Being me in Canada: Multidimensional identity and belonging of Russian-speaking immigrant youths

by

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A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

BEING ME IN CANADA: MULTIDIMENSIONAL IDENTITY AND BELONGING OF RUSSIAN-SPEAKING IMMIGRANT YOUTHS

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Although recent attention has focused on the experiences of immigrants in Canada, few researchers have explored the experiences of invisible immigrants, and Russian-speaking immigrants in particular, whose invisible nature may impact their identity and sense of belonging following their arrival in Canada. Specifically, they may not necessarily integrate with white mainstream Canadians, but they may also not fit in with their visible minority immigrant peers. Moreover, Russian-speaking immigrants often take an indirect path to Canada which may, in turn, have unique contributions to their acculturation experiences which may fit outside of current bicultural models of acculturation. The current study’s focus on immigrant youths is due to the developmental importance of identity and belonging during this time period. Moreover, the role of context in identity and sense of belonging, including peers and politics, will be explored as both factors have been overlooked in past research.

Using constructivist grounded theory methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 decimal- and second-generation Russian-speaking immigrant youths (15 to 19 years of age). A substantive theory of the identity and belonging of these youths was developed. Results indicated that the processes youths engaged in were multidirectional, flexible, and dynamic. At the core of the framework were three processes: choosing identities, expressing
identities, and fitting in. The results of identity and belonging were often multidimensional, with youths choosing from and expressing more than one identity, and experiencing a sense of belonging with one or more groups. In order to facilitate these processes, youths navigated their context, with a particular focus on family, peers, community, politics, and immigration experiences. The youths’ experiences in navigating the context were both positive and negative which had an impact on their consequent identity and belonging.

This study was one of the first to consider the multidimensional nature of identity and belonging among immigrant youths, accounting for factors such as invisibility, indirect migration, and religious/cultural minority identities. Moreover, this study explored overlooked contextual factors such as peer group experiences (positive and negative, in-school and out of school, in-group and out-group) and the political context (multiculturalism and political conflict). Implications for research and practice are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Susan Chuang, for her help, encouragement, guidance, and support over these last four years. From the moment we met I always felt that you had my back, that you believed in me and pushed me to be the best researcher I could be. You helped me get to the finish line even faster than I had hoped, and for that I will always be grateful.

To my committee members, Dr. Vappu Tyyskä and Dr. Michael Ungar, thank you for your guidance, insight, and constructive feedback throughout this process. You strengthened my work and expanded my understanding. I am a better researcher for having had a chance to work with you.

This dissertation would not have been possible without my participants. Thank you, each and every one of you, for your enthusiasm and openness in sharing your stories and experiences with me. I am forever indebted to you.

I would also like to thank the Social Sciences Research Council, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, and the University of Guelph for the financial support that made this research possible.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, both near and far, still with us and those departed. I am grateful for your support and encouragement along the way, and for letting me disappear for stretches of time into writing hibernation mode and being there to welcome me with open arms when I resurfaced again. To my parents, Marina and Alex, and my brother Ron, thank you for always believing me and loving me, no matter what. To my partner, Jon, you are the rock that I leaned on every day, not only for the last four years, but for the last twelve. This would not have been possible without you, thank you!
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Chapter One: Literature Review

Canada is an immigrant nation composed of individuals from over 200 different ethnic origins (Statistics Canada, 2010). This can be accounted for by the increased migration not only to Canada, but worldwide. According to the United Nations (2011), the estimated number of individuals who are living outside of their birth countries is 214 million. This includes an increase of 58 million since 1990. Between 2000 and 2010, Canada was the fourth largest recipient of immigrants worldwide despite making up only .5% of the global population (United Nations, 2011). Canada is projected to be the second largest recipient of immigrants by 2040. The appeal of Canada is rooted, in part, in its official Multiculturalism Policy, which protects the right of immigrants to preserve their cultural diversity and heritage (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2006).

Canada is second only to Australia in its proportion of foreign born individuals (Statistics Canada, 2013a). In 2011, the first-generation immigrant population accounted for 22% of all Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2013b) and it is expected to rise over the next twenty years. More specifically, according to a 2010 projection by Statistics Canada, the foreign-born population in Canada is expected to grow at a four times faster rate than that of the Canadian-born population. It is estimated that by 2031, 46% of Canadians over the age of 15 would be either first- or second-generation Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2010). Currently, second-generation individuals account for about 17% of the total Canadian population, and almost 55% of the individuals have two parents who were born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013b). For example, in the Toronto area, first- and second-generation immigrants make up almost 76% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2013b). This suggests that these immigrant individuals account for a significant proportion of the Canadian population. Unfortunately, we have limited knowledge
about their experiences and adjustment. Research in these areas is imperative to ensure successful adaptation for both individuals and society.

Research on post-immigration experiences has focused primarily on adults (Berry et al., 2006; Yeh et al., 2003). However, in 2007, individuals under the age of 19 years of age made up 7.8 million, or about 23% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2008a). Of these, 2.2 million were late adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age. Most of the youths were Canadian born; however, 34% of youths under 25 years of age were either first- or second-generation immigrants (Galameau, Morissette, & Usalcas, 2013). This suggests that immigrant youths are a significant population and thus it is important to understand their experiences, particularly in Toronto, where over a fifth of youths under 25 years of age were first-generation immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2008a).

In the following sections, I will situate the current study within the literature by reviewing factors that impact immigration and adjustment of youths and families, the demographics and experiences of Russian-speaking immigrants specifically, as well as theories of and research on acculturation. Moreover, I will discuss the importance of exploring the developmental period of adolescence and the role of context (including peers and families), with a primary focus on sense of belonging and social and ethnic identity. The roles of victimization and resilience in identity and belonging will also be discussed. Finally, I will outline the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the inquiry.

Immigration Factors

To gain greater insights into immigrant youths’ sense of belonging and identity, it is important to understand the factors that affect their experiences and adjustment. Specifically, I
will discuss three factors that are of interest in the present study: (a) immigrant generation; (b) direct and indirect migration patterns; and (c) invisible immigrants.

Research on the experiences of immigrant youths in Canada has focused primarily on first-generation and not second-generation youths. Although limited, there has been some research that suggests that outcomes differ across generations. For example, although substance use and delinquency increased across immigrant generation, symptoms of psychological distress decreased (Hamilton, Noh, & Adlaf 2009). The educational attainment of second-generation youths does not tend to be higher than that of their parents, unlike first-generation youths (Perreita, Harris, & Dohoon, 2006). Moreover, research on Former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrants in Israel found that psychological distress was elevated for both first- and second-generation youths (Mirsky, 2009). This psychological distress also manifested in antisocial behaviours and school drop-out, both of which were higher for first- and second-generation youths than their non-immigrant peers. The interest in both first- and second-generation immigrant youths is also rooted in the fact that they maintain a stronger connection to their culture and ethnic identity than youths from later generations, who tend to lose these markers (Robila, 2010). Overall, these findings suggest that more attention should focus on the experiences of both immigrant generations to understand their unique experiences.

In the current study, a further breakdown into “decimal” generations will be considered. Rumbaut (1997, 2004) developed a more detailed labeling of generations to capture the developmental features of individuals. Generation 1.75 includes individuals who arrived in the host country in early childhood (between the ages 0-5) and are considered to be closest to the second generation in their adaptation because of their limited memories of their birth country and their socialization taking place primarily in the host country. Generation 1.5 includes individuals
who arrive in middle childhood (between the ages 6-12), these are individuals whose development began elsewhere and retain memories of it, but complete their development and education in the host country. Finally, generation 1.25 includes individuals who arrived during adolescence (between the ages 13-17) and are considered to be closest to the first generation because the majority of their development occurs prior to their arrival in the host country. Past research suggests that there are significant differences in the outcomes for these decimal generations, particularly around linguistic competence and educational attainment (Oropesa & Landale, 1997; Rumbaut, 2004). Differences on other dimensions, including identity and belonging, should be explored further. Importantly, this study focuses on immigrant youths, and thus only the second-generation and generations 1.25 to 1.75 will be considered because the true first-generation only applies to those who arrived as adults. However, past research had not distinguished among the decimal generations, labeling generations 1.25 to 1.75 as first-generation.

Another factor that should be considered is direct versus indirect migration and the role it may play in post-migration experiences. Indirect migration occurs when the country from which individuals emigrated was not the country in which they were born (Greenwood & Young, 1997). This suggests that these immigrants had at least two countries of permanent residence prior to their arrival in Canada. Census data has yet to capture this pattern of migration in Canada or the United Nations; however, it is more common than expected. According to Greenwood and Young (1997), 16% of all legal immigrants to Canada between 1968 and 1988 travelled an indirect path to Canada. This is a significant proportion of the immigrant population whose complex experiences are not well understood. Moreover, considering that the number of immigrants to Canada increased from 161,588 in 1988 to 257,887 in 2012 (Statistics Canada,
2012), it is likely that many immigrants are taking an indirect path. Israel was a particularly common intermediate country as 50% of those who emigrate from Israel were not born there (Greenwood & Young, 1997).

Finally, much of the research on immigrants to date has focused primarily on visible minorities because these individuals currently account for the majority of new migrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013a). However, the relative lack of attention to the experiences of invisible, white immigrants is problematic. The term invisible immigrants was used throughout this research in order to account for the historically racialized identity of Jewish individuals and their transition towards whiteness only within the last century (Brodkin, 2002).

This oversight of invisible immigrants may be based on the assumption that they “fit in” with the white Canadian mainstream population. However, invisible immigrants may not necessarily integrate with white mainstream Canadians, and yet, they may also not fit in with their racialized immigrant peers. As a result, these invisible immigrants may experience negative outcomes and their unique challenges and experiences may not be well understood or acknowledged (Robila, 2010).

**Russian-Speaking Immigrants**

The lack of attention to invisible immigrants in the recent research on migration may be particularly difficult for white Russian-speaking immigrants. In order to explore this further, I will: (a) review the immigration statistics of this population; (b) provide a brief history of their immigration waves and patterns to better contextualize this population; (c) discuss their sociocultural context, including communism, collectivism, and definitions of ethnicity; and (d) describe the immigration experiences and challenges specific to this population.
**Russian-speaking immigration statistics.** Russian-speaking immigrants constitute the largest European immigrant group that does not speak either of the two official languages (CIC, 2013). Canada is an important destination for immigrants from Eastern Europe (Robila, 2010), and their total number increased from 1991 to 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Overall, the Russian Federation has been in the top 10 immigrant-sending countries every year since the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1990. Although specific statistics for Russian language are not available, Slavic languages (including Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian) are spoken by almost 11% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011). According to the 2006 Census, over 500,000 people of Russian origin live in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006). Moreover, there was a 24% increase in Russian individuals in the 2001 census in comparison to the 1996 census (Kralt, 2003).

Many of those leaving the FSU are Jewish individuals and families (Anisef, Baichman-Anisef, & Siemiatycki, 2002). According to Sarana and Golden (2000), the Jewish population in the FSU decreased from 1.5 million in 1989 to only 440,000 in 2000. Jewish people from the FSU represent the largest group of Jewish immigrants to North America since the 1920s (Gold, 1994). Currently, Canada constitutes the third largest diaspora of Russian Jews, after Israel and the United States (U.S.). Estimates of the size of the community in Toronto, for example, range from 30,000 to 75,000 (Anisef et al., 2002).

Finally, it is estimated that between 50 to 70% of all immigrants from the FSU since 1990 took an indirect path through Israel, where they typically stayed between five and seven years before moving to Canada (Anisef et al., 2002; Remmenick, 2006). The majority of these individuals were Jewish because Israel accepts primarily Jewish migrants in accordance with the Law of Return (1950).
**Brief historical account of migration from Eastern Europe.** Migration from Eastern Europe to North America can be organized into four major waves. The first was from the late 1800s to 1921, the second was from 1921 to 1945, the third was from 1945 to 1989, and the fourth was after 1990 (Robila, 2010). A complete review of these historical periods is beyond the scope of the current study; however, it is clear that these periods are tied to historical and political changes in the area. Briefly, the first immigration wave took place when the Russian empire was under Tsarist rule. The second wave began after the Bolshevik revolution when the Soviet Union, officially called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), was formed and up until the end of World War II. The third wave continued through the duration of the Soviet Union. The final wave took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union when the former republic that composed the Soviet Union began declaring their independence, and this wave continues until today. The last two waves of immigration are of interest in the present study.

According to Robila (2010), reasons for emigration during these two time periods differed from the migration that took place in the previous decades. Specifically, earlier immigrants usually came to North America not to settle permanently, but to work and save money that would allow them to return to their rural home villages and buy land. On the other hand, during communist times, individuals sought to escape the constraints around religious and social practices and increase their standard of living. They did not plan on returning to their home countries. Notably, migration slowed down significantly during the cold war and between 1981 and 1988, almost no emigrants were able to leave the USSR (Remennick, 2006).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many individuals lost their jobs and the living arrangements that were often provided by the communist government. These economic challenges served as the primary factors for migration from Eastern Europe to North America.
Currently, immigrants come primarily from urban centers and usually arrive in Canada as professionals under the economic class (Remennick, 2006). As a result, they tend to have more years of schooling than the North American born population (Robila, 2010). Data from the U.S. suggests that the educational attainment of immigrants from the FSU is also generally higher than that of other immigrant groups (Robila, 2007). The high educational attainment has made this immigrant group desirable for receiving countries, but it also created challenges following immigration due to Canada’s complex process of recognizing international credentials and work experience (Remennick, 2006). In Canada, around 70% of the immigrants from the FSU have below-median income and about 30% live around the poverty line (Anisef et al., 2002).

Although Jewish immigrants from the FSU share some similarities with their non-Jewish peers, there were some unique aspects to their experiences. Starting in 1969, during the third wave of immigration, Jewish people were granted exclusive permission to leave the Soviet Union and move to Israel as a result of an agreement with the U.S. (Robila, 2010). Many of these immigrants found their way to North America in the following decades. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Jewish people were motivated to move not only by economic forces, but by the rise in Slavic nationalism and anti-Semitism (Caplin, 2012; Remennick, 2006). For Jewish people, this history of victimization and repression served as motivation for emigration from Eastern Europe throughout all four immigration waves (Caplin, 2012). Their reasons for leaving Israel and continuing to Canada included the economic and sociopolitical situations in the Middle East and the religious nature of the Israeli state (Anisef et al., 2002; Remennick, 2006).

**Sociocultural context.** The experiences of immigrants from the FSU may differ from the experiences of other European immigrants to Canada due to the cultural differences between
Eastern Europe and Western Europe/North America. Specifically, Soviet culture values collectivism, which emphasizes interdependence and cooperation among in-group members (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). This is rooted in communist ideology which emphasizes the good of the collective over the good of the individual (Mirsky, 2001). Moreover, the socioeconomic conditions during communist times required a greater material dependence between generations, resulting in closer relationships and multigenerational living arrangements (Jasinkaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2000). This cultural value of collectivism results in less autonomy for adolescents in FSU families (Birman & Taylor-Ritzler, 2007; Jasinkaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2000; Mirsky et al., 2002). Moreover, Mirsky and colleagues (2002) suggested that this interdependence could result in particular challenges in psychosocial adjustment found in this population following immigration. Thus, the sociocultural context must be considered when exploring the acculturation of this immigrant group.

Another aspect of this context are the cultural definitions of race and ethnicity. In the FSU, ethnicity was defined by biological lineage, much like race is defined in North America, and not based on place of birth or cultural practices (Avrutin, 2007; Persky & Birman, 2005). For Jewish people, even though they were white, they were seen as physically distinguishable from Russians. Moreover, unlike in North America, being Jewish in the atheist FSU was seen as a racial or ethnic category and not a religious or cultural one. Consequently, the equivalent of the “one-drop rule” that was historically used in the U.S. was utilized to determine ethnicity in mixed marriages (Persky & Birman, 2005). Therefore, Soviet Jews were not considered to be Russian in the FSU, but instead they were seen as ethnically Jewish and their ethnicity was listed accordingly on their passports. Subsequently, although the majority of these immigrants identified as Jewish culturally and ethnically, many reported having no religion (Vinokurov,
Birman, & Trickett, 2000). Thus, religious observance did not reflect the strength of their affiliation to Jewish identity (Simon & Simon, 1982).

Despite these factors, research on Jewish immigrants from the FSU often referred to their ethnicity as Russian because they spoke the Russian language and had an affinity with Russian culture (Birman & Trickett, 2001). However, their use of the Russian language and traditions was the result of a long history of discrimination and pressures towards assimilation. Moreover, this tendency to label all immigrants from the FSU as “Russian” oversimplifies and overgeneralizes the cultural context of the countries that these immigrants come from where ethnicity is defined differently.

**Immigration experiences and challenges.** Eastern European immigrants are seen as white and thus presumed to be assimilated into the majority population’s culture, leaving their unique experiences unrecognized and unaddressed, unlike the needs of other immigrant groups. For Jewish immigrants in particular, their previous experience of ethnicity as a race are no longer relevant in North America but rather, they are broadly categorized with other Europeans who are not seen as racially diverse according to the contemporary construction of race. Thus, once seen as an ethnic minority in the Soviet Union, they were collapsed with the white majority in North America. Further research is needed to determine how this shift may influence their acculturation and adjustment in comparison to the non-Jewish FSU immigrants. Persky and Birman (2001) suggested that qualitative methods may be particularly appropriate for capturing the different meanings that these identities have for this population.

Despite the differences in the definition of ethnicity and consequent challenges related to identity, Jewish immigrants from the FSU are still one of the few immigrant groups who were a minority both in their country of origin and in North America (Roytburd & Friedlander, 2008).
This is because they were considered to be an ethnic minority in the FSU and a religious minority in North America. However, unlike other groups who move to North America, Jewish people have the opportunity to blend in with the white majority and thus discard their minority status, which was not possible in the Soviet Union (Persky & Birman, 2005). Moreover, their Jewish identity may connect them to the Jewish subculture and community in North America and ease their transition. However, North American born Jewish people and immigrants from the FSU have different lived experiences which may lead to difficulties or challenges in creating strong communities. Specifically, the immigrants experienced losses during World War II and lived under communist rule where they not only experienced discrimination for being Jewish but also never received formal religious training (Gold, 1994). Research suggests that whereas Jewish immigrants from the FSU maintained a strong sense of Jewish identity, it was secular in nature and this created tension between them and other Jewish groups in North America (Anisef et al., 2002; Remennick, 2006; Birman & Trickett, 2001). Overall, these studies provide some evidence that this population may be detached from both the mainstream Canadian population and the Jewish community.

Another common factor that must be considered is the role of direct versus indirect migration in the experiences and challenges of this population. Specifically, even though the direct and indirect immigrants share a country of origin and an ethnicity/religion, their experiences prior to their immigration to Canada differed significantly. For example, those arriving from the FSU experienced a tumultuous economy, corruption, and, in some cases, anti-Semitism. On the other hand, those arriving from Israel lived in a democratic country with a Western economy, albeit one with a precarious sociopolitical situation and the threat of terrorism and war (Remmenick, 2006). Moreover, indirect immigrants experienced a second set of new
challenges due to another major migration, requiring them to acquire a third language as well as to adjust to a new community and cultural values (Anisef et al., 2002).

Remennick (2006) found that Jewish immigrants from the FSU who came to Canada through Israel, compared to directly from the FSU, were better equipped to deal with the Western economic marketplace and had more social connections to Canadian society through their participation in the local Jewish community. However, although they had commonalities with Canadian Jews, they still felt more connected to the Israeli community and perceived a cultural and social distance between themselves and mainstream white Canadians.

Overall, Eastern European youths reported challenges in adaptation as a result of a lack of awareness of their cultural background (Robila, 2008) and sense of belonging (Anisef et al., 2002). These challenges that the recent immigrant youths experienced, and the consequent tendency to rely on their co-ethnic peers, were similar among youths who immigrated directly or indirectly to Canada (Remennick, 2006; Ngo & Schleifer, 2005). Moreover, researchers of FSU immigrants in Israel found that the psychological distress experienced by this immigrant group following migration seemed to be culturally specific as well as high and tenacious, often lasting years (Mirsky, Baron-Draiman, & Kedem, 2002). This suggests that this population may need programs and services that are more long-term than what is currently offered. Moreover, the experiences of these immigrants may be particularly complex due to cultural and political differences between FSU countries and the Western world. These unique experiences and challenges of Russian-speaking immigrants may be misunderstood when they are considered alongside other European immigrants and their needs may remain unaddressed. Thus, further research is needed in order to understand the experiences of this immigrant population.
Acculturation Theories and Research

As individuals immigrate to a new country, they experience acculturation, which has been defined as the cultural and psychological changes that groups and their individual members undergo as they come in contact with another culture (Berry, 2007; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Although definitions of culture vary, researchers tend to agree that culture reflects a set of “shared cognition, standard operating procedures, and unexamined assumptions” (Triandis, 1996, p. 407). At the individual level, the process of acculturation has been termed psychological acculturation and includes a long-term process of change in one’s behavioural repertoire, including customs, language, values, and lifestyle (Berry, 2007; Graves, 1976).

According to Williams and Berry (1991), acculturative stress is the stress associated with the demands and difficulties of the process of acculturation and it has been linked with negative consequences to one’s physical, psychological, and social health.

In order to understand the outcomes of the acculturation process on the individual, Searle and Ward (1990) defined two forms of adaptation: psychological (internal sense of personal and social identity, mental health, satisfaction) and sociocultural (external outcomes, including functioning in family, work, and school). Both types of adaptation need to be further explored with immigrant adolescents (Berry, 1997), especially considering the importance and challenge of this developmental period. Two outcomes are of particular interest in the present study. The first is the sense of identity, which is a form of psychological adaptation, and the second is sense of belonging in various contexts, which represent both psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

In this section, I will review the three dominant approaches to theorizing about acculturation, specifically the unidimensional, bidimensional, and tridimensional acculturation
models. I will also discuss the limitations of all three approaches to the study of acculturation as well as the different factors that impact acculturation experiences for youth and their families.

**Unidimensional acculturation.** Historically, researchers first viewed acculturation as a unidimensional process whereby individuals who came in contact with a new culture either rejected the new culture and retained their culture of origin completely, or replaced their heritage culture with the receiving culture (Gordon, 1964). Thus, a bipolar continuum was conceptualized with each end representing one of these two extremes, termed marginality and assimilation. Marginality referred to the experience of individuals who maintained strong ties with their heritage cultures, and rejected the receiving culture. In contrast, assimilation referred to the experience of individuals who created strong ties with the receiving culture and abandoned their heritage culture. It was assumed that assimilation was the ultimate goal. Within these assimilationist frameworks, the bicultural centre of this continuum was not seen as a point of its own, but merely as a transitional state. This focus on the benefits of assimilation was rooted in a strong belief in the superiority of the mainstream host culture over the heritage cultures of the immigrants (Buriel & De Ment, 1997; Chuang & Moreno, 2012).

**Bidimensional acculturation.** Over time, researchers began to acknowledge that this unidimensional approach to acculturation was not able to capture the complexities of post-migration experiences. To account for the dual cultures and their intersections, Berry (1997, 2003, 2007) developed one of the most influential and commonly used models, the Bidimensional Acculturation Framework. According to this perspective, following immigration, individuals make decisions that vary along two dimensions. The first dimension pertains to the extent to which immigrants adopt the host culture and the second dimension refers to the extent to which they preserve their heritage culture. This led to four acculturation strategies that were
based on the choices individuals made along these dimensions. Individuals in the assimilation category did not maintain their heritage culture and instead, embraced the host culture. Those in the integration category maintained both cultures. Individuals in the separation category maintained their heritage culture and rejected the host culture. Finally, those in the marginalization category did not maintain either culture. The individual, the heritage culture, and the host culture all influence the choice of acculturation strategy because there is an interaction between individual orientation and cultural attitudes and policies in determining which strategy will be adopted and the consequent adaptation.

Many researchers have explored the bidimensional acculturation framework. Most notably, in a recent study with over 5,000 immigrant adolescents in 13 countries, Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) found that youths could be divided into four clusters that mostly fit within the four categories outlined. They found: (a) an ethnic profile that resembled separation; (b) a national profile that resembled assimilation; and (c) an integration profile that resembled integration. This provided support for the bidimensional model of acculturation. However, their final cluster represented a diffuse profile, with youths endorsing the contradictory acculturation attitudes of assimilation, marginalization, and separation. This profile accounted for about 22% of the sample and was the third largest group. Integration strategies consisted of around 36% of youths and assimilation had about 19% of the youths.

These variations of adaptation demonstrated the inadequacy of the earlier assimilationist models. However, these findings may also point to a gap in the current literature. Specifically, that around 22% of these youths could not be typologized into one of Berry’s four acculturation profiles may suggest that there is a greater complexity that has yet to be explored. Moreover, this research demonstrated that although the integration profile has been found to be associated with
better psychological and sociocultural adaptation in youths, the diffuse profile was associated with negative outcomes in both types of adaptation (Berry et al., 2006). Overall, these findings suggest that the clustering of youths based on quantitative measures into typologies undermines the complexity of their lived experiences. Although Berry extended the framework to account for more than a single dimension in acculturation, the use of typologies may limit and oversimplify the experiences of some youths.

Another gap in the current bidimensional theorizing and research on acculturation is rooted in the focus on two cultures: the heritage and host cultures. However, this model does not account for the complex identities of immigrants who may have more than one culture of origin or those who settle in countries with multiple cultures of settlement. For example, the identities of Jewish immigrants from the FSU were described as ethnically Russian and nationally American in past research conducted in the United States. In a study with adult Jewish immigrants from the FSU, Persky and Birman (2005) found that their Jewish identity was the most salient (i.e., more so than their Russian or American identities). Similarly, Birman, Persky, and Chan (2010) found that Jewish youths were more likely to identify as bicultural (Russian-Jewish) or tricultural (Russian-Jewish-American) than as Russian only, unlike their non-Jewish peers. This suggests that some immigrants may have a third identity or more that is currently unaccounted for by a bidimensional approach.

**Tridimensional acculturation.** To address these limitations, Ferguson and Bornstein (2014) developed a tridimensional model of acculturation, focusing on the experiences of Black Caribbean immigrants who have acculturated to more than one destination culture within the multicultural American society. This process of acculturation could either present a greater challenge and risk or provide a source of strength and resilience.
In a study with 473 Jamaican mother-adolescents dyads, there were two destination cultures that Jamaican immigrants had to orient themselves towards upon their arrival in the U.S.: African American and European American. The most common acculturation option was the endorsement of three cultures (about 40%): their heritage culture and the two destination cultures. Jamaican immigrants who were typologized into the integration profile were more likely to identify themselves as tricultural than bicultural.

Unlike with the bidimensional model, little is known about the effects of tridimensional acculturation for youths (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2014). The researchers did find that, in comparison to biculturalism, triculturalism was beneficial for behavioural adaptation for both boys and girls, but was disadvantageous for the academic adaptation of boys. These findings suggest that more research is necessary to understand the outcomes of triculturalism for youths.

Overall, Ferguson and Bornstein (2014) offered a tridimensional model that added a dimension to the experiences of immigrants at their country of settlement, accounting for two destination cultures to which immigrants have to acculturate. They suggest that this may be particularly relevant for immigrants who belong to a minority group, whether racialized or not. However, this model is still limited as it does not account for multiple cultures of origin. The researchers do suggest that although three dimensions seemed sufficient for their population, others may require multidimensional acculturation models. According to Ferguson and Bornstein, these models would account for:

(a) the multidimensional nature of their ethnic identity in the home country (Birman et al., 2010); (b) the multicultural nature of the society they enter; (c) the sociopolitical history of their particular ethnic group, especially in relation to the country of settlement (Bhatia & Ram, 2001); and (d) the tenor of societal reception in the host country towards facets of
their identities, particularly those that are negatively stereotyped or discriminated against (i.e., non-White skin, Middle-Eastern origin, Muslim religion). (p. 47)

Despite movement towards research on multidimensional acculturation, this work has inherent challenges. Birman, Persky, and Chan (2010) suggest that including a third category into the bidimensional model would make the model overly complex. Instead they encourage researchers to examine each identification and culture independently and not in combination in order to account for regional, sub-ethnic, and religious identifications. In turn, Ferguson and Bornstein (2014) suggest that due to the added complexity of these multidimensional models, quantitative measures may be difficult to employ and that qualitative approaches may be better suited to capture the full complexity of these acculturation experiences. Overall, it is important to not limit the number of dimensions due to the complexity of the models (e.g., Berry, 2003; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2014; Persky & Birman, 2005) and to move towards allowing individuals’ to identify the dimensions most salient to them.

**Acculturation factors.** Several factors play important roles in the acculturation experiences of youths and their families. Some of these factors are unique to the current population whereas others are more general. In this section, I will review four factors, including: (a) age at migration; (b) immigrant generation; (c) gender; and (d) migration pattern.

Age at migration plays an important role in the acculturation experiences of immigrant youths and their families. Past research suggests that the age of migration and length of residence both impact acculturation in different dimensions. In Birman and Trickett’s (2001) study with FSU families, they found that age of arrival was related to both English and Russian language competence for youths (older age associated with increased Russian language skills and decreased English language skills). For parents, age of migration was associated only with
American behavioural acculturation, whereas length of residence, as opposed to age of arrival, was associated with English language acquisition. Furthermore, Kuo and Roysircar (2004) found that age of arrival was a significant predictor of acculturation, but not acculturative stress, in a sample of Chinese adolescents in Canada. In a cohort comparison, they found that those who immigrated early were the most acculturated and experienced the least acculturative stress. Overall, this suggests that age of migration is an important factor to consider in examining the experiences of families and youths following migration.

Acculturation experiences across generations are also of interest in the present study. Research with the bidimensional framework of acculturation revealed that second generation youths were more oriented to the majority's host culture than were their first-generation counterparts (e.g., Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987), a finding that has been assumed to indicate greater acculturation. This finding led to researchers using one’s immigrant generation as a proxy for acculturation (Bornstein & Cote, 2010). However, a further breakdown into decimal generations has demonstrated varying patterns of acculturation, particularly around educational attainment and linguistic ability (Rumbaut, 2004), suggesting that a breakdown into first- and second-generation only may be insufficient. Moreover, research has not examined acculturation across immigrant generations for individuals who are going through multidimensional acculturation, and this research is necessary to understand their unique experiences.

Research also suggests that there may be gender differences in acculturation, although this finding has been more consistently reported in immigrants from patriarchal to more gender egalitarian societies (Lamb & Bougher, 2009). Lamb and Bougher (2009) reviewed studies that suggested that girls and women acculturate faster than their male counterparts. Specifically,
Russian-speaking immigrant girls in Canada did not appear to experience challenges with the process of acculturation. However, male youths struggled with the cultural differences and, as a result, with making friends following immigration (Anisef et al., 2002). This greater difficulty in adjustment for boys was reported by both the youths and their mothers. When mothers were asked, they were unable to explain these gender differences. However, the researchers suggested that the more frequent absence of father figures, gender differences in peer relationships, and differing gender based cultural pressures may play a role (Anisef et al., 2002). Unfortunately, the number of youths who experienced the absence of father figures was not mentioned and thus, these findings should be taken with caution.

Lastly, the experience of indirect migration and the role it may play is also overlooked in the research on acculturation. Indirect migration may lead individuals to experience multidimensional acculturation and more research is needed to explore the complexities associated with this process. Specifically, Jewish immigrants from the FSU who immigrate through Israel have two heritage cultures (Jewish and Russian/Soviet), one intermediate culture (Israeli), and three destination cultures (Jewish, Russian, and Canadian). Moreover, they are not acculturating to all at the same time, but in a manner that results in the addition, alteration, or replacement of certain cultures or identities over time. This kind of a complex acculturation experience has yet to be sufficiently explored in the literature.

The Developmental Period of Adolescence

Research on immigration and acculturation experiences is important throughout the lifespan, although it is of particular relevance in adolescence. Definitions of adolescence vary across cultures and there is no standard age range for defining adolescence as it is a socially constructed category (Tyyskä, 2014). In fact, chronological age is only one factor to consider;
other factors include physical, psychological, cognitive, and social development. Broadly, the term adolescence captures youths between the ages of 10 to 18, using the standard of the American Psychological Association (2002). During this period, individuals in the West are usually still dependent on others, and thus their experiences of acculturation are of interest. In this section, I will discuss the significant physical, cognitive, and social development that take place in adolescence and both contribute to and complicate the acculturation experiences of youths.

For physical changes, youths experience a growth spurt that is the highest it has been since they were two years old (Huang, Biro, & Dorn, 2009). Moreover, both primary and secondary sex characteristics develop in adolescence as a result of increases in sex hormone production (testosterone for boys and estradiol for girls; Sussman, 1997). This period of significant physical change is also accompanied by adjustment difficulties, particularly in those youths who are not prepared well by their parents due to cultural taboos, such as those around menstruation (Chang, Hayter, & Wu, 2010). Finally, adolescents are at a greater risk for experiencing both internalizing and externalizing problems than either children or adults (Arnett, 1999). Thus, the process of acculturation may compound the experiences of change and challenge with which adolescents must cope during a period that is inherently marked by significant change.

Research also shows significant brain and cognitive development in adolescence (Steinberg, 2005). These lead to developmental adjustments in various abilities including abstract thinking, reasoning, and information processing (Bennett, 2011; Steinberg, 2005). In turn, adolescents have more sophisticated categorization abilities, based not only on concrete features (physical or behavioural), but on abstract and multidimensional features such as beliefs (Bennett, 2011). Therefore, adolescents may struggle on a deeper level with the acculturation
process as they examine and try to adapt to both the concrete and abstract aspects of group membership. These cognitive advancements then allow adolescents to conceptualize and consider relations among more groups at the same time and the boundaries between them (Newman & Newman, 2001). In turn, youths evaluate the meaning and social implications of group membership.

Finally, youths in Western societies experience the transition from middle school to high school, which exposes them to greater diversity in social contexts, relationships, roles, etc. (Tanti, Stukas, Halloran, & Foddy, 2011). Moreover, during the adolescent years, youths become concerned with belonging, identity, and formation of peer relationships (Bennett, 2011; Erikson, 1968; Newman & Newman, 1976). The increased diversity of the social context along with the search for belonging and identity may present a particular challenge for immigrant youths who also have to acculturate to new cultural dimensions of their environment that they had not been exposed to previously. Moreover, because native born youths are also struggling to adjust to their new social circumstances, they may not be able to provide the necessary support to others.

**The Context**

Adolescent development in general, and of identity and belonging in particular, does not take place in isolation, but within a broader context. In this section, I will discuss the ecological view of development which will be used as the guiding framework for understanding the role of context in the identity and sense of belonging of immigrant youth. Then, I will focus on the family and peer contexts, which are the primary microsystems with which youths interact.

**The ecological view of development.** Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of development (1977, 1979) provides a useful framework for considering the context of adolescent development over time. Bronfenbrenner described the ecological environment as a nested, hierarchical
structure. The first level of this structure is the microsystem, which is composed of the interactions and relations between the developing person and his/her immediate context, including home, schools, and other social contexts. The second level is the mesosystem, which is comprised of the inter-relations between these immediate settings the youth is a part of, including family, school, and peer groups. The next level, the exosystem, includes distal formal and informal social structures that do not encompass the youth him/herself but the immediate settings within which the youth exists. Specifically, this level includes interactions between institutions and structures, for example, neighbourhood and parental workplace. The fourth level, the macrosystem, is the “blueprint” for how society functions. This can include explicit forms such as laws and regulations, or implicit and informal forms, such as customs. These are the overarching patterns and structures of cultures and subcultures, including social, economic, and political systems. The other three levels (micro-, meso-, and exosystems) are the manifestations of these. Individuals, roles, and relationships are all endowed with place and meaning by the macrosystems. The final level, the chronosystem, was added to the theory more recently and it encompasses change over time in both the individual and the environment, including changes in family structure, socioeconomic status, place of residence, and so forth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model proposes that the relationships among the individual and these systems are not unidirectional, but reciprocal, particularly between the individual and his/her immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These interactions are termed proximal processes. The form, power, context, and direction of these proximal processes varies as a function of the characteristics of the developing person as well as the environment (immediate and distal). Thus, the individual, his/her interactions with the immediate environment, and the
broader social context within which these are embedded all play a role in the developmental outcomes.

Considering identity development and sense of belonging, researchers suggest that these are shaped by and, in turn, shape the systems around the individual (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Kroger, 2004). The process of development in these areas relies on both social influences and self-constructions. Specifically, Adams and Marshall (1996) stress the importance of understanding the context within which an individual is embedded in order to understand their identity and belonging. This includes others in their immediate context, broader roles and social groups, cultural, historical, and political influences, along with intrapersonal processes.

**Family experiences.** The family is a vital source of identity and belonging in adolescence, despite the increasing importance of peers during this time (Chubb & Fertman, 1992; Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006). The family lays the groundwork for future relationships with peers and loved ones and provides the foundation for how youths navigate and negotiate the world around them. Despite the important role that families continue to play in adolescence, changes in these relationships take place as a result of puberty, affecting attitudes, behaviours, and ways of relating (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Moreover, changes occur in the expectations parents and youths have from themselves and one another, particularly around control and autonomy (Gutman & Eccles, 2007; Hubley & Arim, 2012). Although the view that adolescence is a universal period of storm and stress (Hall, 1904) has largely been challenged (Arnett, 1999), these changes in authority, decision making, and power do lead to conflict in some families (Helwig & Kim, 1999; Montemayor, 1986).
In immigrant families, relationships may begin to realign even earlier in the life-cycle, following their arrival in a new country. After migration, parents may struggle with wanting to retain their previous degree of authority (Tyyskä, 2008). However, youths in North America are often immersed within institutions that foster independence. Immigrant parents, on the other hand, have been found to exercise stricter parenting than did their North American born counterparts (Falicov, 2007; Glick, 2010). This could result in a crisis during adolescence when youths seek independence but their immigrant parents resist loosening the boundaries. This challenge is, in part, developmental in nature as current research suggests that youths overall tend to seek greater autonomy at this stage and may at times resist the authority of their parents (Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio, & Vilhjalmdottir, 2005). Thus, it seems immigration may intensify and magnify the normative challenges inherent in this lifecycle stage.

Although research with non-immigrant populations suggests that parents and adolescents tend to agree on the ‘big’ issues, they still experience conflict around topics that are within the personal domain such as clothing, curfews, music, etc. (Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Rote & Smetana, 2015). These areas of conflict may also be heightened in immigrant families as a result of the cultural differences and expectations in these areas.

Another challenge that is experienced by immigrant families is the acculturation gap that often develops between parents and children (Glick, 2010). Traditionally, this gap is thought to result from children adopting the values and lifestyle of their new culture faster than their parents while simultaneously losing their connection to their culture of origin due to the lack of formal schooling and cultural socialization (Birman, 2006). This may result in children and parents feeling like they are living in two separate cultural worlds (Telzer, 2010). The acculturation gap-distress model (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993) suggests that the
different levels of acculturation between parents and youths may compound the normative intergenerational gaps present in most families, causing individual and relational distress and maladjustment. Specifically, parents are seen as losing authority, which may result in role reversal and the parentification of children (Tyyskä, 2008). Empirical studies examining this model have been inconclusive.

In a recent literature review of 23 studies that examined the acculturation gap-distress model, Telzer (2010) found that there are at least four types of acculturation gaps: (a) the child is more acculturated than the parent in the host culture; (b) the child is less acculturated than the parent in the host culture; (c) the child is more acculturated than the parent in the heritage culture; and (d) the child is less acculturated than the parent in the heritage culture. The original acculturation gap-distress model only accounted for the existence of the first type of acculturation gap, which was assumed to occur simultaneously with the fourth (Telzer, 2010).

The original conceptualization of acculturation in the acculturation gap-distress model fits with the earlier unidimensional views on acculturation (Gordon, 1964). Thus, it would appear that in the acculturation gap-distress model, children occupied the assimilation position (embracing the new culture and abandoning their heritage culture) and parents the marginalization position (rejecting the new culture and holding onto their heritage culture). This was theorized to create conflict and dissonance between the generations. The four types of acculturation gaps that Telzer (2010) discussed fit with the overall move towards bidimensionality in the field of acculturation, as demonstrated by Berry’s (1997, 2007) bidimensional acculturation framework. However, even the four types of acculturation gaps do not account for the experiences of families with multidimensional identities and acculturation experiences.
Research has found that the direction of the acculturation gap may differ depending on the domain of acculturation examined (identity, behaviour, values, etc.). For example, in a study with Chinese immigrant families in Canada, Costigan and Dokis (2006) found that children were more oriented than their parents towards Canadian values and practices, as suggested by the acculturation gap-distress model. However, children and parents did not differ in their orientation towards Chinese practices, and children scored higher on Chinese identity than their parents. Birman and Trickett (2001) found similar results with a sample of immigrant families from the FSU. In this study, children were more competent than their parents in English and less competent in Russian; however, they also scored higher on Russian identity than their parents. Thus, the specific domain being examined is important to consider in determining the direction of the acculturation gap between parents and children. Moreover, Costigan and Dokis (2006) stated that overall, there was high congruence between parents and children across domains of acculturation, suggesting that it is important to consider degrees and not merely dissonance when examining acculturation gaps.

Another important component of research on acculturation gaps is consideration of their outcomes. Although the assumption of the acculturation gap-distress model is that the consequences are negative, the results of empirical studies suggest that the consequences depend on the type of gap. In a literature review, Telzer (2010) found that when children were more acculturated to the host culture than their parents, this was not associated with family conflict or threats to youths’ well-being. These results are contradictory to what is hypothesized in the acculturation gap-distress model. This may be because faster acculturation by the youths may in fact be beneficial for the family as a whole because it represents not only individual gains in
functioning but provides a coping mechanism and a source of resilience for the family as a whole.

According to Telzer (2010), the results for the other three, often overlooked, types of acculturation gaps are less positive. Specifically, three of the six studies found that when parents were more acculturated to the host culture than the youths, there was more family conflict as well as youth maladjustment, including behavioural problems and lower school motivation. This is an overlooked gap and thus research is scant, but these findings do contradict the acculturation gap-distress model that predicts that problems are associated with being more acculturated to the host culture than one’s parents. Moreover, four out of six studies found that when children were more oriented towards their heritage culture than their parents, this was associated with maladjustment including increased family conflict, lower academic achievement, and higher depression. Rasmi, Chuang, and Hennig (2014) found similar results with a sample of Arab immigrants, where the gaps associated with negative outcomes occurred when emerging adults were more oriented towards the Arab dimension in the cultural orientation and values domains. These negative outcomes may be the results of youths struggling with their cultural identity due to racism and discrimination that limited their sense of belonging to the host culture (Atzaba-Poria & Pike, 2007). Finally, four of the seven studies found that when parents are more oriented towards their native culture than their children this was associated with negative outcomes for youths and families. This may be because youths were not involved with their heritage culture and community in a way that would allow these to serve as protective mechanisms. Overall, these findings suggest that native cultural gaps may be more problematic for families than host cultural gaps (Telzer, 2010), a finding which opposes the acculturation gap-distress model and its focus on acculturation to the host culture.
To date, research with immigrant families has focused primarily on the experiences of first-generation immigrants, especially with recent immigrants. However, immigrant generation and age at migration may play a role in the relationships between family members. For example, research revealed that in families where some children were born before migration and some after, the experiences of the youths themselves varied (Glick, 2010). Specifically, the older siblings who were born prior to migration are more likely to know a language other than English and expressed greater solidarity with their parents and their cultural traditions. Thus, research on families with different migration experiences would be imperative to understand the complexities of their acculturation processes and the impact on identity and sense of belonging.

**Peer group experiences.** The intrapersonal and social changes that youths undergo interact to create the need and possibility for a meaningful peer context during adolescence. Specifically, the cognitive changes that take place during this time period lead to adjustments in abilities that are crucial to peer relationships in adolescence such as categorization, perspective taking, and consideration of multiple groups with their respective meanings (Bennett, 2011; Newman & Newman, 2001; Steinberg, 2005). These also contribute to an increased desire for group belonging which lead to more meaningful peer relationships in adolescence. Moreover, the social transitions youths in Western societies experience allow them to explore more diverse relationships (Tanti, Stukas, Halloran, & Foddy, 2011). As a result, the influence of peers increases as the influence of parents decreases, and peers have been found to replace parents as primary social agents (Forthun, Montgomery, & Bell, 2006; Tarrant, MacKenzie, & Hewitt, 2006). Although the importance of peer relationships increases for both males and females in adolescence, there is a gender difference in how these relationships are maintained. Specifically, girls tended to maintain peer relationships through disclosure and intimacy whereas boys tended
to rely primarily on shared activities (McNelles & Connolly, 1999). Overall, this suggests that the peer context plays a multifaceted role during adolescence that needs to be further explored.

An in-depth understanding of how the peer context may influence identity and sense of belonging for decimal- and second-generation immigrant youths may help illuminate mechanisms unique to this critical time period. The importance of addressing these issues in immigrant youths is rooted in two conflicting experiences. Specifically, the parents may be acculturating to the host country more slowly and are relying on their children to serve as language and culture brokers (Glick, 2010; Jones & Trickett, 2005). This would require youths to reach out to the mainstream culture, including their peers. However, despite their desire for peer relations and the importance of these, immigrant youths may have a more limited ability to connect with peers (Goodenow & Espin, 1993). Research with immigrants from the FSU to Canada suggested that youths struggle with social problems and fitting into a peer group at school (Remennick, 2006). As a result, they tend to rely on co-ethnic peer networks (Azmitia, Ittel, & Brenk, 2006; Remennick, 2006).

An appraisal of the role of peers in adolescence requires further insight into the multifaceted relationships and sub-groups that exist in this context. Cliques are small groups of friends who engage in shared activities and have similarities across lines of age, race, socioeconomic status, etc. (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Membership in cliques is somewhat stable, although individuals can belong to more than one clique or not at all. Smaller friendship group are connected to the larger peer groups (Giordono, 2003). Crowds emerge during early adolescence and are composed of a large number of peers that are defined by broad stereotypes such as nerds or jocks (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Although the specific terms used to describe these categories may change over time, a literature review of the past 45 years of research
suggests that there is much consistency in the content and characteristics of these group identities (Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Brown, 2007).

The importance of crowds in adolescence is the result of the increased concern for peer acceptance that is experienced during this time (Bennett, 2011). This need for acceptance leads early adolescents, in particular, to search for a chosen identity in the form of group membership (Bennett, 2011; Newman & Newman, 1976). In addition, youths join groups because membership in any group is more socially acceptable than no membership at all (Steinberg, 2005; Stone & Brown, 1999). Individuals may belong to more than one group, and their various group identifications may have different meanings and values (Newman & Newman, 2001). In fact, peer groups are social categories that are formed by individuals based on certain similarities that are meaningful to them at that particular time (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Research suggests that individuals who are similar tend to be drawn together more than individuals who are dissimilar, a principle referred to as homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). According to McPherson and colleagues (2001), this applies to a variety of characteristics and factors, but race and ethnicity are the strongest contributors to homophily in social networks, and as a result, social networks and environments tend to be divided along these lines. The next most important factors, in order, are: age, religion, education, occupation, and gender. The principle of homophily applies to immigrant youths as well, who tend to form bonds with other immigrants (Chiu, Pong, Mori, & Chow, 2012). However, further research is necessary to understand how youths with multidimensional identities would evaluate and form relationships and how they would choose a relevant mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic reference group. It would also be of interest to understand who second-generation immigrant youths would
reach out to, whether it would be mainstream youths, same culture youths, or perhaps even decimal-generation youths.

A study of immigrant peer networks in and out of school found that youths tend to have the same kind of pattern in both settings (Svensson, Stattin, & Kerr, 2011). Specifically, youths either had primarily immigrant peer groups across both settings, or primarily Swedish-born peer groups across both settings, but not both. Moreover, the results showed that boys (in grades 4 to 12) who were part of a primarily immigrant peer group tended to have adaptation problems, particularly in school, but no such results were found among the girls. The researchers suggest that the adaptation problems were what led youths initially to seek these peer relationships, but more research is necessary in this area.

Peers, either through their function in cliques, or crowds, can also serve as a risk factor in adolescent well-being, identity, and sense of belonging. For example, peer discrimination has negative consequences to self-concept and self-esteem (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Moreover, peers who engage in stereotyping, racism, and classism can assign youths into groups where they do not feel that they belong, resulting in a sense of alienation (Newman & Newman, 2001). Overall, it is important to consider the positive and negative influences of in-groups and out-groups on identity and sense of belonging as well as the interconnections between these peers in the lives of decimal- and second-generation immigrant youths.

**Sense of Belonging**

The topic of sense of belonging has been of interest in the literature for several decades (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996) and both Maslow (1954) and Thoits (1982) described it as a basic human need. Family and peer relationships provide a sense of belonging that is crucial for youths (Chubb & Fertman, 1992; Newman & Newman, 2001). Belonging is
especially important to consider in immigrant research because immigrant youths not only navigate multiple possible peer groups (Sussman et al., 2007), but also two or more cultures to which they can belong (Tartakovsky, 2009). Sense of belonging with their families could also potentially be affected by migration as a result of the development of acculturation gaps between some parents and children. In this section, I will define sense of belonging and describe its characteristics. Then, I will discuss factors that impact sense of belonging, focusing on the role of various relationships and life experiences, including within families, schools, and cultures.

**Definition and characteristics.** Hagerty and colleagues (1992) developed a theoretical model of sense of belonging as part of their theory of human relatedness. According to this model, sense of belonging is an interpersonal process that is nested under the construct of relatedness (Hagerty et al, 1996). Sense of belonging was defined as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 173). This can apply to relationships with families, peers, and community members, as well as environments such as schools, neighbourhoods, countries, and cultures.

Sense of belonging is composed of two dimensions (Hagrerty et al., 1992). The first dimension is valued involvement, or a person’s sense of being valued or needed by people, groups, or environments. The second dimension is fit, referring to a person’s sense that his/her characteristics are congruent with other people, groups, or environments. There are antecedents that must occur before a person can experience a sense of belonging and its positive outcomes. These antecedents are the individual’s energy, potential, and desire for involvement, along with the potential for congruent characteristics. According to Hagerty and colleagues, these antecedents must be explored in order to understand any deficits in an individual’s sense of
belonging and are therefore key for intervention development. Outcomes include involvement (psychological, social, spiritual, or physical) and its meaningfulness, as well as the development of a foundation for behavioural or emotional responses. Thus, sense of belonging has both affective and cognitive components that influence one’s behaviour and functioning (Hagerty et al., 1992).

**Factors relevant to belonging.** Sense of belonging is both affected by and affects relationships. Focusing on perceptions of social support from spouses, relatives, friends, and coworkers, Hagerty and colleagues (1996) found that sense of belonging is negatively connected to negative social support and conflict but positively connected to positive social support actions and more perceived social support. Moreover, a high sense of belonging was also connected to psychological functioning whereas a low sense of belonging was related to loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Peer relationships were significant for both men and women, whereas involvement in community activities was significant for women only. This suggests that sense of belonging may be more connected to social and psychological functioning for women in general, perhaps due to a tendency for women to define themselves in relation to others (Hagerty et al., 1996).

Within the school context, in a qualitative study with Francophone youths from Southern Ontario, Drolet and Arcand (2013) found that one’s sense of belonging in school was connected to having a lot of close and reliable relationships with peers. More specifically, sense of belonging to a specific group or crowd was not as important as having a close circle of friends or clique. Supporting the dimensions of value and fit, popularity was not as important as feeling accepted by and similar to their peer group.
Childhood experiences and family relationships also play an important role in sense of belonging in adulthood. Hagerty, Williams, and Oe (2002) found that caring relationships with both parents in childhood were positively associated with sense of belonging in adulthood. However, overprotection by fathers was negatively associated with it. Moreover, financial problems in family of origin were negatively associated with sense of belonging in adulthood. These particular facets of childhood experiences may be impacted by migration due to the stressors of survival and thus may interfere with future sense of belonging.

Chubb and Fertman’s (1992) study on youths’ sense of family belonging (the feeling of being a member of the family on an equal basis with others), found that youths who felt that they belonged experienced higher self-esteem and a more internal locus of control, and spent more time with their families. Their sense of belonging in their families also extended to their sense of belonging in other groups, including school and community, and greater participation in activities within these contexts. The researchers suggested that perhaps a sense of security and belonging within the family allowed the youths to take more risks in the world, outside the family. Some studies suggest that this is of particular interest for immigrant youths as they may feel caught between the cultural world within their families and outside their families and may therefore struggle with their sense of belonging in one or both of these spheres (Giguère, Lalonde, & Lou, 2010).

Research exploring ethnic differences in sense of belonging has also been conducted. Faircloth and Hamm (2005) explored sense of belonging among high school students from four ethnic groups (European American, African American, Asian American and Latino). Unfortunately, no information was provided on the immigration status of the sample. They examined four dimensions of school belonging, two of which were: (a) having a place within a
peer network (indicated by receiving friendship nominations); and (b) perceived ethnic based discrimination. Overall, they found that youths’ sense of belonging mediated the relationship between motivation and achievement in school, suggesting that it is an important variable to consider in adolescence. However, specific indicators of sense of belonging differed among ethnic groups. For example, both having a place within the peer network and perceived ethnic based discrimination were found to be indicators of belonging for European American and Latino youths, but only perceived ethnic based discrimination was relevant for Asian American and African American youths. This ethnic difference was not due to discrepancies of friendship nominations, but rather a potential measurement issue. Perhaps this type of measure focused on the presence and not the quality of the social relationships (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). As Hagerty and colleagues (1992) stressed, a psychological measure of sense of belonging needs to capture an individual’s perceptions of both value and fit, which friendship nominations cannot assess. Moreover, it may be that for some adolescents, it is not their school peer network that is most meaningful but their neighbourhood peer network and thus, other social networks need to be considered as well.

In a more recent study with 41 countries, Chiu and colleagues (2012) explored immigrant and native-born high school students’ sense of belonging. The findings revealed immigrant status differences in youths’ scores on sense of belonging; native youths had the highest scores, then second-generation, then first-generation immigrants who scored the lowest. Although the role of peers was not explicitly explored, the researchers suggested that perhaps first-generation youths’ difficulties with peer relationships may have impacted their sense of belonging. These findings stress the importance of examining the effects of the peer context on the sense of belonging of
both first- and second-generation youths, and whether there would be other differences among the decimal-generations.

Some research has been conducted on the connection between family and belonging among immigrant youths. With Canadian born Chinese youths, Kobayashi and Preston (2014) found that families provided the youths with a sense of belonging to their culture and community. Moreover, the engagement in cultural practices and activities with their parents provided youths with a sense of belonging to their particular family. These same youths often struggled with their sense of belonging in other contexts and settings. Family also provided the primary ties and attachment to the country of origin and the sense of belonging to it was anchored to the family living there (Ho, 2009).

Researchers have recently extended their investigations of sense of belonging to views on country and culture. For example, Tartakovsky’s (2009) longitudinal study focused on Jewish adolescents from Russia and Ukraine who were participating in an immigration program to Israel. During the three year post-immigration period, although youths’ attitudes toward the receiving country were more favourable than towards their home country, their sense of belonging was stronger towards their home country than the receiving country. However, sense of belonging to the home and receiving countries were independent from one another, suggesting that the countries were appraised in their own context. Nevertheless, sense of belonging with one country may impact attitude towards the other, suggesting that there is some connection.

Unfortunately, limited research has been conducted on the sense of belonging of Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada. Anisef and colleagues (2002) found that youths who came indirectly through Israel had an attachment to Israeli culture, whereas those who came directly from the FSU had an attachment to Russian culture. This suggests that the sense of belonging of
indirect migrants may be particularly complex. However, both groups felt alienated from their Canadian peers. This alienation often resulted in friendship networks being formed between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrant youths from the FSU, despite the strong anti-Semitism that was prevalent in their home country. Taken together, these studies with Russian-speaking, Jewish immigrants suggest that there may be a connection between a sense of belonging and specific post-migration experiences. Furthermore, Berry (1997, 2003, 2007) indicated that cultural attitudes and policies may play a role in the acculturation of immigrants and whether this also then extends to sense of belonging needs to be further explored.

Research on third culture individuals could shed light on the sense of belonging of indirect immigrants (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Third culture individuals are not immigrants but people who grew up outside of their citizenship country, often in several different cultures as a result of their parents’ work. Therefore, similar to indirect immigrants, third culture individuals have lived in two or more countries. In a six country study, Moore and Barker (2012) conducted interviews with adults who reflected on their experiences of living outside of their passport country between six to 18 years of age. Many of the participants expressed a sense of feeling in-between countries and not fitting in anywhere, despite a desire to experience a sense of belonging. Others were able to identify one or more countries to which they felt they belonged (whether it was their citizenship country or not). These findings suggest that sense of belonging is complex for individuals who experience one or more moves during their developmental years. Moreover, sense of belonging and identity were not equivalent. Participants expressed an ability to shift between cultural identities without experiencing a sense of belonging to them. As a result, Moore and Barker (2012) stressed the importance of examining the two constructs separately.
Social and Ethnic Identity

The term ‘identity’ became popular in the field of Social Sciences in the 1950s and ‘60s (Gleason, 1983), leading to widespread exploration of the content and formation of this construct (Wetherell, 2010). Identity, which comes from the Latin root *idem* (the same), refers to the essence that is possessed by a person, place, or group (Gleason, 1983; Wetherell, 2010). The importance of research on identity is rooted in theoretical and empirical evidence linking aspects of identity with various indices of well-being, such as levels of stress, self-esteem, family life, etc. (Sharma & Sharma, 2010; Smith & Silva, 2011). In addition, identity is considered to serve several functions in individual, relational, and social functioning (Adams & Marshall, 1996).

Adolescence is regarded as a critical time period in the formation of identity (Erikson, 1968; Newman & Newman, 1976; Quintana, 2007). This is based on cognitive and physical changes that youths go through during this time, along with the pressures of the sociocultural contexts within which these take place (Kroger, 2007). For immigrant youths, this may be accentuated due to potential differences between the expectations of their family and home culture and their new peer context (e.g., schools). In this section, I will first define and discuss research on social and ethnic identities. Then, in the following section, I will describe the role of identity agents, including parents and peers, in the identity formation of youths.

Social identity. Social identity is defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Thus, social identity is composed of the awareness of group membership (and what it entails), as well as the emotional connection to this group and its standing in relation to others. Thus, groups provide a sense of belonging for individuals through social identity. The key framework for understanding
and exploring social identity and group process is the Social Identity Approach (SIA) (Hogg, 2003, 2006). This framework integrated the Social Identity (Tajfel, 1974) and Self Categorization theories (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Within the context of the SIA, researchers have explored how sense of belonging relates to self-concept, and how it affects and is affected by collective behaviour (Hornsey, 2008; Turner, 1999).

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offered the foundation for understanding group relations and intergroup conflict and how these relate to identity and self-image. Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) built on SIT and expanded the applicability of the underlying concepts into areas such as group processes, stereotyping, and social cognition (Turner, 1999). SCT built on the SIT by exploring what enables individuals to act as a group (Turner et al., 1987). Therefore, SCT is considered to be the cognitive dimension of SIA (Hogg, 2006). Tajfel considered the process of self-definition to be continual and resulting from the need to find one’s place within, or outside of, the various social networks encountered from an early age. Accordingly, one of SIA’s assumptions is that social identity is not a static attribute, but is dynamic and contextually informed (Tajfel, 1974; Turner, 1999; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Thus, social identity is not a fixed attribute of the individual but one that varies depending on the immediate context.

The SIA is built on four concepts that are connected through a causal sequence. The first is social categorization, which refers to the process of grouping entities in coherent ways that are meaningful to the individual based on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, etc. (Tajfel, 1974). Consequently, social categorizations serve to segment and order one’s social environment as well as define one’s place within it (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In turn, social categorizations provide group members with a social identity or an understanding of themselves in social terms.
Social comparison links social categorization with social identity by allowing one to compare the in-group to a meaningful out-group (Tajfel, 1974). Through these comparisons, the individual can establish a sense of distinctiveness or psychological differentiation between the groups. These comparisons lead to either positive or negative social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, these concepts only reflect certain shared beliefs about desirable or undesirable aspects of social identity (Turner, 1975), which are socially constructed and not absolute. This process is continual and groups have to maintain, or try to achieve, a positive social identity through intergroup behaviour.

An important implication of this sequence is that other groups are required for one to experience a sense of social identity. This is because social identity can only be defined when there are groups to categorize individuals into, then compare these groups to one’s own group, and experience a positive sense of distinctiveness. Immigrants may experience themselves as navigating several groups, including their ethnic group, the national mainstream group, as well as national minority groups and religious groups, among others. The number of groups immigrants have to navigate complicates the process of categorization, identity, comparison, and distinctiveness suggested by Tajfel (1974) and this complexity has been overlooked in the research on social identity.

**Ethnic identity.** Ethnicity refers to "status in respect of membership of a group regarded as ultimately of common descent, or having a common national or cultural tradition; ethnic character" (OED, 2014). Others have defined ethnic identity as one’s understanding and interpretation of the group membership, as well as the attitudes and feelings associated with it (Keefe, 1992; Phinney, 1996). Ethnic identity is a part of social identity that is seen as a multidimensional and dynamic construct composed of cognitive, affective, and behavioural
factors (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Sinclair & Milner, 2005). It is believed to play an important role in self-concept and affect how individuals go through life, interact with, and view one another (Phinney, 1996). Thus, I will discuss: (a) prominent models of ethnic identity; (b) the importance of ethnic identity for youths; (c) invisible immigrants and white identity; and (d) factors that may impact ethnic identity formation in this population.

The stage models of ethnic identity formation that have dominated the field are at the intersection of two frameworks of identity: the SIA and Marcia’s (1966, 1980) Identity Status Paradigm (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). In his Identity Status Paradigm (ISP), Marcia (1966, 1980) offered the first neo-Eriksonian identity model. In Marcia’s view, identity development consists of dual processes of exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1980). The extent to which individuals engage in either process affects the outcomes, leading to one of four identity statuses: diffusion (no commitment, with or without exploration), foreclosure (commitment without exploration), moratorium (in the process of exploration, vague commitments), or achievement (commitment following exploration).

Phinney (1996) developed a three stage model of ethnic identity that is based on the theoretical foundations of SIA and ISP. Thus, this model considers two primary elements: ethnic identity exploration and achievement, and ethnic affirmation or belonging. This model is of interest because it acknowledges the multifaceted nature of ethnic identity both as an individual identification (personal identity) and as a group membership (social identity). The three stages of this model are (a) unexamined ethnic identity (not salient and given little conscious thought); (b) moratorium or exploration (interest in and exploration of ethnicity); (c) achieved ethnic identity (internalized and secure identity). Empirical findings provide partial support for stage models of ethnic identity.
In a review of the literature, Quintana (2007) found that there was consistent evidence of increases in identity exploration and identification in adolescence, though the process was gradual and not a dramatic shift or crisis as theoretically assumed. In addition, in a longitudinal study, French and colleagues (2006) found that although there was a significant increase in group esteem (or belonging) over early and middle adolescence, exploration rose only in the older cohort. This suggests that ethnic identity development is not a homogeneous process and that different facets of identity may develop at different times. Moreover, it is unclear how these stage models fit for the multiethnic individuals.

Research also suggest that ethnic and/or racial identity, much like social identity, is dynamic. Specifically, research by Renn (2000, 2008) found that bi- and multiracial individuals reveal certain aspects of their identities depending on the context. Thus, although the underlying identity itself may be stable, its presentation is fluid and contextually dependent.

Research on ethnic identity is particularly relevant for immigrant youths. Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) explored the effects of a secure and strong ethnic identity and suggested that it contributed to positive psychological well-being, regardless of gender. For example, a strongly held ethnic identity has been associated with higher school achievement and psychological adjustment in Chinese immigrant adolescents (Costigan, Koryzma, Hua, & Chance, 2010). In addition, low levels of ethnic identity were associated with lower than average levels of self-esteem for males only, suggesting that ethnic identity may be of particular importance to immigrant boys. Unfortunately, the researchers did not explore the reasons behind these findings. A meta-analysis examining the connection between ethnic identity and personal well-being in racialized groups found a modest positive relationship between the
two constructs (Smith & Silva, 2011). However, it is unclear what role ethnic identity may play in the adjustment of white immigrant adolescents.

To date, researchers have primarily focused on racialized groups in research on ethnic identity, overlooking invisible minority groups. However, following immigration, invisible minorities may face similar challenges as they rebuild their new identities. Moreover, in Canada, all people are members of recognized racial and ethnic groups (Statistics Canada, 2008b) and issues of ethnicity and race are thus applicable to everyone, particularly in diverse areas. Research to date has examined preparation for bias in racialized groups (Hughes et al., 2006). However, little is known about how white children and youths are socialized with respect to race (Quintana et al., 2006). This may be particularly challenging for white immigrant youths who may not receive relevant socialization from their parents to know how to deal with discrimination, but may still experience it due to their immigrant status and sociocultural differences. For white Jewish immigrants, the situation may be different because of their history of discrimination in their country of origin (Robila, 2010). However, there is a dearth of research exploring preparation for bias in Jewish families and thus it is unclear if this would play a role in their ethnic identity following migration. Thus, research on the experiences of white youths could help expand current models of ethnic identity formation.

Kiang and Fuligni (2009) provided some support for focusing on invisible minorities in their multi-ethnic study of youth identity. They found that youths experienced different levels of ethnic exploration and belonging depending on whether they were with parents, youths of the same ethnicity as themselves, or youths of a different ethnicity. Specifically, these shifts in the levels of exploration and belonging were associated with adjustment issues (e.g., lower self-esteem, lack of positive affect, etc.) only among non-immigrant European American youths.
These findings stress the ethnic differences in developing their sense of ethnic identity and that minority youths appear to be more contextually adaptive. Perhaps this ability serves as a protective factor. However, little is known about the experiences of white immigrants in similar situations. These youths may experience an even greater challenge in coping with a lack of relational consistency (depending on whether they are with parents, same- or other-ethnicity peers) in their ethnic identity and belonging.

Over the past two decades, there has been some recognition of the importance of studying white identity in order to gain a better understanding of racism and racial inequality (McDermott & Samson, 2005). Research on whiteness has focused on the limited awareness that white individuals have of their privilege and on the unexamined nature of this racial category. For many, it was an unremarked, invisible identity (Hyde, 1995). However, research and theorizing have focused on the experiences of American-born, mainstream white European American youths. It is unclear how this work may apply to: (a) more recent decimal- and second-generation immigrants; (b) immigrants coming specifically from Eastern Europe; and (c) to Canada (versus the another country with significantly different immigration policies).

This interest in the experiences of immigrants corresponds with a more recent trend of examining white identity as a situated identity that takes into account social location and context (McDermott & Samson, 2005). According to developmental models of ethnic and personal identity, adults are considered as having formed their identity, whereas adolescents and young adults are still in a process of exploration (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980, Phinney, 1989). Thus, immigrants arriving in adulthood formed their ethnic identity prior to immigration, whereas decimal-generation immigrant youths are forming their identity in the context of acculturation to the host culture and enculturation to their heritage culture (Phinney, 1990). Whiteness may have
been an unexamined identity for these immigrant youths in their countries of origin, but their understanding of it may shift once they are confronted with its North American definitions. This identity formation may also become what separates them from other immigrants who tend to be racialized groups and yet, it may not be sufficient to make them align with white mainstream youths. Consequently, they may become acutely aware of their white identity and its role in their adjustment.

Moreover, individuals with multiethnic identities such as Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants may have experienced discrimination based on their Jewish ethnic identity in their country of origin (FSU in particular). Therefore, they may have particular difficulties understanding and accepting their whiteness, as it is defined in North America. A discussion of the connection between whiteness and privilege may not account for the complexity of their experiences. Instead, there may be a conflict between the white privilege and ethnocentrism that these immigrants experience, both in their country of origin and in Canada. An understanding of this could contribute to greater complexity and nuance to ethnic identity research.

Past research on the ethnic identity of Russian Jews did not explore their ideas about their whiteness, but the findings revealed that the centrality of their Jewish identity may facilitate the transition between the American and Russian identities following immigration (Rosner, Gardner, & Hong 2011). However, Jewish identity may be a confusing matter for immigrants who come to North America indirectly due to the sociocultural differences between all of the countries in which they lived. Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union encountered definitions of Jewishness as ethnicity/race in the Soviet Union and religion in North America (Persky & Birman, 2005). Thus, their Jewish identity in the FSU was maintained automatically as part of what was seen as their biological makeup and as a result of discrimination. In North America, the
maintenance of a Jewish identity historically required conscious effort in the form of religious practice. However, Jewish immigrants from the FSU who moved to Israel encountered a third perspective whereby their Jewish identity could be maintained simply through living in Israel, where Jewish holidays are national holidays and the weekend falls on days sacred to Jewish people. Thus, conscious religious practice was not required to maintain identity.

For both direct and indirect Jewish immigrants from the FSU, this effortful maintenance of Jewish identity that they encountered in North America could be different from what they were used to and could create difficulty in becoming a part of the Canadian born Jewish community. Perhaps feeling that they were “insufficiently Jewish” because they were not religiously observant (Anisef et al., 2002) could have led to feelings of isolation and resentment considering they felt sufficiently Jewish in the other countries where they lived. This may be particularly reinforced for people who came indirectly through Israel and thus lived in two societies in which being Jewish was simply part of who they were that did not require conscious effort.

**Identity Agents**

Identity agents are individuals who “actively interact with children and youth with the intention of participating in their identity formation, and who reflectively mediate larger social influences on identity formation” (Schachter & Ventura, 2008, p. 449). Identity agents are of particular interest because of their unique position as situated not only in close proximity to the youths, but also in-between the youths and sociocultural institutions (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Thus, they are situated in the micro- and mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and are in-between the youths and the macro level social influences. Subsequently, identity agents mediate the interaction between the two by actively choosing which explicit and implicit social messages
they pass through or filter out. Past research on identity agents is limited and has focused primarily on the role of close and significant others (e.g., parents, peers, and teachers). To further explore identity agents, I will discuss the research on both parent and peer identity agents, as well as a possible extension to cliques and crowds.

**Parents as identity agents.** The first study to explore the concept of identity agents examined Jewish Orthodox parents in Israel (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). This group was chosen because of the complexity of having to balance different influences on identity, rooted in tradition, religion, and modernity, among others. The researchers developed six major components of identity agency in their grounded theory analysis of parental narratives. These components suggest that identity agents: (a) are concerned with the personal and social identity development of the youths; (b) have particular explicit and implicit goals regarding the content, structure, and/or process of identity formation; (c) act in ways that will allow them to further these goals; (d) assess both the target individual and the relevant sociocultural context with the purpose of mediating the two; (e) hold implicit psychological theories of identity formation that help them decide how to act to further their goals; and (f) continuously reflect on their goals and practices in order to refine both. Importantly, identity agents are not only concerned with the identity formation of another, but their role as agents can be part of their own identity. Moreover, identity agents do not simply impose a predetermined identity on the youths, but are concerned with, and therefore participate in, the formation of their identity.

Not all identity agents embody all of these components. Therefore, Schachter and Ventura (2008) suggest that identity agency is determined based on personal recognition of: (a) one’s active role in the identity formation of another person, in whatever form that may take; and (b)
the reasons and practices associated with it. This supports the view that identity is co-constructed and that understanding the roles of all the individuals and contexts involved is imperative.

Although the research on parents as identity agents is limited, further insight into their role in the identity formation of youths can be gained from the research on ethnic-racial socialization. This research focused primarily on ethnic and racial minority families; however, researchers suggest that most forms of ethnic and racial socialization occur across all ethnic groups (Hughes et al., 2006) and therefore have a broad relevance.

Hughes and colleagues (2006) suggest that there are four particularly common themes in this form of socialization: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Cultural socialization is of particular interest in the current study, and it is defined as “parental practices that teach children about their racial or ethnic heritage and history; that promote cultural customs and traditions; and that promote children’s cultural, racial, and ethnic pride, either deliberately or implicitly” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 749). Past research suggests that this is the most prevalent and salient form of ethnic-racial socialization. Importantly, much of this research has focused on the experiences of American-born racialized families. Within immigrant families, researchers have found that length of time in the country impacts cultural socialization (language, traditions, etc.) in that it requires more deliberate effort on the part of the parents to promote identification with their ethnic group the longer the family lives in the new country (Waters, 1990). However, little is known about the experiences of less recent immigrants and successive generations of immigrants (Hughes et al., 2006).

The process and content of parents’ ethnic-racial socialization shifts with the age and developmental stage of their children, beginning with cultural socialization in childhood and shifting to more complex topics such as discrimination and egalitarianism as children age into
adolescence (Hughes et al., 2006). These topics also shift with their children’s experiences and are discussed as they become relevant.

Neighbourhood composition also makes a difference in ethnic-racial socialization, with parents living in ethnic enclaves being less likely to prepare their children for bias than parents living in diverse areas (Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2005). Taken together, these findings demonstrate both components of identity agency as Schachter and Ventura (2008) has described.

Studies overall suggest that cultural socialization is associated with positive outcomes for youths (Hughes et al., 2005; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). Moreover, research has found that familial ethnic-racial socialization plays a significant role in ethnic identity formation for youths from diverse cultural backgrounds (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006). This research should be expanded to account for ethnic-racial socialization, or parents as identity agents, among white immigrant youths with multidimensional identities, as their experiences are not currently captured by either body of research.

**Peers as identity agents.** Research on peers as identity agents is similarly limited. However, the current work suggests that peer identity agents may differ from authority figures in the goals that they set and the activities they engage in to influence each other’s identities (Marshall & Schachter, 2010). Moreover, peer agents may be able to offer youths a unique context for identity construction that adults cannot. This is due to their shared developmental and learning experiences and common goals of identity formation (Sugimura & Shimizu, 2010). Thus, peer identity agents may actively participate in each other’s identity formation from a position of relative (at least developmental) equality.
To date, only one study directly examined peers as identity agents. Sugimura and Shimizu (2010) focused on educational identity (or identity within the educational domain) with 170 Japanese university students. There were some similarities with authority figures in that peer identity agents were actively involved in the process of exploration and had particular identity goals in mind such as learning practices in the classroom. However, unlike findings with authority figures, peer identity agents used sympathy and confirmation based on their own concurrent experiences to motivate their peers. Moreover, peers shared their own identity goals, processes of exploration, and the challenges they faced. These efforts afforded some clarity and tangibility to the process of identity formation and allowed individuals to see the progression. Therefore, peer identity agents offered companionship through mutual exploration and support. Finally, these peer identity agents acknowledged their social location as in-between childhood and adulthood and their connection to broader institutions and systems like the university and society. Overall, peer identity agents have shared experiences and thus enhance the identities of both individuals in a bi-directional manner.

There is a dearth of research on the active role of identity agents in the adaptation of decimal- and second-generation immigrant youths. Thus, there has not been attention to the experiences of adolescents with multidimensional identities and how peer agents may contribute to their identity formation. This is important because peers are the primary socialization agents in adolescence, perhaps particularly so for immigrant youths whose parents are not familiar with the mainstream settlement culture. Thus, for decimal- and second-generation youths, peer identity agents could provide an important mechanism for acculturation as well as enculturation as they tend to connect with their co-ethnic peers (Chiu et al., 2012; McPherson, et al. 2001).
It is also important to consider the role that individual peer identity agents may play beyond in-person settings for immigrant youths. This is due to the fact that youths can now maintain virtual transnational relationships with peers in their home countries and thus part of their identity construction may take place online. Research suggests that there has been a shift in the communication patterns of adolescents over recent years. For example, the use of text messaging among American youths increased from 51% in 2006 to 88% in 2010. Moreover, two-thirds of youths who text reported that they were more likely to text their friends than they were to call them (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). There has been a similar increase in the use of social media sites. In 2013, three quarters of Canadian youths reported using social media or blogging, a 250% increase from 2005 (Steeves, 2014). These shifts illustrate the importance of considering the online context as it offers various opportunities for both positive and negative peer interactions.

Larsen (2007) conducted an online ethnography to explore the role of peers in co-construction of identity in the online context by examining the activities of 13 to 17 year olds on a Dutch social networking site over a period of seven months. Larsen found that the communication between peers tended to be very affectionate, allowing youths to receive acknowledgement, confirmation, and acceptance from peers (Newman & Newman, 2001). Moreover, youths deliberately engaged in co-construction of identities by inviting one another to edit their profiles and thus the descriptions of themselves and their interests. Youths also posted quotes from friends on their own profiles that allowed them to communicate how their peers see them. These identities were not fictional, because on this particular website, most of the youths were part of a friend network in real life (Larsen, 2007). Therefore, adolescents used the website as a means for exploring and expressing their identity and allowing their peers to participate in
its formation in explicit ways. Research also suggests that online communication with peers enabled adolescents to join offline cliques and crowds (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), and thus potentially facilitated a sense of belonging.

**The influence of cliques and crowds.** Although the theory on identity agents has not yet considered the potential role of cliques and crowds, research suggests that these serve several purposes in identity formation. Both direct and indirect communication from the broader peer group has effects on adolescent identity because it provides a sense of the social worth of one’s self and group within the broader cultural context. In fact, the active role of the broader peer network in identity is important to consider because it can provide a harsher context for identity formation than close friendships (Giordano, 2003).

Crowds are generally arranged in hierarchies and therefore offer youths a framework for understanding and making sense of the social world and its inequalities (McLellan & Pugh, 1999). Crowds may demonstrate that participation in society can have different levels of success, thereby reinforcing societal norms. In addition, these hierarchies offer criteria for intergroup comparisons and resulting perceptions of positive or negative social identity. Thus, crowds actively offer not only a social context within and against which youths can define themselves and those around them, but also the criteria for categorization and social comparison (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). However, it is likely that these hierarchies are purposefully enforced and perpetuated by members in order to experience a sense of superiority and positive social identity. The experiences of decimal- and second-generation immigrant youths in trying to fit into these hierarchies could have implications for their identity and sense of belonging, especially for youths with multidimensional identities. It would be of particular interest to understand how these experiences could impact how youths find their place in Canadian society.
Moreover, crowds influence youths through peer pressure and admiration, as well as a genuine desire for similarity and group belonging (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Consequently, individuals change over time to resemble other group members and internalize group norms. Thus, revisions are made not only to behaviours but also to values (Newman & Newman, 2001; Steinberg, 2005). This experience could contribute to acculturation, but it could also be problematic if these values change in a direction that moves the immigrant youths further away from their ethnic culture and family of origin. However, individuals do not simply internalize all group views because crowds require a balance between similarity and independence (Newman & Newman, 2001). Therefore, crowds actively present values and ideals to youths who then may evaluate their position accordingly, rejecting some and accepting others (Pugh & Hart, 1999).

Adams and Marshall (1996) suggest that a sense of identity requires a balance between integration and differentiation. This balance is provided and, to a certain extent, encouraged by both individual and in-group peer identity agents. In this way, the peer context allows youths to see themselves as both distinct from others and similar to in-group members. It is important to understand how this may work for decimal- and second-generation immigrant youths in in-group and out-group peer contexts. Moreover, for youths with multidimensional identities who may not have a clear in- and out-group, how they balance integration and differentiation may be of particular interest.

In a study with Armenian, Vietnamese, and Mexican immigrants in the U.S., Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang (2001) found that interactions with peers from one’s own ethnic group were significantly related to ethnic identity, even more than ethnic language. Similarly, in a study with FSU immigrants to Finland, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (1998) found that peers influence both ethnic and national identity. Specifically, when adolescents were more orientated
towards their native Finn peers, the stronger was their Finnish identity, and the more oriented they were towards their Russian peers, the stronger was their Russian identity. However, peer groups could also potentially serve as negative identity agents. For example, a study with immigrant youths found that discrimination by peer out-groups can be associated with negative consequences to their national (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009) and ethnic identity formation (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). Thus, research on negative peer group experiences needs further attention.

Experiences of Victimization

Negative peer experiences in adolescence can include bullying and discrimination, which, for the purpose of the current study, will be grouped together under the label victimization. In this section, I will first define bullying and discrimination and discuss their common features, followed by a discussion on the global and local statistics on youths’ experiences of victimization. Finally, I will describe some links to and outcomes of youths’ victimization experiences.

Definitions and features. Bullying has been defined as:

a specific type of aggression in which (a) behaviour is intended to harm or disturb; (b) the behaviour occurs repeatedly over time; (c) there is an imbalance of power with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one (Nansel, et al., 2001, p. 2094).

Bullying encompasses a wide range of behaviours, including physical (e.g., hitting), verbal (e.g., name calling), and relational (e.g., exclusion) activities (Nansel, et al., 2001). Bullying can be motivated by varying factors like social status, envy, and personal differences (Greene, 2006). Of particular interest is bias-based bullying as this type of bullying is specifically motivated by an individual’s membership in a group that is marginalized in some way (Greene, 2006). Bias-
based bullying may be especially psychologically difficult for individuals whose group membership is not in their control, such as members of ethnic, racial, or religious minorities, as well as immigrants.

One specific form of bias-based bullying is ethnic bullying, which is defined as “bullying that targets another’s ethnic background or cultural identity in any way” (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006, p. 242). Ethnic bullying can also takes various forms. Direct forms include slurs and derogatory references to cultural customs, whereas indirect forms include social exclusion.

Members of marginalized minority groups may also experience discrimination, which is defined as “harmful action toward others because of their membership in a particular group” (Fishbein, 2002, p. 6). Religious, ethnic, or immigrant background can all be reasons for discrimination. Like bullying, discrimination encompasses behaviours that are physical, verbal, and relational/social in nature and can be direct or indirect. In fact, outright discrimination is often viewed as unacceptable in today’s world and contemporary discrimination is often more covert or indirect (Fishbein, 2002).

Children’s understanding and perception of prejudice and discrimination become more complex with age (Quintana & Vera, 1999). For example, in interviews with 7- and 12-year-old Mexican American and African American youths, Quintana and Vera (1999) found that younger children focused on discrimination based on concrete and literal, non-social features (e.g., physical appearance). Early adolescents, in contrast, are able to recognize the role that social and group memberships may play in discrimination.

**Statistics on victimization.** The importance of studying victimization is evidenced in its prevalence in numerous countries. Based on a 40 country study, rates of exposure to bullying
varied across countries, from around 9% to 45% among boys, and 5% to 36% among girls (Craig et al., 2009). Of the 40 countries, Canada ranked 20th for boys and 15th for girls in its rates of youths’ exposure to bullying. In Canada, around 23% of boys and 17% of girls reported being the victims of bullying. Across most countries, high-school aged boys reported more experiences of both bullying and victimization than girls. In Canada, the two most common forms of bullying among adolescents were teasing (55% to 81%, depending on the year studied and age of the youths) and indirect bullying (e.g., social exclusion or spreading lies; 54% to 79%, depending on the year studied and age of the youths). Interestingly, boys reported more teasing than girls whereas girls reported more indirect bullying than boys (Craig & McCuaig Edge, 2008).

For bias-based victimization, 34% of the youths reported that they had been discriminated against because of their religion, race, or spoken language at least once in their lifetime (Zeman & Bressan, 2008). Overall, immigrants (both first- and second-generation) were more likely to report discrimination than non-immigrant youths. Recent immigrants were the most likely to report discrimination compared to their peers. Perreault (2008) also found that for individuals 15 years of age and over, almost one in five immigrants, in comparison to one in 10 non-immigrants, reported being discriminated against over a period of five years. Moreover, recent immigrants (five years or less) were even more likely to report discrimination than non-recent immigrants (26% compared to 18%, respectively). Of those reporting discrimination, 70% believed that their ethnic origin, culture, or skin colour was the reason for the discrimination.

McKenney and colleagues (2006) examined the prevalence of ethnic bullying experienced by immigrant and non-immigrant youths in Toronto and found that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the proportions of youths who reported victimization. With both groups, almost 8% reported experiencing at least one incident of general victimization or
bullying over the last two months, and about 14% reported that they were victimized by a student from another ethnicity because of their own ethnicity. There was some evidence that individuals who were born in Canada to immigrant parents reported more ethnic bullying than individuals who were born in Canada to parents who were also born in Canada. In addition, a gender difference was found such that boys reported more overall victimization and more ethnic victimization than girls. McKenney and colleagues suggested that further research is necessary to understand how immigrant youths experience this form of victimization.

Furthermore, in a national study with individuals over 15 years of age, Reitz, Banerjee, Phan, and Thompson (2009) found that among the white participants, Jewish people were more likely than other groups to report experiences of discrimination, in particular, discrimination based on religion. Specifically, 20% of the Jewish respondents reported experiencing discrimination. Birman and Tricket (2001) also found that 68% of the Russian Jewish immigrant youths endorsed the statement, “You heard people saying bad things or making jokes about Russians” and 65% endorsed the statement, “A teacher told you that you shouldn’t speak Russian in class or at school” (p. 470).

**Links to victimization.** According to the Social Identity Approach, social identity and its underlying sense of belonging play a crucial role in the processes of stereotyping and discrimination (Hogg, 2003, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Specifically, the desire for a positive social identity influences the intergroup behaviours individuals engage in, including discrimination and in-group favouritism. These behaviours, in turn, influence their sense of identity by reinforcing group differences and a sense of superiority of one’s own group over another group. Thus, there appears to be a bidirectional relationship between discrimination and sense of identity and belonging.
Accordingly, experiences of bias-based or ethnic bullying and discrimination have common factors connected to an individual’s group membership and a perception of a power differential between the groups. These forms of victimization may be rooted in ethnocentrism, which refers to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that are based on a belief that one’s group is superior over another’s group, which is seen as inferior (Hammons & Axelrod, 2006). The boundaries between the groups are often defined by observable characteristics, including language, accent, religion, and physical features. Consequently, immigrant youths may be more prone and sensitive to experiences of ethnocentrism and victimization due to their marginalized status in society and the resulting power differential with their native-born peers. They may also experience being members of marginalized groups based on more than one criteria: immigrant status, language, accent, culture, religion, customs, and ethnicity. The multiple jeopardy hypothesis suggests that individuals who experience discrimination based on more than one dimension may experience increased negative outcomes in relation to their well-being and belonging in comparison to individuals who experience discrimination based on a single dimension (Dion, Dion, & Banerjee, 2009; Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1991).

**Outcomes of victimization.** Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that there are different reactions to discrimination that result in a negative or threatened social identity: (a) social mobility, whereby some individuals will un-identify with the in-group; (b) social creativity, which involves different strategies such as redefining the dimensions on which the groups are compared as well as comparing one’s group to a different out-group; and (c) social competition between the groups that can result in conflict. Thus, experiences of discrimination, bias-based and ethnic bullying can result in a variety of outcomes for adolescents in relation to their identities and group belonging.
Bullying is associated with adverse social, psychological, physical, and academic outcomes to victims, perpetrators, and bystanders (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Nansel et al., 2004). For the victims of bullying, outcomes included increased reports of loneliness, difficulties with social and emotional adjustment, as well as relationship-building skills (Nansel, et al., 2001). Peer discrimination also had negative consequences to self-concept and self-esteem (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000) as well as social isolation (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). Youths who perceived their victimization to be ethnically motivated exhibited more internalizing and externalizing difficulties than youths who did not (McKenney et al., 2006). Overall, victimization has negative effects on youths’ psychosocial and interpersonal functioning, including their identity and sense of belonging.

Experiences of victimization may have particularly adverse consequences for immigrant youths. This is because these experiences may compound the already stressful acculturation process (Williams & Berry, 1991). Lueck and Wilson (2010) found that increased reports of discrimination (both overt and covert) were associated with increased acculturative stress. Moreover, ethnic bullying can interfere with the challenging process of social identity formation and re-formation for immigrant youths who are dealing with pressures from different directions as a result of their acculturation process (McKenney et al, 2006). This is because victimization impacts not only how youths view themselves but also the group to which they belong. Moreover, research suggests that experiences of peer victimization may compound the acculturation process by negatively impacting sense of belonging (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Liang, Grossman, & Deguchi, 2007). Specifically, experiences of victimization by either the out-group or the in-group could lead an individual to reject or accept their native or host cultures. According to Berry and colleagues (2006), youths who reported
discrimination were more likely to demonstrate the ethnic (oriented towards their ethnic group) or diffuse (lack of commitment to either the national or ethnic groups, and some contradictory attitudes) profiles. This could become even more complex for individuals who are experiencing multidimensional acculturation and have more than one relevant in- and out-group.

Research on the effects of victimization on adolescents has focused primarily on the experiences of out-group victimization (in the tradition of the Social Identity Theory). Specifically, past research suggests that intercultural, out-group victimization is associated with negative consequences to national identity development and negative attitudes towards the national out-group (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009). In a study with Russian immigrant youths in Israel, Tartakovsky (2009) found that discrimination by members of the majority in the receiving country was negatively associated with sense of belonging to the receiving country and a stronger sense of belonging to the home country. Overall, these results suggest that experiences of intercultural discrimination can have negative effects on both national identity and sense of belonging in the receiving country.

For ethnic identity and sense of belonging, Rivas-Drake and colleagues (2009) found that discrimination by peers (but not by adults) predicted lower private (feelings about own ethnic group) and public (perceptions of how other people see one’s ethnic group) regard, although not centrality of the ethnic identity. Research with both Afghan and Iranian immigrants to Canada and with Jewish Russian immigrants and refugees in the U.S. found that perceived discrimination tended to strengthen their ethnic identity (Birman & Tricket, 2001; Khanlou, Koh, & Mill, 2008; Roytburd & Friedlander, 2008). Moreover, these studies reported that experiences of discrimination were not connected to American identity or American acculturation. Taken together, these findings suggest that experiences of out-group discrimination may lead youths to
forge a reactive ethnic identity, which refers to a strengthening in ethnic identification as a result of negative experiences (Rumbaut, 2008). It would be of interest to consider whether experiences of in-group discrimination would lead individuals to forge a reactive national identity.

Limited research has focused on intra-cultural bullying, which could arise as a result of differences in levels of acculturation across immigrant generations (Mendez, Bauman, & Guillory, 2012). Moreover, Schwartz, Montgomery, and Briones (2006) suggest that immigrant youths may be caught between discrimination by members of the majority culture because of their ethnic identity and group membership, and discrimination by members of their heritage culture because they adopt some aspects of the majority culture. This experience could have a negative impact on their identity and sense of belonging. In a study of intra-cultural bullying between Mexican American and Mexican immigrant high school students, Mendez and colleagues (2012) found that the Mexican American students consistently bullied the Mexican immigrant students. Relational bullying was found to be the most common, followed by verbal, and then physical. In another study with West Indian immigrants and African Americans, both groups felt discriminated against by the other due to stereotypes, a sense that the other group viewed itself as superior in some manner, and a lack of belonging (Waters, 1991). Similar results were also found among Chinese Americans and immigrants (Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008). However, researchers have yet to explore white immigrant youths and the effects of intra-cultural bullying on identity.

Taken together, these findings suggest that positive and negative peer interactions within the in-group and between the in-group and the out-group must be explored further. This research is key to developing a more comprehensive understanding of identity and belonging among immigrant youths.
Resilience of Youths

Resilience has been an area of interest for over five decades and is broadly defined as “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation and development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Unfortunately, there has been a tendency to primarily explore protective factors and how they operate in relation to risk factors (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005). The nature of positive outcomes varies, and Masten (2001) refers to what resilient youths display as “ordinary magic” in that these youths can function reasonably well under challenging circumstances. More recently, however, researchers are acknowledging that the process of resilience is biopsychosocial, and encompasses biological, psychological, and social factors that interact in a multidirectional fashion over time to contribute to adequate functioning (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005). Thus, resilience is not a trait, but a dynamic process (Berger, Cardoso, & Thompson, 2010).

In this section, I will first review research on resilience in the context of immigration and bullying that uses various definitions of resilience. Then, I will discuss more recent formulations of resilience as an ecological process that accounts for the role of context.

Overview of resilience research. Research on resilience among high-risk children in the U.S. identified several protective factors or predictors of resilience, such as cognitive and self-regulation skills, connection to competent and caring adults, pro-social peer relationships, self-efficacy, and positive view of self (Masten, 2001). However, researchers have primarily focused on Western cultures, with limited attention to the experiences of non-Western or marginalized groups (Ungar, 2008).

Some studies have explored the protective factors that contribute to positive experiences following migration. In her review of the literature on the adaptation of young immigrants,
Stodolska (2008) identified three protective factors that are of interest to the present study: religious practices, strong cultural identity, and higher levels of social support (particularly from fellow immigrants in the community). Unfortunately, the interactions among these factors were not considered. Berger, Cardoso, and Thompson (2010) found similar protective factors among Latino immigrant families, including: individual (e.g., self-esteem, positive ethnic identity, coping strategies, and social competence), cultural (e.g., cultural capital and biculturalism), and community factors (e.g., positive peer relationships and religiosity).

Despite findings that Russian-speaking immigrants have challenges which may be a serious threat to their psychosocial development, research on this group is very limited. In one study of 450 adult Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel, Aroian and Norris (2000) defined resilience as personality characteristics or coping resources in an attempt to explore the relationships among resilience, demographic characteristics, immigration demands, and depression. Specifically, the researchers explored whether resilience mediated (when viewed as a personal outlook) or moderated (when viewed as a coping style) the relationship between immigration and depression. Resilience was treated as a trait that one “possesses.” They found that resilience, when seen as a coping mechanism, did not mediate or modify the relationship between immigration and depression, prompting them to suggest that the experience of immigration may be distressing for an individual despite the presence of resilience. However, centering the research on the individual in this way does not account for the role of resource provision by the context and the dynamic nature of resilience.

Moreover, there has been limited research conducted on the resilience of youths exposed to bullying (Rothon, Head, Klineberg, & Standfeld, 2011). Recently, Sapouna and Wolke (2013) examined emotional and behavioural resilience to bullying victimization in a longitudinal study.
with 3,136 adolescents in Scotland. They considered individual variables, such as gender, and some contextual variables, such as peer, sibling, and parental relationships. However, resilience was also defined as residing within the individual and emotional resilience was measured by lower rates of depression and behavioural resilience by lower rates of delinquency. For individual variables, Sapouna and Wolke found that following bullying experiences, boys were more likely to report lower than expected levels of depression and girls were more likely to report to lower than expected levels of delinquency. However, the researchers acknowledged that these findings may not be the result of resilience but of gender differences in the levels of depression and delinquency. For the peer context, there was no association between the number of friends a youth had and rates of depression; however, by the researchers’ own assertion, they focused only on the quantity and not the quality of peer relationships. Thus, the meaning and resources provided by these relationship were unexamined. Other studies suggested that high levels of support from peers can protect victimized youths from poor academic achievement but not from mental health difficulties (Rothon et al., 2011).

Parents and families also play a role in the adjustment of youths who experience bullying and victimization. For example, researchers suggest that parents and families can play a supportive role and buffer the negative effects of bullying and victimizations, thereby fostering the resilience of youths (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arseneault, 2010; Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). Specifically, warmth in parental relationships and a positive home environment can help protect youths from some of the negative outcomes of experiencing victimization (Bowes et al., 2010). The preparation for bias that is part of ethnic-racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006) may also buffer some of the negative effects of victimization. Ethnic-racial socialization as a whole is associated with lower perceived stress,
lower engagement in problem behaviours and criminal activity, and better mental health among youths experiencing racial discrimination (Burt, Simons, & Gibbons, 2012; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Neblett et al., 2008). These findings suggest that the role of peers and parents in resilience is complex and must be explored further.

Ecological resilience. More recently, researchers have challenged these conceptualizations of resilience, emphasizing that resilience is not a personal characteristics, but rather as an interaction between the individual and the environment (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). This culturally and contextually embedded framework of resilience is particularly relevant in the multicultural Canadian context with its continuing influx of immigrants. Ungar (2008) provides a comprehensive and ecological definition of resilience:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways (p. 225).

This definition of resilience involves two main components: navigation and negotiation (Ungar, 2011). Accordingly, youths have to navigate the resources that are available to them within their environment (specifically, the resources made available by those who are in power) and negotiate the meaning and relevance of these resources. Therefore, resilience is dependent on the ability of the environment to meet the needs of the individual. This is consistent with Este and Ngo’s (2011) discussion on the importance of viewing resilience from an ecological perspective when considering the experiences of immigrant youths in Canada. Within the context of the current study, the goal is not to identify personal characteristics that make immigrant
youths resilient, but to explore how they interact with a context that does or does not provide meaningful resources for them to flourish. The experiences of immigrants are unique, and the supports provided to them by Western professional contexts may not be relevant (Ungar, 2005). Furthermore, resilience is not a final goal that can be achieved, but a “dynamic state of tension between and among individuals, families, communities, and their culture” (Ungar et al., 2007, p. 301).

This perspective on resilience is based, in part, on the findings of the International Resilience Project (IRP). The IRP is a mixed methods study conducted at 14 sites on five continents with almost 1,500 children (Ungar, 2008). The project led to the development of four propositions that underlie this multidimensional and contextual view of resilience. First, the resilience of youths depends on both global and contextual factors in their lives. Specifically, 32 general domains were identified across 14 different contexts, along with domains that were context specific. These 32 domains were categorized into four dimensions, including: (a) culture (e.g., being culturally grounded and handling cultural dislocation well); (b) community (e.g., perceived social equity); (c) relationships (e.g., having meaningful relationships with peer group); and (d) the individual (e.g., self-awareness and perceived social support). All four of these categories are of interest in the present study.

The second proposition was that different aspects of resilience are not interpreted the same way by participants in different cultures and contexts because they carry different meanings and values. Therefore, each of the global aspects of resilience may be beneficial, neutral, or harmful in nurturing resilience depending on the context and particular needs of the youths. Thus, the meaning making of the youths is key, highlighting the need for qualitative research.
According to the third proposition, the four dimensions of resilience (individual, relational, community, and cultural) vary across contexts. For example, it was found that there were differences between the west (including southern Canada) and the majority world (including Russia and Israel) in the thematic grouping of the domains. Moreover, gender differences were found in the majority world sample. Girls from the majority world were in one group and majority world boys in two groups based on high (such as Russia and Israel) and low social cohesion in the communities (defined as having a shared purpose and sense of collective identity; Ungar, 2006). These results suggest that there may be particular aspects of culture or family that contribute to how youths experience and understand different aspects of resilience. In addition, these findings demonstrate a difference between Canadian-born youths and youths from Russia and Israel, suggesting that immigrants from these countries may have unique experiences of resilience as they acculturate due to competing cultural messages.

The fourth and final proposition was that the relationship between different aspects of resilience depends on seven interacting tensions that youths may navigate: access to material resources, relationships, identity, power and control, cultural adherence, social justice, and cohesion (Ungar, 2008). Resilient youths successfully navigate these tensions based on their individual characteristics along with the resources available to them in their families, communities, and cultures. Therefore, the experience of resilience is based on an appropriate fit between the solutions attempted by the youths and the context within which these take place and not on a single universally beneficial solution.

Most of the tensions that Ungar and colleagues (2007) identified are relevant to immigrant youths. Specifically, the tension around identity encompasses both a sense of individual identity that is centered on the “I” as well as a sense of collective identity. Both
experiences of identity were connected to well-being and self-efficacy albeit differently depending on the cultural context. As discussed, Russian-speaking youths are influenced by both individualistic, Western ideas as part of their acculturation to Canada and to more collectivistic ideas from their Soviet heritage culture. Thus, it would be of interest to explore how both forms of identity and the interplay between them connect to resilience for the population at hand.

Another tension which is of central interest to the present study is the relationships with others, including peers and foes. These relationships either facilitate access to, or are themselves, the resources youths need in order to cope with challenges they face in their lives (Ungar et al., 2007). For example, a sense of belonging is a need youths may have that can be met through social relationships. Both positive and negative peer relationships can contribute to or detract from youths’ sense of belonging. Moreover, negative peer relationships may include experiences of victimization and discrimination that reflect the sociopolitical context immigrant youths encounter in Canada. The social justice tension addresses how youths resist and stand up to these experiences (Ungar et al., 2007).

The tension of cohesion and a sense of one’s engagement with and connection to one’s community or collective (Ungar et al., 2007) is also of interest. The collective could also include youths’ religion and is particularly relevant for the population at hand where youths may share one collective (their FSU origin) and differ on another (their religion). This tension is also related to the sense of belonging, tensions around peer relationships, and social identity that are central to the current study.

Finally, the tension around cultural adherence, although found in every culture involved in the IRP, may be particularly central to the experiences of immigrants (Ungar et al., 2007). This tension refers to the struggle youths may face in their identification with a global culture, a local
culture (e.g., ethnic, family, community), and the balance between the two. The resolution of the tension depends on youths’ abilities to cope with both identifications in a manner that is culturally appropriate and relevant. Both decimal- and second-generation immigrants face this challenge throughout the acculturation and enculturation processes.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The current study examined the experiences of white immigrants, and Russian-speaking immigrants in particular. The invisible nature of this immigrant group, and the cultural differences they face, may contribute to challenges in acculturation following their move to Canada and their experiences should therefore be considered. Moreover, there is a lack of research on the indirect path that many of these immigrants take to Canada that does not fit within the current bi- or even tridimensional models of acculturation. Thus, the current study considered the potential effects of these different modes of acculturation on how Russian-speaking immigrant youths redefine their identity as they settle and adjust in Canada and the extent to which their sense of belonging is developed during this process.

Although the role of parents has been explored to some extent, little attention has focused on to the role of peers including in-groups and out-groups. However, the significance of peer relationships and group memberships increases in adolescence. For immigrant youths, their migration and acculturation experiences may compound these developmental processes. Also, peers can serve as both positive and negative influences on identity and sense of belonging. However, research to date has focused primarily on the positive effects of in-group members as identity agents and the negative effects of out-group members as victimizers. The current study addressed these issues by considering how adolescents make meaning of the complex nature of both types of peer relationships and how this influences their sense of identity and belonging.
This is of importance in the immigrant population because peers can be seen as acculturation and enculturation agents and thus their role must be explored further to understand the nature of their contribution to these processes. In addition, this study built on past research by considering peer relationships both in and out of school as well as online and in-person.

Moreover, much of the past research on immigrant youths has focused on certain parts of their ecological system, specifically the microsystem and to some extent the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, it is important to understand how all components of the ecology of the youths’ social world are interconnected and influence their identity and sense of belonging, particularly for youths experiencing multidimensional acculturation and identity formation.

The present study also expanded current notions of immigrant resilience by considering it not only as an internal trait or a set of coping mechanisms as previously thought, but as a dynamic and ecological process. The focus was both on how the youths interacts with these factors and how the factors interact with one another.

The present study explored four research questions:

1. What factors play a role in the identity and sense of belonging of Russian-speaking immigrant youths?

2. How do youths make meaning of the multidimensional nature of their identities and belonging experiences?

3. How do youths understand the role of personal and familial experiences of direct and indirect immigration pathways in their definition and re-definition of their identity and sense of belonging?
4. How do youths make meaning of both positive and negative peer experiences in relation to their identity and sense of belonging? How do these peer experiences influence, positively and/or negatively, their identity and sense of belonging?
Chapter Two: Method

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory methodology (GTM) was selected for this study in order to develop a substantive theory on the role of context in identity formation and sense of belonging of Russian-speaking immigrant youths in Canada. GTM is recommended for use in under-researched areas that could benefit from theory generation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, GTM is a good fit for the current study as there has been limited research on the experiences of white immigrant youths with multiple identities. Moreover, GTM allows researchers to move beyond simply describing data and towards explaining it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as was the goal in the present study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory as a way to promote theorizing and theory generation through the construction of categories, and an exploration of their properties and relationships (Daly, 2007). The process of theory generation is inductive and GTM offers concrete steps for researchers to follow. However, grounded theory was designed to be pluralistic in that Glaser and Strauss encouraged others to add to and expand the procedures they outlined in their seminal work (LaRossa, 2005). Beginning in the 1970’s, Strauss and Glaser further expanded their own versions of grounded theory methodologies (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987). These various versions and changes to the approach over the years have created some ambiguity around grounded theory and a multitude of potential rules and procedures to follow (LaRossa, 2005). Thus, it is imperative to be explicit about one’s data collection and coding operations in order to contextualize the results.

More recently, postmodern critiques have been leveled at the objectivist assumptions that underlie the traditional grounded theory approaches that Strauss and Glaser (Daly, 2007)
outlined. Consequently, Charmaz (2006, 2014) offered a constructivist grounded theory approach that is based in a social constructionist epistemology. The differences between the objectivist and constructivist approaches to grounded theory are found in both characteristics and procedures. However, the two approaches can be seen as lying on a continuum in terms of principles and practices, with the key difference being an epistemological one (Daly, 2007).

Specifically, with objectivist grounded theory, there is an assumption of an objective reality that can be understood and therefore represented through a theory. Consequently, data are treated as objective, and there is an emphasis on controlling the researcher’s bias. Thus, theory is seen as emerging from objective data, with little consideration of the role of the researcher. Conversely, in constructivist grounded theory, the researcher is seen as playing an active role in theory construction. The reality is not seen as objective; instead, constructivist grounded theory assumes that there are multiple realities. There is an emphasis on theoretical sensitivity, including both the researcher’s own experiences and knowledge of the literature. The grounded theories are therefore constructed as part of a social interaction between the researcher and the researched. It is an interactive process, and neither the data nor the resulting theory are seen as objective (Daly, 2007). The meaning of the theory is complex yet partial, conditional, and changeable, and it is seen as situated in “time, space, positions, action, and interactions” (Charmaz, 2014, pg. 236).

The constructivist approach was chosen for this study because it aligns with the social constructionist views that I hold on this project. Also, this approach focuses on understanding phenomenon through patterns and connections, rather than prediction, and fits with the aims of the current study (Charmaz, 2006).
From a social constructionist framework, I, the primary researcher, see myself as an instrument in producing the results. My personal experiences as a Jewish, Russian-speaking immigrant who moved to Canada in my youth from Israel sparked my interest in this area of research. My own experiences became my initial data points, long before I embarked on this research project. I was drawn to the literature on identity and belonging as these were topics and challenges that resonated with my own experiences. I became interested in the stories of other people who had experiences similar to and different from mine, with the goal of gaining some insight into the threads that connect these. Consequently, my personal experiences with migration as well as my knowledge of the literature became the points of departure for this research project. In particular, these sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2014) were a starting point for the development of questions. As Charmaz (2014) cautions, the substantive theory itself must be grounded in the data, and not be limited or directed by formal theories or personal experiences. I was cognizant of following the directive to use sensitizing concepts as a starting point in theory formation, not the end point.

Recognizing my active role in developing questions, asking questions, and constructing the results, I used reflexive memo writing throughout the research process to be conscious of the ways in which my personal experiences and knowledge of the literature influenced my perspective (Daly, 2007). This reflexivity also allowed me to remain open to different perspectives as I encountered new information. Moreover, I specifically sought out and paid attention to narratives of youths who did not confirm my preconceived notions. Finally, consultations with my advisory committee and fellow graduate students ensured that more than a single view is represented in the final categories and subsequent theory.
Participants

Inclusion criteria and sample size. The participants in this study were 24 Russian-speaking youths in Canada who met the following criteria: (a) decimal- or second-generation immigrant; (b) self-categorized as “Russian-speaking”; and (c) currently attending high-school in Grades 10 to 12. The second criteria was used due to the politics of the former Soviet region and the indirect immigration patterns to Canada. Thus, participants were included if they self-identified as Russian-speaking rather than the criteria being country specific. The third criteria was used in order to ensure that the youths had at least one year of experience in high-school to reflect on in the study. The number of participants was determined by reaching saturation of the emergent categories, in accordance with GTM (Charmaz, 2014).

Demographics. The participants were 17 females and 7 males and they ranged in age from 15 to 19 years ($M = 16.38$ years, $SD = .97$). All of the participants lived with their families full-time. Sixteen youths (66.67%) reported that their parents are married, six youths (25.00%) reported that their parents are separated or divorced and they live with their mothers, and two youths (8.33%) reported that their fathers are widowed and remarried and they live with them. Three youths (12.50%) have fathers living outside of Canada.

Participants reported five different birth countries: Canada ($n = 4; 16.67\%$), Israel ($n = 9; 37.40\%$), Moldova ($n = 1; 4.17\%$), Russia ($n = 3; 12.5\%$), and Ukraine ($n = 8; 33.34\%$). For their parents, participants reported seven birth countries: Belarus ($n = 3; 6.25\%$), Moldova ($n = 2; 4.17\%$), Romania ($n = 2; 4.17\%$), Russia ($n = 10; 20.83\%$), Siberia ($n = 1; 2.08\%$), Ukraine ($n = 27; 2.08\%$), and Uzbekistan ($n = 3; 6.25\%$).

For religion, eight youths (33.33\%) were raised Christian/Orthodox, 13 youths (54.17\%) were raised Jewish, and two youths (8.33\%) were half Jewish half Christian, one was raised
within the former faith, and the other within the latter. One youth (4.16%) reported that he was raised atheist. In the interview, six youths in total (25.00%) stated that they currently identify as atheist or agnostic.

Of the youths in this study, four were second-generation and 20 were decimal-generation immigrants. Of these, five were 1.25-generation (migrated between the ages of 0-5; born in Ukraine, Russia, and Moldova), four were 1.5-generation (migrated between the ages of 6-12; born in Ukraine and Israel), and 11 were 1.75-generation (migrated between the ages of 13-17; born in Israel, Ukraine, and Russia). For the decimal-generation youths, their length of residency in Canada ranged from 1 to 15 years ($M = 8.86$ years, $SD = 5.47$). Eleven youths lived in the FSU and their length of residency ranged from 5 months to 17 years ($M = 9.30$ years, $SD = 6.93$). Ten youths lived in Israel, ranging in their length of residency from 6 months to 12 years ($M = 3.85$ years, $SD = 3.46$). Three youths experienced indirect migration (one via Israel, one via Ukraine, and one via the United States). For parents, 30 experienced indirect migration, 28 through Israel (58.33%) and two through the United States (4.17%). One set of parents moved back to Ukraine from Israel before continuing to Canada.

Information about the socioeconomic status (SES) of the youths and their families was collected only for the households the youths were living in. Therefore, information was not provided on five fathers (20.83%). Overall, youths’ parents were highly educated, with the majority of the mothers ($n = 23; 95.83$%) and fathers ($n = 16; 88.89$%) holding a Bachelor’s degree or higher (one participant did not know the educational background of her father). Moreover, most of the mothers ($n = 18; 75.00$%) and fathers ($n = 17; 89.47$%) worked full-time. Nineteen youths (79.17%) indicated that their parents owned their homes. Three youths
(12.50%) attended private schools (two were Jewish), one youth (4.17%) attended a semi-private school, and the rest (83.33%) attended public schools (three were Catholic).

Procedure

Recruitment. Participants were recruited through social service and settlement agencies in the Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, which is the highest recipient of immigrants in Canada (CIC, 2009). Moreover, a non-probability, snowball sampling strategy was employed due to the inherent difficulty of recruiting this immigrant population and to capture the experiences of youths who may not use community services and programs. Russian-speaking service providers were identified at various organizations and contacted with information about the study. They were then asked to invite their members and/or clients to participate in this study. The service providers either forwarded expressions of interest to the interviewer or provided potential participants with the interviewer’s contact information. In one case, the interviewer presented information about the study in Russian to a group of newcomer youths at their agency. All participants were provided with flyers at the end of the study to share with other Russian-speaking youths.

The prospective youths were initially screened over email or phone to confirm that they met the research criteria. Those youths who met the criteria were invited to participate in the present study and were assigned a numeric participant ID. In addition, they were given the option to choose a pseudonym that was used in the reporting. Each youth then scheduled an appointment for the semi-structured interview in the youth’s home or a location preferred by the interviewee. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the participant’s home, although some ($n = 7, 29.17\%$) were conducted in a private room at the agency from which the youth was recruited, a coffee shop, the library, or a park. If the interview was conducted in the youth’s
home, one of his/her parents/guardians was present during the interview, although not in the interview room itself so as to not skew the results.

Three days before the scheduled interview, the interview time and place were reconfirmed. Prior to the interview, the researcher emailed the participants the consent form (see Appendix A) in either Russian or English (depending on the parent/guardian’s preference) to be signed by the youth and one of his/her parent/guardian. A Background Questionnaire (see Appendix B) was also sent at this time to be completed prior to the interview.

On the day of the interview, the interviewer verbally introduced herself, and reminded the youths that their participation in the study was voluntary, that they could stop at any time or skip questions without any negative consequences, and that there were no right or wrong answers. The interviewer also obtained verbal consent to use voice-recording for the interview. After the consent was obtained the voice recorder was turned on and remained on until the debriefing, except in the case of a break.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, although youths were able to ask for translation to Russian or to include Russian words, phrases, or sentences in their responses. Translations during the interview were done by the interviewer. A trained research assistant who was fluent in both Russian and English reviewed three interview transcripts for accuracy. Any discrepancies were discussed and then agreed upon. The face-to-face interviews lasted between 63 and 187 minutes ($M = 110.71$ minutes, $SD = 35.76$).

In the interviews, youths were first asked to create an immigration timeline (see Appendix C) of their own (if applicable) and their parents’ migration experiences. This was meant to not only gather the data but to also ease the youths into the study, focus on the topics to be explored, and establish rapport with the interviewer. Youths were then asked about these
migration experiences and what they learned from each culture/country. Youths were also asked to describe their identity in each country in which they lived and rank its various components. Finally, youths were asked specifically about their experiences with their peers, focusing on two in-groups to which they belong and two out-groups to which they do not belong, as well as the potential advantages and disadvantages associated with being a member of each. Overall, youths were asked to reflect on the effects of these different experiences on their identity and sense of belonging. (See Appendix D for interview guide).

The format of the interview was semi-structured to allow for flexibility and appropriate follow-up questions depending on the individual interview. The order of the questions were the same for all youths. Moreover, theoretical sampling was used in this study, and therefore, interview questions were adapted and included in order to flesh out emergent categories (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, the interview guide was adjusted throughout the interview process following consultations with the advisor and committee members. Whenever possible, participants were contacted over the phone to participate in follow-up interviews in which they were asked the added questions.

Following the interview, the participants were debriefed and allowed to ask questions about the study. For their participation, the youths received $30 in cash. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. Speech disfluencies such as false starts, repeated phrases, and fillers (including “like” and “um”) were removed in this manuscript in order to improve the readability without compromising the meaning. Moreover, the interviewer wrote memos detailing general impressions and ideas that occurred during the interview process and these were reviewed during data analysis.
Data Analysis

The process of GTM includes both collection of the data and its analysis, undertaken simultaneously (Charmaz, 2014). Interviews were therefore transcribed as they were being conducted, and analyzed shortly thereafter. This allowed for adjustments to the questions (both changing the phrasing and adding questions) as the transcripts were being coded and categories were being formed. Thus, the process of analysis was not linear, but somewhat cyclical in nature.

The data analysis process in GTM is centered on coding, which is the process of defining what data are about. It is a process that allows the researcher to select and sort data in order to begin summarizing and moving towards analytic interpretation. The analysis follows in three main phases as Charmaz (2014) outlined: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested another type of coding: axial coding. However, this type of coding was not used in the current study because it requires researchers to apply an analytical framework to the data, which Charmaz (2014) suggests may limit researchers’ abilities to learn about the world of their participants and the codes constructed. Instead, Charmaz encourages the use of intuition in conceptualizing categories, subcategories, and the relationships between them.

Initial coding was the first phase of the analysis and these codes were “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, 2014, pg. 117). This coding can be done using word-by-word, line-by-line, and segment-by-segment or incident with incident coding. For many researchers, line-by-line coding is the starting point. Therefore, the first interview was coded using this approach. However, because of the length of the interview as well as the structure and repetition of the questions, the codes generated were not deemed theoretically useful and an attempt to code the mundane initial codes as suggested by Charmaz (2014) did not resolve this issue. Thus, the first interview and all consequent interviews were coded using segment-by-
segment and incident with incident coding. Specifically, one or more complete sentences were coded together and incidents were compared across participants and situations in order to understand the context of each, as well as the similarities and differences between them. This process is referred to as constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and it enables researchers to establish analytic distinctions.

Initial or open coding was done using words that reflect actions, which “reduces tendencies to code for types of people” (Charmaz, 2014, pg. 116) and allows for greater focus on the data. Thus, coding was done using gerunds instead of nouns, which allows the researcher to go deeper into the phenomenon to understand processes. These codes can be reworded to improve fit and filled in by collecting further data. The goal was to code for the possibilities suggested by the data, providing the researcher with directions for further data collection (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, at this point it is suggested that coding stays close to the data before moving to interpretation in later phases of analysis.

The second major phase in coding was focused coding, where the most meaningful and/or frequent initial codes were identified in order to analyze and categorize larger segments of data more comprehensively (Charmaz, 2014). These codes were more conceptual and required comparisons among initial codes and how they account for the data. This process also required engagement in the constant comparison process among the codes, and focused codes were also checked against large sections of previously coded data. Thus, continual comparison within and across interviews was used to develop general categories and sub-categories from the initial codes. Links between these categories and subcategories were explored in order to develop the relational factors.
In the focused coding phase, codes were included even if they fit outside the original scope of the current study and resulted in broadening its scope. For example, the role of parents and the political context were not considered as part of the initial proposal for the study, but youths frequently mentioned these as key factors in their lives, and they were included in the results. Thus, the original literature review conducted before the study served to sensitize me to the topic; however, the analysis expanded beyond the areas originally considered to account for the experiences of the youths themselves.

Theoretical sampling was employed during the first two phases of analysis, where early analysis of data indicated areas that needed exploration and the sampling process was guided by on-going theory development (Charmaz, 2014). This approach was used to refine the categories developed. Through this process, interviews were conducted until saturation of the categories and their properties, so that the analysis of additional interviews would not produce additional concepts.

The final stage of coding was theoretical coding whereby the categories were condensed and integrated in order to form an analytic story of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Daly, 2007). Core or central categories were identified and the context of these was clarified at a higher level of abstraction. The goal was to add both precision and clarity at this final stage of analysis. In this final stage, I shared all of my focused codes with my advisor and colleagues and sought their feedback in understanding my data, diagramming the relationships between the different categories, and identifying the core categories. The goal of this process was to create a substantive theory that was linked closely to the data, was saturated, plausible, integrative, generative, linked to formal theory, and parsimonious but not overly simplified (Daly, 2007).
I used memo writing throughout the data collection and coding processes, in order to both document and organize the grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2014). As suggested by Daly (2007), several types of memos were used in this study. Preliminary or orienting memos were used to add ideas or interpretations to initial codes. Observational memos were used to preserve the context of the interviews, focusing on what I as the researcher saw, felt, or experienced during the interviews, as well as to keep a record of details of the setting that may influence the participant in some way. Operational memos were used to keep track of practical concerns of a methodological nature, such as questions to be asked in future interviews, or sampling strategies. Conceptual/theoretical memos were used to record analytic ideas as they came to mind and write about the development of categories. These memos in particular were crucial in the theory generation process. Finally, reflexive memos were used to reflect on my own role in the research process, including feelings, questions, wonderings, uncertainties, and concerns. These memos not only provide a record of the analytic process, but in fact formed the core of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).
Chapter Three: Results

The proposed grounded theory aims to describe how invisible immigrant youths navigate and interact with their context in ways that influence their sense of identity and belonging. This process is composed of several parts that are continuously in motion, reflecting the dynamic nature of the search for and development of identity and belonging (Figure 1). This chapter will detail each of these processes, beginning with the three core elements: (a) choosing identities; (b) expressing identities; and (c) fitting in. Each of these elements will be discussed within its own section, as well as highlighting the connections between them. Then, the focus will expand to the broader process of navigating the context within which these three core processes occur. As part of the section on navigating the context, I will review five specific domains that were generated from the interviews with the youths: parents and families, peer groups, community, political context, and immigration experiences.

The outcome of this overall process is individualized with certain identities being highlighted and internalized over other identities, and a sense of belonging experienced with some groups over others. A sense of being true to and comfortable with oneself are both the consequences and the goals of the youths’ interactions with their social environment. Moreover, these processes are multidirectional, taking into account what the context is able and/or willing to provide, how individuals interpret and navigate this context, and what they choose to take from it. Resilience is reflected in all of these processes moving smoothly and collaboratively, even though the components of the context itself or the resulting identities will differ among the individuals.

The existence of these elements around choice and expression of identity, as well as fit, is rooted in the fact that the youths, although immigrant and often of religious minority status, were
white. To a certain extent, the invisibility of their racial identity afforded them greater flexibility to choose their identities, when to express them, and where and when to fit in. Although these processes were challenging at times, and created certain degrees of internal and external conflict, they also afforded the youths a privilege that is often denied to racialized groups in Canada. The identities of racialized groups are often decided for them based on their physical appearance. Thus, invisibility is an underlying thread in this model, and it is seen as both an opportunity and a challenge. Finally, no gender differences were determined based on the narratives of the youths, potentially as a result of methodological issues related to the small sample size of male participants as well as self-selection bias. However, gender will not be addressed as part of the current model.

Choosing Identities

Choosing and internalizing an identity at a particular time and context is an active, dynamic, and internal process. In this section, I will discuss how youths: (a) identify the various labels or identities that are available to them in regards to their race, ethnicity, and/or religion (the three elements explored in the current study); (b) evaluate the components and features of the different labels or identities and make meaning of them; and (c) decide on which components of each identity to hold on to or not. Overall, the ability to differentiate the identities and cultures, evaluate them, and then choose certain identities or their components was rooted in the youths’ degree of connection to, enjoyment of, and familiarity with the particular culture or place (customs, traditions, history). It also reflected an important process of reflection and critical thinking that these youths were able to engage in, in part because of their familial migration experiences.
Identifying labels. The ability to identify the labels or identities available to youths depended on their context and life experiences. Youths were asked to reflect on their identities at different points in their lifetime: their birth country (if applicable), an intermediary country in which they lived (if applicable), and in Canada. Three youths followed an indirect path to Canada and reflected on their identities in three countries, four youths were born in Canada and reflected on their identities in one country only, and the others (17 youths) reflected on their identities in two countries.

Youths used various labels to describe their identities: Jewish, Christian, Orthodox, Atheist, Agnostic, Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Israeli, Canadian, Soviet, European, and White/Caucasian (see Table 1). Only six of the decimal-generation youths did not report any changes to their identities over time, and all of these were 1.25-generation. For the 18 remaining youths, the changes in their identities from one context or time period to the next were most often in the relative importance of each identity to the youths. For seven youths, identities were also additive (in particular, the Canadian identity) and by the time they were in Canada, 15 of the 24 youths listed between three and four identities. For others (5 youths), the religious identity was replaced with an atheist/agnostic identity.

Importantly, the youths listed identities that have been overlooked in past research that focused on ethnic identity (place of birth was used as proxy) and national identity (current place of residence was used as proxy). On the contrary, five of the nine youths born in Israel did not list their place of birth as an identity, nor did one youth born in Canada. Even the Israeli-born youths who listed Israeli as one of their identities did not rank it first. However, all of these youths listed Russian and Jewish as identities that were important to them, and these identities would not have been considered in past research on ethnic identity and acculturation.
Overall, youths appreciated the multidimensional nature of their own identities. However, the reaction of other individuals in their social environment to their identity also had a role in the labels they identified and internalized. Specifically, the confusion of other individuals, including peers and friends, about the intricacies and complexities of their identities (e.g., Russian-speaking Ukrainian) was, at times, wearisome. Youths expressed getting tired of having to explain their identities to others. These conversations often occurred out of identity assumptions based on spoken language. Consequently, confusion and assumptions sometimes interfered with identity choice and forced youths to claim identities that were not their own. Maria described such an experience:

All the time I do presentations in front of a class I always say, ‘I know every one of you thinks I am Russian but I’m actually not’… Sometimes people ask me, ‘So you’re from Russia right?’ So, I need to explain to everybody ‘I’m not Russian. I speak Russian.’ They ask me, ‘Why do you speak Russian?’ and that’s hard for me. Not hard for me, but I’m tired of that because I need to explain to everyone that I’m not Russian. Not in school, but sometimes people outside of school, not my friends, not my group of friends but sometimes at a shop they can ask me, ‘Oh, are you Russian?’ I just say, ‘yeah, yeah.’ I’m really tired to explain to everyone why I speak Russian, why maybe I have a Russian accent or where is Moldova and everything like that. (female, 17, born in Moldova)

Thus, identity choice was not always available to the youths. Although within the Canadian context these youths were largely invisible immigrants, this was not the case within the context of Israel, where FSU heritage could be noticeable due to the difference in physical appearance (e.g., light hair and blue eyes). Therefore, for these youths, their Russian-speaking identities felt like they were worn on the outside and chosen for them. This resulted in youths who were Jewish
or Israeli-born, but their Israeli identities were denied to them. Thus, they did not feel that those identities were necessarily theirs to choose. For example, Liron stated: “I don’t think I look Israeli. Like if someone was to see me on the street they would see me as European. They wouldn’t see me as Israeli” (male, 17, born in Israel). Importantly, identity denial was not only the experience of youths’ with FSU heritage in Israel, but more broadly, of immigrant youths in Canada. In some cases, peers back home denied and questioned their knowledge and loyalty, and consequently, their ethnic identity, which will be further discussed in the Peer Group section.

**Evaluating labels.** I will first discuss the common factors that youths used in their evaluation of their identities, the resulting multidimensional definitions, and the importance of comparisons between cultures and identities. Next, I will explore youths’ complex views of Canadian and white identities.

In evaluating the different labels or identities, youths reflected on several factors that were typically tied to identity: birthplace, upbringing, residence, citizenship, and language. For some, there were overlaps among these factors and for others, there were not. For example, recent immigrants from the FSU viewed birthplace (same as upbringing for them) as more important than residence. Moreover, some youths born in Israel and Canada considered upbringing as more important than birthplace or residence. Others viewed Canada as the place where one lived and Israel as just the place one was born. Citizenship was recognized as a factor in identity, but some did not consider it to be important if there was a lack of connection to or knowledge of that culture. For language, youths reflected on both their knowledge and/or frequency of use. For many of the Jewish youths, the Russian identity was chosen based solely on their knowledge and use of the language. When asked about the meaning of a Russian identity, Eva said: “I feel I’m
still Russian, even though that’s not very expressed in my… daily life, except for language” (female, 16, born in Israel).

In their process of evaluating the identity labels available to them, youths did not provide a single definition of any of their identities but offered a multidimensional web of components that were based on various factors, including individual, familial, social, political, and historical. At times, these were presented as separate elements, but often their interwoven and complex nature was reflected. As these youths describe:

I have Russian roots so I guess you can say I am Russian. My parents have Russian roots. They have parents from Russia, all of them are from Russia. So, I guess I could say I’m Russian. I do usually say that...if people ask you ‘What are you?’ I usually say ‘Russian-Jewish’ but really I just speak Russian fluently at home and it’s always been that way so I say I’m Russian-speaking. Sometimes I’ll say I’m Russian I guess if in that day I’ll think about the fact that my parents are from Russia and they have Russian roots. (Ella, female, 16, born in Israel)

I was thinking that I’m pure Russian, end of story, no Ukrainians in my life, done, leave me alone. No, because again once I realized that everybody around me is Ukrainian, and I was officially raised in Ukraine, but… Crimea is so different. It’s Russian. I can’t get out of that. It’s Russian, it is. But now I think that I’m Ukrainian because I am so used to their traditions because my boyfriend brings me everywhere with him, to the church, to the Ukrainian festival events… They are Ukrainian, and I totally love them completely. Just everything around me outside of school is pretty much Ukrainian. I don’t know [which identity is more relevant]. I would say something Russian is definitely in me because the
mentality wouldn’t go away again, probably Russian then Ukrainian. (Anita, female, 16, born in Ukraine)

The complex definitions of these identities often required youths to reflect on them in relation to others, comparing and contrasting the various elements. The distinction was often made between passive or active elements of identification: the being and the doing or the internal (psychological) and the external (physical appearance). These two youths described this contrast:

I think Jewish is a religion, so that comes with the holidays I celebrate, the prayers that I read. We’re not…my household isn’t religious, so there’s no specific clothing or anything like that, but traditions and stuff like that. Then Israeli to me, is more of who I am…not what I believe in, more of who I am, so how I speak, how I act. Just how I am, not what I believe in I guess. (Eva, female, 16, born in Israel)

Russian would be first because it’s more a part of me physically. It’s more a part of me because I look Russian. I was born in Russia but I grew into Canadian customs so I just like putting Russia first because it’s more the physical part of me. Canada is more a mental part of me. (Sabina, female, 15, born in Russia)

In effect, it was youths’ experience of living within multiple cultures that allowed them to become more insightful, reflective, and able to critique their identities. Through their process of comparison between countries and cultures, youths were able to recognize differences in mentality, cultural values, and lifestyle. They highlighted elements such as being close with family and community, the role of discipline, the role of honesty versus corruption and aggression versus friendliness, open-mindedness, and the focus on appearance. In addition, living in Canada (particularly for the more recent, 1.25-generation immigrants who still have clear memories of their birth countries) created a shift in their view of their birthplace, allowing
them to see some of the negatives, such as the corruption, lack of safety, and lower living standards, now that they had a frame of reference. As Andrey explained:

When you come to another country, you find the good things about it and for example, the way mostly streets are cleaner than in the Ukraine, and you sort of observe it and you just realize that it’s probably the way it should be. So, it’s probably something wrong with Ukraine. It’s not like I consider Ukraine as bad place, but I just felt that there’s actually places way better in terms of people and services. (male, 18, born in Ukraine)

Consequently, even those youths who missed their birth countries did not want to move back. Those who did visit their heritage countries expressed that these visits encouraged a greater appreciation of living in Canada. At the same time, the visits also allowed them to reconnect with their roots, see the places where they and/or their parents grew up, and the relatives who still live there.

Interestingly, this ability to evaluate and compare cultures and countries did not always reflect on which identity the youth felt most proud of. Specifically, the youths expressed pride in their ethnic, cultural, and/or religious identities, but pride in the Canadian identity was lacking. Often, an identity was ranked first when youths were most proud of it. This pride was rooted in both history and themes of perseverance, as well as current events, as these youths explained:

Judaism has faced a lot of trials and tribulations throughout its very, very long history. To be able to stand and tell someone I’m Jewish, and if they know the history of the Jews then they know that we’ve been through a lot. But whether they know or not I know, I know. I’m really very proud to be a Jew because like I said, Israelis band together, but Jews also band together, just as much if not more. Like when the three Israeli teenagers were
captured. I’ve never seen more Jewish people come together than that time of need. It makes me really feel proud to be Jewish. (David, male, 17, born in Canada)

Maybe I have some pride to be Ukrainian at some point, just education in school, and culture. Ukrainian culture is kind of rich for traditions. It means something to me to be Ukrainian. Well, it’s probably mostly about history and the literature because we had those classes in school… You read your Ukrainian history textbook and you see how events in Ukraine sort of influenced the other stuff that was going on in Europe… It’s just this thing from Ukrainian history that Ukraine was always kind of abused by other bigger countries, and still we kind of stand up for ourselves. We’re kind of still independent, even after 80 years of being a part of the Soviet Union… Ukrainian is not even a culture. It’s not even a nationality, and still it’s kind of independent, you can see it on a map. (Andrey, male, 18, born in Ukraine)

All of these conflicts with European countries, I think that Russia is nevertheless very admirably holding its position. I really love our president… very resilient Russian spirit, with all of the countries, friends and so on. That’s what I mean, I am very grateful and very proud of our country. (Sabina, female, 15, born in Russia)

Only one youth expressed pride in being Canadian and related it to Canada standing by Israel in the 2014 political conflict with Palestine. Moreover, the only youth (1.75 generation) who ranked the Canadian identity first in terms of his internal sense of himself stated that he did not present himself in this way publicly: "I think the way I kind of make myself appear for society would be Ukrainian first, then Canadian, then Soviet and then Orthodox" (John, male, 17, born in Ukraine). This suggests that the Canadian identity was not valued as compared to their other identities, both internally and within their immediate social contexts.
Fourteen youths reported that moving to and living in Canada have influenced them the most and that they valued the access to opportunities, the safety, and multiculturalism that they found in Canada. Despite this, these youths, even those born in Canada, the Canadian identity appeared to be an afterthought. Perhaps because they are white and the Canadian identity is assumed, there is both less need and desire to explore and claim it. It was a default identity if one has lived in Canada long enough or moved at a young age, as demonstrated by the fact that only 1.75 generation youths identified with this label. However, even for these youths, it was not a chosen or valued identity. The majority of the youths did not claim this identity until I asked about it directly. Thus, the Canadian identity was one that was often ascribed to them by virtue of living here, but did not necessarily fit with how they viewed themselves. David, despite being born in Canada, explained this experience:

If I’m living in Canada people already assume I’m Canadian. So, I don’t bother telling them I’m Canadian, but I primarily associate myself as being Israeli. Cause I’m the proudest of being Israeli. I’m more proud of being Israeli than being Canadian. (male, 17)

This may, in part, be rooted in the youths’ dual desire to fit into their local community, which is often an ethnic enclave, and set themselves apart from others within the majority Canadian culture. In this way, labels may be used for setting oneself apart, or highlighting a way in which one differs, from the majority. Therefore, there is no need to use a label such as Canadian that groups one with the majority. As Bella said: “When people ask me I say Israeli and I say Jewish because I think that it’s an obvious fact that I’m Canadian” (female, 15, born in Israel).

Furthermore, the more recent, 1.25-generation immigrants reflected on being confronted with greater awareness of race, ethnicity, and religion upon their arrival in Canada. This may have provided them with greater opportunities to be more critically reflective. However, when
asked about the Canadian identity directly, the reasons they provided for why they did not identify as Canadian were more oppositional and represented a more active rejection of that identity. These youths also expressed a sense that they will never be Canadian, in part because of their strong connection to their heritage culture. They also felt that it is more important for them to hold on to their cultures of origin. There was a fear that the Canadian identity would overshadow their ethnic identity, which is often internal only and expressed through language or tradition. Recent immigrant youths stated that to become Canadian, one must assimilate, reject one’s heritage culture, and forget where one came from. Karina explained this view:

It takes a really big amount of time, and also you have to talk only to Canadian people, and must forget all your culture, all your traditions, and even your language. You’re going to have to not speak to anyone who speaks your language, to be completely the citizen of the country. (female, 17, born in Russia)

Interestingly, these same youths also expressed admiration for Canada’s multiculturalism. However, they did not view multiculturalism as something that is possible within an individual, only within a society. Importantly, all of these youths arrived directly from the FSU and were not Jewish and thus, in most cases, they did not grow up having to balance multiple ethnic identities.

However, even some of the youths who were able to reflect on the complexities of their own identities appeared unable to see the potential for a multidimensional Canadian identity. When describing what being Canadian meant to them, they offered simplistic views. This, they explained, was rooted in part in their lack of knowledge of and connection to the Canadian culture:

Canada is an absolutely amazing country to live in. I’m really thankful to my parents for bringing me here. But again, being Canadian, that means following some kind of culture. I
don’t really follow any culture of Canada. I don’t really go see sports, or anything like hockey. I mean I don’t at all like hockey. I don’t really care about the bears, and the other animals that are traditional to Canada… But I totally love this country, this is an amazing country to live in, I plan to stay here. (Anita, female, 16, born in Ukraine)

Similarly to the Canadian identity, youths also expressed ambivalence around their white identity. Only seven youths included white or Caucasian as a label when describing their identities (three by recent immigrant). In most cases, youths referred to being white due to their skin colour, and it holding no other value (e.g., social power). The importance of the white identity appeared to be based on two factors: exposure and racism. First, exposure to people who are not white encouraged the youths to think about their own race. For others, in communities that are not diverse, race was not talked about, as demonstrated in this statement:

White is such a dominant ethnicity, not that I value it being dominant, but honestly in this society in this day it is dominant. So to us, it doesn’t really mean anything anymore because everyone… in the country that we lived in was white so it was really not important, not to them at least, not to me. (Julia, female, 16, born in Israel)

The second factor was whether the youths considered themselves or their communities as racist. Specifically, youths who viewed their communities (or themselves) as more racist valued their whiteness more. One of the two youths who ranked their white identity first stated: “White probably because of the racism that I was taught. It’s everywhere, no matter where you live, where you go. It’s everywhere” (Anita, female, 16, born in Ukraine). Another youth stated:

I still pride myself on being white and still having all the privileges that I get to be as white, although it’s kind of sad that it’s still kind of a racist community but by being white I have a lot more doors open up for me. (Julia, female, 16, born in Israel)
**Selecting components.** The process of evaluating different components from each culture provided youths with the information they needed to decide which components to incorporate into their cultural practices and identities, and which to replace or discard. For cultural practices, this process was bidirectional. Specifically, the more youths learned about Canadian culture, the more they viewed their heritage culture differently and sought different aspects from it. Consequently, what they chose to maintain from their heritage culture then influenced what and how much they accepted from the Canadian culture. For example, youths made choices around issues of values and mentality, such as holding on to the value around closeness with family, but letting go of the judgmental mentality (e.g., about appearance, behaviour) they reported is common in the FSU. In addition, youths (and their families) chose which behavioural components of identity from each culture to carry over and continue practicing, such as traditions, food, and music. This process would become more complex the more cultures an individual was navigating. Thus, youths created an internal mosaic of these cultures, taking the best elements from each.

For identities, this ability to think critically enabled youths to not simply incorporate the components they gathered from external or traditional narratives. Instead, they interacted with and critically evaluated these views and produced their own multidimensional definitions of their identities. This was particularly common in evaluating the religious components of identity, highlighting the importance of separating faith from culture/tradition and the connection these provide to history and community. Jewish youths, in particular, discussed being Jewish as important to them, but also described themselves as not very religious. In this way, youths created a place for their identity both within and outside of the traditional narrative and held on to components of their identities that were personally meaningful to them. As Stella described:
I think being Jewish is more than just praying and I know people who are Jewish and they don’t pray or go to synagogue every day. Same thing with people who are Christian. They don’t necessarily go to church ever even. They just don’t feel a connection to God, they don’t feel like He could exist, but according to them, it’s very unrealistic, but you can still… There’s more culture to it than that, and it’s more of tradition I guess is a better word, to carry on the traditions that you grew up with. It’s comfortable to, for example, talking about the origin of Islam and Jewish culture from the holidays and I’ve learned about it so much and the events that happened. I don’t disregard them. I feel like you can still celebrate a culture and agree with it and you’re allowed to remember it and celebrate it, but you don’t necessarily have to connect to God. You can still recognize the events that happened before you, and the traditions, what other people believe, but you don’t really have to connect to the spirit or a higher power. (female, 16, born in Ukraine)

Overall, these youths were not very religious. In fact, only one youth stated that she was devoutly religious and she was the most recent immigrant interviewed and the only one raised in a religious household. Although the label and cultural elements of the religious identity (whether Jewish or Christian) were something youths expressed being born into, the religious component was considered to be a personal choice. Several factors played a role in the religiosity of the youths: exploring different beliefs once exposed to diversity in Canada, understanding of science, as well as migration and family factors.

In summary, these youths’ process of choosing identities involved identification of available labels or identities at each time and place, the evaluation of these identities and their components, and the selection of which components to incorporate into one’s multidimensional identity and cultural practice. This process was rooted in the migration experiences of these
youths and their parents, in their knowledge of and connection to different cultures, and their ability to think critically and reflectively about these.

**Expressing Identities**

The Russian-speaking immigrant youths had the ability not only to choose which identities to claim and internalize, but also to decide when and how to disclose them. How they expressed or disclosed their identities were linked to the avoidance of bias, and relied on the ability to reflect on factors in one’s environment, which has both short- and long-term implications for their self-identities. In this section, I will first discuss the benefits and challenges of invisibility to the expression of identities, then explore various factors in identity expression, including decision-making around it, its role in social connection and relationships, and experiences when the expression of identities could not be controlled.

**Benefits and drawbacks of invisibility.** Invisibility played an important part in the decisions and experiences around identity expression, both in positive and negative ways. The benefit of the invisibility was based on the youths’ ability to control external markers of identity (e.g., attire, language, etc.). In addition, they were able to choose which label to provide when asked the questions: “where are you from?” or “what are you?” This was particularly the case around the Jewish and Israeli identities. One youth even expressed relief in being able to hide that identity behind the more visible FSU-heritage identity:

I think that I’m more privileged by the fact that people would think that I’m European because I know there are people in my school that don’t like Jewish people. They hate Jewish people. Especially with everything that’s going on right now. I think that I’m lucky to look white, I guess so I’m not discriminated against. (Liron, male, 17, born in Israel)
The challenge of the invisible identity arose when youths heard negative comments about their identities without the speakers knowing that they were members of the group. Youths then had the choice to speak up or remain silent and allow the negative comments to continue. Often, they chose to stand up for themselves and their group, but at other times, for reasons of safety, discrimination, or simply a desire to avoid a fight, they remained silent. Thus, their internal struggle was unresolved. As Julia described:

I remember coming up into a group of people at one point in my life where we didn’t discuss our cultural backgrounds, but we would get into the conversation of countries such as Russia or whatever. They would say, ‘oh this is such a bad country’ and then I would just say something like ‘oh well, surprise, I come from there!’ In those situations I’m not quite comfortable telling people that I’m from there, but it doesn’t make me any less proud to have come from there. It just makes me annoyed that people would say those kinds of things. (female, 16, born in Israel)

Factors in identity expression. Youths spoke about their ability to discern when it was or was not a good idea to express or disclose an identity. Specifically, they trusted their own ability to judge the safety of a situation. This was a particular concern for the Jewish and Israeli-born youths. The Ukrainian- and Russian-born youths did not feel that there was a danger to disclosing their identities and generally felt that their identities were accepted in Canada (though not always understood), despite the current conflict. For the Jewish and Israeli identities, fear of anti-Semitism and avoidance of bias and conflict around these played a role in identity expression. For these youths, this was especially the case outside of their ethnic communities and when interacting with Christians or individuals of Middle Eastern heritage, as in this narrative:
Friday actually, I was subwaying downtown with a friend, and there were a couple of drunk guys trying to talk to us or whatever. I could tell that they were of Middle Eastern descent. Definitely not Israeli, but you know, somewhere in the Middle East. They were talking, and they asked me what my background was, and I don’t like to associate myself with Canadian or Russian and for some reason it kind of slipped out that I’m Israeli. As soon as I said it I’m like, ‘I made a huge mistake, I’m going to try and get out of this right now.’ So, me and my friend just got out of there as quickly as we can, with as little words as possible. I don’t know, I just didn’t feel comfortable saying that because I recall that they told me that they were Syrian. I don’t know why I said Israeli. I should have said Canadian. But I knew that as soon as I said Israeli I didn’t feel comfortable talking to them anymore, because their facial expressions didn’t seem very approving. I was worried that it might just start a fight based on the fact that I’m even Jewish to begin with. (David, male, 17, born in Canada)

Youths who came from families that experienced indirect migration had more than one ethnic/cultural identity to choose from. They often highlighted and expressed the identity they viewed as more accepted in Canada, even though they did not choose the Canadian label itself. For some youth, this was the Russian identity whereas for others, it was the Jewish identity. As Anna-Lee explained: “Here I emphasize the fact that I’m more Jewish because here Jewish people are more accepted than Russian people are. In Israel I felt myself more as Russian because… all the time I was in a Russian atmosphere” (female, 17, born in Israel).

That is not to state that FSU-born youths did not choose to hide certain aspects of their identities. One youth expressed not even wanting to disclose her immigrant identity because of what she considered to be the negative stereotypes associated with it (particularly around English
language skills). For the rest of the FSU-born youths, concealing an identity was reserved for their trips to their birth countries. There, their parents and relatives told them to avoid sharing with others that they were from Canada for fear of safety: “My grandparents along with my parents told me not to tell anyone I was from Canada because, again, they thought that if kids thought I was from Canada they’d think I was rich and try to rob me or something” (John, male, 17, born in Ukraine).

Despite the youths’ decisions to conceal their identities in certain situations, expression of identity was still important in the creation of the social connection and sense of community. Youths stated that they used these invisible identities and markers of identity as ice breakers when meeting new people: “In my classes if there were Russian speaking people it’s just kind of like an icebreakers, easier to begin our friendship off of” (Stella, female, 16, born in Ukraine). Thus, identities were expressed when they allowed youths to form a connection with individuals, but were hidden whenever the youths sensed that they may interfere with connection.

Identities were also disclosed as part of the youths’ desire to highlight the ways in which they were different and stood out in Canada. Particularly, in situations when they felt that this difference would be handled positively: “There’s not a lot of people here who are Ukrainian so it’s kind of cool to say that you’re different and that you know a different language because everyone is always so fascinated like ‘Oh, say something in Russian!’” (Albina, female, born in Ukraine).

Decisions around identity expression were not only made in the context of strangers and concerns about safety, but also with friends and family. With friends, in certain situations, youths highlighted one identity over another because they believed that identity was more accepted within that group. With family, youths who moved away from religion made decisions around
the expression of their atheist identity to their parents. Their considerations revolved around the potential reactions of their parents and, in some cases, youths chose to keep this new invisible identity hidden in order to avoid conflict with their parents. Overall, youths’ ability to make decisions around identity expression based on their context in ways that ensured their safety and fostered relationships demonstrates their resilience.

However, as with identity choice, the expression of identity was also not fully in the youths’ control. Specifically, some youths felt that their FSU-heritage identities were not invisible and that people were able to discern these based on appearance. This was the case not only in Israel, but even within the Canadian context. For example, there were situations when these identities were expressed for them: “I even shouldn’t say that I’m Russian, they’re always ‘you’re Russian’ and I even didn’t open my mouth and they’re like ‘you’re Russian. It’s only because you’re blonde’ and I’m like ‘ok’” (Olena, female, 19, born in Russia).

Physical appearance, however, was not the only external marker of identity. Ethnic names and issues around language may also reveal their identity. Although youths felt that there was a benefit to knowing multiple languages, some felt that their knowledge of all or some of the languages was incomplete and that they had an accent in one or all of the languages. Moreover, all of the Israeli-born youths who did identify as Israeli (five youths) were not able to speak Hebrew. Thus, for these youths, language skills limited their control around identity expression. As Anna-Lee explained:

I don’t know Russian fully. I don’t know English fully. It’s this mix, and that’s I guess a drawback of being an immigrant. That you don’t really get to know one language in the best way that you could’ve. If I was in Russia all my life, I would’ve known Russian very, very well. If I was born here and I was raised in an English speaking family, then I would
know English very, very well. But, because I have a mix, at school I have English, at home I have Russian, I know some words in Russian that I don’t in English, and in English I know some words that I don’t in Russian. So it forces me to mix up everything. (female, 17, born in Israel)

Fitting in the Social World

Fitting in consisted of a sense of comfort and connection within oneself and with others. Specifically, youths could have an internal sense of fit and be comfortable with who they were. Youths also fitted in within their families, peer groups, schools, broader community, as well as the country at large. Moreover, fitting in within one context also increased one’s sense of comfort with oneself, as Bella described: “I’m with these girls and I just feel like I found who I am... I feel wanted... I actually have someone to be there for me and I don’t have to be worried that I’ll be alone” (female, 15, born in Israel).

The term fitting in was chosen instead of the term belonging because it captured the conscious and active engagement of the youths with their social world and was more grounded in their narratives. In this section, I will first describe how assessments around fit are made and the interplay between fitting in and choosing and expressing identities. Then, I will outline the challenges in and experiences of fitting that were discussed by the youths.

An internal assessment of how well one fitted in with each of the spaces mentioned required an ability to recognize similarities and differences between oneself and others or the social environment. This process was similar to how youths made decisions about choosing and expressing their identities. Specifically, the context provided the information, knowledge, and tools that allowed the youths to make decisions about fitting in. Similar to identity, the process of fitting in was flexible and dynamic in that youths had a choice around the extent to which they
engaged in this process and what they were willing to do in order to fit in. Moreover, there was flexibility in how, when, and with whom to fit in.

Overall, the process of fitting in was closely connected to identity, and could be viewed as both an accumulation and goal of choosing and expressing identities. Moreover, a dynamic, bidirectional relationship existed between the processes around identity and belonging. Specifically, if youths felt that they fit in, they were more likely to choose and express certain identities. In turn, their choices and expressions of certain features of identities led to a greater sense of fitting in, or belonging. Thus, once identities were chosen, youths were able to navigate the context around them, assess their level of fit within it, and alter the expression of identity if more or less fit was required or desired. As these youths explained:

If people around me didn’t speak Russian then I would just say ‘oh I’m Jewish.’ You kind of more adapt to not really what other people think… but you kind of just go with what makes sense wherever you are. It depends, you don’t always want to stand out but you don’t always want to blend in either, kind of depends on your situation. (Jackie, female, 16, born in Canada)

I think it depends on who I’m with, because let’s say I’m with some of my friends that are Russian, some of my friends that are Jewish, I kind of point it out in that situation. But if… I have friends who are not Russian or Jewish so I do describe myself as a Jewish Russian speaker, so it really depends with who I’m around. (Bella, female, 15, born in Israel)

Fitting in within their social world was a central issue for these youths, and the challenges they described experiencing were often more connected to belonging than survival. This was particularly apparent post-migration, although separation (from parents, families, and friends), financial challenges, and challenges with the migration process were also mentioned. For their
struggles with belonging, youths expressed feeling different from individuals from their birth countries once they adjusted to Canada, were not able see their old friends regularly and spend time with them, and had an opportunity to explore different interests and meet different people: “I kind of changed a little bit, they also changed, and probably we don’t have as much in common anymore” (Andrey, male, 18, born in Ukraine). There was a sense that they would have been different people if they stayed: “I think that if I would have stayed in Israel it would have been a lot different because… the people, different language… everyone’s really different here…different environment” (Anat, female, 16, born in Israel). Others discussed being different from people in Canada because they grew up elsewhere: “The social norms and the way people talk here and the things they talk about, the way they act. It’s completely different than it was in Israel so it was kind of hard for me to integrate here” (Liron, male, 17, born in Israel).

Their description of lack of fit was twofold: they had an internal feeling of being different, and, they perceived themselves as externally or visibly different, based on factors such as appearance or spoken language. Specifically, experiences of language loss or inability to master a language could hinder their sense of fit within certain communities, both Canadian and heritage. As Maria explained: “This English-speaking group, I was not really comfortable. Because… I couldn’t talk in my language and I couldn’t explain what I think because it’s English. I couldn’t explain my emotions so that was hard” (female, 17, born in Moldova).

Similar to choosing and expressing identities, fitting in was not simply an internal process as individuals did not have full control over how well they fit in. For example, some identities, even among invisible immigrants, were more visible or noticeable than others, based on appearance (physical features), spoken language, or accent. In turn, there was an external perception of how well the youths’ fit in and these perceptions were not always in line with their
own sense of fit or desired level of fit. Thus, the processes of identity denial and assumption may impact internal sense of fit and belonging as they did with identity.

Despite these challenges, youths expressed a desire to fit in and sought contexts and relationships that would provide them with this sense of belonging. Context specific examples and experiences will be detailed in the Navigating the Context section.

**Navigating the Context**

The process of navigating the context encompasses the core elements of choosing identities, expressing identities, and fitting in. This process refers to the youths’ experiences in interacting with the individuals and institutions around them in multidirectional ways. In this section, I will first describe the process of navigating the context before moving on to describing each of the different elements of the context.

**Description of the process.** The process of navigating the context is represented visually in Figure 1, which illustrates the various components of the context, their relative importance, and the interactions among them. Overall, in the current study, five components appeared to be significant and salient: (a) family (immediate and extended); (b) peers (in-groups and out-groups); (c) community (neighbourhoods, schools, and organizations); (d) political context (within the country and international); and (e) and immigration (history and experience). Each youth conceptualized these components and made meaning of them in varying ways. For example, a component such as family for one youth may only include a mother, but for another, it included both parents, two siblings, and their maternal grandparents.

Thus, the process of navigating the context differed among individuals. The variations of the process were based on: (a) the makeup of the context the individual must navigate (number and type of components); (b) the importance and meaning of each component to the individual;
(c) how the different components interact among each other; and (d) how they interact with the individual (the multidirectional nature of the interaction and the level of individual control over it). Moreover, all of these factors may change over the course of time and circumstances. These individual differences reflect the complexity and flexibility of the process of navigating the context.

This individual variability can be visually represented in the diagram. Specifically, only the components that are salient for each youth would be included and their relative importance to one another would be reflected in their size. Components may move in and out and alter in size, depending on the context over time and based on the youth’s own developmental experiences and the timing of migration and acculturation. The location of each component reflects its interaction with both the individual and the components around it. The closer the component is to the core mechanism, the greater its direct effect on the individual. Indirect effects among the components are demonstrated through the proximity of different components to one another. Family and peers tend to be particularly common intermediary components which filtered some of the direct effects of the other components.

In navigating the context, different components may become engaged or disengaged, either automatically or purposefully. Much of the time, this process may be automatic in nature and youths navigate their context with minimal thought and like a habit. However, when a shift occurs, such as immigration, it causes a disruption in the automatic movement of this process and it becomes more purposeful. As a result, youths may become more alert and aware of the context, think about how it impacts them more, and may notice when something is not working well or changing. Thus, youths may become more aware of processes around identity and belonging, and how these connect to the context around them, upon their move to a new country.
Moreover, following migration, more components may be added or certain components may change in size, highlighting the complexity immigrants must contend with.

This process of interaction between the youth and the context can be both positive and negative, and either experience can impact one’s identity and belonging. Resilience is reflected in the positive interactions between the youths and their environment in ways that allow them to navigate these challenges successfully and collaboratively. Conversely, a negative process where there is conflict (internal and external) between some of the contextual components reflects a challenge or a risk.

The overall process of navigating the context can continue to move smoothly for some youths, although some of the effects are negative. However, challenges may occur when the smooth movement of the process is interrupted, if a youth begins to struggle with a certain component and is unable to resolve or come to terms with the impact it is having. Challenges may also occur when components do not fit together. For example, there may be conflicting messages between components when peers and families are communicating different ideas about identity. Finally, challenges may occur if the process is moving too fast (if there are too many components to address and not enough time or ability) or too slow (if the youth is simply disregarding contextual information).

In sum, the process of navigating the context is based on individual agency and the ability to directly interact with the environment in complex ways. These interactions are multidirectional, not the environment simply acting on the individual, but the individual making conscious choices about what to take in and also what to express externally. Thus, in addition to the direct and indirect effects of each component on the individual, there is continued and active decision making and exploration on the part of the individual. This is, in part, dependent on the
context itself, and more or less agency on the part of the individual would be required depending on the demands and challenges posed by the environment. Moreover, this process impacts the multidimensional nature of the youths’ identities, to the extent that it influences not only the various identities, but their content and the relationships among all of them. Thus, all of these components, and the youths’ interactions with them, contribute to both socialization and acculturation to varying degree.

**Parents and family.** Youths’ parents and families appeared to be the most significant components in their identity and belonging. In the current study, family structures varied from single parent households to multigenerational homes. Some youths had transnational relationships with one parents and/or extended family members. Although the family they lived with appeared to have the strongest impact on identity and belonging, other family members and their relationships with them were also influential. In particular, family members in other countries also provided a connection to the youths’ roots, reminding them of their cultural heritage.

The primary focus of this section will be on parents as the most influential individuals on youths. Thus, I will discuss parents’ direct influence on the socialization and acculturation experiences of the youths, youths own participation in these processes, as well as the reported differences between parents and youths in their identities and ways of being. Finally, I will also include the indirect influences of parents, which will be mentioned throughout the following sections.

Parents had a direct effect on the youths by providing them with the knowledge of and connection to their cultures. Parents made decisions about which holidays to celebrate, what food to eat, what media to consume, and which language to speak at home and teach to their children:
“They put me in a Hebrew school because they thought it was correct to learn my heritage” (Abigail, female, 15, born in Canada). In fact, some of the youths stated that they simply transplanted the lifestyle and atmosphere from their heritage culture: “Our atmosphere here, in our family it’s completely, absolutely Russian” (Karina, female, 17, born in Russia).

Parents’ choices around which countries to visit or not visit, and how often, also played an important part in the youths’ socialization, acculturation, and adjustment. First, these visits both reconnected youths with their roots and allowed them to appreciate life in Canada. However, when parents chose not to visit a certain country (e.g., Russia or Israel) because they did not like it (as reported by the youths), it also communicated this negative message about that culture and identity to the youths. Similarly, parents who did not return to their heritage countries because they were focused on building a life in Canada also sent an implicit message to their children about the importance of adjustment and acculturation.

Beyond sharing behavioural aspects of cultures, parents also offered the relevant labels to choose from, shared stories about the history of different identities, made meaning around these stories, discussed political issues, and communicated pride in these identities. This provided youths with a more comprehensive and complex understanding of culture, identity, and belonging for them to then base their own decisions around. As Ella described:

Just that we’re people that have suffered a lot and that we need to acknowledge that and understand that we weren’t at fault because it really wasn’t our fault what happened. It’s not like you can blame us for it. He just wanted me to understand that it happened. He wanted me to understand why he has pride in it and why he will never back down to say ‘I’m a Jew.’ (female, 16, born in Israel)
The role of parents was particularly apparent in the use of the “Russian” label as the families of most of the Jewish and Israeli-born youths who identified as Russian (11 out of 13 youths) did not come from Russia but from other countries that were formerly republics within the Soviet Union. The use of this label is connected to Soviet times, and reflected the decisions parents made around how to communicate their identities to their children and which labels they chose to use based on their own upbringing. As one youth explained: “Both my parents identify as Soviet Russian, and their roots are from Ukraine and Russia. I guess at some point it was all soviet Russia so… their roots lead to Russia and their roots are my roots” (Ella, female, 16, born in Israel).

As youths discussed, the cultural elements parents chose to share with their children did not always reflect their own or their children’s places of birth, suggesting that the parents had to balance their own multiple identities and cultures and make decisions around these issues. For example, some parents born in the FSU who moved to Israel and had their children in Canada chose to raise their children as Israeli as opposed to Russian or Canadian. Alternatively, parents born in the FSU who had their children in Israel prior to the move to Canada sometimes chose to raise their children as Russian, even though they themselves were born in other parts of the FSU and not in Russia proper.

From youths’ perspective, the main factor appeared to be the parents’ knowledge of, connection to, and comfort with the cultures in question. The extent to which identity, customs, religion, and language were important to the parents appeared to determine what was shared with the youths. Moreover, the timing of migration in the lives of the parents, youths, and within the historical context were also key factors in determining which language, culture, and identity the parents shared with their youths.
Although the youths were not always privy to the reasoning behind such decisions, when it came to language, they were able to explain why their parents chose to teach them one language over another, despite the youths’ own place of birth or current country of residence. Language in particular was of interest as it has been used as a proxy for acculturation in past research. Parents had an important role in choosing which language(s) to maintain, and often chose the language(s) they felt most comfortable with or knew best. Of the nine youths who were born in Israel, none learned Hebrew from their parents and instead learned Russian and spoke primarily Russian (all or most of the time) to their parents. One youth learned Hebrew in school and spoke it occasionally. The only youths who did report speaking Hebrew to their parents most or all of the time were those born in Canada to FSU-born parents who migrated indirectly through Israel. For these youth, it became up to the grandparents to maintain the Russian language and identity as the parents focused on the Israeli identity: “I speak Russian with my grandparents, not my parents. That’s what they passed onto us” (Maya, female, 16, born in Canada).

Complexity around which languages parents shared also applied to youths who moved directly from the FSU to Canada as the majority moved not from Russia proper but other countries in the region. Some spoke the official language of their country, but some learned Russian from their parents (and the other language at school) because it was the official language of the FSU and the language their parents grew up with. Some youths were fluent in more than one language and made choices about which language to use with their parents. Thus, creating a shared family language was a bidirectional process between the youths and their families, as Andrey explained:

I know both languages perfectly. I don’t see a difference in which one to speak, but they [my parents] were born in times of Soviet Union. All those countries inside of Soviet
Union, they were kind of republics, and every country still had to consider Russian as a primary language. So in school you would definitely learn it [Russian], you would also learn your own language, like Ukrainian, but mostly you would speak Russian. My parents are just used to that. Obviously their parents were speaking Russian. Probably just that last generation of people who prefer Russian over Ukrainian to use at home. (male, 18, born in Ukraine)

In some cases, parents did not only share their heritage/ethnic culture(s) with their children, but to some extent, also participated in the exploration of Canadian culture, particularly in the areas of language, food, and holidays. In this way, parents used Canadian multiculturalism to strengthen the multidimensional identities of their children. As John described:

I think a very big thing is my mother. I don’t really remember when it started, but she kind of really branched out from just Eastern European food to Mexican food, Indian food, Chinese food. It’s been a really great experience for me… I feel like we definitely immersed ourselves in many different cultures. Even with music, a lot of different kind of Hispanic music that my parents like and I’ve listened to also. (male, 17, born in Ukraine)

These collaborative experiences around socialization and acculturation were also reflected in youths’ reports of the similarity in their identities to those of their parents and the closeness of their relationships. The three primary differences between youths and their parents were on Canadian identity, open-mindedness, and religiosity. Specifically, youths who immigrated within the last five years reported that they considered their identities to be identical to their parents. However, youths who lived in Canada longer were primarily educated in Canada, unlike their parents. Thus, they perceived themselves as being “more Canadian” than their parents, despite the similarities in other aspects of their identities. As a Russian-born youth claimed: “I have
more Canadian, North-American culture in me. They’re more Russian. They’re more adapted to Russian customs and I’m more adapted to Canadian” (Sabina, female, 15). This cultural difference in life experiences also affected youths’ relationships with their parents: “I’m less close with my parents as they [Canadian born youth] are with their parents. Because they lived here too and they generally have the same environment. While my parents had more of a different environment so I can’t really relate” (Anat, female, 16, born in Israel).

In addition, some youths felt that their parents were less open-minded than them because of their religious values, and as a result of being brought up in less open-minded cultures, notably the FSU. Ella described her interactions with her parents:

We’ll get in a lot of fights when it comes to racism, homophobia and sexism because those are the things that they didn’t teach them. I completely understand that, but it’s so hard sometimes because we get in the biggest fights. (female, 16, born in Israel)

Finally, some youths who perceived their parents as more religious did not always feel comfortable discussing their own views about religion with their parents. As with the Canadian identity, this was a challenge specific to youths who migrated to Canada at an early age, who began questioning their religion as a result of their exposures to scientific education, diverse religions, and atheism. Youths who moved to Canada more recently shared the same level of religiosity as their parents (either high or low).

Despite the varying levels of religiosity, parents and the children were fairly similar in this aspect. Youths reported not being religious, in part, as a result of their upbringing and family. Specifically, religion was banned in the FSU and parents did not grow up with it and therefore did not pass it on to their children. In addition, challenges of migration resulted in parents being too busy and focused on survival to maintain their religion. Finally, the lack of an extended
family made it more difficult to maintain practice as there was no family to celebrate the holidays with. As Albina explained: “We don’t really celebrate the Christmas. I guess because I don’t know any of the traditions so it just, it didn’t stick when there’s only three of us here” (female, 17, born in Ukraine).

Importantly, parents’ influences on their children’s identities were not always direct, such as sharing the cultural elements at home. Parents also used indirect ways to influence their youths’ identity and belonging through their choices around where to live, what school to send their children to, and which extracurricular activities their children would pursue. Thus, parents were active in creating a cultural environment for their youths to be socialized in. In turn, youths made decisions within this cultural environment that influenced their own development.

**Peer groups.** Youths’ peer groups varied in size and composition, but the reasons why groups were formed and the impact they had on youths were fairly consistent. In this section, I will outline the three primary underlying factors in peer group formation and maintenance: similarities and shared experiences, fun, and social support. Then, I will discuss online experiences with in-groups, outcomes of positive in-group experiences, as well as negative in-group experiences. Finally, I will explore experiences with out-groups and youths’ coping with negative experiences within both in-groups and out-groups.

For similarities and shared experiences, a common area was their ethnic/cultural or religious background. Seventeen youths reported that at least one (and usually both) of their top two peer in-groups consisted of a majority of individuals who shared the same background as them. They discussed the importance and benefits of having a shared culture, religion, language, and/or birthplace and consequently upbringing. These factors were used as ice breakers when
first meeting people and as an early foundation for friendship as discussed in the Expressing Identities section.

This attraction towards culturally or religiously similar friends could be either a conscious choice: “One week I was in Canada, so I was not actually so scared. I just really wanted to find someone who speaks my language” (Karina, female, 17, born in Russia), or a subconscious one: “Not all my friends are Russian or Jewish, but most of them are, and that’s something that I can perhaps connect with, even subconsciously. I don’t choose that on purpose at least” (Stella, female, 16, born in Ukraine).

These fundamental similarities allowed youths to understand each other on a deeper level and reduced the need to explain or excuse certain aspects of their tradition or language. Moreover, youths felt more comfortable bringing peers of the same background into their homes where they would interact with their parents who often had accents. This basic level of understanding resulted in less judgment and confusion in these peer relationships. The shared background and upbringing also contributed to youths having largely similar opinions about the recent political conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. This added to their level of comfort, especially considering the concerns they had about expressing their opinions to other people and their general desire to avoid conflict. As Nick discussed:

Having people that you can easily relate to and not having a fear of them having extremely different opinions that could ruin friendships. For example, what’s going in Gaza… towards who is right in that conflict and who is wrong. Just the group having more bias towards Israel. (male, 16, born in Israel)

Simultaneously, some youths believed that their friends were not influential to their identities because they did not talk about them with each other. As Anat explained: “Most of my
friends are the same ethnicity as me…no one really talks about it I guess, so I don’t think about if it plays an effect or any role” (female, 16, born in Israel). However, they reported how their identity was reinforced by these friendships as it served as an, at times unspoken, reminder of where one came from and where one belonged. In some cases, the cultural connection was maintained through participating in certain activities with one’s peer group, such as volunteering for the holidays or performing cultural songs. Some of these interactions also deepened their understanding of their own culture or religion and its complexities by observing how it functioned in other people’s households. When discussing having friends with a shared background, Jackie stated:

It could also be good because you learn more about your culture. You know how there’s the same Russian family, but some of them are a little bit different than others because there’s no one that’s the exact same, right? You can learn a different Russian recipe.

(female, 16, born in Canada)

This increasing comfort with the cultural and/or religious identity allowed youths to further develop their identities outside their parents’ influence. Through these friendships, youths felt that they were finally able to express their identity in other areas of their lives: “I met more Russian speaking people that taught me that being Russian isn’t just something you keep with your family, you can expose it” (Stella, female, 16, born in Ukraine). In fact, sharing their culture with others in public became an important way of being true to themselves, expressing their identity, and fitting in. Maya recounted her experience of going to a Jewish high-school and making Jewish friends:

I definitely feel more open at the school that I’m Jewish and speaking Hebrew. I don’t hide that I speak another language… I was in Israel not too long ago and I bought myself a ring
with Hebrew writings engraved into it, and my dad says to me ‘are you sure you’re going to wear this?’ and I said ‘Yeah, why wouldn’t I?’ he says ‘in elementary school you wouldn’t wear this to school.’ But here I feel so comfortable wearing it. A bunch of my friends even have things that have Hebrew letters on them. It’s so casual, it’s so normal to be open with your religion that that’s how I feel now also. As opposed to before I was kind of closed up with religion in a way. (female, 16, born in Canada).

Thus, youths joined groups that they felt a connection to, and being part of the groups strengthened and broadened this sense of connection. Moreover, they reported becoming more comfortable not only with their ethnic/religious identity and culture through group membership but also with themselves as well: “In front of them I’m a lot more comfortable. The things I say, the way I feel around them. I’m more open” (Julia, female, 16, born in Israel).

However, more recent immigrants discussed various challenges when socializing and making friends in Canada, primarily due to the lack of common interests and similarities. Recent immigrant youths expressed struggles with understanding social norms and expectations (e.g., degree of friendliness and openness) as well as cultural artifacts (e.g., places, TV shows, music, activities). As Olena described:

Sometimes when you communicate with persons you even didn’t know something was rude or something wasn’t polite but they say that it was rude and then like ‘why?’ They try to explain and I don’t understand because, for example, in Russia it’s not rude and I’m like ‘Okay, I know this now.’ (female, 19, born in Russia)

Friendships built around language assisted recent immigrants with their immigration challenges. First, some youths specifically chose an English speaking friend group with whom to practice their language: “I can talk in English with them, improve my English, my language, my
second language, so that’s really good for me” (Karina, female, 17, born in Russia). Second, some youths learned or improved another language (that is not their first language or English) in order to communicate with peers:

I came here and at school they asked me ‘What language do you speak? What language do you know?’ I said ‘Russian, Romanian, English’ and a woman said ‘You know we have a Russian club here in school so you can go and make new friends.’ I said ‘Okay’ so from the first day I started being with Russians… My Russian became better than English. Even persons right now say I do not have an accent, that I speak very fluent Russian. Even right now, all my friends are Russians, I mean, not Russians but all of them are Russian-speaking. Some of them are Ukrainian but they speak Russian with me. (Maria, female, 17, born in Moldova)

Third, having friends who spoke their language also provided the youths with some reprieve in a world that is overwhelmingly English-speaking, particularly for recent immigrants. As Boris stated: “I want to hear Ukraine. I’m fed up with English. English is everywhere outside, on the street, on the school, on TV. Please I want to hear Ukrainian! My language I want to hear” (male, 17, born in Ukraine).

Finally, a shared language allowed youths to express themselves completely. Communicating in English was often more challenging and their closest friends were the ones they felt they could express themselves to, as Maria described:

When you speak another language but not your language you cannot be yourself a lot because you cannot say all your emotions and everything that you feel and everything that happens in real details because you don’t know the language... we cannot be friends because of the language. (female, 17, born in Moldova)
The accounts of the youths do suggest that they tended to gravitate towards people who had a similar background, but underlying this was the indirect role of the parents in ensuring that this was a possibility. The majority of youths lived in ethnic enclaves, and/or went to ethnic/religious schools, and/or participated in camps or extracurricular activities that are culturally based. Some youths even met their friends through their parents and family friends. In this way, parents created the context from which these peer groups could grow and directly affect the youths themselves. Unfortunately, this lack of access to broader Canadian culture could also create a deficit: “I’m not into Canadians. Most of my friends are Jewish so I don’t really know any ‘eh’ Canadian people. So, I don’t really associate myself with them” (Abigail, female, 15, born in Canada).

However, shared ethnic/cultural or religious backgrounds were not the only criteria to making and maintaining friends. Other similarities that played a role in in-group formation or membership included values, goals, priorities, and personalities. These similarities allowed friends to help and support each other and feel more comfortable with themselves. As Eva explained:

I like to think of us as different from other high school students… We’re good kids, we don’t drink, we don’t smoke, we don’t go to parties, we don’t do any of that stuff when we hang out… It’s the nerdiest group of friends in the world but it’s similar people to who I am… I like that because I’ve never been a person interested in drugs or drinking, and that’s a lot of what happens in high school, it’s a big part of being a teenager, parties and stuff like that, and that’s not my scene at all. And so having this group of friends… It’s nice because there’s none of that pressure and stuff that you get with high school. (female, 16, born in Israel)
The second factor in creating and maintaining peer groups was the importance of having fun and enjoying the company of their in-group peers. The fun represented more than the experience of happiness itself, but the feeling that everything was good and will continue to be so. There was a sense of hopefulness and levity associated with having fun that are often needed and valued in adolescence and beyond. As Abigail explained: “I’m always happy when I’m with them. There’s not one time that I’m upset when I’m with them.” (female, 15, born in Canada).

Enjoyment connects to the third major factor in adolescent peer relationships: social support. As Bella stated: “My friends are really caring, they’re always giving me advice when I need it. They’ll always be there. I know that if I ever have a problem I won’t be alone, I’ll always have someone to talk to” (female, 15, born in Israel). The support peers were able to provide was apparent in many different areas of life: school matters, language practice, relationships with other peers, parent-child struggles and conflict, as well as support of identity exploration. Youths felt that they were able to talk to their in-group peers about personal topics and open-up; trust was valued in these relationships.

For youths, their peers were often the first individuals they went to if they faced a challenge (although some youths also coped by turning to their parents or simply dealing with issues on their own). Peers were able to encourage and help youths work through their problems. This form of support also made youths feel more comfortable with themselves because their peers were able to understand and help them, as Olena explained:

Now there is someone who can understand and it helped me to feel better that I can speak about this. I can be open and that if I have any questions this person maybe knows the answers. It made your inner moral more stable. They just showed me that there is someone who can understand you. (female, 19, born in Russia)
Youths felt that being on the same level as their peers was important when seeking support, in a way that parents were not always able to provide. This was particularly relevant for issues of religion, and especially for those who felt that their parents were not supportive of religious exploration. These five youths moved away from religion over the course of adolescence through the support of their peers. Some of these peers were also going through a process of questioning religion and they reinforced each other’s identities. As Sabina described: “The internet has enforced my atheism because I think a lot of people from the internet communities I’m from, are really atheist or not religious and stuff, and they often talk about its logic, which enforced my atheism” (female, 15, born in Russia).

Social support was not seen as unidimensional and youths also placed importance on supporting their friends. This, again, connected to a sense of being true to themselves and happy with the kind of people that they are. One youth discussed her friendship with a group of more recent immigrants:

I absolutely enjoy helping them all the time. I remember myself when I was in that position, although I wasn’t an international student. They do have lots of knowledge on English, but I understand how scary it is to get into a new country with absolutely different education system. It’s very scary to be here alone without parents. I really enjoy helping them. (Anita, female, 16, born in Ukraine)

At times, parents also had a direct effect on friendships. In some cases, youths turned to their parents when they encountered challenges in friendships or when friendships ended. They also provided counsel on how to handle interpersonal conflicts. As Jackie explained:

With my other friend, I used to drop everything and I’d go and my mom’s like, ‘Why? Think about yourself first. She’s still your friend. She’s not going to run away and not be
your friend anymore. Just think about yourself, what’s important for you first, before you drop everything and do something for your friend who most likely wouldn’t always do the same.’ (female, 16, born in Canada)

Not all experiences in peer groups took place in person, but online as well. Group chats, forums, and online videogames played an important role in group formation and maintenance. Group names and membership were often based on these online components. As David explained: “We have an iMessage group amongst the three of us, we just call it ‘The Boys’ because we’re ‘The Boys’” (male, 17, born in Canada).

These online groups and interactions were important not only for recent immigrants who were still maintaining friendships and holding on to membership in groups back in their birth countries through electronic means, but also for youths who maintained contact with peers outside of school or other in-person activities online. Substantial conversations and interactions took place through these electronic means: “Whenever anyone has a problem we just put it in the group chat and we start talking about it and you always know you have them there, a group of people there” (Albina, female, 17, born in Ukraine). At times, the majority of youths’ interactions with their peers were online, and three youths indicated that one of their in-groups was an online only group. For some, their closest friends came from those online groups as well. In some cases, the peers were individuals that the youths never even met in person.

For outcomes of group membership, a sense of belonging appeared to be the most integral. Youths highlighted the importance of not feeling lonely or alone, but instead feeling that they were a part of something (in group, in school, in ethnic community, and in Canada in general):

It’s kind of a relief to actually have a bunch of people to speak to as opposed to not having that. It made me feel more welcomed to school and more exciting to go to school. Just
because I know there’d be people waiting for me there and not just an empty table.

(Maggie, female, 16, born in Ukraine)

This was the case not only when their groups were ethnically/culturally/religiously similar, but also in their diverse groups. As Andrey explained:

Most people in this group are immigrants as well, so I’m not the only one. I see that Canada’s really a country with lots of immigrants, with lots of different peoples, so I feel like I’m not being a minority. There’s so many people from different cultures and different backgrounds and immigrants here so it’s all mixed. (male, 18, born in Ukraine)

Overall, youths felt that their non-co-ethnic peers accepted their ethnic background. In addition, recent immigrant youths reported that once they formed relationships with peers in Canada and became more accustomed to Canadian social norms, they became friendlier, more open and outgoing, as well as open-minded and accepting. As Olena described:

Something changed in understanding of how life is going, because here it’s different. So, sometimes you should understand that you should calm down, or no, you should smile! When we just came here I didn’t believe that people can just smile when they’re going across the street they smile and I’m like, ‘what’s going on? Is it ok?’ (female, 19, born in Russia)

Another youth explained: “They definitely brought in more culture. They taught me more North American culture. I became more accustomed to what my friends were teaching me, and it’s made me more Canadian” (Sabina, female, 15, born in Russia). Experiences with diverse peers also allowed youths to learn more about other cultures, in addition to Canadian culture. This suggests that peers served as both acculturation and socialization agents for the youths, providing them with the information they needed to choose and express identities, as well as fit in.
However, not all experiences within the peer context were positive, and some negative experiences occurred, even with in-group peers. However, only in a few cases these experiences were associated with discrimination or negative comments made by in-group members based on ethnic or religious identity. These negative experiences were more common within mixed groups: “Occasional racial jokes that people throw around. Like making fun, the jokes that make fun of Jews and the Holocaust, and having people say it to me in hopes that I will laugh at them” (Adam, male, 15, born in Israel). Yet they also happened when the youths were a minority in some way within the group (e.g., being the only Russian-speaking, Israeli-born youth among a group of Canadian Jews). Thus, although some aspects of their identity were common (e.g., all were Jewish), other aspects were looked down upon or rejected: “They were raised here and they found themselves as Canadian Jews. They think of me only as Russian and I told them ‘well you know I’m Jewish too.’ It’s really weird but it’s this barrier that’s between us” (Anna-Lee, female, 17, born in Israel).

At times, youths were torn between two groups they belonged to based on certain parts of their ethnic/religious background, for example, belonging to both a Russian and an Israeli group, or both a Russian and a Ukrainian group. In some cases, negative comments were made by one group about another: “If my friends see me hanging out with them they’re like, ‘why are they always so loud?’ Or ‘why are they always fighting?’ Because it kind of sounds like they are if you have never really heard Hebrew dialogue” (Stella, female, 16, born in Ukraine). These situations compromised youths’ comfort with that part of their own identity, and perhaps their sense of belonging in both groups.
In order to avoid some of these challenges, youths adjusted their identity expression (e.g., by highlighting one identity over another, or avoiding discussions of religion or politics) in order to increase their level of fit and comfort within a group. As Anna-Lee explained:

I don’t feel like it’s uncomfortable for me that with every group I identify myself as a different person. It’s just that I try to make it, to get closer with them, and maybe make it seem like I’m more this or more that so there won’t be any miscommunication or misunderstandings or some bad feelings from their side. I don’t really care personally, I just want to feel more comfortable. (female, 17, born in Israel)

This was not always possible and youths sometimes felt left out within their in-groups as a result of factors that were outside of their control, such as language skills. As Stella, who grew up in Israel but forgot Hebrew, described:

Sometimes I get really annoyed because they would speak in Hebrew for a long period of time and it would just be really annoying. One time I slept over with a couple of girls and they were speaking Hebrew all night and I felt really left out and it was just really annoying… I know that they prefer to speak in Hebrew, but I felt really left out and uncomfortable… I’m not just going to learn Hebrew to fit into a group, but, it was just kind of hard. (female, 16, born in Ukraine)

However, the relatively small number of ethnically/religiously based negative experiences with in-groups suggests that once youths found a place and group where they belonged, the issues they experienced became more normative and developmental as opposed to cultural. Such issues included disagreements about where to go, and difficulties with alliances within peer groups. Thus, ethnic/cultural/religious in-groups offered a protective space within which youths could be themselves and not experience significant conflict around their identities.
Although most youths had largely positive experiences within their in-groups, a few reported having had negative experiences with out-group peers around culture/religion. Those youths reported being made fun of (e.g., for being different, their accent, English language skills). Only a couple of cases were of direct discriminatory behaviour, such as this story Ella shared:

I remember one time in class, I brought in a Hanukah video for the class to watch. It was grade 3 at the time. We finished it and this one kid stands up and he goes ‘I hate Jews’ or something like that, something very discriminatory. I didn’t feel comfortable then. I didn’t feel like I was in the right body almost. It was really weird for me. But it didn’t last for long, because when I went home to my parents, and we talked about it, and it was ok.
(female, 16, born in Israel)

Youths expressed that such overt experiences with both in-groups and out-groups became less frequent with age. However, youths still experienced indirect discrimination, in the form of negative comments made about certain aspects of their invisible identities by people who did not know about these. Finally, one youth also shared experiences of social exclusion between different immigrant generations of the same ethnic groups:

In my school there are 20% of Ukrainians. Half of that Ukrainians, they were born here. Their parents or grandparents are Ukrainians. They say that they are Ukrainians but they don’t speak Ukrainian. If I’ll ask such Ukrainians that were born here in Canada and who speaks English, I’ll ask him to go for walk, he won’t go with me just because I’m Ukrainian born in Ukraine… It’s like they don’t want to go with us and maybe they’re racist or it was kind of discrimination against us… If Ukrainians that are from Ukraine that were born there, you can be five years here then you will go [for a walk with me]. But, if
he or she is more than five or six years [in Canada] it’s really big question if she’ll go or he’ll go with me for walk. I don’t know why it happens. Another people, like Serbians, are born here and other Serbians that came from Serbia that’s the same, the same problem with all of people at school. (Boris, male, 17, born in Ukraine)

However, most youths, even those who did not have negative experiences with out-groups did look down on the out-groups they were familiar with. This happened whether the other group was of a higher or lower status. The reasons mentioned included being fake, rude, untrustworthy, unambitious, using substances, and having a sense of entitlement. Only five youths did not say negative things about the out-groups they discussed. Overall, perceiving the out-groups and interacting with them made youths appreciate themselves even more for not having these traits or engaging in these behaviours, As Eva explained: “When I see the way they treat a school setting …it makes me happy or proud to know that this is something that I’ve put care and time into it rather than disregarding it, kind of like they do” (female, 16, born in Israel). Similarly, youths viewed their in-groups in a more positive light, as David described: “I have perceived they don’t have that kind of emotional connection that… I have with my friends so I don’t want it to be so just basic and, you know, one-dimensional” (male, 17, born in Canada).

When the out-groups shared a cultural/religious background with the youths, one of two reactions took place. First, when the group engaged in negative behaviours youths felt that the out-group was not representative of their culture and were concerned it would give other immigrants a bad name. In describing another Russian-speaking immigrant group Adam said:

Mainly them just giving the whole image of being an immigrant a bad image, make it seem like all immigrants act the way that they do. I wouldn’t say [I feel] ashamed, but it does make me think about how other people view immigrants, and how they might view me for
being an immigrant. The fact that I would act the way they act because I’m also an immigrant. (male, 15, born in Israel)

Second, the more recent immigrants felt that encountering a positive out-group with a shared background gave them hope of a good future in Canada. As Karina said in describing a group of older Russian-speaking immigrants: “When I’m looking at that group I can understand that everything is possible. They actually found new friends, they learned English, and they can speak it appropriately now. So everything is possible… they are a good example for me” (female, 17, born in Russia). This sense of hope also arose when encountering other groups of immigrants who were doing well, even those from a different cultural backgrounds.

In other cases, the out-groups were former in-groups that became estranged as a result of immigration. Overall, the recent immigrants discussed the challenges around maintaining friendships because of distance, time differences, and having increasingly less common interests and experiences. Only three youths mentioned still being a part of in-groups in their birth countries and all of these youth had been in Canada for under two years.

For coping with negative experiences within in-groups and with out-groups, youths tended to either cope alone (often through avoidance or distraction, as well as reflection and shifting perspective) or through the support of their friends (members of the same or of a different in-group). Youths also engaged in communication and mediation strategies and, at times, stood up for themselves or their friends when conflict arose. In some cases they also turned to family, and in only one instance to a teacher and mental health support.

Community. The community consisted of their neighbourhoods, schools, and other religious, social, and community organizations including settlement agencies. Most youths reported living in cultural/ethnic enclaves where the majority of the people they regularly
interacted with came from similar backgrounds. Consequently, the schools the youths attended within their own neighbourhoods had the same population. Some youths who did not live in ethnic enclaves attended ethnic and/or religious schools, agencies, and activities with populations similar to themselves. These community contexts and schools also tended to be predominantly white. Subsequently, the youths spent most of their time interacting with others who were at least in some way similar to themselves. In this section, I will focus on the benefits and challenges of ethnic enclaves (whether within neighbourhoods, schools, etc.) for youths.

These ethnic enclaves provided youths with knowledge of and connection to their culture. Consequently, youths discussed their benefits in terms of allowing them to explore their identities and feel more comfortable with them. In addition, such communities offered culturally appropriate resources in their language(s). Thus, they provided the context where youths chose their identities, the places where they expressed their identities, and fit in.

As discussed in the Peers section, youths reported that they had very few negative experiences around their identities, possibly because ethnic enclaves and ethnically/religiously based schools served as protective factors. Especially for immigrants, these communities may have buffered some of the negative consequences of migration, to the extent that communities provide a platform to “be youths” rather than being overshadowed by the challenges and barriers of being an immigrant or a minority. This is because the group(s) youths belonged to tended to hold the majority status in their communities: “I guess I’m in a bubble now, I would call it. Many people are Jewish and that’s a bubble” (Maya, female, 16, born in Canada). Thus, these enclaves did not necessitate youths to explain their identity (or at least parts of it), as others already understood. Another benefit of these enclaves was that they played an indirect role in group
formation and membership. These experiences of feeling welcomed then enhanced youths’ identities and sense of belonging.

Despite all of these benefits of ethnic enclaves, schools, and organizations, these also created some challenges for youths. Specifically, youths expressed that they were less familiar with Canadian people and customs because they were rarely exposed to these within their communities and had few interactions outside of them. Similarly, a few youths shared that they wanted greater diversity in their peer groups and a greater understanding of other people outside of their community. Bella explained why she chose not to join a group of teens of the same ethnicity:

I think that I should be friends with all different kinds of people, and not only be friends with people who share my identity. Because I think being friends with people who share different identities provides more connections for me and more opportunities in life.

(female, 15, born in Israel)

Another drawback of ethnic enclaves was that at times youths felt less comfortable interacting with people outside of their communities, which can result in a sense of isolation from the rest of the Canadian population. As Anat described:

Since I was always surrounded by it, most of my friends were Russian and Jewish, I wasn’t really open to other ethnicities, until I moved to a different school. So, I think that plays a huge role. I wasn’t not open, I was just always surrounded by it, so I wasn’t used to a different environment. (female, 16, born in Israel)

Finally, the focus on the culture/religion could be overwhelming for youths, and may distance them from the culture/religion as they seek a greater connection to the broader Canadian culture. As Ella explained:
Sometimes itannoys me because it feels like the community is trying to push the religion on to me, or not even the religion, but the culture and everything... There’s Jewish network, and Jewish community centre, and there’s Jewish camps. There’s just so much, and sometimes it feels like you’re being forced into it. That’s why I like going to such a diverse school. That’s why I like to have different groups of friends. That’s why I never really remain friends with one type of person, from one type of culture, because I like that diversity. Sometimes I might feel a little bit almost claustrophobic from all that culture that’s trying to push onto me. (female, 16, born in Israel)

**Political context.** Youths reflected on the political context, both locally and globally. In this section, I will discuss the local political context, with a focus on multiculturalism, and the global political context, with a focus on the recent conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East in 2014.

The first topic that was frequently raised was Canada’s multiculturalism. Youths believed that this was one of the reasons why their parents were attracted to Canada. Multicultural acceptance was also greatly appreciated. Youths stated that in Canada, individuals are able to explore and express their identities, and view their own multidimensional identities in a positive light. Youths also considered being different as a positive within the Canadian context. One Canadian-born youth even stated that it is better to be an immigrant and expressed a desire or a wish to have been born abroad:

Usually people ask me if I was born in Israel because I’m fluent in Hebrew. So, I feel like I should have been born in Israel. I feel like if I were born in Israel that would be so much better and cooler. It’s not like people don’t accept me because I wasn’t born in Israel,
because most of my friends were born here. But I don’t know, I just feel connected in a way that some of my friends don’t. (Abigail, female, 15, born in Canada)

Youths expressed that they loved Canada because they were able to be themselves in a way that was not always possible in other countries where they lived that did not have similar views and policies around multiculturalism. This reflected the youths’ ability to compare and contrast the political climates of different countries. Stella shared that Israel was less accepting of immigrants than Canada is:

In Israel I can say that what my mom went through and her experiences. How she was always targeted as a Russian immigrant. They would prefer Israeli people or Jewish people. In Canada that’s not what they want. They don’t want that assimilation, they want all these different cultures to stay with you. (female, 16, born in Ukraine)

Moreover, Canada was widely considered to be more open-minded than countries in the FSU, where historically anti-Semitism was also common: “In Ukraine a lot more people are a lot more conservative than they are in Canada. People there are a lot more racist, more homophobic, more sexist than in Canada” (Maggie, female, 16, born in Ukraine).

According to youths, Canada’s multiculturalism also provided families a way to escape discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or immigrant status. Youths reported that the original move to Israel served a similar purpose and was connected to a desire to have all the Jewish people in one place where they would not face anti-Semitism. However, despite this, youths stated that Israel did not offer the expected level of stability, safety, or opportunities for these families and thus, they migrated to Canada in the hopes of creating a better life for themselves and their children. As Adam explained: “They were noticing that even in Israel it
wasn’t that safe, how there were bombings happening occasionally and that it wasn’t as safe as it would be somewhere else” (male, 15, born in Israel).

Furthermore, youths viewed Canada’s policy around multiculturalism as creating a climate that enabled ethnic enclaves. In turn, these had increased youths’ comfort in their ethnic/religious identity, provided protection and connection, and ensured better adjustment after migration. Moreover, multiculturalism allowed youths a choice in the degree to which to embrace their heritage culture(s) or explore diverse cultures. Some youths reported exploring other cultures and learning about diverse religions (particularly through peers and schools) and consequently, becoming more open-minded. Others, who have not yet had the opportunity, expressed a desire to explore other cultures.

However, for some youths, the establishment of ethnic enclaves precluded them from connecting with the broader Canadian society and compromised their identification with and understanding of the Canadian identity. Recent immigrant youths also felt that there was too much focus on multiculturalism, which, in turn, highlighted differences of race, ethnicity, and religion, making people more aware of these differences and precluding people from moving past these differences. In discussing her peer group in her birth country Olena said:

They actually never spoke about the differences in race or any other spheres. It’s only here, when you come here, because it’s a really multicultural country, you start to think why people are different. But, they actually are not. Only when you start to speak about this. People are always saying it doesn’t matter what colour of your skin, religion, or race. It doesn’t matter because in all cultures you meet the same person. (female, 19, born in Russia)
In addition to differences in values of multiculturalism, youths also discussed the role of global political conflict and war on their identity and belonging. In 2014, during the time the interviews were conducted, both the Middle East (Israel and Palestine) and Eastern Europe (Russia and Ukraine) were either in the midst of a conflict or recovering from one. Both political conflicts were also frequently reported in the news in Canada and on the Russian, Ukrainian, and/or Israeli channels that the youths and their parents watched at home. As a result, their identities were more often on their minds and could not be ignored. The conflicts highlighted certain aspects of the youths’ identities and forced them to become more aware of their links to their ethnicity, culture, and/or religion. Moreover, youths felt that they had to choose sides of the conflict(s) and be able to take a position, whether in person or online conversations about the conflicts. These situations also offered an opportunity for youths to engage in more discussions with their parents and peers about the conflicts, read more about them, and become more educated about their cultures. Some of the Ukrainian-born youths expressed a sense that before the conflict, people lacked knowledge about their identity and country. The conflict had placed their country on the map and as others became more aware of it and inquired about it more, the more they thought about and reflected on their own identity.

Being treated as a “representative of the country” to which one has ties was a double edged sword. On the one hand, it did encourage youths to be reflective, and on the other hand, they resented being placed in this position. Youths generally did not want to be asked questions about the conflict(s) and did not want the conflict(s) to negatively reflect on their own identities or how people viewed them, as Maggie explained:

[I do think they might] start treating me as if I’m a representative of all the people in Ukraine and start saying stuff like ‘oh you must feel so horrible!’ Yeah, I do feel bad. I feel
like people might start treating me as the one source out of all their friends or media. I guess… make it seem like what I know about the events going on is more or more important than what the other people know just based on where I was born. (female, 16, born in Ukraine)

Overall, however, the political conflict(s) appeared to strengthen the youths’ ethnic, cultural, and/or religious identity and most of them discussed their pride in their people and/or countries of origin when reflecting on the conflicts. As Adam explained:

It made me more proud to be Jewish than before. Just the oppression that’s happening. It makes me even more proud to be able to say that I am Jewish and that even with what’s going on, it’s not keeping me down because I’m Jewish and it’s not oppressing me. The racism, the fact that the Jewish people aren’t really treated equally in other parts of the world because they’re Jewish. Just treating them like they’re not human, and not giving them the same needs as any other person. I think as I was always raised to be proud to be Jewish and never be ashamed of it and when this situation came up, the way that I was taught showed more by being more proud now. What’s going on in Gaza now and Israel. (male, 15, born in Israel)

In addition to the internal sense of pride, youths also reported that the political conflict had a unifying effect on their communities, bringing Israelis, Jews, Russians, and Ukrainians together. In this way, the political conflicts touched on both identity and belonging for these youths. The conflicts even had the ability to unite groups that previously experienced tension, such as Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians:

I feel more accepted as a Russian speaking Ukrainian because before there was a divide in Ukraine between Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians.
However, now when Russia intervenes there’s more of a difference between Ukrainians and Russians… Ukrainians don’t really care that much anymore about whether you’re Russian-speaking or Ukrainian-speaking, as long as you’re just on the same side. So if anything, I feel more comfortable with my identity. (John, male, 17, born in Ukraine)

From youths’ perspectives, families and organizations played an important role in filtering and interpreting information about the conflict(s), which influenced their own understanding and views of these. For example, some youths sided with one country based solely on their own background and their personal ties to it: “You usually want to support where you’re from, or where your family is from, not really where you’re, not really against, but what your country is fighting with” (Jackie, 16, female, born in Canada).

Overall, youths tended to side with the country they had roots in. Thus, all of the Israeli-born and Canadian-born Jewish youths sided with Israel, the Russian-born youths with Russia, and the Ukrainian-born youths with Ukraine. This pride in and support of one’s culture and identity was positive in some respects, because it allowed the youths to be comfortable with and feel good about themselves. However, the lack of critical examination of the conflicts hindered dialogue with other groups (e.g., Ukrainians not speaking to Russians, Israelis not speaking to other Middle Easterners) and the groups became more insular. Consequently, youths discussed the difficulty the conflict(s) created in making friends and even communicating with people from other ethnic backgrounds who have opposing views, as Adam stated about a Persian group at his school:

What’s going on in the Middle East. It’s not making our opinions the same and the fear that if we were to interact and voice separate opinions what would happen. I don’t know what I fear, just the fact that something might happen, and it might become violent or
further problems, further disagreement, and always having a bad relationship with those people. (male, 15, born in Israel)

Friendships could even end over opposing views about the conflict, as Boris described:

Different views about Ukraine. Some of them, they want that Ukraine was part of Russia and I’m not big fan of Ukraine was part of other country. Everyone wants that his country was independent. Then he told me that I didn’t understand, and he told me it’s because of religion…. He’s from that Russian [religion], but he’s Ukrainian, and he prefer that Ukraine was part of Russia [sic]. I think like ‘what’s wrong with you? Ukraine was fighting for their independence and now you want it to become Russia?’; ‘yeah why not.’ And that’s why we separate. (male, 17, born in Ukraine)

Tensions also existed within in-groups, particularly for youths with friends in their home countries. One youth reported being told by her friends back home that, despite having left Russia only one year before the start of the conflict, she did not understand what was happening: “Some of my friends they say ‘Yes’, that ‘You’re in Canada, I am in Russia, you don’t understand’ That’s all. I’m like ‘okay.’ I just agree because to argue with them it’s too long” (Olena, female, 19, born in Russia). Others reported worrying that they would be seen as traitors in some way for not being present in their countries during the conflict. Consequently, youths did not always feel entitled to have an opinion about the conflict(s), or at least to express it to people in their lives, peers in particular.

Being in Canada also created internal conflict for the youths. In most cases, they reported being happy to be away from danger and be safe. At the same time, there was also a sense of: (a) guilt and shame to be away; (b) feelings of helplessness and uselessness: “It makes me feel a little bit helpless and useless because I can’t really do anything about it” (Nick, male, 16, born in
Israel); and (c) worry about their family and friends. For some youths, this motivated them to take whatever action they could from afar in order to support their countries. For others, these feelings remained unresolved.

Youths also expressed being worried about the long-term effects of these conflicts on the views of people in Canada and worldwide. Specifically, youths worried about a potential rise in anti-Semitism and people developing a negative or pitying attitude about their country and/or identity. Nick described his concerns about the future:

A lot of these protests and the message that they’re spreading, a lot of what people around the world are getting from this conflict is that Israel is the aggressor, whether this may or may not be the case. I believe that this sentiment is spreading to Jews being aggressors. That’s the platform pushed for by Hamas and Israel’s enemies, that Jews are the enemies. But Jews can’t really be the enemy, because they’re not all in Israel and even those that are in Israel, they don’t control their country. But people believe in this and it’s really easy to hate a group of people and to scapegoat them. I’m afraid of something like 1930’s Europe repeating itself. (male, 16, born in Israel)

The Israeli-born and Canadian-born youths whose parents migrated through Israel were dealing with both the Middle Eastern and the Eastern European conflicts at the same time due to their familial ties to both countries. However, youths dealt with being in that position in different ways. Some reported only paying attention to one over another, whereas others expressed struggling with both. Their sense of connection to and knowledge of the different countries played an important role in which conflict they chose to follow and the impact the conflict had on them. Youths were more likely to be interested in, sided with, and affected by the conflict taking place in the country where they had relatives, whether it was Russia, Ukraine, or Israel.
This reflected the role of the family in filtering certain pieces of information and influencing which side the youths chose. However, at times youths also expressed confusion or uncertainty about the conflict(s) and which side to choose or what information to believe, as Nick described:

Any time something like this happens, I find myself in a difficult situation in terms of figuring out what I believe and what I stand for because there’s always two sides to a story. That’s what I’ve learnt. Both of them can have very compelling arguments at times. Also, on top of that, there are lies going around often, and because you don’t know if what you’re reading or hearing about is the truth or not, and it leads to a lot of confusion. (male, 16, born in Israel)

Particularly with the Eastern European conflict, there was a sense that both sides were corrupt and not to be trusted. As a result, some of the Israeli- and Canadian-born youths did not choose a side in this conflict, but considered the impact of the conflict on their Russian identity. This was despite the fact that their parents were not necessarily born in Russia and many of the parents were in fact born in Ukraine. Youths wanted to disentangle their own identities from how people viewed the country, Russia in particular:

The people that I’ve known, they don’t really like Russians that much because of the politics that’s going on. They think that all people that are Russian are with the president. Especially with the events that are going on now. So, I always emphasize that fact that I’m Jewish and I just speak Russian. (Anna-Lee, female, 17, born in Israel)

Seven youths expressed not being affected by one or both of the conflicts. The reasons focused on lacking an emotional connection to a particular country, not having family there, and being geographically far away. Youths stated that physical proximity to the conflict would have allowed them to be more active, would mean they would be more affected by it as well as more
used to it, and have more defined opinions about it. In addition, for some youths, the recurring nature of the conflict in the Middle East resulted in a desensitization to these conflicts.

**Immigration experiences.** Timing of migration, more than any other immigration factor, appeared to play a key role in the youths’ identity and belonging. Three aspects of temporality will be discussed: (a) age at migration of the youths themselves; (b) timing within the lives of their parents; and (c) historical context. The timing of migration in all three of these areas influenced knowledge of and connection to culture (how much they and/or their families carried over) and their identification and belonging.

The age at migration (the decimal-generation) for the youths and their length of residence within each country appeared to be important. Specifically, youths expressed a belief that their identities were formed in childhood, and no youth who moved after the age of five (generations 1.25 and 1.5) identified as Canadian, even when asked directly. They expressed feeling that their identities were already formed and would not change as a result of the move, even for those who have been in Canada for almost a decade. As Maggie, who has been in Canada since her early teens, explained:

I wouldn’t say I identify as Canadian just because I feel like to do that I would have to have been at the very least born in Canada. I still feel a very strong connection to my Ukrainian roots. So, I would maybe say I’m Ukrainian Canadian, but mostly I just say I’m Ukrainian. (female, 16, born in Ukraine)

Overall, youths in generation 1.75, who migrated at a younger age described experiencing the migration process as smooth because most of their development occurred primarily in Canada. This process appeared to be quite easy and natural and those who moved prior to school-age reported no challenges. As Nick described:
I think before elementary school, your personality doesn’t really develop that much, at least I feel that way…. That was the majority of my life, I spend the majority of my life in Toronto and that was the part, I think, me as a person developed the most. (male, 16, born in Israel)

However, youths who moved at an older age, particularly those in generation 1.25 who migrated during adolescence, experienced greater challenges around adjustment and socialization. Other areas that were challenging were: (a) the immigration system (e.g., lack of certainty, long process, happens suddenly); (b) financial challenges post migration and changes in socioeconomic status; and (c) the education system (e.g., studying in English, non-transferable education, and having to repeat grades). These challenges, along with the differences in mentality, resulted in a sense of shock, stress, depression, and being lost, for some youths and/or their parents. As Anita said of her first year in Canada: “I got into ESL, I got lots of friends, but still that shock didn’t go at all. I was shocked because of the mentality, so different, it is so different” (female, 16, born in Ukraine).

To cope with these challenges, youths developed various strategies. For example, they found services in their own languages, learned languages (either English or another language commonly spoken in their area, mainly Russian or Ukrainian), and sought out in-culture and out-culture friends to support them with their various culture and language related needs. Moreover, youths who migrated at a later age (generation 1.25) and directly from the FSU were exposed to their heritage culture prior to their arrival in Canada. On the other hand, youths who moved to Canada at a young age (generation 1.75) were exposed to their heritage culture(s) and to the national culture(s) at the same time, having to balance these from a young age. As John explained:
I feel like I didn’t really develop much of a character or a personality back in the Ukraine. So growing up I think I was developing both because I continued, with my parents, I continued to develop my Soviet Heritage and my Ukrainian heritage while in Canada. I was also developing the Canadian mentality of open mindedness. So I think it was more I was developing both at the same time versus having one and then suppressing it and developing another one stronger. (male, 17, born in Ukraine)

Similarly, youths born in Israel were exposed to the Jewish, Russian (as they call it), and Israeli cultures collectively and were not able to distinguish the unique contributions of each culture. As Anat explained: “I don’t know which ones [traditions] they had prior to Israel and which ones they didn’t so I don’t which one they actually got from Israel” (female, 16, born in Israel). Therefore, they felt that they brought not only the Jewish and/or Israeli cultures with them from Israel, but the Russian culture and language as well, because all were part of their socialization there.

Beyond age of migration of the youths, the timing of the parents’ migration was also important to consider. Fourteen youths described an indirect migration path for their parents through Israel. As a result, youths believed that their parents made decisions about what to impart to their children from each culture.

How old the parents were when this happened played an important role in their decisions around upbringing. Specifically, in the case of three of the four second-generation youths, their parents chose to maintain Hebrew and passed on the Israeli identity, overlooking the Russian one. These were also the only parents who grew up in Israel from a young age themselves, which likely played a role in their decisions.
Finally, the historical timing of the migration was significant, with some youths and their families leaving the FSU soon after the fall of the Soviet Union and others migrating to Canada within the last five years. This cohort difference is reflected in label choices, customs, and values that parents shared with their children. Furthermore, most youths whose parents left the FSU around 1990 referred to themselves as Russian regardless of the actual birthplace of their parents (e.g., Ukraine, Belarus), whereas more recent and direct immigrants were more specific about the country and culture within which they were born and highlighted the differences in identities. As Maggie explained:

There’s a lot of cultural differences between Russia and the Ukraine. Ukraine has been used by Russia in the past a lot so I don’t really like being associated with Russian. I don’t like being labelled as Russian just because... that’s not who I am. I don’t really have the history to describe myself as Russian because the Russian and Ukrainian experience are completely different. I think that the power dynamic between Russia and Ukraine is too strong and too present to really combine them, and to not distinguish them. So I say I’m Ukrainian. (female, 16, born in Ukraine)

Finally, the timing of migration in relation to the current political conflict was also a contributing factor to consider. Some youths who migrated right before the conflict in Eastern Europe felt like they were abandoning their family and friends (or worried about being seen as abandoning them). This is despite the fact that the conflict had not begun when they left, as Andrey described:

For some time I actually was kind of ashamed I was not there. I know my parents would kind of participated [sic]. They have these really strong political views, and they would probably take place and they would probably be somewhere there on the demonstration,
trying to do something, trying to change the way country lives. Since I wasn’t there for some little part, I was a bit shamed I’m being in another country right now. (male, 18, born in Ukraine)

Summary

In this chapter, I proposed a grounded theory of the identity and sense of belonging of Russian-speaking immigrant youths. These youths engaged in multidirectional processes of choosing and expressing identities, as well as fitting in. In order to engage in these processes, youths had to be able to reflect on the differences between countries, cultures, and identities, and made decisions about what to internalize, what to express, and where and with whom to fit in. Consequently, this resulted in multidimensional identities and a sense of belonging within one or more cultural and/or peer groups.

This capacity to tease apart cultures, identities, and groups required: (a) knowledge of and connection to these different elements; and (b) an ability to engage in critical reflection. These capacities were gained through a process of navigating the context. Specifically, parents, peers, and communities provided youths with information about and connection to their own, and other, cultures and identities. Moreover, youths had to navigate experiences around political issues (local and global) as well as their personal and familial migration histories (specifically, the timing of these). These not only provided youths with information and connection, but also with the critical thinking ability by providing youths a frame of reference and a point of comparison.

This process of navigating the context was multidirectional, with different components influencing the youths and one another, and with youths deciding what to take from each component, what not to take, and how to influence the context in return. This process was conscious or subconscious on the part of the youths.
At times, this process of navigating the context and consequently choosing and expressing identities, as well as fitting in, was positive and easy, whereas other times were more challenging and created internal and external conflict for youths. In accordance with the ecological view, resilience was reflected not only in the youths’ own ability to successfully navigate the context in ways that fostered successful adaptation around identity and belonging, but also in the context’s ability to provide the resources required for the youths to do so.
Chapter Four: Discussion

The present study extends our current understanding of the multidimensional acculturation experiences of Russian-speaking immigrant youths in Canada. Specifically, the primary goal of this study was to generate a substantive theory of their identity and sense of belonging, using a contextual and strength-based lens. A constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014) was used in conducting and analyzing semi-structured interviews with 24 youths between 15 and 19 years of age to explore their perspectives and experiences. The model was developed around two core aims: (a) to understand how youths make meaning of the multidimensionality of their identities and belonging experiences, and (b) to identify the contextual factors that play a role in the identity and sense of belonging of this population and how youths navigate these.

First, youths approached the multidimensionality of their identities and belonging through the core processes of choosing identities, expressing identities, and fitting in. Second, youths used input and resources from their social contexts, by engaging in a broader process of navigating the context. Five contextual factors were of particular importance for the youths in the current study: family (immediate and extended), peers (in- and out-groups), community (schools, neighbourhoods, and agencies), politics (national and international), and immigration experiences (timing in particular).

The processes that youths engaged in were dynamic and reciprocal and thus interacted with and affected one another. Choosing and expressing identities, as well as fitting in, influenced youths’ navigation of their context. In turn, as youths navigated their context, their identities and belonging were further altered. Moreover, the different components of the context may have impacted one another and the youths in ways that the youths did not have control over but had an effect on their identities and belonging.
Two issues need to be addressed before delving into the complexities of identity and belonging. First, past research found more struggles with adjustment for male versus female immigrant youths from the FSU to Canada (Anisef et al., 2002). However, the researchers focused on academic functioning, which was not examined in the current study. Also, factors such as the absence of a father figure and gender differences in peer relationships were hypothesized to play a role. In the current study, however, only one male youth had an absent father and there did not appear to be gender differences in relation to how boys and girls maintained relationships. In fact, the boys talked about the importance of connecting, relating, and opening up. Overall, the current study did not identify gender differences in the discussions of identity and belonging. The lack of gender differences may be due to the particular outcomes examined in the current study, the lack of equivalence between the number of male and female participants, and types of youths who would self-select to participate. Moreover, the results of the study are consistent with research with other populations that did not find significant gender differences in adjustment and ethnic identity (e.g., Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Yeh, 2003). Therefore, responses from male and female participants were discussed together.

The second issue is the context of age. Using definitions of adolescence based in identity research (Kroger, 2007), the current study did not find differences between the middle adolescent (15-17 years of age) and late adolescent (18-21 years of age) participants. This is likely due to the makeup of the sample, with only two late adolescent participants and all participants being in the same stage (high-school). Youths within the middle adolescent stage and high-school age range are considered to be similar to one another in their identity development, and are differentiated from early and later adolescents in the literature (Marcia, 1980; Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010).
In this chapter, I will discuss the results of this study within the context of the two aims identified, and by positioning them relative to previous research and theorizing in the field. Following this, I will discuss the limitations of the current study, as well as future directions and implications to both research and practice.

**Multidimensionality of Identity and Belonging**

Youths in this study revealed a multidimensionality of identity and belonging that would likely have been overlooked and/or oversimplified in past research on identity and acculturation. In this section, I will first discuss multidimensional acculturation. Then I will explore five specific identities that were of interest in the present study (Jewish and Christian identities, Russian identity, Canadian identity, Israeli identity, and white identity) along with youths’ experiences of belonging around these.

**Multidimensional acculturation.** Youths in the current study discussed label choices that fit outside of the bi-and tridimensional models of acculturation (Berry, 2007; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2014). In reflecting on their current identities, 15 of the 24 youths listed between three to four labels. These identities accounted for factors outside of their places of birth, residence, or citizenship (the factors commonly considered in bidimensional acculturation research). Instead, language, religion, upbringing, familial heritage, migration patterns, invisibility, identity denial, minority status, as well as familiarity with and connection to a community or culture were all factors youths highlighted. These factors affected not only whether youths chose certain identities (or components of identities and cultures), but also the salience of these in their lives.

In particular, there were differences in the salience of certain identities between Canadian and Israeli-born (or raised) youths, and the FSU born (or raised) youths. Specifically, the most salient identities for the Israeli-born youths (including the youth who experienced indirect
migration through Israel) were their Jewish and Russian identities, although these did not reflect their places of birth, or residence, and in the majority of cases, these did not reflect the birthplaces of their parents either. Similarly, for most of the Canadian-born participants, their Jewish identity was the most salient. However, for the FSU-born youths (including the youth who experienced indirect migration through the FSU), the most salient identity was the identity that corresponded to their own or their parents’ birthplace. Therefore, only the latter group followed the pattern assumed in the literature in their identification (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001).

Past research suggests that decimal-generation immigrant youths form their identity in the context of both acculturation to host culture and enculturation to heritage culture after immigration (Phinney, 1990). The model developed illustrates that there are greater complexities of the youths’ acculturation and enculturation process to multiple cultures simultaneously. For example, a Russian-speaking Ukrainian youth who migrated at the age of four was acculturating to mainstream Canadian culture (through country of residence and media), Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainian culture (through peers, school, and neighbourhood), and Catholic religion (through school), while enculturating to Soviet culture, Russian-speaking Ukrainian culture, and Orthodox religion (through parents). A Russian-speaking youth from Israel who immigrated at the same age was acculturating to mainstream Canadian culture and Christianity (through country of residence and media), as well as North American Russian culture, Jewish culture and religion (through ethnic enclave and school), while enculturating to Russian-speaking Soviet culture, Israeli culture, and Soviet and Israeli Judaism (through parents). These complex and multidirectional processes of acculturation and enculturation must be further explored among other immigrant groups.
The model created also demonstrated that identity is fluid and identity choice and expression may shift according to the situation. These results are consistent with past research; for example, Liu (2015) suggested that strategies of shifting identities according to the situation were particularly common among the 1.5-generation immigrants. Similarly, past research on multiracial individuals found that some youths held a situational identity whereby different elements of their identity become more salient, depending on the context (Renn, 2000, 2008). Thus, these results fit outside of the bidimensional and tridimensional models of acculturation which treat identity as a static element, reflective of acculturation.

Ferguson and Bornstein (2014) suggested that experiencing tridimensional acculturation could be either a challenge or risk, or a source of strength and resilience. In the current study, youths, for the most part, reported appreciating and valuing the multidimensional nature of their identities and felt that some aspects (e.g., speaking multiple languages) were particularly beneficial. Youths also believed that these identities were generally accepted in Canada, as well as in their own ethnic enclaves. The relatively small number of negative experiences around these multidimensional identities could be the result of the youths’ ethnic invisibility. Thus, youths were able to make decisions about labels, their expressions, and fitting in in ways that visible immigrants may not be able to. Moreover, many of the present youths spent most or all of their lives in Canada, and thus did not have to struggle with their multidimensional identities as immigrants coming to a new country and having to reconsider and reform their identities. Moreover, some of these identities were not only invisible but were also the majority identities (e.g., white, Christian), suggesting that there may have been less struggle around these overall. Finally, many of the youths lived in ethnic enclave and felt that their identities closely resembled those of their parents, both factors may have played a protective role in the lives of youths,
creating meaningful resources for them to negotiate and navigate (Ungar, 2011) in their acculturation processes.

**Jewish and Christian identities.** The present results are consistent with past research that suggest that the Jewish identity is the most salient one among Jewish immigrants from the FSU (Persky & Birman, 2005). This is likely due to the complexity of ethnic identity definitions in the FSU, as discussed in the Russian-Speaking Immigrants section of the literature review (Avrutin, 2007). Specifically, although the Jewish identity is typically considered to be a religious identity in North America, it was considered to be an ethnic identity in the secular Soviet Union. Consequently, the Jewish identity (like a Russian, Ukrainian, or Romanian identity) was identified as an ethnicity on passports. Similarly, the Jewish identity is viewed as an ethnic identity in Israel, and prior to 2002, it was identified as an ethnicity on all Israeli identity cards (Takana 6160).

Thus, it is important to consider not only multiple identities in future research (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014), but also how individuals make meaning of those identities. Specifically, in the current study, youths generally did not view the Jewish identity as a religious one, but as a cultural one. This is consistent with past research which found that most Jewish immigrants from the FSU do not practice Judaism and do not consider themselves religious (Remennick, 2006). Thus, definitions of Judaism are complex and largely socially and culturally constructed and bound (Persky & Birman, 2005). As a result, collapsing it with other religiously-based identities in research oversimplifies its complexity and does not account for the lived experiences and considerations of individuals holding these identities. Moreover, the differing definitions around the Jewish identity could influence individuals’ sense of belonging in various communities. For example, because the Jewish identity is primarily defined as a religious one in Canada, FSU and
Israeli-born youths who are not religious and view their identities as ethnic or cultural may feel insufficiently Jewish (Anisef et al., 2002). Such identity denial could result in them being treated as Russian first by other Jewish people, although it was not their most salient identity, consequently compromising their sense of belonging.

The Jewish identity was not the only religious identity highlighted in the present study. For many of the FSU-born youths, the Christian/Orthodox identity was salient, although the majority stated that they were not very religious. Unlike with the Jewish identity, there were no explanations on the separation between religion and culture, but youths still reported that although they were not very religious, religion was a part of their upbringing and informed many of the traditions currently practiced in their households. These youths came from countries in which the Christian identity was the majority and were now living in another country where this was also the case, albeit not the Orthodox identity specifically. Either due to this factor or to their reported relative lack of connection to this identity, they did not engage in complex reflections around the meaning of this identity in their lives. The only youths who did reflect on it at length were those who were moving away from religion and towards identifying themselves as atheist or agnostic. These youths discussed their changing views of religion and, in some cases, concerns regarding their parents’ reactions. This was similar for both the Jewish and non-Jewish participants, although the Jewish participants felt they could continue to identify as both because their Jewish identity was seen as cultural, whereas for the Christian/Orthodox youths, the two labels (atheist and Christian) were mutually exclusive.

These results are in line with past research that suggests that religious identity could be the most salient one among certain immigrant groups and thus must be examined further. Specifically, past research found that religious identity is particularly important to consider for
individuals who are entering the country as religious minorities (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014). This research has focused primarily on Muslim immigrants because they account for a large portion of immigrants in European countries (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014). Research with Muslim immigrants also found that their religious identity was often the most salient of their multiple identities (more so than their ethnic or host identities; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Moreover, this study is consistent with past research that suggests that an atheist identity is an important aspect of self and participation in the community for those individuals who identify with it (LeDrew, 2013; Smith, 2011). Thus, this identity must be examined further in future research.

**Russian identity.** Another difference between the Israeli- and Canadian-born immigrants versus the FSU-born immigrants was their views around the Russian identity. This was based on two factors: (a) timing of migration in relation to the fall of the Soviet Union and the current political conflict; and (b) minority versus majority status within the FSU. Specifically, the parents of the Israeli- and Canadian-born youths left the Soviet Union either before or very soon after its dissolution. During its existence, all citizens were considered to be Soviet, although they did have their own ethnic identifications, and the Russian language was the official language of the Soviet Union. Moreover, because the Jewish identity was considered to be an ethnicity in the Soviet Union, Jews were a minority in any former Soviet republic they lived in. They were unified by their Jewish identity, as well as by their Russian native language and Russian Soviet culture (Gold, 1994; Birman, Persky, & Chan, 2010). This connection to the Russian identity may be particularly strong for Russian-speaking, Jewish individuals who migrated through Israel due to their widespread status as Russians within that context. Thus, these elements around Russian culture and language were passed on to their children, all of whom identified as Russian in the current study.
However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its republics were re-established as countries and their individual cultures and languages were strengthened. Thus, immigrants leaving those countries years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not view themselves as Russian, but identified with the particular republics/countries they were from. Moreover, these individuals were members of the majority in the republics/countries where they lived and thus, even during Soviet times, maintained the same ethnic identification they continue to use now. In addition, as a result of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Ukrainian-born youths, in particular, sought to distance themselves as much as possible from the Russian identity, and often spoke of Russians in disparaging ways. The Jewish participants were more conflicted on this point, and sought to distance themselves from the politics of the region.

**Canadian identity.** The rates of identification with the Canadian identity in the present study were in line with past research with white immigrants, although it is important to note that the very small sample size used in the current study does not allow for an accurate comparison. Specifically, Reitz and Banerjee (2007) examined responses of various cohorts and generations of immigrants from the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey. The respondents were individuals 15 years of age and over and no youth specific results were reported in this study. They found that recent immigrants (in Canada for 10 years or less) were less likely to identity as Canadian (about equal rates for white and racialized immigrants, at 21.9% and 21.4%, respectively). However, among immigrants who were in Canada for 10 years or longer, 53.8% of white immigrants identified as Canadian, compared to only 34.4% of racialized immigrants. By the second generation, the rate of white immigrants identifying as Canadian increased to 78.2%, but remained at 56.6% for racialized groups. Overall, this research revealed that both first- and second-generation immigrants struggled with achieving a Canadian identity.
In the current study, only seven youths identified as Canadian when initially asked to identify the labels they would use to describe themselves. Of these, three were second-generation youths (75% of second-generation participants), and four were 1.75-generation youths (20% of decimal-generation participants). All of these youths who were in Canada for longer than 10 years accounted for 36.36% of the non-recent immigrant participants in the study. None of the participants who had been in Canada for 10 years or less identified as Canadian. When asked directly, the remaining second-generation youth and five more of the 1.75-generation youths who had been in Canada for 10 years or longer said they would identify as Canadian because they have lived in Canada for all or most of their lives. This accounted for all of the second-generation participants and 81.82% of the 1.75-generation participants.

However, two additional factors beyond length of time in Canada were important in the present study. First, immigrant generation was an important factor in the current study, although Reitz and Banerjee (2007) did not examine it. Specifically, no youths who moved after the age of five (generations 1.5 and 1.25) identified as Canadian initially or when asked directly. Moreover, none of the 1.25-generation youths reported a change in their identity since their move to Canada (they had been in Canada for three years or less). It is likely that a combination of age at migration and length of time in a country would play a role in identification; however, further research is needed to understand the interaction between these factors. Second, unlike past research, strength of identification was considered in the current study. By examining rankings, instead of allowing participants to choose only one label or a hyphenated label, this study accounted for youths’ complex understandings of their identities and their meaning-making around these. With regard to the Canadian identity, the values and makeup of their communities, as well as their hesitations around assimilation and their unidimensional view of the Canadian
identity, played a role in their lack of identification. Youths reported valuing Canada and experiencing a sense of belonging in Canada, in part because Canada’s multiculturalism policy allowed them to reside in ethnic enclaves and maintain their own cultures. However, they described being Canadian in narrow terms and, for the recent immigrants, as mutually exclusive with their ethnic identities.

Even among Canadian-born youths, the Canadian identity was never ranked first. This does not correspond with past research that suggests that successive generations will be more acculturated (e.g., Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). This could be the result of these youths being raised with a strong ethnic and/or religious identity, both within their families and within their ethnic enclave communities. Thus, immigrant generation alone may be not a predictor of acculturation and the context, including dominant cultural values and invisibility, must be considered in understanding acculturation levels.

However, it is also important to note that the construction of the question, the context of the study, and the focus on multiculturalism in Canada may have skewed the results. Specifically, participants may have provided the answers they thought were expected and downplayed their Canadian identity. Thus, this must be examined further in order to understand the factors that play a role in identification with the Canadian identity.

**Israeli identity.** One of the goals of the current study was to examine the role of indirect migration in identity and belonging. Although only three of the youths experienced indirect migration themselves, twenty eight of the parents moved to Canada through Israel. One youth were born in the FSU, and the rest in Israel and Canada. The identity and belonging of these youths reflected the role of indirect migration, particularly with regard to the Israeli identity. Specifically, only four out of nine youths born in Israel to FSU-born parents, and two of four
youths born in Canada to FSU-born parents who lived in Israel, identified as Israeli. However, all of these youths identified as Russian.

These results stress that indirect migration, even when not experienced by the youths themselves, creates complexity around identity and belonging and leads to a lack of identification with some identities that youths would be expected to identify with, alongside identification with unexpected identities. For most youths, not accounting for the indirect migration path of their parents would result in there being no explanation for certain aspects of their identification. Without an understanding of indirect migration, the Israeli identities of Canadian-born youths, as well as the Russian identities and lack of Israeli identities of Israeli-born youths, would all be unaccounted for.

Three factors in particular played a role in the reasons behind identification and belonging (or lack thereof) with the Israeli identity: knowledge of language, upbringing, and identity denial. The first two factors were closely connected. Specifically, the majority of Israeli-born youths did not speak Hebrew because they were taught Russian by their parents. The Canadian born youths who did identify as Israeli were fluent in Hebrew, but not in Russian, because that was the language chosen by their parents. Thus, parents made decisions about which language, culture, and identity to raise their children with, often based on their own comfort and familiarity. Language knowledge, in turn, impacted youths’ ability to participate in the corresponding communities and thus, affected their sense of belonging. Moreover, identity denial based on language, appearance, or Russian heritage all contributed to the reasons why some youths did not claim the Israeli identity.

White identity. Proportionally, more recent immigrants noted their white identity than those who had been in Canada for longer. This could be connected to their greater awareness of
racial diversity, which they had not encountered to the same extent in their birth countries prior to their arrival. This was in line with the expectations around the white identity of recent immigrants, specifically that it was an unexamined identity prior to migration and that it is a more noticeable identity within the broad context of Canada’s diversity, and in particular, within its immigrant population. However, although recent immigrants become more aware of their racial identity upon their arrival, this does not appear to have a negative impact on their adjustment and some even questioned why racial differences were highlighted in Canada. Some challenges around the white identity were predicted for the Jewish youths due to their past personal and familial experiences of discrimination and differences in definitions of whiteness. However, although youths reported no such challenges the majority of them youths also did not use the white label to describe themselves. Thus, a top-down assignment of this identity by the researcher may be problematic.

Overall, of the youths who mentioned their white identity, none appeared to struggle with it. In fact, it was either viewed as inconsequential, or as positive and protective from discrimination. Thus, some of the youths were able to recognize the privilege associated with their white identity and invisibility. Particularly for the Jewish youths, they were able to hide their Jewish identity behind their white identity, and passing as white was a way in which they navigated their context in order to experience safety.

**Contextual Factors in Identity and Belonging**

The second aim of the current study was to describe the factors that played a role in youths’ identity and belonging and how they navigated these. In this section, I will discuss how the results corresponded with the ecological lens used in the current study, followed by a
breakdown of youths’ experiences with the different contexts of their lives. Finally, I will connect youths’ experiences around identity and belonging to the need for social distinctiveness.

**The ecological lens.** The current study was framed using ecological views of both development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) and resilience (Ungar, 2008, 2011). First, the results of this study are consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) ecological theory of development in that youths were nested within an ecological structure with certain levels. The microsystem in this study was represented by parents, peers, and schools. The mesosystem was represented by the effects parents had on the social groups and schools of the youths. The exosystem was represented by the neighbourhoods. The macrosystem was represented by beliefs, laws, and customs, multiculturalism in particular. Finally, the chronosystem was represented through the consideration of the timing of migration experiences for youths’ and their families, as well as historical timing. As Bronfenbrenner suggested, the relationships between these various systems and the individual were reciprocal and they had an impact on overall child development.

The current study also extends Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) theory in several ways. First, the focus in the current study is on the subjective experiences of the participants and their own views and interpretations of their world, not on objective realities as understood by a researcher. Second, the current study considers developmental outcomes related specifically to identity and belonging. Third, the consideration of immigrants adds complexity to all levels of the ecological system as youths have to struggle with conflicting messages from different levels of the system as well as disruptions to different systems. Finally, the current study accounts for international political conflict and the effects of this on youths, an area which has not been sufficiently accounted for in the literature.
With regard to ecological resilience (Ungar, 2008, 2011), the results of the current study support the view that resilience is not a personal characteristic but an interaction between the individual and the environment. Moreover, diverse outcomes could represent resilience depending on the particular cultural context of the youth in question. Overall, the youths in this study reported experiencing feelings of well-being, although their identities and acculturation profiles varied. The current study also highlighted the two components of resilience (Ungar, 2011): navigation and negotiation. Specifically, parents, peers, communities, schools, and agencies provided youths with resources to help them with their enculturation and acculturation processes. In turn, youths navigated these resources, and negotiated their meaning in creating their sense of identity and belonging. Moreover, Ungar (2008) outlined four dimensions of resilience that were identified in the present study: individual, relational, community, and cultural.

The challenges youths reported were in line with past literature that suggests that Eastern European immigrants do not experience major challenges, and that the challenges that they do experience are often rooted in language difficulties, a sense of isolation from the broader community because of their residence in ethnic enclaves, and identity (Robila, 2010). This corresponds with several of the tensions Ungar and colleague (2007) identified, which the youths in the present study had to navigate: identity, cultural adherence, relationships, and cohesion. In dealing with these tensions, youths relied on their own critical thinking and reasoning skills, as well as on their parents, peers, and communities. Youths’ experiences in navigating and negotiating different aspects of their context (with regard to both tensions and resources) will be detailed next.
Parents, peers, and communities. In this section, I will explore the three closest and most influential factors on youths’ identity and belonging, primarily parents, peers, and communities, and the interwoven nature of their influence. Overall, the youths’ narratives suggest that parents engaged in decision making around the components of cultures and identities that they shared with their children, often based on their own comfort and familiarity. In this way, parents served as identity agents (Schachter & Ventura, 2008) through both direct and indirect means. Their direct influence was rooted in what they taught their children and shared with them within the home, whereas their indirect influence was through the choices they made about neighbourhoods, schools, and extracurricular activities for their children. Thus, although the parents were not examined directly, they appeared to meet Schachter and Ventura’s (2008) two criteria for identity agency, having: (a) an active role in the identity formation of another person, in whatever form that may take; and (b) reasons and practices associated with it. Although parents’ personal recognition of these was not assessed directly, youths’ narratives reflected an active role for parents in this area. Future research should directly interview parents navigating multiple cultures and/or experiencing indirect migration in order to further understand their decision-making around these and the impact on their own identities.

With regard to the acculturation gap, the present study was consistent with past research that found high congruence across domains of acculturation between parents and youths (Costigan & Dokis, 2006). In this study, gaps were identified only among immigrants who have been in Canada for the majority of their lives, and they reported greater acculturation to the host culture than their parents. However, similar to past research, even when youths exhibited this acculturation gap, it did not appear to be associated with negative outcomes for the majority of the youths or their families (Telzer, 2010). Some conflict was reported, but it appeared to be
associated with the general quality of the relationship between parents and their children (Rasmi, Chuang, & Henning, 2014), particularly around parents’ acceptance of their children’s differences.

A potential reason behind the relative lack of acculturation gaps between parents and youths could be their residence in ethnic enclaves. The move to an enclave could be viewed as a coping strategy by the parents to deal with the culture shock they experienced upon their move to Canada. This is consistent with past research that suggests that the collectivist ideology of FSU migrants may be a challenge in the more individualistic mainstream Canadian culture (Mirsky et al., 2002). Thus, moving to an ethnic enclave may fit with this focus on community and interdependence and thus be a protective factor. Moreover, the enclave also served as an indirect way through which parents ensured that the peers, schools, and communities of their children would, at least to some extent, participate in their enculturation and help maintain a connection to their heritage culture(s). For many youths, the culture within the home was similar to the culture outside the home, and thus this did not result in a significant gap between them. Furthermore, consistent with past research, the immigrant youths themselves used disclosure strategies (Yau, Tasopoulos-Chan, & Smetana, 2009) in order to avoid conflict with their parents around the gaps that did exist (particularly about religion).

With regard to their experiences with their peers, the results of the present study are consistent with past research that highlights the importance of homophily in friendships (McPherson et al., 2001). In past research, race and ethnicity were the strongest contributors, followed by age, religion, education, occupation, and gender. Youths in the present study did gravitate towards peers who shared an ethnic, cultural, religious, and/or linguistic background, as was found in past research with immigrants (Chiu et al., 2001). The similarity in upbringing and
the reduced barriers to socializing were the key factors in these decisions. However, in this study, youths also emphasized the importance of similarities in personalities and goals. These reflected shared interests, as well as similar attitudes around importance of education and long-term goals around occupation (McPherson et al., 2001).

One of the goals of the present study was to explore who second-generation youths would reach out to: mainstream youths, same culture youths, or decimal-generation youths. Although there were only four second-generation youths in the current study, they all either lived in or attended ethnic/religious communities or schools. Thus, their main in-groups tended to be of ethnically similar youths, whether Canadian-Jews, Israeli immigrants, or Russian-speaking immigrants. The groups of Canadian Jews tended to be composed of predominantly Canadian-born youths of Jewish descent, whereas the other two groups were composed of primarily decimal-generation immigrants. One youth also had a mixed group of decimal-generation immigrants, and was proud of his own contribution as an Israeli to the group’s diversity.

Another goal of the present study was to describe how youths with multidimensional identities chose relevant in-groups. The results revealed that the groups chosen tended to correspond to the youths’ strength of identification. Those who identified as Russian first, tended to prioritize a Russian-speaking group over other groups, same with those who identified as Jewish, Israeli, or Ukrainian. In some cases, youths’ other in-groups corresponded to their other identities, such that they had different groups with which they felt kinship around each of their identities separately. In other cases, groups were ethnically mixed and youths felt kinship based on a shared immigrant status or simply felt that the group was beneficial to them in some way, despite differences (e.g., learning English). The seven youths who did not have any groups with a shared ethnic/religious background nevertheless tended to have a group composed of decimal-
generation immigrants, or Eastern European immigrants. Thus, there was still a shared experience or minority status of some kind. These results extend our understanding of homophily, which could refer not only to a shared ethnic background, but to a shared immigrant background. Thus, youths chose both mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic in-groups. The relationship between strength of identification and peer group could reflect a reciprocal relationship between belonging and identity, as well as the role of peers as identity agents. These results are consistent with past research that found that the more youths are oriented towards a particular peer groups, the stronger that identity will be (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1998). These youths reported both active/direct and implicit/indirect roles for their peers (individuals and groups) in their identity formation. In some cases, peers exposed youths to certain cultural elements and deepened their experiences and understanding of their identities. In other cases, the mere fact that the identity was shared strengthened their connection to it because the identities could be talked about and acted upon on a daily basis without the youths actively noticing this happening. In this way, peers did appear to fulfill the two criteria for identity agency (Schachter & Ventura, 2008); however, interviews with the peers themselves would enhance our understanding of the meaning-making around the role of peers in relation to one another’s identity, and the bidirectionality of these interactions.

The present study did not find evidence that youths tended to have the same pattern of peer groups in and out of school, in terms of having only immigrant or not immigrant groups in both contexts (Svensson et al., 2011). Specifically, in the current study, youths appeared to create groups that would meet their needs in different settings, for example having an English-speaking group at school, and a Russian-speaking or Hebrew-speaking group outside of school. Stevenson and colleagues (2011) also suggested that adaptation problems may have led youths to seek
primarily immigrant peer groups. The present research does suggest that youths appreciated sharing a similar cultural background and language with their peers and that this alleviated some migration challenges around socializing. This tendency to rely on co-ethnic peers was particularly apparent among recent immigrants, and was consistent with past research (Ngo & Schleifer, 2005; Remennick, 2006). However, these youths also responded to these challenges by reaching out to English-speaking or other immigrant peers, demonstrating their resilience and ability to navigate their context and the resources it is able to offer based on their particular needs and challenges.

Past research also suggests that alienation from mainstream Canadian peers led to friendships being formed between Russian-speaking Jewish and non-Jewish youths (Anisef et al., 2002). These friendships did occur in the current study, but the reason did not appear to be active rejection by mainstream peers. At least in the GTA, Russian-speakers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, live in the same ethnic enclaves and these enclaves were where the peer relationships were formed. Perhaps the linguistic and overall Soviet cultural connection were more significant in the formation of these enclaves than religion alone.

In the current study, youths were interviewed about both their in-group and out-group peer experiences. Overall, youths’ comments about their out-groups were generally negative, even when the youths themselves did not have negative experiences with them. These negative comments served to highlight the positive aspects of the in-group and consequently, maintain a sense of positive distinctiveness and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tarrant, MacKenzie, & Hewitt, 2006). This was particularly true for youths talking about out-groups who shared an aspect of their identity, and reflected a need to distance themselves from them.
Overall, youths did not report many negative experiences of victimization by either their in-groups or out-groups. Youths discussed more experiences of indirect discrimination (hearing people make negative comments about one of their invisible identities) than direct discrimination. These results are consistent with past research that demonstrated that contemporary discrimination is typically more indirect or covert (Fishbein, 2002). For this particular population, this could be rooted in two factors: first, although their invisible identity did lead to some indirect experiences of victimization, it also allowed them to avoid some direct experiences by hiding their identity in different situations. Thus, youths engaged in an active process of identity management, around choice, expression, and fitting in. Second, it is possible that ethnic enclaves and schools protected youths from experiencing victimization and also from the negative consequences of the victimization they did experience, which has been found in past research (Coll et al., 1996; Tsai, 2006). Specifically, there were messages of pride communicated by parents, peers, schools, and communities that may have buffered the negative impact of the victimization experiences.

Although the overall experiences youths had with their in-groups were positive, youths did report some experiences of ethnic identity denial by their in-groups, which is a form of discrimination (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Specifically, they experienced being treated as insufficiently Jewish, Israeli, Russian, and Ukrainian based on various factors such as language, birthplace, heritage, physical appearance, and immigration. Similarly, youths also experienced Canadian identity denial by out-group peers, when comments were made about their accents, spoken language, or “Russian” appearance. These resulted in some sense of being caught between cultures and not quite fitting in within one or more of them. This was particularly
accurate for youths who did not (yet) feel Canadian if their ethnic identity was in some way denied to them.

Despite these challenges youths experienced in their peer context, the negative experiences with their out-groups peers did not appear to result in a reactive ethnic identity (Rumbaut, 2008). Similarly, the few negative in-group experiences (between immigrant generations or between different in-groups a youth was a part of) did not appear to be associated with a reactive national identity. Moreover, the one experience of intra-cultural discrimination between immigrant generations reported did not appear to have an effect on the youth’s own identity, but it led him to discredit the legitimacy of the Ukrainian identity of the discriminatory youths who have been in Canada for longer.

Lastly, most youths in the current study did report extensive socializing with their peers using technology. However, their online socializing was with their in-real-life friends, suggesting that the online and offline worlds are closer than is often assumed. Moreover, the present study supports past research that found that online communication with peers enables in-person clique and crowd membership (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In some cases, youths did report meeting their friends online first, or that creating an online group for offline friends had an impact on group membership in-real-life. In this way, online interactions with peers did facilitate a sense of belonging, both on- and offline. Moreover, some youths also explored their identities online, particularly around the atheist identity, demonstrating that online interactions could also contribute to identity formation (Larsen, 2007).

Political context. For the political context, these youths discussed both national and international politics. For national politics, the focus was on Canada’s multiculturalism policies, which were viewed in a positive light. Youths stated that they felt more accepted and able choose
whether to practice their cultures/religions in Canada as a result of these policies. This is in line with past research that suggests that multiculturalism policies have societal and individual benefits (Berry & Sam, 2014). Societally, this leads to greater understanding and acceptance of diversity, and individually, it provides immigrants with greater access to cultural resources through their participation in two or more communities. These policies also enable stronger ethnic identification, which has been found to be a protective factor for immigrants in past research (Stodoloska, 2008). However, costs could be associated with such policies as well, in particular around a potential reduction in national unity (although ethnic and national identities are not mutually exclusive).

In the current study, youths, at times, reported feeling isolated from the broader Canadian culture, and did not express pride in their own Canadian identity (if it was claimed at all). However, youths did express appreciation for Canada itself and most viewed it not only favourably, but as the most influential component of their development (in comparison to other place where they lived). Thus, it may be that identifying as Canadian is only one component of engagement in society and national unity. Positive views of Canada and productive participation in Canadian society could also be considered to be elements of cohesion, even when the Canadian identity is not salient, as long as there is no active rejection of, or conflict around, the Canadian culture or identity.

For international politics, the focus in the current study was on the political conflicts in Eastern Europe, between Russia and Ukraine, and in the Middle East, between Israel and the Palestinian territories. Both conflicts intensified in the summer and fall of 2014 when the interviews were conducted. Although these particular crises were new, both conflicts have significant historical roots and important implications for both current citizens and members of
the diaspora. The impact of war on mental health is well documented (e.g., Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006), and is a concern in addressing the needs of immigrants in Canada (Stermac, Brazeau, & Kelly, 2008). However, past research has focused on war experiences as a pre-migration factor in well-being, which overlooks the impact of ongoing or new conflict in heritage country on the well-being of individuals who are residing abroad. Thus, this study sought to examine this important area of research.

Overall, youths reported having mixed feelings about the conflicts. Specifically, although the majority stated that they were happy to be in Canada and far away from the wars, there was also a sense of worry for their families and friends, along with some guilt over being far away and unable to do more. Youths did express that if they were closer to the conflicts, they would be more engaged. However, even from afar, they participated in conversations (online and offline) and demonstrations to show their support. The two most significant factors in determining which conflict the youths felt most impacted by were which countries they had more personal ties to (by virtue of having friends or relatives there) and which conflict their parents were more interested in. Similarly, the countries they supported within each conflict were influenced by these factors as well. Youths born in Israel and Canada to FSU-born parents expressed greater complexity in choosing sides in the Eastern European conflict, and tended to distance themselves from it because of the internal conflict between their parents’ birthplace (majority from Ukraine) and their identification (Russian). Thus, country of birth alone did not determine which conflict the youths followed, supported, or were most impacted by. Particularly for the children of indirect immigrants, most reported knowing more about, and being more influenced by, one conflict than the other, despite the fact that the majority had some ties to both.
The conflicts did not appear to have the negative impact on mental health as reported in past research (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006), likely because the youths did not experience the conflicts first-hand. However, they did influence their identity and belonging. For belonging, youths felt that the conflicts had a unifying effect on their communities, and that previous challenges around fitting in or belonging (such as being a Russian-speaking Ukrainian, or an Israeli with Russian heritage) were now overlooked. However, in some cases, the recent immigrant youths reported that their friends back home treated them differently because they left. Thus, although they experienced a sense of belonging with other immigrants from the same group in Canada, they lost some of their sense of belonging with their communities in their birth countries. The conflicts also resulted in some sense of isolation from the general Canadian population, as well as from certain immigrant groups (Ukrainians from Russians and vice versa, and Israelis from other Middle-Easterners and vice versa). Thus, the divisions between in-groups and out-groups became more significant.

Focusing on their identities, youths expressed a great deal of pride in the countries they supported and the corresponding identities. Specifically, the Ukrainian-born youths expressed pride in their Ukrainian identity, the Russian-born youths in their Russian identity, and the Israeli- and Canadian-born youths in their Jewish and/or Israeli identities. However, these children of indirect immigrants did not express pride in their Russian identities. For these youths in particular, there were concerns about the negative views of others on their Russian identity. Youths also expressed concerns about being treated differently because they are members of certain groups and that the conflicts would have a negative impact on them as a result, such as a rise in anti-Semitism or a pitying attitude. Although they did describe some incidents of questions and fears in interactions with others, there were no outward experiences of
victimization. This could be in part because of the protective nature of their ethnic enclaves where they rarely had to interact with people outside of their own in-group. Taken together, these results demonstrate the importance of considering the impact of political conflict in birth country on immigrants, both in relation to their connection to their birth country, and the host country.

**Social distinctiveness.** The processes around choosing identities, expressing identities, fitting in, and navigating that context that I constructed from the interviews may reflect a way of maintaining positive group distinctiveness and thus a positive identity and belonging according to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Immigrants experience threats to their cultural identity, belonging, and self-continuity (Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown, & Zagefka, 2014). In response to these threats, immigrants may engage in the identity management strategies detailed in SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), including: (a) individual mobility (dis-identification with the in-group or in this case, passing as white); (b) social creativity (changing the comparative situation by changing the comparative group or the dimensions of comparison); or (c) social competition (direct competition with the out-group, in this case, mainstream Canadians).

For individual mobility, although these youths often did not claim the Canadian identity, they did benefit from their ability to “pass as Canadians,” and not express their ethnic, cultural, and/or religious identities when they did not feel comfortable. Moreover, some youths experienced members of their different in-groups commenting negatively about one another or immigrant generations discriminating against one another. Both could be viewed as examples of social creativity, whereby instead of competing with mainstream Canadians, the members of those groups chose to compete with other minority groups over which they felt they had more power, and where competition would allow them to maintain positive group distinctiveness and
social identity. This is also apparent in the aftermath of the political conflicts with groups competing with one another (e.g., Russians versus Ukrainian) instead of with mainstream Canadians. Similarly, living in ethnic enclaves could be viewed as a way of avoiding direct competition with the mainstream Canadian out-group and maintaining positive distinctiveness and social identities (Schwartz et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the choice and expression of identity labels appeared to serve the purpose of highlighting these youths’ minority identities (e.g., Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Israeli) over their majority identities (e.g., Canadian, white). This may have reflected their desire to fit into their minority culture and community, and be different from the majority culture and community. Consequently, even out of the youths who claimed the Canadian identity, only one ranked it first, and only for his internal identification, stating that externally he would still present his Ukrainian identity first as that is what is expected of him in his context.

This tendency to highlight a certain minority identity was also apparent in the reversal of Jewish and Russian identities for some Israeli-born immigrants, as well as the emphasis of the Jewish identity among Canadian-born immigrants. These results are consistent with past research that reveals that Russian-speaking immigrants tend to highlight the identity they view as most advantageous in the context they live in, and thus in Israel such immigrants tend to highlight the Russian identity, and in Canada the Jewish one (Laitin, 2004).

**Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications**

Although the current study extends the literature in several areas, it is not without its limitations or possibilities for future research. In this section I will discuss the limitations, future directions, and implications of the current study.
Limitations. The primary limitations in the current study were: (a) the use of single informants; (b) youths’ retrospective experiences; (c) the sampling procedures and lack of balance within the sample; and (d) the impact of the interviewer’s identity on participants.

With regard to the single informant issue, the current study sought to examine the context of the youths, and although the youths’ meaning-making around this was explored, it would be interesting to also examine the parents’ and peers’ perceptions of their active role in the youths’ identity and belonging. Future research should explore the views of other informants and compare and contrast these to the views of the youths’ themselves to understand the role of both similarities and discrepancies in the outcomes for the youths. However, since there is a dearth of research in this area, it is important to have a greater understanding of the lives of the youths first, before delving into other complexities and/or informants.

The current study was also retrospective in nature, particularly in ranking identities in different countries and discussing immigration experiences. This was not an issue for some of the youths because their immigration experiences were recent and they were already adolescents with an understanding of their identities when these happened. Moreover, the retrospective nature of the interviews allowed participants to describe their own experiences and shifting understandings over time, which was a strength of this study. However, the migration experiences of some of the youths occurred when they were very young (before the age of four), and the identities they reported were often their assumptions or theories about how they would have (or their parents would have) identified at that time. Thus, this may not capture the shifts in identity for these youths because they were too young when they immigrated. Longitudinal research examining pre- and post-migration experiences would also be beneficial in exploring these changes.
For sampling procedures, youths were recruited through both word of mouth and agencies, which referred more recent immigrants, differentiating the two groups from one another. Moreover, most recent immigrants came from FSU and long-time immigrants from Israel. The settings that youths were recruited from may be unique due to the existence of such ethnic enclaves in the Greater Toronto Area where there are large populations of Russian-speaking and Jewish immigrants. However, ethnic enclaves and schools may not be available in other regions and thus may be somewhat unique to this sample. Furthermore, the current study did not have equivalent numbers of boys and girls, Jews and Christians, recent and non-recent immigrants, middle and late adolescents, decimal- and second-generation immigrants, or direct and indirect immigrants. Such equivalence would have been difficult to achieve for a qualitative study because of the small sample size. However, future research could compare the experiences of youths in these different categories, and the intersections among these, in order to further elaborate the model. Finally, the youths in the current study self-selected to participate and perhaps youths who were better adjusted and more reflective were more likely to participate in such a study. Social desirability bias may have also played a role in the youths’ reporting of few negative experiences and overall portraying themselves in a positive light.

The final major limitation of the study was in the role that my own identity played during the interviews. Specifically, the gender of the interviewer has been found to have an effect on the interview process, particularly in the case of a female interviewing male participants (Pini, 2005). However, this was a more significant issue when the topic of research was related to gender or sex. The topic of the current study was not connected to either of these two topics. Second, the age of the interviewer, being an adult interviewing teens, has also been found to be a challenge in past research (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman, 2008). Thus,
efforts were made to increase the comfort level of the youths through the opening statements of the interview and the collaborative nature of the first portion of the interview. Finally, the ethnic/religious background of the interviewer may have also impacted participants’ responses. All of the youths knew that I was Russian-speaking because I offered the options of translations in the introduction to the interview. Some of the youths knew or guessed my other identities (based on my appearance, accent, etc.), and although these were not revealed until after the interviews (if participants were curious) they it may have still had an impact on how youths identified or described their identities. However, matching the ethnicity of the interviewer to that of the interviewees has been suggested as an important strategy to provide a more equal and culturally sensitive context for the collection of accurate information (Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002).

**Future directions.** The current study provided insight into the role of the context in the multidimensional identity and belonging of Russian-speaking immigrant youths. This study was among the first to examine this process of multidimensional acculturation. Building on the present results, future research should examine multidimensional acculturation among other immigrant groups, including those who were ethnic minorities in their countries of origin, those who experienced indirect migration, and those who are ethnic minorities within their host countries. Moreover, in 1989, in the last census conducted in the FSU, its population was 286,717,000 (Dewdney, 1990). The residents of, and immigrants from, the 15 republic that constituted the FSU have complex identities, between their religious, ethnic, and national identities, which should be explored further, especially in light of the current political conflict in the region. It would be of interest to explore the different contextual components that impact acculturation, identity, and belonging in various populations.
With regard to indirect migration, research should further examine the impact on the individuals who experience this migration path, in comparison to their descendants, and how these paths may impact personal and familial experiences of enculturation and socialization. It would be of particular interest to compare the experiences of those who never planned to stay in the intermediate country, versus those who did, and how the reasons for any subsequent migrations impacted acculturation experiences, particularly around identity and belonging.

Furthermore, future research should examine the role of the quality of the relationship between parents and youths and its role in acculturation gaps and identity agency, from the perspectives of both youths and their parents. Similarly, future research should explore bidirectionality in, and quality of, relationships between youths and their peers, and the experiences of youths who are similar on one dimension of identity (e.g., Russian) but different on another (e.g., religion) and how they facilitate one another’s identity formation in both. Finally, the present study showcased the role of political conflict in countries of origin on immigrants even when they do not experience it directly. This factor must be further explored in the literature, particularly in examining the experiences of individuals with split or multiple loyalties and how they navigate these.

Implications. Despite resources that are available to immigrant youths and their families, they still face some challenges, particularly around language, identity, and belonging. Settlement and community agencies have provided youths with resources to assist in their adjustment (Chuang, Rasmi, & Friesen, 2011). Such agencies could also support them in fostering relationships with parents, co-ethnic youths, and diverse youths as all of these were found to be factors in the resilience of the youths in the current study. Moreover, these programs could be strength-based instead of focused on the deficits of immigrant youths, such as their challenges
with language acquisition or academics. Instead, program could focus on their unique strengths and capabilities and the resources provided to them by their families and ethnic communities. In addition, they should account for the complexities in youths’ identities and belonging, and allow youths to explore the multidimensionality of these, treating it as a benefit and not a liability. Furthermore, the needs of indirect immigrants (and their descents) and of different immigrant generations may vary, and services should be tailored to their particular experiences.

Moreover, these results indicate the importance of research accounting for multidimensionality and moving away from using quantitative measure to assess bidimensional acculturation, using birth and host countries as proxies. Individuals should be allowed to not only select their own identity labels, but to define these and express their meaning-making around them.

Finally, the results of the current study suggest that there may be a social and cultural need to redefine what the Canadian identity means and discard the narrow one-dimensional views that privilege a small segment of the current Canadian population. Immigrants need to be able to see the multidimensionality not only of their own identities but of the Canadian identity itself, allowing them to interpret their own ethnic/cultural/religious identities as part of the global Canadian identity and not as separate from it. Such a shift would not only facilitate the integration of immigrants, but could also create greater cohesion in the identity and belonging of all residents of this country.

Conclusions

The current study sought to understand the role of context in youths’ multidimensional identity and sense of belonging. The results of the current study highlight the limited nature of the current bi- and tridimensional acculturation models, which do not account for the complexity
and dynamic nature of the immigrants’ experiences. In the current study, youths exhibited complex reasoning processes in choosing identities, expressing identities, and fitting in. Moreover, their identities and experiences of belonging were fluid and situational (Renn, 2000, 2008), reflecting the importance of considering the factors that impact such shifts instead of treating identity and belonging as static.

Furthermore, the model created illustrates that experiences of acculturation and group interactions are dynamic processes that depend not only on choices made by immigrants around identification and expression of identities and belonging, but also on the reception of these by their context, whether it is the mainstream out-group, or other minority out-groups. Thus, when considering acculturation, not only individual choices and experiences, but also the context within which these take place, must be examined (Schwartz et al., 2014). In considering context, research must expand beyond exploring the roles of the micro- and mesosystems, and towards accounting for exo-, macro-, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) in identity and sense of belonging of immigrant youths.

Finally, these results also highlight the importance of considering migration path and immigrant generation in research on acculturation, identity, and belonging. Specifically, immigrants who experienced indirect migration, as well as their children, are navigating a more complex network of cultural and identity components, as well as potential in- and out-groups. Although these immigrants account for about 13% of all immigrants to Canada in the last 30 years (Agrawal, 2015), there is a dearth of research on their experiences and these must be examined further.

Finally, with regard to immigrant generation, the results of the current study indicate that length of time in Canada alone is a not a sufficient factor when considering identity and
belonging. Decimal-generation youths differed from one another in their patterns, with only 1.75-generation youths claiming the Canadian identity, and no 1.25-generation youths reporting changes to their identity after their move to Canada. These results highlight the importance of not grouping all foreign-born individuals into one, first-generation group, but considering decimal generations in acculturation research.
References


and social cohesion: Potentials and challenges of diversity (pp. 69-87). New York, NY: Springer.


Table 1

Demographics and Identity Rankings by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Time in CAN (^d) (years)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Immig. Gen.º</th>
<th>Birth Country</th>
<th>Intermediate Country</th>
<th>Host Country (Canada)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liron</td>
<td>M(^1)</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna-Lee</td>
<td>F(^2)</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Jewish</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anat</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Jewish &gt; Israeli</td>
<td></td>
<td>Russian &gt; Jewish &gt; Israeli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Israeli &gt; Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Israeli &gt; Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Russian = Israeli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Israeli &gt; Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Israeli/Jewish &gt; Canadian &gt; Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Israeli &gt; Jewish &gt; White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Russian &gt; Jewish/ Atheist &gt; Israeli &gt; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Orthodox &gt; White</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Orthodox &gt; White (^a)</td>
<td>White &gt; Russian &gt; Atheist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Ukrainian &gt; Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ukrainian &gt; Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Atheist &gt; Ukrainian &gt; White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ukrainian &gt; Atheist &gt; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>White &gt; Russian &gt; Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Russian- Ukrainian &gt; White &gt; Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>Time in CAN (years)</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Immig. Gen.*</td>
<td>Identity Rankings</td>
<td>Host Country (Canada)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Ukrainian &gt; Christian</td>
<td>Ukrainian &gt; Agnostic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Ukrainian or Russian</td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Russian (^b) Russian &gt; Atheist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>Canadian &gt; Soviet &gt; Ukrainian &gt; Orthodox Ukrainian &gt; Canadian &gt; White &gt; Orthodox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Ukrainian = Orthodox</td>
<td>Ukrainian &gt; Christian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Orthodox &gt; Russian &gt; White</td>
<td>Orthodox &gt; Russian &gt; White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Russian &gt; European &gt; Christian</td>
<td>Russian &gt; European &gt; Christian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Orthodox &gt; White</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Orthodox &gt; White (^c) Atheist &gt; Russian &gt; Canadian &gt; White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Romanian &gt; Orthodox</td>
<td>Romanian &gt; Orthodox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Israeli &gt; Canadian &gt; Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jewish &gt; Canadian &gt; Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jewish/Israeli &gt; Canadian &gt; Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Russian &gt; Jewish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Identity changes are highlighted in yellow; *Immigrant generation

\(^a\) Former Soviet Union \(^b\) Israel \(^c\) United States \(^d\) Canada;

\(^1\) Male \(^2\) Female
Figure 1. Conceptual model for the formation of identity and belonging of Russian-speaking immigrant youths.
Appendix A: Consent Form

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

Consent to Participate in Research

PROJECT TITLE: The World You Live In

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jenny Glozman and Dr. Susan Chuang, from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph. The results of this study will contribute to a dissertation.

If you have any further questions regarding this project or this consent form, please contact me at jglozman@uoguelph.ca or 416-951-6337. My Faculty Advisor, Dr. Susan Chuang, may be contacted at schuang@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120 ext. 58389 or write: Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, Macdonald Institute, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study will explore the peer context of Russian-speaking immigrant youth in Canada. We wish to investigate the challenges and benefits of interacting with friends and peers as an immigrant and/or second-generation adolescent from Russian-speaking families. We will examine how experiences in the peer context influence how youth feel about themselves and where they feel like they belong. Your participation will provide greater understanding into the experiences and challenges of immigrant youth in Canada.

PROCEDURES

You are eligible to participate in this study if you identify as coming from a Russian-speaking family, are in grades 10 to 12, were born outside of Canada and/or if one or both of your parents were born outside of Canada.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You will be asked to participate in two interviews. The first will focus on your and your family’s migration experiences and will last approximately 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The second interview will focus on your friendships and will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. Only the researcher and participant will be present during both interviews. The questions will include your and your parents’ immigration history and your friend and peer experiences.

The interview will take place in your home or in a location of your choosing. Skype on phone interviews may also be used. The entire interview will be tape-recorded. One parent/guardian
must be present in this location while the interview takes place. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of your responses.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The risks to you of participating in this study are minimal such as the loss of the time spent participating in the study. The questions that you will be asked are minimally intrusive. Also, some questions may cause discomfort (for example we are asking questions about unpleasant peer experiences). If this happens, you can take a break at any time. You are free to refuse to answer any questions. Please feel free to ask questions about the research and I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail if you wish. If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The benefit of this research is to develop a better understanding of the friend and peer experiences of immigrant youth in Canada. Little is known about the experiences of Russian-speaking youth. Participation in this study will provide an opportunity to reflect on your friend and peer relationships, which you may find interesting.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

For the first interview, participants will receive $30 for their participation. For the second interview, participants will receive $20.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Only my advisor and myself will know your identity. All participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a secure room with access limited to the researcher and the advisor. Data will be destroyed five years following completion of this study. You will be assigned an identification number and reference to you will be by number only. So, your name will not appear anywhere and no one will know about your specific answers except my advisor and myself. All findings will be reported as a group, and not individually.

Every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of participant’s answers. No information will be disclosed to anyone outside of the research team (including parents and/or peers) to the extent allowable by law.

Audio recordings will be made on a password protected recorder and downloaded to a secure location within 24 hours. Once recordings have been transcribed, they will be destroyed.

For publications, your identity will be kept private. Code numbers will be assigned to each participant’s interview and pseudonyms will be used for names and geographic locations. Selected quotations from written transcripts may also be included in the results section of the final research report. A pseudonym or a general descriptors of age and gender will be used to identify these, for example, a 14-year old boy stated, “…”.
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 negative consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study for a period of up to two weeks following participation. If you choose to withdraw from the study within this two week period, your data will be erased permanently. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and 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 may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Director, Research Ethics; Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606; E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I have read the information provided for The World You Live In study as described herein. 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.

Participant’s Name  Participant’s Signature  Date
__________________  ____________________  ______________

Parent/Guardian Name  Parent/Guardian Signature  Date
__________________  ____________________  ______________

Researcher’s Signature  Date
__________________  ____________________
1) What pseudonym would you like us to use when discussing our findings?
______________________________

2) Would you be willing to be contacted in case follow-up questions arise?

□ Yes  □ No If YES, Phone number: _________________

3) Would you like to receive a copy of the write-up once the research is completed?

□ Yes  □ No If YES, Home or email address:
______________________________

I understand that participation in research takes time and effort. I appreciate your invaluable contribution to this project. Thank you!
Appendix B: Background Questionnaire

Listed below are a number of questions about you, your family, and your past experiences. Please answer the questions as best you can. There are no right or wrong answers.

Family structure may vary from family to family. In terms of most relevance to your life, please choose the parents that you consider as “mother” and “father”.

All of the information is CONFIDENTIAL and will only be used for the purposes of this study. Each person will be assigned an identification number and all data will be used according to the identification number. Results will be reported in group form only.

ID: ___________

Your first name: ___________________________ YOUR AGE: ___YEARS ___ MONTHS

Mother’s age: ___YEARS ___ MONTHS

Father’s age: ___YEARS ___ MONTHS

Sibling(s): 1. age: ___YEARS ___ MONTHS

Sibling(s): 2. age: ___YEARS ___ MONTHS

Sibling(s): 3. age: ___YEARS ___ MONTHS

Gender (circle one): Female Male Other

City: ___________________________ Postal code: ___________________

Cell phone number: ___________________________ Email: ___________________

What pseudonym would you like us to use when we report our findings? ___________________
ID: __________ Date: _________________

**Background Information Summary**

1. What grade are you in now? (circle one) 10 11 12 12+

2. How many students are in your grade? (circle one) <50 51-99 100-200 200-400 >500

3. Is your school: (circle one)
   a. Public  Private  Semi-Private
   b. All boys  All girls  Mixed
   c. Religious?  Yes  No  If yes, what kind? _________________________

4. For your current household, please list each person who lives with you on a **regular** basis, and provide the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials (first letter of first and last name)</th>
<th>Relationship to you</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education *see scale below</th>
<th>Employment *see scale below</th>
<th>If employed, job title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Educational Scale
1) Less than 7th grade
2) 7th, 8th, or 9th grade
3) Some high school
4) High school graduate or GED (indicate which one)
5) Some college (at least 1 year completed); or completed a specialized training
6) Standard college or university (BA, BSc, etc.)
7) Graduate professions degree (MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD etc.)
8) Don’t know
9) Not applicable

* Employment scale
a) Working full-time
b) Working part-time
c) Not working and looking for work
d) Disabled and not looking for work
e) Not working and not looking for work
f) Retired
g) Full-time student
h) Part-time student
i) Don’t know
j) Not applicable
5. What job(s) do you currently hold?
   (job) ________________________________ □ paid □ volunteer _____ hours/week
   (job) ________________________________ □ paid □ volunteer _____ hours/week
   (job) ________________________________ □ paid □ volunteer _____ hours/week

6. Do your parents rent or own their home?
   □ Rental apartment □ Rental condo □ Owned condo
   □ Rental house □ Owned house □ Don’t know

7. Are your parents…
   □ Married □ Common-law □ Separated □ Divorced □ Widowed
   □ Re-married □ Single-parent (circle one): mother father □ Other: __________

8. Place of Birth: Mother: City: ________________ Country: ________________
   Father: City: ________________ Country: ________________
   You: City: ________________ Country: ________________
   Sibling(s): City: ________________ Country: ________________
   City: ________________ Country: ________________
   City: ________________ Country: ________________

9. Do your parents live in Canada full-time?
   Mother: □ Yes □ No   Father: □ Yes □ No

   Cultural Background

10. People are often described as belonging to a particular cultural background. How would you
    describe yourself in terms of your race, ethnicity, and religion? That is, to which group(s) do
    you think you belong?
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________

11. What does it mean to you to belong to these groups? How do you feel about being a part of
    this group?
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
ID: __________ Date: __________________

**Language**

12. What languages do you know? *List all.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Where did you learn this language?</th>
<th>Can you?</th>
<th>How often do your parents speak to you in this language? <em>see scale below</em></th>
<th>How often do you speak to your parents in this language? <em>see scale below</em></th>
<th>Do you speak it with any of your peers?</th>
<th>If yes, to whom and how often?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLE:</td>
<td>From my parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother: □ Read □ Write □ Speak</td>
<td>□ Read □ Write □ Speak</td>
<td>□ Read □ Write □ Speak</td>
<td>□ Read □ Write □ Speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td></td>
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<td>□ Read □ Write □ Speak</td>
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* Language Use Frequency Scale

1) Never  2) Rarely  3) Occasionally  4) Most of the time  5) All the time
### Friendships

13. Who are your top 10 friends?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race, Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion</th>
<th>When did you first meet him/her? (city, country)</th>
<th>Where did you meet him/her? (city, country)</th>
<th>Current location? (city, country)</th>
<th>How often do you generally see/talk?</th>
<th>How do you stay in-touch with this friend? (check all that apply)</th>
<th>Describe this friend with 3 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Male</td>
<td>□ Female □ Other □ Other</td>
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<td>□ Male □ Female □ Other □ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Of these, please rank your top three friends:
   a. ______________________________
   b. ______________________________
   c. ______________________________

15. Why did you rank them in this way?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
### Appendix C: Immigration Timeline

**You:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Parent:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Parent:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix D: Interview Guide

Hi. As you know, my name is Jenny Glozman and I’m a graduate student at the University of Guelph.

I want to thank you again for volunteering to participate in this interview. Before we begin, I wanted to let you know that this is volunteer and that you can stop at any time, or not answer certain questions. There will be no negative consequences to doing this. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. You can take a break at any time.

I just want to know about your experiences in Canada, as well as your country where you were born, and other countries that you may have lived. I am greatly interested in your experiences and views about your peers so I’ll be asking you about this.

Because I’ll be asking you questions, I can’t write fast enough and so I would like to voice-record this interview. Then I can transcribe this interview word for word.

Is this OK?

Do you have any questions?

OK. Let’s begin. *(Turn on recorder; state date)*
**Immigration Timeline**

First we are going to talk about your immigration experiences.

This is a timeline that starts when you were born and stops at the age you are at now.

- Mark year and place of birth (city, country) on timeline.
- Mark age, year, and current location (city, country) on timeline.
- Now, let’s mark all the cities and countries that you moved to and how old you were when that happened.

Next, we will do the same for your parents. To the best of your abilities, let’s mark:

- Year and place of birth (city, country) on timeline for each parent.
- Age, year, and current location (city, country) on timeline for each parent.
- All the countries they moved to and how old they were when that happened.

*Note: for second generation youths, only ask about parental immigration timeline*

**Parental Migration experiences**

*(Note: repeat questions 1-5 for each migration their parents experienced)*

1. Whose idea was it to move? Why did they want to move?
2. Who moved there with them?
3. Was there anyone who came after them?
4. Was there anyone who stayed behind?
5. What are some beliefs, customs, traditions, food, music, language/expressions that your parents have shared with you that you think they learned in country x?

**Personal migration experiences**

*(Note: repeat questions 6-13 for each migration they personally experienced)*

6. Whose idea was it to move? Why did they want to move?
7. Was there anyone from your family who moved there before you? Why did they move before you?

8. Who moved there with you? Why were these the people who moved there with you?

9. Was there anyone who came after you? Why did they come after you?

10. Was there anyone who stayed behind? Why did they stay behind?

11. Thinking about your move now, what stayed with you when you went to country Y? (For example, beliefs, customs, traditions, food, music, language/expressions)

12. What new things did you learn in country Y? (For example, beliefs, customs, traditions, food, music, language/expressions)

13. Did anything change about you when you moved to country Y?

(Note: repeat questions 14-15 for each country they lived in)

14. When you were in country X, how did you describe yourself in terms of your race, ethnicity, and/or religion?

15. If you were to rank each of these labels in terms of how much they meant for you at that time, what order would you put them in?
   a. Why would you put them in that order?

16. As you look at this timeline now, of all of these experiences:
   a. What do you think has influenced you the most in being who you are today? How so?
   b. Was it positive? Negative? Both?

17. Has the current political situation in (the Middle East and) (in Eastern Europe) had an effect on the way you think or feel
   a. About yourself?
   b. Your race and/or ethnicity?
c. Religion?

d. Being in Canada and/or being an immigrant?

18. Do you go back to country X (for each country)? Why or why not?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add or highlight?

**In- and Out-Groups**

When you entered high-school, how old were you?

We are going to talk about your peers and we’re focusing on your experiences since you turned ______. (In any of the countries you’ve lived in)

**Part 1: In-Groups**

20. Thinking about your peers, are there groups (3 or more people) that you feel like you belong to, or hang out with, either in person or online (we call them in-groups)? (yes/no)

21. What are those groups? (name 2 or 3) can you rank the top two by order of importance

I will now ask you some questions about the top two groups that you are a part of  (Note: repeat questions 22-37 for each in-group group)

22. What do you call yourselves/do you have a group name and if so, how did it come about?

23. Where did this group form? (In school? Community? Online?) How?

24. Can you please describe (group name) for me?

25. How did you become a part of that group?

26. Was it easy or difficult to join that group? Why was it easy or difficult?

27. How long have you been a member of this group?

28. How have your peers in group X treated you?

   a. (if negative) why do think that was?

   b. (if negative) What feelings did you have about how you were treated by this group?
**Positive experiences**

29. What are some of the benefits/advantages of being a part of this group?

30. Can you please describe your best memory of this group? What makes it the best memory?

31. Have the various positive experiences or advantages you have had by being a member of this group had an effect on the way you think or feel about
   a. Yourself?
   b. Being in Canada and/or being an immigrant?
   c. Your race and/or ethnicity?
   d. Your religion?
   e. Your gender?

**Negative experiences**

32. Do you feel that there is anything negative or challenging about being a part of this group?
   a. Challenges in terms of how you are treated by other group members?
   b. Challenges in terms of how you are treated by other people because you are a member of this group?

33. What is your worst or most difficult memory of this group? What makes it the worst memory?

34. What feelings did you have about what happened?

35. How did you manage or cope with the way you were treated?

36. Who helped you with this? Where did you turn? (person, a place in community)
   a. Of all those people or places, who/what was the most helpful?

37. Have the various negative experiences or disadvantages you have faced by being a member of this group had an effect on the way you think or feel about
a. Yourself?
b. Being in Canada and/or being an immigrant?
c. Your race and/ethnicity?
d. Your religion?
e. Your gender?

38. What are the similarities and differences between these two groups?

39. In the last X years, have there been changes in the groups that you belong to? (2 examples)
Why?

40. In the last X years, have there been groups that you used to be a part of that you are not now?
Why?

Part 2: Out-Groups

Now, let’s talk about the other groups that you don’t belong to, which we call out-groups.

41. Are there groups you feel like you don’t belong to either in-person or online? (Yes/No)

I will now ask you some questions about the top two out-groups that you know the most. (note: repeat questions 42-49 for each out-group)

42. Does the group have a name or what can we call them during the interview?

43. Can you please describe (group name) for me?

44. Where did this group form? (In school? Community? Online?) How?

45. What do you think would be the benefits/advantages of being a part of this group?

46. Would you want to be part of that group? Why or why not?

47. Do you feel that there is anything negative or challenging about being a part of this group?

48. Have you had any personal interactions with them? If yes, describe two.
   a. Why do you think you had that positive/negative interaction?
b. What feelings did you have about this interaction?

c. (if negative) How did you manage or cope with the way you were treated?

d. (if negative) Who helped you with this? Where did you turn (person, a place in community)? Of all those people or places, who/what was the most helpful?

49. Have the various positive or negative experiences you have had with this group had an effect on the way you think or feel about

   a. Yourself?
   
   b. Being in Canada and/or being an immigrant?
   
   c. Your race and/or ethnicity?
   
   d. Your religion?
   
   e. Your gender?

Before we end the interview, I would like to know if there is anything else you would like to share that I did not ask about.

Follow-up:

50. Do you identify as Canadian? (note: only for the youths who did not state this in first interview)

51. Can you tell me about a time when you experienced conflict between your identities (list)?

   What happened?

52. In the last X years, have there been groups that you tried to or wanted to join but it did not work out? What happened?

53. Can you tell me about two experiences in group settings (in- or out-group) when you didn’t feel comfortable being or disclosing who you are in terms of your ethnic, racial, or religious identity?
54. Can you tell me about two experiences in group settings (in- or out-group) when you had difficulties in trying to balance your multiple identities? (list the ones they stated on questionnaire)
   a. How did you feel when that happened?
   b. How did you cope when that happened?

55. How has your family influenced your ethnic, racial, and/or religious identity?

56. If your parents had to identify themselves how do you think they would identify in terms of their ethnicity, race, and/or religion?
   a. Would you say their identities are similar to or different from yours?

57. How has your community influenced your ethnic, racial, and/or religious identity?

58. Can you tell me about your neighbourhood? (Is it diverse or not?)