

**The Acculturation Experiences of Female Syrian Youths in Canada: Barriers to Integration and
Coping Strategies**

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Abstract

This research reports on a qualitative and autoethnographic study that examines the acculturation experiences of Syrian female youths in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Canada using in-depth interviews with 11 participants conducted in 2019 by the Refugee Integration Stress and Equity (RISE) Team. This research investigates the difficult experiences and coping strategies adopted by female Syrian youths as a part of their acculturation process and cultural identity in Canada. This study contributes to the growing research on Syrian refugees' acculturation and cultural identity. The findings are discussed within the framework of Berry's (1997) model of acculturation. Based on the participants' reports, most Syrian female youths follow a separation orientation in which they highlighted their perceptions of cultural dissonance and Canadians as the "Other," and demonstrated a strong preference for in-group interactions. Syrian female youths have coped with the post-settlement difficulties by utilizing many available resources and support of their mothers, sisters, teachers, and community. Religious coping emerged as a mediator factor. Although Syrian female youths' participants expressed their desire for "successful integration," their post-migration circumstances and difficulties have placed them in isolation, separating them from experiences with Canadians locals and therefore integration.

Keywords: acculturation, cultural identity, female, Syrian, youths, Canada

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The Acculturation Experiences of Female Syrian Youths in Canada: Barriers to Integration and Coping Strategies

2012 marked the year when the war reached my city, Aleppo. I lived in the Al-Ashrafiya neighborhood which became the front lines of the battle between the regime forces and the Free Syrian Army. During my last two years in Syria, I was studying independently to finish high school because schools closed in Aleppo. There were many mornings when I woke up to the sounds of “Takbirs,” meaning that the Free Army had controlled our neighborhood. One night, I was standing on the balcony when the hospital across the street of our apartment was bombed. It was like watching a live action movie with real consequences. After this incident, my family and I had to move from one house to another for more than six times looking for safety. One morning in Aleppo, regime forces almost broke our door trying to come into our home looking for my brother who was a recent dissident from the regime army. My family was politically active against the regime and this pushed us to leave for Turkey.

Passing the armed checkpoints and running through snipers’ areas were my most challenging experiences when leaving Syria. After settling in Turkey for less than a year, we had to find a legal status in a safer country. I had moved to the US alone, and my mother took a boat from Turkey to cross illegally to Europe. I was then 17 years old and it was my first experience of long-time separation from my family. My family and I thought that seeking refuge was temporary until the war settled in Syria; however, after seven years of constantly moving around the world, I think my search for refuge is permanent.

For the past seven years, writing and conducting research about Syrian refugees has been my only tool to help me express my care for Syrian people and our revolution. I remember all the times in Aleppo city. I also remember my continuous dream of going to university in the

United States of America. It was not only my dream—I shared these ambitions with almost all young Syrian girls. We knew that there was no future for us in Syria even before the war started. I remember clearly the day I shared these dreams with some relatives. One man said, “you will never manage to get to America, it is impossible.” It was not usual for men to hear girls speaking confidently about big future plans. In fact, pursuing education in the USA definitely seemed impossible to achieve. For me, I wanted to go to America to pursue a good education and gain my personal freedom, both of which were unattainable in Syria, especially for girls and women. After fleeing the war to Turkey, I received a full scholarship from Monmouth College to study in the USA and moved there with high hopes.

Throughout my four years of college in the USA, I knew that I was living the dream of all Syrian youths. But in reality, I felt suffocated by the American suburbs and racism. I also felt so much guilt for leaving my country behind. I was living two dichotomized lives, one on social media where I was able to connect with my family and read news about Syria, and the other while attending classes with American (mostly White) students to discuss fine arts and theories. During my last year of college, I realized that I was no longer the same person I was when I lived in Syria. This realization came to me during a phone call with my father when I was talking for so long that my father had to stop me to say that I had been speaking in English the whole time and he could not understand me. I burst into tears knowing that I started losing my only tool of communication with my culture—Arabic. For this reason, I started reading about acculturation research trying to understand how Arab refugee communities have managed to adapt to North American culture.

When the revolution began with Syrians demanding their rights and freedom in 2011, Bashar Al-Assad led the republic into a war that resulted in the largest mass migration since

World War II. The Syrian crisis has resulted in the displacement of more than 5.6 million Syrians (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNHCR, 2020). In 2015, Canada became a major destination for Syrian refugees fleeing the war, especially for those who are particularly vulnerable including children, women, families, elderly, disabled, and members of the LGBTQ community. After experiencing the dangerous nature of the refugee pre-migration and migration journey, Syrian refugees face further challenges adapting to their new home in multicultural Canada (Government of Canada, 2018).

Canadian multiculturalism policies are intended to create a link between different cultural groups in Canada providing a vehicle for intercultural relations. The purpose of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act is “the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada” (Minister of Justice, 2020). Furthermore, while multiculturalism serves the needs of skilled immigrants and Canadians through moderating integration policies and programs, vulnerable refugees present a special case. Many elements contribute to the Syrian refugees’ integration and cultural identity including historical and socio-geographical factors. The focus of this research is on Syrian female youths’ cultural identity and acculturation in the GTA, a multicultural and immigrant-receiving city in Canada. This research builds mainly on Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation to explore cultural identity and acculturation orientations. Analyzing qualitative interviews with 11 Syrian female refugees about their experiences in the GTA provides a lens into Canadian multiculturalism and whether such multicultural policies are achieving their goal of “successful integration.”

Research Importance

Most acculturation literature is focused on the experiences of immigrants in multicultural communities using a quantitative research model, rather than a qualitative one, which is the focus

of this paper. While the scholarship on refugees' migration-related conditions, challenges, and mental health is prolific (see for example, Beiser, 2016; Dube et al., 2019; Safak-Ayvazoglu & Kunuroglu, 2020), there is limited literature on research about post-migration resettlement and acculturation. Furthermore, even less research has been concerned with youths' acculturation experiences, especially Syrian refugees, who comprise an underrepresented population. A systematic review by Pritchard and Ramos (2018) on youth refugee research in Canada also identifies a need to examine acculturation and resettlement challenges from a gendered perspective because at present, only two studies have focused on the experiences of female refugee youths. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature through documenting acculturation experiences and the complex cultural identity of 11 female Syrian youths in the multicultural GTA.

Research Questions

This study's purpose is to identify and explore some common themes in the acculturation experiences of Syrian female youths in the GTA, Canada.

The two research questions that guide this inquiry are:

- What are some possible factors that may contribute to making the integration, acculturation, process for Syrian female youths difficult?
- What are some coping strategies and factors that may mediate the challenges that Syrian female youths face in the integration process?

To address these questions, this major research paper proceeds in several parts, the first of which is a review of existing knowledge on this phenomenon. Here, I introduce the Syrian crisis and describe refugee resettlement in Canada. I then define refugee status in Canada using a comparison method to differentiate between immigrant and refugee statuses. I follow this by

explaining theories of acculturation focusing on Berry's model, and then explore the meaning of cultural identity. Next, I review Canadian multiculturalism and discuss how refugees fit in this rubric. I conclude the review by describing Syrian youths' preflight and flight journeys, their challenges in Syria and transit countries and finally, discuss existing research on post-migration resettlement experiences and acculturation of Syrian youths in Canada. Following this review, I describe the methods that underpin the empirical data from which my paper is drawn and provide a discussion of my analysis of the data.

Syrian Refugees and Resettlement in Canada

Syria has been undergoing a civil war since March 2011. The conflict started with a movement of protests calling for freedom from the dictatorship regime; however, it was repressed by the Syrian government forces, leading to civil war. As a result, this movement developed into a revolution and became a part of the Arab Spring uprisings. The continuing conflict in Syria has resulted in forcibly displacing more than half (55%) of the general Syrian population (UNHCR, 2017). Since the end of 2016, the highest number of refugees in the world have come from Syria, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2018). It is estimated that 5.6 million Syrians have been forced to flee Syria and crossed international borders during the past nine years. This conflict has led to the displacement of 5.6 million Syrian refugees most of whom have moved to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt, and one million have requested asylum in Europe. Three hundred thousand Syrian refugees have moved to North American countries (UNHCR, 2018). More than half of Syrian refugees are children and youths under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2016). Demographic characteristics show that the vast majority of Syrian refugees are Arab and Muslim (UNHCR, 2018).

Canada has been long considered an immigrant-receiving country. In 2015, Canada's federal Liberal government started an initiative to provide resettlement for 25,000 Syrian refugees through private, governmental, and blended sponsorship. This "Welcome Refugees" initiative was extended to admit more than 40,000 Syrian refugees in more than 350 Canadian communities, 52% of whom are adolescents under the age of 19 (Government of Canada, 2018). Thus, with a range of immigrant and refugee groups, Canada is considered a multicultural country that values diversity and reflects a complex multi-ethnic setting involving host communities and numerous immigrant groups of contrasting demographic backgrounds (Government of Canada, 2018).

Refugee Defined

The distinction between "refugee status" and "immigrant status" is of a great significance. While immigrants decide to move for economic or other political reasons, refugees are forcibly displaced both within their country and across international borders. According to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, a refugee is "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, What is a Refugee, n.d.). Moreover, refugees and immigrants display different patterns of immigration and acculturation.

Yu et al. (2007) identify two main characteristics that distinguish refugees from immigrants. First, refugees are resettled in Canada based on humanitarian grounds, whereas immigrants' abilities and skills are the key focus in achieving admission to Canada. Second, "the circumstances surrounding refugees' migration are likely to be much more traumatic than voluntary immigrants, which may impact their integration patterns and call for specialized

integration services” (Yu et al., 2007; p. 18). The challenges that refugees face throughout their lives are enormous.

Despite the benefits that refugees receive when resettling in contemporary Western countries as compared to the traumatic experiences from their homeland, many pre-migration and post-migration factors and stressors play a role in the “successful integration” of refugees into their resettled country. Pre-migration stressors include traumatic experiences in the war, loss of loved ones due to war, economic hardship, loss of home, and identity struggles. During migration, refugees are faced with the danger of traveling conditions. Post-migration challenges include new language acquisition, sociocultural hardships, reconstruction of identity, searching for jobs and housing, dealing with discrimination, and constantly planning for family reunification (El Khoury, 2019). All of these challenges are of significant importance when assessing and exploring the post-migration resettlement and acculturation of refugees.

Theories of Acculturation

Acculturation has been long defined as the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural groups “come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield et al., 1936). When individuals raised in one culture attempt to live in a new setting with a new set of cultural expectations, they will go through a process of changing their behaviors to be more appropriate to the new cultural setting (Berry, 1997). In addition to the migration difficulties refugees experience before resettlement, adopting a new mindset and new set of behaviors can be the source of difficulties for individuals. These difficulties experienced when adapting to a new setting are also referred to as acculturation stress (Celenk, 2011). However, acculturation models

have failed to recognize the gendered nature of acculturation and the importance of cultural differences in facilitating the integration process.

Researchers in immigrant and refugee studies distinguish between three categories of acculturation: acculturation *conditions* refer to antecedent conditions including contextual variables and settings that are the background of the acculturation process; moreover, it refers to the characteristics of the receiving country and country of origin (Celenk, 2011), acculturation *orientations* (also known as strategies) refer to the extent to which the migrant prefers to maintain the cultural heritage and/or adopt the host culture (Celenk, 2011), and acculturation *outcomes* refer to the psychological and social consequences of acculturation (Celenk, 2011).

Berry (1997) distinguishes between four different acculturation orientations. Immigrants or refugees who endorse *integration* want to maintain their cultural heritage and adopt the cultural identity of the host community. Integration in pluralist societies is based on two main values: diversity and equity. When intercultural relations between different cultural groups are based on the value of diversity but do not accept equity, *separation* and segregation result. Moreover, when there is equity but no acceptance of diversity, assimilation results. However, the integration proposed by multiculturalism is only achieved when balancing the values of both diversity and equity (Berry, 2011). *Assimilation* refers to the newcomer's wish to only adopt the host community's cultural identity. *Separation* refers to the newcomer's choice to only maintain their heritage culture. A *marginalization* orientation includes alienation from both their culture of origin and that of the host community (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation is a multidimensional process that is influenced by personal factors such as the individual's characteristics of culture of heritage. The perceived discrepancies between the cultural of origin and the host environment can impact acculturation. According to Berry (1997),

a large perceived cultural distance can be a challenge for migrants as it implies greater culture shedding and cultural learning. The greater the gap between the migrants' culture of origin, their perceived cultural identity, and the host's culture, the harder the acculturation process (Berry, 1997).

Two main patterns that should be identified when looking at refugees' integration in Canada are economic integration and socio-cultural integration. According to Yu et al. (2007), evidence about the refugee labor situation in Canada shows that government-assisted refugees lag behind in economic integration compared to privately sponsored refugees and landed-in-Canada refugees. During the fifth year, these differences disappear among refugees. However, data reveals that refugees in Canada have significantly lower employment rates and earnings compared to immigrants and Canadians (Yu et al., 2007). On the other hand, socio-cultural integration seems to be more difficult to assess as it includes variables of life satisfaction, Canadian citizenship, and social and political engagement.

Previous research on acculturation experiences of the Syrian refugee population in Turkey is mainly focused on education, language, sociocultural adjustment, and well-being. Safak-Ayvazoglu and Kunuroglu (2019; 2020) examined the acculturation experiences of Syrian refugees in Turkish universities and the Netherlands using a qualitative approach. The first study (2019) found that the majority of Syrian students in Turkey have adopted an integration orientation in public domains and separation in the private domain meaning that Syrian college students in Turkey display different patterns of acculturation orientations in different conditions; an integration orientation when in school or other public environments and a separation orientation with friends or in other private spheres. The second study (2020) found that the level of religious identity corresponds to the chosen acculturation orientation in which Syrians in the

Netherlands with low religiosity preferred an assimilation orientation and those with higher religiosity followed an integration orientation. In addition, religion seems to create a social-cultural distance between Syrians and the Dutch in the secular social environment of the Netherlands.

Acculturation research on Syrian youths in Canada is very limited. A recent study (Afify, 2020) explored male Syrian youths' acculturation experiences in the GTA drawing conclusions from the same larger set of qualitative data that I used for this study. Afify (2020) found that most of the adolescent males chose either an integration or separation acculturation orientations. More importantly, Afify explored how these Syrian males construct their identities in relation to the host majority of Canadians and identified their experiences related to acculturation stress and discrimination. Interestingly, while some males seemed to be comfortable expressing their affiliation with Canada and accepted multicultural ideologies, the study shows that others expressed stress and fear about "eventually assimilating and neglecting their cultural roots" (p. 17). In other words, Canadian multiculturalism, its policies, and the promoted integration policies seem to create pressure on Syrian youths to possibly praise Canada even for those who have experienced discrimination.

Cultural Identity

Adolescence is a sensitive period for identity formation and development, as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood (ages 16-19). Erikson's (1968) recognition of the psychological development of identity during adolescence marks the starting point for identity research. Erikson's focus on adolescence and identity formation as a part of human cycle development led to the realization that identity is an important construct. He states, "in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity" (p. 130).

According to Erikson (1968), psychological, social, and cultural factors should be recognized when considering youth's identity; however, his research mainly focused on the psychological aspect of identity and less on the cultural dimensions.

Social psychology researchers have explored cultural identity as a part of the acculturation process among migrants and displaced youths. Cultural identity is discussed within acculturation studies and is conceptualized as “an aspect of acculturation that focuses on immigrants' sense of self” (Berry et al., 2006). Cultural identity refers to more than the group category or label that one chooses. Phinney (1990) defines it as a sense of belonging to one or more cultural groups and the feelings associated with group membership.

The process of developing a sense of self that integrates previous experiences is influenced by the environment in which the youth is exposed to including family, community, peers, and national context (Phinney, 1990). This perspective has shed light on cultural identity as being context-bound, and on the idea that “cultural identity manifests in the presence of culturally different other(s)” (Khanlou, 1999). According to Khanlou et al. (2018), cultural identity is multileveled, fluid, complex, and dynamic and is influenced by youths' environment and their perceptions of this environment. To capture the cultural identities of Syrian female youths, it is important to explore their personal experiences and perceptions of the Canadian and Syrian cultures and values.

Multiculturalism

This part discusses how Canada's policy of multiculturalism manifests and contributes to articulating the acculturation orientations adopted by Syrian refugees and their youth.

The year 1971 marked the announcement of Canada's adoption of multiculturalism policy. Assimilation policies were discredited for their discriminatory nature against cultural

groups after War World II. This change in policy was accompanied by the adoption of integration policies, which encouraged all individuals to maintain their ethnic culture *and* participate in the larger Canadian society. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act's* objectives are to “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage” (Minister of Justice, 2020). In other words, Canadian multiculturalism policy proposed two main points regarding cultural diversity: first, the maintenance and support of different cultural groups, and second, is the promotion of intercultural contact and relations (Berry, 2013). Furthermore, multiculturalism policies were later adopted and promoted within governmental departments, agencies, and programs, followed by school curricula and media.

The concept of multiculturalism has been interpreted by many scholars. Berry and Kalin, (1977) provide a clear distinction between the definition of multiculturalism as a demographical fact (diversity), ideology (desire for maintaining diversity), and as a policy (governmental orientation). Furthermore, two main values are at the core of multiculturalism: diversity and equity. When both values are balanced, “successful integration” is achieved. Critics of multiculturalism have focused on presenting examples of how multiculturalism has failed in Europe, in the Netherlands in particular (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). Reasons behind this critique of multiculturalism include that it focuses mainly on diversity and maintenance of ethnic groups and disregarding the importance of promoting and sustaining equity (through programs) leading communities to segregation (Berry, 2013).

According to the objectives of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of Canada, one of the resettlement program’s goals is “to promote the successful integration of permanent

residents [immigrants and refugees] into Canada while recognizing that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society” (Government of Canada, 2019, para. 4). However, another objective in Article 32 states: “the Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of [domestic asylum] refugees” (UNHCR, 1954, p. 18). These two directions are both important to consider when assessing how refugees are adjusting to their new home. Settlement programs in Canada have stressed the fact that integration is not only concerned with the refugee/immigrant groups but with “mutual obligations” for host Canadians and newcomers. Therefore, multiculturalism is the vehicle that links different ethnic groups together providing programs that facilitate these intercultural relations. Without policies of multiculturalism, such links would be more difficult to achieve and “national identity is more likely to lead to intolerance and xenophobia” (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; p. 61).

Contemporary refugee literature in Canada have recognized the co-creation of two identities: the refugee “Other” and the national “self” (Bauder, 2008). Previous research examined the process of “Othering” refugees as a part of the construction of the Canadian national identity. The construction of Canadian national identity is a dialectical process that involves maintaining the self-image of humanitarian, liberal, and refugees as burdensome and vulnerable Other (Olsen, 2016). Research suggests that Othering is more of an implicit process that is embedded in social beliefs and discourses surrounding the refugee. The continuous distinction of “refugees” separates refugee groups from the population and constructs the refugee group as collective existing within the boundaries creating the self-image of Canadian national identity (Kumsa, 2006).

Perceptions of Canada's multicultural policies differ among Canadians. This is notably true between English and French settings in Canada. According to Berry (2011), French respondents who live in Quebec viewed multiculturalism differently from those who live beyond Quebec. French people who live outside Quebec view multiculturalism policies and programs as important for the continuity and maintenance of the French culture and identity, whereas respondents inside Quebec perceive multiculturalism as a support for the continuity of "Other" groups and "possibly undermining the majority position of French Canadians in "their own" province (Berry, 2011; p. 2.10). Social psychologists relate this issue to Social Dominance Theory and orientation (Esses et al., 2006) indicating that Canadians who follow social dominance orientation favour a hierarchically structured social system, tend to prefer in-group dominance, and perceive cultural immigrants and refugees as threats (Esses et al., 2001). Moreover, those who adopt the social dominance orientation tend to show negative attitudes toward immigrants/refugees and migration (Esses et al., 2005). Moreover, Arab and Muslims in Quebec seem to experience the highest rate of discrimination suggesting a tendency to affiliate more with the separationist (ethnic) acculturation strategy and following strategies of assimilation less often (Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

According to Banting and Kymlicka (2010), Muslims in Canada identify themselves as Muslims first and Canadians second. Syrian refugees in Ontario tend to identify themselves as Arab-Canadians with an understanding that there is a low probability they will return to Syria (Mohammed & Bastug, 2020). However, Arab immigrants and refugees seem to be "overwhelmingly proud of Canada" and its diversity (p. 56). Reasons behind such pride are related to their protected freedom to express their Muslim and Arab identity in Canada without the need to justify their beliefs in this culture that contradicts views from their homeland. A

study by Mohadmed and Bastug (2020) found that Syrian refugee artists in the Kitchener-Waterloo area report that multiculturalism in Canada to have provided space for them to express and produce art about their Syrian culture. In fact, Muslims display higher sense of belonging and pride of their Canadian identity which was found to be mainly related to the Canadian multicultural image (McCoy et al., 2016).

Although Muslims in Canada seem to perceive less hostility and discrimination compared to those in different Western countries (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010), newcomers from Muslim-majority countries (Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria) seem to lag behind other immigrants even when key markers of human capital (e.g. level of education and skills) are held constant (Taylor, 2019). In fact, several European countries have experienced challenges in the social integration of different ethnic groups, resulting in the belief that support for multiculturalism is misplaced (Norton-Taylor, 2008).

In the past, Canadian multiculturalism policy has promoted an integration orientation hoping for immigrants and refugees to achieve “successful integration.” Multiculturalism in Canada has mainly focused on bringing immigrants who are highly skilled in comparison to immigrants in different countries. With a higher rate of skilled immigrants, a higher rate of human capital is established. According to this fact, Canadian multiculturalism policy contributes “nothing to the successful integration of immigrants in Canada and may in fact impede it” (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010, p. 60).

The Impact of Displacement on Syrian Female Youths

Pre-migration

Refugee youths are exposed to many traumatic events as they are fleeing persecution from their home country. Due to the nature of war and violence in Syria, most children and

youths have experienced living in a war zone, torture or loss of a family member, violence, bombings, kidnapping, separation from parents, and poverty (Mercy Corps, 2016). War trauma is most recognized when describing pre-migration challenges of refugees and their wellbeing. According to studies concerned with mental health, results indicate that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is most common among children who have been exposed to war and violence, followed by depression (Hadfield et al., 2017). Sirin and Roger-Sirin's (2015) study on Syrian children in a Turkish camp have found that 23% of children included sources of trauma in their drawings, and 9% of children drew images of blood when asked to "draw a person." Another study that compared immigrant and refugee children with youths in Canada found that refugee girls exhibit higher levels of internalizing problems compared to refugee boys, and refugee children overall demonstrate higher levels of emotional problems having experienced significant trauma (Beiser & Hou, 2016). Moreover, the number of traumatic events children and youths were exposed to contribute directly to their symptoms of PTSD, internalizing problems, and aggression (Beiser & Hou, 2016).

Gendered War

Conflict and war have put women and girls in increased vulnerability and danger. Men and women experience war differently, as feminist research shows "wars are gendered" (Asaf, 2017). The conflict in Syria has imposed different challenges on Syrian females, and this is why investigating gender specific challenges is important. The majority of female youths were children between 5-11 years old when the Syrian war started in 2011. War and migration have shaped their identities and has impacted their post-migration experiences and their ability to be resilient. In order to have a deeper understanding of refugees' acculturation and resettlement experiences, it is important to highlight gender specific challenges, resilience, and survival in the

midst of cultural constraints and crisis. The dangerous situations that refugee girls experience do not end when arriving at a destination or host country. Furthermore, humanitarian responses do not always prepare women and girls to respond to crisis. For instance, one study by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) found, "Certain populations receive less attention and less access to programs, including the elderly, women and girls living outside the camps, people with disabilities and sexual minorities" (WRC, 2014, p. 1). However, many girls and women have managed to survive and are able to play a role in peacebuilding.

In Syria, women and girls have been long perceived as representing the family's honor. Women and girls who experience extra-marital sexual conduct (even if it was by force) are thought to bring shame to and damage the honor and reputation of their families and communities. This phenomenon reflects how women are perceived and treated in Syria and is important in understanding the experiences of Syrian girls. Additionally, early and forced marriage has always been part of the Syrian culture; however, according to a report by Save the Children (2014), "early and forced marriage among Syrian refugee girls in Jordan has doubled since the onset of war" (page or paragraph number). Adolescent Syrian refugee girls are considered to be the most at-risk for different types of gender-based violence "with 28% (of female participants) also mentioning that the safety and security of all children in general has been at increased risk during the years since 2011" (Feghali, 2019, p. 6). The collectivist Syrian culture has long imposed many restrictions on young girls in such a way that not only do they represent their own family's reputation, but also their entire ethnic group.

Migration

Syrian Girls in Transition Countries

The image of Alan Kurdi (photo credit: Nilufer Demir, 2015), a child who was found lying dead on the shores of Turkey generated a sympathetic humanitarian response from around the world. The journey of refugees is indeed full of challenges and those who survived travel across the Mediterranean Sea are fortunate. The journeys of refugees, via sea or land, is often as dangerous as the war they are attempting to escape. Syrian refugees spend a significant time in transit countries waiting for opportunities to seek refuge in Europe and other North American countries.

Syria's neighboring countries have been on the front lines of the Syrian refugee humanitarian crisis with Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey currently hosting over 600 thousand, almost 900 thousand, and over one million refugees, respectively. Moreover, Iraq hosts around 220,000 refugees, while Egypt hosts more than 140,000. While these numbers only include registered refugees, in reality, the number of Syrian refugees is much higher. This is because many choose not to register their names with UNHCR for the fear of having their names on official record, or because they lack documents that allow official registration (Berti, 2015), or because only 7 percent of the refugee population lives in camps (UNHCR Regional Report, 2020). The demographics of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries reveal that the majority of refugees are women and children with more than half of the Syrian refugee population under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2018). Almost all Syrian refugees in Canada have spent time in Syria's neighboring countries when fleeing the war. The lack of security had the most negative impact on the well-being of refugee women and girls, creating extremely difficult challenges for refugees in the Middle East. Reports from neighboring countries stress how refugees experience

a lack of basic security, shelter, healthcare, housing, and employment, all of which are important for survival (UNHCR Regional Report, 2020).

The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon who live in resident communities is estimated at almost 1.5 million, with 70% living in poverty. Lebanon is considered to be the host of the highest concentration per capita of refugees in the world (Dube et al., 2019). However, Lebanon has not established a formal refugee camp, leading refugee families to live in informal tented areas or overcrowded rented apartments. This influx of refugees causes increased chaos in Lebanon, considering that it always had a fragile economic and public service infrastructure (Dube et al., 2019). Since the arrival of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and due to the heightened poverty, refugees are often unwelcomed. As the tensions between refugees and Lebanese people heightened, refugees began to adopt different coping mechanisms to ensure safety. These coping mechanisms have contributed to tight restrictions on refugee women and girls, including keeping women and girls in homes and children out of schools.

Education in Transition Countries

Providing access to education is complex for most Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, in particular as international humanitarian and host communities struggle to accommodate Syrian children where “the local educational system [is] increasingly overcrowded, under financial strain...with overworked personnel” (Berti, 2015, p. 45). For instance, the population of Syrian children in Lebanese public schools outnumbers Lebanese children. However, the gross enrollment rate of Syrian children drops from 55% during primary education to 13% for secondary education (Berti, 2015). The refugee children’s enrolment decline is related to reasons such as the insecure nature of the Lebanese environment, male children are put in labor market to help their families, and girls usually are prepared for early and

forced marriage. Still, Syrian children in refugee camps are more likely to attend school. For instance, 83% of Syrian children (age 6-11) in camps in Turkey attend school, whereas only 14% of Syrian children outside Turkish camps are in school. Syrian children face many challenges in accessing education, “Lack of proper documentation, costs of education, distance from school, safety issues, cultural or language barriers, strong differences in the curriculum, or the need to work to support the household have kept Syrian children out of schools, a trend with extremely negative long-term consequences” (Berti, 2015, p. 45).

The interrupted educational years of Syrian refugee children in transit countries contribute to stressors in transit and resettlement countries. Syrian youths (aged 12-17) are no longer considered children by their Syrian community or by their host community and have been referred to as “the lost generation” (Watenpaugh et al., 2014). For instance, Syrian families in Turkey send their boys to work for 15 Euros a week, while girls with no access to schools are left with one option—to get married as soon as possible (WHR, 2015). Furthermore, interrupted schooling and learning gaps have an effect on youths’ ability to “integrate” when continuing their education in resettlement countries.

Until this moment, the lack of financial support for refugees in transit countries of the Middle East creates the most challenging and insecure environment for vulnerable refugees who are seeking security at first. As a result of continuous poverty, refugees feel constantly unsafe in transit countries and attempt to flee to Europe and North American countries.

Post-migration Acculturation

Once in Canada, adolescent refugees further are challenged to face various resettlement stressors including separation from their home country, family members, caregivers, and friends, along with language barriers, discrimination, educational difficulties, and lack of resources

(Hadfield et al., 2017). The post-migration period, which includes adjusting to a new environment in one's host country usually causes what Fazel and Stein (2002) refer to as "secondary trauma." During this period, youths may continue to experience stressors related to racism, discrimination, financial difficulties, cultural distance, linguistic differences, and loss of familiar support system (Fazel & Stein, 2002). Furthermore, acculturation differences between refugee family members may add to the stress on youth. According to Berman (2001), as youths learn the language and norms of the new country, parents start to depend on their children to help them navigate how to communicate with their host environment. As family roles shift, youths may feel pressured to meet both their parents' and peers' competing expectations.

It has been suggested that the level of acculturation is strongly related to one's individual characteristics (Celenk, 2011). A systematic review on refugee youth research identified three key post-migration factors which corresponded to successful integration. These key dimensions include language and learning, social integration, and wellbeing (Pritchard & Ramos, 2018). In other words, language proficiency, learning to navigate the culture of the host country, and ensuring wellbeing of refugee youth are the key determinants of successful integration.

Language and Learning

Refugee youths face many challenges in their new learning environment. Many have gaps in their education due to pre-migration war and migration circumstances. While younger refugee children demonstrate faster development of English learning, youths who arrive at later age are most at risk of negative educational outcomes. Canadian educational institutions (including teachers and staff) seem to have little knowledge of refugee students' pre-migration experiences; moreover, such institutions often lack suitable assessment tools for grade placement. The misinterpreted assessment and the families limited documentations of students'

educational histories lead refugee students to be placed in grades below their age group. Thus, making friendships with younger classmates becomes more challenging for refugee youths especially those who have been taking an adult role throughout their migration journey. While the disrupted schooling can create challenges when entering schools in Canada, many teachers often attribute the student's failure to lack of language proficiency. Additionally, placing children in grades which are above their previous schooling level adds to the challenges that children experience in their new learning environment (Pritchard & Ramos, 2018). Moreover, El Khoury (2019) investigated the sociocultural adjustment and found more than 40% of Syrian refugees in Germany reported language learning as the major obstacle experienced when adjusting to their new life in Germany.

A recent cross-cultural qualitative study (Shamim et al., 2020) examined the challenges Syrian youths and children face when adapting to a new learning environment in Canada and Germany. Results revealed that refugee children's English levels were significantly lower compared to Canadian-born children, while noting that these children have been in Canada for only three years. Interestingly, teachers reported that Syrian youths and children had the ability to solve numerical equations and preferred non-language-centered subjects such as arts and gym. Moreover, social connections and friendships were noted to be easier to form in small English Second Language groups where all students were recent newcomers. Lastly, parents had trouble communicating with the children's teachers and school staff due to the lack of English proficiency (Shamim et al., 2020). Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) found that lower levels of language learning can prevent refugee children and youths from forming social networks outside their ethnic group, leading to isolation and exclusion.

Social Integration

The initial settlement housing and location of Syrian families in Canada is an important predictor of social integration. According to Connor (2010), refugees often reside in poor neighborhoods surrounded by immigrant populations. In particular, Syrian families seek residence in high concentration Syrian population neighborhoods which have familiar cultural and religious institutions from which to seek support. While living in a Syrian neighborhood has its benefits for maintaining cultural identity and values, there are many negative consequences such as social isolation and exclusion. According to Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2019), Syrian refugees are most concentrated in the GTA and Montreal. There are many challenges that newcomer refugees face when entering the housing market in Canada. The lack of affordable housing for large families in the cities (40% of the Syrian refugee population have over 6 family members; Rose, 2019) leads families to relocate shortly after initial settlement to suburbs where transportation services are limited. However, social services intended for refugees' integration are concentrated in larger cities, so many of these services often struggle to locate enough refugee participants (Rose, 2019). Results show better accessibility to services when refugees live in the city, in particular, those privately sponsored refugees whose sponsor helps them secure housing that is near by the sponsor's own residence. On the other hand, "social isolation of refugee newcomers is thought to contribute to distress and impede integration" (Rose, 2019, p. 15).

Wellbeing

Adolescence can be usually a stage when youths are challenged with understanding and managing their own mental health. Recent research concerned with youths' interpretation and perception of mental health has found that reinterpreting this term resulted in a more in-depth

conversations with Syrian adolescents. A study by Filler and her colleagues (2019) explored how Syrian youths conceptualize mental health. Syrian youth participants have associated the term “mental health” with illness or shame. Moreover, participants’ interpretation of what mental health means shifted when it was framed with different words such as “stress, pressure, and comfort” (Filler et al., 2019, p. 6). Research findings include positive hope for the future in Canada, whereas service providers noted avoidance of discussing pre-migration stressors and experiences (Filler et al., 2019).

In conclusion, this literature review addressed the implications of Canadian multiculturalism and its’ policies on Syrian refugees’ integration into the Canadian society. Understanding refugees’ status and conditions compared to immigrants is important in this case. Syrian refugees are challenged by various stressors during pre-migration, the migration journey, and acculturation during post-migration. Canada’s “Welcome Refugees” initiative adds the challenges which multiculturalism impose on different cultural groups. Moreover, evidence shows an early integration and possible segregation (separation) orientation among Syrian refugees. Lastly, understanding various acculturation orientations and cultural identities adopted by refugees provide us with a closer look at Canadian multiculturalism and Canada’s ability to welcome newcomers.

Methods

The data for this project was designed and collected as part of Refugee Integration Stress and Equity Team (RISE; Human Subjects Approval #00036436), a 2018-2023 longitudinal study of Syrian newcomers in the GTA, led by Principal Investigator Dr. Neda Maghbouleh, an Associate Professor of Sociology and Canada Research Chair in Migration, Race, and Identity, at the University of Toronto. The RISE Team is funded by a SSHRC Insight Grant and the Ontario

Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade. As a research assistant on the RISE Team, I was given the opportunity to use the data collected between 2018 and 2019 for my research. The original dataset includes interviews with mothers and their children; however, this research focuses on Syrian female youths (ages 16-19) from that dataset. The interview items include 40 questions about participants' history, religion, identity, and problems (see Appendix A).

Interviews with youth participants were scheduled by contacting their mothers. The location and time of the interview were scheduled according to the participants' preferences. Following the ethical guidelines, interviews began with debriefing the participants on their rights as participants in this research, explaining how confidentiality would be maintained, and that participation is voluntary. The interviewer explained clearly that if the participant wished to terminate the interview, they could do so at any moment, at which time, all of their information would be deleted from the study. Moreover, participants were also informed that they would be assigned an ID number and that if any portion of their interview was going to be used in research publications that their identity would be protected by a pseudonym. Collected data was protected and only accessible to RISE Team members. Finally, every participant was given a \$25 gift card to a local pharmacy store in recognition of their time and contribution.

Interviews were conducted in Arabic or English depending on the participant's preference. After the completion of data collection, interviews were transcribed and translated into English. Once the transcription process was finished, a thematic analysis was run to explore acculturation strategies and cultural identity among the participants. Lastly, it is important to note that many interviews were conducted with parental supervision. It is likely that parental presence may have had an impact on the youth participants' responses.

Results

This section presents an in-depth exploration of the themes that emerged from the data in relation to the research questions set out in this study, specifically, the acculturation experiences of Syrian female youths in the GTA. The analysis of the participants' experiences in Canada reveals that the acculturation process is impacted by several challenges. These challenges include language barriers, perception of Canadians and cultural differences, limited social interactions, emotional difficulties, and discrimination. However, Syrian female youths employ a range of coping strategies to mediate these difficulties. Such strategies include language acquisition, making use of available support, and various coping strategies related to religion. This study's purpose is to explore some common themes in the acculturation experiences of Syrian female youths in Canada. Excerpts from the interviews were carefully considered to answer this study's research questions.

The research questions that guide this study are:

- What are the possible factors that may contribute to making the integration process for Syrian female youths difficult?
- What are some coping strategies and factors that may mediate the challenges that Syrian female youths face in the integration process?

Overview of Findings

All Syrian female youths ($N=11$) in this study were 16 to 19 years old. See Appendix B summarizes the participants' profiles. Only one interview (Participant 11) was conducted in English while the rest ($n=10$) were conducted in Arabic.

Syrian female youths often compared their experiences between Syria, transit countries, and Canada. Many participants described having experienced traumatic incidents such as war in

general, being kidnapped in Syria, losing family members, and being lost in Syria. Additionally, participants explained the challenges they experienced in transition countries including educational pause, financial difficulty, and the absence of a social life.

All participants reported learning English as their most or only challenging experience since arriving to Canada. Some participants reported that English barriers limited them from making social connections. The majority of participants emphasized their preference for in-group relationships. Some participants reported emotional difficulties with feelings of homesickness and isolation. Ten participants identified as Muslim and one as Christian, with the majority of youths identifying as religious. Some participants reported experiences with discrimination, bullying, and racism. All of these experiences are important to consider as a part of the participants' fluid and complex identities when assessing their acculturation in Canada.

Participants' perception of Canada's culture and Canadians is a strong indicator of their preferred acculturation orientations. The majority of participants noted the differences between the Canadian and Syrian cultures. Such perceived dissonance between the two cultures seemed to influence their cultural identity and acculturation orientations. The majority of participants referred to Canadians as White Westerners; however, participants believed that Canadians are nice and were grateful for their welcoming of Syrian refugees.

Findings are organized in two clusters. The first cluster comprises the youths' discussions about the challenges and barriers they encountered during the acculturation process such as their perception of Canadians and cultural differences, language barriers, limited social interactions, emotional difficulties, and discrimination. The second cluster includes factors that mediate the challenges and their various coping strategies adopted during the acculturation process including English acquisition, making use of different social support, and religious coping strategies.

Barriers to Integration

This section answers the first research question and elucidates themes in the acculturation experiences of Syrian female youths in the GTA. The research question addressed in this section is:

- What are some factors that may contribute to making the integration process for Syrian female youths difficult?

All participants were asked about the difficulties they encountered since their arrival to Canada. Reported difficulties were recognized and categorized as follow: language difficulties, social difficulties, and emotional difficulties.

Language Difficulties

As reported by all participants, language difficulties were most ubiquitous and impacted among many aspects of all the participants' lives. The majority of participants reported that language difficulties were the only, or at least the most prominent challenge they experienced in Canada. Some participants also stressed that language is a key to adaptation. Almost all participants acknowledged that "if you don't learn the language here, you can't do anything. The language is the most important" (Participant 3). Although they acknowledged the importance of English acquisition to the integration process, Syrian female youths were still experiencing difficulties with language even approximately three years after their arrival in Canada.

According to participants' reports, language challenges impacted their ability to engage in social relationships and in the academic context, and language emerged as a major social barrier between Syrians and Canadians. Below, Participant 1 expresses finding tribulation and feeling "scared" when initially faced with new post-migration challenges with English barriers being the core of these challenges.

Participant (P) 1: Okay. So, when we first arrived in Canada, to be honest it was hard, when we arrived. In terms of language, a new country, and a lot of people told us a lot of things about Canada like in terms of religion, uh studying... So, at that point, we were scared to be honest. Like a new country and you saw, it's not an Arabic country. So, everything is the opposite of course. For sure we found a lot of tribulations like the language, how do you communicate with people, how to find work. It's hard. So, we stayed in the hotel. When we first moved to the house, I enrolled in school. The first two years were very hard, but this year, thanks to God, I was telling my mom a while ago that this year was different than the past years. You feel like this is it. I'm speaking the language, my things are going well, I have friends. This is it.

In the above excerpt, Participant 1 first describes the difficulties she experienced when first arriving to Canada but then, recognized the progress she made with learning the language and its impact on her ability to develop friendships.

The following excerpt highlights how the language barrier limits the youths' ability to socially interact with English-speaking peers. Participant 8 explains below the feelings of isolation and social difficulties she experienced related to being surrounded with only English-speaking students in her high school.

Interviewer (I): What are the hardest things that you find at school? Now, where you are, what are the hardest things? It can be... courses... anything that you find hard.

P8: Sometimes it's understanding people or making friends. It's like so hard. Especially in my school, they all speak English. No one speaks my language. No one at all. So, it's sooo hard... In the old school, there were a lot of Arab people. They were all newcomers and stuff. But they were all so friendly; I found a lot of friends in the beginning. But this

school, it's all Canadians so it's hard to find friends. But like, yeah... No one speaks my language. They all speak English.

This participant's narrative is in line with previous research findings (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009), where lower levels of language learning prevented Syrian female youths from forming social networks outside their in-group, leading to isolation and exclusion.

Some participants highlighted how language issues impacted their learning of other subjects such as science and math. Below, Participant 11 explains in the next excerpt how she had already learned the basics of these subjects in Arabic and Armenian, but experienced difficulty relearning them in the English language.

I: Do you have any difficulties with the language or any specific classes?

P11: I had difficulty with language when I first came because the English, I knew it was only in books. I never used English to talk with people. So that took time to get used to. The only subject I have difficulty with is math. And that is because the basics that I know are in different languages. I know them in Arabic, and I know them in Armenian, but I do not know them in English.

The following excerpt exemplifies how the language barrier and difficulties learning English adds to feelings of uncertainty and lack of confidence about the participant's ability to study science. Participant 8 responds to the interview question by sharing that she decided to change the course of her studies because of her difficulty with grasping the English language.

I: Do you have any concerns about your future here?

P8: Yeah, sometimes... Like... Cause... I don't really speak the language so it's hard for me to choose what I wanna study. Like when I first came here, I was like really good at science and math and like everything. Except like the language, the English. And when I

tried to study science, because I wanna be a doctor, so... it was... Science was soo hard so I couldn't study science. So now I can't study to be a doctor. I have to study something else.

Language acquisition emerged as the main challenge for Syrian female youths participating in this study. Although participants realized the importance of language acquisition in the integration process, low levels of English proficiency impacted the participants' abilities to make social connections and continue with their desired educational path. Moreover, participants related feelings of fear, uncertainty, and isolation to their low English proficiency which contributed to integration barriers and acculturative stress.

Perception of Canadians as the "Other"

In this section, I present findings on how Syrian female youths understand and mediate their Canadian and Syrian identities. Cultural identity in this study was evaluated as perceptions relating to collectivistic and other Syrian cultural values. The interviews with the youths provide us with insights into their preferred acculturation orientations. They also address the participants' perceptions of Canadians and Canadians' perceived attitudes of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, the interviews reveal the participants' perception of the cultural differences between Canada and Syria to better describe the acculturation conditions.

It is important to note that the participants' perceptions of Canadians are formed through their interactions and experiences with Canadians in the GTA where the participants settled permanently. The youths' perceptions of who is Canadian and their understanding of Canadians' attitudes towards Syrian refugees varied. While the majority of participants were grateful for the Canadians' support of Syrian newcomers, many of their narratives indicate their perception of

Canadians as the “Other,” while also acknowledging the cultural differences between Canadians and Syrians in relation to the values of individualism and religiosity.

The way Syrian female youths view themselves in Canada is a part of their cultural identity formation and acculturation orientation. One question in the interview guide examines the youths’ perception of who is Canadian and whether the participants find themselves a part of Canadian society. When asked to describe a Canadian, seven participants used words such as “white,” “blonde,” and “foreigner.” Only two Syrian female participants perceived and categorized themselves as a part of the same social group as the Canadians in the GTA.

Contemporary refugee literature in Canada have recognized the co-creation of two identities: the refugee “Other” and the national “self” (Bauder, 2008). Previous research examined the process of “Othering” refugees as a part of the construction of the Canadian national identity. The construction of Canadian national identity is a dialectical process that involves maintaining the self-image of humanitarian, liberal, and the refugees as burdensome and vulnerable Other (Olsen, 2016). Research suggests that Othering is more of an implicit process that is embedded in social beliefs and discourses surrounding the refugee. The continuous distinction of “refugees” separates refugee groups from the population and constructs the refugee group as collective existing within the boundaries creating the self-image of Canadian national identity (Kumsa, 2006).

The distinction between refugees and Canadians may have influenced the participants’ perception of Canadians as “Other.” While previous research has examined Canadians’ perceptions of refugees as the “Other,” in this study, the majority of youths described Canadians with words such as “blonde” and “white.” When the particular participant describes a Canadian as “P: Like those on TV, white, blonde” (Participant 6), this demonstrates the participant’s

perception of that Canadian person as the “Other.” Moreover, Participant 3 considered Canadians as “foreigners,” meaning that she also perceives Canadians as “Other,” rather than her own self as “Other.”

I: Like, what is a foreigner? Like, someone not Syrian?

P3: For sure someone who isn’t Syrian, [unclear 20:17; may have said: not of Syrian heritage], there are Canadian and whatnot, their heritage is like that.

Furthermore, some participants also attributed English proficiency and experience to a Canadian identity. For example, Participant 1 described a Canadian as a blonde who speaks fluent English and has experiences due to the opportunities Canadians usually receive. In this case, a Canadian is perceived as the “Other” whose identity is not similar to the participant’s.

I: (Laughing). So now when someone says “Canadian,” what do you think of?

P1: I don’t know like (nervous laughing) first, a Canadian has the language. English, he speaks. Uh –

I: Is there a specific appearance you think of?

P1: Yes.

I: What do you think?

P1: I think – I don’t know like I can’t explain it to you, but it’s like Canadians would have studied a lot, they know a lot of things, and stuff. That’s how I feel them, because really, they have a lot of experience, for example. You go and ask them a question; they would have a lot of experiences in life and stuff. So, yeah and blonde, first of all (laughing).

I: Blonde. Okay.

P1: And like that.

Additionally, those who perceived Canadians as “Other” also tend to rely on in-group Syrian support leading to a lack of quality of social interactions with Canadians which is also related to low English language proficiency. Although Participant 3’s description of a Canadian indicated a preference for an integration orientation when she said, “he looks like a human, like us,” throughout the conversation with her, indicators of separation orientation emerged such as strong preference for in-group relations. When we asked her about her school and friends, she expressed that she only interacts with Syrians when class is finished. In addition, she describes feeling more “comfortable” when being around her Syrian friends:

P3: Studying is good and now I started second “semester” [unclear 4:57; may have said: the last] “semester” in school. And, thank God, everything is good. And I have friends, of course, but I don’t interact much with foreigners, outside of class.

I: Now, you said, foreigners, like who are the foreigners?

P3: Like those that are with us, there are Koreans, there are Pakistanis, there are Canadians.

I: Do you talk to them?

P3: I talk to them in class, but outside of class I’m with my friends, all of them are Syrian.

I: All of them are Syrian?

P3: Yeah.

I: Mmm, and why?

P3: Mmm, I don’t know, when I’m with them I feel more comfortable [unclear 5:37-5:38]

I: Do you talk with them in Arabic?

P3: Mhmm.

The majority of participants have distinguished their cultural identities from the Canadian population by indicating that they perceive Canadians as different “Other.” Moreover, only two participants have perceived their cultural identities to be part of the multicultural Canada. The Othering process of Canadians is an indication of Syrian female youths’ preference for separation acculturation orientation that places them within their in-group as a collective within Canada.

Perception of Cultural Dissonance

Participants expressed their cultural identities by stating that they noted discrepancies between Syrian collectivist and Canadian individualist cultural values. The majority of participants noted the gap between the cultural values of Canadians and participants’ own Syrian culture. Lack of social solidarity and values of collectivism was highlighted by some participants. Participant 5 relates her initial perception of Canadians to the cultural value of individualism as those who “depend on themselves.” She also highlights the lack of collectivist culture or “social solidarity,” as this participant calls it.

I: Okay, uhh, when you used to hear someone say “Canadian”, what did he look like in your head?

P4: I used to feel that uhh it is always cold and there isn’t, there isn’t any warmth at all, and one must depend on themselves, there isn’t much of social solidarity or anything like that.

I: Is your perception different now?

P4: Yeah.

I: How so?

P4: My expectation was that there were no people, no people, no sun.

The participants' perception of individualistic Canadian society evoked feelings of isolation and "loneliness" in Canada. Furthermore, Participant 5 highlighted positive feelings and having "good times" when being around her larger family and neighbors in Syria. Her separation from her larger family and collectivist culture evoked feelings of isolation related to the lack of social life in Canada. Thus, a preference for a separation acculturation orientation is evident in this excerpt below from her interview.

P5: But, after [she arrived, she realized that] no there is a social life but like not a lot.

I: Mhmm. Uhh, did you expect that there would be more of a social life?

P5: No

I: More isolation?

P5: Yeah.

I: Ah, okay, okay. Okay, why would you like there to be more of social life?

P5: I don't know, I feel that one, one spends a good time, and like we are also used to this since we were younger, always a large family, neighbors, and what not.

The cultural differences between Syria and Canada have contributed to the acculturation challenges experienced by the Syrian female youths. The Canadian cultural value of individualism, which is against the nature of the Syrian highly collectivist culture, was reported to evoke feelings of isolation and loneliness among some participants.

Religious Differences

The majority of participants reported that they enjoyed learning about different cultures and religions in the multicultural GTA. While the majority of White Anglo Canadians are from a Christian background, Muslim participants note the cultural distance between the Christian West

and their culture of origin. For example, Participant 7 notes, “Now, there is one difference that we don’t hear the Adhan [call to prayer].” Here, this participant notes the absence of the sounds of Adhan she used to hear five times a day from mosques in Syria.

Participant 1 describes the mutual respect she observed between people from different religious backgrounds. Although she was “weirded out” by some practices she observed in her Christian and Jews neighbors, she emphasizes on her positive experience when learning about religions other than Islam and how such learning did not change her Muslim beliefs.

P1: Here when I came, the first while to be honest uh – before, I wasn’t living in an area with Christians and Jews, but it’s nice. I like it this way. You get to know about their religion, their culture and stuff. So, when I first came here, at first, I was weirded out by a few things that are different than what we have, but at the same time, my perspective on my religion didn’t change. No, it’s the opposite. I liked it like a different religion, something all [inaudible] according to their culture, but at the same time, I respect all religions. They also respect my religion so...

The perceived discrepancies between the Syrian and Canadian cultures can impact acculturation. A large perceived cultural distance can be a barrier for Syrian female youths’ integration as it requires balancing aspects of both cultures and it implies greater “culture shedding and cultural learning” (Berry, 1997; p.23). The greater the cultural gap between the participants’ perceived cultural identity and the host’s culture, the harder the acculturation process (Berry, 1997).

As noted in the excerpts above, participants expressed their respect for Canadian culture, religions, and values. However, those who have stressed their perception of cultural differences between Syrians and Canadians rely heavily on in-group for their social interactions.

In-group Interactions

Friendships play a significant role in the youth's construction of identity and acculturation process, both in terms of having Syrian friends and making new friends. Relationships within the Syrian community were found to be the core of the participants' social lives. Participants rely heavily on in-group support and have a preference for in-group interactions due to language barriers and difficulties forming relationships with the English-natives. Many participants stressed the importance of having Syrian or Arab connections. While many participants reported feelings of familiarity and comfort with Syrians in Canada, they also reported deeper and more meaningful relationships (like those formed in Syria) were difficult to establish in Canada, even with Syrians. One participant expressed her preference to befriend only Arabs in the beginning: "When I first came here, no, I talked to Arabs, I didn't talk to foreigners." (Participant 2)

Previous research about Syrian children and youths in Canada have found that small-group classes, such as English Second Language (ESL), have encouraged students to communicate with their peers who are also refugees and newcomers (Shamim et al., 2020). Below, Participant 4 expressed making friendships with Syrians and newcomers from the English Second Language (ESL) class.

I: How – how did you make your friends?

P4: At first, we were in ESL class.

I: Mhm.

P4: So, we were approximately all coming here new and that.

I: Mhm.

P4: Most of us were Syrian, so we became friends a lot with each other.

Below, Participant 8 expressed her frustration about not having any Arabic speaking students in her school and talked about her feelings of isolation. The following excerpt demonstrates how finding Arab friends during the initial period of resettlement was easier, while forming Canadian friendships in the new school were more difficult.

I: So that's the school where there are not many Arabs, right?

P8: In the old school, there were a lot of Arab people. They were all newcomers and stuff. But they were all so friendly; I found a lot of friends in the beginning. But this school, it's all Canadians so it's hard to find friends. But like, yeah... No one speaks my language. They all speak English.

I: Did you try having some Canadian friends?

P8: Yeah, but they are not like... I didn't really like hanging out with them... (silence)
The newcomers are nice, actually. When we came here, we were all newcomers, so I liked hanging out with them.

The majority of participants expressed a preference for friendships with Arabs and Syrians in Canada. Some participants reported feeling more comfortable when being with Syrian friends and another participant reported emotional difficulties related to not finding any Arab students in her school. Participants' strong desire for integration into their Syrian and Arab community in the GTA hindered them from making new friendships with locals, thus, contributing to the acculturation difficulties and barriers for integration into the larger Canadian society.

Discrimination

Experiences of discrimination have a large negative impact on youth's integration, mental health, and expressions of cultural identity (Khanlou, 2008). Muslims, in particular, may experience racial discrimination as a result of their religious appearance or beliefs (Hanniman, 2008). All participants were not consistent in detailing their experiences of discrimination in Canada. The majority of participants initially denied experiencing any discrimination when they were asked if they were treated unfairly. Some participants have indicated experiencing discrimination; however, they have decided not to share these experiences with the interviewer.

Still, some experiences of discrimination and bullying were identified throughout the interview. One of the major issues reported by some participants was racial discrimination. Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett (2010) found that refugee youths experience bullying by their peers in school due to their racialized status in Canada. In this research, Participant 2 reported experiences of ethnic and racial discrimination. In the following excerpt, she shared that she was told to go back to her country because of her Syrian nationality describing her experience with social exclusion.

P2: Yes, there is racism here, there are people that say, "why did you come here, why don't you go back to your country?" and such.

Below, Participant 8 also reported experiences of racist bullying by her classmates in school because of her low English proficiency.

I: Did you have any bad experience with someone who treated you unfairly?

P8: Yeah, when we were in Greenwood some students in the school beside us would always make fun of us because we are new and we don't speak the language and stuff, yeah...

Religion was another reason that the refugees became a target of discrimination. While all bullying can be distressing, race and religion-based bullying is particularly disturbing. Below, Participant 2 reported facing discrimination because of her identity as a female Muslim.

P2: Now, when I first arrived here...problems happened with me, at school. So, it takes time, came here with such problems, because people were very racist, they didn't like Muslims and such.

Theories of dehumanization focus on members of host countries' perceptions of refugees as barbaric and animalistic (Esses et al., 2015). Recent research has found that dehumanization of refugees involved denial of "full humanness" (Esses et al., 2015). These negative portrayals of refugees are most common among media and refugee policies and discourses (Esses et al., 2013).

Additionally, many participants noted that Canadians were not knowledgeable about Syria's culture, history, and politics. Participants reported that Canadian's misconception of Syrians is evident in their everyday questions. Below, Participant 11 reports feeling disappointed by some Canadian people's misperceptions and negative perceptions of Syrians as "less aware" compared to Canadians:

P11: I think the stereotype coming from, again Syria or any Middle Eastern country, is that we are not as advanced, or we are not as aware of somethings. And a lot of people take advantage of that but after a while they understand that you know as much if not more than they do.

Although Participant 8 expressed receiving positive compliments about her Hijab, she describes feeling the need to constantly explain her reasons for wearing the Hijab. In addition, such need to justify her religious appearance relates to previous experiences with some people

assuming that she is bold. The following excerpt highlights a discussion with Participant 8 typically had with Canadians about why Syrian females wear a Hijab:

I: Uh (pause) now is there anyone that treated you unfairly, because you're from Syria or you wear the Hijab or?

P1: Now I wasn't faced with this thing to be honest, but my sister did. I didn't face that not once. So, I don't know. I wasn't faced with that. It's the opposite, they all tell me 'the way you style your Hijab is nice'. They get surprised.

I: Mhm.

P1: At first, they get surprised like 'Why would you wear it on your head?' So, come and explain to them this talk so – there are some of them that believe you don't have hair, so that's why I wear a Hijab (laughing).

I: (laughing)

P1: They really did think that like this girl told me, 'You have nicer hair then why—'so, then I sat and explained to her about the Hijab and why we wear it and from that talk.

Discrimination is a major source for acculturative stress, especially in the case of Muslims in North America. Negative experiences with local Canadians regarding Syrian female youths' cultural or religious identity contribute to acculturative stress and barriers to integration.

Emotional Difficulties

Emotional difficulties resulted from unfavourable conditions such as the challenging nature of forced migration, feelings of fear and uncertainty during the initial period of resettlement, and uncertainty about the future. Many participants experienced homesickness, stating that missing family members and friends was a large source of stress. Some participants coped with homesickness by maintaining ties with their friends and family in Syria. Participant 8

expressed feelings of homesickness claiming that she misses speaking Arabic and living in permanent housing. The following excerpt exemplifies feelings of homesickness which are related to social isolation, and complicated the language barrier:

P8: Like, I don't know, feeling at home, we're living here... we're renting a house, so you still feel like that's not your home. I miss, like, speaking my language all the time (laughing). Because I don't really like English. It's like I have to speak English, but I don't really like it. So... yeah. And also, like, I miss my dad. So, I feel like...yeah. It's not the same.

Moreover, Participant 8 described her preference for making friends with newcomers over making friendships with Canadians. It is also important to note that this female participant had reported feelings of confusion and experienced “having a lot of nightmares,” which indicates struggles with her mental health. She also reported experiences with traumatic events (i.e., her father's death and separation from her brother), which contributed to difficulties with her mental health. All mentioned emotional difficulties resulted from unfavorable conditions contribute to acculturative stress and barriers of integration.

Coping Strategies

This section addresses the second research question which deals with various mediating factors and coping strategies adopted by Syrian female youths in the GTA. In order to answer this question, participants were asked to explain how they deal with difficulties they encounter. Coping strategies are those techniques that female Syrian youths employ to handle issues and challenges. According to the participants' reports, mediating factors include social factors such as English acquisition, Canadian and in-group support, while coping strategies include making use of family and social support and religious coping.

English Acquisition

English acquisition means that refugee youths can navigate everyday activities with ease and it also ensures their future success in integrating into and navigating life in Canada in general. Speaking English was reported to be an important factor that provided positive outcomes and facilitated agency among participants. Furthermore, learning to speak English eliminated some struggles that resulted from the language barriers such as making friendships and navigating in the new setting. Moreover, speaking English was reported to be the main factor mediating social interactions. The following excerpts below all demonstrate how youths' experiences in Canada became easier after learning English:

P6: My English has improved, like I'm now able to speak outside.

I: "Okay, okay" what has changed in the 3 years you've been here?

P7: A lot different, now we're able to speak English, able to come and go, like depend on ourselves.

P8: No, it's much easier because like I learned the language so it's easier, and now I have some friends.

English language acquisition provided Syrian female youths with confidence and agency. In contrast to in-group support, having supportive relationships with Canadians was a factor reported by some participants that mediated their long-term adaptation to Canadian society. Some participants were conscious about making links with Canadians, more so than the Syrian community, as they noted the need to integrate and improve their English skills. Below, Participant 9 expresses the desire of befriending Canadians to help her with English acquisition.

I: Who do you prefer to be close friends with? Canadians or others?

P9: Canadians. They help me learn English and they teach me more about Canada.

Some participants expressed joy about their younger siblings' ability to adapt and to acquire English more quickly. When asked about how their siblings were adjusting in Canada, several participants highlighted the rapidity with which their siblings adjusted as well as their higher language proficiency. For example, Participant 3 noted, "Their English is very good because they're young" (Participant 3). Participant 2 highlighted her younger brother's early integration, pointing out that it relates to his social connection with English-speaking Canadians:

P2: Uh, at first, when we first came, like, he didn't talk to Arabs, he didn't [unclear] with Arabs. But he learned English quickly.

I: (Oh, okay,) Yes.

P2: Mhm, not like me. When I first came here, no, I talked to Arabs, I didn't talk to foreigners.

I: Mhm.

P2: I didn't, like, I didn't know how to speak English.

Learning the English language provided Syrian female youths with confidence.

Participants emphasized the agency that accompanied language acquisition. Friendships with English-natives Canadians supported some participants English language learning process. Moreover, participants emphasized their younger siblings' faster integration and language acquisition.

Positive Perceptions of Canadians

According to Environics Institute for Survey Research (2018), Canadians' attitudes towards migration were found to be the most positive in the world. Surveys found that the

majority of Canadians (92%) stated that Canada is a good place for immigrants. However, these relatively positive attitudes of Canadians towards immigrants should be reassessed in relation to refugees. The majority of participants in this study perceived Canadians to be kind and supportive towards Syrians. They attributed Canadian people with positive qualities such as kindness, open-mindedness, and respect. The following excerpts from the interviews highlight some participants' positive perceptions of Canadians:

I: “Yeah”. Okay, what’s your opinion on Canadians?

P3: They’re very good, they treat us Syrians very well.

P8: I told you, the fact that I thought they [Canadians] were arrogant and not nice, but they are actually very kind. I’m still surprised about it (laughing). And not all of them are rich and stuff. Which is, yeah...

I: Then what are the things that you like the most?

P10: Education. And people here are so nice and respectful.

Some participants expressed an acceptance of Canadian multiculturalism and diversity, which indicates that they perceive themselves not as the “Other” but as a part of the flexible multicultural Canadian society. Participant 11 below describes a Canadian as potentially any person with qualities such as kindness and open-mindedness. In this case, perceptions of the Canadian society as flexible and multicultural indicates that Syrian youths’ perception of their integration into Canadian society is made easier because of the kindness and open-mindedness of some of the Canadians they encounter.

I: When you hear someone is saying “Canadian” to describe someone, like a person or a family, whom do you think they are describing?

P11: I don’t think you can put an image on a Canadian family because any family with Canadian values can be a Canadian family.

I: Ok. Can you describe how a Canadian person would look like or acts like?

P11: A Canadian person would be nice, understanding, and open-minded.

I: When you hear someone is saying the word “foreigner” to describe someone, whom do you think they are describing? Or who do you think is described as a “foreigner” in Canada?

P11: I am not sure. I don’t think you can say there are any foreigners in Canada because it is such a multicultural society. So, you can’t ignore someone and say that they are foreigners.

For Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), relationships with sponsors often are the first social ties refugees have after their arrival to Canada. Only three participants indicated that they were PSRs. Participant 2 discusses below how sponsors have helped her not only with material resources but also have provided her with a psychological and emotional support.

I: You did not know anyone when you arrived in Canada?

P9: We only had the sponsors who supported us to come here. A little by little they taught us about the city and the language. They helped so much with everything, mentally and financially.

Canada’s implementation of multicultural policies has encouraged and supported cultural mosaic and diversity resulting in a more welcoming attitude towards refugees. The majority of participants in this study have expressed gratitude for Canadians welcoming attitudes.

Furthermore, some participants noted the positive influence of her relationship with private sponsors in Canada. Through highlighting positive characteristics of Canadians, it minimizes and mediates the negative influence of the participants' perceived cultural dissonance and acculturative stress.

Making Use of Family and Social Support

The interview guide prompted questions about different possible supports that participants seek when they need help with homework, advice about how to handle problems with peers in school, and when they needed to talk to someone. Answers to these questions revealed that participants mostly relied on “either my mom, teachers, or friends” (Participant 9) for support. The tendency of refugees to rely on family support has been found in previous research (Abdi, 2015). Almost all participants indicated that talking to their mother about their problems was most helpful. Syrian girls are usually more comfortable with their mothers when sharing their experiences, feelings, and problems. In contrast, Syrian fathers are mainly responsible for ensuring financial support of the family, leaving the majority of child-rearing responsibilities for the mother. One participant was asked about her strong preference to talk with her mother and not father. In the excerpt below, Participant 10 talks about her close relationship with her mother and siblings:

I: And to who do you open up to, like if you have a problem?

P1: My siblings and my mother. Because as you see, we are three here. I have two sisters. We're almost the same. And mom. So yeah.

I: And your father?

P1: My father, honestly no. The father isn't like the mother that you can open up to like you'd talk to her and stuff. No, my father – like yeah, we talk with him, but not like I talk to my and open up to my sisters.

The majority of participants were grateful for their teachers' help and support in Canadian schools. Furthermore, participants indicated that they might go to their teachers, school principal, and other school staff for support when needed or when they were experiencing difficulties. One participant expressed her close relationship with her teacher: "I'm friends only with the teachers, actually. I don't really have friends, like students" (Participant 8). Participant 8 also highlights sharing personal feelings and asking for help from her teacher when experiencing any difficulties.

P8: Well, they're like my best friends. (laughing)

I: Do you express that to... When you're not feeling good about something, who do you do speak to?

P8: To my teacher, she's like my best friend so I always tell her everything about me.

I: That's amazing. Does she help you?

P8: Yeah, she always helps me with everything. Math, English... And if I have problems, I always tell her.

Furthermore, Participant 8's teacher provided her not only with support for the material she is learning but also helped her with emotional difficulties.

I: How are you these days? How do you feel?

P8: Confused. (laughing)

I: What's hardest for you?

P8: My mental health... I am having a lot of nightmares.

I: Is there someone you can talk to about that?

P8: Yes, I tell my teacher.

Having a support system within family and educational institutions was reported to be most useful when participants are faced with a problem. Syrian female youths have utilized the familial support of their mothers and sisters and educational support of their teachers. Having a supportive environment is one of the most helpful factors facilitating the integration process of Syrian female youths.

Connecting with Friends through Social Media

In line with previous research (Veronis et al., 2018), refugee youths have made use of social media as a platform to learn about news in Syria and to connect with their family, friends still in Syria, and/or who have been displaced to different countries. All participants who discussed their continuing communication with friends from Syria were over 17 years old. These participants were slightly older than other younger participants when they left Syria and still remember and maintain their pre-migration relationships. Below, Participant 4 discusses how she maintained a connection with her friends from Syria throughout their migration journey.

P4: Yes, all the time we talk to each other; even though... it's been around... 7 years of not seeing them at all, but [inaudible] a lot of friends.

I: Ah! To that point your relationship with them is strong.

P4: Yes. Like they, we, all of us, we finished 6th grade elementary –

I: Mhm.

P4: And everyone – after it, the situations got really bad. Every one of us went to another area.

I: Ah, okay.

P4: And like that, from social media... we all reunited together again and we're still friends.

On the other hand, some females chose not to connect with their friends from Syria. Participant 1 explains how she maintained her friendship with friends she made in Turkey but not Syria. She adds that some of her friends from Syria are married.

I: Correct. And do you talk to your friends in Syria or in Turkey?

P1: Alright so in Turkey, yes, but in Syria I haven't heard much from them. So, I don't know where they ended up. Half of them got married. So, in Turkey, yes. Until now we talk, not a lot but in Syria, to be honest, I don't have an idea about them.

Syrian female youths who are 17 years old and older have continued their communication with Syrian friends who are still in Syria or those they met in transition countries. When discussing friendships from Syria with participants, Participant 1 notes that the reason for her discontinued connection with friends in Syria is their early marriage and distance.

Religious Coping

Religious coping was evaluated as any statements regarding participants' relationships with religion, and how these practices helped mediate their acculturation experiences. Religion was a sensitive topic of discussion with Syrian female youths' participants. The majority of participants indicated that their relationship with religion did not change compared to before arriving to Canada. However, some participants have indicated an increased sense of religiosity after arriving to Canada. Participant 9 related this increased sense of religiosity to the necessity of reminding her younger siblings about the importance of religion. Below is an excerpt that demonstrates this increased sense of religiosity.

I: Tell me about your relationship with religion.

P9: I am religious. Very religious, Alhamdulillah.

I: Did this relationship changed since you came to Canada? Were you able to maintain this relationship?

P9: Yes, it became stronger here. I do not know why. I go to mosque every Friday. The whole family became stricter about religion since we moved here especially for my little siblings. We try to keep them on track when it comes to religion. We keep reminding them to pray and fast.

Moreover, some participants expressed feelings of contempt and pride for maintaining their religious beliefs and practices. Some participants also seemed to have fears about eventually assimilating and abandoning their cultural traditions. Below, Participant 9 explains how she managed to keep practicing religion even when other Syrians she encountered were not able to do so and were drifting towards “bad stuff and became foreigner.”

I: You mean that you have not changed in a good way? Can you explain more?

P9: I mean that I did not become a bad person. When you arrive to Canada you see some Syrians who left their families and started doing some bad stuff and became foreign. For me, Alhamdulillah, I am still following religion, I did not forget who I am, and I am still the same. So that is what I am proud of.

For this participant, religious coping seemed to mediate the difficulties she faced. After sharing difficult experiences and emotions with the interviewer, Muslim participants expressed gratefulness to Allah by saying, “Alhamdulillah,” which means “praise to God” in Arabic.

Furthermore, religion, or religious coping, for female Syrian youths is a source that strengthens familial and cultural collectivist ties, enhances life satisfaction, and possibly reduces the negative influence of acculturative stress (Adam & Ward, 2016).

Discussion

This study explored Syrian female refugee youths' acculturation experiences in the GTA in relation to 1.) the difficulties that impact their integration process; and 2.) some of the coping strategies that they adopt in the face of these difficulties. Participants' experiences did not fit into distinctive categories but were rather multidimensional and interwoven. Interviews were analyzed to understand the challenges that have risen for Syrian female youths, their perceptions of their cultural identities, and some coping strategies that they have used in Canada as a part of their acculturation process.

In line with previous research (Shamim, 2020), language is the major challenge for female Syrian refugees' acculturation in Canada. Language emerged as a common and important factor in acculturation. Low English proficiency created difficulties for Syrian female youths in connecting with new friends and influenced their career and educational choices. Low English proficiency was related to participants' feelings of uncertainty, lack of confidence, and acculturative stress. However, language acquisition emerged as a mediating factor: it gave youths a tool for agency and communication with Canadians.

In terms of the Syrian female youths' acculturation orientations, almost all participants have demonstrated their desire for integration into Canadian society. The majority ($n=9$) of Syrian female youths in this study have chosen a separation orientation, while the rest ($n=2$) have chosen an integration orientation. Acculturation orientations were assessed by exploring whether youths perceive themselves to be part of the flexible multicultural society or not. Participants who demonstrated an integration orientation indicated their perception and acceptance of the multicultural identity.

Participants who chose a separation orientation have emphasized the cultural differences with Canadians and aligned themselves strongly with their in-group. Participants expressed their cultural identities by emphasizing this cultural dissonance. The highlighted cultural distance between Syrian and Canadian cultures include social differences in religion, traditions, and values. Syrian female youths with an orientation of separation perceived Canadians as White Westerners.

According to Berry (1997), the greater the cultural gap between the participants' perceived cultural identity and the host's culture, the harder the acculturation process. The perceived cultural dissonance was linked by participants to feelings of isolation which could be related to the lack of social contact with Canadians and a sense of rejection. The noted cultural distance led participants to a strong preference for in-group relationships.

According to previous research, higher cultural connectedness was found to be related to higher rates of acculturative stress among female refugees (Hilario et al., 2014). In the case of Syrian female youths, cultural strictness and parental dominance are prominent in Syrian families, especially among females, which may cause acculturation stress when Syrian female refugees are attempting to adjust to the Western culture while maintaining their cultural heritage and traditions. Syrian female youths' desire to integrate into the Canadian society while not wanting to abandon their cultural heritage may place youths at risk for acculturative stress.

The negative experiences that Syrian female youths have encountered in Canada with forms of discrimination and dehumanization are based on how Canadians perceive and misunderstand their race, low English proficiency, and religious appearances. According to previous research (Berry & Sabatier, 2010), discriminatory experiences have a strong influence on youths' integration. In fact, feelings of isolation and preferences for separation orientation are

strongly related to experiences of discrimination (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). It is important to note that those who have adopted an integration orientation have also reported experiencing discrimination.

Some participants coped with homesickness by maintaining ties with their friends and family in Syria and other resettlement countries. Still, some participants complained about the quality of relationships even within their Syrian community in Canada. This finding can be related to the effects of the Syrian revolution and uprising on Syrian community divisions between regime supporters and revolution supporters. It is important for future research to consider political ideologies as a contributing factor to post-migration integration and cultural identity.

In comparison to Afify (2020) study's findings with male Syrian youths, female youths demonstrated higher rates, majority of participants, of preference for a separation orientation and expression of cultural identity as male youths' orientations were evenly split between integration and separation. Furthermore, the majority of female Syrian youths expressed their preference for in-group relationships and reported higher racial discrimination. Reasons behind this gender comparison's finding can be related to higher parental dominance and cultural restrictions over female youths compared to male youths. Understanding the refugees' family dynamic is essential for future research on Syrian youths in Canada. In addition, direct gender comparison method is important to consider for further research.

This study has some limitations. First, due to the sensitivity of some topics, some participants were hesitant when sharing their experiences due to fear that it will affect their residency status and rights in Canada. However, interviewers assured participants that their contributions will not influence their rights in Canada. Second, given the qualitative nature of

this study, the results cannot be generalized to the experiences of female Syrian refugee youths. Future research should consider a quantitative method to measure acculturation. Furthermore, it is important to consider designing and validating new measurements for Syrian refugees in North America that specifically examine cultural values, identity, and acculturation. Lastly, parental supervision was a limitation in this study as it may have had an impact among participants' responses.

In conclusion, this study has examined the acculturation experiences of Syrian female youths in the GTA. Based on the participants' reports, most Syrian female youths follow a separation orientation in which they highlighted their perceptions of cultural dissonance and Canadians as the "Other," and demonstrated a strong preference for in-group interactions. Experiences with different forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, and peer bullying may have also influenced their preference for separation orientation. Syrian female youths have coped with the post-settlement difficulties by utilizing many available resources and support of their mothers, sisters, teachers, and community. Religious coping emerged as mediator factor. Although Syrian female youths' participants expressed their desire for "successful integration," their post-migration circumstances and difficulties have placed them in isolation, separating them from experiences with Canadians locals and therefore integration.

A day after my graduation ceremony from Monmouth College, I have decided to move to Canada as Trump's new immigration restrictions were making life more difficult as an asylum seeker in the USA. In May 2018, I crossed the Canadian/American borders after spending the night in the passport's office waiting for the immigration officer to admit me as a refugee claimant in Canada. Unlike this study's participants who arrived in Canada with a permanent residency status, I was not a sponsored refugee and even after almost three years of being in Canada I still do not have a permanent residency status.

The most painful experience for me in Canada was retelling my displacement story to the Canadian court to prove my fear of returning to Syria. Since then, I have wondered, why would I highlight my fear as a revolutionist? Simply, fear and vulnerability were the main characteristics of a refugee. In order to prove that they deserve to be in a safe place, refugee claimants have to convince the Canadian court that they are weak and in need of protection. I was not weak nor afraid. On the contrary, I was and still am driven to tell my real story of activism, resilience, and courage. As Canadian's portrayals of refugees did not always align with my experiences and self-image, I was determined to write my own research about what it means to be a female Syrian refugee.

My experience in Canada is quite different from this study's participants. As I am slightly older from the participants, I am currently 24 years old, I had to find a job starting from the moment I received my work permit, four months after arriving to Canada. Fortunately, being a professional violin performer and teacher provided me with the opportunity to join orchestras and other music teaching institutes. However, similar to my research participants, finding home within the Syrian community in Canada is my most significant and positive experience. In fact, Canada was a Syrian paradise for me as I was able to practice my Arabic language again and take a part in the Syrian community in Toronto.

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Appendix A

AT START OF INTERVIEW [consent process]

1. Thank participant; Introduce ourselves.
2. Explain that the study focuses on newcomer parents and teenagers.
3. Explain that we are interviewing you (the teen) because your parent has consented to be in our study and consented to your participation. Each mother and teen is asked to do 3 interviews and surveys about their migration and experiences of family and resettlement over the course of 3 years.
4. Though we expect each conversation to take approximately 60 minutes, they can be as short or long as you desire.
5. You can quit at any time or skip questions you feel uncomfortable answering.
6. If any one member of the mother/teen dyad decides to withdraw, data for both will be removed. You may also change your minds after the interview is concluded and if you get in touch with us afterwards, we will do our best to remove data for both mother and teen, though that may be difficult once it has been made anonymous and compiled with information from the other people we are interviewing.
7. Some of the issues we discuss may be painful and we will be sensitive to that. The goal of the study is to help create policies and systems of support for newcomers to Canada like you.
8. Participation does not come with any personal benefit other than a \$20 gift card in honor of your time.
9. We work for the University of Toronto, not the government, but our study is funded by the government.

10. Only we, the researchers, will have access to your personal responses. We will not use any real names. What is shared with us will be kept confidential with the following exceptions: we will report any evidence of child (persons under 18 years of age) maltreatment to the appropriate agency as required by law. However, this has never happened before. The University ethics review team may make sure we follow the ethics review process by examining our procedures and data.
11. Nonetheless, it is possible that certain characteristics about your life (number of siblings, etc.) may be recognizable to people you know, even when fake names are attached.
12. We will pause frequently to allow for questions.
13. We reiterate that participating in the university study will have no effect on your residency in Canada. It will not affect relationships with any center, agency or school.
14. After the study is done, we will make the results available (but not with any names or their actual voice recordings) via a project website and through academic publications.
15. Do you still wish to participate?

We will record their responses as follows:

CASE ID number:

Agrees to participate:

YES

NO

Interview Guide - Teens

"Thank you for agreeing to do this interview."

"First, I'd like to ask a few simple questions about your family. Remind me, how many siblings do you have?" [if needed, ask participant to list in detail their ages/gender]

"This next series of questions asks about your life before and after moving to Canada."

1. Tell me the story of how you left Syria:

[probes: where did you first go when you left Syria? How did you end up in Canada?

Sponsorship [Government? Private?]

2. How were things when you first arrived to Canada?

3. In what ways are things better since you first arrived? In what ways are things more difficult?

4. Are you currently enrolled in school? If yes, what kind of school do you attend? How is it going?

[probes: any difficulties? language? specific classes?]

5. Do you do any kinds of work inside or outside the home right now? Tell me more:

6. Tell me about your work goals: what do you hope to do for your job someday? Why? Have you shared this with your parents? What do your parents think about this?

7. Tell me about things you enjoy in your life (*hobbies, fun, and leisure*). Has this changed since Syria?

8. Aside from your family, do you spend time with other people here in Canada? Friends?

[probes: Have you been able to make friends here? How?]

9. Is this different than back in Syria? How so?

10. Are you still in communication with friends from Syria? Say more:

11. Tell me about your relationship to religion in Syria. Was religion part of your upbringing? If yes, how?

12. Has your relationship to religion changed since coming to Canada? Have you been able to maintain the practices that are important to you?

[probes: What about your mother [and father, if relevant]? What is your impression of their practices and relationship to religion now?]

[more probes: have you felt pressure to change your practices since coming to Canada?]

"In this next series of questions, I'd like to ask more about your family."

13. Tell me more about your family in Canada. Tell me about those not with you in Canada:

14. Tell me about your mother. How do you feel is she doing these days?

[probes: What is your relationship like? What disagreements do you have?]

15. Have you noticed a change in your mother since coming to Canada? If yes, what?

[probes: What do you think is the biggest difficulty she is facing today? What do think she is proud of? What makes her happy?]

16. [if relevant] Tell me about your father. How do you feel he is doing these days?

[probes: What is your relationship like? What disagreements do you have?]

17. Have you noticed a change in your father since coming to Canada? If yes, what?

[probes: What do you think is the biggest difficulty he is facing today? What do think he is proud of? What makes him happy?]

18. Tell me about your siblings. How are they doing right now?

Repeat: for sibling X

Repeat for sibling Y

Repeat for sibling Z

19. Tell me about your youngest sibling. How is s/he doing?

20. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your family?

"In this next series of questions, I'd like to ask you more about school."

21. Tell me about your schooling experience in Syria. Did you like going to school?
22. Tell me about your schooling after you first left Syria.
23. Do you like school right now? Why? Why not?
24. What do you hope for yourself this year in school?

"In this next series of questions, I'd like to ask about your impressions of Canada:"

25. What did you think of Canada before you arrived? Had you heard anything from others (stereotypes, ideas, warnings) about Canada?
26. When you first arrived to Canada, what were your initial impressions? Were they different than what you expected? Have your first impressions changed?
27. When you hear someone say "Canadian" to describe someone (a person/a family), whom do you think they are describing? To you, what does a Canadian look like?
28. When you hear someone say "foreigner" to describe someone, whom do you think they are describing? To you, who is described as a foreigner in Canada?
29. How do you view Canadian mothers? Canadian fathers? Canadian teenagers?
30. Are there things you have seen in Canada that you are surprised about? Things that you like? Things that you dislike?

"In this next series of questions, I'd like to ask about troubles you may have experienced."

31. Have you had any difficult or negative experiences so far in Canada? Tell me about that experience.
32. Have you ever felt you were treated unfairly because of who you are? Tell me about that.

[probes: for the way you look, your language, accent, status, because born outside of Canada?]

33. What concerns do you have about your future? Why?

34. What things do you most miss from life before you moved to Canada?

35. How often do you worry about how your family will pay the bills? What are your biggest concerns about money right now?

36. Are you happy where you are living?

[probes: If yes, why? If no, why?; what kind of troubles are in your building/street/neighbourhood]

37. If you have trouble with your schoolwork, with whom would you talk? How do you think you might get help for that?

38. If you have trouble with others at school, who would you talk to? How do you think you might get help for that?

39. With whom can you talk when things are difficult for you? Is there anyone here in town? How about people who do not live here -- through phone, texting, or other means?

40. If it was possible, would you want to return to Syria? To visit Syria again? To stay in Syria permanently?

41. How do you think your future in Canada will be? How much control do you feel that you have over your future? How about your family's future in Canada? What are your hopes for your family?

42. Would you want to settle in Canada permanently? If not, what other country else?

43. How much do you feel like you matter to others here in the community? To Canada?

44. How are you doing these days? What things are most difficult for you?

45. What are you most proud of?

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us. The last part of this interview asks you to complete this survey:

[hand paper copy of survey to participant]

[respondent self-administers survey items]

As we mentioned at the beginning of the interview, this is the first in a series of interviews we would like to conduct with you. The next interview will be about a year from now it will be shorter, as we will not need to repeat questions about your background.

- *Are you still ok with doing another interview then?*
- *How would you like us to contact you to arrange that interview?*

Appendix B

The following table demonstrates the participants' demographic information including age, educational level, sponsorship, transition country, time spent in transition country, and arrival date to Canada.

Participant ID	Age	Grade	Sponsorship	No. of Family Members	Transition Country	Number of Years in Transition Country	Arrival Year to Canada
Participant 1	16	11	GSR	6	Turkey	5	2016
Participant 2	16	11	PSR	8	Jordan	7	2018
Participant 3	16	10	GSR	8	Lebanon	4	2016
Participant 4	18	12	--	7	Jordan	3	2016
Participant 5	16	11	--	7	Jordan	3	2016
Participant 6	17	11	GSR	5	Lebanon	1 month	2016
Participant 7	16	11	GSR	3	Lebanon	3	2016
Participant 8	19	12	--	6	Turkey/Lebanon	5	2016
Participant 9	16	10	PSR	5	Turkey	2	2016
Participant 10	16	10	--	--	Lebanon	--	2016
Participant 11	17	12	PSR	4	Armenia	3	2016