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A phenomenological analysis of cultural transition among newcomer youth. The rationale for intercultural counseling

Everything I'm doing right now is not what I was doing before

Upon transitioning into Canada, newcomer youth navigate a number of important changes, which are taking place at a critical time in their development. This descriptive psychological phenomenology investigated the experiences of cultural transition among newcomer youth who migrated to Canada during their adolescence. Ten participants, between the ages of 15 and 17, from six different nationalities, completed a 90-minute, semi-structured, in-depth, qualitative interview. Data analysis revealed eight major structures: a) pre-migration experiences, b) post-migration impressions, c) education, d) friendship, e) community involvement, f) family, g) language, and h) internal experiences. Important implications for practice within schools and communities are discussed.

Keywords: newcomer youth, migration, cultural transition, descriptive psychological phenomenology, qualitative research.

As a growing segment of the Canadian population, newcomers (i.e., immigrants and refugees) have attracted a significant amount of scholarly interest. National statistics reveal that more than 31,000 of the individuals given permanent residency in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2017), and over 1.6 million of the newcomers living in Canada were classified as youth (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, the majority of research pertaining to migration has been quantitative in nature and has focused on the experiences of adults (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2010; Morawska, 2018; Salehi, 2009). While some parallels may be found between the experiences of newcomer adults and that of youth, the stresses of migration come at a time of critical developmental importance for adolescents (Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, & Cabral, 2008;

Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Marks, 2016). That is, the challenges encountered during the transition to a new society can result in a dramatic disruption of the typical developmental trajectory and may impede a youth's capacity to succeed within this new environment (Ellis et al., 2008). In addition to the normal development of one's identity and sense of autonomy, youth who migrate to a new country must establish this sense of self within an entirely new culture (Cohen & Kassan, 2018; Ngo, 2009).

Cultural transition, which is the process that accompanies migration prior, during, and after integration into Canadian society, has been said to represent a helpful framework to conceptualize and study migration (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009). With respect to the experiences of newcomer adults, research has demonstrated that a successful cultural transition requires a positive occupational, linguistic, and social integration. Although the process of cultural transition has been explored among newcomer adults; little is known about how these experiences translate to those of youth. Further, the developmental needs of this group have not been considered in the process of cultural transition. In an effort to address this gap, this study investigated the phenomenon of cultural transition among newcomer youth who had migrated to Canada during their adolescence.

Youth and Immigration

Research with newcomer youth has been conducted in various domains. When looking at post-migration experiences of newcomer youth in North America, a number of stressors have been documented in the literature, which have been said to impede their successful integration process. Such challenges include the personal struggles of newcomer youth (e.g., Li & Grineva, 2016), their integration into the school system (e.g., Gallucci & Kassan, 2019), and changes within their families' dynamics (e.g., Lazarevic, 2017). Social problems may arise due to pressures to fit into a peer group – experiences that are exacerbated by language barriers and often lead to bullying and discrimination. Specifically, research has shown a strong correlation between levels of perceived discrimination and rates of depression among newcomer youth. Additionally, a lack of peer support has also been linked to feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, and isolation (Stodolska, 2008). Given that social isolation can impede newcomer youth's cultural transition, studies have also explored how the opposite experience can serve as a protective factor; that is, social inclusion as a contributor to one's strength and resilience (Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005; Stermac, Clarke, & Brown, 2013).

In addition to this positive peer influence, protective factors can include school support and strong family ties (Fawzi et al., 2009; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Gallucci & Kassan, 2019). However, schools and families may not always function as protective factors and may actually impede a newcomer's ability to successfully transition

into their new country (Kassan, Priolo, Goopy, & Arthur, 2019). Within the school system, research has unearthed issues of bullying and discrimination (Stodolska, 2008; Suárez-Orozco & Michikyan, 2016), a lack of supportive resources, and educational challenges related to the challenges of linguistic transition (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Marks, 2016). For example, many newcomers enter their new school system with a limited understanding of English. It has long been established that it can take 5–7 years to gain the language proficiency required for academic success and this limited understanding of English can result in increased school drop-out rates (Cummins, 1994; Ngo, 2009; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). An overall dissatisfaction with a new school's curriculum can also result in disengagement from the classroom (Li, 2010; Ngo, 2012; Stodolska, 2008; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010), and traumatic stress exposure prior to migration can result in a further decline of academic performance (Ellis et al., 2008; Fawzi et al., 2009).

While close family ties have been shown to serve as a protective factor for newcomer youth, the pressures of migration can occasionally turn a once healthy family dynamic into a risk factor for mental health problems (McMichael et al., 2010). This situation can occur when migration and prolonged periods of separation (often due to staggered migration) result in a reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities that place a strain on domestic relationships (McMichael et al., 2010; Petersen & Park-Saltzman, 2010). Often, newcomer youth want to relieve this strain by helping out financially, keeping their problems to themselves, and trying to exceed the expectations of their parents (Li, 2010). Additionally, faced with the unfamiliarity of a new culture and strained by financial pressure, newcomer parents may attempt to re-establish a sense of control by pressuring their children to retain their old cultural norms and values (Li, 2010; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Marks, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

Despite a growing body of research in the area of migration, the in-depth experiences of newcomer youth remain largely absent from the literature (Valibhoy, Kaplan, & Szwarc, 2017; Gallucci & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2019). According to Ellis and colleagues (2008), "it is essential for the mental health field to understand how experiences following resettlement, particularly those that are amenable to change, relate to mental health problems" (p. 185). Further, newcomer youth and their families tend to underutilize psychosocial services and community programming (Ellis, Miller, Baldwin & Abdi, 2011; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Majumder, O'Reilly, Karim, & Vostanis, 2015; Ziaian, de Antiss, Antoniou, Baghurst, & Sawyer, 2013). Thus, in order to design and deliver culturally sensitive services that can support the cultural transition of newcomer youth, research needs to tap into their first-hand experiences of moving from one cultural context to another. As Ngo

(2009) has suggested, researchers need to turn to the youth themselves, as "young immigrants are experts in their own socio-cultural realities and know what services are best for them" (p. 95). Accordingly, this descriptive phenomenological study addressed the following research question: *"How do adolescents who immigrate or seek refuge in a new country experience cultural transition?"*

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive psychological phenomenology, as outlined by Giorgi (2009, 2012), was employed to obtain a rich description of participants' lived experiences with respect to the process of cultural transition. Merging phenomenological philosophy, psychology, and science, this approach aims to uncover the structure of a phenomenon, which entails "the identification of the constituents that are essential for the phenomenon to manifest itself in this particular way as well as an understanding of how the constituents relate to each other" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 200). As this tradition of inquiry aims to describe the subjective perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of several individuals in regard to a particular phenomenon, it emphasizes the subjective and non-critical experiences of one person at a time (Creswell, 2013). In this sense, this approach parallels the hermeneutic philosophy in that it prioritizes the identification and description of the subjective perspectives of each individual, unearthing common and unique experiences among the entire group of participants (Schwandt, 2015). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived and internal experiences of participants surrounding a phenomenon of interest, that of cultural transition.

Procedure

Upon obtaining ethical approval, participants were recruited through a variety of local organizations that provide services for newcomers. Contacts within these organizations were provided with information on the research project and were given the choice of forwarding it to their contacts. Those interested in participating were asked to contact the primary researcher for further information. Three organizations invited the researcher to present the objectives of the study to three separate groups of youth who were attending community programs. To partake in the study, interested participants had to meet eligibility criteria as determined by a series of screening questions, including whether they (a) were between the ages of 13 and 18; (b) had either migrated or come to Canada seeking refuge during their adolescence; (c) self-identified as having the intention of staying in Canada; (d) had lived in Canada for a minimum of 6 months, and (e) spoke English with enough proficiency to communicate their experience without translation.

Once eligibility was determined, participants were scheduled for an interview with the primary researcher, in a mutually agreed upon location where confidentiality could be maintained. All participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and issues of confidentiality were discussed. Each participant signed a consent form, filled out a demographic form, and was provided with a $20 gift certificate for their participation. Data collection took place through in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews that lasted approximately 90 minutes. Paper files were stored under lock-and-key in the primary researcher's office and electronic data was password protected.

As found in related literature, interview questions were based on key themes related to the phenomenon of cultural transition among newcomer youth and were followed by prompts that could help facilitate further discussion (Langdridge, 2007). Interviews began with warm up questions that allowed the researcher to build some rapport with the participant. The interview then shifted into the following overarching research question: "*I am interested in learning about your overall experience of moving from [insert country of origin] to Canada. Can you tell me about what it's been like for you?"* Once participants began describing their experience of migration, the researcher followed their lead and personalized questions that allowed for a deeper exploration into the topics that were brought up.

Participants

Ten individuals between the ages of 15 to 17 (M_{age} = 16.2 years) participated in this study, including six who identified as female and four who identified as male. Data collection ceased at this number, as it reached saturation (Green & Thorogood, 2014). Further, in a review of phenomenological studies, Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) found that the general trend in this type of research was to recruit 10 participants, and Langdridge (2007) recommended an average of 6 or 7 participants given the demands of data analysis. Participants' migrated to Canada during their adolescence from a range of countries, including Iran (n = 3), Mexico (n = 2), Thailand (n = 2), China (n = 1), Peru (n = 1), and the Philippines (n = 1). At the time of the interview, participants had lived in Canada between six months to four years. Nine participants arrived as immigrants and one as a refugee. Each participant reported speaking two languages, in addition to English. These languages included Spanish, Farsi, Thai, Mandarin, and Tagalog. On average, participants lived with 2 to 4 family members. Included in this sample was one pair of siblings (a brother and sister). All participants were enrolled in high school and were in grades 10 to 12. Participants were living in urban cities in Western Canada.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of this study followed the steps of descriptive phenomenology as outlined by Giorgi (2009, 2012). Following the transcription of each individual

interview, at which point all identifying information was removed, data analysis began with reading the transcript as a whole and then going back to re-read it and identify individual meaning units. Each time a shift in meaning was observed, a mark was made that separated that section from the next. The aim of this process was to breakdown the transcription into manageable pieces that could then be individually assessed.

The next stage of analysis required that each individual meaning unit be transformed in a psychologically sensitive expression, meaning that the underlying psychological meaning could be described. To do so, meaning units were transferred into a chart. The first column contained the transcript and each row housed a meaning unit. In the second column, the meaning unit was re-written in third person expressions. The third column contained the transformed meaning unit, whereby the process of free imaginative variation was used to determine the most salient and important component of the unit, as it pertained to the phenomenon of cultural transition. At this point, peer auditors reviewed each chart and provided feedback confirming the analysis and/or offering alternative meanings found in the units. Following the transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions, the units were then used as the basis for describing the underlying structure of each participant's experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Once the individual structural summaries were written, they were shared with each participant for member checking. Finally, summaries were compared horizontally to determine common and unique constituents among them. The goal here was to find elements of the experience that varied among participants, and compare them to the ones that did not (Langdridge, 2007). A chart was used to track commonalities and differences among participants (through an analysis of their individual structural summaries), and specific quotes and examples helped clarify these emerging structures.

Rigor

Rooted in a social constructionist worldview, phenomenological research acknowledges the position of a researcher in the development of results (Creswell, 2013). As such, a number of steps were taken to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Shenton, 2004). For example, reflexivity, bracketing, and peer debriefing were used to monitor the researchers' subjective stances (Patton, 2002). Peer auditing and member checking were used during data analysis in order to verify the emerging results (Schwandt, 2015). Further, an audit trail was maintained throughout the entire research process (Morrow, 2005). Finally, catalytic validity was established when debriefing the qualitative interviews with participants (Stiles, 1993).

Results

This study was guided by the following research question: *How do adolescents who immigrate or seek refuge in a new country experience cultural transition?* The process of data analysis resulted in eight overarching structures that together formed the general composition of the phenomenon cultural transition as experienced by the participants. An overview of these structures and their corresponding constituents can be found in Table 1. To preserve participants' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used.

Table 1. Experiences of Cultural Transition: Overarching Structures and Constituents

Pre-Migration Experiences	Decision to leave Preparing to leave
Post-Migration Impressions	Adjusting to new surroundings Expectations versus reality
Education	Navigating changes Curriculum The impact of school staff ESL class
Friendship	Support and information Exclusion Befriending newcomers and international students Community involvement
Family	Strengthened family connection Prolonged periods of family separation Family as a source of support or stress
Language	English proficiency Self-expression Supportive resources
Internal Experiences	Resilience Internal struggles
Identity	A mixture of the two Being open minded

Pre-Migration Experiences / *I was excited*

Decision to leave. All participants discussed the reasons why their families chose to migrate to Canada and the role that they had played in that decision. The majority of participants reported that their families chose to come to Canada to pursue a better life for their children, which consequently affected the participants' attitude about leaving. Although most participants did not feel a sense of agency in the decision-making process, their level of participation in the decision to migrate was not evaluated as a negative or positive facet of their experience. Many expressed gratitude for their parents' sacrifices, a sense of trust in their parents' capacity to make the decision, and a responsibility to appreciate the opportunity and approach it with an open mind. Vivien, a 15- year-old girl from China, explained that *it's like a whole new experience and not everyone has the chance to go to another country and live there for your life*. Common among all the participants was a sense of hope for something better. Whether the notion of a better life was derived from their parents' stories, from portrayals of North America in the media, or from their own dreams and desires, all the participants hoped that a life in their new country would lead to a greater future.

Preparing to leave. Following the decision to migrate, many participants began a process of preparation, which involved undertaking English classes and research on Canadian life, but also necessitated the emotional process of accepting the upcoming change. Participants reported that practical preparation (such as taking English classes and conducting research) helped them to feel more control in a situation that was otherwise completely new. A lack of preparation, on the other hand, was described as a precursor for disappointment and increased difficulty (both linguistically and emotionally) during the initial time period following arrival. This was especially the case for Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru who felt that his family had been given false information about what Canada was going to be like. When asked what would have helped, he described the need for pre-migration preparation programs:

> *It would have been nice if the programs weren't so focus on once you're here because … if they help you before you come here, then the problems – first of all it would be easier for the government for monetary point of view – and then it would be easier for the person because then they would feel more comfortable because they know where they're going, right?*

Emotionally, the prospect of leaving their home countries involved mixed feelings, including a sense of loss combined with the anticipation for a new beginning. For those that had a year or more to prepare, their attitude about migration sometimes shifted forms; while some began to warm up to the idea, others felt a sense of resistance develop as they came closer to their departure date. Catherine, a 15-year-old girl from the Philippines explained: *when I knew that we were already approved*

and we have the Visa already I feel sad. Having waited five years for her mother's sponsorship visa to be approved, migration had seemed like a far-off idea. The reality of her upcoming departure triggered a sense of loss and involved a subsequent period of mourning.

Post-Migration Impressions / ***A totally new environment***

Adjusting to new surroundings. Participants described their first few days in Canada to be a time of landing and learning. This initial time period was laden with a mixture of feelings, including disorientation, confusion, excitement, and disbelief. Participants' initial reactions largely depended on the circumstances into which they arrived. Those that had relatives and friends found comfort in the familiarity of friendly faces and familiar relationships. Those who did not start school immediately described the first few days to feel like a temporary vacation that was free from the challenges they would soon encounter. They spent their days exploring the city, and, according to Vivien, a 15-year-old girl from China, getting *familiar with the whole environment*. However, those who did not have pre-established connections in their new cities often experienced their initial time in Canada as lonely, disorienting, and overwhelming. Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru, migrated a week before his birthday and described: *I was 13, it was one week before my birthday. It was quite sad, there was no one at my birthday*. Evidently, social connections had a large impact on the initial adjustment period of participants.

Expectations versus reality. For most of the participants, their early days in Canada were filled with discrepancies between how they had expected things to be and how things actually were. A recurring belief among the participants was that the more fixed their pre-migration expectations had been, the more difficult it became to adjust to the reality of their surroundings. For half of the participants, pre-migration expectations were largely shaped by what they had seen in movies and television; unfortunately, their new environment often paled in comparison to the urban life and high school culture that was depicted in North American media. Sohrab, a 17-year-old boy from Iran, stated:

the movies, seeing the High School Musical…like…it's not as fun as they show, I haven't been on a single field trip here. I thought that this is all it's about here just going out, doing creative stuff, but it's not like that.

Although a majority of the participants took time to let go of their initial expectations, they reported eventually coming to terms with the reality of their new environments. This importance of accurate information is evident in Vivien, a 15-year-old girl from China who spent a lot of time researching what to expect from Canadian life. When asked if her experience aligned with her research, she said: *It was exactly what I expected Canada to be*.

Education / *I'm always in school*

Navigating changes. All of the participants spoke about the many differences between the schools in their home countries and the new schools that they were enrolled in. Many described a sense of vulnerability as they relied on the willingness of others to help them. As they began to navigate the new system around them, half of the participants conveyed feelings of confusion that resulted from a lack of sufficient information. Many were provided with an orientation on their first day, but were then left to navigate school on their own. Common among the participants was a sense of frustration at the lack of information their schools provided, which further disadvantaged them. Alicia, a 17-year-old girl from Mexico was told to look at the calendar to find her classes. Having come from a school where students stayed in one classroom all day, she explained:

> *I was in this class and the bell rang and everybody stood up. And then they leave and then I'm like, you know I said like "What? What should I do?" and then you know I asked someone, and he's like "OK go straight and then turn left, look at the numbers".*

Curriculum. A majority of participants expressed that their families came to Canada in hopes of a better education for their children. Consequently, participants' academic experiences were important to them. Most of the participants reported that the curriculum felt easier than they had anticipated. Teaching methods were more "hands-on" and less theoretical, and the attitude of teachers seemed more "laid back". This was surprising for them, and participants reported feeling dissatisfied at first. Explaining his frustration on the subject, Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru described:

> *Like math was really really boring. We were doing equations with tiles, I did that in grade 2 with tiles, cuz tiles were supposed to be for kids, like who uses tiles? And so when we had to use tiles it made me angry.*

This sense of frustration often led to disengagement from the classroom. Participants reported, however, that a lack of engagement in the early stages of their academic transition often left them falling behind as the content of the curriculum advanced. For those with lower levels of English proficiency, however, keeping up with the new curriculum proved difficult. Malia, a 16-year-old girl from Thailand, describes the stress of trying to keep up in school:

> *I actually got headaches during classes because it was so stressful. I actually got pretty good grades but that made it harder on me, to keep up with my grades. But my mom said "don't worry about it" but I didn't really believe that.*

Linguistic difficulties forced many participants to work twice as hard to keep up with the rest of the class, which felt unfair for some, as participants had to spend

extra time translating material they had already learned in their home countries – all while keeping up with new material. In addition, half of the participants expressed confusion at having to pick from a wide array of courses to create their own schedule.

The impact of school staff. Teachers and counsellors were described by all participants as people who were in a position to help them with their social, academic, and emotional transition into the school system. Although many participants felt nervous and resistant to asking for such help, they were specifically appreciative when it was offered to them. School staff were able to introduce new students to other students, as in the case of Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, who decided to move schools after being bullied at her previous high school. On her first day at the new school, she explained the impact the school counsellor had on her integration:

> *My counsellor come to me and told me "Oh all grade twelves are sitting in the front, why you are not with them?" I said that I don't know any of them and she introduced me to them and they were really nice with me, I'm so happy to see that.*

In addition to social support, helpful teachers and counsellors were described as people who took time out of their day to provide academic assistance. Those that initiated support and inquired about their students' progress made participants feel cared for and important. The impact of supportive staff was made even more evident when compared to the reactions of participants who did not feel supported by teachers and counsellors. Unsupportive staff were described as uninvolved and were unaware of the struggles faced by newcomers in the classroom such as bullying, academic stress, and social isolation. When Alicia, a 17-year-old girl from Mexico, was trying to plan out what courses she would need in order to apply for medical school, the school counsellor told her that she would most likely fail them and advised her to "be realistic". Alicia explained that while she recognized the value of talking to counsellors, she lost trust in the counsellor in that moment, saying: *I don't really feel that she cares.*

ESL Class. All participants had been enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, and for most of them, this class stood apart from other components of their school life. Since the class brought together students who were new to the school and to Canada, it normalized many feelings that the participants were experiencing and helped them to feel less alone in their experience of cultural transition. Vivien, a 15-year-old girl from China, explained:

> *Since we're all newcomer and ESL student, we had like more common topics, we had… something to talk about like we couldn't talk with the other students like Canadian students and… cuz they, they won't be able to understand like our feelings.*

Additionally, the majority of participants viewed ESL teachers as those who best understood their situation, and were consequently utilized for emotional comfort and added academic support. Ava, a 15-year old girl from Iran, described:

> *Basically, my ESL counsellor, she likes really helps me, especially in this year, I'm asking her about the courses… I kind of have a connection with her because I feel like she knows like what my level is. Other teachers and regular counsellors they like look at us all like grade 10 students, but my ESL counsellor knows my ESL level and stuff, so I felt like of connected to her and can talk with her.*

In some cases, ESL teachers also connected newcomer students with local organizations that provided additional services and opportunities for newcomer youth, according to Mona, a 17-year-old from Iran, and Catherine, a 16-year-old from the Philippines. Such additional support was said to be extremely appreciated and was helpful to participants as well as their families.

Friendship / *Friends is such an important part*

Support and information. All participants found their friends to be primary sources of support in that the companionship of even one friend helped to alleviate feelings of loneliness and gave them an increased a sense of resiliency when facing challenges. Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, encountered regular bullying at her school. She explained:

> *It was in my pre-cal too, but because one of my German friends was with me, we were sitting by each other. They used to laugh to her too, because of me I think, they were sitting exactly to back of us and laughing to us, and it got to both of us, but because we were together…it wasn't that much hard.*

Acquiring a single friend was not only beneficial for the emotional comfort it provided – it was also conducive to meeting more friends. Friends also became accessible sources of information about their new environment and schools. The majority of participants described friendships (both within and outside the school setting) to be a catalyst for social integration and a feeling of belonging. Miguel, a 15-year-old boy from Mexico, described the impact of having friends, stating: *that I could express myself, be myself…that's when I was like 'oh ok I'm back home'.*

Exclusion. Although all participants discussed the benefits of friendships, a majority encountered challenges when trying to make friends. Primary among these challenges were feelings of exclusion that resulted from being on the outside of existing social circles. While many participants attempted to integrate and make friends, they quickly realized that people already had their established friend groups. Other participants hoped to be approached by Canadian students on their first day, but found the apathetic response of their peers disappointing. Alicia,

a 17-year-old girl from Mexico, commented on her initial impression of the students at her school:

> *Well you know it's not like in the movies and they say like 'oh they're not going to like you, and then in the cafeteria is like these people and these people' no… but they just don't care.*

For some, exclusion took on a more active form and resulted in bullying and discrimination. Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, described her experience:

> *They start talking about me… moving from my place. And after two month I was the only person who was sitting in front of the chemistry class, and they all moved to the back, and they were talking about me and I heard them what they say.*

Those who faced bullying struggled to defend themselves in English, and felt targeted because of their clothing, accents, and the fact that they were unaware of certain social norms. Exclusion from school peers resulted in an overall sense of isolation amongst newcomers. Common among participants was the desire for others to initiate contact and show an interest in them, as the task of approaching groups of strangers proved overwhelming.

Befriending newcomers and international students. For a majority of the participants, the process of making friends felt more natural with other newcomers as well as with international students. Their shared experience of migration provided common ground and participants felt less intimidated in approaching and initiating friendships. For example, after spending many lunches alone, Catherine, a 16-year-old girl from the Philippines, discovered a classroom in which other newcomers would hang out at lunch. Catherine explained how she instantly felt more comfortable amongst these students:

> *Cuz they also eat rice and I feel like we're all the same and I don't know… I'm more comfortable when I'm with international students cuz I know that they're also learning English and we have the same… almost the same situations.*

Shared experiences (combined with the awareness that English was a second language), liberated participants to speak more freely, resulting in more authentic behaviours when around other newcomers and international students. However, for some participants, the decision to befriend other newcomers felt less like a choice and more like an only option. This restricted friendship choice proved especially problematic because international students must leave after a year or two. Alicia, a 17-year-old girl from Mexico who, despite having lived in Canada for four years, felt she could not connect with the Canadian students at her school. Alicia connected with international students but longed to connect with a peer group that was less transitory. She said:

Well in a way it stops me now of really adapting because I just, it's just temporary, you know I'm used to being with these people and it's good and everything, but then they leave.

Community Involvement. All participants had been involved in youth programs servicing immigrants and refugees, delivered through non-profit organizations in their communities. While some learned about these programs through their ESL teachers, a majority of the youth had heard about these services through their parents. For some, these programs provided respite from the effort required to fit in at school. Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, explained that she was not really herself at school, but rather tried to be more "Canadian". When attending these youth programs, she stated:

But in youth programs… I was myself, and they all, I think, were kind of themselves and I felt really more comfortable there. I didn't have to play for them, I wasn't actress there, I was Mona.

Similarly, Miguel, a 15-year-old boy from Mexico, felt that because other youth had been through similar experiences, they would not judge him. He explained that this resulted in feeling *more, like, open to talking about what's going on, like within your experience that you're going through.* However, despite its capacity to increase feelings of belonging and connection, a few participants remarked on the insular nature of the community programs. For these participants – whose greatest challenges were at school and at home – these programs provided a much-needed break, but failed to address their primary concerns.

Family / *Changing makes you come closer*

Strengthened family connections. All participants experienced a closer relationship with at least one family member post-migration. Having lost connections with their prior communities, extended families, and friends, they found comfort and companionship in the members of their immediate family. As an only child, Vivien, a 15-year old girl who moved to Canada from China with her two parents, described the following experience:

Well, the first few months we were actually closer… like changing, makes you come closer, you don't have… it's only you three, maybe you have family friends but the only people you can really rely on it's your close family, so we became closer the first year.

In addition to strengthened relationships, participants spoke about the shifting roles within the family unit. Milo, a 17-year-old boy from Thailand explained that the experience of migration put him in a caretaking role for his younger sister. He described: *she has some trouble at school with her friends and I'm 'oh it's ok, you'll find some friends don't worry about it' so you know I had to be more mature.*

Prolonged periods of family separation. Throughout their process of migration, a majority of the participants experienced prolonged periods of time where they were separated from at least one parent. Reasons for this separation included staggered migration, wherein one parent would migrate to Canada before the rest (either to sponsor the family or to set things up in preparation for their arrival), and parents returning to their country of origin for work purposes. Prolonged family separation impacted participants' pre-migration experiences as well as their post-migration transition. Catherine, a 16-year-old girl from the Philippines, had waited nearly 10 years to see her mother. Once reunited, she explained, *the first time that I came here I was not talking, I was so quiet cuz I didn't know what to say and it's kind of new to me*. Likewise, Malia, a 16-year-old girl from Thailand, spent periods of time separated from her mother and then from her father. As she tried to adjust to a new school, Malia found herself withdrawing socially, explaining that her

> *focus was school and family, cuz my dad had to go back to Thailand to do his work. So, it was just me and my mom and I was trying to make a connection with her since we had been away*.

In addition to the many changes that accompanied the move to a new country, participants who had experienced prolonged family separation had the added task of getting reacquainted with their parents.

Family as a source of support or stress. Most of the participants discussed the particular ways in which their families either supported them during their cultural transition or added additional stress to their overall experience; additionally, some of the participants illustrated ways in which their families did both. Half of the participants described feeling supported in a variety of ways, including having an open and honest dialogue, and being supported in their future ambitions where they were encouraged to join community programs and introduced to new hobbies that helped them get through difficult times. For Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, the biggest support came in the form of her mother's open mindedness to the new culture in which they lived. She explained:

> *Yeah, because being someone out of home and coming to home, another culture, is kind of hard. You have to be someone else out of home and inside someone else. But when I saw my mom is changing with me, I felt really good. I understand that I don't have to be someone else at home – I can be myself.*

Conversely, the other half of participants felt their families were often sources of added pressure during an already stressful time. For them, parental expectations were at the root of the problem. Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru, explained how his father was fearful of him going out on his own, as well as his involvement in organizations in the community. He explained:

Sometimes they would be like "Can you come downtown with us?" and then I'd be "Can I go downtown?" and he would be like "No! It's too far away its too dangerous" … Like I never went out anywhere cuz he didn't let me, so it was really hard making friends.

Frequently, such negative parental reactions and interactions increased participants' stress levels and, in turn, impacted the ways in which they behaved at school and socialized with friends.

Disconnection. As time passed, half of the participants reported feeling an increased sense of disconnection from their family members, with busy schedules and increased responsibilities resulting in less communication and shared time as a family. While the participants understood the reasons for this disconnection – namely an increase in parental responsibilities as a result of financial and/or work obligations – they experienced the situation as something they had very little control over. Family members were described as having their own "personal bubble" and households felt empty, with everyone attending to their responsibilities. Participants unwillingly resigned themselves to this new reality, as explained by Miguel, a 15-year-old boy from Mexico, who said:

Like my mom – I hardly see her. Today, she works just from like 7–2 but she usually works 7–2 then she rests for like an hour while I'm at school and then she goes back to work and I don't see her sometimes for like 4 days.

Hand in hand with a sense of disconnection was a decrease in communication between these participants and their parents. They worried that by confiding in their parents, they would be adding to an already heavy stress load. Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru, explained: *We didn't share everything because then everyone, it would be a little bit too heavy a load for my parents if I told them everything*. Rather than turning to parents for support, participants often felt their parents were the ones in need of protection, and would consequently internalize their concerns or seek support elsewhere.

Language / *Sometimes I don't want to say anything*

English proficiency. Participants' English proficiency impacted their capacity to communicate, thereby dictating their ability to make friends, succeed academically, and feel able to involve themselves in their communities. All participants reported that the higher the level of English proficiency, the more confident they felt in navigating their new lives. Pre-migration preparation, including private English tutoring and English classes at school, helped participants feel less overwhelmed upon arrival. Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, described her process of preparation and the result that ensued:

I had a teacher at home and… he taught me English a lot, and I love English. I was watching English movie all the time, I was talking with myself in English so when I came to Canada I didn't have that much problems.

Those with little English comprehension upon arrival felt excluded in their new surroundings, and noticed their own sense of identity being impacted by their incapacity to express themselves. Malia, a 16-year-old girl from Thailand, transitioned from being a straight A student to feeling unable to complete her own homework. She disclosed:

It took me actually over a year to feel happy and confident and all that. Actually, I cried once, at school, because I couldn't read anything, we were given a thin book to read in English, but I couldn't read it at all, I had to come home and get my dad to translate the whole page, pretty much the whole book.

All participants came to the conclusion that the more English known upon arrival, the smoother the initial transition was; as more English was learned, the experience of living in Canada became better.

Self-expression. The majority of the participants reported that difficulties with English proficiency inhibited their self-expression. For some, this resulted in a withdrawal from social interaction altogether. Unable to socialize in the way in which they were accustomed, they felt cut off from a part of who they were. Miguel, a 15-year-old boy from Mexico spoke no English when he arrived to Canada. Normally a talkative and outgoing person, he explains the impact this had on his self-perception:

At the start, I always look mad so I was sort of like this [makes serious face] … Like with a frown on my face… and people thought I was shy and stuff like that, so it was like, kind of looking in a mirror and being like, "Who is this person? That's not me?"

Participants reported feeling fearful that they would get teased for speaking with an accent or for using the wrong words. Instead, they sought respite with people who spoke their first language. Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru stated: *I felt like it was more easy to express myself when I'm talking in Spanish because that's what I've been doing all my life… Whereas when I talked in English… I didn't know how to engage them*. However, as participants' English proficiency advanced, their stress levels reduced and their confidence increased; as their language improved, space opened up for them to focus on other areas of their lives, such as connecting with peers and advancing academically.

Supportive resources. Half of the participants highlighted the importance of speaking English with others as the key to advancing linguistically. Some specified that talking with Canadian born students was instrumental to learning the subtleties of conversational English. Sohrab, a 17-year-old boy from Iran, commented:

talking to Canadians, that's actually one of the main reasons I wanted to hang out with Canadians was learning the language. However, the majority found the experience of talking to fluent English speakers to be too intimidating. By contrast, practicing English with other English language learners resulted in them feeling less insecure about making mistakes. Catherine, a 16-year-old girl from the Philippines, attended a summer camp for newcomer youth where she felt more comfortable practicing English. She explained:

> *Yeah and I don't think about what others… what they think about you… like for example, our English… like your grammar and stuff… it's ok to ask them if you don't, if I didn't understand what they said.*

The feeling that "it's ok" to make mistakes and ask questions was shared by the other participants, who reported that watching other youth make mistakes reduced their own anxiety. Other helpful ways of learning English included volunteering in the community, watching movies and playing video games in English, and listening to the lyrics of English music. These alternative modes of practice were especially valuable to participants who had a harder time making friends and therefore had fewer people with whom to practice English.

Internal Experiences / *I wanted to leave*

Internal struggles. Since migrating to Canada, half of the participants reported struggling at one point or another with what they described as feeling "depressed" (or feelings that could be linked with depression, including hopelessness and a lack of enjoyment from their daily lives). Contributing factors included bullying, family conflict, parental pressure, and feeling excluded by the community. Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru, was struggling to make friends at school by day, and returning home to parental depression and conflict by night. When describing the impact that this combination had, he stated: "I was really depressed – I wasn't like super depressed to the point of suicide – but I was really depressed." In addition to feelings of sadness, most participants experienced loneliness resulting from difficulties in connecting with their peers (as a result of language barriers and/or bullying).

Despite these struggles, most participants felt that they could not turn to outside sources for support. For some, it was an issue of confidentiality; they worried that if they confided in an adult, their parents might be notified, causing additional problems at home. For others, having no pre-existing relationship with the counsellors in their schools was what prevented them from reaching out. However, these participants expressed a desire to have someone who could understand them and help them feel less alone. As Milo, a 17-year-old boy from Thailand explained, he wanted to talk about the "stress of life" and *this teenager phase I'm going through*, but did not feel his friends or his parents would understand, and did consider the counsellors to be approachable.

Resiliency. As difficult as their experiences had been, participants also discussed the ways in which they overcame the challenges. For many participants, a shift in attitude was often what they needed in order to facilitate some kind of change. For Sohrab, a 17-year-old boy from Iran, this shift took place within the domain of his social life. At first, Sohrab felt Canadians did not want to be friends with him, yet once his perspective changed he began to make friends with many Canadian students at his school. He recounted:

> *I just decided to… sometimes I thought Canadians are being racist to me, but as soon as I realized 'I'm thinking that way and the way I think shows'… I started being myself.*

Likewise, after reading a couple of biographical books about people who experienced displacement and migration, Alex, a 17-year-old boy from Peru, discovered:

> *I need to realize every place can be… you can make it home wherever you, any place you can make it home; it's up to you.*

In addition to shifting their perspective, some participants explained that having future goals and aspirations made their integration challenges worth enduring. In these cases, pursuing these goals required that they stay in Canada. Mona, a 17-year-old girl from Iran, recounted that she knew other people who found the transition to Canada too difficult and decided to return to their home countries. When asked what made her want to stay, she explained: *I would like to be at the top of the world. I want to study at a good University, I have lots of dreams, and those dreams make me to have those things*. Having dreams and goals helped give meaning to the difficulties that participants encountered, and provided them with the motivation to move forward.

Identity / *A bit of everything*

A mixture of the two. A majority of the participants described their cultural identity as being influenced by the culture in which they had spent their childhood as well as by the Canadian culture in which they currently lived. On one hand, they felt they had the option to take the best of both cultures, and integrate those best features into a unique identity; on the other hand, participants also felt confused on how to define their identity, given that they were now connected to more than one culture. Having been in Canada for a short time, Catherine, a 16-year-old girl from the Philippines, reflected on the ways in which her self-concept was already changing. Although internally she identified herself as Filipino, she recognized that her external behaviour did not always adhere to Filipino culture: *I don't know… sometimes I feel like I'm still a Filipino, but sometimes I'm a Canadian now cuz… everything I'm doing right now is not what I was doing before.* Common among participants was the desire to find a balance between Canadian culture and the cultures

they grew up in. Consequently, most participants conceptualized any changes they made as personal choices. However, some felt that, with time, they would inevitably become "more Canadian". Milo, a 17-year-old boy from Thailand, shared:

> *I used to think it's a choice, but as time goes… not a lot of people speak Thai and they don't have the same humour and cultural aspects as I do, so I just had to assimilate and go on with it to survive and stuff like that.*

Regardless of whether participants wanted to hold on to their roots, fit in with Canadians, or find a balance between the two, they all expressed an increased awareness regarding the role of culture in their lives, including the impact that culture had on who they were and who they wanted to become.

Being open minded. Participants reported that coming to Canada exposed them, for the first time in their lives, to a diverse range of cultures. While unfamiliar at first, the new cultures that they were exposed to taught them about parts of the world that they otherwise would not have known about. Participants felt this exposure instilled a more open mind in them, of which they were appreciative and excited about. Ava, a 15-year-old girl from Iran, described the change this had on her:

> *But you know some things have also changed, like some of my beliefs, like in Iran there aren't that much different religions or cultures, so I'm feeling kind of, maybe open minded, so I'm including other cultures in my life too.*

Exposure to other cultures also helped them shed longstanding prejudices. Participants reflected on the societies they came from, where they had initially learned to discriminate based on culture and class. As they befriended people from diverse backgrounds, they began to question their old ways of thought and felt surprised by the ignorance of their previous beliefs. Overall, participants felt proud of their new open mindedness because it represented personal growth; it was a tangible way to identify that they had changed and that their worldview had expanded.

Discussion

Results of this study contribute to the literature on cultural transition and migration more broadly. Specifically, eliciting the first-hand voices and experiences of newcomer youth provides a unique perspective. Findings indicate that the significant structures identified in this research are interrelated – highlighting the complexity of the process of cultural transition. Generally, the process of cultural transition began to take shape when participants were informed they would be migrating to Canada. From there, each step built on one another and was interdependent on developing experiences, leading to both challenges and resiliencies through the entire process. Overall, these results add to our existing knowledge of the phenomenon of cultural transition, which prior to this study, had only been researched with

adult newcomers (see Sinacore et al., 2009). Detailed findings are discussed here with respect to scholarship on youth and migration.

Participants' experiences of cultural transition began with the decision to migrate. According to participants, the most common reason their parents chose to migrate was the potential of a better future for their children. While this rationale is well known as a primary force for migration (Hutchins, 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Marks, 2016; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), there is little information on the involvement or agency of youth in the decision-making process (Hutchins, 2011). Participants in this study began to fill this gap in the literature by describing their degree of involvement and internalization of the decision-making process. Those who had advance notice regarding their migration felt more included in the decision-making process, which tended to result in a more positive outlook on their upcoming migration. Conversely, a lack of preparation or accurate information prior to migration left other participants at a disadvantage upon arrival. Having the time to prepare emotionally and linguistically were of particular importance to the participants and, for some, this preparation was key to their post-migration success.

The early stages of cultural transition were marked by the many environmental and socio-cultural changes for participants. While exciting for some, the steep learning curve was stressful and overwhelming for others. The stress that accompanies the process of negotiation between what was familiar in one's home country and one's new country is often coined *acculturative stress*, and can result in an increased risk of psychological vulnerabilities (Sirin, Ryce, Gupta, & Rogers-Sirin, 2012; Falavarjani, Yeh, & Brouwers, 2019). Interestingly, the participants in this study discussed the role that their pre-migration expectations had on their post-migration experiences and acculturative stress. Especially significant was the apparent role that North American media played in shaping those expectations – leaving many newcomer youth feeling disappointed upon arriving in Canada. Negy, Schwartz, and Reig-Ferrer (2009) posit that one of the primary contributors to acculturative stress is a phenomenon titled *expectancy violation theory* (EVT), which contends that when a person's expectations are unmet, it is usually followed by a negative psychological reaction. Likewise, Sinacore et al. (2009) found that immigrants with high pre-migration expectations regarding their future community almost inevitably had more difficulties transitioning. While these findings support the descriptions relayed by participants in this study, it is important to note that limited research has been conducted on this issue with newcomer youth. It appears that the accessibility of accurate and relevant information for youth may prove beneficial in mitigating feelings of disappointment following their arrival.

For most participants, the permanence of their move was solidified by their enrolment in school. In line with previous research, school was described as the primary backdrop against which a majority of the academic, linguistic, and social components of their experiences took place (Suárez-Orozco, & Michikyan, 2016;

Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Gallucci & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2019). Additionally, participants were aware that future opportunities were reliant on academic success, and consequently felt increased pressure to do well. Unfortunately, many of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the school curriculum, echoing previous research (Li, 2010; Stodolska, 2008). Research shows that failing to draw upon the existing knowledge base newcomer students bring with them can result in a disengagement from the classroom and student boredom (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010; Ngo, 2012; Gallucci & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2019). This was evident among participants who reported a decline in academic performance due to their boredom and lack of intellectual stimulation.

Intriguingly, many participants experienced their ESL class as somewhat of a safe haven from other environments in the school. Existing literature states that for many newcomer students, ESL further alienates them from the rest of the school (Li, 2010; Stodolska, 2008) – yet only one of the ten participants in this study indicated this to be their experience. While participants did express a general dissatisfaction with the ESL curriculum (Cohen, 2012; Li, 2010; Stodolska, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, & Michikyan, 2016; Suarez Orozco & Suarez Orozco, 2001), they were more on how they *felt* in the classroom – specifically how the safety and warmth of the ESL classroom contrasted with the rest of the school (McCloud, 2015; Oikonomidoy, 2015). ESL teachers were described as being available and willing to help, and participants explained that the activities in the classroom (e.g., games to help students get to know one another better) helped form friendships. These findings are valuable for school personnel in that they present an opportunity to learn from helpful practices in ESL classes, which can be expanded to create safe and welcoming atmospheres within schools as a whole.

The importance of social connection was evident across all participants in this study. In line with current research, friendships were seen as a source of emotional support and an important link to their new environment. Researchers have argued that the development of friendships can act as a protective factor against depression (Fawzi et al., 2009), provide an outlet for youth to share their experiences of migration (Kim, Suh, Kim, & Gopalan, 2012), increase access to community resources (Tsai, 2006), and establish a sense of connection that contributes to a desire to stay in one's host country (Chow, 2007). Most of all, friendships cultivate a newcomer youth's sense of belonging within their new community (Borrero, Lee, & Padilla, 2013; Chow, 2007; Salehi, 2009). The need to belong was especially salient among participants in this study, as it was one of the reasons that they primarily befriended other newcomers and/or youth from similar cultural backgrounds.

A unique point of divergence among participants in this study was that they validated the importance of community groups, while simultaneously critiquing their effectiveness in connecting them to mainstream Canadian youth. Participants expressed a strong desire to connect with Canadian youth; however, bullying, teasing,

exclusion, and a general lack of interest were among the leading challenges they faced in doing so. Such difficulties have been recognized in the literature as common barriers to social engagement (Li, 2010; Ngo, 2009; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Stodolska, 2008). These findings point to a gap in services that would help newcomer youth integrate into Canadian society. While individual and group efforts that focus solely on newcomer youth are helpful, they are not sufficient in ensuring a positive cultural transition. School personnel such as teachers and counsellors are ideally positioned to assist newcomer and Canadian youth develop relationships.

Language was one of the primary challenges that participants faced when attempting to integrate socially and academically, a finding mirrored in much of the migration research (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Sinacore et al., 2009; Gallucci & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2019). Critical to this study is the depth to which the impact of limited self-expression had on self-perception; for many participants, losing their ability to communicate was experienced as a loss of self. Not surprisingly, this contributed to external behaviour patterns discussed in the literature – social isolation (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009), anxiety (Sirin et al., 2012), depression (Ellis et al., 2011), and low self-esteem (Fawzi et al., 2009). Participants noted the importance of practicing English (ideally with English speakers) as a vital, yet often inaccessible way of learning the language. Findings of this study and others reveal a lack of environments that facilitate this type of practice between Canadian born and newcomer youth (Li, 2010; Stodolska, 2008). Consequently, finding ways to support this type of English Language Learning among newcomer youth and/or encouraging alternative ways for self-expression (e.g., art, sports, or music) may not only increase newcomers' self-efficacy, but may also assist in the healthy development of their self-conception.

The role of the family as a protective factor during transition has been supported by migration research, and has been affiliated with positive outcomes, such as academic success (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010), reduced vulnerability (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009), and a decrease in depression and anxiety (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). Participants in this study discussed the importance of family, with those who felt supported by their families seeing them as additional strength and resilience to overcome challenges. Yet, families also presented additional stress for newcomers who experienced parental pressure, domestic conflict, as well as disconnection or prolonged periods of separation. In line with previous research, participants struggled to navigate different expectations at home and at school, feeling pressured to keep up with parental expectations (Li, 2010; McMichael et al., 2010). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) refer to the increase of parental expectations as a reaction to the overwhelming changes around them and to the fear of losing their children to new cultural values. Alternatively, participants who described their parents as optimistic and open minded reported better relationships with them as well as greater well-being among the entire family. This speaks to the importance to working closely with newcomer youth and their families throughout

the process of cultural transition, as the individualistic nature of counselling services is likely to be unfamiliar.

The majority of the participants in this study exhibited what has been termed a *transcultural identity* (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). They expressed a desire to adapt to the cultural environment around them, while still maintaining a connection to their cultural heritage. Indeed, an integration of cultural values, norms, and practices that allow youth to engage in both cultures simultaneously has been argued to result in the most adaptive success (Berry et al., 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Cohen & Kassan, 2018). Unique to this study, however, is the experience of *cultural ambivalence*. That is, participants who felt excluded by mainstream culture seemed to develop a sense of ambivalence and detachment toward Canadian culture. Research postulates that marginalization generally results in an adversarial identity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) or cultural separation (Berry, 2001), yet the reactions described by participants in this study were less extreme and manifested as disinterest or occasionally disapproval of mainstream culture.

The many changes demanded in a cultural transition have been known to cause mental health concerns among newcomer youth (Ellis et al., 2011; Fawzi et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). Yet, little is known about the manner in which migration stressors can be internalized (Fawzi et al., 2009; Sirin et al., 2012). Through this study, newcomer youth had an opportunity to describe their internal processes in more detail, which in turn shed light on the interrelatedness of social isolation and depression. Not surprisingly, the majority of the participants in this study did not turn to external sources of support (e.g., teachers or counsellors), echoing previous literature on the underutilization of mental health services among newcomer youth (Ellis et al., 2011; Fawzi et al., 2009; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Majumder et al., 2015; Ziaian et al., 2013). In line with these previous studies, participants did not access support due to a distrust in the parameters of confidentiality (Ellis et al., 2011) and a lack of information regarding available services (Garcia et al., 2011; Gallucci & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2019). However, participants did not discuss the stigma of mental illness, cultural differences, or language barriers as part of their rationale for not accessing support (Ellis et al., 2011; Garcia et al., 2011). For many, support was not accessed because of the unavailable demeanour of school counsellors, a desire to be approached by them rather than having to initiate contact, and the lack of a pre-existing relationship with them. These findings are noteworthy because they suggest that while these participants wanted external support, they were hesitant in accessing it. As a result, participants turned to their peers, and while this type of support is important, studies have argued that adult mentors and confidants greatly contribute to the well-being of newcomer youth (Hersi, 2011; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Marks, 2016; Suárez-Orozco & Michikyan, 2016; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the multi-faceted complexities of the phenomenon of cultural transition, which does not represent a linear process of integration into Canadian society. A key finding in this study centers of the multiple contexts in the lives of newcomer youth, including influential factors found within the school system, home life, and cultural community. It is critical, then, to bridge the gaps between these domains and adequately assess where intervening might be needed. Similarly, programs that engage newcomer youth and validate their roles in their new environments will help foster a strong sense of belonging and make them feel at home within the larger society.

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