the process of re-establishment, learning a new language, making new friends, adapting to the new culture, lack of financial resources, and getting used to the school environment and system. Specifically, family characteristics such as a high degree of cohesiveness, being able to work together towards a common goal, and being united, were reported to ameliorate their difficulties. Jennifer, when talking about her challenges with school said,

> The support from my family, I think that is what helped me the most. We were united, is like we had a team with my mom and my brother. That’s what helped me to overcome this. The trust that we had in each other, that was what helped me the most.

Similarly, Fernando referred to this cohesiveness as being helpful in coping with his experiences with racism. When he was asked what had been the most helpful factor he said, “My family. We were always together. That familial warmth (‘calorcito de familia’) helps a lot.”

Parents in particular were reported to provide support, comfort, encouragement, and instill hope. For Juan, it was comforting that his parents made the effort to “set the Colombian culture in the house”. This made his transition into the new country a lot easier. Adriana stated that the support from her parents and the sense of hope that they had was helpful when dealing with the family’s financial difficulties. She expressed,
My parents helped a lot, they were like, ‘don’t worry, you can get something new later’; ‘don’t worry, it’s o.k., we will get out of this’; or ‘don’t worry, I will get a job soon’. They were very nice about it, they weren’t yelling and screaming about it, they talked to us about it. So I guess that’s how I coped with it, they helped me a lot.”

Jennifer also mentioned that her parents’ encouragement helped her to overcome her difficulties. Their message was, “keep going, you can do it.” That helped me a lot.”

Only Juan referred to having siblings as lessening the negative effects related to the process of re-establishment and making new friends. He stated that he would “talk to [his] brother... because he was even less comfortable” with having moved to Canada, allowing them to establish a sense of shared experiences. He further explained that he viewed having a brother as helpful “…because [he] wouldn’t feel as lonely.” Thus, the presence of a sibling in this case was perceived to be a source of companionship and comfort.

In addition to parents and siblings, two participants mentioned that their extended families, more specifically their cousins, were instrumental when dealing with the lack of friends and the lack of English language skills. For example, Laura reunited with her cousin in Canada after being separated for a few years. Her cousin became a significant person in her life as she was rebuilding her friendship network. She expressed,

I missed hanging out with her, from when we were younger. You can be silly with your cousins, and I did miss not having friends in school. But family is better than friends. It is more lasting right? So, I felt like it was alright. Even if I didn’t find friends.
Similarly, having cousins was beneficial for Viviana since they assisted her with her English proficiency. She found that socializing with her cousins, who had lived in Canada for a few years, allowed her to become familiar with the new language and to practice English outside of the school setting.

*God.* Only Laura stated that having a relationship with God was helpful when trying to overcome her challenges. When talking about the difficulties related to having an undefined immigrant status she expressed, “I know this is going to affect me later on, but I just keep having hope, right? Hope in God. If I am meant to stay here in Canada, I will.” For her, having faith in God allowed her to worry less about the uncertainty related to her difficulties and made her less anxious. In addition, she stated that praying helped her keep calm in difficult situations, specifically when trying to make new friends.

*Individual resources.* All of the youth also referred to personal factors when overcoming a variety of challenges. These factors include: (1) coping strategies; (2) change in mindset, (3) personal qualities, (4) previous experiences, (5) having set goals, and, (6) language brokering.

*Coping strategies.* All of the participants referred to a number of psychological and behavioural responses that helped them manage the emotional and psychological effects caused by their challenges. The coping strategies that were useful included: personal effort, communication, helping parents out, journaling, maintaining contact with the native country, thinking positively, avoidance, crying, and ignoring difficult situations.

Working extra hard and personal effort was perceived by some youth as very helpful when adapting to the new school environment and system and making new
friends. Jennifer stated that her personal effort in school allowed her to gain additional help from her guidance counsellor because:

The counsellor was very closed off at the beginning and didn’t really help me out much. So I said to myself, I have to do the best that I can in school and get good grades, so I can pressure her to help me out. I realized that what she wanted was good results, and after she saw my report card she was willing to help me.

Also, engaging in active communication was perceived as helpful in coping with cultural and family related challenges. For instance, Adriana stated that she talked to her parents constantly in order to deal their lack of knowledge about her school system. She explained that she would,

Usually come home and tell my mom what we did at school. I try to keep them informed about what is going on, about my grades, or about what we are doing, cause that way it makes it a lot easier instead of just telling them all at once ‘I did all this’. They wouldn’t get it, it is harder to explain everything at once than bit by bit.

Youth also expressed that actively helping parents or family members was perceived to ameliorate the negative consequences of some challenges. For example, Juan stated that he “tried to help out [his] parents at home so they could have more time to look out for jobs” and that way contribute to improving his family’s financial situation.

A variety of other strategies were reported to be helpful to manage the youth’s emotions. Journaling allowed one youth to “let feelings and thoughts out without hurting anybody.” For example, Juliana felt that she was “not good with words.” Therefore writing, instead of talking to others, gave her a safe place where she could vent.
Furthermore, Juliana expressed that at times she would feel sad, and she would allow herself to cry in order to let her emotions out. She stated that this led her to relieve the emotional tension that she experienced in relation to her difficulties with making new friends, missing her family, and the process of getting re-established.

Another strategy that helped manage youth’s emotions was maintaining contact with friends and family members still living in the native country. This contributed to decreasing feelings of sadness and maintaining an emotional bond with missed loved ones. In addition to this strategy, engaging in positive thinking was perceived as helpful to decrease negative feelings for some youth. Viviana stated that to overcome her challenge of adapting to the new Canadian culture it was helpful to maintain the hope that changes will eventually become easier to manage. Furthermore, avoidance was also mentioned to contribute to the management of feelings of discomfort. Jennifer in particular expressed that she coped with her challenge of socializing with individuals from cultures that differed greatly from her by avoiding their company. She expressed that this was helpful because she did not have to engage with others she did not feel comfortable with.

Three youth expressed that ignoring stress or anxiety provoking situations was the most helpful strategy they used because it allowed them ‘get their mind off the problem’ and focus on something that was more enjoyable. For example, Fernando explained that he would engage in exercise as a way of ignoring his challenges of racism and adapting to the Canadian culture. Laura also chose to avoid thinking about the difficulties that stemmed from her undefined immigrant status. She acknowledged that this challenge
would affect her more in the future, which made it easier for her to calm her anxiety about the uncertainty by saying, “Why am I going to start to worry about it now?”

Some coping strategies were challenge specific, and these included wearing warmer clothes, engaging in indoor and winter activities to cope with the new cold climate, exercising financial restraint to cope with financial issues, and getting involved with other cultures to cope with culture related challenges. Specifically, youth reported that in order to cope with the new climate, they would try to use warmer clothing and tried to “keep warm in order to go out” with other peers. Furthermore, it was also reported that they would try to find activities that they could do indoors in order to keep themselves occupied. For example, Adriana shared that she would watch a lot of movies with her brother when it was too cold to go outside. Engaging in winter related activities and sports, such as snowboarding, was also perceived as contributing to make the cold climate more enjoyable.

Another challenge specific strategy was financial restraint. Two youth, whose families were experiencing financial difficulties, expressed that they coped by limiting their spending and learning about budgeting so that there would be more money available for essential necessities. Adriana stated that she became more aware about how she was spending money. She said, “I didn’t always ask for new candy. I didn’t ask for new clothes. I was just like “ok I can’t get it” and that’s it, end of the story. Similarly, Fabio expressed that in order to cope specifically with the cultural diversity in Canada he became involved with individuals from other cultures. This involvement helped him to learn more about other people’s customs and beliefs, and facilitated the socialization with peers with diverse cultural backgrounds.
**Change in mindset.** Five youth found that it became easier to overcome their challenge once they started to have a more positive outlook of their experiences. This change in mindset was seen as helpful to deal with the challenges of making new friends, financial issues, language, family related challenges, and cultural differences. Some of the factors that led youth to adopt a more positive outlook included giving their challenge less importance, comparing themselves to peers who were in worse situations, maturing, and acceptance.

Fernando explained that the stress related to the racism he was experiencing started to diminish once he started to give less importance to those who discriminated against him. He said, “...I started to think ‘whatever, it must be their culture’ or ‘whatever, he is just an idiot.’ That helped me”. For him in particular, it seemed that attributing the instances of racism to external aspects, not to himself, helped him to change his mindset and eventually move on towards a more positive mental state.

For other youth, this change in outlook stemmed from being able to compare themselves to other peers who were perceived as less fortunate. Viviana shared that while struggling to learn English it was helpful to realize that, compared to the Canadian-native peers, she was at an advantage by learning a second language. She explained:

At the beginning I was like, ‘I don’t understand anything, I am nothing, I feel lost amongst all these people who do not speak Spanish’ so it was difficult. I was disappointed at the beginning, but then I thought, ‘It doesn’t matter, I have to keep going. I don’t know English, but they don’t know Spanish.’ So that kept me going.”
Only Adriana referred to the process of maturation as a reason for more positive outlook. This was primarily in relation to her parents’ high degree of parental monitoring. She explained that she used to get “mad” with her parents, but over time, she understood that parents’ perspective by stating, “I wouldn’t want my daughter to go somewhere I don’t know either.” She believed that she was able to take her parents’ perspective because she was older and more mature. Thus, this meet-and-greet became less stressful and more of a routine.

Only Juliana attributed her shift in outlook to her ability to become more accepting. She perceived that her difficulties of making friends were caused by her expectation that peers in Canada would replace the friends she left behind. Once she accepted that the friends she left in Colombia could not be replaced it became easier to develop new friendships. This is what she explained:

I think I was trying to find someone here who was just like [my friends in Colombia], but I didn’t find that person. I just did not want to hang out with anybody. I got really closed off. But now [my friends] and I have grown apart and I have accepted that it has to be like that. So now, I have more friends.

For these participants, a mind shift towards more positive perceptions related to their challenges was necessary in order to start the process of overcoming them.

**Personal qualities.** Five youth expressed that certain personality traits and qualities were helpful in dealing with a variety of challenges such as the process of re-establishment, adapting to the new culture, and making new friends. The personal qualities that were reported to be the most helpful were being outgoing, being assertive, knowing when to seek for help, and ‘being Colombian.’ For example, Jorge explained
that being friendly and wanting to interact with others helped him to overcome his difficulty of getting re-established in Canada. He stated,

> It was chill because of the fact that I like to interact with people. That made it a bit easier and even though most of the time I didn’t know what they were saying, I still hang out with Canadian people. It wasn’t that hard because once I made friends I was like, ‘O.K., I like it here’.

The importance of being outgoing was emphasized when youth alluded that shyness exacerbated the difficulties inherited in their challenges. Juliana stated,

> Making friends took time. The first year I was here I was in grade 7 and I met Jessica. I was still very shy at that point and I didn’t really talk much. So Jessica would hang out with Sarah, and they would both talk with each other and I would just sit next to them. So, I would say that not being so shy anymore has helped me.

Other personal qualities were perceived as useful when coping with challenges. Fernando, who was dealing with racism, talked about how his ability to stand up for himself and being assertive helped him with his difficulties. He explained,

> When I saw that racism was occurring I approached those people and I asked them, ‘What are you doing?’ and I believe that helped stop it. Maybe those people thought I was going to punch them or something like that. Eventually word started to travel about me and people stopped bugging me. It was not the same for other people though. So I think that was what helped the most to solve the problem.

For Jennifer, the personal characteristic that she found helpful was ‘knowing when to seek help’ from adults. This was particularly important when she experienced
aggression resulting from rivalries among different ethnic groups. She explained that when she felt she was in danger and the situation was no longer manageable, she felt it was necessary to ask for help from teachers, parents, or even the police to help her deal with this aggression.

Finally, Fabio stated that ‘being Colombian’ was a helpful personal quality when trying to make new friends. He stated that when other Colombians in his school learned that another Colombian had just arrived they sought him out. This made it easier for him to establish new relationships with peers in his new school environment. He claimed:

People came up to me. They knew I was Colombian so they wanted to talk to me and they wanted to learn more about me...The fact that I was Colombian was the most helpful...Most of the people that I made friends with at the beginning are still my friends now.

These accounts make reference to individuals’ personality or personal qualities which were perceived to lessen the negative consequences of their immigrant challenges.

**Previous experiences.** This category contains instances when the youth found it helpful to have lived through similar challenges and difficulties in the past. Three youth referred to these previous experiences as contributing to overcome the challenges of making new friends and learning a new language. For example, Laura explained,

Something that made it easier was the fact that one of my good friends in the States was going through a rough time before I left and I didn’t see her that often. Another one of my friends also, she was always really busy and she went to another school. And then my really two close friends from school were also really
busy all the time, so we couldn’t really hang out that much either. So, even then I
told that I didn’t really have friends I didn’t really miss them that much.

In this particular case, the youth was already used to being alone before she immigrated
which made it easier to manage her emotions. Similarly, for Fabio, it became easier to
overcome his challenge of making new friends because “

It wasn’t the first time that [he] moved to a new school, so [he] knew what to expect.”

Along the same lines, Jennifer referred to her previous experiences of learning
French while living in Quebec as helpful in approaching her difficulties with learning
English. Her previous accomplishment of learning French equipped her with the
strategies and confidence to overcome the difficulties of learning another language. For
these youth, having dealt with similar past challenges and developing coping strategies
better prepared them overcome their new issues.

**Set goals.** Only one youth talked about finding it helpful to set goals for herself.

Jennifer expressed that having clear goals of what she wanted to achieve in the future
motivated her to learn English. She stated,

There have been moments when I think ‘oh my God, I want to quit, leave
everything and quit.’ But those are only moments. Thankfully I have my goals
clear, I know what I want to do, so I say to myself ‘I have to do this, I have to do
this, I know I can do this’ and I keep trying.

Having set goals gave this youth the motivation and confidence to learn the new
language.

**Language brokering.** One youth, Jennifer, stated that engaging in language
brokering for her family helped her to improve her English skills. Her uncle and his
family had recently moved to Canada and she was assisting them to re-establish themselves by acting as a translator. She explained:

Right now, what is helping me is helping my family who just arrived. For example, going with them to the schools and translate. Or like, they needed to buy a car, so I had to help them to go talk with the sellers and get quotes. I think this has helped me improve my English skills. I think that’s what has helped me to feel more comfortable with the language.

Thus, the role of translator gave this youth an opportunity to practice and improve her English. Her English skills, although limited, led others with poorer English language abilities to rely on her to help them complete necessary tasks. This in turn, pushed her to improve and eventually becoming more comfortable in speaking the language.

**Environmental resources.** In addition to finding relationships and personal qualities as helpful, youth also referred to factors in their overall environments that contributed to the process of overcoming challenges. These factors included: (1) media, (2) aspects of their school environment, (3) engaging in extracurricular activities, and (4) certain aspects of their community.

**Media.** Six youth reported that reading books and comics, watching TV and movies, and listening to music was very helpful to improve their language skills. Reading was reported by two youth as instrumental in learning new vocabulary. Jorge explained that reading comic books was particularly helpful because “even though you might not understand something, the comics have pictures and you can try to figure out what they are saying by looking at them. So your reading skills get developed faster.” Sebastian explained that reading was very helpful because if there was a new word he could “look
at the words that were before and after and then try to figure out the meaning” thus increasing his vocabulary.

Most of the youth (5) who reported using media to help them improve their language skills stated that watching TV and movies was instrumental in improving their listening skills. Youth reported that it was helpful to watch movies and cartoons because it allowed their “ear to get used” to the new language. Children’s TV shows such as ‘Dora the Explorer’ or ‘Go, Diego, Go!’ were reported to be helpful to improve English skills because they were easier to understand than regular shows and helped them improve their listening skills. For some of the youth, the availability of closed captioning while watching TV, or being able to turn on the subtitles while watching movies were particularly helpful for improving their English language skills. Another media was listening to music, which helped Jennifer improve her English skills.

**School environment.** This theme included instances when participants stated that their school environment, their teachers, and school staff were helpful in overcoming their challenges. Five youth talked about their school environment as a helpful factor. For two youth, in particular, their school work and attending classes were perceived as particularly helpful when learning English. Jennifer explained:

The school has been very helpful because they require you to read, and write, and all that. So unconsciously, you make an effort to fulfill those requirements... For example in Biology or Science, which is mostly theory, the teacher would talk and talk and I didn’t understand much. So, I had to grab the book and start reading. And whatever I didn’t understand I would have to translate and read more about. It is also the ESL (English as a Second Language) class I was in at
school. They make you write a lot in that class. For example, we write our thoughts. We also have to read stuff and answer questions about it. So that helps a lot.

Thus, for some youth, the process of learning English was accelerated by their need to complete school work and by simply being in class.

Only Fernando explicitly referred to the school’s overall environment as helpful when managing racism. He stated that instances of racism decreased once he changed school. He perceived his new school environment as much more inclusive and accepting because the school population was very diverse. For the other youth, the most helpful factors in school were: school work, teachers, and school staff.

For three youth in particular, it was their teachers who they found to be the most helpful. Jennifer expressed that the way her teachers approached the class made her motivated to learn. She stated,

Thankfully my teachers used a lot of visual aids so that made it easier for me to understand what is going on in class... when I saw that they were like that and that they were very good at explaining everything it seemed a lot easier than I thought.

So, that helped me to keep trying and slowly my challenge started to solve itself out.

Jorge also had similar experiences with his ESL teacher. He stated that his teacher was “down to earth,” “really nice,” and she would “always spend one on one time with him and he perceived that as “huge help.” For these youth having good teachers, who used a variety of visual aids, who were motivating, friendly, and took great effort in making sure
that the students succeeded, made the difference in their ability and motivation to improve their English language skills.

In addition to finding teachers helpful, two youth expressed that school staff, such as guidance counsellors and chaplains, were also instrumental in overcoming their challenges. Jennifer talked about the role that her guidance counsellor played in helping her achieving her academic goals. She expressed that her counsellor was helpful because she made available academic alternatives that allowed her to complete all the credits that she needed to graduate in a time. She stated,

Fortunately, my guidance counsellor has been very helpful. At first I was very afraid that I was not going to be able to graduate on time because of my missing credits. But now, my counsellor helped me to get enrolled in night classes, and I will be taking summer school. I went to her for help and she helped me find those options, and I know I am going to be able to advance much faster.

Similarly, Laura expressed that her school chaplain helped lessen the negative effects of having limited financial resources by facilitating funding to engage in school related activities. She explained,

My chaplain is very understanding. In school there are different events and to partake in them I have to pay. Because I am really involved, my chaplain has always said, ‘Don’t worry, you don’t have to pay for it.’ For a retreat that we had, for example, I didn’t pay. The costs were covered by the school... They still allowed me to have those opportunities.

In these cases, school staff played a facilitating role in these youth’s attempts to overcome their challenges.
*Extracurricular activities.* Five youth reported that getting involved in extracurricular activities was helpful when dealing specifically with the challenges of learning a new language and making new friends. The range of extracurricular activities that were found to be helpful included volunteering, doing sports, attending dance and acting classes, and attending summer camp. For those youth having a difficult time learning English, extracurricular activities provided a venue, outside of the regular school environment, in which they were forced to talk with others and practice their newly acquired English skills. Juliana illustrates this by saying,

> My mom enrolled me in a summer camp at the community center. I did not want to go at first, but she enrolled me anyways. And, thanks to that, I was able to loosen my tongue because I had to talk. What if I had to go to the bathroom and I had to ask where it is? So, I started talking more.

Viviana similarly referred to being part of these activities as helpful during her process of learning the new language. She stated, “My parents enrolled me in swimming and dance classes and that helped me to get out of my shell and to talk to other kids.” These activities represented a relaxed environment where they could improve their language in an informal way.

For those whose main challenge was making new friends, engaging in extracurricular activities was viewed as an opportunity to socialize with peers and to meet others who have similar interests as themselves. Juliana particularly explained that attending acting classes helped her to overcome her shyness and gave her a space where she could interact with others who were also learning about acting. In another instance, Laura, who attended a Catholic secondary school viewed volunteering in Chaplaincy,
which is a group that supports the role of the Chaplain (pastoral minister) at each school, as contributing to her desire of meeting others similar to her. This is what this youth stated about her experiences:

I got involved like in Chaplaincy and I have gone to conventions about leadership, about peace, and stuff like that. I got to go to a summer camp during my first summer here and it was really fun. That was a really awesome experience because it helped me to get a closer to God and at the same time meet a lot of people that are really awesome people... By getting involved in this I met people that were interested in the same things, right? That was awesome, and that gave me like a sense of belonging.

Community. Two participants referred to certain aspects of their community as helpful in overcoming cultural differences and difficulties inherited in their process of re-establishment. The main aspect that was particularly helpful for this youth was the presence of other Latinos and Colombians in their communities. For example, Viviana explained,

Meeting Colombian people. Here in Canada they try to keep the Colombian culture alive and when we first arrived we used to go to a lot of festivals and celebrations related to this. There, we met a lot of people that eventually became our friends... They gave us advice and they told us about their struggles. It made us feel that we were not alone... Also, we didn’t have to speak English to them and we could communicate in our own language.

Making contact with other Colombians made this family feel that they belonged and could relate to others with a similar background. They did not feel as outsiders, and in
turn, were able to maintain their native culture by engaging in various cultural activities. Only in one instance community services, such as police services were considered as helpful for the youth. Jennifer stated that when dealing with the aggression that stemmed from ethnic disparities, it was very reassuring to know that her and her peers could call the police to solve the issues so they did not have to “take justice into their own hands.”

**Discussion**

The present study was one of the first studies to explore definitions of resilience related concepts in Colombian immigrant youth. Furthermore, it contributed to an increasing interest of resilience research which focuses on the influence that culture and context have on appropriate development and youth’s ability to overcome adversity. Ungar et al. (2007) stated that to gain a better understanding of the process of resilience it is imperative to establish contextually and culturally meaningful definitions of resilience related concepts. It was found that youth’s definitions of competence, adversity, and health-enhancing resources were influenced by Latino cultural beliefs and the youth’s experiences of immigration.

**Colombian Youth’s Views on Doing Well**

As found in the current study, the cultural value of familism, which emphasizes caring for the welfare of the family (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008) and maintaining family closeness and loyalty (Sy, 2006), played an important role in the way youth defined “doing well.” These Colombian youth often talked about having family obligations of doing well and being successful in life. This is not surprising since according to Hill and Torres (2010), Latino parenting practices emphasize responsibility and children and
youth are expected to make productive use of their time, take advantage of opportunities, be responsible, and provide family assistance. For example, the World Value Survey (1997) reported that “a feeling of responsibility” is one of the most important childhood qualities that Colombian parents try to promote in their children.

Colombian youth’s views of doing well were discussed along three specific contexts: family, peer, and the school. For the family context, youth expressed that it was important to make a conscious effort to maintain a deep connection with family members, to preserve the family unit, and to create a harmonious family environment. These findings are in line with previous research which suggests that Latino youth tend to have stronger family ties than those in the mainstream culture (Cervantes & Cordoba, 1999) and maintain frequent interactions with family members due to their role as reciprocal aid systems (DeGamo & Martinez, 2006). Researchers reported that to achieve such family cohesion, it was necessary to engage in constant communication with other family members and to show respect to elders (Cervantes & Cordoba, 1999; DeGamo & Martinez, 2006).

Researchers have also found that providing assistance to both nuclear family and extended family members is essential achieving such family cohesion (Cervantes & Cordoba, 1999; DeGamo & Martinez, 2006). According to Jurkovic et al. (2004), this provision of instrumental and emotional assistance by youth to their families, defined as filial responsibility, derives from the value that Latino families attach to loyalty, cooperation, and kinship ties. As the World Value Survey (1997) showed Colombians considered “tolerance and respect for other people” as one of the most important qualities to instill to children. Furthermore, Esparza and Sanchez (2008) found that
individuals who had higher levels of familism and stronger attitudes towards helping the family were more likely to believe that elders should be respected.

In Colombia, youth placed great importance on their friendships; 85% of Colombians surveyed perceived their friendships to be very important or rather important in their lives (World Value Survey, 1997). Colombian Canadian youth were no different. The present study was able to allow these youth to elaborate on the importance of friendships. Specifically, youth referred to their friends as extensions of their families. Successful peer relationships involved deep connections with friends that they could trust and with whom they got along with, developed harmonious peer relationships, and ensured the wellbeing of those who are considered friends. Thus, aspects of familism were found to influence youth’s definitions of their competence within this context.

These youth also stated that having social relationships at school who can support their efforts to do well academically was important. This is similar to Ibanez, Kupermin, Jukovic, and Perilla’s (2003) findings which suggest that having a sense of school belonging and peer relationships within the school context is related to achievement motivation among Latino students. They further stated that the importance that Latino cultures place on collectivist socialization and that regardless of acculturation and generational status, the key academic motivator for Latino youth was based on social relationships.

In relation to academics, definitions of success involved primarily attaining good grades in order to attend university. It has been well documented that Latino youth often lag behind academically when compared to their white, African American, and Asian counterparts and that their school dropout rates are particularly worrisome (DeGamo &
Martinez, 2006; Ibanez, Kupermin, Jukovic, & Perilla, 2003). Although this study did not explicitly focus on the youth’s actual academic performance, they did provide evidence to support the fact that achieving an education was highly valued among Colombian youth. It is possible that the academic disparities among Latinos stem from factors other than lack of motivation to succeed or not valuing education as important.

Youth described doing well in school and attaining an education as a moral duty to their parents and a way to honour the sacrifices their parents had to endure when they moved to Canada. Academically succeeding was viewed as an opportunity to “give back” to their families. Fuligni (1998) suggest that immigrant children and adolescents often internalize a sense of obligation towards their families. Furthermore, Esparza and Sanchez (2008) stated that Latino youth who have a high sense of family obligation and who have parents who perceive education as a means of social mobility, may be encouraged to obtain higher grades when they witness parental sacrifice. It is also possible that the strong emotional connection between parents and children can contribute to their desire to obtain good grades. Based on the theory of social capital, the trust and interconnectedness experienced by Latino youth within their families may contribute to the development of a mutual sense of obligation and expectation among Latino families (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008). This, in turn, can encourage positive academic behaviours which is seen as fulfilling family expectations and contributing to the welfare of the family.

In contrast to evidence which suggests that youth acculturate faster to the mainstream culture than their parents, Colombian youth in the present study endorsed the importance of family connectedness, family obligation, and the value of familism. These
perceptions have been found to be endorsed by parents rather than by youth in past studies (Azapocznik & Kurtines, 1993; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). This contradiction may be due to the Colombian youth’s maintenance of their cultural values despite, their relocation into Canada. This in turn, may have influenced their perceptions of competence and their definitions of ‘doing well.’ However, it is also possible these youth have not lived in Canada long enough (average time in Canada was 4 years) to have altered their Colombian and Latino values, such as familism. It would be of interest to analyze the responses of Colombian youth who have lived in the country for longer periods of time to assess whether these specific cultural values continue to affect definitions of competence for this specific group.

**Colombian Youth’s Perceptions of Challenges**

Another goal was to explore the influence that culture had on the Colombian youth’s perceptions of adversity. Findings revealed that the challenges described were mostly determined by the general immigration process rather than to their cultural background. The youth in the present study talked about experiencing stress when they re-established into Canada. More specifically, they experienced difficulties in learning a new language, understanding culturally heterogeneous peer groups, navigating a foreign school system, dealing with the uncertainty of not having a defined immigration status, experiencing economic disadvantage, and adjusting to the harsh Canadian winters. Stress experienced by immigrants due to being away from one’s country of origin, navigating a distinctly different new environment, and learning the skills necessary to function in such environment (i.e., language, norms, culture) is referred to as immigration related stress (Suarez-Morales et al., 2007). It has been suggested that immigration related stresses was
linked to anxiety, which, affected the mental health of immigrant populations (Suarez-Morales et al., 2007). The youth in the present study talked about many challenges when they re-established themselves into Canada. More specifically, they experienced difficulties in learning a new language, understanding culturally heterogeneous peer groups, navigating a foreign school system, dealing with the uncertainty of not having a defined immigrant status, experiencing economic disadvantage, and adjusting to the harsh Canadian winters.

Colombian youth, similar to many others who immigrate from countries where neither of Canada’s official languages are spoken, found it challenging to learn the new language and to function effectively in their new communities. Many studies have shown that language and communication stressors are one of the main barriers for non-English speaking immigrants (e.g., Chuang & Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, 2009; Cordoba & Cervantes, 2011; Ko & Pereira, 2010; Suarez-Morales & Lopez, 2007; Torres Stone & Meyler, 2007). It was also found that Colombian youth perceived their lack of English language skills as a barrier to do well academically. According to Carhill, Suarez-Orozco, and Paez (2008), many recent immigrants do not have the necessary English language skills to thrive in their studies. Moreover, limited English language skills in Latino immigrants in the United States have been associated with lower grade point averages (GPAs), repeating grades, and low graduating rates (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Also, English language proficiency has been found to be the most powerful variable when explaining variance in students’ GPA and performance in math and reading achievement tests (Suarez-Orozco, Sarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).
Inadequate English language skills are a significant barrier to achieving academic success for Latino immigrant youth. The present findings support this assumption. This, in addition to the youth’s perception that academic success is a way to repay parents for their sacrifices, contextualizes the heightened stress that the lack of English language skills represented for them. The lack of language competence has been associated with negative mental health outcomes such as depression and low optimism (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2009) and it has led to teasing and alienation from peers, diminishing youth’s feelings of self-worth and lead to increased feelings of anxiety (Araujo Daw & Williams, 2008). This is consistent with the results from the present study that showed that Colombian youth often felt embarrassed due to their lack of English proficiency, exacerbating the already difficult process of establishing new peer relationships in the new environment and contributed to the youth’s feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Developing friendships was another significant challenge for the Colombian youth. They reported that both English language difficulties and the multicultural nature of their classmates were the main reasons for such difficulty. Chuang and colleagues’ (2009) conducted focus groups with 125 immigrant youth across Canada and they revealed that more than half of the sample had difficulties in developing friendships due to language barriers and being foreign to the social environments youth entered (i.e., school). It is especially important for adolescents to fulfill their need to belong especially since their peer relationships and achieving acceptance from peers are salient at this age (Erikson, 1968; Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Steinberg and Morris, 2001). It is not surprising then that difficulty creating new friendships poses stress for immigrant youth.
Although most evidence suggests that an inability to appropriately function in a social sphere represents a struggle for many immigrant youth, Benner (2011) found that the majority of Latino youth in their sample did not face loneliness during their first two years in high school. This discrepancy however could be attributed to Benner’s sampling strategies since the Latino youth in their sample were primarily U.S. born. It is possible that the difference in Latino findings is related to inherent differences between foreign-born and recent Latino immigrants. For example, Kao (1999) reported that immigrants showed lower levels of self-efficacy and control when compared to later generations. These findings are evidence of the importance that length of residency in the host country has on the youth’s adjustments and settlement process. Thus, generational status of immigrants needs to be taken into consideration in the future.

These youth also referred to instances when stress was caused by economic disadvantages stemming from their parent’s inability to integrate successfully into the Canadian working force. The particular stressor of economic disadvantage and family poverty has been often associated with internalizing problems and a variety of poor developmental and health outcomes (Tarshis, Jutte, & Huffman, 2006). Researchers have suggested that many immigrants from various immigrant contexts and cultural backgrounds deal with challenges related to their immigration processes (Chuang & Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, 2009; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Torres Stone & Meyler, 2006) suggesting that these are not exclusive to Colombian youth in particular.

It is important to note that the majority of studies that have investigated stress in immigrants have focused mainly on family conflict and discrimination. Research has
suggested that family conflicts between immigrant parents and children often arise as a result of acculturation (Torres Stone & Meyler, 2007). However, these Colombian youth did not report any family conflict as part of their family related challenges. Rather, they reported difficulties in relation to explaining to their parents the nuances of the Canadian school system, language brokering, and parental monitoring but none of these were found to be sources of conflict between parents and children. Furthermore, these challenges were discussed only by a small proportion of the sample (2 youth). It is possible that the youth in this investigation have not lived in the host culture long enough to experience distinct discrepancies in acculturation levels between themselves and their parents.

In relation to discrimination, another common stressor among Latino youth, Suarez-Morales et al. (2007) found that Latino pre-adolescents reported greater stress associated with it rather than with immigration-related stress (difficulties related to living in a new country, being away from one’s country of origin, and learning to speak a new language). This is contrary to the findings from the present study since only one Colombian youth spoke of instances of discrimination that he perceived as highly stressful. It is possible that levels of discrimination against Colombian youth and Latino youth in the Canadian context are lower than in the United States due to their history of multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and tolerance for immigrant diversity (Brooks, 2005). Future research should take into account then the characteristics of the host culture since it may influence youth’s experiences of adversity.

The prevalence of only a few stress sources (i.e., family conflict, discrimination) could be the result of the methodologies used to study immigration related stressors and risk in the Latino youth population. For example, Torres Stone and Meyler (2007)
identified potential risks and protective factors of Latino youth who lived in a non-metropolitan Midwest community and found that the most prevalent stressors were parental stressors, language, and perceived prejudice and discrimination. Others have found that Latino youth viewed similar challenges such as family stressors related to family obligation and translating for parents, and discrimination stressors related to being uncomfortable with other cultures, being uncomfortable with ethnic jokes, and being worried about immigration were the most prominent challenges (between 70 to 78% of youth reported these issues as important stressors) (Romero & Roberts, 2003). It was not the case in the present investigation since the youth discussed a broader range of challenges, which included family stressors in addition to difficulties with the re-establishment of one’s life in a new country, learning a new language, and adjusting to the Canadian climate. It is possible that the broader range of findings in the present study was the result of the open nature of the interview questions. Torres Stone and Meyler focused only on questions on cultural identity and this may have limited the challenges to those related to cultural discrepancies with parents and peers. Furthermore, Romero and Roberts used a pre-determined scale of everyday stressors which did not allow youth to discuss other issues. These findings reflect the need to implement more open ended qualitative methodology to better understand Latino youth’s immigration related stressors.

It was of interest also to explore the intensity of stress experienced by the Colombian youth in this study. The findings suggest that most youth perceived their challenges as not highly stressful or threatening. According to Suarez-Morales and Lopez (2009), the way in which individuals appraise stressors that stem from adapting to
a new cultural context determines whether they experience mental health problems such as anxiety. Therefore, it can be suggested that the youth in this sample were less likely to experience instances of mental health problems based on the perceptions of their difficulties and implies that these specific youth did not have the need to be resilient. Similar findings have been reported by Romero and Roberts (2003) in regards to culturally relevant stressors for Latino adolescents. According to their results, the majority of the Latino youth reported that the stressors they experienced were not ‘very stressful.’ It is possible that Latino youth’s perceptions of challenges and stressors as non-threatening could be the result of the availability of the strong support systems and the array of factors that provided protection against the challenges experienced.

**Colombian Youth’s Perceptions of Health Enhancing Resources**

A final goal for this investigation was to explore what resources Colombian immigrant youth find helpful when dealing with immigration challenges. Based on an ecological framework, health enhancing resources are unique to each context and can be influenced by cultural beliefs, and are identified by individuals as compensating for what they perceived as challenging (Slavin et al., 1991; Ungar, 2004a). It was clear that some health enhancing factors that the youth reported were derived from cultural influences (i.e., social support). Others, on the other hand, did not appear to be as clearly influenced by cultural beliefs (i.e., individual factors, media, and engaging in extracurricular activities).

Previous research on protective factors and health enhancing resources has shown that three specific categories are important sources of protection (Crean, 2004; Rak and Petterson, 2001). These include family qualities, individual characteristics, and resources
found in the environment. The Colombian youth in the present investigation reported resources in all of these categories. In addition to these however, the Colombian youth relied heavily on peer relationships as sources of support, category that was not included in previous classifications of protective factors.

This investigation revealed that Colombian youth rely heavily on social support when dealing with immigration stress. Social support acts as protection against stressful events and buffers the negative effects of life stressors (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; Sandler, Wolchik, Braver, & Fogas, 1991; Wertlieb, Weigel, & Feldstein, 1987; Wills, Blechman & McNamara, 1993). In general, it has been found that young individuals rely on three major sources of support: family, school and other formal institutions, and peers (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006). In fact, Crean (2004) suggests that the presence of supportive social networks changes the nature of life’s stressors. Previous research has revealed that Latino cultures attach great importance to collectivist and affiliative socialization goals. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that the health enhancing resources reported in the present study included significant relationships.

DeGarmo and Martinez (2006) found that the presence of social support, which included school, peer, and parental support, was related to greater academic well-being. Of these sources of support, only school support and parental support were found to have a significant effect when analyzed individually. Furthermore, parental support was found to have the greatest effect among all types of social support. Similarly, Ibanez et al. (2004) found that both school belonging and parent involvement were related to achievement motivation in their study of school achievement in immigrant and Latino adolescents born in the United States. In addition, the impact of discrimination has been found to be
lessened by family and friends’ support (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007). Findings from the present study similarly revealed that relationships and social support, not only from the family, but also from the school environment and peers played an important role in the Colombian youth’s ability to deal with their challenges.

More specifically to family support, immigrant families show high levels of family obligation between children and adults, high expectations of children, and high levels of trustworthiness (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003). Suarez-Morales and Lopez, (2009) suggest that family processes have been found to protect immigrant children from the negative effects of acculturation. More specifically, it has been suggested that Latino’s ability to overcome immigration stressors is the result of their cultural beliefs in relation to strong family ties and a sense of family obligation. The emphasis on family solidarity and support is reflected in less child-centered approaches to everyday activities, frequent contact with family members, positive attitudes toward parents by their children, and greater levels of satisfaction with family life (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Leyendecker, Lamb, Schomerich, & Fracasso, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Zayas & Solary, 1994). In the present study, youth reported that a high degree of cohesiveness, being able to work together towards common goals, and being united as the main ways in which their family helped them overcome their challenges. Similarly, Torres Stone and Meyler (2006) found that Latino youth reported strong family ties to be one of the main protective factors against the negative effects of immigration stressors.

Furthermore, the Colombian youth reported that, in addition to immediate family members (i.e., parents and siblings), extended family members (i.e., cousins) were also found helpful. This is consistent with other researchers who have found that extended
family members provide support, information, advice, and comfort in times of adversity for Latino families (Esquivel & Keitel, 1990; Hovey & King, 1996; Smart & Smart, 1995; Torres-Rivera, 2004). Particularly, Calzada et al. (2010) has suggested that the extended family is an important source of social and emotional support for Latino youth. Family support is an important source of protection for youth in general, however family dynamics seem to be especially significant for Latino youth due to the cultural influences of familism. Due to the greater emphasis placed on family cohesiveness and familial responsibility in Latino families, it can be suggested that family support would have an even greater effect on diminishing the negative effects of stress and adversity.

In fact, the protective role that families play in Latino youth’s resilience has been well document. Villalba (2007) indicated that the resilience shown by many Latino youth is related primarily to the importance that they place on the family. Villalba reports that this type of social support is essential in maintaining mental health despite the presence of adversity. A strong sense of family orientation, obligation, and cohesion appears to improve the physical health, emotional health, and educational well-being of adolescent youth (Bird et al., 2001; Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson, 1997; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003). Familism was found by Smokowski, Rose and Bacallao (2009) to be associated with decreased internalized problems, higher levels of self-esteem in Latino youth, lower truancy, more academic effort, and higher GPA even when mother’s education was lower than a high school degree (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008). Furthermore, researchers have reported that parental supervision, especially maternal monitoring, lack of parent-child conflict, and a good quality mother-adolescent relationship were significant buffers that contributed to psychological well-being, less internalizing and externalizing problems,
and fewer adjustment problems for many Latino youth (Corona, Lefkowitz, Sgiman & Romo, 2005; Harker 2001; Rose, & Bacallao, 2009; Loukas, Suizzo, & Prelow, 2006; Loukas & Prelow, 2004). Thus, these findings support the notion that the family support experienced by the Colombian youth in the present investigation could have had influenced the youth’s perception of immigration related challenges as less stressful.

Another important protective factor reported by the Colombian youth was peer support. Although DeGarmo and Perreira (2010) found that peer resources were not as important relative to parental support for Latino youth, they did find that the total support score which included support from parents, peers and school was more important than any individual source of support. Therefore, the buffering effect that peer support has for Latino youth is contingent on the presence of other more salient resources such as those coming from family and school. Consistent with the present findings, Chuang and the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance (2009) also reported that Canadian immigrant youth found peers as sources of support and guidance when adjusting to the new culture. More specifically, friendships have been found to have a positive effect on Latino adolescent’s academic adjustment (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Cole, Matheson, & Anisman, 2007), especially for those who reported high levels of loneliness. According to Benner (2011), for Latino youth who experienced loneliness, having support from friends buffered its effects on their academic performance. However, those who experienced loneliness but did not reported support from friendships had poor academic progress. Although the findings of how peer support contributed to academic performance was unclear, these Colombian youth reported that having English-speaking friends were especially beneficial for their improvement of English language skills. It is possible that
greater competence in English skills further contributes to the youth’s ability to complete school work and do well academically. Since the present investigation did not focus on understanding the relationships between specific protective factors and positive outcomes the findings are speculative. More research is needed to further understand this relationship.

Youth also reported that Spanish-speaking friends were very helpful because they served as cultural bridges between the known culture (Colombian/Latino) and the host culture (Canadian). Access to friends with similar backgrounds allowed these youth to share their identity in a social context, and this, in turn, added to their assets and their ability to overcome their challenges. Although few studies have focused on peer support as a source of protection, findings from this study suggest that it was perceived as important by Colombian youth. Perhaps friends’ support was especially salient because of the importance that the Colombian culture attributes to friendships. As found by the World Value Survey (1997), more than 85% of Colombians reported that friendships were very or rather important in their lives. Furthermore, it is also possible that friend support was salient as a health enhancing resource because of the developmental stage of the sample. Adolescents tend to place great importance to peers and to the need to belong to a social group (Tartakovsky, 2009). Further research would be necessary to better understand the dynamics of peer support as a source of protection for Colombian youth.

In the study of protective factors among immigrant Latino youth, few studies have focused on the Latino youth’s individual assets and coping as sources of protection. This study showed that the youth relied in a number of coping strategies and individual characteristics in order to overcome adversity. Consistent with these findings, Chuang
and the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance (2009) found that the immigrant youth in their study reported certain personal characteristics (i.e., confidence, positivity, not being shy, being proud of oneself, and taking initiative) as helpful when dealing with immigration challenges. The youth in the present study also reported to have used a greater number of personal coping strategies that included problem-focused (e.g., active efforts to change the stressful situation) and emotion-focused (e.g., efforts to control one’s emotional responses to the stressful events) strategies (Crean, 2004; Slavin et al., 1991) rather than avoidant strategies (e.g., coping that involves avoiding dealing with stressors in an attempt to minimize their effect) (Crean, 2004). Among Latino youth, Torres and Rollock (2009) suggest that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are related to better psychological adjustment and are considered a significant predictor of self-esteem. Furthermore, active coping accounted for more variance than other factors such as sociodemographic and biculturalism variables when predicting self-esteem levels among Latino youth (Torres & Rollock, 2009). Thus, active coping is thought to reflect an internal dimension of competence which contributes to the negotiation between the individual and their environmental demands (Bowleg, Craig, & Burkholder, 2004). Due to the positive effects that this type of coping has on mental health, it is possible to that the coping strategies used by these youth contributed to the predominant perception of challenges as not highly stressful.

Lastly, some environmental resources were also reported by the youth to be helpful when overcoming immigration challenges. These included media, aspects of the school environment, engaging in extracurricular activities, having contact with other Colombians, and feeling safe in their communities. Chuang and colleagues (2009) also
reported that youth found community resources helpful in their process of adjustment such as books, TV, and media to help them improve their English language skills, access to libraries or youth programs, teachers who were helpful and supportive, and participating in non-academic school activities. These Colombian youth identified similar resources that facilitated improvement of their English language skills, allowed them to meet peers with similarly interests, and heightened their feelings of belonging. Such resources have increased potential socialization for youth which, in turn, reflects the centrality that social aspects have for the effective adjustment of immigrant youth.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

There were some limitations of the present study that need to be taken into consideration. First, the sample size was small and most of the youth lived in around the Greater Toronto Area, Kitchener, and Waterloo. This limits the ability to generalize the results to other Colombian youth living in other regions of Canada (i.e., Quebec) or who have different demographic characteristics. Also, the participants were recruited through advertisements in Settlement Agencies and snowballing. It is possible that those youth who are willing to answer to the poster advertisement are inherently different than those who did not participate. Perhaps these participants were more outgoing and assertive and this, in turn, could influence the ways they perceive and deal with challenges related to their immigration process. The nature of snowballing technique was biased toward youth who maintained friendships with each other or who belonged to the same family. This could have led to having youth in the sample who have similar upbringings, lifestyles, and perceptions of the world around them and who would have provided similar answers. Therefore, these findings may not be representative of the youth in Colombian
communities. In the future, larger sample sizes that include a greater variability of Colombian youth (i.e., from diverse regions of Canada) and that have been chosen using randomized recruiting methods should be investigated.

A common limitation with the use of interviews is the presence of biases. It is possible that the youth could have answered questions in way that would have portrayed a favourable image of themselves (social desirability bias). Furthermore, it is also possible that the researcher’s own cultural background and biases could have affected the analysis. Great effort was put into keeping these biases on check, such as ensuring the development of positive rapport with each participant, recognizing the researcher’s own biases and epistemological stance at the beginning of the study. A member of the cultural group under study was asked to review the results and to provide feedback about the results to decrease the possible biases. Memoing was also utilized in order to help the researcher be reflective about her own biases and beliefs. However, the researcher’s statements and questioning in the interviews were excluded from the analysis even though she was an active participant in the conversation. Future qualitative research using semi-structured interviews should take into account the interviewers’ statements and recognize that interviews are interactions where participants’ answers are influenced by the interviewer and the context of the interview (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Another limitation was the inability to directly compare the Colombian youth’s answers to those of youth from other cultural backgrounds. It was of interest to understand how the Colombian youth’s perceptions of resilience-related concepts (competence, adversity, and health enhancing resources) were affected by their cultural beliefs. Although it was possible to establish cultural influences using previous research
evidence, it would have been more effective to recruit youth from diverse cultural backgrounds (i.e., Asian) in order to better understand the potential cultural nuances. Collecting data from culturally distinct samples could provide a more concrete way to investigate differences among individuals that belong to specific group. It would be important that future research attempting to investigate cultural influences in the perceptions of resilience related concepts employ sample groups that are culturally distinct.

Finally, the results from this exploratory qualitative study could provide a good foundation for future investigations. It would be of great interest to establish the degree of the relationships between competence, the presence of challenges, and the protective factors perceived as helpful among this population. Understanding the directions and dynamics of such relationships would be imperative to further extend the literature on the processes of resilience across cultures.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This investigation provided important evidence that contributes to the field of resilience across cultures. Based on the results from this investigation, the definitions of competence and well-being provided by Colombian immigrant youth living in Southern Ontario are highly influenced by traditional Latino cultural beliefs, more specifically familism. Moreover, it was found that they not only experienced many challenges related to their role as immigrants, but also that they found a significant number of assets in their environments that assisted them to overcome such challenges. Based on the Colombian youth’s ratings of the stress they experienced due to the immigration process, they were not at high risk of developing negative outcomes. Unfortunately, it was not possible to establish whether the adversity experienced due to immigration was mild and therefore
did not represent a high risk for positive development, or if the presence of the broad range of protective factors contributed to the youth’s perceptions of challenges as less stressful.

This study has important implications, not only for the resilience literature, but also for practitioners that work closely with immigrant communities. Using the results from this study, community organizations, settlement agencies, and mental health experts would be able to provide more culturally relevant services for Colombian immigrant youth. The design of such services should take into account that Colombian immigrant youth are similar to other Latino immigrant youth in the way they value their families, but they seem to be unique in the value they attribute to peer relationships and friendships. Furthermore, program designers should be cautioned not to overemphasize the role of the family as a health-enhancing resource for Colombian immigrant youth, but to also pay attention to other resources such as peer support and personal attributes.
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RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

Certification of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Participants

APPROVAL PERIOD: September 26, 2011 to September 26, 2012

REB NUMBER: 11AU017

TYPE OF REVIEW: Delegated Type 1

RESPONSIBLE FACULTY: SUE CHUANG

DEPARTMENT: Family Relations & Applied Nutrition

SPONSOR: N/A

TITLE OF PROJECT: Resilience of Colombian Immigrant Youth Living in Canada

CHANGES:
15 Dec 11: B.13 Recruitment; D. 17 Consent; E. 22 Confidentiality
04 Jan 12: B.10 Methodology

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human subjects in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University’s ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement.

The REB requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB. The REB must approve any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please complete the Change Request Form. If there is a change in your source of funding, or a previously unfunded project receives funding, you must report this as a change to the protocol.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Responsible Faculty, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.
If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, a final report and, if the approval period is longer than one year, annual reports. Continued approval is contingent on timely submission of reports.

**Membership of the Research Ethics Board:** B. Beresford, Ext.; F. Caldwell, Physician; K. Cooley, Alt. Health Care; J. Clark, PoliSci (alt); J. Devlin, OAC; J. Dwyer, FRAN; M. Dwyer, Legal; D. Dyck, CBS; D. Emslie, Physician (alt); H. Gilmour, Legal (alt); G. Holloway, CBS (alt); B. Ferguson, CME (alt); S. Henson, OAC (alt); L. Kuczynski, Chair; J. Minogue, EHS; I. Newby-Clark, Psychology (alt); L. Niel, OVC (alt); A. Papadopoulos, OVC; B. Power, Ext.; L. Robinson, CBS; V. Shalla, SOAN (alt); L. Son Hing, Psychology; J. Srbely, CBS (alt); T. Turner, SOAN; E. van Duren, CME.

Approved: 

Date: ______________________

per

Chair, Research Ethics Board
Appendix B

Are you in high school? Did you arrive to Canada less than 10 years ago? We want to talk to you!

Contact Maria for more information:

mcabalga@uoguelph.ca

Receive a $10 for your participation
Appendix C

E-mail for snowballing recruitment strategy

Subject heading: Research study on Colombian immigrant youth.

Dear ______:

My name is Maria Cabal and I am a Master student at the University of Guelph. I am currently completing a study about the experiences Colombian immigrant youth have when they arrive into Canada and I would like to invite to consider becoming a participant in my study. One of my current participants mentioned that you might be interested in becoming part of this project.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the immigration and settlement process of recent Colombian immigrant youth in Canada. To participate, you need to be in high school, you need to have arrived into Canada less than 10 years ago, and you need to have immigrated with a parent. Your participation will involve filling out a questionnaire and participate in a face-to-face interview. You will receive $10 for your participation.

I would like to schedule a time to talk with you on the phone to give you more information about the study. Please reply to this email with a phone number so that I can reach you. You can also call me at (519) 827-8204.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you.

Maria Cabal
Appendix D

Reply e-mail

Subject heading: Research study on Colombian immigrant youth.

Dear ______:

Thank you for taking an interest in my research on Colombian immigrant youth. The purpose of this study is to talk about the experiences you had when you arrived to Canada.

I would like to schedule a time to talk with you on the phone to give you more information about the study. Please reply to this email with a phone number so that I can reach you. You can also call me at (519) 827-8204.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you.

Maria Cabal
Appendix E

Consent form.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

Conceptualizations of Resilience by Colombian Immigrant Youth in Canada

You are asked to participate in a study conducted by Maria Cabal Garces as part of a Masters Thesis, from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph. She is supervised by Dr. Susan Chuang.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact: Maria Cabal Garces, mcabalga@uoguelph.ca, Masters student, University of Guelph or, Dr. Susan Chuang (advisor), schuang@uoguelph.ca, 519-824-4120 ext. 58389.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the immigration and settlement process of recent Colombian immigrant youth in Canada. As part of this study, it is of interest to examine the unique experiences of newcomer youth, the challenges they face, and how they dealt with these challenges.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 45 to 60 minute face-to-face interview related to the experiences of Colombian immigrant youth. You will participate in this research at a location that is comfortable to you. Your total time commitment will be less than 90 minutes.

If you wish to obtain information regarding the results of the study, please write your email on the consent form. Results will become available in the Fall of 2012.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Some people may feel uncomfortable discussing recounting the immigration stories, in general. However, you may stop answering interview questions at any time if you feel uncomfortable, or skip questions (during the interview) you do not feel comfortable answering. Also, if you desire, you may utilize the Counseling Services Resource sheet, which provides names and numbers for counselors who can discuss with you some of the
issues participating in this study may have raised. There will be no negative consequences should you stop or not answer certain questions.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There are some benefits to participating in this study. Many people enjoy participating in social science research of this type. You will learn about the process of conducting research on Colombian immigrant youth. You will also benefit by knowing that you are contributing to our understanding of how you adjust to Canada, the challenges that you experience and the resources that you find meaningful in dealing with such challenges.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will be provided with $10 for participating in this study. You will receive the compensation even if you do not answer some or all of the questions during the interview or questionnaire.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We cannot guarantee anonymity for persons participating in this project as it is possible the participant and interviewer may know each other. Also, there is the possibility that you and other participants in this study might know each other which might further affect the level of confidentiality. However, every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Your name will be substituted and no names will be mentioned in the thesis/reports.

You will not be asked to provide any identifying information in the interview, only in the demographic questionnaire. Your identity will be protected and identifying information such as your gender and your date of birth will be reported in an aggregate form (e.g., a 15 year old girl). Identified data will be kept for 7 years in a locked cabinet. The interview will be tape recorded to assure accuracy of the content, and then transcribed by the lead investigator of this study, Maria Cabal. Transcripts will not include identifying information and will be kept in a locked cabinet. Study data (including transcripts) will be saved on a password-protected computer. If you have contacted the main researcher through Facebook, please note that Facebook administrators have access to all the information that you provide through it, thus further reducing participant confidentiality. When on these types of sites, your membership is known to other members. To further ensure your confidentiality, the Facebook study page will be set up to only allow the main researcher to post information in the public wall and participants will be asked to communicate with the main researcher through the internal inbox option.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time while participating in the interview or while completing the questionnaire without negative consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Once you decide to withdraw from the study all the data you have provided will be destroyed immediately. If you would like to have your data removed from this study at a later time, email the principal investigator listed at the top of this information letter, and your statements will be removed from the transcript. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so (e.g., deliberate falsification of information).

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Officer
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1
Sandra Auld
Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I have read the information provided for the study “Conceptualizations of Resilience by Colombian Immigrant Youth in Canada” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I give permission to my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

___________________________________
Name of Parent or Guardian (please print)

___________________________________
Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

I have read the information provided for the study “Conceptualizations of Resilience by Colombian Immigrant Youth in Canada” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.

___________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

___________________________________
Signature of Participant Date
[OPTIONAL]

If you are interested in the results of this study, please leave your email address below. Your email address will only be used to send information regarding the completion and results from this study:
Appendix F

Adolescent Background Questionnaire

Interview ID # _______ (To be filled out by researcher)  Date: __________________

Participant Information

1. Date of Birth (month, day, year) ___________  2. Gender:  Male □ Female □

3. What grade are you in?
   a. 9th  b. 10th  c. 11th  d. 12th  e. Other _________

4. Are you employed?  Yes □  No □

5. If yes, what type of work?  Part time □  Full time □
   a. Number of hours that you work per week _______________

6. When did you move to Canada? ______________

7. When you arrived to Canada, what was your immigrant status?
   a. Refugee  b. Landed immigrant  c. Sponsored by family  d. Permanent Resident

8. Who did you immigrate with?
   a. Mother  Yes □  No □
   b. Father  Yes □  No □
   c. Siblings  Yes □  No □
   d. Number of siblings; Age of siblings ______________
   e. Extended family (Please list) _____________________

9. Have you lived anywhere else (other than Colombia) prior to moving to Canada?
   Yes □  No □

10. If yes, where? ______________  When? ______________  For how long? ______________
11. Please answer the following:
   a) How well do you speak your first language? (Please circle your answer)
      
      1  2  3  4  5
      Completely fluent         Not fluent at all

   b) How well do you read in your first language? (Please circle your answer)
      
      1  2  3  4  5
      Completely fluent         Not fluent at all

   b) How well do you write in your first language? (Please circle your answer)
      
      1  2  3  4  5
      Completely fluent         Not fluent at all

12. Please answer the following:

   a) How well do you speak English? (Please circle your answer)
      
      1  2  3  4  5
      Completely fluent         Not fluent at all

   b) How well can you read in English? (Please circle your answer)
      
      1  2  3  4  5
      Completely fluent         Not fluent at all

   c) How well can you write in English? (Please circle your answer)
      
      1  2  3  4  5
      Completely fluent         Not fluent at all
13. Please list the main three challenges that you have faced since moving to Canada and why
   a. ______________________________
      ______________________________
   b. ______________________________
      ______________________________
   c. ______________________________
      ______________________________

Household Information

14. What country were your parents born?
   a. Mother ________________
   b. Father ________________

15. What are your parents’ CURRENT occupations? (if applicable)
   a. Mother ________________
   b. Father ________________
      Number of Jobs ______
      Number of Jobs ______
      Full Time □
      Full Time □
      Part Time □
      Part Time □

16. What are your current living arrangements?
   a. Rent apartment/house
   b. Own house/condo
   c. Live with family or friends and do not pay rent
   d. Live with family or friends and pay some rent

17. Other housing arrangements (Specify): ______________________________

18. Please list all the family members who live in your household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First name (or pseudonym)</th>
<th>Relation to you</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>________________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>________________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you!
Appendix G

Acculturation Scale

*In this questionnaire, we want to know about your experience living in Canada. Please circle only one answer which best describes you in each question.*

1. How many non-Colombian friends do you have?

   None  1 to 2  3 to 4  5 to 6  7 or more

2. How many Colombian friends do you have?

   None  1 to 2  3 to 4  5 to 6  7 or more

3. How often do you get together with your Non-Colombian friends outside of school? (e.g., parties, socializing at their houses or yours)

   Almost  Once a month  Twice a month  Once a week  More than once a week

   Never

4. How often do you get together with your Colombian friends outside of school? (e.g., parties, socializing at their houses or yours)

   Almost  Once a month  Twice a month  Once a week  More than once a week

   Never

5. Do you enjoy socializing/talking with Non-Colombian people?

   Not at all  A little  Sometimes  Most of the Time  All the time
6. Do you enjoy socializing/talking with Colombian people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>All the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. How well do you speak in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. How well do you read in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. How well do you write in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. How often do you read English novels or magazines?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>2 to 4 times a week</th>
<th>Almost Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11. How often do you read Colombian novels or magazines?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>2 to 4 times a week</th>
<th>Almost Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

12. Do you like the Colombian culture?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
13. How often do you watch Colombian TV?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>2 to 4 times a week</th>
<th>Almost Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

14. How often do you listen to music in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>2 to 4 times a week</th>
<th>Almost Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

15. How often do you listen to music in Spanish?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>2 to 4 times a week</th>
<th>Almost Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

16. Do you like North American food?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17. Do you like Colombian food?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

18. Are you proud of the Colombian culture?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Much</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

19. Do you celebrate North American holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving, Halloween etc.)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost all the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
20. Do you celebrate Colombian holidays (e.g. Independence Day, etc.)?

| Never | Hardly ever | Sometimes | Often | Almost all the time |

21. Do you think you are …

| Colombian | Latino | Colombian-Canadian | Latino-Canadian | Canadian |

22. Are you happy to be a Colombian?

| Not at all | A little | Somewhat | Much | Very Much |

23. Are you happy to be a Canadian?

| Not at all | A little | Somewhat | Much | Very Much |

Thank you!
Appendix H

Interview Questions

[Introductions. Talk about the reasons to participate. Researcher will start the introduction and talk about her own background as a Colombian immigrant.]

I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in the study. My name is Maria Cabal and I am a Masters student at the University of Guelph. I am under the supervision of Dr. Susan Chuang. I will be tape recording our conversation so that valuable information will not be missed, since I cannot write that fast. This interview will be transcribed word for word and I will be using this information as part of my thesis research.

As it was explained in the consent form that your parents and you signed, the purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences that Colombian youth like yourself have when coming to Canada. I am mostly interested in the specific features about your cultural background, challenges that you might have encountered when migrating, and factors that might have helped you overcome such challenges. You are here today to share your thoughts, perspectives and beliefs regarding this topic. I want you to know that I am myself Colombian and that I also immigrated into this country very recently. Please know that no answer is a wrong answer, and that you may feel free to respond however you want. The interview should last between 45 and 60 minutes. Also, I have a background questionnaire that should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. If you wish to receive a summary of the results, you can include an email address in the questionnaire.

There is very little risk in taking part in this study. You may feel uncomfortable discussing your experiences or thoughts related to your immigration experiences, but it is your choice to not answer any of the questions. Your thoughts, ideas and feelings, however, are always welcome and highly valued. Please remember; there are no right or wrong answers. Therefore, I invite you share your ideas and experiences. You can also choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and still be eligible for your gift.

Now, I would like to mention some important information about confidentiality. Since we are doing this interview face-to-face, I cannot guarantee you complete anonymity. However, you can choose to use your real or a fake name during the interview. If you choose to use your real name during the interview, that information along with the information from your questionnaire can be linked back to you via the consent form. However, I will not be mentioning your name in the study or any report. I won’t ask you to give any personal identifying information during the interview. I will
keep the recordings from this interview, along with the transcripts, and the questionnaires in a safe and secure space in a locked cabinet.

Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Let us start.

1. How long have you been in Canada?
2. Where exactly in Colombia are you from?
3. What do you miss the most from home?
4. Do you consider the Colombian and the Canadian cultures different?
   a. How are they different from each other?
   b. Do you think that you act differently here than when you were in Colombia?
   c. If yes, how so?
   d. Do you see yourself as more Colombian or more Canadian?
   e. Why?
5. For what reasons did you, and your family, move to Canada?
6. “Doing Well”
   a. What does it mean to ‘do well’ at your age (behaviours)?
   b. What does it mean to do well in school?
   c. What does it mean to do well in your family?
   d. What does it mean to do well with your peers?
   e. If you were still in Colombia, how would you describe a young Colombian who is doing well?
   f. How would you describe a young Canadian (white) who is doing well?
   g. Are they different? Why?
   h. Do you consider that you are doing well? Why or why not?
   i. In a scale from 1 to 10, how ‘well’ do you think you are doing? one being not ‘doing well’ at all, 5 doing O.K. but not as much as you can, and 10 doing very well.
7. What are the most significant challenges that you found when you immigrated to Canada?
   a. Let’s talk about your first challenge:
      i. When did this occur? (Be mindful of early, middle, late in immigration/ Provide an example)
      ii. What happened?
      iii. Can you describe the challenge?
      iv. How has it affected you in adjusting?
      v. How did you cope with this challenge?
      vi. What strategies did you use to cope with it?
vii. What factor or factors in your environment have helped you the most?

viii. Why has this factor(s) been so helpful?
b. Ok, now let’s talk about the next challenge (Go over the questions again)
c. If you had to rate these challenges from 1 to 3 based on their effect on your ability to be successful, one being the one that had the greatest effect and three the one that had the least, how would you rate them?
Table 1

*Coding System for Definitions of Doing Well*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family context</td>
<td>Factors that are needed to have successful family relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being respectful</td>
<td>Showing respect to other family members, especially parents or elder members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help parents and family members</td>
<td>Providing emotional and instrumental help for family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnectedness</td>
<td>Developing a sense of intimacy and closeness with other family members; a sense of harmony within the family unit. Mutual affection; being engaged in family activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling essential needs</td>
<td>Having essential needs met. This included the family’s needs as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal indicators</td>
<td>Psychological and behavioural responses that are needed to define oneself as doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School context</td>
<td>Factors needed to do well academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting involved</td>
<td>Being engaged in school-related activities that are non-academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good performance</td>
<td>Attaining high grades in school; keeping up with school work; fulfilling their school duties, being able to attend post-secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing with Peers</td>
<td>Having positive and meaningful relationships in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social context</td>
<td>Factors that are needed to have successful peer relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being oneself</td>
<td>The ability of displaying one’s personality and identity with their friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving advice</td>
<td>Being able to provide recommendations or opinions on how their friends can do better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnectedness</td>
<td>Having a deep connection and a high degree of intimacy with friends; having friends who are trustworthy; getting along and spending time together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Coding System for Personal Challenges for Colombian Immigrant Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to climate</td>
<td>Difficulty adjusting to the extreme winter conditions in Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
<td>Challenges related to the differences between the youth’s cultural behaviours, beliefs, and norms and those of others’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Culture</td>
<td>Challenges related to adapting to and learning the Canadian culture in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic disparities and inclusion</td>
<td>The challenges that are caused by the various cultural beliefs and values among different ethnic groups. This includes aggression caused by ethnic group differences or rivalries, and racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family related challenges</td>
<td>Difficulties related to the youth’s parents or extended families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental knowledge</td>
<td>Parent-child disconnect when trying to understanding school options and school related struggles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language brokering</td>
<td>Difficulties related to the Colombian adolescent having to translate and interpret English communications or documents for their parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing family</td>
<td>Emotional difficulties related to the lack of physical proximity with family members left back in Colombia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Challenges related to the amount of supervision the parent is exercising on the adolescent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial issues</td>
<td>Challenges related to financial matters and/or parents’ inability to work until their immigrant process is resolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Difficulties related to not knowing how to communicate in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relations</td>
<td>Difficulties related to peer relationships due to the lack of language knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School performance</td>
<td>Difficulty completing school work, assignments, or gaining good grades due to the lack of language skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>The challenge of meeting new friends when the participant first arrives into Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-establishment</td>
<td>Difficulties related to the changes caused by moving from one country to the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School environment and system</td>
<td>Difficulty navigating and adapting to the Canadian school system. These also include difficulties related to teachers and other school staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undefined immigrant status</td>
<td>Challenges that related to not having a defined immigrant status. This includes difficulties related to uncertainty about the near future and difficulty accessing educational programs, scholarships, or abroad volunteering program because the participant’s immigrant status has not been resolved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Coding System for Health Enhancing Resources for Colombian Immigrant Youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental resources</td>
<td>Factors in the overall environment that contributed to overcoming challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Perceiving elements from their overall communities as helpful in coping with the challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td>Getting involved in activities not related to school that were perceived as helpful in coping with the challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Using TV, music, books, and magazines and aids in learning English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School environment</td>
<td>School features such as the educational system, the teachers, and the environment in general is perceived as helpful in coping with challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual resources</td>
<td>Factors within oneself that were found to be helpful in overcoming challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in mindset</td>
<td>Arriving to a more positive understanding of the participants’ challenge over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping strategies</td>
<td>The psychological and/or behavioural responses that diminish the physical, emotional and psychological effects of challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language brokering</td>
<td>Having to help other people, such as peers or family members, by translating for them is perceived as helpful in overcoming the challenge of learning English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities</td>
<td>Personal characteristics and traits that are perceived by the participant as helpful in coping with the challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous experiences</td>
<td>Perceiving that things that were learned in the past through previous challenges could be used to cope with the present challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set goals</td>
<td>Having a clear view of what the participant wants to achieve was perceived as helpful in learning the new language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social resources</td>
<td>Instrumental support received from those with whom the youth had a relationship with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Relying on both immediate and extended family members as a source of help and support when coping with a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Having friends is perceived as helpful when coping with a challenge. It also includes instances when making or finding new friends is perceived as helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>Using prayer and having faith in God to cope with the challenge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>