The Experiences of Lesbian and Gay First Generation Immigrants to Canada:

Negotiating Identities Post-Migration

by

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A Thesis

presented to

The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

The Experiences of Lesbian and Gay First Generation Immigrants to Canada:
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The present study explored the experiences of lesbian and gay first generation immigrants to Canada by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 participants and by employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Experiences pertaining to the negotiation of sexual identity and other central identities post-immigration in the context of diverse, and at times, contrasting cultural influences and social belongings were the focus. The psychological literature on sexual minority first generation migrants is rare on this topic (Huang et al., 2010), especially within the Canadian research terrain (O’Neill & Kia, 2012). Participants offered rich discourse around four main themes: (A) Post-immigration change around sexual identity, (B) Negotiating sexuality post-immigration-intrapersonally, (C) Negotiating sexuality post-immigration-interpersonally, and (D) Post-immigration reflection. Implications are discussed with regards to the study’s potential in enriching psychological research on both immigration and sexual identity domains. Furthermore, thoughts on potential future venues in research and practical implementation of the study results are offered.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the guiding forces and positive energies in my life that have made it possible for me to be in a position to give back with research. Thanks to my family for offering me opportunities to be exposed to the experiences that drive my passions in research and beyond.

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Professor Saba Safdar, for her undying encouragement, patience, and mentorship throughout this research process, as this process wasn’t always easy! Thanks also to my committee member, Dr. Serge Desmarais, for being so enthusiastic about this vision, as well, and for thorough guidance over this research period. You have both greatly enriched and helped to evolve this journey!

Great thanks to faculty for advice on this project, and especially to Professor Kieran O’Doherty and Professor Jeffrey Yen, for generously offering their time to students who employ qualitative methodologies, which I greatly benefited from. To my fellow graduate students whose support is invaluable and often a much needed boost: Thank you!

I cannot forget to mention the kindness of the service providers and volunteers of the community and campus organizations that helped me make recruitment a reality. To Oyo: I cannot express in words my gratitude for your continuous faith in this project, as well as your support in making it happen. Finally, I would like to thank my participants. Truly, without you, this project would still be an idea, but your stories made it what it is now and what it could be.
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For researchers, investigating prejudice and discrimination, answering the question of “Which group is ignored?” may be as critical to understanding the nature of prejudice and discrimination as answering the question “Which group is the target?” (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p.388)

Introduction

Within psychological literature in the North American research domain, there is quite substantial and growing research on first generation immigrants, i.e. immigrants born in their country of origin, especially around topics of acculturation, ethnic and cultural identity, and discrimination post-immigration (American Psychological Association, 2012; Esses, Deaux, Lalonde, & Brown, 2010). A PsycINFO search for the keywords ‘immigrant’ or ‘immigration’ resulted in 1088 hits for the period 1980–1989, 2330 hits for the period 1990–1999, and 5909 hits for the period 2000–2009 (Esses et al., 2010). Similarly, although not at the same rate, research on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community has grown over the past couple of decades (Mitchell, Howarth, Kotecha & Creegan, 2009). Mitchell et al. (2009) note sexual identity formation, discriminatory experiences, and psychological health are some of the main areas researched in sexual minority psychology research.

First generation immigrants, often times, experience significant pre- and post-migration stressors, including discrimination and prejudice, and acculturative stress (Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005). Members of the LGBTQ community face similar experiences pertaining to discrimination but also distinct challenges, often having to decide whether to reveal or conceal sexual identity (Espelage, Aragon & Birkett, 2008; Garnets, 2002). Despite the growing focus on both of these communities, psychological research that has devoted itself to the unique challenges, experiences, and strengths of those at the intersection of these statuses/identities, namely first generation LGBTQ immigrants, is very rare (Huang et al., 2010). The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of Lesbian and Gay (LG) first generation
immigrants to Canada. Specifically, their negotiation of sexual identity with other central aspects/identities, e.g., pertaining to culture/ethnicity post immigration is explored within the different socio-cultural segments they navigate.

Research on immigrants has maintained a heteronormative lens, often overlooking sexual diversity (Luibheid, 2004; Wiesner-Hanks, 2011). In addition, most LGBTQ research has been dominated by a research focus on the native-born Anglo-Saxon/Caucasian gay or lesbian, often disregarding other types of ethnic background and/or citizenship status (Huang et al., 2010; Mitchell et al., 2009). Within some literature, namely queer migration and/or sexual migration scholarship, migration and sexuality scholarship do meet to produce a critical exploration at this intersection (Carrillo, 2004; Lee & Brotman, 2011). This domain concerns itself with exploring the relocation of sexual minorities and the potential reasons and impacts of such relocation. Disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, and immigration law tend to be dominating this relatively scarce literature. This exploration at the intersection of immigration and sexuality is often theoretical or historical, often falling outside the psychological domain, and often not accentuating, empirically, LGBTQ immigrants’ experiences within society (Huang et al., 2010; Lee & Brotman, 2011). However, this literature is valuable in that it urges us to direct much needed attention to the global circulation of non-Western gay and lesbian identities and the negotiation of these identities in a cross-cultural context (Luibheid, 2004; Wiesner-Hanks, 2011).

According to some researchers, such as Boyd (2006) and O’Neill and Kia (2012) attention has been given to some specific sub-groups of first generation immigrants to Canada, such as immigrant youth and women, but the experiences of LGBTQ migrants to Canada have been largely overlooked. As Reading and Rubin (2011) note, sexual minority migrants often encounter an array of psychological, economic, interpersonal, and cultural challenges.
LaViolette further states that immigration for LGBTQ migrants can be more painful and discriminatory than for non-sexual minority immigrants (as cited in Fischer, 2010).

While there are similarities that gay and lesbian migrants of ethnic minority or of non-Western cultural backgrounds share with Caucasian/Anglo-Saxon Canadian-born gays and lesbians, as they are both situated within largely heterosexist societies, researchers such as Akerlund and Cheung note there are also unique challenges in being a “multiple minority” (as cited in Yang, 2008, p. 29). Croteau, Talbot, Lance, and Evans emphasize individuals can have differing experiences depending on the composition and visibility of their oppressed and privileged statuses (as cited in Harper, Jernewall & Zea, 2004). Caucasian Canadian-born sexual minorities, therefore, may experience oppression around their sexual identities, yet hold more privileged status based on their ethnicity, skin colour and citizenship status. Therefore, it is not advised to generalize to ethnic minority and/or non-Western immigrant LGBTQ populations from research that is often conducted on Caucasian Canadian-born LGBTQ populations.

Often, combined discrimination from ethnic/cultural community, the white mainstream LGBTQ community, as well as mainstream society, is embedded within the lives of non-heterosexual ethnic minorities (Harper et al., 2004; Ibanez et al. 2009; Meyer, 2010; Szymanski & Sung, 2010). Researchers such as Akerlund and Cheung (as cited in Yang, 2008), Aster (2012), and Eguchi (2006) note that gay and lesbian ethnic minorities are faced with integrating ethnic and sexual identities in a society that does not fully respect either one. Migrants to North America are also often exposed to a new and unfamiliar stratification system that gives status based on skin colour (Deaux & Wiley, 2007) or what is often times referred within literature as ‘race’. In this paper I will move away from language that may connote categorization of the human race based on dichotomized grouping of skin pigmentation (white versus black). The term
skin colour will be utilized since it allows discourse that includes a broader range of skin pigmentation in our discussions (e.g., for the discussion of European, Latin American, South (East) Asian, African participants).

In addition, for first generation immigrants, other layers of complexity must be taken into account, such as pre-immigration stressors and experiences, acculturative stress, language barriers, social isolation, and shift in how sexual identity and other identities are experienced post migration (Chen & Vollick, 2013; Espin, 1997; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010). First generation immigrants often have to learn to integrate newly acquired identities around ethnicity and immigrant status, and, potentially, status based on skin colour, and often have to become familiarized with the associated social experiences such as prejudice (Cantu, 2009; Espin, 1997). Furthermore, shifting identities, including sexual identity may have to be negotiated differently than pre-migration (Espin, 1997), as new sexual norms may apply in the new country.

A definition of culture is relevant here but definitions vary within the literature. In its more traditional sense, culture has been defined as the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired” shared by people within a given society (Tylor, 1871, p. 54). However, more recent definitions have challenged previous assumptions and propose that culture can be located within the societal context rather than within the individual’s mind (Schwartz, 2013). In that sense, societal culture can be mediated to individuals per societal institutions, policies, and governments. Both definitions, as will become clear, will be relevant to this study as individual’s cultural values, as well as the national and socio-political context in which they are situated in will be discussed.
Researchers, such as Mao, McCormick and Van De Ven (2002), also point out broad individualism-collectivism cultural divides between Western and non-Western cultures can affect negotiation of sexual identity. The individualism-collectivism cultural dimension was initially proposed by Hofstede (1980) and describes the extent to which allegiances to personal interests versus in-group interests are upheld within a culture. Mao, McCormick and Van De Ven (2002) find that for LGBTQ individuals from non-Western collectivist cultures, wherein stronger emphasis is placed on in-group responsibilities than personal desires, integrating cultural and sexual identities may be more complex than for those from Western backgrounds. Therefore, LGBTQ ethnic minority immigrants and/or those from non-Western cultures may reside at the intersection of all those complexities addressed above, negotiating multiple minority statuses pertaining to their heritage culture/ethnicity, skin colour, sexual orientation and citizenship status (Chen, & Vollick, 2013).

Within research, understanding intersectionality as a lived experience is often neglected while theoretical abstraction is emphasized (Taylor, Hines & Casey, 2011). One such abstraction however may explain why LGBTQ immigrants’ experiences are often neglected in research and society. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) believe holding multiple sub-ordinate identities (e.g., sexual, ethnic, cultural identities) can situate one within an ‘intersectional invisibility’. They propose that androcentric, ethnocentric, and hetero-centric ideologies create a tendency for people who have multiple subordinate-group identities (such as immigrant and gay) to be defined as non-prototypical members of their respective identity groups. Such individuals are at the risk to be marginal members within marginalized groups. This status can relegate them to a position of social invisibility, which can have implications for their well-being and social integration.
The main purpose of this study is to contribute to the erosion of this invisibility by bridging these research domains or identities often researched separately within psychology. It is at the heart of this qualitative study to highlight the lived experiences of lesbian and gay first generation immigrants to Canada and give voice to often unheard stories. Individuals with multiple oppressed identities may often experience stressors from the internal domain, or stressors brought on by self-perception of potentially conflicting identities (intrapersonal), as well as the social domain, such as stressors due to perceptions held by others about them (interpersonal) (Nettles & Balter, 2011). For this study, first generation migrants’ experience of negotiating potential shifting identities pertaining to sexuality and culture, are explored by semi-structured interviews. In addition, potential newly acquired statuses post migration such as immigrant status and status based on ethnicity or skin colour are also explored. Their associated perception of self, as well as their social experiences within different socio-cultural segments within the Canadian society are highlighted. This is accomplished utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, a qualitative methodology best suited to explore meaning making of lived experiences first hand.

As the following literature review will show much of the thin research terrain is dominated by studies conducted within the United States, making Canadian research crucial. Due to differences in immigration policies for sexual minorities and LGBTQ rights and policies in general, as well as Canada’s unique stance on multiculturalism, specific research with LGBTQ immigrants to Canada is needed (O’Neill & Kia, 2012).

**Overview of Common Research Focus and Gaps**

A fairly recent report, released in March of 2013, estimates there is a quite significant number of LGBTQ immigrants within the U.S. (Gates, 2013). Unfortunately, Canadian statistics
were not available. It is estimated that around the time of the report, there were approximately 267,000 LGBT-identified foreign-born individuals among the adult undocumented immigrant population (close to 3% of that sub-group) and an estimated 637,000 LGBT-identified foreign-born individuals among the adult documented immigrant population (close to 3% of that sub-group) in the U.S. These are viewed to be lower-bound estimates of the true population, since many LGBTQ immigrants may hesitate to identify as non-heterosexual (Gates, 2013).

The fairly considerable representation of self-identified LGBTQ first generation immigrants within the population, unfortunately, has not translated into the psychological research literature. Although not distinguishing participants based on immigrant generational status, a much needed and valuable content analysis that focused specifically on psychological research with LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) ethnic minorities was conducted by Huang et al. (2010). They identified current common research focus and research gaps by indexing U.S. journal abstracts from 1998-2007 in PsycINFO; unfortunately, a Canadian version was not available. Studies that focused on LGB ethnic minorities constituted about only 3.5% of all sexual orientation abstracts and less than 1% of ethnic minority abstracts during this period.

The article by Huang et al. (2010) also states that research on LGB ethnic minorities is not only very rare in psychological research, but that the breadth of topics addressed is also quite narrow. Most of the studies represented during the time span are empirical, non-experimental, quantitative studies; and qualitative studies that explore experiences of ethnic minority non-heterosexuals are rare. The top five topics of focus for empirical studies revolve around AIDS/HIV, high-risk sexual behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse, psychological symptomatology, and condom use. Interestingly, the top two topics in non-empirical, theoretical publications are
issues related to experiences with identity intersections and negotiation, and ethnic minority/socio-cultural issues, which are the foci of this present empirical study.

My own thorough literature review also revealed that research on risk behaviour (e.g., substance abuse and HIV risk) of ethnic minority non-heterosexuals (e.g., Hahm, Wong, Huang, Onoff & Lee, 2008; Lee & Hahm, 2012), as well as on psychological symptomatology (Harper et al. 2004; Ibanez et al., 2009; Meyer, 2010; Szymanski & Sung, 2010) is relatively more common. These studies are valuable in that they emphasize a need in researching LGBTQ ethnic minorities' or immigrants' unique challenges, indicating this population might be more vulnerable than their heterosexual counterparts. However, some researchers believe accumulation of such studies without the appreciation of unique socio-cultural factors and the complexities involved in negotiating multiple identities and belongings pertinent to LGBTQ ethnic minorities’ lives may contribute to this population being pathologized or misunderstood (Garnets, 2002; Harper et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2010).

Huang et al. (2010) note qualitative exploration of this sub-community’s experiences around meaning making and negotiation /management of their multiple identities is very rare. However, as mentioned previously, scholars believe this is very important to address, as a challenge for LGBTQ ethnic minority individuals is to integrate multiple identities, each of which can be disparaged (Garnets, 2002). However, outside of the context of LGBTQ refugees experiencing the refugee process specifically, very limited literature exists in relation to LGBTQ newcomers’ experiences after settlement in Canada (Lee & Brotman, 2011). In addition, Huang et al. (2010) recommend for future researchers to make distinction based on immigrant generational status, as studies that focus on LGBTQ individuals who moved to North America as adults are even rarer than studies on ethnic minority LGBTQ populations born in North America.
For this literature review, due to the scarcity of research on LGBTQ first generation immigrants, I will also draw from literature not specifically on first generation immigrants. The literature review will highlight research on the intra- and interpersonal negotiation of multiple identities of ethnic minority/LGBTQ populations from non-Western cultural backgrounds, specifically focusing on ethnic/cultural identity and sexual identity. Then I will turn more specifically to research that includes the interplay of migration experience and post migration settlement in this negotiation. Lastly, the small Canadian literature relevant to this topic will be explored.

**Negotiation of Ethnic/Cultural Minority and Sexual Minority Identities**

Frenk (2011) proposes in order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of identity negotiation within the cross-cultural context or the context of migration we need to further understand the conceptual division between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. According to Heidi Keller (as cited in Frenk, 2011), there typically is an independent construal of the self (individualism), that emphasizes unique personal attributes and independence (commonly identified with the West); and there is an interdependent construal (collectivism), where individuals understand themselves as fundamentally connected on others, especially the family. Fouad and colleagues (as cited in Chen & Vollick, 2013) note the value of the family to the immigrant as an emotional support and, even, see it as the decision making unit within more collectivist cultures. Triandis (as cited in Mao, McCormick & Van De Ven, 2002) further argues each culture and each individual is believed to hold both individualistic and collectivist tendencies.

However, some research has explored how this macro cultural divide *can* translate into day to day negotiation of sexual identity for sexual minorities from non-Western cultural backgrounds. Although heterosexism exists in both cultural contexts, Pope and Chung (as cited
in Chen & Vollick, 2013) note that within more collectivist cultures, homosexuality can be viewed as a highly individualistic behaviour as it separates one from the general norms of the (heterosexual) majority. They believe individuals in this context can encounter more difficulties as they try to prioritize amongst their multiple identities. Even in the absence of religiosity, sexual minority individuals from more collectivist cultures can be held to cultural code standards that can complicate sexual identity negotiation (Fisher, 2003; Jaspal, 2012; Levy, 2008). For example, open conversation about sexuality in general and/or public declaration of one’s sexual identity may be severely discouraged by these codes(Aster, 2012; Espin, 1997), while public gay and lesbian identities are often championed by Western mainstream LGBTQ culture (Mao, McCormick & Van De Ven, 2002). LGBTQ identity may be perceived as a sign of assimilation into White mainstream culture, a public announcement that reflects badly on one’s culture, a violation of gender role expectations (Greene, 1997).

Mitchell et al. (2009), in a sexual orientation research review summary, highlight some common issues specific to non-Western LGBTQ populations who live within Western countries (e.g. those of African, Asian, Latin backgrounds). These include feelings of alienation and/or discrimination from the queer community, ethnic community and the general wider community. In addition, dissonance between cultural identity and sexual orientation and experiences of being torn between identities are common concerns. Based on this review, Mitchell et al. (2009) suggest that in studying multiple identity negotiations, themes of identity dissonance and alienation would appear to require further research and further development for LGBTQ BME (black and minority ethnic) communities in general. In addition, Akerlund and Cheung (as cited in Yang, 2008) in their study with African-, Latin-, and Asian-American gay and lesbians found similar commonalities in experience and a tendency to feel having to choose between cultures.
They emphasize how the centrality of the family unit, traditionalism, and gender role expectations make expression of sexual identity and self-identification a delicate balancing act. These notions are especially crucial to explore as Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, and Soto (as cited in Enno, 2012) note the ability to successfully integrate ethnic/cultural and sexual minority identities in a positive way is related to better psychosocial outcomes.

Common findings emerge from other studies pertaining to the balancing of personal desires around sexuality with family expectations while both were important to the individual (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Phellas, 2005; Russell, 2012). On an intrapersonal level, there may be challenges with self-identifying as a sexual minority within families’/ethnic community’s cultural context and, at times, associated feelings of self-stigma. Some participants describe being able to ‘compartmentalize’ their multiple identities, living a life where both identities are kept separate; a feeling of living in separate worlds (Boulden, 2009; Jaspal, 2012; Phellas, 2005). Others describe much desire and distress associated with attempting to reconcile two or more opposing identities, and this usually pertains to sexual identity and cultural identity. They see these identities or worlds as conflicting due to negative messages about or silencing around homosexuality within their family/ethnic community context (Jaspal, 2012; Phellas, 2005), as well as due to, at times, the mainstream LGBTQ community’s unreceptiveness towards cultural diversity (Mao, McCormick & Van De Ven, 2002).

Associated feelings of frustration, depression, and self-stigma are often common in these cases reviewed (Phellas, 2005; Yang, 2008). Strategies for minimizing these threats include managing sexuality, such as closely monitoring and restricting one’s expression of sexuality outside of the queer community or even complying with cultural expectations, such as entering relationships with the opposite sex (Jaspal, 2012; Phellas, 2005). These strategies are employed,
often, to save face within the family and community and to maintain social support.

Intrapersonal negotiation often takes place within the backdrop of greater societal identity negotiations, wherein loyalties to ethnic community, queer community and mainstream community need to be delicately weighed. Some studies conducted reveal some complex social and interpersonal challenges for this sub-community, due to their belonging to multiple social groups. For example, Szymanski and Sung (2010) report that in addition to internalized heterosexism and internal tension, societal racism and heterosexism appear to have cumulative negative psychological effects for ethnic minority LGBTQ persons. LGBTQ ethnic minorities and/or immigrants may rely more heavily on familial support as the outside mainstream society may not be as inclusive to them as it may be to Caucasian Canadian-born individuals (Aster, 2012). Boulden (2009) suggests that the same factors that have been found to be protective against the effects of racism, such as family and ethnic community, may not be as accessible as buffers to LGBTQ ethnic minorities if they are primary risk factors for rejection based on sexual orientation. Hence, these individuals may not disclose their sexual identity or self-identify as non-heterosexual as this support is crucial in the face of external societal discrimination already present (O’Neill & Kia, 2012).

However, there can be a disconnect from these sources of potential support (e.g., family, ethnic community). While first generation immigrants and LGBTQ individuals can each buffer discriminatory and stressful experiences by seeking support from their respective communities, LGBTQ immigrants can be less likely to enjoy a safe haven in either of the communities (Nakamura, Chan & Fischer, 2013). Nakamura et al. (2013) conducted focus group discussions and compared the level of connectedness and discrimination that first and second generation Asian immigrant MSM, i.e. men who have sex with men, experienced within the LGBTQ
community and their ethnic community situated in Canada. The first generation immigrants in
their study report feeling less connected to their ethnic communities than their second generation
counterparts and perceive more homophobia within this community. The authors emphasize that
while second generation immigrants may have more alternative social support resources
available, new immigrants often do not enjoy these resources. They also conclude that sexual
minority first generation immigrants are less likely to enjoy the same level of support from their
ethnic communities as heterosexual immigrants often do and often have to lead “dual lives”.

Authors such as Cantu (2009), and Lee and Brotman (2011) speak to the danger of over-
emphasizing homophobia in non-Western cultures and also direct attention to the systemic
oppression that exists within the West and North American context. LGBTQ immigrants do not
automatically find a safe haven post migration, due to racism and homophobia present in the new
land (Brown, 2012; Cantu, 2009; Rhein, 2011). For example, Ibanez et al. (2009) conducted a
study in which 911 Latino gay men, recruited from three U.S. cities, report experiences of
discrimination based on skin colour and ethnic background within and outside the gay
community. Other authors draw attention to prejudice towards as well as sexual objectification of
ethnic minority LGBTQ populations within the mainstream LGBTQ community (Brown, 2012;
Cantu, 2009; Goh, 2006; Harper et al., 2004; Watt, 2003). In addition, it would not be fair to
single out some cultures without referring to some historical/political factors that may have
encouraged some sub-groups to more strongly uphold heterosexism. For example, some
historically oppressed ethnic groups, such as those originating from African descent, may reject
homosexuality to assert normalcy due to a history of stigmatization within Western countries;
others, such as Natives, may emphasize reproduction due to a history of genocide of their people
(Greene, 1997).
Embedded within these accounts are also experiences of family and community acceptance for LGBTQ immigrants (Mireshghi & Matsumoto, 2008; Poljski, 2011). Meyer (2010) emphasizes also that identity conflict can be exaggerated in the literature and media amongst LGBTQ ethnic minority populations due to pre-conceptions about the mismatch of these identities; and researchers are advised to be open to accounts of a sense of unified self and/or lack of this intrapersonal tension. For some individuals, although there may be an awareness that others in society perceive a mismatch between their sexual orientation and culture or ethnic background, they themselves may not experience a mismatch at the self-concept level (Meyer & Ouellette, 2009). Authors such as Mao, McCormick and Van De Ven, (2002), Phellas (2005), and Reading and Rubin (2011) indicate that even in the presence of complex tension between sexuality and culture, many of their participants report retaining a deep attachment to their culture and/or a desire not to completely assimilate to western mainstream gay culture. Authors like Mireshghi and Matsumoto (2008), and Tremble et al. (as cited in Fygetakis, 1997) urge us to also pay attention to the potential buffering effects of more collectivist cultures in cases where there is familial willingness towards acceptance of the gay or lesbian individual. These authors highlight how the cultural emphasis on responsibility towards family can manifest itself in a strong unification of this support system during this identity negotiation. Meyer and Ouellette (2009) also emphasize how a perceived mismatch between identities can act as a motivator towards attempts to reconcile these aspects of oneself. Ethnic minority LGBTQ individuals often make the most of what has been called ‘situated freedom’ by Greene (as cited in Meyer & Ouellette, 2009, p.100) -that is freedom exercised within constraints that are often inevitable for this sub-population.
My focus for this study is to explore these intra- and interpersonal negotiations, as well as potential resilience and strategies for managing potential conflicts. Potential cultural resources that could alleviate tension and facilitate identity negotiation are often neglected within this literature. In addition to negotiating sexual and cultural/ethnic identities, LGBTQ immigrants likely have to negotiate new (e.g., immigrant status/status based on skin colour) and potential shifting identities (e.g., sexual identity). The very few accessible studies that are devoted specifically to first generation sexual minority non-western/ethnic minority immigrants will be explored next.

**LGBTQ First Generation Immigrant Research relevant to Identity Negotiation**

The very few empirical studies conducted with first generation sexual minority immigrants not only highlight the complexities of identity negotiation as discussed by the previous studies. In addition, the interplay of migration and settlement experiences in transforming those identities, and the gains and losses in status and freedom that LGBTQ immigrants experience with migration around those identities are noted. Carrillo (2004) points out that researchers have minimal knowledge about how sexual identities and behaviours change with migration and calls for more enquiry in the area. Some literature (Bianchi et al. 2007; Espin, 1997; Kuntsman, 2003; Lee & Brotman, 2011) highlights how realization or awareness of same sex attraction or sexual identity can follow migration due to factors such as access to language that describes sexual identity, resources, cultural openness, anonymity. However, LGBTQ immigrants do not always automatically express their sexual selves post migration. Although, migrants report greater sexual freedom and less rigid gender expectations within the North American context (Carrillo, 2004; Espin, 1997), heterosexism is still a prevalent issue post migration as already mentioned. Furthermore, Fisher (2003) highlights how post migration and
in the absence of family, LGBTQ immigrants are still guided by familial expectations around sexuality and generally are motivated to uphold familial reputation. In addition, asserting one’s sexual identity within the family context post migration can be complex as many immigrant communities and families ascribe homosexuality to immigrating and the subsequent acculturation and not something pre-existent to migration (Fisher, 2003).

Furthermore, researchers highlight not only how sexual identities are experienced after migration, but how they can affect the settlement experience. For example, for some of Kuntsman’s (2003) immigrant lesbian participants in Israel, the common bond achieved per sexual identity with the native-born of the new land alleviates feelings of foreigner status and even reinforces new national belonging. Thing (2010) highlights how several gay immigrants from Mexico experience a shift in identity post immigration, in that they report a strong gay Latino identity in Los Angeles whereas they had strongly identified as Mexican before immigrating. The author attributes this shift to exposure to a more expanded Latino gay network in Los Angeles whereas pre immigration individuals interacted within a strictly Mexican gay niche community. While pre immigration aspects of sexuality were seen as central to their sense of self, post immigration these immigrants’ perceptions of their identities are more complex and expand to ethnic/cultural/national aspects of self. These studies highlight how new social contexts can not only influence the experience of sexuality but also how sexual identity can interact with other new found or shifting identities such as ethnic or national identity.

Transitions associated with LGBTQ immigrants’ migration are never just sexual but marked by ethnicity and first-second-third world relocations (Kuntsman, 2003). Some studies highlight how LGBTQ immigrants can experience new gains and losses in relation to these identities or belongings post migration. Migration can create positioning for LGBTQ immigrants
within a new hierarchy based on ethnicity, skin colour, and class in addition to sexual minority status. Although migrants of these studies often experience greater freedom around their sexual identity within the North American context, they do so at the price of new stigma around new found immigrant identity and skin colour status (Acosta, 2008; Cantu, 2009; Lopez, 2010). For example Acosta (2008), Cantu (2009, ) and Lopez (2010) each interviewed Latin first generation sexual minority immigrants in the U.S. and uncover that pre migration privileges around skin colour and class held in the native country are often relinquished post migration to gain relatively greater sexual autonomy. They find this can create contradictory feelings, such as gratitude and resentment towards the host country, due to gains often being associated with losses.

Authors such as Cantu (2009) and Greene (1997) encourage other researchers to look to other factors relevant to migrants’ lives, such as e.g., socio-economic, historical, and political factors beyond culture in studying sexual identity negotiation. For example, in Cantu’s (2009) exploration of Mexican sexual minority men, their ability to financially support their families in the new country - a post migration power shift - facilitated family acceptance of sexual orientation. Class and educational level differences and pre-migration extent of exposure to gay issues may also contribute to how sexual identity is negotiated post migration. Although a simultaneous exploration of all these factors would be very complex, researchers within this domain should, at least, be cognizant of these factors where appropriate.

The need for more Canadian research on LGBTQ first generation immigrants.

Within the Canadian context, there is even less accessible literature to be found. As mentioned, the majority of the few Canadian studies available mostly address the refugee process or legalities involved in sexual minority refugee cases and, perhaps, at times refugees experiences of the process (Jordan, 2010; LaViolette, 1997, Murray, 2011). Settlement needs and
experiences relevant to psychological adjustment of LGBTQ immigrants have been mentioned as either part of immigrant health governmental review reports, or, more seldom, form the focus of a needs assessment or government-funded project.

A fairly recent Canadian report, “The Global City: Newcomer Health in Toronto”, by Toronto Public Health, reports that no statistics are available on the sexual orientation of newcomers to Toronto. Focus groups with newcomer clients have been conducted, and sexual minority participants discuss the mental health concerns that they face related to stress, self-esteem, abuse, depression, fear and trauma. Participants emphasize that they feel a need to be extremely vigilant about protecting themselves from harm and that this leads to health effects such as exhaustion, social isolation, hopelessness and depression. The same report encourages more research in the area, specifically emphasizing that very few local or Canadian research studies have investigated the issues faced by LGBTQ newcomers (Toronto Public Health, 2011).

O’Neill and Kia (2012) call for more research around the general settlement experiences of sexual minority migrants, especially non-refugee migrants as they have been neglected within the Canadian LGBTQ immigrant literature. They conducted a study of settlement experiences of LGB refugees and immigrants in British Colombia. Findings reveal the multifaceted ways immigrants self-identify and highlight experiences with lack of safety, isolation, and exclusion, particularly in smaller communities (O’Neill & Kia, 2012). Navigating the new and unknown Canadian society and lacking knowledge and access to LGBTQ friendly services post migration are common concerns for these immigrants. The authors call for specifically more Canadian studies due to the social and legal unique standpoint on LGBTQ issues and Canada’s immigration policy around sexual minority refugees (e.g., advanced recognition of LGBTQ individuals’ rights and union and same sex spousal immigration rights).
Only a couple of Canadian studies (unpublished thesis papers) on queer first generation migrants’ lived experiences around settlement (outside the refugee legal experience) were accessible to me. Brown (2012) interviewed 4 Caribbean queer men to Canada and Fischer (2010) interviewed 9 lesbian and gay immigrants about their pre-and post-migration experiences. Brown’s (2012) participants report challenges around pre-and post-migration homophobia, stereotyping within the mainstream Canadian LGBTQ community, discomfort interacting with own heritage culture/community, as well as barriers around employment and acculturation. Furthermore, participants state having had to adjust to both navigating the society as an ethnic minority immigrant as well as openly gay men. Fischer (2010) discovers both barriers and coping strategies for her lesbian and gay immigrant participants. These include internal tensions/internalized homophobia, relational stress and social isolation. Participants also report utilizing symbolic resources to cope with the stress such as spirituality and forging new relationships. In addition, the Canadian supportive and socially progressive environment was reported to aid in coping. Authors indicate that the progressed Canadian gay rights laws overwhelmingly not echoed by most other nations, may have significant implications for how queer migrants’ post migration lived experiences are shaped. Hence, there is a call for further research on LGBTQ first generation immigrants to further understand the unique lived experiences of these individuals within the Canadian context.

Based on these very few, yet valuable studies, it becomes clear that sexual minority immigrants live a shared experience of complexity. It appears as though the multiple oppressions and stressors, including the interplay of racism and homophobia have implications for identity and psychological adjustment. Studies like these emphasize that it would be difficult to separate experiences of immigration, sexual and cultural/ethnic identity, and multiple stressors, such as
racism and homophobia. All of these constructs appear crucial to understanding the lived experiences of lesbian and gay immigrants and have implications for their overall well-being. Hence, exploring the lived experiences of sexual minority first generation immigrants in depth needs to take into account the simultaneous interplay of these factors that seem common and central to this sub-population. LGBTQ first generation immigrants hold a unique knowledgebase due to their exposure to two worlds (pre – and post migration) as to how identities may shift, rearrange and be managed differently and how experiences as LGBTQ members may differ according to varying socio-cultural environments and national contexts. This paper also utilizes relevant theoretical frameworks that speak to the intersectional identity negotiations and experiences of individuals, such as sexual minority first generation immigrants. Although this research is not designed to test these theories or be fully guided by them, it incorporates certain aspects of these frameworks to position the findings of the study within the greater relevant literature.

**Theoretical Frameworks Utilized**

**Intersectionality.** Intersectionality theory informs us that studying experiences around identities in silos does not offer us a complete appreciation of the experiences of individuals that reside at the intersection of these identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Identities interact in constructing experiences and oppression which cannot be fully captured by simply adding subjectivities associated with these identities (Taylor, Hines & Casey, 2011). While many themes were expected to be identified from our analysis of the interviews I conducted, the focus of the analysis was placed on experiences within the above mentioned foci situated at the intersection of sexuality, ethnicity/culture, and immigration. The intersectionality framework utilized for this thesis allows the exploration of experiences of this sub-population at the intersections of social
identities rather than within silos (e.g., stigma experienced due to sexuality added to stigma experienced due to ethnicity). The intersectionality framework coupled with the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows us to travel into the often unchartered territory of not only barriers at the points of intersections but also the rich experiences of LG immigrants at those points of interaction.

**Identity Process Theory (IPT).** IPT proposes that the individual’s identity is a dynamic social product as the individual interacts with the physical and societal structures within a certain socio-cultural context (Breakwell, 1986, 2010). This interaction can lead to a re-organization of multiple identities, more specifically, it organizes how central a certain identity is to the person. For example, migration could be a factor as it often leads to exposure to a changed social context. In addition to identity shifts or changes, identity threats/conflict and how they can be minimized are also well captured by this theoretical framework. IPT has been utilized in some other studies that explore negotiation of sexual identity with other identities (mostly religious but also cultural on rare occasion, such as Jaspal, 2010; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, 2012). It provides an invaluable framework for identity shifts and the potential minimizations of intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions, which are likely all relevant for sexual minority immigrants.

**Communications Theory of Identity (CTI) and Identity Gaps.** Hecht (1993) (as cited in Jung & Hecht, 2004) argues that the individual, social, and communal aspects of identity are interrelated and mutually construct each other. Identity, as described by this theory, is seen as a communicative process; that is, an individual’s sense of self is formed and shared through communication. Four frames within the CTI are proposed, and they are interrelated: 1) personal; how individuals define and view themselves and their identities and how they feel about it, 2) enacted; how they express their identities, 3) relational; individuals’ perceptions of how others
view them, individuals’ defining themselves in relation to others, or their identities being partially shaped by how others view them. 4) communal; collective identity based on group membership. Jung and Hecht (2004) propose identity gaps are present when there are discrepancies between two or more of these four frames of identity communication. For example, a (e.g., personal-enacted frame gap pertains to viewing yourself one way and presenting yourself in a different way or a personal-relation frame gap could exist when there is a discrepancy between ascribed identities by others and one’s own view of the self by oneself). These identity gaps can have psychological implications, such as leading to loneliness and feeling misunderstood. CTI is utilized as it offers an appropriate framework to situate the interdependent self-construal within more collectivist culture. CTI has been previously utilized to study the negotiation of sexual and religious identities for Jewish sexual minorities (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011).

**Purpose and Focus of Present Study**

The purpose of the proposed study is to fill an important research gap within the psychological literature that could inform immigration, sexual orientation, and multiple identity research. As reviewed, there is a need to explore how sexual identity may shape post migration settlement experiences rarely discussed within immigration literature. Furthermore, it is of interest to explore how sexual identity is negotiated with other minority statuses not adequately fleshed out within sexual minority research that does not distinguish participants’ ethnic/cultural backgrounds or immigrant status. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from such a study could be valuable in informing potential future tailoring and creation of services specifically geared towards the needs of this sub-population. This study explores, in depth, potential internal and external barriers first generation LG immigrants may face, their negotiation of their multiple
identities, as well as potential resiliency. As addressed in the literature review, some researchers suggest studying sexual minority first generation immigrants separately from ethnic minority LGBTQ individuals born in Canada, as they have different experiences from one another, although they may share the experience of intersectional identities pertaining to minority sexual and ethnic status (Huang et al., 2010; Meyer, 2010). The narrow focus of topics and thin research terrain is in need of further Canadian research to more fully reflect the range of LGBTQ first generation immigrants’ experiences. There is a general dearth of qualitative research literature on everyday life experiences, for example familial and social relationships and social justice topics, such as discriminatory experiences (Huang et al., 2010).

**Research focus/questions.** This qualitative research is guided by the following main question: What are the lived experiences of lesbian and gay first generation immigrants to Canada with regards to negotiating their multiple identities intra- and interpersonally? Specifically, within that main focus, questions address meaning making of and negotiating these identities and social belongings post migration and potential challenges associated. In addition, follow up questions will gauge immigrants’ social connectedness in Canada within different sociocultural segments (mainstream Canadian society, ethnic community, LGBTQ community). Lastly, in addition to focusing on potential barriers that lesbian and gay immigrants may have faced or are facing, attention will also be paid to potential strategies they employ to minimize emotional distress if these emerge within the interview.

Conducting thorough exploration of all aspects of identity construction or self-definition is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, the central piece is intended to revolve around identity negotiation pertaining to culture/ethnicity/skin colour, sexual identity and immigration/immigrant status. Participants were, at first, asked to talk about the negotiation of
central identities within the Canadian context, without determining for them what these central aspects are. However, due to the reviewed studies’ emphasis that sexual identity and cultural/ethnic identity negotiation is often relevant to this sub-community, it was expected that rich discourse around these identities would emerge. Follow up questions encouraged participants to talk more about these in cases they did not address these in the initial stages of the interview. Due to the nature of these research questions/focus, qualitative research methodology was utilized. It needs to be emphasized that research questions within qualitative research are guidelines, as usually, rich information that goes beyond the actual question emerges. Please see Appendix F for the guiding questions utilized.

Methodology

Participants and Recruitment

Participants consist of a total of 10 lesbian and gay first generation immigrants to Canada, specifically consisting of three women and seven men. Both female and male immigrants were recruited to capture potential unique challenges /experiences, based on gender/sex. Prior empirical research on LGBTQ people of minority ethnic background has rarely included an intensive focus on the lives of lesbians from various ethnic minority groups (Huang et al., 2010). Also, for the proposed study, the focus is on lesbian and gay immigrants and not on bisexual and/or trans-gender/transsexuals immigrants. Qualitative psychological research is often best utilized with somewhat of a homogeneous participant pool; and bisexual and trans-gender/trans-sexual individuals may have different experiences/needs than lesbian and gay individuals. All of the participants identified either as gay or lesbian or queer with same sex attraction. None of them identified as bisexual, or transgendered/ transsexual.

The immigrants interviewed originated from Africa, the Caribbean, South East Asia and
South Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America. All immigrants originated from countries that, on average, emphasize a more collectivist culture than the dominant Western culture of Canada. Per The Hofstede Centre’s website (n.d.), which draws from Hofstede’s cultural dimension research, Canada is one of the most individualistic countries in the world, and the countries from which the participants originated from were more collectivist (please see their Individualism-IDV-scores in Table 1). Although these macro cultural divides do not always translate into individual’s cultural values, many participants’ narratives spoke of such cultural context. In addition, different types of newcomers (immigrants versus refugees) were included in the study. For the purposes of the study, holding any first generation newcomer status was deemed as sufficient. Most participants were in their mid-20s, although there was one participant who was in his 50s. The average age was about 30 years. Most participants had lived in Canada for about one and a half to seven years at the time of the interview, although there was one person who had resided in Canada for over 20 years. Please see Table 1 for more detailed demographics. Table 2 outlines LGBTQ state of affairs in participant countries.

Over 50 Local Immigration Partnership Organizations in Ontario alone were contacted, as well as a number of other immigrant organizations and mainstream LGBTQ organizations. However, many participants were recruited from community organizations specifically geared towards LGBTQ newcomers within the Greater Toronto Area, Ontario. Numerous project presentations were given at the 519 Church Community Centre, Access Alliance, Metropolitan Community Church etc. in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area in Ontario), although presentations were also given within the Waterloo-Wellington area in Ontario (e.g. Guelph). Other participants were recruited per student organizations through the University of Guelph and also per Waterloo-Wellington region. After about two and a half months of intense recruitment efforts the first
participant was interviewed. Interviews were conducted from September of 2013 to December 2013, either in downtown Toronto, ON, in a private room rented for the purpose of interviewing or in Guelph, ON, within a private room at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research. Three participants were recruited per presentations given and appearances within LGBTQ migration services. Three were recruited per snowball sampling. Two participants were recruited per study flyer circulation to members of LGBTQ organizations and two per personal networking with service providers. None of my participants were recruited through the generic Immigrant services that were contacted. Participants were not financially compensated for the interviews, however they were provided refreshments and travel reimbursement, where applicable.

**Measures and Procedures**

Each participant that expressed interest in the study was given more information about it per email or over the phone, after which an appointment for an interview close to their place of residence was set up (private rooms were rented within the GTA or lab space utilized in Guelph). Before the interview was conducted, participants were provided with a consent form (please see Appendix D). Immediately prior to the interview, each participant was asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire acquiring about basic information, such as age, country of origin etc., but also information regarding how they self-identify (please see Appendix E). Interviews, on average, lasted about one and a half hours, with the shortest interview being 40 minutes and the longest two hours. No labels were placed upon interviewees, rather participants were asked at the beginning of the interview how they identify themselves (in terms of sexual orientation) and what aspects of their identity (e.g., ethnicity /culture) were most important to them.

Post- interview the participants were informed about next steps and were provided with social service contacts in case they needed to utilize these due to emotional distress. None of the
participants reported emotional distress post interview; the majority expressed relief due to being given an opportunity to talk about these issues, as well as a sense of empowerment. A debriefing took place after each interview during which the participant was allowed to express how they felt about the interview and the study and to add or withdraw any information. Furthermore, the researcher summarized some of the interview points and checked back with the participant regarding major points that emerged. Interviewees were given the option to check their interview once it was electronically transcribed. Please see Appendix A for more details on recruitment, methodology/procedures which were taken from the Research Ethics Board application for this study.

**Data Analysis and Validation**

For data analysis, the one-on-one interviews were transcribed guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as outlined by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009). Please refer to this literature for a thorough guideline, which I attempted to adhere to closely. IPA is a method that enables the researcher to explore a certain phenomenon or experience that participants share. IPA suggests a step-by-step procedural guideline that consists of thorough and intimate exploration of each interview, by reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across, and doing so for all cases, to look for patterns. IPA is appropriate when exploring in detail participants’ perceptions or accounts of personal lived experiences, particularly how participants make sense of these; rather than generalizability, in-depth exploration is encouraged. The inductive and hermeneutic nature of this type of qualitative research honours both commonalities in experience, as well as idiosyncratic nuances. It was decided that the focus of this particular analysis will be compressed in order to stay true to the idiographic nature of IPA and to adhere to the in-depth analysis encouraged by it.
Table 1

Participant Demographics and Country IDV Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Nation of origin/IDV score</th>
<th>Immigrant status/type</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Years in Canada</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Mid-30s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Ghana 15</td>
<td>Sexual orientation refugee claimant</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Waterloo-Wellington, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Serbia 25</td>
<td>Sexual orientation refugee claimant</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>GTA, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Kosovo Not available</td>
<td>Sexual orientation refugee claimant</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>GTA, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Mid-50s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Colombia 13</td>
<td>Political refugee</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>GTA, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No label (same sex)</td>
<td>Sri Lanka 35</td>
<td>Immigrant-educational reason</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Waterloo-Wellington, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Nigeria 30</td>
<td>Immigrant-educational reason</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Waterloo-Wellington, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Queer (same sex)</td>
<td>Rwanda Not available</td>
<td>Immigrant-professional class with family</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Waterloo-Wellington, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Hong Kong 25</td>
<td>Immigrant-business class with family</td>
<td>Post-sec</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>GTA, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Brazil 38</td>
<td>International student</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Waterloo-Wellington, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Queer (same sex)</td>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago 16</td>
<td>International student</td>
<td>Some post-sec.</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Waterloo-Wellington, ON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IDV is the Individualism score of the countries that had the score available as per http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html. The IDV for Canada for comparison is 80. Higher scores indicate higher individualistic tendencies.
# Table 2

**State of LGBTQ Rights by Participant Country**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Legal persecution of same-sex/queer activity</th>
<th>Anti-discrimination laws for LGBTQ populations</th>
<th>Recognition of LGBTQ rights (e.g., union/adoption)</th>
<th>Urban-Rural (participant originates)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>None-legal</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>None-legal</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>None-legal</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Illegal-imprisonment (for males especially)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>None-legal</td>
<td>Some in place</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>None-legal</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Illegal-up to death penalty</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>Not illegal per se but sexual minorities punished under public decency law</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>None-legal</td>
<td>In place</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Illegal-imprisonment</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>Illegal-imprisonment</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Information gathered per ILGA (International lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex association) from [http://old.ilga.org/Statehomophobia/ILGA_map_2013_A4.pdf](http://old.ilga.org/Statehomophobia/ILGA_map_2013_A4.pdf). Existence of legal protection does not mean there is an absence of societal stigmatization. In addition, other factors such as rural-urban differences need to be taken into account within same nation.
In this analysis, identity conflict due to competing identities/aspects of the self, identity gaps between one’s personal self-view versus one’s expressed or ascribed identities in social contexts, as well as some management/coping employed by participants are explored. All 10 participant voices are honoured in the analysis with quotes and references. Once the major framework of the analysis was established, a validation check was conducted with the majority of the interviewees. Participants were provided with their transcript sections used for analysis and the subsequent interpretations made by the researcher. At that point, participants were given the opportunity to modify interpretations and enrich the meaning. No major modifications were made by these participants.

Analysis

Four major themes were identified per analysis, which are presented in detail as follows and summarized in Figure 1. These themes captured common experiences most significant to my participants, while honouring idiosyncratic and nuanced differences.

Theme A: Post-immigration Change around Sexual Identity

When participants were asked which aspects of themselves resonated the most with their self-perception, various types of social and personal identities were reported as central. The term identity was often mentioned by the participants themselves. Strong identification with sexual orientation, nationality, and/or culture, as well as identification with more abstract or idiosyncratic characteristics was evident. All LG (Lesbian and Gay) immigrants reported knowing about their sexual orientation since childhood or youth (pre-immigration) and most reported their orientation to be a fairly central aspect of their identity at the time of the interview. While labels such as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ or ‘queer’ were used by some, others spoke in more general and abstract terms, e.g., “I knew who I was since age of…” or “who I am”. However,
almost all participants interviewed for this study reported a change in the experience around their sexual identity/orientation post immigration. Some reported that their orientation became more relevant to their sense of self or identity and/or narrated a stronger commitment to their sexual identity post immigration. Others, while not reporting an increased commitment to their sexual orientation post immigration, reported a change in perception (a more normalized view) on their sexual orientation.

**Theme A1: Post-immigration exposure to gay rights and emergence of sexual identity**. Some participants who reported a stronger commitment to their sexual identity post immigration, partly attributed this change to Canada’s emphasis on LGBTQ rights, an exposure that was absent or minimal pre immigration. G, a young male immigrant from Nigeria, where homosexuality is a punishable crime, experienced much of the prioritization of his sexual identity that occurred post immigration after becoming familiar with the LGBTQ rights movement in Canada:

I knew I was different since I was a kid but the sexual identity really came on as a piece of my identity when I moved here… now because after moving it's around, it's in the media, there are laws to protect the community, things I was not exposed to before I came to Canada …Now it's a pretty huge part of me, I think same level as my spiritual and my cultural identity which have always been big; before I moved to Canada it would not be anywhere near.
Figure 1. Analysis Themes A-D.
G, who moved to Canada from Nigeria, where homosexuality is criminalized, believed his sexual identity was promoted to the same level as his spiritual and cultural identity after his move to Canada. He stated that he had been aware of his same sex attraction before migration, but his sexual orientation became an integrated part of his identity post immigration (“really came on as a piece of my identity”). Over the years in Canada this aspect of his identity has grown in importance, even to the point where he can compare its relevance to pieces of his identity that had been integral to him his entire life, such as his cultural identity. Interestingly, participants who shared G’s perception regarding Canadian rights used the term identity when speaking of their sexuality post immigration while this term was not used to describe their sexual orientation before their move to Canada. This is even more highlighted by K’s experience in Canada, a refugee who fled Ghana, where homosexuality is criminalized, after being persecuted by his family and community for being gay:

I feel like the experience…with my sexuality has changed in Canada because of the context of law. Here is the identity as a gay man in Canada now. Back home… I don’t know…since my sexual orientation is not considered, not acknowledge or is illegal, punished by imprisonment. So, I would say there is the identity as a gay person in Canada now. It makes you feel it is legitimate.

K specifically situated his sexual identity within the context of Canada (“my identity as a gay man in Canada now”) where, in his opinion, it has become a more legitimate part of him. He contrasted the post immigration legitimate nature of his sexual identity to its either invisible or punishable nature in Ghana, where, at best non-existent or at worst deemed to be a criminal act. Interestingly, he used the term “sexual identity” when discussing this aspect of himself within the Canadian context, while calling it “sexual orientation” when recalling this aspect of his self
in Ghana. For these immigrants/refugees, it appears as if the legal protection promoted their sexual orientation into a more legitimate identity in Canada.

**Theme A2: Post-immigration societal acceptance and the normalization of sexual orientation.** Some participants, who had fled their home countries after much social stigmatization and severe social chastising due to their sexuality, reported that the availability of LGBTQ (especially refugee LGBTQ) communal spaces as well as broader societal acceptance of sexual diversity has helped normalize their own view around their sexuality. S, a female refugee from Serbia and in her early 30s, reported having been exposed to much social stigmatization pre-immigration, due to her unwillingness to adhere to a heterosexual lifestyle, in which marriage plays a large role, especially for a woman:

> Here, I can be who I want and express, and nobody can say oh you are this and this. People accept me at the [organization]… I had contradictions in my country…because everyone, a girl at certain age is supposed to date and get married, but when I came here, I just thought you are crazy, I saw it's normal in the world, because I meet a lot of people like me, see different countries and they are part of LGBT and everything is normal and so I understand why I felt that way in my country about my sexuality, but here I saw different view… I am so happy.

S outlined how her view on her sexuality changed with immigration, as well as subsequent active socialization with a multicultural pool of sexual minority immigrants (“I meet a lot of people like me”). This seemed to subsequently have resulted in a more ‘normalized’ perspective of herself as a lesbian. She experienced ‘contradictions’ within herself in her country of origin due to the display of gender and social role expectations that emphasized heterosexuality and marriage for women. However, migration to Canada helped her realize her
existence was not a solitary or abnormal one. In that sense, immigrating to Canada offered her new societal standards of ‘normality’ and helped shift her view of herself in regards to her sexuality. However, migration also provided her with a shifted world view regarding sexual orientation in general. Canada was described by her as the point of contact of many LGBTQ immigrants from “different countries”, signaling that homosexuality is more prevalent in the world than she initially thought and not something abnormal.

B, a refugee claimant from Kosovo who also fled to Canada due to his sexuality, similarly discussed a change in perception of his sexual orientation, contrasting the lack of social network amongst the LGBTQ community in his nation of origin to the social support he enjoys in Canada:

> Once I left there, I am free and secure… It’s like breathing in freedom, humans know the smell and taste of safe…you can feel who you are all you want but if you cannot identify yourself freely …I mean really anyone who is different can be discriminated against …here people have clubs and organizations that have made it easier to feel okay about myself and to feel I am normal.

B shared his pre-immigration experience of physical abuse and added that he was forced out of his home in Kosovo when they found out about his sexual orientation. Considering his pre-immigration ordeal, welcoming LGBTQ friendly social networks in Canada that have allowed him to “identify freely” were crucial to him. The post immigration societal acceptance of his sexuality reinforced the idea that life as a gay person in Canada can be a “free and secure” one without the severe social stigma that he had endured pre-immigration. He likened the experience of being able to freely identify and express himself in Canada to a liberation of all senses- smelling, tasting, and breathing in freedom.
Theme A3: Post-immigration norms and the focus on sexuality. For a couple of immigrants, being away from familiarity, such as from family and the cultural environment of their native country in combination with new cultural norms in Canada was experienced to have contributed to an intensified focus on sexual orientation post immigration. Interestingly, these were not LGBTQ specific differences but broader social and cultural norm differences around social interaction. L, a man in his mid-20s who had left Brazil almost two years prior to the interview portrayed how the interplay of migration, absence of socio-cultural familiarity and new cultural norms in Canada was experienced in relation to his sexual orientation:

Not because I am in Canada, but more because I’m away from my culture, from my family. Because in my country it’s so much easier for you like to feel okay and surrounded by noise, we are very noisy, always have people around you… and so you keep yourself on the shelf… When you are in your comfort zone it’s easier for you like to keep it quiet inside and ignore but now I feel it more now who I am inside … Being lonely forces you to be brave and express who you really are I feel like you have a lot pressure to make friends as a new person in Canada in another culture and language. …because you are lonely and people open less here you have to push more to express yourself, all of yourself… more than in my culture… to make friends here.

At the time of his interview, L had not disclosed his orientation to anyone but reported that since coming to Canada he had acquired a more heightened internal focus on the sexual aspect of himself and was emotionally preparing to share this part of himself. L narrated of two distinct but related forces that seemed to have directed increased attention to his sexual orientation post immigration. Immigrating removed him from being “surrounded” by the liveliness and chatter (“surrounded by noise”) that his family provided in his home country. The
post-migration more silent social atmosphere around him allowed his inner voice to become amplified, and the pre-immigration L who kept himself “quiet inside” was contrasted to the L who was more engaged in hearing and feeling more strongly “who I am inside” (“I feel it more now”) in Canada. In addition to the loneliness having created a deeper sense of self-focus, the lack of emotional cushioning of family and old friends pushed him to a new terrain of self-expression to build a new social network. The more reserved nature of the Canadian culture (“people open less here”) around social interaction as perceived by L, his status as a newcomer, and the difficulty in making friends in new language and culture, pushed him towards a more deeper self-expression of what was placed “on the shelf” in his home country. Interestingly, he pointed out that he does not perceive the Canadian environment to be at the root of this transition around his sexual orientation, but “being away from culture, family” and other aspects of his transition to a new country did contribute to this process. It appears that distance from his traditional family also offered L an environment in which he could explore this aspect of himself while enjoying more anonymity without exposing his loved ones to his sexual orientation.

J, a male refugee from Colombia and in his mid-50s, had been in relationships with women in his country, but often times revealed to them his true sexual orientation after some time. Similar to L, he reported the experience of being distant from familiar cultural context and the resulting loneliness to have intensified a focus on his sexual orientation after migration. In addition, he spoke of different cultural norms in Canada (vs. Colombia) to explain how the new environment in Canada allows him to be more reserved with women and focus more on his same sex attraction:

I am…how can I explain? I am more sure about who I am, because here I am more alone.

In Colombia, I never been alone…I was with women…but in loneliness and different
culture it is interesting, because be more sure that I am gay than in Colombia. Not that I was in doubt in Colombia, but in Colombia, people are very tender and touching you all the time. It is more openly… is also a lot of noise…noisy …but, I can be more shy with women in Canada…it is less openly here. Here my mind, my feelings, my heart, everything I do is more focused on that…who I am. It is very interesting, we are changing the comfort zone, an unknown zone to be who I am.

J actually had coined the loneliness he encountered in Canada as a positive experience and not as a sad consequence of immigrating, as it had helped him in his personal growth. Much like L who spoke of surrounding liveliness and “noise” diverting attention in his home country, J similarly attributed the increased attention devoted to his sexual orientation to the removal of “noise”. In this case the lack of “noise” also refers to the lack of involvement with women. He described how residing in a country where the culture is less ‘touchy feely’ than he is used to, allowed him to be more “shy with women”. He indicated that in Colombia, at least according to his experience, the culture lends itself to more opportunities for physical relations with women, but he could utilize the ‘less open’ Canadian culture as a way to avoid sexual interaction with the opposite sex. Post immigration, the new state of disengagement from sexual acts with the opposite sex due to new cultural norms in Canada did not make him realize he was gay, as he was not in “doubt in Colombia”. However it aligned his actions (“everything I do”) with his ‘mind’, ‘feelings’, and ‘heart’ which resulted in an increased commitment to his orientation. Interestingly, much like L, he used the term “comfort zone” to illustrate the hurdle he needed to pass to reach a higher level of acceptance of his sexual orientation, an “unknown zone to be who I am”, and this was experienced as a positive experience.
Theme B: Negotiating Sexuality Post-immigration-Intrapersonally

Theme B 1: Post-immigration intrapersonal conflict around sexuality, cultural values, and family expectations. Stronger commitment to sexual identity, or more positive outlook on sexuality, was common to almost all of the participants I interviewed and was often seen as a positive life event that stimulated personal growth, discovery, and commitment to one’s true self in Canada. However, several immigrants reported experiencing increased internal tension post immigration in the face of this centralized sexual identity due to other existing prominent aspect of their self. Specifically, cultural values and the importance of family loyalty were reported overwhelmingly to be involved. Therefore, for these participants, immigration, commitment to sexuality, and importance placed on cultural values emphasizing family loyalty intersected, resulting in an internally experienced heightened struggle to unite these aspects post immigration. Participants who reported experiencing this conflict were relatively closely connected to their family, although not all of them had family members residing in Canada. Although participants reported they experienced this conflict between sexuality and culture at an intra-personal level, they talked overwhelmingly about family values and views. They did not report any of their own views on homosexuality to be problematic.

Additionally, not only were heritage culture and family involved in this tension, but more so the experience of being situated between often contrasting cultures (heritage versus Canadian mainstream culture) in negotiating sexual identity. These cultures were perceived to encourage different norms around sexuality, placing different emphases on personal freedom and collective well-being (e.g., family loyalty). Three immigrant stories are highlighted in order to portray common points of tension and nuanced differences experienced in this intrapersonal negotiation.
As E’s sexual identity became more prominent after moving out of Rwanda, the internal conflict he experienced between his sexual identity and cultural value system also became more pronounced for this young man who identified as queer:

It's a conflict because both (culture and sexuality) now mean a lot to me, and it's something like when I first moved out of Africa, I defended my culture, then you got into this culture and into your sexuality after moving here… and see how gays are treated over there versus here… I rejected the culture for some time… It became more difficult… I'm torn because I am Rwandese and don’t know how I'm not gonna accept it fully and completely… thinking how can I be Rwandese and gay at the same time and open about it? But then I realized and experienced there is homophobia here too, and racism… so I still have history with that place and wanna go back to visit… for some time I tried to think this is not me- I am not gay- because my father said we don’t have that in our culture and it was the most hurtful thing putting my family through it, because I witnessed how much they sacrificed coming here and all… I wanted to be that good son, but despite the struggle, which is still going on, somehow it has brought us closer, too, because for us, like the culture, like family is core.

E portrays the evolution that may have led to the internal conflict he experienced between two very important aspects of his being, his sexual and cultural identities (“both now mean a lot to me”). Post immigration the initial strong endorsement and advocacy for his heritage culture was challenged by the growing commitment to his sexuality, as well as the contrast he perceived between the state of gay rights in Canada versus “how gays are treated” in Rwanda. This stark contrast in national and cultural standpoints regarding gay issues translated for E into an internal contrast, a state of unsuccessful reconciliation between being Rwandese, gay and the subsequent
feeling of being “torn”. However, the initial perception of stark national contrast was alleviated as he started to experience sexual identity (and racial) discrimination in Canada, which may have undermined his idealistic perception of unconditional acceptance of gays and lesbians in the new land. His use of words indicate that some progress might have been made in reconciling himself with being “Rwandese”, because while he “rejected it for some time” he came to “not know how to accept it fully”. The language indicated at least somewhat of a change in direction from turning away to turning towards re-consideration (reject versus not knowing how to accept). This wording foreshadowed his narration later on in the interview regarding his intention to re-evaluate his judgement towards his heritage culture (Theme D). However, in the meantime, reconciliation of nationality, cultural background and sexual identity was a challenge, a perceived incompatibility not only reinforced by national standpoints towards homosexuality but also by his family’s assertion that homosexuality does not exist in their culture (“we don’t have that in our culture”).

In addition to this perceived and reinforced incompatibility, strong loyalty to family and respect for his parents’ view added to the internal struggle. E actually indicated how subsequent to initial disclosure to his parents he attempted to deny his sexual identity in order to protect them. Memories of migrating and having witnessed his family’s sacrifice throughout made it even more crucial to prevent family pain and preserve family loyalty and be that “good son”. E, like many other immigrants interviewed, outlined how their sense of their own identity is often heavily influenced by family values and perspectives. The strong sense of interdependence with family, although it complicated the negotiation of sexuality and culture also encouraged interdependent conflict resolution and growth as a strong family unit (“brought us closer…family is core”).
D, a young man from Sri Lanka, also portrayed the complex interplay of being a first generation immigrant in combination with cultural values in the negotiation of sexuality post immigration. He described how it feels to have been exposed to two strikingly different worlds within the same lifetime as many immigrants can attest to. He detailed how the comparison of these two different national realities, as well as the influence of both heritage and host culture influenced the internal conflict experienced around his sexuality:

It’s hard for me to think of myself as Sri Lankan gay…I reflect back on things people had to go through in Sri Lanka, what I am feeling here regarding my sexuality and my family’s difficulty with it should feel like nothing. …Like the war, and there are so many gay people who can’t even come out in Sri Lanka, they are practically stuck in this prison cell of their own nature and their culture. I feel like, look at me, I am like super well off like socially here and still want more acceptance… Like gay people, or people generally here do in Canada, but I cannot blame them because there is a different culture and they have not seen things I have … so they cannot understand my struggle, although I have great Canadian friends and they helped me immensely but hard to talk to anyone that understands this. My family is still in Sri Lanka, exposed to a different way, it’s hard for them to understand, although they try. They see me as the angry son not the son who cares. So, I almost feel guilty for wanting what they want and end up always trying to suppress my emotions. In our culture, like feeling sad or weak is not encouraged. So, I have these two voices going in my head all the time, one about how I feel about my sexuality in Canada now and one saying how I should feel based on what I have seen in Sri Lanka…I just want one of the voices to go dormant because I feel so drained.
D illustrated how having witnessed people’s struggles with the war in general, but also with LGBTQ issues in Sri Lanka has created a mindset that made it quite difficult to mourn his own tribulations regarding his sexuality in Canada. D’s adaptation to Canadian standards of hardship and expectations of sexual identity acceptance has translated into a feeling of deep disappointment about his parents’ inability to accept his sexuality to the extent he is accustomed to in Canada. The resulting feeling of sadness often was reported to be automatically accompanied by painful and vivid memories of people’s struggle in Sri Lanka, which he carried within him as a first generation immigrant. Due to having been exposed to starkly different socio-political environments, the slightest trigger of a sad emotion around his own challenges immediately resulted in comparing his state of affairs to the despair of the Sri Lankan people he has witnessed, resulting in guilt and suppression of emotions. He likened the two internalized standpoints to two voices constantly pulling him in opposite emotional directions, a feeling that had left him ‘drained’. In this way, D did not report experiencing a conflict due primarily to internalized cultural chastising of homosexuality but more so due to his own guilt when comparing two distinct cultural and political spaces he has been exposed to. D’s complex inner experience helps to highlight how culture (both heritage and host culture) and first generation immigrant status can complicate the negotiation of sexual identity in Canada without necessarily involving the influence of values that are opposed to homosexuality.

For G, the elevation in importance of his sexual identity did not come without great internal tension either in Canada. His story highlighted the negotiation of starkly contrasting cultural influences in negotiating a sexual identity, as well as conflict born out of own personal beliefs and sexual orientation. G was the only immigrant interviewed for this study who reported
negotiating both religious values as well as cultural values with sexuality, and his narration is valuable, distinguishing tension experienced due to religion versus culture:

After coming here, it became less about the culture around me, because I was kind of removed, it became more of a personal struggle in terms of my faith. I hated myself for a while because of it but, then I re-read the bible and became more okay with it and I came out to some people here. But, still for me was like ‘I know they're ok with it but they don't come from where I am coming from’ …because I have friends at the same spiritual level who are gay but they still don’t understand my struggle because they come from a different country and culture than me…and I find that Canada has a very individualistic culture, being the kind of "live your life" and be out, but I come from more a collectivist culture, all my life, where it's like "ok, you should think about how it would affect family first....’ The only reason I have not yet come out to my family is to protect them from feeling embarrassed within their community; they are still in Nigeria. Yes my family may be culturally misguided but it is not just our culture, that is pulling us back not to be gay but also sometimes this culture and gay community here which can be individualistic and over-sexualized pushing us not to be anything else than gay or sexual. So, I found myself very alone in my struggle in trying to come to terms with all of it.

In Nigeria, G had been aware of his sexual orientation, the mainstream general stance on homosexuality and specifically his family’s view about homosexuality. He specified that emigrating out of Nigeria “removed” him from the external cultural pressures associated with sexuality. The pre-immigration friction between his sexuality and cultural expectations transitioned in Canada into more of an internal “personal struggle”, mostly between his spiritual beliefs and his sexual identity at first. Although G said he was physically removed from the
cultural environment of Nigeria, his subsequent narration underlined how his own personal cultural values were preserved post immigration. He stated that even post re-evaluation of religious scripture and minimization of self-hatred, he experienced a struggle to negotiate a sexual identity within the Canadian context while remaining true to his and his family’s cultural value system. Therefore, G distinguished the negotiation of sexual identity and cultural values from religious values. He articulated the perspective the “collectivist” culture he originates from has given him in negotiating sexual orientation and family responsibilities. He stated that he found himself in a specific niche of struggle, not finding the individualistic cultural stance on sexual orientation (“live your life”) helpful to his internal plight. Interestingly, he portrayed that acceptance from Canadians he came out to—even those who were religious like him—did not diminish this internal struggle, knowing they are culturally different. G, explicitly used the terms ‘collectivism’ versus ‘individualism’, but while this cultural tension was not as explicitly verbalized by others, his story echoed many of the immigrants’ struggle between reconciling personal desires and freedom with inherent loyalty to family that does not approve or understand homosexuality.

G highlighted how the lack of appropriate social support and services (culture specific), the push from the mainstream LGBTQ culture to come out, the pull from his own heritage and family culture not to identify as gay, and the divisions within communities he partly can identify with can fuel this internal struggle. Unlike some other participants (e.g., some refugees like S as will be discussed next) who had stated that acceptance from people around them had minimized ‘contradictions’ and resulted in a sense of liberation after migration, this external acceptance did not overpower G’s own internal conflict as it did not come from a source that was viewed as culturally relevant to him. Some migrants’ perspective of themselves appeared to be heavily
influenced by the surrounding community’s view on homosexuality rather than guided by an internal cultural compass as is discussed next.

**Theme B2: No intrapersonal conflict around sexuality and other identities post-immigration.** Although the previously mentioned individuals depicted a complex interplay of sexual orientation, cultural values and influences in the context of post migration in contributing to internal conflict in Canada, some other LG newcomers denied experiencing any internal conflict related to personal values post immigration. In fact, all three individuals, interestingly, were refugees, who left their country due to persecution regarding sexual orientation and reported having hardly maintained any family contact. They denied feeling any connection between their heritage culture and their sense of self and/or sexual identity. Like many immigrants interviewed they did report experiencing external pressures due to stigma around homosexuality, however they denied experiencing any of these pressures on an intra-personal level due to own values or family values as the others did.

S had narrated earlier how the change in societal view on homosexuality post migration had changed also her outlook on herself. When S was asked about potential conflicting aspects of her identity in relation to her sexuality she denied experiencing any conflict. She reported being very minimally connected in cultural terms. She expressed how lack of connection to her culture had existed prior to her migration, perhaps due to her sexual orientation or due to a sense of independence in general:

Who am I as person don't connect with my country’s culture… I don’t see it as conflict, maybe also because I never really connected with culture or my family in my country. I am not so close with family and away from people from my country now. Culture has nothing to do with who I am. Maybe it was because of who I am or maybe because I am
just totally independent person…but I do not have problems inside with it. And now that I am here, I am so happy. Here everyone is a refugee, we are all newcomers, we understand each other and are like a family that identifies together. We are all LGBTQ and all have these experiences with the past, like family and country.

S emphasizes that her sense of self ("who am I") was not influenced by the culture/religion in her country or even by her family perspectives on issues such as sexuality, as she was always a “totally independent person”, distanced from both of these sources of cultural influence. S speculated that perhaps her sexual orientation (which she termed “who I am” throughout the interview), in addition to her independent personality, had something to do with her cultural disconnect which transferred to Canada. S echoed something that the other sexual orientation based refugee claimants of this study narrated, namely an indication of a new found family and community they collectively identify with—the refugee LGBTQ organizational members. S and other refugees like her appeared to share a post immigration collective identity based on sexual identity and refugee experiences, which were reported as more relevant to their sense of self than heritage culture or nationality as some other immigrants previously discussed reported.

Very similarly to S, K did not report experiencing internal conflict around sexuality due to holding values in opposition to it. As a refugee who fled persecution, he did experience tremendous conflict due to family trauma after his sexual orientation was disclosed. However, he denied that heritage culture had anything to do with his sense of self:

Who am I has nothing to do with culture so I don’t see it as a conflict or as something that is contradictory. No, I don’t think I see it that way. Because who am I has nothing to do with it…Has nothing, has nothing to do with it. So, inside I did not connect with it. I
always had my own way of thinking of it and never felt it as something contradictory with my sexuality.

K stated that he did not see his nation’s culture as relevant to him, and it did not pose any threat, internally, to his sexual identity. Similar to S, he indicated somewhat disconnected from those cultural teachings even in his home country (“I did not connect with it”). As K narrated later on in the interview, and as will become evident in subsequent extracts from his interview, he keeps his distance from his ethnic community due to his sexual orientation, and hence is not surrounded by his tribe’s culture in Canada (Theme C). Having had to escape his country and having lost ties with his family and community in Ghana also catapulted him out of a cultural context, much like the other refugees. Thus, K reported not being culturally connected at the time of the interview, both in terms of cultural beliefs and connections to the cultural community. Lack of family contact was also the case for the other two refugees mentioned here. K stated that he possessed his “own way of thinking of” culture in relation to his sexuality, which is a point that will become even clearer within the discussion of the last theme (Theme D).

Theme C: Negotiating Sexuality Post-immigration-Interpersonally

In addition to negotiating identities on an intrapersonal level, participants also overwhelmingly talked about challenges with regards to negotiating their prominent identities within society in Canada (within mainstream Canada, their ethnic communities, LGBTQ mainstream community). Like many other gay and lesbian individuals of any ethnicity, active management of sexuality (disclosing versus concealing and strategies in between) was utilized in order to prevent discrimination and social disapproval, however for many LG immigrants interviewed, this often involved management of other identities and within different segments of society, as well (Theme C1). However, even in the case where there was desire and perception of
safety to disclose one’s sexual orientation as an expression of one’s true self, opportunities were not always available (Theme C2).

**Theme C 1: Active management of identities.** All of the LG immigrants/refugees interviewed for this study reported actively concealing, disclosing and expressing their sexual identities at least at some point or within at least one societal layer in Canada. Some LG immigrants’ stories of sexual identity management depicted how managing sexuality within layers of society was often intertwined with managing national background/immigration status/culture.

For example, K, a refugee who fled Ghana due to his sexual orientation, articulated throughout his interview a delicate and continuous negotiation of his multiple prominent identities/aspects within the Canadian society. His experience represented the post immigration management of visible and invisible identities similar to several, especially non-Caucasian, LGBTQ immigrants interviewed. K reported how pre immigration he actively attempted to conceal his sexuality in order to prevent persecution and/or imprisonment. He noted that active management of his sexual identity is something that he still engages in post immigration, like some other immigrants reported, due to homophobia within both his ethnic community and mainstream Canada. However, this management has taken on a more multifaceted approach in Canada, involving identities/aspects that were not in need of management pre-immigration, such as national background and skin colour:

Here and before moving. Every time I step out, I make sure I know my identities… to know my limit and I will not go beyond. Back home you are underground I could not say, here the law says you cannot touch me but still in society is difficult to trust and make those difficult decisions…to say not to say …To Canadians here, I cannot hide my race
which is another thing now here.. but my sexuality, yes I can hide or show…I can say, but even here sexuality and race can be the same in terms of discrimination…so both together can be bad if you say it…with my own people, no…the story about my identity and who I am and where I am from I fled leaked to the African community …There are a lot of blacks who ask me are you Ghanaian? I say ‘no, I am from Kenya’. You have to be very secretive, otherwise they will point finger at you. Haunting me back home , haunting me here, too…what do you want from me? It is killing me every day. I feel I cannot be me.

K detailed a deep and constant awareness of all of his prominent social identities, both visible and invisible ones, every time he steps out into the Canadian streets as a gay immigrant from Ghana. In Canada, he has the opportunity, as prescribed by the law, to disclose his sexuality without the persecution experienced in his nation. While this offered him freedom it may also complicate sexual identity management. While in Ghana the lack of such protection in a way simplified his sexual management, restricting it to concealment (keeping it “underground”), post-immigration this involved detailed decision making he is not used to. In addition, he indicated that in Canada his skin colour has become another focal point, especially since he cannot hide that aspect of himself (unlike his orientation) and thus cannot protect himself from its connotations within society. It seemed he perceived the axis of his multiple identities as borders he could permit himself mobility within (“I know my identity…to know my limit”). After crossing geographical borders into Canada, the navigation of Canadian society seemed to be confined by other borders he would not “go beyond”, limits reinforced by the societal connotations around his identities. K perceived that his sexual orientation could ignite as much discrimination as his skin colour in Canada, and hence would not disclose this to just anyone,
confining himself within designated safe borders in conversations and social interactions. K reported that the leakage of his identities is the main reason why he abstained from interacting with people from his country in Canada, another border he would not cross. K stated that he could not be seen as a gay individual within that community, otherwise they would stigmatize him ("point finger at you"). The above extract illustrates how the public access to information about his escape and sexuality has resulted in denial of two prominent identities in Canada, sexual orientation and national background. Sexual identity management, specifically when interacting within that sector is accomplished, partly, by misrepresenting his national background ("I say I am from Kenya"). This negotiation has caused much emotional hardship and has made him feel persecuted even post immigration ("Haunting me back home, haunting me here").

K exemplifies how sexual identity management for some refugees/immigrants can affect representation and experience of identities beyond sexual orientation ("I feel I cannot be me"). Several other immigrants narrated abstaining from engaging with their ethnic communities in Canada due to fear of being stigmatized due to their orientation. Although K’s denial of his national/ethnic identity to others was an extreme case, it represented some other immigrants’ denial of national/ethnic/cultural ties to themselves in order to prevent stigma. This active disconnection manifested itself in abstaining from social interactions with others from their ethnic culture, as well as, refraining from other cultural activities. Furthermore, lack of social interaction was reported to reinforce the social isolation especially for more recent immigrants.

While sexual orientation could often not be expressed within one’s ethnic community or mainstream Canada, LGBTQ communities in Canada were much appreciated by these immigrants. However, active management of integral identities or values did not cease within that community for some participants. M, a woman in her early 40s and originally from Hong
Kong, identified as a lesbian. She had been residing in Canada for over two decades at the time of the interview. Like most other immigrants interviewed, especially non-Caucasian participants, she narrated throughout her interview years of negotiating both visible and non-visible identities. She narrated experiences with homophobia within both mainstream Canadian society and within ethnic community, underlining the importance of utilizing the LGBTQ community for safe expression of oneself. However, even in the LGBTQ community she perceived herself to be different due to her ethnic background, as well as cultural values. In the following excerpt she depicts how cultural aspects and immigration experience, have contributed to her seeming different than the normative Canadian lesbian:

My father was an investment immigrant, we were not welfare immigrants like a lot of people think immigrants are. I try to educate people about that. People have their perceptions, and all that gets repeated in the gay community here. But maybe because of my Chinese cultural background and also the type of immigration experience we had, work ethic and capitalism is important to me and I identify myself as a right wing lesbian. But all this often makes me an unpopular lesbian around gay circles, but also in Canada in general it is not associated together for some reason with being a lesbian. They think I am too capitalist for a lesbian. So, I don’t mention those things anymore. It’s like you cannot win between being the right kind of lesbian or right immigrant, like when I try to negate those stereotypes … I mean I am already different than the norm because of the way I look so that’s on top of that.

M portrayed how culture and immigration experience have contributed to molding her into a person with a certain value system in Canada. She explained having come from a family of investing immigrants and from a cultural background that emphasizes economic responsibility
for oneself and strong work ethic, which she speculated had geared her towards acquiring a political value system not seen as reconcilable with a lesbian identity by Canadian mainstream (LGBTQ) standards. M’s narration emphasized how these aspects of herself were in no way experienced as conflicting internally. However, she perceived there existed an external perception of mismatch between these integral identities within the only layer of society where, she can express her sexual orientation without restraint, namely the gay community. Despite the opportunity for unrestrained sexual orientation expression, she felt she could not freely express her own unique lesbian identity informed by culture and immigration experience. Furthermore, attempts to correct stereotypical view of the kind of immigrant she believes she is often perceived to be (welfare immigrant background) within gay community and within mainstream Canadian society (“try to negate those stereotypes”) could come at the price of looking like an “unpopular” lesbian, or one not in agreement with Canadian standards.

Similarly, other immigrants who reported not having a comfortable culturally relevant niche to express their sexual identity due to homophobia, found only a partially safe haven within the mainstream LGBTQ community where sexual orientation could be expressed at a price, accompanied by compromising other integral aspects of themselves. Often times, culture and ethnic background were aspects that some immigrants experienced would either make them seem different, which could lead to either sexual objectification (“exotic”) or marginalization, or both.

**Theme C 2: Ascribed identities by others.** In addition to reporting being engaged in active management of sexual identity and other identities as discussed, some of the LG immigrants also stated how prominent identities, especially sexual identity, often remain unacknowledged within the Canadian mainstream society, even if they wanted them to be
acknowledged. K, who carefully managed sexual identity and national background in spaces not perceived to be safe, stated that even when he wanted to share these identities/aspects with others when he felt “safe”, this was often complicated due to an amalgamation of factors, including cultural norm differences, pre-immigration experience with persecution, and newcomer status. He self-identified at the intersection of sexuality and nationality and expressed a desire to be seen as such in “safe” spaces within Canadian society:

I am a young Ghanaian guy who identifies as gay, but reality in society is different…Canadian people identify you as immigrant, they can see you are skinny and from Africa, ‘not really part of us’. So, if I wanted to share about the real me and my sexuality cuz I am safe …often I don’t have a chance to say it….I like that about Canada, they don’t ask too many questions about private things, and they assume if you don’t say it… not like my own community, but also you cannot have that conversation unless you are part of them…I am not used to talking about it, unless someone asks. I was living underground back home and never really talked about it to many…and in our culture we don’t really talk about these things with people… I feel I cannot be seen as me even when I am safe here.

K narrated that within the mainstream Canadian community his ‘noticeable’ newcomer status (“they can see you are skinny and from Africa”) and cultural norms difference between mainstream Canada and his heritage culture discourage conversation about private matters such as sexuality. They, together with societal perception of ‘refugees,’ interact to create a space of invisibility for his self-identification for the “young Ghanaian guy who identifies as gay”. He felt the ascription of broad refugee/ immigrant category placed upon him makes it quite difficult for K to build “close” relationships with Canadians. Here he spoke from what he believed would be
a Canadian stance on newcomers—“not really part of us”. Since he believed communication regarding sexuality usually occurs between more acquainted individuals within the Canadian culture and people that are “part” of that culture, his sexuality is, hence, often times, left unacknowledged again due to lack of opportunities to get close. Although he acknowledged this cultural norm of not asking “too many questions” as helpful when concealment of his sexuality is desired, it does not aid in having his sexuality acknowledged. Years of living “underground” in his home country, as well as cultural norms that discourage open discussion about sexuality have instilled a tendency not to open that conversation, unless it is brought up (“Unless I am asked”).

From a distance, he believed he is perceived as an immigrant from “Africa” due to his skin colour, while his specific national background (Ghanaian) is often not acknowledged in this sector either. Therefore, within mainstream Canadian society (as well as his ethnic community as described in Theme C1 for K), the “Ghanaian guy who identifies as gay” is left invisible. J, another refugee and from Colombia depicted how the interaction of immigrant status and cultural norms also situates him in in a niche of invisibility within the Canadian mainstream society, wherein both his sexuality and ethnic/national background that he stated are prominent aspects to him are not validated:

I see myself as a man from Colombia who is part of the LGBTQ, too. In my country I had to hide myself because people will not understand. I mean I think it is easier to say I am gay here than back home with Canadians, I think, but still it is not much different than back home...why? Hmmm...How I see myself and how they see me here is still different...Let me tell you it is very difficult to find a person to share here, as an immigrant. It is an openly country to talk about these things in general but people are closed. I am also not comfortable to talk about, ok, I am gay to anyone when I am not
close relation. My mother raised me not to talk too much about situations like private matters to people not close …And people here do not believe I am from Colombia…they say, no you are from Russia, or France…. So, who I am alone, my identity is different than who I am in society. Ideally for me, both should be the same but are not.

In his interview, J narrated that his pre-immigration societal invisibility of his orientation was something that traveled with him to Canada. Although J expressed that he thought disclosure of sexual identity within mainstream Canada would be followed with acceptance, he stated that he had not yet engaged in such disclosure. His sexual identity has remained unacknowledged, despite a stated desire to be seen as he self-identifies (“Ideally, both (private and public identities) should be the same”). Similar to K, he attributed this lack of disclosure to cultural norms and his newcomer status. Although, he perceived Canada as a society, as a whole, open to discourse around sexuality, he did not see the Canadian people he met as receptive to close relationships for a newcomer to have that conversation in (“It’s an openly country but people are closed”). Narrating how cultural influences from his childhood prevented him from sharing private matters with people outside of close relationships, he has had no culturally appropriate opportunity yet to disclose his sexuality due to the lack of close relationships with people he would have no problem disclosing his sexuality to. In addition, ethnicity/nationality is often placed upon him within the Canadian society, which J later on speculated may be due to his relatively light skin tone (“People do not believe I am from Colombia…”). J, similar to K, and several other participants stated he does not enjoy a communal space within these segments of society where his self-identification matches societal perceptions of his identities, and he reported that this has caused a feeling of loneliness for him. He later stated that this invisibility
has created an additional “layer” of problems to his already challenging current life as a newcomer who is restarting from anew as a mature man in a new country.

C narrated one particular moment to portray her general invisibility in Canada as a lesbian woman from Trinidad and Tobago as she was faced with a statement that, to her, was informed by stereotypes pertaining to ethnicity and sexuality combined. She illustrated this example to depict her experience around the gap that she often perceives exists between her self-identification and people’s assumptions about her ethnicity and sexual orientation within mainstream Canada:

There was this girl in my dorm, she is like, C now tell me about black Jamaican {genitalia}, and I was like in complete shock…no, what…no… I mean, she didn’t even know I was gay or where I was from so that’s why she is asking me about guys… even though I try to butch it up here more because I feel I can do that more than back home… like there is almost an assumption that coming from where I am I cannot be gay? I don’t know…And people assume I am Jamaican all the time just because I have an accent…there is lots of different accents around! I feel like I should not have to verbally come out and reveal my sexuality… it’s almost like you have to scream it out for some people to get it… but I do educate them about where I am from, cuz I am so proud of that I cannot let it pass.

C, in her interview, stated that she is often viewed within mainstream Canada as a heterosexual Jamaican girl, while she identifies as a lesbian from Trinidad and Tobago. Although she stated this bothers her, she often refrains from correcting people’s assumption about her sexuality, as she said she does not feel she “should” have to verbally come out, as she is already, in her own non-verbal way signaling her identity in Canada more so than she did in her nation of
origin ("butch it up more here"). Still, she is often assumed to be heterosexual and feels as if her sexual orientation needs to be conveyed directly for people to acknowledge it ("you have to scream it out for people to get it"). She speculated that her immigrant background or ethnicity may contribute to people assuming she is heterosexual ("coming from where I am I cannot be gay?"). C depicted here society’s potential lack of awareness about the existence of people at the intersection of ethnic minority/immigrant/status and sexual orientation. Although C stated that she identifies as someone at the intersectionality of ethnic background and sexuality, her ethnic identity is the most central piece of herself, and thus she “cannot let it pass” when people mistake her as a Jamaican. Therefore, at least one of her identity’s representation within society is usually corrected and reclaimed by C. However, C narrated throughout her interview that, aside from people who are really close to her, she navigates the Canadian society, often not seen or acknowledged the way that she identifies herself.

**Theme D: Post-immigration Reflection**

In order to minimize emotional repercussions due to internal conflict or due to mismatches between self-identification and perception of others, many strategies became evident in participants’ narratives. By actively engaging in these strategies, participants showed their resilient selves in the face of all the challenges. However interestingly, and what will be focused on here is the return to the same experiences or factors that were perceived as contributing to the conflict in the first place. Many participants indicated that they need to go back in order to move forwards, in other words return to their cultural roots and their histories with their countries in order to live as a unified self in Canada (Theme D1). Others stated that as immigrants they had gained multiple perspectives, having seen the world from different angles, instilling in them a
potential for great empathy for other people’s perspectives on issues, including sexual orientation (Theme D2).

**Theme D1: Going back to move forward.** Some participants reported attempting to reconcile sexual orientation and belief systems often conveyed to them in opposition to homosexuality by revisiting or re-interpreting the sources of these values, whether that be the history of the nation’s culture, one’s own history with the land etc. They often spoke of letting go of some of the judgment that they may have held about their nations or cultures, acknowledging that their cultures and families often have also offered them a place of comfort or strength. Re-evaluating culture was said to be utilized in order to repair a somewhat wounded relationship with these sources or value systems:

When I left Sri Lanka, my culture, I was in much conflict about how they think about gay issues … living in Canada … I thought I was like too white washed, but I realized, I wasn’t really, I am still a very culturally connected person. Given the person I was with he definitely had a similar cultural aspect to him, there were little things and that’s why we jived together… I feel that I just need to revitalize by visiting Sri Lanka again instead of not giving it a chance. Cuz I feel there is more to it than what I saw…there was the war, and everything, including my sexuality, got masked by all the violence and people’s way of thinking from that. Immersing myself and letting go of some of the judgment…I mean I feel the culture will change around sexuality maybe in my life time, these things change…I mean throughout all this, one thing I can say is that I never ever gave up on myself…and maybe some of it had to do with my culture because we are encouraged to be mentally strong and overcome weakness.
D narrated how he perceived himself as “white washed” and very much integrated into the Canadian culture post immigration. He had estranged himself from his culture due to the narrow mindedness he connected with it with regards to issues around sexuality. However in the context of a relationship, he realized how deeply connected he still was to his culture and became open to the possibility that his culture was so much more than he had labeled it to be when he had emigrated (“I feel there is more to it”). He came to see that culture affects every day “little things” that made him feel more connected to his partner than he believed he would have been in the absence of that “cultural aspect”. D, as explored previously, had narrated experiencing conflicting thoughts and feelings due to opposing forces informed by culture and family versus his desire to express his sexuality and have it accepted. The ongoing struggle he faced trying to reconcile his family’s cultural values and his own with his orientation had contributed to forming a negative mental representation of that culture. In addition, his memories from his home land “got masked by all the violence” of the war he had witnessed. He concluded that revisiting Sri Lanka (“immersing myself”) as a more mature and open person, and without the overshadowing power of the war that had affected many experiences during his youth, may offer him a fresh outlook on the culture. Returning to Sri Lanka in the absence of national violence may aid in the metamorphosis of the mental representation he held of this culture. In a way, D here re-evaluated his own life history with his nation and engaged in the separation of culture from the socio-cultural repercussions of violence and war he became to know as “culture” (“violence and people’s way of thinking from that”). Simultaneously, he also highlighted valuable cultural tenets encouraging mental strength that he believed helped him to “never ever” give up on himself through difficult times in his life.
Similar to D, E painted a similar journey in his attempt to revisit the history of his nation’s culture:

When I came here, for a few years I really rejected my culture because I had a lot of pain that came from that society and I feel that also I was judging it really hard due to my coming out… I feel a lot of ideas, ideologies in Rwanda tend to be much more conservative, no one reflected me there. But now I’m realizing that I have a lot of habit in Rwanda, and there are good things, and that I wanna go back. I have a to let go of judgement and get to know people as individuals instead of as nations. I mean I should know how that feels being discriminated against based on nation or race…I am now understanding why certain people see different things and understanding more like colonialism and how it has left a lot of traumas to my people and why a lot of things are the way they are, like religion and everything, things that were imposed on us.

E had distanced himself from his culture in Canada as his sexual orientation became a more integral part of him. Although he would call himself “Rwandese” he did not connect with the belief system he associated with being Rwandese as he did not see anyone that “reflected” him in that country, growing up and knowing about his sexual orientation. In order to reconcile culture and sexuality, he was attempting to shed some of his stereotypes about the culture and intended to make up his mind on a case by case basis (at an individual level) rather than judge based on the nation. Interestingly, he noted that him being judged by others due to his background, sexuality, and/or immigrant status, as he outlined throughout the interview, had given him an understanding of the unfairness of ignorance and discrimination (“I should know how it feels…”). E illustrated how he has taken it into his own hands to reconcile himself with his culture as he believed he shares a history with the land (“Have a lot of habit back in Rwanda
and wanna go back”). Similar to D, he acknowledged that his nation and culture are part of his life history and also have “good things” to offer him. However, in order to heal his life history with the land he found it crucial to educate himself about the history of the land itself, in order to form a understanding of the reasons behind certain current cultural beliefs, such as e.g., “colonialism” and “religion”.

K, a refugee who fled Ghana, cannot return to his nation physically as D and E stated they felt they needed to do in order to re-connect and re-evaluate. However, K indicated that he had already framed a similar way of thinking about his nation’s culture while still in Ghana as E was beginning to form at the time of the interview. K explained the influence the dominant culture in Ghana has on views on sexuality on a constitutional level but distinguished this from his own perspective or personal values as an individual:

My tribe back home, we have a rich culture and the constitution of Ghana is built on it. So, when someone is gay, culture and traditions falls on that automatically… but all of this, it started when the British came to colonize Ghana. It started from that time. So, how come you see my orientation as deviant in the views of culture and constitutions? It started long long time ago from outside…Does not apply…For me as long as I don’t infringe on others rights, I am okay and that’s what guides me.

K articulated in a sophisticated manner how his tribe’s culture informed the constitution, and the interplay of law and tradition regarding sexual orientation in Ghana. He specifically spoke of the history of British Colonialism and its old anti-sodomy laws that still prevail as part of the current Ghanaian constitution. A distinction was made between the history that informed much of the current anti-LGBTQ sentiment and his own belief system as an individual (“as long as I do not infringe on others”). In a way K traced back cultural influences that were incorporated
into the Ghanaian current culture from external influences (“British came to colonize Ghana”). Although these took place a “long time ago”, he still viewed these influences as something that is not inherently Ghanaian (“from outside”) and thus did not see these cultural teachings that inform the current anti-gay laws in Ghana as anything that would “apply” to him. Although legally they applied to him and he had to flee his country in order to prevent the legal repercussions of his sexual orientation, they were not relevant, in his eyes, to his personal value system.

**Theme D2: Understanding relative position.** Some immigrants stated that appreciating one’s current socio-cultural positioning in the world (e.g., being situated in a certain political, cultural etc. environment versus another) aided them in understanding why certain opinions regarding sexual orientation are held by certain groups or individuals. Acknowledging this relativity in positioning was stated to help minimize both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict in relations with others who expressed difficulty accepting homosexuality.

As depicted earlier, D had discussed how he experienced internal conflict and guilt when comparing his own current tribulations around his sexuality with hardship that people in Sri Lanka experience. He had also narrated how he had experienced difficulty in reconciling his Sri Lankan self with his sexual self. Here, he illustrated that he has acquired a certain perspective that allowed him to diminish some of this tension brought on by sexuality and memories from his country, as well as to appreciate his family’s difficulty in fully accepting his identity:

I don’t put a label on myself like I used to … rather than saying or seeing myself as Sri Lankan gay, like I need to keep it neutral and, I tell myself the cultural aspect is I came from Sri Lanka, which was in very conservative environment and now I am in Canada, in a different environment…because where I am at my relative position in the world to
everybody else is what is real to me at that time and I am molded by it and should not feel bad. My family has said to me regardless of what or who you are, you are still our son but I still knew they will never…accept me… They are there and I am here. See I know they are trying for where they are but not enough for me in this environment I am in. But, after all, I used to be there and know what they are exposed to…And, what I am trying to do now is to shift it and to listen, let go of this initial ‘I am gay deal with it’ attitude…to see where they are coming from. I mean I don’t have children, I am not a parent in that culture… I don’t know what it’s like…same thing with Canadian people, I cannot be mad at them for not understanding my struggle, they were not exposed to these things. It’s about the relativity of our life experience.

D emphasized that the label that verbalizes the intersectionality of his identities can be “too strong”, and to him the term was too charged. Unlike several other immigrants who identified with those intersectionalities, he did not think of himself in those labels. Rather, he perceived himself in terms of where he is positioned in the world at a certain time. This seemed to offer him a certain flexibility and openness that labels do not (“Sri Lankan gay” versus “I came from Sri Lanka” and “now I am in Canada”). Perceiving himself in such flexible ways diminishes the contradiction that may otherwise exist between sexuality and cultural origin. He was cognizant that the relative position of a human being can colour their perspective and attempted to utilize this way of thinking to mellow out some of the self-criticism he automatically experiences in moments of sadness. Thinking of himself as a person in Canada that used to live in Sri Lanka helped him refrain from pushing himself to look at his current tribulation in Canada from a Sri Lankan person’s perspective who has witnessed great destruction pre-immigration.
In addition to appreciating his own positioning in the world, D also attempted to appreciate his family’s positioning to understand their difficulty in their journey towards acceptance. With D immigrating to Canada while his parents stayed behind, the gap between his and his parents’ perspectives on LGBTQ issues has widened. Although he knew they are “trying their best”, he assessed their efforts as sub-standard to what he perceived to fit within the Canadian context, having lived in this environment for several years now. However, D also said he takes advantage of the fact that he has had that immigration experience and was well aware of the cultural context in Sri Lanka, having experienced it first hand as a first generation immigrant (“After all I used to be there and know…”). Continuously appreciating the relative positioning of his parents aided him in acquiring more empathy and an open ear, while disconnecting from the stubbornly acquired attitude that initially aggressively demanded unconditional acceptance (“I am gay deal with it”). This newly found empathy, D, believed would be beneficial in dealing with some of the internal conflict he experienced due to his family’s slow paced progress in accepting his self-identification. In addition to attempting to appreciate his versus his parents’ relative socio-cultural positions, he also addressed the distinct positions they hold within the life span. His parents are situated in a different life phase than he is (“I am not a parent in that culture”). Lastly, he applied the same strategy to minimize emotions of frustrations brought on by his Canadian friends not being fully able to appreciate his struggle informed by his own life experiences and beliefs.

In talking about sexuality and attempting to diminish conflict brought on by cultural intolerance, J stated that he is attempting to appreciate the relative socio-cultural positioning and political environment of his fellow country men and women. He utilized the metaphor of mountain landscapes that encloses a community geographically to describe the dearth of his
people’s exposure to “messages” about a variety of issues that would help normalize diverse life styles:

Around the world, there are different truths. I know now especially having moved from one country to another…In my culture is we are very close in terms of we are very surrounded with mountains and beautiful, very beautiful but at the same time in your mind when you are seeing that scenario and you are not sharing with other people outside or others with you then you close your mind, and you say, ‘oh, that is very strange, this is very strange’ … the political situation is completely different, so social situation is different, too but human beings are the same, receiving message every day like that people can live different, you know that is the point of the difference between Canada and Colombia.

Here J opined that the reason behind the different stances on sexual orientation are often influenced by the kinds of “messages” relayed within society, whether those are media messages, religious messages etc.; he believed them to be related to the political situation of a nation. He stated that all “human beings are (inherently) the same”, and thus intolerance is not something that is inherent to in one human clan versus another. He stated that different political climates and governments influence what is condoned within a society and influence communication of distinct discourses affecting socio-cultural climate around these issues. So, although the cultural landscape is “very beautiful” in J’s opinion, it can be enriched with opportunities to incorporate views that transcend borders, or mountain ranges, sharing with others and learning from others different viewpoints. Immigration has helped him incorporate new ways of thinking like that (“having moved from one country to another”). Therefore, there is a critical re-examination of the role of culture versus political situation and media control and how these can be related to
situate a community in a certain relative position, rather than a naïve judgment of one’s culture. J later stated that this type of thinking made it easier for him to not take stereotypes about sexuality personally when he interacts with certain people that are situated within that socio-cultural/political position, whether they are physically/geographically situated or still mentally situated in it post immigration.

**Discussion**

This study explored the experiences of Lesbian and Gay (LG) first generation immigrants to Canada pertaining to their negotiation of sexual identity post immigration in the context of diverse, and at times, contrasting cultural influences and social belongings. Negotiations of these aspects were described to occur on an intrapersonal level, as well as on an interpersonal level. However, for many of these participants, negotiation on a personal and intra-psychic level was intimately interwoven with close interpersonal relations, mostly within the family context. Despite the many complexities involved, participants emerged as active protagonists, motivated by desire to reconcile these different, or even opposing, elements of their lives.

**Theme A: Post-immigration Change around Sexual Identity**

Most participants reported a post immigration solidification of sexual identity, a higher commitment to sexual orientation or more positive outlook on their sexuality. For sexual orientation based refugee claimants, their sexual identity had propelled them to Canada, while the other immigrants reported other life events to have triggered their move. In either case, participants verbalized how the meaning and experience of their sexual orientation was transformed in Canada, and, in turn, often affected their post immigration experiences of negotiating their multiple identities. One’s sense of liberation around sexual identity and personal growth in general were associated with this transformation. Unlike some previous
literature that indicates some immigrants had minimally considered their sexual identities pre-immigration (Kuntsman, 2003), all of the participants of the present study reported they had been aware of their same sex attraction or sexual identity before moving.

The malleability of identity structure, i.e. what elements of identity are central to the self and its responsiveness to the changing social context, is emphasized by Identity Process Theory (IPT) (Breakwell, 1986, 2010). Migration can be accompanied by change along social network structures, such as the nature of and extent of availability of interpersonal ties and group membership. Breakwell (1986, 2010) proposes that social influence processes (rhetoric, propaganda, education, law etc.) can also change, establishing values that manifest themselves in social and cultural norms specific to that environment. Participants of the present study experienced LGBTQ specific differences along both of these dimensions between Canada and nation of origin to have solidified/normalized their sexual identity. For example, Canadian LGBTQ rights and movement communicated per law and media and LGBTQ communal spaces for newcomers were reported to have aided this transformation. O’Neill and Kia (2012) highlighted the importance of investigating how the Canadian social context specifically may affect the experience of non-heterosexual newcomers, as Canada’s supportive LGBTQ policies are not very often echoed within other nations. In some rare previous Canadian literature, Fischer (2010) and Lee and Brotman (2011) also noted the socially and legally progressive nature of Canada around LGBTQ as having facilitated general personal growth and a normalization of self for LGBTQ newcomers in their studies. However the level of detail participants of the present study delved into with regards to how these Canadian laws, support systems, and socio-cultural ambience were perceived to have affected their sexual identity post migration is one very rarely mirrored in studies reviewed.
An interesting pattern emerged as participants from regions with similar LGBTQ policies or with similar pre-immigration experiences around sexual orientation reported similar factors in contributing to this change. Participants from African countries in which homosexuality is illegal associated mostly Canadian LGBTQ rights and movements with acquiring a solidified and legitimate sexual identity. The legal legitimacy appeared to have translated into more of a personal legitimate identity for these individuals. Although, the legal protection in Canada has been noted in previous literature to have contributed to general feelings of well-being for LGBTQ newcomers (Fischer, 2010), this was not specifically reported to be associated with acquiring a more solid sexual identity. As will be discussed in the next section, for some of my participants, this solidification was followed by an intrapersonal conflict fuelled by contrasting national (legal) and cultural standpoints on sexual orientation between country of origin and Canada (discussed under Theme B1).

The importance of pre-immigration personal and social experiences around sexuality for how identity is shaped and experienced post immigration was highlighted especially by sexual orientation based refugee claimants. For refugees who reported being social outcasts prior to migration due to sexual orientation, experiences with social inclusion in (refugee specific) LGBTQ organization in Canada were contrasted with the virtual invisibility of such resources in the nations of origin. These communal spaces allowed expression of sexual identity within the context of having experienced severe family and communal trauma. Exposure to a multicultural pool of queer individuals from a multitude of nations, acceptance of the LG refugee’s sexual orientation and empathy towards their experienced trauma, which was often a shared experience, were reported to have instilled a sense of normalcy and dignity. Such spaces have been found to have the power to break social isolation, build a collective identity, foster self-affirmation and
alleviate distress caused by intersectional marginalizing experiences for this sub-population (Lee & Brotman, 2011; Masequesmay, 2003; Russell, 2012).

Interestingly, broader (non-LGBTQ specific) cultural norms encountered in the new country and the absence of familiar ones were also perceived, at least partly, to have contributed to focusing on one’s sexual orientation. Several participants mentioned having encountered a more reserved attitude when socially interacting in Canada. For one participant (J) this allowed withholding oneself sexually, while for another (L) it encouraged pushing oneself towards more self-exposure and disclosure to attain new close relationships. Interestingly, these participants originated from cultural contexts they described to be more “touchy-feely” (Latin American culture). Although a thorough review of the literature did not yield any association between this socio-cultural dynamic and change in sexual identity of LGBTQ immigrants to Canada, general cultural ambience, more so openness and gentleness of Canadians, was mentioned by other sexual minority migrants to Canada in having helped to ‘unfold’ one’s sexuality (Fischer, 2010).

Participants in the present study who were used to being continuously surrounded by family/company also reported loneliness and the absence of this previously experienced social distraction encouraged them to inwardly evaluate themselves, including their sexual orientation. The powerful relevance of solitude and removal from all familiar to personal growth has been documented for immigrants in general (Ritivoi, 2002), as well as for sexual minority immigrants in triggering a journey into self-discovery, including sexual identity (Carrillo, 2004; Watt, 2003). Both Carillo (2004) and Watt (2003) found that the absence of familiar people can allow the LGBTQ immigrant to self-identify and self-express without pressure from family expectations. Although this post immigration centrality of sexual orientation and focus on self was regarded as positive to personal growth by my participants, it also provided new challenges of negotiating
newly prominent personal desires with family expectations/views as will be discussed under Theme B1.

Participants of this study narrated what has been called by Cantu (2009) “shifting meanings” (of their sexual identity) which are informed by “structural variables, institutional policies, cultural influences, and the dynamics of migration” (p.21). Migration and the subsequent exposure to new policies, networks, and socio-cultural dynamics transformed the experience of sexual identities. However, as will be discussed, post-immigration sexual identities also contributed to shaping negotiations with other aspects of their selves in Canada.

**Theme B: Negotiating Sexual Identity Post-immigration-Intrapersonally**

**Theme B1: Post-immigration intrapersonal conflict around sexuality, cultural values, and family expectations.** Almost none of the immigrants reported viewing their sexual orientation as inherently wrong, immoral or sinful or reported a negative view of themselves due to their orientation at the time of the interview. Rather, participants narrated a couple of common points of tension, including having to balance their individual desires with family roles and family views on homosexuality, having to reconcile their national background with their sexuality, as well as having to juggle contrasting cultural norms around sexuality. For these individuals, migration, resulting intensified commitment to sexual orientation, central cultural values/family roles, and being situated at an intersection of cultural influences interacted, resulting in heightened internal tension post immigration. This surprisingly prevalent theme indicated that post immigration some LGBTQ immigrants may actually experience higher emotional distress around their sexual identity, a departure from the reduction in internalized barriers around sexuality and self as described in some other literature on LGBTQ immigrants to Canada (Fischer, 2010).
Interestingly and of note is the fact that all of the participants who reported internal conflict were those who moved to Canada for non-sexual orientation related factors (e.g., political/educational reasons and not due to persecution on grounds of sexuality). Almost all expressed a desire, willingness, or openness to return to their nation of origin for visits and/work etc. and reported being relatively close with their families. In addition, none of the female participants in this study reported this kind of internal conflict.

Jaspal (2012) proposes it is difficult to maintain a “sense of continuity between… the self prior to entry in gay space and the self subsequent to this experience” (p.233). According to Jaspal (2012) exposure to gay affirmative environments where homosexuality is viewed as acceptable may cause disruption to the existing identities or views if those contradict such an affirmative social representation of gay identity. Although for many of these participants entering Canada cannot be equated with entering ‘gay space’ for the first time, this entrance, as discussed above, aided in incorporating that identity more solidly into the self-concept.

Evaluation (i.e., value attached) of a new identity configuration, according to Identity Process Theory, can cause internal tension if the new central identity is perceived to be in opposition to other prominent identities (Breakwell, 1986). Although this internal tension was experienced as within themselves, as between their sexual identity and own cultural values, interestingly, my participants conversed almost entirely about close interpersonal relations. They emphasized their family roles, and families’ values and expectations, and external stigma rather than their own misgivings about their sexual orientation.

Strong internal tension in the absence of internalized stigma and self-devaluation has been noted amongst minority ethnic/immigrant gays and lesbians from collectivist contexts (Jaspal, 2012). This has been attributed to the strong social interdependence of the individual’s
sense of self to family and community identity; and this interdependence within more collectivist cultures can allow threats at the interpersonal level to translate to the intrapersonal level (Jaspal, 2012; Phellas, 2005). Weinreich (1983) proposes conflict in the absence of internalized stigma and self-devaluation pertains more so to culture conflict, where someone being situated in two opposing worlds can internalize conflicts between the values of one culture versus another, which often happens in the case of first generation immigrants. According to Settles (2004) identities can also have opposing cultures, with different set of normative beliefs shared by those with a particular identity. For example, gay identity is often viewed as a highly individualistic identity especially in collectivist communities, which can make the reconciliation of gay identity and cultural or family identities within this context more challenging (Mao, McCormick & Van De Ven, 2002).

As proposed by Hecht (1993) (as cited in Jung and Hecht, 2004), Communications Theory of Identity (CTI) allows us to recognize how identity negotiation within the self can be strongly influenced by what is conveyed within communication by important others about one’s identity, a phenomenon that was embodied within participant stories. For several participants this interdependence to their families translated into a tension between their personal and relational layers of identity as proposed by CTI (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Participants expressed having difficulty reconciling their self-concepts (personal identity layer), which post-immigration included one’s sexual identity as a central component, with their culturally appropriate family and societal roles (relational identities, such as the ‘good’ or ‘caring’ son who will not shame the family as verbalized by some participants). For first generation immigrants these familial roles, responsibilities, and family solidarity can take more central stage than second generation immigrants according to Merz, Ozeke-Kocabas, Oort & Schuengel (2009).
Emphasizing collective needs (mostly within family context) and welfare over one’s own desires resulted in several sacrifices on participants’ part to prevent family shame and pain, much of that in the absence of own internalized stigma around homosexuality. For example, many participants reported constantly guarding one’s self-expression, restricting one’s involvement in relationships, and even attempting to change one’s orientation, similar to what has been found in other literature on sexual minority individuals from collectivist cultures (Boulden, 2009; Jaspal, 2012; Phellas, 2005). Interestingly, one immigrant’s sense of interdependence transcended beyond family unit to nation compatriots, as he narrated difficulty in justifying his own personal needs, goals, and tribulations around his sexual orientation when he is aware of the suffering of his own people located in his nation. His continuous conflict was a unique one informed by memories from the home country not echoed in relevant accessible studies reviewed.

Identities within the communal and personal frame as proposed by CTI also conflicted for some of my participants. Especially national identity proved to be difficult to reconcile with sexual identity. Like most gay and lesbian individuals from any nation, these participants stated having to negotiate family and community views often heterosexist or homophobic. However, unlike second or higher generation immigrants, the majority of the first generation immigrants of the present study still had their parents and family situated, at times, in countries where homosexuality is illegal. Some individuals acknowledged the positions of their parents as adding to the difficulty experienced. Governmental stance cannot be assumed to translate automatically into family culture, since it is informed by economical, historical and political influences apart from cultural tenets or beliefs as proposed by other researchers (Cantu, 2009; Malesevic, 2006; Mathews, 2000). However, according to Hunt and Valentine (as cited in Mitchell et al., 2009) it
has been found that condemnation of homosexuality can be strongly influenced by national legal stance even when controlling for religiosity/traditionalism.

Furthermore, lack of exposure to LGBTQ issues in some countries can translate into a general sense that homosexuality is a ‘western phenomenon’ as highlighted by previous studies conducted (Fisher, 2003; Greene, 1997). Interestingly, in the present study, participants whose parents viewed their child’s sexual orientation as a result of immigrating or something foreign to the heritage culture were the same who verbalized a difficulty reconciling their nationality (a communal type of identity) with how they viewed themselves as gay individuals (e.g., ‘How can I be Rwandese and gay…’, “hard to see myself as Sri Lankan gay”). Experiences around negotiating sexuality, culture and family within the migration context, therefore, highlighted the important link between family (and community) communication and the identity on personal, relational, and communal levels.

As an added challenge, and a challenge not often intensely explored in literature, this negotiation did not occur within one main socio-cultural context, and participants’ heritage culture or family were not the only influences that contributed to this tension described. Some participants expressed experiencing pressure and difficulty in adhering to the westernized individualistic template of negotiating sexuality and family’s viewpoints on homosexuality. There was a concern not only with self-identifying as gay within their family context but also with what would constitute a culturally appropriate gay lifestyle.

Fisher (2003), as well as Raspal and Cinnirella (2010) found that, in the absence of a solid religious history, the LGBTQ immigrant can still be reprimanded by family and ethnic community for violating culture “codes” and proper conduct around sexuality (as addressed previously within the literature review of this paper). For one participant of this study (G), even
after having been able to reconcile religious and sexual identity to some extent, and having been accepted as a gay man by religious friends in Canada, the internal struggle persisted. This was a struggle to reconcile gay identity and family identity and to reconcile conflicting socio-cultural norms around sexuality within starkly different settings and contexts he found himself positioned in.

According to Spickard (2013), post-immigration, individuals are situated within a cultural intersection or what has been called ‘transnational positionality’ (Spickard, 2013). Spickard (2013) proposes first generation immigrants’ negotiations are informed by fluid and malleable ‘positionalities’ between diverse cultural influences rather than by a rigid cultural identity. The LG first generation immigrant’s negotiation of sexual identity is nestled between, at times, opposing socio-cultural norm landscapes (family, ethnic community, mainstream LGBTQ and mainstream Canadian society), each encouraging a certain kind of conduct or discourse around sexuality. Participants of this study expressed a need for constructing a culturally appropriate template that they could adhere to as first generation immigrants, often bridging contrasting cultural norms. Publicly declaring one’s sexual orientation, the individualistic manner in which sexual identity is often managed within family context, as well as emphasizing sexuality in asserting one’s sexual orientation (perceived over-sexualization) were seen as acceptable norms in Canada (or at least within mainstream Canadian gay culture) by several of my participants. However, they were seen to be in stark contrast to norms around sexuality and conduct within the family and heritage culture context. As in the present data, other researchers note the cultural emphasis on family reputation and a tendency to keep private and public sexual behaviour separate to save face within collectivist communities (Acosta, 2008; Watt, 2003; Yang, 2008).
The physical distance between many of my first generation migrant participants and their parents did not translate into an emotional detachment from family or from family expectations. Although some participants appreciated processing these aspects of their selves in the relative anonymity of society away from family and nation, they found it difficult to feel “outside the (re)imagination” (Fisher, 2003, p.184), of their former content. In other words, participants were still aware of family judgments and expectations even in their absence. Many respondents in the present study still maintained a strong attachment to their place of origin. Their present lives were described as consisting of a collection of memories from the nation of origin, the immigration experience, and future plans associated with the home nation. For example, memories of their parents’ sacrifice around and post migration, as well as memories of compatriots suffering in the nation resulted in guilty feelings, particularly when emphasizing individual desires. Furthermore, several immigrants verbalized a desire to return to the homeland for visits or work, which made the need to reconcile one’s sexual orientation with family (roles) and/or cultural/national identity even more crucial in their intrapersonal negotiation. These again were intricacies unique to first generation immigrants not noted in relevant accessible literature reviewed.

Despite the complexity involved in these negotiations, some participants’ narrations were ripe with cultural pride and strong familial love as has been noted in other literature (Poljiski, 2011). As the central family unit can be a site of tension, it can also be a great resource for LGBTQ immigrants. As per Tremble (as cited in Fygetakis, 1997) the emphasis on close-knit family ties could potentially provide the LG immigrant with a wealth of emotional support once the conflict is processed within the family unit. Mireshghi and Matsumo (2008) propose that collectivist family contexts could render the LG individual at an advantage in comparison to
individualist contexts in the case of parental/familial acceptance. They found that while Iranian sexual minority participants on average perceived their culture as more homophobic than Americans perceived the American culture to be, those Iranians who had disclosed their orientation and received parental support showed better mental health than Americans who were out to their parents. The authors concluded that since the mental health of individuals from collectivist cultures, like Iranians, is likely more heavily influenced by familial relations than those from an individualistic culture, their psychological state of mind is lifted more significantly in the case of parental acceptance. However, they speculated that in the case of parental rejection, LGBTQ individuals from collectivist backgrounds, like Iranian sexual minorities, can suffer from more deleterious mental health consequences than those from individualistic cultural backgrounds.

My participants’ intrapersonal negotiation was more of a desire to unite currently conflicting aspects for a more unified self than an echoed story of despair or self-hate. Nevertheless, the optimistic stance taken should not undermine the psychological and emotional distress, such as reported within stories, feelings of guilt, loneliness, and lack of being understood within a new land, often without family and familiar ties. Even in the context of some available social support in Canada, not having a source of support that would be culturally resonating with them in the face of this post immigration period of internal tension was reported as a challenge.

**Theme B2: No intrapersonal conflict around sexual identity and other identities post-immigration.** There were also some participants who reported experiencing no internal conflict brought on by their sexuality and personal cultural values and/or by negotiation of sexuality and family expectations. Interestingly, these were lesbian and gay refugees who fled
their countries due to persecution based on sexual orientation. Other studies conducted with LGBTQ individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds/non-western cultures indicate that internal conflict is not an inevitable result of having two or more seemingly opposing identity aspects (Meyer, 2010; Meyer & Ouellette, 2009) and this can be a sign of resiliency in face of multiple obstacles and trauma.

Alternatively, it could also be a sign of detachment from the trauma some of the participants in the present study had to endure, from severe social isolation, to having been persecuted by one’s own parents. These individuals vehemently emphasized a pre- and post-migration disconnection from heritage culture and family. Complete catapulting out of country and family context that accompanied sexual identity disclosure and subsequent fleeing to Canada further appeared to reinforce the disconnect from culture and family that participants had said pre-existed. Having lost virtually all family ties and contact, having experienced general pre-immigration disconnect from culture and/or family, and, as refugees, having no intention to return to their nations they also denied having to negotiate sexuality with aspects that previous immigrants reported as important to them (i.e. family, culture, memories and plans around the nation of origin). A potential active detachment from family and culture as described by all of these refugees has been noted in previous literature, on the part of some ethnic minority gays and lesbians due to inability to fulfill the roles expected from their family (Boulden, 2009). Some have been said to have a capacity for “psychological independence” in the face of much trauma and marginalization (Nettles & Balter, 2011). Cantu (2009) reported if the LGBTQ immigrant is seen as marginal pre-immigration (e.g., due to sexuality), as was the case for these refugees of the present study, then a very real social separation and detachment may precede the geographical separation phase often implemented by migration.
This separation phase existent prior to migration may cease for some LGBTQ immigrants who may experience a greater sense of community and belonging post migration. Pre-migration traumatic experiences/disconnect and post-migration group membership could have contributed to a different experience in negotiating sexuality in Canada than the previous immigrants of this study reported (Theme B1). For the refugees of the present study, migration to Canada was followed by membership in specific LGBTQ refugee organizations due to the type of refugee claim made (sexual orientation refugees), whereas my non-refugee participants previously discussed did not enjoy such membership. Refugees of this study regarded sexual orientation and refugee experiences as common unifiers between them and other LGBTQ refugees, regardless of ethnic and national differences, which may have contributed to acquiring a post-immigration collective identity as the “queer refugee in Canada”.

Similarly, in Kuntsman’s study (2003) a “sense of belonging” and a ceasing of” being a foreigner” (p.301) was ironically reported to have been attained by migrating to a foreign country. Kuntsman interviewed lesbian immigrants from Russia to Israel who insisted feeling no connection to heritage roots and reported tendency to bond with others in the new land based on similar sexual identities. Their membership in mainstream queer communities even, in some cases, encouraged the construction of new national belongings. Findings like these highlight how sexual identity may affect the immigration and settlement experience of some immigrants, minimizing feelings of foreigner status that may have been felt more intensely before migration. The distinct experiences of negotiating sexual identity in Canada among the different newcomer groups in this study highlight what has been described the existence of “notable variability” in LGBTQ newcomer experience to Canada (O’Neill & Kia, 2012). They believe that a multitude
of specific social and cultural contexts LGBTQ migrants are situated in (pre and post- migration) can result in heterogeneity of experience within this sub-population.

**Theme C: Negotiating Sexual Identity Post-immigration-Interpersonally**

As proposed by Jung and Hecht (2004), identity gaps as per Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) are disconnects between layers of identity. These identity gaps were reported to have manifested themselves in some of my participants’ experiences of interpersonal negotiation within Canadian society. Participants reported actively concealing their sexual orientation within both mainstream Canada and ethnic community in order to prevent discrimination, a form of actively creating an identity gap. However, even when there was no need to conceal or a desire to disclose, sexual orientation and other central identities were often ascribed by others, an identity gap created not enforced by the lesbian or gay immigrant.

**Theme C1: Active management of identities.** Although Canada was often viewed as a very socially progressive nation, many participants of the present study reported an active concealment of identities when interacting with others, actively implementing a gap in how they view themselves versus how they enact their identities (a personal-enacted identity gap as per Jung & Hecht, 2004) to prevent stigmatization. This finding is consistent with other Canadian literature on similar populations, noting concealment of sexual orientation due to post migration discrimination (Lee & Brotman, 2011; O’Neill & Kia, 2012). For example, O’Neill and Kia (2012) interviewed sexual minority newcomers to Canada (refugees and non-refugee newcomers), as well as immigration and LGBTQ related service providers. They concluded many of their participants did forego disclosure of sexual orientation as to not complicate the post migration settlement process which is already laden with “cultural and practical barriers” (p.32) with additional stigma around sexuality.
Experiences with discrimination and marginalization based on one identity (sexual versus ethnic, e.g.) were reported by my participants (e.g., homophobia within ethnic community versus discrimination within mainstream gay community due to skin colour) and are highlighted in some previous literature on LGBTQ ethnic minorities/immigrants (e.g., Acosta, 2008; Fisher, 2003, Szymanski & Sung, 2010). However, for the purpose of the focus of this section, experiences with negotiations of sexual identity (disclosure/expression versus concealment) that were intricately linked to other central multiple identities of the LG immigrants are discussed here, as this is not often highlighted in previous literature on this specific population.

As the case of one refugee-K- uniquely depicted, sexual identity concealment involved simultaneous active denial of another belonging, namely national/ethnic background. K, as some other newcomers, did not feel he could be himself due to often having to verbally deny sexual and national identities simultaneously (both being gay and Ghanaian). On a symbolic level, K’s story represented other lesbian and gay immigrants’ experiences. For many participants, managing sexual orientation within society, especially within ethnic community context, often also meant letting go of nationality, culture, ethnicity. Some participants stated feeling culturally short changed, having been denied full standing as a national of their country by others in the ethnic community due to homosexuality being often associated with westernization as echoed in previous research (Masequesmay, 2003).

Others reported actively denying themselves, by abstaining from social interactions within ethnic community or from cultural events due to fear of being outed, based on certain ‘signals’ that may connote homosexuality. Hence for many, interpersonal negotiation of sexuality was intimately linked to management of ethnic/ cultural/ national identities, even in the absence of intrapersonal conflict between these identities (e.g., those who had denied
experiencing any conflict between these identities within their own self-concept). These continuous negotiations, i.e. the denial of identities within communication with others can in turn affect one’s own self-concept, as is proposed by Jung and Hecht (2004); and this is most relevant to the discussion of the inter-linkage of intra and interpersonal negotiation of identities as experienced by some participants. As per Jung and Hecht (2004), discrepancies between identity frames (e.g., how one views herself versus how one is viewed in society) can result in feeling misunderstood/excluded and in communication dissatisfaction, and this can have implications for social relations and integration.

In addition, K’s story illustrated how status based on skin colour can become an additional factor post-migration that needs to be managed. Furthermore, in some cases it can also affect sexual identity management; as in the case of K, for example, the already existent prejudice based on skin colour would be amplified by the disclosure of another stigmatized identity. Some participants verbalized some of the gains and losses experienced in Canada with regards to their multiple statuses. For example, while some freedom was gained around relatively free sexual expression in Canada, a new status based on skin colour factored into the experience of post-migration navigation of Canadian society. This is in line with previous research with migrant sexual minorities to North America (Acosta, 2008; Cantu, 2009; Lopez, 2010).

For example, Acosta (2008) interviewed Latina lesbian migrants to the U.S. and highlighted how participants who were seen as relatively light skinned in their home countries were exposed to a new hierarchy based on skin colour in the new land. Post-migration, they became “people of color… minorities” (p.646), and this shift in status impacted the self-concept of participants negatively. Participants of these studies portrayed how the person can witness inequality based on skin colour from a position of the oppressed group post-migration, whereas
pre-migration she/he may have belonged to a privileged group. This new less privileged status can further discourage sexual identity disclosure in the new country. As per Cantu (2009) some Mexican sexual minority migrants to the U.S. experienced a “downward social mobility” (p.96) due to shifting statuses based on skin colour and class which left minimal room for negotiating sexual identity. Thus, lived experience of marginalization has been suggested to be contingent upon the intersection of ethnicity, skin colour, citizenship status, gender, sexuality and negotiations of these both visible and invisible identities (Nettles & Balter, 2011; O’Neill & Kia, 2012).

Although the existence of LGBTQ communities in Canada was much appreciated for sexual identity expression by many participants, this expression did not come without a price to other identity aspects of LG immigrants. While, at times, participants stated there was often a strong focus on racial markers within mainstream LGBTQ community, leading either to marginalization or sexual objectification, several immigrants stated cultural diversity was often not acknowledged. In some instances, cultural background and/or experiences pre, around and post migration informed the construction of a lesbian or gay identity distinct from the image or norm celebrated within mainstream LGBTQ community.

For example, both culture and migration experiences contributed to the formation of an unpopular politically inclined lesbian identity for one immigrant lesbian, named M. M had to actively manage these values, often needing to conceal them within mainstream LGBTQ quarters. Other participants of the present study felt that, although they could relatively freely express their sexuality and desires within the mainstream LGBTQ community, they could not assert their own unique gay or lesbian identities or even had to conceal other aspects or identities. For example, religious, or celibate, or family centred, or not publicly announced
gay/lesbian identities were perceived as unpopular within mainstream LGBTQ community, and similar stories have been noted within literature (Vega, Spieldenner & Tang, 2012; Watts, 2003). For example, Watt’s (2003) ethnic minority gay young men voiced how they perceived being expected to live the ‘typical’ Western gay lifestyle, having to adhere to the ideal image pertaining to physical attractiveness but also to behaviour standards around sexual relations, the coming out process, and how to manage family relations etc.

**Theme C2: Ascribed identities by others.** Interestingly, some participants, especially refugee claimants, indicated that, even in the absence of post migration homophobic experiences, they have not engaged in much sexual identity disclosure since moving to Canada. Pre-migration, some had not engaged in such delicate decision making process, often situated in contexts that called for (close to) complete concealment. Participant stories indicated an identity gap not actively implemented and were reminiscent of what Jung and Hecht (2004) coined an identity gap between personal and ascribed relation frames, where there is a discrepancy between self-perception and perception of how others see him/her. This was a phenomenon that was complex and interwoven with different nuanced cultural layers, settlement specific barriers, pre- and post-migration experiences and immigrant status not echoed in other studies accessible to me for review, although some notions involved have been addressed separately in some literature.

Despite recognizing Canada’s open discourse around sexuality on a broad national level (e.g., as connoted by laws and policies), this openness was not perceived to translate to the day to day interactions within these individuals’ lives. Some participants described how their cultural background/upbringing around sexual discourse prevented public declaration of sexual identity within superficial or newly forged relationships. However, meaningful relationships wherein disclosure could occur were not easily attainable according to my participants.
Some noted Canadians to be more distant and less open to engage in conversations and friendships that may lead to appropriate disclosure. Cultural differences have been reported to make forging new relations in Canada difficult for other LGBTQ immigrants in another study (Fischer, 2010). Some newcomers of the present study also attributed some of this to a general reluctance to socially include refugees. Deaux and Wiley (2007) proposed key elements in the representation of immigrant identity are skin colour and citizenship status/legality; and newcomer statuses are stratified according to these elements. For example, according to Steiner (as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010) refugees due to their migrant status, as opposed to, e.g., business class migrants, may be viewed as a drain to society. Some of my participants felt their newcomer status was noticeable per physical markers, such as seeming skinny/mal-nourished, or per their accent, and often perceived as being regarded as a burden on society. This made creating meaningful relations wherein disclosure could occur difficult for recent migrants.

In addition, pre-immigration experiences of persecution and/or trauma due to sexual orientation disclosure also minimized disclosure within more superficial social relations; and this was especially the case for refugees. Some participants had been outed to others by people they had trusted, such as siblings, friends etc. Previous literature corroborates that pre-immigration effects of disavowing and denying sexual identities do not automatically disappear in Canada, nor does the vague language around sexuality that may have been used prior to migration to prevent suspicion from others (Jordan, 2009). Society’s potential general ignorance about the existence of gays and lesbians from other countries was also mentioned by a couple of my participants (e.g., C) as a potential contribution to what Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) call ‘intersectional invisibility’ or the invisibility of those at the intersection of multiply oppressed identities.
Interestingly, some immigrants stated not only was their sexual orientation left unacknowledged but other central aspects or identities, such as ethnicity/nationality were ascribed by others, often due to stereotypes. Alternatively, their specific nationalities or ethnicities would dissipate into the background as they were lumped together into an encompassing group of “refugees” or “immigrants” as has been reported by other LBTQ immigrants in another study (Acosta, 2008). This was especially disturbing to those participants of this study who were proud of their national backgrounds/ethnicity. Having one’s sexuality and other aspects such as nationality/ethnicity left unacknowledged, accumulated into a feeling of not being ‘seen’ for some of my participants.

Thus, while active management and concealment of sexual identity and other identities was often utilized to prevent discrimination, participants depicted a layer of complexity in identity negotiation that transcends beyond an attempt to prevent overt acts of discrimination, but, at other times, revolves around a desire to be acknowledged by others for who they perceive themselves as. However, a complex array of experiences, norms and other intricacies tends to leave their identities invisible within mainstream Canadian society.

**Theme D: Post-immigration Reflection**

Given the complexities of the post-migration lives of my participants, their continuous negotiations of identities, relationships, and navigation within different communities they perceived to be partially part of, associated emotional repercussions of loneliness, frustration, loss of hope, and even histories of suicidal ideation were not surprising. However, it became apparent that they found strength in the same aspects and experiences that had contributed to these complexities, and the conflicts that they experienced motivated them towards a unification of all these distinct, and at times conflicting, aspects and relations. These individuals utilized
their cultural belongings and immigration experiences, and hence their multiple group memberships, as a source of strength and resource to minimize conflict and move forward. IPT predicts that individuals will make use of their multiple group memberships and experiences associated to minimize feelings of conflict (Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal, 2012).

**Theme D1: Going back to move forward.** For many of these participants, although they were undergoing difficulties in uniting their sexual identities with culture, culture was reported to be an inseparable part of their being, and they expressed wanting to preserve and incorporate invaluable cultural teachings into their lives. Reading and Rubin (2011) explored LGBTQ asylum seekers’ psychological needs, moving beyond the single event model of trauma, but appreciating the “subtle and continuous…ongoing” (p.88) discrimination and barriers accumulating into an “insidious traumatization” for this sub-population (as per Maria Root) (p.88). They noted that many participants expressed a wish to maintain tenets of their heritage culture in their healing and settlement process in the U.S.

Several of my participants delved into detail around how they had or were intending to draw from cultural resources and life experiences to unify aspects of their selves and move forward. In the present study, different manners of revisiting and re-evaluating culture and land emerged, such as planning to revisit the actual birth place and immersing oneself in the culture to make peace with one’s own history with the land. Mentally re-visiting the history of the nation and culture, including educating oneself on how the culture morphed into its current state, and understanding the fluidity of culture itself were other strategies. Specifically, several immigrants narrated how they have learned to dissect their mental representations of what ‘culture’ has meant to them. This involved an attempt to separate the essence of their heritage culture from socio-political influences, such as political events like war, influence of government and
economic state of affairs of the nation, religion and external cultural influences of colonialism etc. Participants believed that these factors have, at least, partly informed their culture’s standpoint on many issues, including homosexuality. These strategies and plans were often utilized in order to manage some of the internal conflict that several participants were bothered by as discussed previously.

**Theme D2: Understanding relative position.** In addition to re-evaluating one’s heritage culture, appreciation of one’s socio-cultural location in the world was also employed. This helped participants to understand other important people’s lack of understanding of their sexual identity or generally the stigma towards their sexual orientation. Especially the socio-cultural and socio-political gap between participants and their families who were still located in nation of origin were appraised. As first generation immigrants, their exposure to often starkly different social contexts and discourse around social issues, including homosexuality, aided in appreciating how one’s outlook is malleable and often dependent on public discourse, media and other forms of communication from the government and within society. They talked about letting go of judgment, appreciating others’ cultural standpoint and capacity for the unknown and an intention to gently educate others about their alternative stance. Carrillo (2004) believes such two way flow of information exchange and learning on participants’ and families/communities part has the potential to contribute to cultural change around sexuality both within home and host nation as both parties learn from each other’s viewpoints.

No accessible research on LGBTQ immigrants, especially Canadian research, was found to delve into such detail around immigrants’ utilization of cultural attachment, background, and immigration experience to minimize conflict experienced due to sexual identity negotiation. This dearth of accessible literature on managing these conflicts specific for this population was noted.
by many of my participants who emphasized needing such culturally relevant material/resources. Not only does this focus on LGBTQ immigrants’ resilience fracture stereotypical images of the LGBTQ immigrant being a victim of culture and immigration experience, but also offers others in their position a refreshing alternative to merely assimilating to the host country’s main template of gay/lesbian identity.

A Word on the Canadian Context

Given that identity negotiation is shaped within a particular socio-cultural context, it is important to examine societal norms, values, and legal discourse with reference to sexual minorities. There is insufficient literature on socio-cultural context in which lesbian and gay first generation immigrants’ identity negotiation is explored. Although there is some literature that examines the impact of immigration policies and national context on LGBTQ newcomers in Canada and the United States, this does not delve into identity negotiations situated within these countries (Pickert, 2012). Canadian researchers speculate that due to the legal protections of LGBTQ individuals in Canada, the social context of sexual minorities and the experience of heterosexism may differ to some extent from that of sexual minorities in other nations (O’Neill & Kia, 2012).

As illustrated in Theme A, participants talked about normalization of sexual orientation in Canada due to societal acceptance. They also referred to exposure to gay rights in Canada and emergence of sexual identity. As I discussed earlier, despite the difficulties that many of participants experienced within the post-settlement context, the Canadian legally and socially progressive stance on sexual minority issues and the availability of resources appeared to have facilitated sexual identity integration. In the words of one of the participants “there are laws here…so I can tell you, I am gay, and you cannot touch me”. Participants also mentioned factors
they perceived as representative of the Canadian society that were not specific to LGBTQ issues. For example, emphasis on acceptance towards diversity and multiculturalism provided a welcoming context in which identity negotiation and personal growth were situated in. As one participant articulated, the exposure to other immigrants’ stories instilled a sense of “openness and feeling that everyone came here for a reason”. Emphasis on respect for privacy, and the non-judgemental nature of the greater Canadian society was often also mentioned to have created a space for identity exploration and expression that was deemed to be respectful of many participants’ comfort level. As some participants put it, “Canadians are polite and don’t ask too many questions” and “respect you for who you are”. In sum, the present research contributed to this gap with regards to how Canadian specific societal and legal structures may play a role in the intra and interpersonal identity negotiations amongst the LGBTQ newcomer community. Hopefully, more future research will expand on this.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Practical Implications

Limitations. Having to disclose one’s sexual orientation and/or having to share stories that may be tainted with trauma and pain (especially in case of refugees) may have contributed to limited number of participants who were willing to take part in this study. Initially, a number of 10-15 participants with a more balanced number of women/men was proposed, however, the realities of recruitment resulted in the attained number and gender balance. Having 10 participants for such study that utilized IPA and generating fairly rich data the number was deemed to be more than sufficient. Although, in the initial stages of the study the aim was to interview more immigrants from Asia/Middle East, due to their rare involvement in LGBTQ studies, the difficulties of recruitment and lack of service contact points for LGBTQ migrants from these territories led to more broad inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria had to be broadened
in terms of country of origin and newcomer status (e.g., refugees and immigrants). After deliberation with supervisors and other researchers these modifications were not regarded to be crucial shortcomings due to the fairly homogenous nature of the participants, namely their sexual orientation, collectivist cultural background, and first generation newcomer status. Broadening the criteria also aided in including more diversity in experiences while still maintaining homogeneous criteria of sample. These common criteria were deemed appropriate in exploring sexual identity negotiation within the context of migration and settlement.

The number of women who took part in the study, and furthermore the relatively guarded narratives given by two of the three women that participated was a limitation of the study. Perhaps female migrants have to face additional barriers, such as norms that discourage discourse around sexuality. Also, perhaps female sexuality may be more fluid, the inclusion criteria (exclusively same sex attraction) may have been too restricting for migrant women.

My own role as an insider qualitative researcher (being a first generation immigrant) definitely helped me in recruiting participants, however, it may have also affected the dynamics during data collection, i.e. interviews specifically. However, I made every effort to allow the participants to talk freely and only probe them if they asked for further information or assistance. My own sharing of my experiences (which was done to a limited extent when appropriate) aided in providing in-depth and rich narratives on participants’ behalf. Specifically, due to my own experiences, a validation check was performed with participants, where possible, to ensure interpretations were in similar lines to what they had meant to say.

As with any analysis approach IPA also has its limitations. As described in the methodology section, the method lends itself very well to the meaning making of lived experiences first hand. It allows the layers of the complex experiences around identity
negotiation and migration to be highlighted through the individuals’ eyes. However, IPA is not the best method of choice if, for example, one is to explore critically how these participants formulated answers or justified their choices or experiences, such as discourse analysis methods would encourage the researcher to do. The use of method here is not a limitation considering the purpose of the study, it is more of an acknowledgement that IPA, like any other method is better suited to some analyses than others. Simultaneously, it is a misconception that utilizing phenomenological analysis methods as a researcher translates into simply re-iterating participants’ meaning making of their experiences and taking everything at face value without critically examining how pieces of the experiences may fit together. Landridge (2008) argues that, e.g., discourse analysis and phenomenological analysis each give different weight to function /action-oriented speech versus content, and that the object of study for each differs. He further argues that phenomenological analysis is much needed in areas where not much research has been established, since “psychology …has rushed too quickly to explain and has yet to fully establish the nature of the terrain it seeks to interrogate” (p.1134).

**Future directions.** As the literature review depicted, more Canadian research is needed to understand the experiences of sexual minority immigrants in this country. This will be beneficial not only because it can inform services specifically for this sub-population, which in itself is an important rationale for conducting such work. Furthermore, this work can be extended to inform theories of multiple identity negotiation, enrich sexual orientation literature with its cross cultural focus, explore further how sexuality may affect settlement and acculturation of immigrants, and speak to the complexities involved in recruiting hard to reach/vulnerable populations etc. More studies need to explore the role of context in sexual identity negotiation as mentioned. Furthermore, there is need for cross-cultural studies
comparing identity negotiation and adjustment of such communities to highlight the role of socio-cultural context.

If researchers have the budget, time, and research support, further studies on the experiences of sexual minority first immigrants should include larger samples of women to potentially uncover nuanced migration experiences or negotiation strategies or challenges that women may face. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to explore potential barriers that may keep women from engaging in such studies. Larger samples could also provide opportunities to explore how other factors, such as immigrant status type, socio-economic status, education, rural versus urban residency interplay with identity negotiation. Future studies could also look at other sexual minorities, such as bisexual, or at transgendered migrants.

Another potential interesting research venue would be to include first generation immigrants’ family members or parents (if in Canada) in the study. Given the central focus that family and especially parents played in participants’ identity negotiation, understanding more about the parents’ challenges, views, or support around their child’s sexual orientation and/or coming out would be invaluable. This information would be useful in creating services that could help alleviate some of the family conflict and stress for these individuals.

**Practical implications.** As mentioned, the main purpose of this study is to give voice to this often unheard newcomer group to Canada and to gain insight into the unique experiences, challenges and strengths of this population. The act of telling stories themselves was quite cathartic to my participants. Many noted this was the first time they had shared their stories, challenges and strengths in such an in-depth and coherent manner. This information is intended to be communicated to interested service providers and community partners to inform them of the common points of experience and barriers to eventually, and hopefully, incorporate that
knowledge in their service delivery (both at the level of Immigration and LGBTQ services). My existent contact points acquired during the recruitment process are intended to be utilized in this endeavour. The initial goal is to engage in generating awareness and interest with further contacts suggested. Although there are some, albeit limited services available for LGBTQ refugees especially within the GTA area, non-refugee newcomers should also be directed to appropriate services upon arrival to Canada. The stories of many participants and my own conversations with some service providers indicated that both Immigration and LGBTQ services could benefit from being more inclusive and informative to sexual minority immigrants. For example, settlement services and ESL classes could address sexual diversity as part of their service or curriculum. Minor advancements have been made so far, e.g., in 2011, Canada’s new immigrant study guide (“Discover Canada”) mentioned a sentence about gay and lesbian rights in Canada for the first time.

Mainstream LGBTQ program providers would benefit from training that includes cultural sensitivity and cross cultural literature on sexuality. Individuals at the intersection of these identities have the power to inform culturally appropriate strategies for approaching this topic with ethnic communities and families, so that, over time, some of the association between westernization and sexual orientation may be alleviated within those communities. Collaborating with LGBTQ ethnic minorities and/or first generation sexual minority migrants on the mainstream LGBTQ organizations’ part could also help in decreasing this association by creating more services, programs, workshops and festivities that represent the multiculturalism Canada stands for. A need that was expressed by many participants was to have culturally appropriate services and literature available. In the future, I am also intending to address this need by crafting further literature, highlighting my participants’ stories (e.g., more of a narrative
form of participant stories in short booklet form) that could speak to other sexual minority migrants.

As several participants’ narratives depicted, migration to Canada does not necessarily automatically lead to decrease in internal conflict and increase in sexual identity expression. This was especially the case for new refugee claimants in this study, often, partly due to pre-migration experiences and survival tactics. Refugee and Immigration Boards should be educated more about these pre-migration experiences as well as post-migration homophobia and other forms of discrimination (e.g., racism in mainstream gay community) that may make this disclosure or social interaction difficult. In addition, the subtle complexities that can be so easily overlooked, such as socio-cultural norm differences and how they may restrict disclosure need to be taken into account when appraising whether a claimant is making a valid sexual orientation claim.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the post immigration experiences of Lesbian and Gay first generation immigrants to Canada, specifically highlighting negotiation of sexual identity in the context of diverse, and at times, contrasting cultural influences and social belongings. Participants negotiated sexual identity on both intra-and interpersonal levels within the different societal segments of Canada. Challenges pertained to the negotiation of sexual identity with other central aspects (e.g., culture/ethnicity) perceived as incompatible either by themselves or by significant others around them. Most participants had to delicately balance the disclosure and concealment of these central identities within relationships and society in general to prevent stigmatization and/or retain support. However, identity negotiation transcended beyond stigma prevention as many participants desired to have their intersectional identities acknowledged but had to navigate a complex array of different cultural norms, pre-migration experiences, and obstacles unique to
newcomer status. Despite the hardships, their cultural belongings and immigration experiences, and hence their multiple group memberships, were utilized as a source of strength to move forward.

For researchers, answering the question of “Which group is ignored?” may be as critical to understanding the nature of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression as answering the question “Which group is the target?” (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Not only is the negligence of research on sexual minority immigrants incompatible with democratic principles and in opposition to social justice, but studies like this could enrich areas within psychological research, such as immigration, sexuality, and multiple identity research. In addition, further research about the unique experiences of these individuals will likely tell stories of hope and resilience that have the power to aid other similarly marginalized populations both per tangible means (such as providing information to create services) and intangible ones (such as offering inspiration).
References


Appendix A: Further Details From REB Application

Recruitment

Describe how and from what sources the participants will be recruited, including any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g., instructor-student; manager-employee).

Participants will be recruited from community organizations in Toronto, Guelph, and Wellington area. LGBTQ and immigration organizations, as well as other community organizations, such as CCAC and other recruitment avenues introduced to me by snowball sampling are asked to aid in recruitment or circulation of the study. Potential participants will have opportunities to ask the researcher questions and about the research before they engage in the interviews. Supervisory staff at the community centres will be my first point of contact, and upon agreement to circulate the study or aid in recruiting participants, I will talk to potential participants personally to introduce to them the purpose of my research. Supervisory staff should not directly solicit participants.

These are the organizations I am intending to contact for recruitment:

The 519 Church St. Community Centre in Toronto, e.g., LEGIT (Immigration to Canada for Same-sex partners)

LGBT Newcomer Community Program

IRQR (Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees) in Toronto

Kulano Toronto (Jewish LGBT organization)

CampOut at the University of Guelph

Wellness Centre at the University of Guelph

Out on the Shelf (Queer Library and Resource Centre) in Guelph

Community Care Access Centre Guelph and Toronto

Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership

Immigrant Services Guelph-Wellington
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

and other recruitment avenues introduced to me later by snowball sampling

**Methodology/Procedure**

Describe sequentially, and in detail, all procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, physical assessments, physiological tests, time requirements etc.)

Participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview that is estimated to be about an hour to hour and half long. The interview is semi-structured; that is the interview is guided by several main questions, however, the researcher will execute flexibility in order of question and nature of follow-up questions asked, depending on each case. The researcher will conduct the interviews and audio-tape them. Participants will be informed as to when the recording is started and, before the interview is started, they will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire.

Interviews will take place within areas that are most convenient to participants, e.g., within private area in community organization, or library. The participants will also be given the option of having the interview at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, 025 MacKinnon Building. Separate rooms with doors are available in the lab, so that interviewers can share their stories within private quarters. Participants will also be given the option of reviewing their interview data and results at a time that is mutually agreed upon.

First, during and immediately after the interview, participants will be given an opportunity to reflect on their responses and if they would like to change or omit parts of their conversation, they could do so while the tape is running and immediately after the interview. Then, the researcher either will not transcribe the part that the participant instructed to be deleted or only will transcribe the revised response that the participant has provided. Second, after the transcription is completed, if the participant would like to review the transcript, a copy of the full transcription will be sent via email within one month after the interview and the participant will be asked to provide feedback. At this point the participant has the opportunity to omit or modify parts of his or her conversation and send feedback to the researcher within two weeks of receiving the transcript. The participants will have the option of receiving a hard copy of transcription, if they prefer.

Participants will be given the option of seeing the research information summary if they choose at a later time when the study is completed (after about one year maximum after interviews conducted). Participants' emails will be kept on an encrypted file and they will be contacted after transcription is done if they had expressed they wanted to review their transcript. Participants who had expressed an interest in reviewing the research summary will be contacted once it is ready.
Participants' emails will be kept on an encrypted file and they will be contacted after transcription is done if they had expressed they wanted to review their transcript. Participants who had expressed an interest in reviewing the research summary will be contacted once it is ready.

Confidentiality

Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

The full name of each participant will be known only to the researcher. The full name will not be released at any time of the research process. Instead an alias or initials will be used at the consent of participants for the write-up of the results and for coding the data (i.e. the audio and the transcripts). Any specific information (such as specific location) will be altered within the transcripts and final written product. A master list that links each participant's name to an I.D. code number will be securely stored with password on the Centre for Cross Cultural Research lab computer and only the primary researcher and Prof. Safdar will have access to this information.

Explain how written records, video/audio tapes and questionnaires will be secured, and provide details of their final disposal or storage.

The audio recording and notes taken within the session will be secured in the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the University of Guelph where only the primary researcher and Prof. Safdar will have access to the data. The audio recordings and transcripts will be ID coded and information that could identify the participants will be deleted or altered from these, so that confidentiality is executed. Immediately, after each interview, the audio clip will be downloaded onto the primary researcher's encrypted mobile computer (laptop) and the audio recording will be deleted from the recorder. Additionally, a copy of each audio recording will be saved on a desktop at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research in password protected files. The audio-files files will be encrypted. Therefore, only two copies of the audio recording will be kept while the research is ongoing. Both audio-recording files on the two computers will be deleted after transcription is completed and cross-checking with the audio-recording is done. It is expected that the recording files will be deleted from both laptop and desktop at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research within six months of completing the study.

Immediately, after each interview, the audio clip will be downloaded onto the primary researcher's encrypted mobile computer (laptop) and the audio recording will be deleted from the recorder. Additionally, a copy of each audio recording will be saved on a desktop at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research in password protected files. The audio-files files will be encrypted. Therefore, only two copies of the audio recording will be kept while the research is ongoing. Both audio-recording files on the two computers will be deleted after transcription is completed and
cross-checking with the audio-recording is done. It is expected that the recording files will be deleted from both laptop and desktop at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research within six months of completing the study. Any notes taken during the interview will be transcribed within 48 hours after the interview and the hard copy will be destroyed using shredding facilities at the Psychology Department of the University of Guelph. Participant consent form will be kept in sealed envelope and will be stored in a locked cabinet at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research for six months after the completion of the study. The transcripts that have no identifying information of the participants will be kept for five years on the password protected computer at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research.
Appendix B: Research Study Notice to Organizations

Dear Sir or Madam

I am a graduate student at the University of Guelph conducting research on the experiences of lesbian and gay immigrants in Canada or immigrants who are attracted to the same sex. I am seeking your assistance to connect me with this particular immigrant group, in order to conduct interviews with them. I am specifically interested in interviewing gay and lesbian immigrants over the age of 18. The information collected for the current research could increase understanding and appreciation of gay immigrants' experience. It would also have the potential to highlight effective services that are provided by community service providers and identify gaps in support services for this group. The risk of participating in the current study is minimal. It is anticipated that participants would benefit and feel empowered by having an opportunity to tell their stories in a supporting environment. The information collected from participants will remain confidential.

It would be very much appreciated if you could circulate the attached flyer by emailing organizations that may have access to potential participants. I would also appreciate it if you could display the attached flyer in your organization in areas visible to potential participants or hand copies out when appropriate. I would be more than happy to discuss this study with you further before you pass along the flyer on my behalf. If you would like to speak to my graduate advisor, please feel free to contact her (see below).

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you!

Melisa Choubak

Melisa Choubak
M.A. Candidate, Applied Social Psychology
Centre for Cross-Cultural Research
University of Guelph

mchoubak@uoguelph.ca

Professor Saba Safdar
Professor, Applied Social Psychology
Centre for Cross-Cultural Research,
University of Guelph

safdar@psy.uoguelph.ca
519-824-4120 x53520
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer for Participants

Are you an **immigrant**, who is, at least 18 years old, and **who is attracted to the same sex exclusively** (not attracted to opposite sex)?

**Did you move to Canada within the last 2-10 years roughly?**

Then you are invited to **share your story for a study that is designed to explore the experiences of lesbian and gay immigrants or immigrants attracted to the same sex in Canada.**

My name is Melisa and I am a Master’s student at the University of Guelph and I am very aware of the struggles, discrimination, and strength associated with being a sexual minority immigrant.

Your participation would involve completing a short demographic questionnaire and being interviewed by me for a duration of approximately 1-1.5 hours about your experiences around your sexual identity, cultural identity, your immigration experience, including your relationships with family, friends, coworkers and others, and negative and positive experiences (e.g., well-being, discrimination). All interviews will be audio-recorded and kept strictly confidential.

**How you could benefit**

You can ask for a summary of the results of the study to be sent to you once it is ready. My vision is that **your stories and experiences will help to support other gay immigrants in the future** by informing community support workers, policy makers and others as to how better serve this population.

**So, come on and let’s have a chat over a tea or coffee and your favourite pastry!**

If you have any questions about the research and/or would like to participate, please do not hesitate to contact me, Melisa Choubak, at [mchoubak@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mchoubak@uoguelph.ca), or (519) 362-0809 (please leave your contact information). For further questions about the study, you could also connect with my supervisor, Saba Safdar, at [safdar@psy.uoguelph.ca](mailto:safdar@psy.uoguelph.ca), or 519-824-4120 x53520.
Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An Exploration of the Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Immigrants in Canada

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Melisa Choubak, Master’s student from the University of Guelph, and Prof. Saba Safdar from the Department of Psychology at the University of Guelph. The results of this study will contribute to a Master’s thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Prof. Saba Safdar, safdar@psy.uoguelph.ca, 519-824-4120 x53520.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the lives of Canadian gay and lesbian immigrants (i.e. immigrants attracted to the same sex). We are interested in your experiences, strengths and needs, specifically within social and cultural contexts (for example, relationships with family, friends and others).

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: To read this consent form and sign the bottom of this form.

To complete a short demographic questionnaire that will ask you a few questions, such as e.g., duration of stay in Canada, questions about what ethnicity and culture you belong to etc.

To participate in a 1 or 1.5 hour audio-taped interview with the researcher, Melisa Choubak. In this interview, you will be asked to share your experiences associated with social relationships, sense of belonging, discrimination, and your sexual identity, cultural/ethnic identity, and gender identity. Your name and other details will remain confidential.
POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no physical risks associated with this study for you.

As a result of talking about your experiences around sexual identity, your ethnic and cultural identity, your relationships etc., you may experience some psychological discomfort, as these issues may be hard to talk about. However, please know that the interviewer herself is likely to have shared some of the same experiences and is very empathic to these experiences. In addition, all the information you will be sharing will be kept confidential by the interviewer. This means that no one, other than the interviewer and her supervisor, will have access to your personal information.

You are free to withdraw from this study, if you do not feel comfortable participating. If you do participate, you may skip any question that you are not comfortable answering.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS AND/OR SOCIETY

Your participation in this study will likely help others who are in your position. Immigrants, who are of a sexual minority, are almost never asked, in research, for their experiences, needs, and opinions. You have the expert information that will help the researcher understand what can be done to help new gay immigrants to this country. Information gathered from you could help policy makers and program implementers and others to make a positive difference. Before presenting the results of this study to a larger audience, all identifying information of participants will be removed and the data will be aggregated.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no financial compensation for participating in the study. However, if traveling is involved for the participants, they will be reimbursed for travel. Coffee/tea and/or pastry for the interview will be provided by the interviewer.

ELIGIBILITY

You must be a gay/lesbian immigrant or an immigrant attracted to same sex. You must have come to Canada about 2-10 years ago and must be 18 years old or older at the time of signing this consent form.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

Your interview will be audio-taped and stored as a computer file with a password only the primary researcher and her supervisor, Prof. Safdar, will have access to.
Your interview will be typed up into a transcript, however, this will be stored on a computer with a password system that only the researcher and her supervisor have access to. In addition, only initials or an alternative name will be used instead of your actual name for the transcripts. The transcripts, without your name, may be shared with selected colleagues at the time of analysis for input. Audio clips will not be used for dissemination process and they will be destroyed after the interviews are transcribed.

Audio-recordings will be destroyed within 6 months after completion of the study. Any notes taken during the interview will be transcribed within 48 hours after the interview and the hard copy will be destroyed using shredding facilities at the Psychology Department of the University of Guelph. Participant consent form will be kept in sealed envelope and will be stored in a locked cabinet at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research for six months after the completion of the study. The transcripts that have no identifying information of the participants will be kept for five years on the password protected computer at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research.

After the transcriptions are completed, if you would like to review the transcript, a copy of full transcription will be sent within one month after the interview via email and you will be asked for feedback. At this point you will have the opportunity to omit or modify parts of the conversation and send feedback within two weeks of receiving the transcript. You also have the option of seeing the research information summary if you choose at a later time when the study is completed (after about one year maximum after interviews conducted). If you would like this feedback, your email will be kept on an encrypted file and you will be contacted when the information you requested is ready.

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 without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and potentially still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Director, Research Ethics
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236
QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS RESEARCH
If you have any questions about this research, please contact the researchers below:

Principal Researcher: Melisa Choubak  
Centre for Cross-Cultural Research  
Psychology Department  
University of Guelph  
Tel: (519) 824-4120 Ext. 52884  
Email: mchoubak@uoguelph.ca

Research Supervisor: Professor Saba Safdar, Ph.D.  
Centre for Cross-Cultural Research  
Psychology Department  
University of Guelph  
Tel: 519-824-4120 Ex. 53520  
Email: ssafdar@uoguelph.ca

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
I have read the information provided for the study “An Exploration of the Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Immigrants in Canada” as described herein. I acknowledge that by signing below that my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

________________________
Signature of Participant  
Date
Appendix E: Short Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to complete this short demographic questionnaire.

Thanks a lot for your time!

Initial: ____________________

Age: ______________________

Gender (please check what applies):

☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Other: ______________________

To whom are you sexually attracted (please check what applies):

☐ Only same sex
☐ Mostly same sex
☐ Same sex and opposite/other sex equally
☐ Mostly opposite/other sex
☐ Only opposite/other sex
☐ Other: ______________________

How would you describe your sexual orientation (please check what applies):

☐ Gay
☐ Lesbian
☐ Homosexual
☐ Heterosexual
☐ Bisexual
☐ Queer
☐ Questioning/Unsure
☐ I do not identity with any label
☐ Other: __________________________________________

Relationship status (Please check what applies):

☐ Single
☐ Dating
☐ In a relationship
☐ Married
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed
☐ Other: __________________________________________

Were you ever married? (Please specify gender of your spouse):

☐ Yes
☐ No

Gender of spouse:

☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Other: _____________________

Do you have children?

☐ Yes        How many: ___________________________

☐ No

Which religion or spirituality do you associate with (please check what applies):

☐ None
☐ Islam (e.g., Sunni or Shia or other) Please specify: __________
☐ Judaism (e.g., Orthodox or Reform or other) Please specify __________
☐ Christianity (e.g., Catholic or Protestant or other) Please specify: __________
☐ Hinduism (e.g., Shaivites or Smartha or other) Please specify __________
☐ Buddhism (e.g., Theravada or Mahayana or other) Please specify __________
☐ Zoroastrianism (e.g., Masdayasni or Parsee or other) Please specify __________
☐ Other: __________________________________________
Please specify where you were born (country and city/town):

_______________________________________________________________

Where were you raised, if different from above (country and city/town):

_______________________________________________________________

How long have you lived in Canada: ______________ years

Where did you live before you came to Canada:

_______________________________________________________________

What city do you live in now: ___________________________

How would you describe your ethnicity (e.g., Asian, Indian, Chinese, Arab, Iraqi, Iranian etc.):

_______________________________________________________________

Where does your family live (do you have some relatives in Canada and who? If not, where do they live?):

_______________________________________________________________
Appendix F: Interview Guide

The interviews were roughly guided by the following questions. Please note that due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, question order and nature of follow up questions may differ for each interview. For some interviewees only a few probing questions were utilized, for others more probing more were utilized. Also, please note that although the majority of answers were used for this thesis analysis, some (like Question 8) will be utilized for other projects/endeavors.

Q 1) If someone asked you “who are you”, to describe yourself, what would you tell them about yourself if you trusted them enough? What are the things that make up “you”?

Q2) Thinking of all the pieces of yourself that you described earlier, is there one that you would describe as the most important piece? Can you organize them in terms of importance or are they all equally important? Was it always so, like before coming to Canada or has this order changed? Please elaborate.

Q3) Talking about these most important aspects of who you are, briefly describe when did you first become aware of these facets of yourself? What was your experience associated with this? (especially if they had mentioned sexual identity/orientation as one)

Q 4) Now, tell me about your experience of living in Canada as a (whatever they described themselves in the order they chose, most likely:) gay/lesbian immigrant/newcomer/international student (Let them talk as freely as can here).

Q 5) Do you think that after immigrating to Canada, your view of who you are has changed with regards to these pieces of yourself? And how has it changed? Are you experiencing or expressing any of these aspects differently (probe for sexual identity if necessary and other central aspects)?

Q6) Do you feel any challenges at all being gay/lesbian? Are there any parts of yourself that you feel are hard to reconcile, or do you feel there is no such challenge? Please describe (probe if necessary about culture or religion or family)

Q7) Think about all your social circles and relationships in Canada (and outside). Do you feel you can present all the aspects of yourself to everyone in your social network? Why/why not? (Probe different social groups family, friends, coworkers, people in society, as well as LGBTQ, mainstream, or cultural groups, Probe: Has your sexual orientation affected your social relationships (family, friends)? And how do you manage this and feel about it)
If not already addressed, probe:

i) Do you and how much do you identify with your native country’s culture at this point, in terms of feeling as part of the community and in terms of behaviours, (e.g., there cultural events you attend and/or cultural/religious dates or ceremonies you celebrate etc.).

ii) How do you think, so far, the Canadian culture is different or is it? How much do you identify with the Canadian culture? Why do you think that is?

iii) Have there been some social barriers and needs (e.g., let them talk freely but probe if have to about external stressors, such as discrimination; internalized stressors, such as identity clash etc.) that you face or have faced as a gay immigrant in Canada (or however they labeled themselves)? From what social groups or where in the community have you faced this?

iv) Which of these was the most difficult experience and why? What or who helped you or would have helped you throughout this time? What helps you with feeling okay with who you are as a gay immigrant? What are some of the positive experiences you had as a gay immigrant in Canada?

Q8) With regards with everything we addressed and didn’t, in your opinion, what (e.g., services, programs, policy) would help lesbian/gay immigrants transition better into Canada after settlement socially? Aside from the legal help with regards to the immigration process for gay and lesbian immigrants, what are some of the needs that should be addressed by services in order to help them adjust socially to Canada?

Would you like to add anything that you think may have been left out in your story? Or any more recommendations you may have to add?

Debriefing post-interview:

How did you feel about the interview? Discuss with them the social services available if emotional distress.

Is there anything you would like to change in your answers or would like to have taken out?

Where would you like to see the results of this study go?