Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Immigrant Acculturation Experience

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The goal of the current study was to understand the process of acculturation of LGBT immigrants to Canada. I used the grounded theory approach to obtain an in-depth interpretive understanding of the subjective experience and perceptions related to the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants. The emerged grounded theory revealed that the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants is formed by two consistent parallel subprocesses: cultural identity development and sexual identity development. Data analysis demonstrated that queerphobia in the culture of origin was a central phenomenon of the grounded theory, and played the most dominant role in the development of cultural and sexual parts of the LGBT immigrants' identity. Furthermore, the culture of LGBT immigrants' country of origin, as well as Canadian culture, strongly influenced their sexual identity development before and after immigration, and vice versa – their sexual identity development influenced the way LGBT immigrants relate to their culture of origin and to the Canadian culture before and after immigration. Moreover, the emerged grounded theory suggested that in the case of LGBT immigrants, the acculturation process often begins long before the beginning of the actual immigration process, as LGBT immigrants often assume a Western orientation as a response to queerphobia in their culture of origin. In addition, this study identified the perceived challenges and advantages that LGBT immigrants experience during the acculturation process, as well as presented variables responsible for the variety of acculturation outcomes. Finally, the study provided clinical implications and recommendations for mental health practitioners regarding the design and implementation of micro and macro level interventions that address multiple challenges LGBT immigrants face in their acculturation process.

Résumé

L'objectif de la présente étude était de comprendre le processus d'acculturation des immigrants LGBT au Canada. J'ai utilisé l'approche de théorisation ancrée pour obtenir une compréhension interpretative en profondeur de l'expérience subjective et des perceptions liées au processus d'acculturation des immigrants LGBT. La theorie ancrée générée a révélé que l'expérience de l'acculturation des immigrants LGBT est formée de deux sous-processus parallèles cohérents: le développement de l'identité culturelle et de développement de l'identité sexuelle. L'analyse des données a montré que la queerphobie dans la culture d'origine est un phénomène central de la théorie ancrée, et a joué un rôle des plus prépondérant dans le développement des parties : culturelle et sexuelle de l'identité des immigrants LGBT. En outre, la culture du pays d'origine des immigrants LGBT, ainsi que la culture canadienne, a fortement influencé le développement de leur identité sexuelle avant et après leur immigration, et vice versa - le développement de leur identité sexuelle a influencé la façon dont les immigrants LGBT se rapportent à leur culture d'origine et à la culture canadienne. D'autre part, la théorie ancrée générée a suggéré que, dans le cas des immigrants LGBT, le processus d'acculturation commence souvent bien avant le début du processus d'immigration en lui même, les immigrants LGBT mettent en avant leur orientation vers l'occident comme opposition à la « queerphobie » dans leur culture d'origine. De surcroît, cette étude a identifié les défis et les avantages perçus que les immigrants LGBT vivent durant le processus d'acculturation, ainsi que les facteurs présentés dans l'étude responsables de la variété des résultats d'acculturation. Enfin, l'étude a fourni des implications et des recommandations cliniques pour les professionnels de la santé mentale concernant la conception et la mise en œuvre des interventions au niveau micro et macro

qui répondent à de multiples défis. Défis auxquels les immigrants LGBT font face dans leur

processus d'acculturation.

Preface & Contribution of Authors

The work described in this thesis was performed under the supervision of Dr. Nathan G. Smith at the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology at McGill University. The thesis author conducted the literature review, collected the data, performed the qualitative analyses, and wrote the manuscript. All of the above-mentioned elements are original scholarship and distinct contributions to knowledge. Dr. Sandra Peláez provided continuous guidance regarding methodology throughout all stages of the project. Six members of the Coping and Resilience research laboratory at McGill University assisted the author with transcribing the interviews and/or acted as peer reviewers to establish the trustworthiness of the generated grounded theory.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the participants of this study for their courage, openness, and strength. I feel privileged to have heard their stories, some of which were never told before. These stories often made me emotional, and continued to be an inspiration throughout all the stages of this study.

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1 Introduction

The experience of immigrants to North America has been studied extensively in the contemporary scientific literature (Brown, Gaertner, & Liebkind, 2008; Chun, Organista, & Marin, 2003; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2009; Sam & Berry, 2006). Upon their arrival, immigrants face multiple challenges including language barriers, finding a place to live, recognition of educational credentials, finding employment without local experience, anti-immigrant discrimination, and homesickness, to name but a few (Guieb, 2009; Taras, 2008). Immigration is often associated with psychological stress and disorders (Palinkas, 1982), which could negatively impact immigrants' psychological well-being and adjustment in their new country (Antonovsky, 1979; Joseph & Linley, 2008; Monat & Lazarus, 1991).

It is even more so in the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) immigrants. The substantial current research findings on the challenges facing LGBT individuals identify homophobia, hate crimes, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, among many others (Shankle, 2006; The National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Centers, 2008; Zwiers, 2009). LGBT individuals report higher rates of mental health challenges than the general population including depression, anxiety, trauma, and lack of self-acceptance due to heightened and long-term exposure to societal and institutional prejudice and discrimination (Oetjen & Rothblum, 2000; Vincke & Bolton, 1994; Zwiers, 2009). As well, LGBT immigrants are in a "double jeopardy" as a "double minority," being exposed to the risk factors of both immigrants and LGBT persons (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2009). This double minority status creates a dilemma when family, community, and religion, which usually serve as the main protective factors for mental well-being of new immigrants, become primary risk factors for rejection and discrimination based on sexual orientation (Boulden, 2009) for

LGBT immigrants. At the same time, language and cultural barriers, as well as racism inside mainstream LGBT groups, often prevent LGBT immigrants from integrating into the local LGBT community (Ibanez, Van Oss Marin, Flores, Millett, & Diaz, 2009).

Despite the multiple risk factors and challenges facing LGBT immigrants, scientific literature examining various aspects of experience of immigrants who self-identify as LGBT is rather scarce. In addition, the vast majority of the literature reviewed was produced by U.S. researchers and focused on LGBT immigrants to the U.S. While there are multiple cultural, political, and socioeconomic similarities between the U.S. and Canada, there are as well differences that exist between these two countries that impact immigrants' experiences. Although these differences will be discussed in detail in the literature review section, it is critical to mention that U.S. governments do not actively promote immigrant settlement, and thus, most immigrants who arrived in the U.S. after the 1960s received little state assistance with integration (Bloemraad, 2006). On the other hand, the Canadian government has focused on growing immigrant settlement programs and developing diversity policies that encourage multiculturalism with an emphasis on acculturation.

Acculturation has to do with the process through which immigrants acquire beliefs, values, and behaviours of a host country, while either preserving or modifying those of their country of origin. This process allows immigrants to preserve their original home culture while at the same time adapt to and accept the new culture. As such, while the dominant discourse in the U.S. remains assimilatory (i.e., replacing immigrants' home culture with the U.S. culture; Turegun, 2007; Jeter, 2007), the Canadian government's focus continues to be on acculturation. Therefore, due to governmental programs in combination with interventionist immigration public policy, Canada represents a more encompassing landscape to immigrants in terms of integration

when compared to the U.S. (Bloemraad, 2006). However, while integration of immigrants is one of the strengths of Canada's immigration policy, research on the acculturation experiences of Canadian LGBT immigrants is lacking.

The acculturation experience of immigrants has been studied extensively in the contemporary scientific literature (Sam & Berry, 2006; Chun, Organista, Marin, 2003; Taras, 2008). Multiple frameworks and theories are utilized by researchers to interpret the acculturation experience, and identify the variables responsible for the successful integration of newcomers in the host country (Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001; Taras, 2008; Chun, Organista, & Marin, 2003; Sam & Berry, 2006). The rich body of literature on acculturation contains data and research findings on a wide range of ethnic, cultural, religious, racial, and age groups (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2009; Sam & Berry, 2006). Researchers found that such facets of LGBT immigrant experience as the development of sexual identity, sexual expression, and closetedness were found to be strongly related to the level of acculturation to the host country (Boulden, 2009; Kuntsman, 2003). The level of acculturation also played an important role in health outcomes of LGBT immigrants. For instance, acculturation was found to be a strong predictor of sexual risk behaviours and of LGBT immigrants' abilities to take care of their health (Poppen, Reisen, Zea, Bianchi, & Echeverry, 2004; Bianchi et al., 2007). Moreover, the level of acculturation was quite often found to be a predictor of LGBT immigrant individuals' likelihood to seek mental health help (Das Dasgupta, 2007). However, while most of the researchers cited in this paper recognized acculturation as an important factor in shaping the various aspects of LGBT immigrant experience and its implications, the research literature examining the acculturation experience itself of immigrants who self-identify as LGBT is virtually non-existent. That is, while in multiple studies on LGBT immigrants, acculturation was shown to play an important

role in the development of sexual identity, sexual expression, closetedness, health outcomes, and likelihood of seeking mental health services, the process and experience of acculturation of LGBT immigrants was never examined in the scientific literature. Given the sizes of the immigrant (almost 20% of total population; Statistics Canada, 2006) and LGBT (1.7% to 8.1%; Statistics Canada, 2004; Wilde Marketing, 2009) populations in Canada, research specific to the Canadian context is needed that will bridge two separate bodies of knowledge (i.e., acculturation research and LGBT research) in order to help understand the acculturation experiences of LGBT immigrants to Canada and the factors responsible for acculturation outcomes. This paper fills this gap in the contemporary research literature by developing an understanding of the issues and barriers that immigrant LGBT people face, and providing useful implications for organizations and practitioners to help them better serve these often-overlooked communities.

The main objective of this research study is to understand the process of acculturation of LGBT immigrants. This study identifies the perceived challenges and advantages that LGBT immigrants experience during the acculturation process. It also determines the perceived impact that LGBT sexuality has on acculturation experience. Finally, it identifies variables responsible for the variety of acculturation outcomes for LGBT immigrants, as well as suggests ways for organizations and practitioners to improve LGBT immigrants' acculturation outcomes.

Given the current status of the literature, and the exploratory nature of the research, I decided that a qualitative approach was more appropriate than a quantitative one (Bryman, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The advantage of using qualitative methods in exploratory research is the use of open-ended questions and probing that allow participants to respond in their own words and to explain their answers "rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do" (Family Health International, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, qualitative

research offers an excellent opportunity to approach under-explored topics, as in the case of research on acculturation of LGBT immigrants.

In this case, I chose the grounded theory approach to obtain an in-depth interpretive understanding of the subjective experience and perceptions (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ponterotto, 2005) related to the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants. A grounded theory approach is recommended when current scientific literature does not provide theoretical frameworks related to the topic researched (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Plano, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

Purposeful sampling was employed through a combination (theoretical and maximum variation) sampling strategy. Data were collected from 20 participants who are first generation immigrants and thus went through an acculturation experience. In addition to the fact that sample size was in line with the guidelines recommended for grounded theory (Creswell, 2007), I made sure that data collection ended only once data saturation was reached.

Semi-structured audio-recorded interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim to collect data. Interviews took the shape of reflexive conversations; i.e., while the questions were formulated based on a thorough review of the scientific literature on immigrants' acculturation and LGBT issues, the interview protocol mostly served as a framework for an open-ended interview, during which the participants were encouraged to explore issues and ideas that were not covered in the interview protocol (Rutledge, 2007; Carlson, Siegal, & Falck, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 1994). This interviewing approach allowed the interviewer to build rapport, heighten collaboration, and gather contextual elements of lived experience to establish a good understanding and enhance interpretation of LGBT immigrants' acculturation stories.

Interviews were transcribed and the transcripts of interviews were coded using the procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) for grounded theory data analysis. Through the process of "open coding," the basic concepts were identified through abstracting data into categories; these categories were named using participants' own words. Open coding was followed by "axial coding," where the categories identified were reexamined and reassembled in new ways to determine the linkages between them, and to form initial theories and hypotheses. This process was followed by "selective coding," where theories and hypotheses were used to connect categories in order to arrive at a "story line" that explains the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants. Finally, an integrative diagram depicting the actual theory in the form of a visual model was developed.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the following three strategies recommended by Creswell (2007) were utilized: author's bias was clarified from the outset of the study to make sure the researcher's position and any biases that might impact the inquiry were acknowledged; peer review was used to provide an external check of the research process; and member checking was used to solicit participants' views of the credibility of the finding and interpretations. The Methodology section provides a detailed explanation of the concepts, frameworks, and approaches overviewed in this paragraph; this discussion will be preceded by the Literature Review section, presented next.

2 Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is not only to help the reader develop an appreciation of the issues and barriers that immigrant LGBT people face, but also to demonstrate a need for understanding the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants. The literature review will also provide useful implications for research and practice for organizations and practitioners to help them better serve these often-overlooked communities. In order to do that, this literature review will be structured in the following way. The conceptual framework used to guide this literature review will be introduced first, followed by a review of literature covering various aspects of LGBT immigrant experience and health outcomes in LGBT immigrants.

It is important to point out the limitations of this literature review for the Canadian context. The vast majority of the literature reviewed in this paper is U.S.-based, as was mentioned earlier. While for the purposes of this literature review many aspects of LGBT immigrant experience were assumed to be similar for immigrants to North America, it is important to consider the differences that exist between the experiences of immigrants to Canada and to the U.S. due to their cultural, political, and socioeconomic specificities. Historically, Canada and the U.S., both "White settler" societies, followed similar paths in terms of immigration practices and procedures, mostly focusing on the British Isles as the main source of immigration to North America at first, followed by the gradual expansion into Continental Europe (Turegun, 2007). This immigration was quite homogeneous until late 1960s, with immigrants being predominately European, White, Christian, and coming to Canada motivated by economic reasons, as well as to escape religious and ethnic persecution. New patterns of immigration, rather heterogeneous, emerged after racial preference was removed from Canadian and U.S. immigration policies in the 1960s, resulting in racial, geographic, ethnic, and religious

diversity, as well as introducing a refugee component to immigration policy (Turegun, 2007).

Following the 1960s reforms, Canadian and U.S. immigration policies took on different

trajectories, where Canadian policy emphasized selection of immigrants based on skills required

in the country, while U.S. policies focused on family reunification (Borjas, 1999). During the

Cold War, both the U.S. and Canada played an important role in the resettlement of refugees

from communist countries of Eastern Europe, but the focus of Canada's immigration policy still

remained economic (Turegun, 2007).

Another important difference is that Canada's immigrant source countries remained

balanced in terms of immigration figures, which is not the case in the U.S., where legal and

illegal immigration from Mexico significantly dominates that from all other countries (Turegun,

2007). It is therefore not surprising that over 50% of the studies reviewed in this paper,

predominantly produced by U.S. researchers, focused on Latino LGBT immigrants, thus

reflecting the makeup of the U.S. immigrant community. For similar reasons, some aspects of

LGBT immigrant experience in this literature review are presented predominantly based on

research on a specific ethnic group of immigrants, due to lack of similar research on other ethnic

groups. For example, the vast majority of research on HIV prevention within LGBT immigrant

groups focuses on Latino gay men. However, in Canada, Latino countries are not even included

in the top 10 source countries for Canadian immigrants, according to the latest report produced

by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2011). Furthermore, in the process of literature review

no studies on Middle Eastern or Arab LGBT immigrants were identified, while such countries as

Iran, United Arab Emirates, and Morocco are within the top 10 source countries for Canadian

immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Similarly, there were virtually no

studies identified examining the experience of LGBT immigrants from Europe, while such

countries as United Kingdom and France are also in the top 10 source countries for Canadian immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011).

Yet another dramatic difference between Canada and the U.S. are the countries' political attitudes toward immigrants' home cultures: while Canada officially assumed a multicultural position with an emphasis on acculturation, the dominant discourse in the U.S. remains assimilatory (Turegun, 2007). Multiculturalism (i.e., the appreciation, acceptance, and promotion of multiple immigrant cultures) was adopted as the official policy of the Canadian government during the term of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in the 1970s (Duncan & Ley, 1993). Bloemraad (2006) argued that such political attitudes create a critical difference in immigrant political integration, operationalized by three indicators: acquisition of citizenship (proportion of citizens among the immigrants), election to political office (proportion of immigrants in government), and community advocacy (community involvement by immigrant community organizations and their leaders). From the 1970s through today, Canada and the U.S. score differently on all three indicators. For example, while the proportion of citizens among immigrants to Canada increased from 60% in 1971 to 72% in 2001, it has declined in the U.S. from 64% in 1970 to 38% in 2004 (Bloemraad, 2006). In terms of election to public office, less than two percent of the members of the U.S. Congress were immigrants in 2000, compared to fifteen percent of the members of Canada's House of Commons. Canada also scored higher on community mobilization, according to Bloemraad's (2006) analyses. Bloemraad attributes most of Canada's success in immigrant integration to the generous reception that Canada offers its immigrants, including orientation information, settlement agencies, and integration services, along with multiculturalism. On the other hand, U.S. immigration policy mostly revolves around border control, and immigrant integration is mostly considered to be beyond the scope of

responsibility of the state (Turegun, 2007). The organization of bureaucracy dealing with immigration is also different in the U.S. and in Canada. For example, Citizenship and Immigration Canada is a centralized department, responsible for all the aspects of immigration and settlement, while the immigration bureaucracy in the U.S. does not have a dedicated department but instead is divided between the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security.

The research presented in this paper addresses limitations and challenges described above by being specific to the Canadian context and its unique LGBT immigrant community makeup. The conceptual framework used to guide the literature review is introduced next.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Traditionally, psychologists have viewed sexuality as a phenomenon that reflects psychological or biological needs, drives, and motives of an individual (Buss, 1994; Symons, 1979). Zea et al. (2003) argued that these traditional approaches grounded in personological theories are not effective on their own when studying LGBT immigrants because they ignore cultural and socioeconomic factors that play an important role in defining the immigrant experience. Even some of the traditional writings conceptualized sexuality as a socially-constructed phenomenon, where the culture played a large role in shaping the sexual expression of individuals (Foucault, 1978; Simon, 1987). In more recent research, the role of cultural factors has become a consistent theme when studying sexuality of various populations (Becker, 1998; Marin, 1996; Peterson, 1998). When researching LGBT immigrants, it is imperative to understand the role that culture plays in shaping the overall trajectories of their lives in the host country, as well as their day-to-day realities. Cultural factors, which include the degree and style of acculturation, generation of immigration, home country, immigration status, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation, define the degree to which LGBT immigrants have integrated the

values, beliefs, and unwritten rules of conduct of their home and host cultures (Zea et al., 2003).

Eventually, these cultural factors define the manner in which LGBT immigrants articulate their

sexuality. Socioeconomic factors, including the combination of privileges or disadvantages

related to certain social class, education, and current and previous geography, also play an

important role in shaping the cultural context of LGBT immigrants' lives (Becker, 1998).

Thus, considering the dominant role that cultural and socioeconomic factors play in

defining the experience of LGBT immigrants, the study of this population should employ a

methodological perspective that encompasses a combination of these factors (Diaz, 1997, 1998;

Zea, Reisen, & Diaz, 2003). Therefore, a theoretical psychocultural model developed by Diaz

(1998, 2000), which incorporates not only individual but also cultural and socioeconomic

factors, will be utilized by the author to guide the study of various aspects of LGBT immigrant

experience in this literature review. Diaz (2000) suggested that cultural values and beliefs are

internalized by individuals and define their identities as well as the way individuals' social and

sexual relations develop and operate. These internalized cultural beliefs strongly influence the

manner in which individuals articulate, construe, and contain their sexuality. As part of

development, an individual internalizes a certain set of cultural guidelines including values,

beliefs, morals, and cognitive scripts, which tend to influence an individual's identity and

relations in predominantly unconscious ways.

According to Diaz (1998), identical processes take place when LGBT immigrants, who

represent a marginalized group from a social, economic, and political point of view, repeatedly

face anti-immigrant discrimination, racism, oppression, and homophobia. For example,

homophobia in both the host and home cultures may be internalized and form cultural scripts that

manifest themselves through a negative self-image, self-hate, and shame. Carpenter's (1998)

script theory, which is based on a social construction framework, suggested that internalized cultural scripts are shaped by cultural scenarios and interpersonal interactions. LGBT immigrants' cultural scripts define their values, beliefs, ideals, relationship templates, and expectations. Cultural scripts that deal with sexuality, sexual identity, romantic relationships, and love influence behaviour and motivation in both conscious and unconscious manners (Gagnon, 1990; Laumann, 1994). Indeed, numerous qualitative research studies have demonstrated that, as a result of repeated discrimination and oppression, the experience of disempowerment becomes internalized by LGBT immigrants, making them perceive themselves as unable to control their own destiny (Diaz, 1998). Consequently, because of the repeated cultural messages of social disempowerment, according to Diaz, fatalism often develops. LGBT immigrants who internalize powerlessness and fatalism become a group at risk in terms of higher likelihood of contracting HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) because they often feel that they are not able to control their lives, and therefore may lack motivation to act in self-protective ways, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section (Acevedo, 2008; Ayala & Diaz, 2001; Bianchi, Zea, Poppen, Reisen, & Echeverry, 2004; Carballo-Dieguez, 1989; Carballo-Dieguez & Dolezal, 1995; Carballo-Dieguez, Remien, Dolezal, & Wagner, 1997; Choi, Han, Hudes, & Kegeles, 2002; Diaz, 1997, 1998; Diaz, Morales, Bein, Dilan, & Rodriguez, 1999; Domanico & Crawford, 2000; Jarama, Kennamer, Poppen, Hendricks, & Bradford, 2005; Marin, 1996; Mason, Marks, Simoni, Ruiz, & Richardson, 1995; Ramirez-Valles, Fergus, Reisen, Poppen, & Zea, 2005; Ramírez, Suarez, De La Rosa, Castro, & Zimmerman, 1994; Van Oss-Marin, 2003; Zea, Reisen, Poppen, Echeverry, & Bianchi, 2004).

2.2 LGBT Immigrant Experience

2.2.1 Sexual identity of LGBT immigrants. Research on immigrants' health indicates that strong communities, supportive families, and spirituality and religion are key protective factors in immigrant populations (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). The research on LGBT immigrants, however, presents a vivid picture of the dilemma created when family, community, and religion, which serve as the primary protective factors against the effects of the racism and anti-immigrant discrimination, become primary reasons for rejection and discrimination based on sexual orientation (Boulden, 2009). Boulden's findings suggest that LGBT immigrants try to manage these multifaceted conflicts by "living in several worlds at once" (p. 148), where they are thus forced to constantly bounce between their heterosexual immigrant communities and LGBT mainstream communities, relentlessly having to deny some aspects of their identities and emphasize others.

According to Acosta (2008), lesbian immigrants often silence their sexual minority existence/identity in order to preserve relationships with their families of origin. In order to maintain connection to both their families and their LGBT identities, immigrants create "borderland spaces" for themselves by forming "imagined communities", families of choice apart from their families of origin, where they can openly express their sexuality (Acosta, 2008, p. 640). Constructing borderland spaces allows them to obtain sexual autonomy but puts their identity in flux. When outside of these safe spaces, they hide their LGBT existence because of the fear that families will find out those "unacceptable" sides of themselves.

As was discussed earlier, LGBT immigrants are constantly fearful of being rejected or discriminated against in each of their worlds based on changing but always present criteria. They often are forced to explain and defend the meaning of representing their native culture, or the

meaning of being LGBT (Boulden, 2009). LGBT immigrants frequently report that neither of their multiple environments allows them an opportunity to interact with others while having an opportunity to relax and acknowledge their complete identity. For example, one participant in Boulden's study explained the attitudes of people in his community in the following way: "They won't even acknowledge that gays and lesbians exist. They have not seen a Hmong who identified him or herself as gay or lesbian" (p. 143). Due to perceived and real dangers related to being out (i.e., open about their sexuality), LGBT immigrants often choose the option of being closeted, where they do not disclose their non-heteronormative sexuality most of the time. The following paragraph will cover various aspects and implications of closeted sexuality.

Research on closetedness found that less disclosing individuals are significantly more likely to be ethnic or racial minorities (Catania et al., 2006). Catania and colleagues' findings suggested that immigrant men who have sex with men (relative to non-immigrant men who have sex with men) are likely to be closeted because of increased exposure to racism, anti-immigrant discrimination, or fears of being "othered" in their ethnic communities. Such findings are concerning because non-disclosure of sexual orientation is a widely recognized risk factor for depression, and even an additional explanation for increased rates of psychiatric morbidity among LGBT immigrants, compared with their ethnic/racial community or with the larger LGBT community (Ullrich, Lutgendorf, & Stapleton, 2003).

Another reason why immigrant LGBT people are less open about their sexual orientation compared to non-immigrant LGBT individuals is attributed to cultural expectations (Kimmel & Yi, 2004). In Latino and Asian immigrant communities, for example, cultural expectations related to family role obligations require maintaining strong connection to the family of origin and discourage the level of individuation that is considered necessary for successfully coming

out (Cochran et al., 2007). Such expectations create a greater pressure on LGBT immigrants than on their non-immigrant peers in terms of maintaining the illusion of being heterosexual in order to avoid conflict with their families of origin. Therefore LGBT immigrants are less likely than non-immigrant LGBT people to disclose their sexual orientation to their family members (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999). Furthermore, Kimmel and Yi (2004) found that nationality and ethnic background also play an important role when it comes to disclosure of one's sexual orientation. For example, according to Kimmel and Yi, Koreans tend to be more secretive and restricted when it comes to sexual orientation disclosure compared to other Asian groups due to certain cultural norms. Finally, Kimmel and Yi have also identified important gender differences when it comes to closetedness among LGBT immigrants. For instance, the findings of their research suggested that lesbian or bisexual women were more open about their sexual orientation compared to gay or bisexual men (Kimmel & Yi, 2004). It is important to note, however, that while most researchers (e.g., Cochran et al., 2007) believe that being out is essential for mental well-being of LGBT immigrants, some researchers (e.g., Fisher, 2003), do not view outness as a prerequisite to well-being. Fisher (2003) argued that "culturally hybrid" LGBT individuals may actually benefit from being closeted when in their communities of origin by using the closet as a space where the intersections of sexuality and ethnicity can be comfortably negotiated. Fisher applied Michel de Certeau's (1984) notion of tactics to the daily micro-practices of LGBT immigrants as they maneuver between the demands of overlapping, conflicting, and contradictory cultures. Fisher stated that contrary to a popularized notion in LGBT community of the benefits of being out, LGBT immigrants would benefit more from becoming skilled in oscillating between visibility and invisibility—outness and closetedness. The author suggested that in the case of LGBT immigrants there can be "a fluid and productive relationship between

the two [closeted and out sexualities]" (p. 174). She believes that queer immigrants should not underestimate the advantages that they can gain through perpetually moving between closeted and out sexualities - the opportunity to move, according to Fisher, is a tactical form of power. To demonstrate how this power can be leveraged, in her study Fisher presented her own narrative as a member of a queer Russian-American immigrant community, in which members often preferred to operate in "between the gaps and cracks of fixed identity" (p. 174), using closets as spatial techniques to assist them in organizing and operating their complicated culturally-layered lives. For example, the research participants in Fisher's study believed that the ability to perpetually move between closeted and out sexualities offered them an instant opportunity to manage various dimensions of their identities; that is: Russian, American, immigrant, homosexual, and heterosexual. The closet then is not perceived as place for stillness and hiding but rather as a means to enable action and investigation. From Fisher's point of view, the closet becomes a practical and helpful form of agency, an unseen and transitory space, which allows immigrants to avoid the real, unpleasant, and at times dangerous consequences of being out. Unlike many other researchers quoted in this paper, she argued that immigrants need to maintain a sexual identity that is fluid and ambiguously constructed, because outness can potentially become a burden and not liberation if one wants to stay involved with her or his ethnic community, family, and friends. Thus, Fisher argued, LGBT immigrants should utilize the opportunity to move between the closeted and the out sexualities when in different worlds in order to maintain their standing in their communities of origin, as well as relationships with family and friends, while exploring and developing their non-heterosexual identity. Furthermore, North American LGBT people usually view sexual orientation identity as a matter of self-definition, as the culture highly values individual autonomy (Triandis, 1995). Many immigrants,

however, come from collectivist and alocentric cultures, where the individual is expected to adjust to the expectations of the group (Matsumoto, 1997). Latino culture, for example, puts a great deal of emphasis on family and community; therefore issues related to one's sexual orientation reflect not only on an individual, but also on his or her family and community (Zea et al., 2003). Due to this collectivist nature of the Latino culture, the context of the social group may strongly influence the way individuals perceive themselves. For example, research by Zea and colleagues has demonstrated that frequently Latino gay men perceive themselves as straight when in the context of their families, but do self-identify as gay when in a gay bar. Thus, context, space, and place tend to play an important role when it comes to LGBT immigrants' sexual identity.

LGBT immigrants usually view their country of origin, the host country, and the immigration journey in terms of space and place in their minds – they tend to label spaces and places as queer, homophobic, a-sexual, or liberatory (Kuntsman, 2003). Kuntsman argued that this labelling is always ethnicized, where LGBT immigrants compare their ethnic homophobic home culture to queer, liberal Western culture. Immigration is often seen as a discovery of LGBT identity, detachment from home country culture, and re-grounding in the host country's queer community. LGBT immigrants often have to go through various stages of discovering and determining their personal sexual identity, quite often not having had an experience of self-identifying as LGBT prior to immigration because the majority of them never considered their identity in terms of sexuality (Kuntsman, 2003); most of the time it is a struggle to fit that new knowledge within the context of their culturally-defined environments and expected roles (Boulden, 2009). Furthermore, the participants of many research studies noted that there are even no references to the possible existence of LGBT people in their culture; for example, the words

"gay" or "lesbian" simply do not exist in Hmong language (Boulden, 2009). The closest term

that Hmong people can use to refer to LGBT individual is a Thai word that means "man who

wants to be a woman," which refers more to gender identity than sexual orientation. The word

for "man" in Hmong language is equivalent to "husband," which then leaves no room for men

who are romantically attracted to other men. The non-existence of terms to describe one's queer

sexuality complicates matters related to sexual identity exploration and development even

further. However, according to Kuntsman (2003), finding a large LGBT community in the new

country and familiarizing themselves with the idea of sexuality as identity provides LGBT

immigrants with a discursive framework, which allows them to label their feelings and define

themselves in terms of sexuality.

     This new discursive framework helps them find their LGBT sexual identities, and thus

quite often LGBT immigrants' stories represent a narrative of exploration, self-discovery, and

liberation (Fimbres, 2001). Westernization is seen as enlightenment, the condition for being able

to be queer. LGBT immigrants' stories often suggest a narrative of leaving the world of

heteronormativity for an LGBT identity (Fortier, 2001; Shimmel, 1997). Coming out is seen as

"growing up" into LGBT identity and coming home to an individual's body and community. The

new discursive framework also plays an important role in regards to dimensions along which

sexual identity is defined (Zea et al., 2003). In Western cultures, individuals usually classify

themselves along sexual dimensions of straight and queer. In more alocentric cultures, for

example among Mexican gay immigrant males, sexual categorization happens based on a

relational dynamic between the dyad (Almaguer, 1991), with categories being active (referring to

an individual in an insertive role) and passive (referring to an individual in a receptive role).

Furthermore, research by Zea (2000) demonstrated that blending of categories of sex, gender,

and sexual orientation is common among immigrants. For instance, according to Zea, Cuban gay men usually consider anal-receptive individuals ("bottoms") to be gay, but insertive individuals ("tops") to be "men." As immigrants become more acculturated into the host culture, they tend to integrate a gay-straight dimension into their traditional active-passive categorization, as well as differentiate between the categories of sex, sexual orientation, and gender (Zea et al., 2003). Changes in levels of acculturation therefore become associated with changes in sexual identity as immigrants redefine the narratives of their lives to integrate the sexual identity dimension.

These narratives usually reflect a personal transformation process, which is often accompanied by a geographic move: individuals often leave their families, move to bigger cities or to gay neighbourhoods in the cities, in search of a new, queer home (Kuntsman, 2003). Quite often immigration itself is seen as a way of transitioning into their new LGBT identity. For example, some studies suggest that many Latino gay men reported immigrating to the U.S. to escape homonegativity and to acquire greater sexual freedom (Bianchi et al., 2007). The transitioning, however, is not limited to sexual identity, and instead of being liberating often ends up just changing the basis for discrimination, i.e., instead of being discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation in their country of origin, LGBT immigrants are discriminated based on their race and ethnicity in their new country and its mainstream LGBT community, according to some authors (Acosta, 2008; Manalansan, 1993). Thus, immigrants' expectations of finding a new home and creating a family of choice apart from their family of origin in the queer community are often not met. Instead of finding romanticized intertwined networks of protection and acceptance (Acosta, 2008), the new queer homes and identities are also often labeled in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. Some authors who employ a post/anti-colonial perspective believe that for many LGBT immigrants, White queer spaces become yet another place of exclusion due to

their race or ethnicity, and therefore complicate the matter of LGBT identity integration even

further (Lee, 2009; Manalansan, 1993).

In light of multiple difficulties facing LGBT immigrants, including challenges integrating

sexual identity within culturally-defined immigrant environments, most LGBT immigrants report

being constantly fearful of rejection and feeling bad about themselves, which results in a wide

range of mental health issues including depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, eating

disorders, and high risk sexual behaviours (Acevedo, 2008; Ayala & Diaz, 2001; Bianchi et al.,

2004; Breslau et al., 2006; Carballo-Dieguez, 1989; Carballo-Dieguez & Dolezal, 1995;

Carballo-Dieguez et al., 1997; Choi et al., 2002; Cochran et al., 2007; Diaz, 1997, 1998; Diaz et

al., 1999; Domanico & Crawford, 2000; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Jarama et al., 2005;

Marin, 1996; Mason et al., 1995; Poppen, Reisen, Zea, Bianchi, & Echeverry, 2004; Ramirez-

Valles et al., 2005; Ramírez et al., 1994; Van Oss-Marin, 2003; Zea et al., 2004; Zwiers, 2009).

Furthermore, the fact that LGBT immigrants often face challenges in trying to maintain a

connection to their culture, family, and friends, makes the situation even more concerning

because such connections tend to serve as a protective factor against the effects of racism and

anti-immigrant discrimination (Boulden, 2009), which will be discussed next.

2.2.2 Racism and anti-immigrant discrimination experienced by LGBT immigrants.

LGBT immigrants experience racial and anti-immigrant discrimination both within and outside

the LGBT community. Research revealed fairly high levels of racism and anti-immigrant

discrimination reported by LGBT immigrants, with one study finding 36% of respondents

reporting experiences of general racism (e.g., being called names, being physically assaulted due

to their race and/or ethnicity), and 58% of respondents reporting discrimination in various forms

within the LGBT community (Ibanez, Van Oss Marin, Flores, Millett, & Diaz, 2009). The levels

of experienced racism are strongly linked to mental and physical health outcomes (as will be

discussed below) and depend on multiple factors. For example, in a study by Ibanez and

colleagues, individuals who were born in the host country reported more racism than the ones

who immigrated later in their lives. This can be partially explained by the fact that recent

immigrants might prefer ethnic enclaves, including bars and gathering places that attract mostly

individuals of the same race and/or ethnicity, to White LGBT bars. This limited exposure to a

broader mainstream LGBT community, according to Ibanez and colleagues, may actually

decrease the levels of experienced racism. Also, immigrants with limited command of English

often might not be able to comprehend racist remarks in English, or be less attuned to

discrimination-related cultural cues (Ibanez et al., 2009).

Racism and discrimination in the LGBT community, according to Ibanez et al. (2009),

tends to be reported more frequently compared to general racism and anti-immigrant

discrimination outside the LGBT community because they include milder forms of racism and

discrimination. Such milder forms of racism can include being rejected as a sexual partner

because of being an immigrant or an ethnic/racial minority, or made to feel uncomfortable in a

White LGBT bar, versus harsher forms of general racism and discrimination, such as being hit or

beaten up. Ibanez and colleagues measured racism within the LGBT community context and

identified the following trends: objectification, where respondents reported that potential partners

pay more attention to their race than to who they are as a person; feeling uncomfortable in

predominantly White LGBT environments; and being rejected as sexual partners or having

sexual partners find them less attractive because of their race and/or ethnicity. A study

examining Asian gay and lesbian immigrants (Boulden, 2009) resulted in similar findings.

Common themes among Asian respondents, for example, were that they were often rejected on

online LGBT dating websites as soon as they disclosed that they were Asian, and that they were

often ignored in LGBT bars with predominantly White patrons. Lee (2009) stressed the

importance of understanding the historical and current racism that queer immigrants face in the

context of 19th and 20th century colonial/imperialist makings of Canadian empire. The complex

ways in which race, gender, and sexuality were historically socially constructed in Canada

continue to impact recent immigrants to Canada. Similarly, Manalansan (1993) applied

postcolonial and critical theory to analyze the issues of post-colonial displacement, immigration,

and homosexuality, and their impact on identity formation of queer immigrants. He came to the

conclusion that experiences of discrimination based on race or ethnicity among immigrant gay

men, stemming from colonialism and/or imperialism, often result in internalized racism, making

White men the desired image or standard to model. Manalansan argued that Asian men often feel

that they are not seen as viable objects of desire in LGBT community except in very specific

"Orientalized" ways. In New York, for example, there are LGBT bars that cater predominantly

to Asians and White men who are interested in them. These bars are referred to as "rice bars"

and White men attending these bars are labeled "rice queens." Similarly, there are "dinge" bars

for Black LGBT individuals or "cha-cha" bars for Latinos (Manalansan, 1993). Acosta's (2008)

study of Latino lesbians supported the findings above regarding racism and discrimination in the

LGBT community. Acosta found that participants' sexual, racial, and class identities were

constantly shifting because the process of immigration repositions them in a new system of

inequality. For example, Acosta's participants shared mostly negative attitudes towards

mainstream LGBT groups because, while they felt protected from homophobia there, they still

were "othered" based on their race or ethnicity. The author argued that systemic inequalities

exist in both home and host countries, and that the process of immigration only changes the basis for discrimination from sexuality to race or ethnicity.

It is important to note that experiences with racism in the LGBT community, similar to the ones described above, might have longstanding impacts on LGBT immigrants' well-being (Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). Williams and colleagues argued that these milder but chronic forms of experienced racism in the LGBT community context can be rather debilitating because, due to their frequency, they can have negative and longstanding impacts on the self-esteem of LGBT immigrants. Research has also demonstrated that racism, anti-immigrant discrimination, and homophobia strongly contribute to increased psychological symptoms and result in higher rates of psychological symptomatology among LGBT immigrants compared to mainstream LGBT community members (Ayala & Diaz, 2001; Yoshikawa, Wilson, Chae, & Cheng, 2004). Higher rates of psychological symptomology among LGBT immigrants are often attributed to the fact that repeated experiences of discrimination based on race or ethnicity and sexual orientation are experienced in combination by LGBT immigrants who are minorities along both of these dimensions (Yoshikawa et al., 2004). However, very few studies explored the link between racism and anti-immigrant discrimination and mental well-being of LGBT immigrants. In fact, most of the findings cited in this section came from studies that researched risky sexual behaviours among LGBT immigrants. These studies demonstrated that the negative impact racism has on LGBT immigrants goes beyond their mental well-being. For example, research found that psychological well-being, when measured by levels of depression and self-esteem, is linked to HIV risk (Ayala & Diaz, 2001). The following findings thus explain higher rates of HIV risk among LGBT immigrants: elevated levels of depression among immigrant LGBT people (Yoshikawa et al., 2004) and low self-esteem serve as mediators

between experiences of racism, anti-immigrant discrimination, and homophobia on one hand, and increased involvement in high-risk situations on the other (Ayala & Diaz, 2001). The study by Ibanez et al. (2009) also found a link between the experiences of racism (in particular in the mainstream LGBT community) and sexual risk. For example, there is evidence that men who often get rejected as sexual partners due to their ethnicity or race might abandon condom use to attract a potential sexual partner, or may feel less powerful in the relationship to assert their need for safer sex (Ayala & Diaz, 2001). While the studies exploring the link between the experiences of racism and anti-immigrant discrimination and risky sexual behaviours provide some insight into the impact of racism and discrimination on the mental health of LGBT immigrants, there is a need for more focused research in this area.

So far in this section of the literature review I have demonstrated that double-minority status, anti-immigrant discrimination, and homophobia put LGBT immigrants at risk in terms of mental and behavioural health. However, there exists a group of LGBT newcomers exposed to even greater risks and challenges than the rest of the immigrant LGBT population: LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, as will be discussed next.

2.2.3 LGBT refugees and asylum seekers. A separate group of LGBT newcomers, refugees and asylum seekers (i.e., refugees whose claims have not yet been definitively evaluated), with even more challenging issues than other LGBT immigrants, is virtually ignored in the scientific literature (Heller, 2009). For example, a comprehensive manual by Potocky-Tripodi (2003) that focuses on practice with refugees and immigrants includes only two paragraphs on gay men and lesbians. The lack of research on LGBT refugees and asylum seekers is concerning considering the vulnerable condition of this group of LGBT newcomers.

LGBT refugees usually have experienced a serious trauma, have scarce financial resources, and are exposed to linguistic, racial, and cultural oppression (Heller, 2009). In order to be able to be helpful to these very vulnerable populations, professionals in the mental health field need to understand the theoretical, socio-historical, and legal issues affecting LGBT refugees. Yoshino (2006) introduced the concepts of "covering" and "reverse-covering" to assist mental health professionals in understanding the complicated asylum requirements for LGBT refugees. The author described covering as the process employed by people to individually and collectively downplay characteristics that identify them as belonging to oppressed or marginalized groups. Reverse-covering happens when a person is expected to display stereotypical characteristics of his or her identity, usually under external pressure. Much research has explored the ways society forces LGBT people to downplay or even completely cover aspects of their identities. LGBT asylum-seekers however are required to establish the authenticity of their sexual identity by means of reverse-covering, where they would emphasize traits based on established stereotypes of LGBT minorities. The reverse-covering demands faced by LGBT asylum-seekers during asylum hearings strongly depend on the mainstream society's stereotypes of sexual minorities, according to Heller (2009). Instead of focusing on behaviours threatened against the LGBT asylum-seekers, the focus is shifted to the behaviours of the individual who is seeking refuge and protection. In these scenarios, a gay man is expected to be feminine; a lesbian is expected to be masculine; a male-to-female transgender individual is expected to have undergone surgery; and so forth. Quite often stereotyped behavioural characteristics of wealthy White gay men are used as the baseline to determine "gayness" of LGBT asylum-seekers, making it extremely difficult for a gay asylum-seeker to reverse-cover appropriately to prove that he really is gay (Keung, 2007). Similar to most immigrants, LGBT

asylum-seekers are predominantly low income, ethnic or racial minorities, and come from cultures with dramatically different cultural norms. Therefore the stereotypes relied upon during the asylum hearing, and which serve as the basis for reverse-covering demands, are often non-relevant for LGBT asylum-seekers (Morgan, 2006).

Reverse-covering demands also incorporate the assumption that upon arriving in North America, LGBT asylum seekers feel that they are no longer required to cover and can openly project LGBT identity. However, it is common for immigrant communities to maintain similar prejudices and discriminations as in the home country, thus preventing LGBT asylum-seekers from being openly LGBT (Leland, 2001). LGBT asylum-seekers quite often come from countries where not covering could be punished with violence or death (Hanna, 2005). These individuals, because of their vulnerable status in their home countries, became experts at covering, and the demand to reverse-cover and project their LGBT identity in the asylum hearing tends to be counterintuitive for LGBT asylum-seekers and difficult to re-enact. Most of them continue to cover in North America due to its own legal, social, and economic systems still rewarding LGBT covering in general (Heller, 2009). It thus becomes a paradox that the same society that often requires covering by LGBT people in order to keep their jobs, custody of children, or social standing, at the same time reinforces reverse-covering for LGBT asylum-seekers (Yoshino, 2006). To make matters even worse, in the situations where asylum cases fail, the individuals are forced to cover again upon their return to their countries of origin. While the current legislation does not explicitly require asylum seekers to "act gay," it does so implicitly by expecting asylum-seekers to be recognizably and undeniably LGBT, through various aspects of asylum law, the subjective perceptions of decision makers, as well as recent cases that actually punished the ones who did not reverse-cover (Keung, 2007; Heller, 2009). For example, Keung

quoted a Canadian asylum case that failed because the asylum-seeker was not perceived by the

decision makers to be "gay enough." Mental health professionals working with LGBT refugees

therefore face tough choices under the current Canadian immigration system when deciding on

which approach to take with their client. On one hand, Heller (2009) argued that mental health

professionals should not act as extensions of the oppressive immigration systems by encouraging

clients to reverse-cover. However, she did acknowledge that mental health professionals should

still be mindful of the fact that reverse-covering may provide LGBT asylum-seekers with an

advantage when dealing with the immigration system.

Despite multiple risks and challenges LGBT refugees and asylum seekers face, the

research exploring mental health of this population is virtually non-existent. Empirical research

is needed to help mental health professional to better understand the specific needs of this group

of LGBT newcomers, which is exposed to multiple stressors for prolonged periods of time while

attempting to obtain permanent residency in Canada.

2.2.4 Sexual expression following immigration. The social context in which LGBT

immigrants find themselves during the early years following immigration shapes their sexual

behaviour and risk (Bianchi et al., 2007). Bianchi and colleagues' participants often reported that

they found it much easier to meet sex partners in their new country than in their country of

origin, and that following immigration the frequency of their sexual encounters increased. For

those LGBT immigrants who perceived their countries of origin as places where they had to be

constantly vigilant, immigration became the best way to create anonymity in terms of their

sexuality (Acosta, 2008). Living in "gay centers," with the anonymity they provide and without

social connections from the past, is experienced as liberating and conducive to one's sexual

exploration, according to Bianchi et al. (2007). Many gay immigrants in the study by Bianchi

and colleagues reported feeling free to explore their sexuality as they no longer had to be

concerned about disrespecting or embarrassing their families. For example, even gay men with

no or limited command of English reported being able to easily find sexual partners in public

venues (e.g., parks or public washrooms). Overall, Bianchi and colleagues' research showed a

tendency to engage in significantly higher levels of sexual activity after immigration, often

exposing immigrants to risk behaviours and negative health outcomes, implications of which will

be discussed next, in the Health Outcomes section, right after a brief review of limitations in

research on LGBT immigrant experience.

2.2.5 Limitations. The impact that immigration to a country that welcomes sexual

diversity (versus home country where non-heteronormative sexuality is often condemned) has on

mental well-being of LGBT immigrants is practically non-researched in the current scientific

literature. LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, with even more challenging issues than other

LGBT newcomers, are also virtually ignored in scientific literature (Heller, 2009). Finally, as

was mentioned earlier, further research focusing on the impact that racism has on mental well-

being of LGBT immigrants is also required.

2.3 Health Outcomes

2.3.1 Mental health. Research has demonstrated that LGBT people are at elevated risk

when it comes to mental health disorders and psychological morbidity (Burgard et al., 2005).

The risk is often attributed to the negative effects of anti-gay discrimination (Meyer, 2003). In

the case of LGBT immigrants, their dual minority status (immigrant status/ethnicity/race and

sexual orientation) is likely to generate even greater susceptibility for negative mental health

outcomes stemming from discrimination (Ayala & Diaz, 2001; Cochran et al., 2007). It is

important to note that the occurrence of psychiatric morbidity is quite often lower among

heterosexual immigrants than among the general population. For example, psychiatric morbidity is normally lower among Latino and Asian heterosexual immigrants compared to Whites in the U.S. (Alegria, Canino, Stinson, & Grant, 2006; Breslau et al., 2006). As was discussed earlier, quite often mental well-being of immigrants is attributed to strong links and support they receive from their ethnic communities. However, such is not often the case with LGBT immigrants. Their sexual orientation may become the basis for their exclusion and discrimination in their community of origin (Boulden, 2009). Discrimination and exclusion often result in LGBT immigrants' unwillingness to disclose their minority sexual orientation in the context of their community of origin. Non-disclosure of sexual orientation is a widely recognized risk factor for depression, and even an additional explanation for increased rates of psychiatric morbidity among LGBT immigrants, compared with their ethnic/racial community or with the larger LGBT community (Ullrich, Lutgendorf, & Stapleton, 2003). A study by Yoshikawa et al. (2004), which studied the influence of racism, anti-immigrant discrimination, and homophobia on mental health of Asian and Pacific Islander gay men, identified that 45% of the respondents scored above the clinical cut-off of a standard measure, thus constituting increased risk for clinical depression. These figures are significantly higher than for both the general population and for non-immigrant LGBT people. Some research, however, contradicted the above and suggested that LGBT immigrants might be similar or even less likely than non-immigrant LGBT people to have a mental health disorder. For example, a study by Cochran et al. (2007) found that Latino and Asian gay immigrants showed a lower prevalence of substance use and depressive disorders compared to the rest of LGBT community. The factors that are assumed to be contributing to the lower prevalence include cultural or religious values and beliefs that discourage or prohibit substance use and therefore limit the risk for substance use disorders, along with higher rates of

family cohesion and familial or social support. Thus, the research findings on prevalence of

mental health disorders and psychological morbidity among LGBT immigrants seem to be

equivocal and therefore more research is needed exploring this area of study.

Finally, access to mental health services is yet another challenge for LGBT immigrants.

Immigrants in general have less access to, as well as lower utilization of, mental health services

(American Psychological Association, 2011). They tend to face numerous barriers to receiving

proper care, which include financial difficulties, the lack of culturally- and linguistically-

competent and appropriate services, and overall mistrust of mental health providers. In the case

of LGBT immigrants, these barriers are even more profound. Research by Lee (2009)

demonstrated that LGBT minorities frequently reported having difficulty finding a therapist who

would have the capacity to acknowledge and address in therapy their intersecting identities. Most

of the participants in Lee's study expressed frustrations in regard to individualistic approaches to

therapy. They found the interventions introduced by the counsellors simplistic, developed for a

White majority, and not helpful because interventions either did not take into account at all or

addressed minimally their immigrant or LGBT identities, and virtually never addressed the

intersection of the two. Quite often after a few attempts LGBT immigrants reported being

discouraged to the point of ceasing to seek out helping professionals, according to Lee (2009).

Some LGBT immigrants, however, reported learning to successfully navigate accessing mental

health services through fostering self-reliance and being proactive by, for example, explicitly

requesting to work with a counsellor who is trained to work with ethnic and sexual minorities

(Lee, 2009). Considering the prevalence of mental health disorders among LGBT immigrants

(Burgard et al., 2005; Ayala & Diaz, 2001; Cochran et al., 2007), the challenges, discussed

above, related to access to and receipt of mental health services are concerning. Furthermore,

untreated mental health disorders can have impacts on the physical and behavioural health of

LGBT immigrants. For example, untreated substance abuse is considered to be an important

predictor of unprotected anal intercourse, a risk factor for HIV; moreover, LGBT immigrants

often turn to substance use in order to counteract the effect of internalized homophobia (Choi et

al., 2005). Higher levels of depression among LGBT immigrants also have been found to be

linked to increased rates of unprotected sex among this population (Poppen et al., 2004;

Yoshikawa et al., 2004). Thus, quite often, challenges in getting needed and appropriate mental

health care play an important role in increasing LGBT immigrants' risk for HIV and sexually

transmitted infections, as will be discussed in the following section. In fact, research focusing on

mental health of LGBT immigrants is rather scarce, and most of the findings presented in this

section came from the research that explores predictors and implications of risky sexual

behaviours among this population.

        2.3.2 Sexual risk. As was discussed earlier, LGBT immigrants are a group at risk when it

comes to risky sexual behaviours. The psychocultural model developed by Diaz (1998, 2000) is

helpful in understanding sexual behaviour of LGBT immigrants. As was explained in the

Conceptual Framework section, this model is based on the assumption that cultural values are

internalized by LGBT immigrants and shape their sexual relations and identity. As a result of

repeated discrimination and oppression, the cultural message of disempowerment becomes

internalized and affects many areas of immigrants' lives, including their sexuality. LGBT

immigrants with an internalized sense of powerlessness and fatalism are likely to feel incapable

of shaping their own destiny in regard to sexual behaviours and therefore fail to behave in self-

protective ways (Bianchi et al., 2004; Zea et al., 2003).

Research has identified four important types of predictors of risky sexual behaviours that

undermine LGBT immigrants' ability to engage in safer sex: demographic, developmental,

social-cognitive, and behavioural (Diaz et al., 1999; Zea, Reisen, Poppen, & Bianchi, 2009). The

demographic profile associated with risky sexual behaviours among LGBT immigrants,

according to Ramirez et al. (2004), can be characterized by the following set of attributes:

immigrant men either in their early twenties or older than forty, usually of lower socioeconomic

status, who are closeted or not well integrated as members of LGBT community. The

developmental predictor associated with risky sexual behaviours (e.g., the practice of

unprotected sex) among LGBT immigrants tends to be a history of childhood sexual abuse,

according to Ramirez and colleagues. The social cognitive factors responsible for risky sexual

practices include low levels of perceived self-efficacy, weak personal intentions for safer sex,

and lower perceptions of peer norms in regard to safer sex (Diaz et al., 1999). In terms of

behavioural predictors, sexual recklessness, which can be characterized by lack of interest for

self-protection/preservation, along with use of drugs during sexual activity, and frequent sex with

casual partners, tends to be responsible for risky sexual behaviours, according to Diaz and

colleagues.

In addition to individual risk and protective factors, social factors, including homophobia,

anti-immigrant discrimination, racism, and financial hardship, have been demonstrated to be

strong predictors of psychological symptoms among LGBT immigrants (Diaz, 1997).

Psychological distress in turn may lead to sexual recklessness. For example, as was discussed

earlier, substance use is considered to be an important factor related to having unprotected anal

intercourse, as LGBT immigrants often resort to substance use in order to counteract the effect of

internalized homophobia (Choi et al., 2005). Finally, while frequent sex with casual partners is

most often associated with risky sexual behaviour, Diaz et al. (1999) argued that immigrants in

committed sexual relationships are another group at risk: the highest rates of unprotected sex are

reported for LGBT immigrants who are in primary sexual relationships. Due to interpersonal

factors associated with romantic relationships, LGBT immigrants quite often have unrealistic

perceptions of safety within relationships. For example, a qualitative study by Diaz et al. (1998)

found that Latinos have serious difficulties when it comes to negotiating safety in their primary

relationships, and might be living under the illusion of safety based on false assumptions

regarding their partner's serostatus or the level of monogamy in their relationship. Diaz and

colleagues also found evidence suggesting that condom use within a relationship can be

perceived by Latino gay men as a barrier to intimacy and even as a sign of mistrust, thus

exposing them to additional health risks in cases when the relationship is not actually

monogamous. This finding suggests that norms of protective behaviours in immigrants' cultures

play an important role in determining their sexual risk profiles, as will be explained in more

detail next.

Attitudes toward protective behaviours in immigrants' home countries might be

significantly different from North American (Yoshikawa et al., 2004). In fact, LGBT immigrant

populations frequently report norms of unprotected sex that stem from their countries of origin.

For example, according to Yoshikawa and colleagues, norms of unprotected sex are

characteristic of most Asian cultures, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Indian,

Bangladeshi, and Pakistani. There is evidence that LGBT immigrants belonging to certain racial

or ethnic groups are at particularly high risk for HIV/AIDS; cultural variables, according to

Yoshikawa and colleagues, play an important role in determining the risk profile of a particular

ethnic or racial group. For example, the annual AIDS rate for Latino gay men is on average 3-4

times higher than in Whites (Jarama et al., 2005; Poppen et al., 2004), which can probably be

attributed to the fact that Latinos report the highest rates of unprotected anal intercourse

compared to any other racial or ethnic group (Diaz et al., 1999). While the prevalence of mental

health disorders, which quite often lead to risky sexual behaviours, tends to be lower among

Latino immigrants (Cochran et al., 2007), in the case of Latino gay men, high rates of

unprotected sex are often attributed to a cultural variable called "machismo" (Jarama et al.,

2005). The cultural value of machismo reflects strict gender role expectations, characterized by

the need for anal penetrative sex in the insertive role, and the frequent use of the sexual

encounter as means to prove masculinity. "Machista" men, i.e., men who assumed machismo

attitude, according to Jarama and colleagues, are expected to demonstrate virility by having

frequent sexual encounters with multiple partners, and having strong sexual urges for penetrative

anal sex that are difficult to control. A Latino man might not be perceived either by himself or

others to be gay or bisexual as long as he plays the insertive and active role during intercourse.

Research found that machistas' perceptions of low sexual control often are linked to frequent

unprotected anal sex (Carballo-Dieguez et al., 1997).

LGBT immigrants' race also was found to be related to the stage of HIV infection at the

time individuals seek initial treatment (Bianchi et al., 2004). For instance, Black and Hispanic

LGBT immigrants usually wait longer to seek initial treatment than Whites, which in turn

impacts the way the disease progresses, as well as survival rates (Easterbrook et al., 1991).

Furthermore, Latino immigrant men tend to report significantly greater physical symptoms

compared to, for example, Black immigrants, which indicates a higher degree of debilitation and

further progression of HIV at the time of treatment-seeking among this population (Domanico &

Crawford, 2000). Bianchi et al. (2004) argued that delayed treatment-seeking behaviour among

minorities can be attributed to logistical difficulties (e.g., financial constraints, transportation),

cultural or social barriers (e.g., class, race, limited command of English), and limited access and

knowledge related to health care resources.

Another reason why immigrant communities often have different norms of protective

behaviours is attributed to the fact that these communities usually maintain social distance from

the LGBT community due to negative perceptions of homosexuality, thus decreasing exposure to

messages promoting safer sex (Singer & Marxuach-Rodriquez, 1996). Internalized homophobia,

typical of LGBT immigrants who are predominately identified with their ethnic community,

often prevents immigrants from actually self-identifying as LGBT and therefore keeps them

away from participating in broader queer culture, and in turn, from support for safer sex (Jarama

et al., 2005). In fact, the majority of immigrant cultures view homosexuality negatively, which

decreases the disclosure of information by LGBT immigrants that can be associated with non-

heterosexual orientation (Zea et al., 2004). For example, research found that LGBT immigrants

disclose their HIV-positive serostatus to their friends, family, and sexual partners less often than

non-immigrant LGBT people (Mason et al., 1995). Furthermore, negative perceptions of

homosexuality in immigrant cultures often prevent LGBT immigrants from sharing their

experiences of discrimination and homophobia with friends and family, which is troubling

because these types of conversations are often responsible for lower levels of unprotected anal

intercourse (Yoshikawa et al., 2004). Conversely, the combination of the inability to discuss

issues related to discrimination with family and high levels of experienced discrimination tend to

be linked to higher rates of unprotected anal intercourse. According to Yoshikawa and

colleagues, support from social networks is considered to be one of the most important factors in

reducing the spread of HIV epidemics; the fact that LGBT immigrants are often not able to

receive that type of support further increases the risks of spreading HIV in LGBT immigrant

circles. Social support also plays an important role when it comes to HIV treatment adherence

patterns among LGBT immigrants (Van Servellen et al., 2003), as will be discussed next.

2.3.3 Living with HIV/AIDS. Since the very inception of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, HIV-

positive people had to face a great deal of stigma and discrimination (Acevedo, 2008). While

recently stigma somewhat ameliorated in the mainstream culture due to efforts of multiple

organizations educating the public about the nature of the epidemic, within immigrant

communities HIV/AIDS often remains highly stigmatized (Van Servellen et al., 2003). For

example, Van Oss-Marin's (2003) study indicated that Latino LGBT immigrants tend to carry a

strong sense of shame, feel isolated and lonely, and have a strong belief that they hurt their

families by being LGBT. As a result, they quite often internalize the homophobia and stigma

associated with HIV/AIDS that is prevalent in Latino communities (Acevedo, 2008). HIV-

positive immigrants tend to refer to being HIV positive as "our condition" or "patients like us"

instead of using the actual term HIV (Acevedo, 2008, p. 116). The disclosure of HIV serostatus

is frequently associated with emotional and cognitive dilemmas, where LGBT immigrants

experience fear and shame and anticipate rejection upon disclosure. Quite often, in fear of

shaming and burdening one's family, LGBT immigrants withhold information about their

serostatus thus isolating themselves from familial and social supports (Mason et al., 1995). This

finding is concerning as social and familial supports were found to have a strong influence on

adherence to HIV treatment among HIV positive LGBT immigrants.

The outcomes of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART), a combination of

medications that work to slow down the replication of the virus, depend strongly upon patients'

adherence to medication regimens (Acevedo, 2008). While HAART was shown to have a

dramatic effect on reducing the rates of mortality, non-adherence to HAART continues to be an issue with LGBT immigrants (McClure, Catz, & Brantley, 1999). Social support is found to be the most important factor to influence patients' adherence patterns (Van Servellen et al., 2003). Therefore, social isolation, which is quite often experienced by LGBT immigrants, is likely to partially explain the non-adherence to HAART regimens, according to Van Servellen and colleagues. Adherence is also influenced by the common belief of immigrants that HIV infection is a punishment for engaging in socially-unacceptable lifestyles (Acevedo, 2008). The quality of relationship with healthcare providers also plays an important role as it was shown to influence patient's experience of HIV and adherence to HAART (Van Servellen et al., 2003). Finally, active coping was also found to play an important role in maintaining positive health attitudes (Bianchi et al., 2004). Bianchi and colleagues found that active coping is a mediator between discrimination experiences and positive health habits. Discrimination and experienced stigma were found to have a negative effect on ability to actively cope in LGBT immigrants, which consequently negatively affects the ability to care for self and adhere to treatment regimen. Research by Ramirez-Valles et al. (2005) found that the effects of experienced homophobia in immigrant communities can be compensated for by community involvement. Community involvement, volunteerism, and activism in LGBT and HIV/AIDS-related organizations, according to Ramirez-Valles and colleagues, buffer or compensate for the negative effects of stigma and discrimination on psychological well-being of LGBT immigrants, and therefore are likely to improve their ability to actively cope and thus improve adherence to HIV treatment. The next paragraph will discuss acculturation, another factor playing an important role in determining LGBT immigrants' ability to manage HIV/AIDS.

As noted earlier, through the process of acculturation, immigrants acquire beliefs, values, and behaviours of a host country, while either preserving or modifying those of their country of origin. Acculturation plays an important role in understanding the risk behaviour of LGBT immigrants because immigrants' cultural norms and scripts related to sexual behaviour and safer sex stem from attitudes, values, and beliefs of both their home and host countries (Poppen et al., 2004). LGBT immigrants may acculturate to various communities, such as co-ethnic communities, mainstream North American communities, and mainstream LGBT communities. These communities are likely to be different in terms of levels of HIV seroprevalence, norms concerning safer sex, and perceived risks for HIV infection. Research found that LGBT immigrants who are less acculturated to mainstream society tend to have less positive attitudes toward safer sex (Zea et al., 2009). According to Zea and colleagues, this can be explained by the presence of cultural norms in their countries of origin that do not support safer sex, as well as by exposure to poverty, social isolation, and lack of knowledge related to healthy sexual behaviours. The level of acculturation to the host country also plays an important role in determining LGBT immigrants' ability to take care of their health (Bianchi et al., 2004).

Individuals with higher levels of acculturation tend to take better care of themselves due to their ability to engage in more active coping strategies. The better command of English and knowledge about the culture of the host country are instrumental in terms of helping individuals to feel that they are in charge of their lives, which in turn translates into more proactive health-related behaviours directed at taking care of their health (Bianchi et al., 2004). Furthermore, more acculturated LGBT immigrants have better access to educational resources and information related to health care and HIV. Overall, LGBT immigrants with higher levels of acculturation tend to be more integrated into mainstream LGBT culture and less identified with their home

cultures, thus also helping to ameliorate the effects of internalized homophobia, which in turn helps them internalize cultural norms and values that focus on personal control and healthy lifestyle (Bianchi et al., 2004).

2.3.4 Limitations. The studies researching health and sexual risk among LGBT immigrants often have similar limitations. Most of the studies reviewed employed non-probability sampling to gather data because of the difficulty in recruiting participants (Diaz, 1998; Jarama et al., 2005). Also, as was discussed earlier, quite often LGBT immigrants represent a hidden population that cannot be enumerated precisely, and therefore it becomes virtually impossible to derive a truly representative sample of the entire population (Poppen et al., 2004). Furthermore, the vast majority of research exploring health outcomes in LGBT immigrants has been done on Latino gay men (Carballo-Dieguez et al., 1997; Diaz, 1997, 1998; Diaz et al., 1999; Jarama et al., 2005), while LGBT immigrants of other races and ethnicities, as well as women and trans people, are largely underrepresented. Finally, most of the research on LGBT immigrants' health outcomes focuses on risky sexual behaviours and HIV, leaving many other important areas, including mental health, largely understudied. The next section will review various issues in research on LGBT immigrants and explain some of the above-mentioned challenges related to researching this population. These issues and challenges were considered and addressed in this study's design and they strongly influenced the choices made in regard to its methodology.

2.4 Gaps in the Contemporary Research Literature

Multiple studies referenced in the literature review, looking at various aspects of LGBT immigrant experience, consistently identified acculturation as an important factor defining an overall immigration experience of LGBT people. This review has demonstrated that such aspects

of LGBT immigrant experience as the development of sexual identity, sexual expression, and closetedness strongly relate to the level of acculturation to the host country. The level of acculturation also played an important role in health outcomes of LGBT immigrants. For example, it was found to be a strong predictor when it came to sexual risk behaviours and to determining LGBT immigrants' abilities to take care of their health. Finally, researchers found that the level of acculturation was quite often an important predictor of LGBT immigrant individuals' likelihood to seek mental health help. However, while most of the literature reviewed in this paper recognized acculturation as an important factor in shaping the various aspects of LGBT immigrant experience and its implications, the research literature examining the acculturation experience of immigrants who self-identify as LGBT is virtually non-existent. Moreover, given the large sizes of the immigrant and LGBT populations in Canada, research is needed that will bridge two separate bodies of knowledge (i.e., acculturation research and LGBT research) in order to help understand the acculturation experiences of LGBT immigrants and the factors responsible for their acculturation outcomes.

Furthermore, as was mentioned earlier, the vast majority of the literature reviewed in this paper was produced by U.S. researchers and focused on LGBT immigrants to the U.S. While for the purposes of the literature review many aspects of LGBT immigrant experience were assumed to be similar for immigrants to North America, considering the multiple cultural, political, and socioeconomic differences between the U.S. and Canada, it is likely that important differences may exist between the experiences of LGBT immigrants to Canada and to the U.S. Thus, further research, specific to the Canadian context and its LGBT immigrant community makeup, is needed in order to identify and address these differences. Also, in the process of literature review, I found that while some LGBT immigrant populations are researched quite extensively,

others seem to be either under-researched or not researched at all. For example, over 50% of the studies reviewed in this paper focused on Latino LGBT immigrants, and over 30% focused on Asian and/or Pacific Islander LGBT immigrants. There were only a few studies on Eastern European (mostly Russian) and African LGBT immigrants. However, no studies were found on some other large groups of LGBT immigrants, for example, Middle Eastern populations. This can possibly be explained by stronger stigma and severe risks associated with being LGBT (or even with being affiliated with LGBT-related research) in many Middle Eastern cultures when compared to other immigrant cultures. However, it is important to find ways to research these hidden populations in light of their increased risk for HIV transmission and mental health problems (Bianchi et al., 2004; Jarama et al., 2005).

Additionally, the literature review identified that sociocultural factors play an important role when it comes to safer-sex practices of LGBT immigrants. Most studies identified such factors as social discrimination and social inequalities as responsible for most risky sexual behaviours (Bianchi et al., 2004). However, currently there is not enough research that focuses on the development of strategies that could address sociocultural and structural causes responsible for risky sexual behaviours in LGBT immigrants.

The research study fills the above-identified gaps in the contemporary research literature by developing an overall understanding of acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants to Canada, as well as the issues and barriers that immigrant LGBT people face, and provides useful implications for organizations and practitioners to help them better serve these often-overlooked communities. The next section will discuss research approaches that were considered in the design of this research study.

2.5 Research Approaches

Research on LGBT immigrants (Zea et al., 2003) has revealed that it is critical for

traditional research approaches to be modified, when used with ethnic or sexual minority groups,

in order to assure meaningful results and interpretations. As discussed earlier, understanding the

role of culture is essential when developing or adopting theories and methodologies for

researching LGBT immigrants. Cultural scripts, according to Zea and colleagues, need to be

examined to understand the ways they influence self-identification, sexual behaviour, and safer-

sex attitudes. This understanding will help ensure that research methods chosen for the study

account for the role of cultural and socioeconomic factors in shaping LGBT immigrants'

experiences.

Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods have their place when researching various

groups of LGBT immigrants, as long as they account for the role of culture (Zea et al., 2003).

For example, qualitative methods allow exploring constructs and identifying unasked questions,

which facilitate theory advancement and hypothesis generation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This

type of research method can be instrumental in helping researchers understand the ways in which

individuals experience, perceive, and construe their life experiences, which is crucial when

studying minority groups, such as LGBT immigrants, that have not been represented in the

psychological literature before (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Quantitative measures can be used

then to test the hypotheses that were developed by the use of qualitative research methods.

Additionally, combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for triangulation, a dialectic

procedure through which new insights and research questions are generated based on the

findings from both approaches, which is vital for this under-researched area of study (Zea et al.,

2003). Furthermore, as noted by Zea and colleagues, it is important to consider LGBT

immigrants' perceptions of research methodologies when designing a study. For example, while LGBT immigrants often perceive qualitative methodologies as inviting them to discuss their subjective experience, survey instruments, which are often used in quantitative methods, are at times seen as imposing silence.

2.5.1 LGBT immigrants' interactions with researchers and perceptions of the research protocol. Cultural and socioeconomic factors that shape LGBT immigrants' sexual behaviour also have a strong impact on the way they will be able to relate to researchers and research itself (Zea et al., 2003). Repeated exposure to discrimination, racism, oppression, and homophobia influence the way LGBT immigrants perceive and respond to research. For example, Latino community members are often not accustomed to participating in research, and researchers, especially the ones who are asking questions related to sexual behaviour, are often seen as suspect by LGBT immigrants (Marin & Marin, 1991). Furthermore, because of experiences of discrimination and oppression, LGBT immigrants might fear being mistreated by researchers, which explains why Latino LGBT immigrants are often reluctant to volunteer to participate in research (Zea et al., 2003). Finally, according to Zea and colleagues, while most non-immigrant LGBT people are aware that their participation will eventually result in something beneficial for the community, many LGBT immigrants do not necessarily understand the connection between their participation in the study and increased well-being of the community. Therefore researchers need to make sure that the LGBT immigrant participants explicitly understand that there is a direct link between a research project and benefits to the community.

Participants' cultural assumptions also play an important role in forming how they perceive the research protocol and interactions between the participants and researchers. For

example, due to strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships, typical of collectivist cultures, impersonal approaches to research, where participants are seen as sources of information, might be perceived as dismissive and cold by immigrants, while at the same time perceived as appropriate by non-immigrant participants (Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994). In light of such cultural assumptions, the emotional detachment typical of traditional research settings might not be ideal when working with LGBT immigrants; on the other hand, a friendly informal conversation often helps to make LGBT immigrants more comfortable in the research setting and thus makes research more productive (Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1992).

2.5.2 Making the research experience comfortable for LGBT immigrant participants. Considering the multiple challenges related to researching LGBT immigrants, I will review some practical implications that will help make research endeavours more effective. Zea et al. (2003) argued that the first priority for researchers is to make the research setting as hospitable as possible for LGBT immigrants. Considering how important social interaction is, for example, in alocentric cultures, it is recommended that researchers dedicate some time to friendly informal conversation with the study participants before beginning to collect data, thus demonstrating their sincere interest in participants and their life experiences. Payment for the participation in the study might be another strategy that will allow researchers to communicate to participants the researchers' appreciation of their participation (Landrine et al., 1992). Another aspect of the research process that can influence the level of participants' comfort is the use of formal or informal verbs (which exists in many languages, for example, Spanish) in interviews and in instruments (Zea et al., 2003). The usage of these forms can be different depending on the country of origin, social class, and age of the participants. It is recommended to have alternative versions of the research instrument, and ask the participants which one they prefer. Sometimes, it

might make sense to conduct a focus group to learn potential research participants' preferences

and perceptions before establishing a research protocol. Finally, it is important for the

researchers to keep in mind that many LGBT immigrants are not out and are cautious when it

comes to discussing their sexuality due to their experiences with homophobia (Diaz, 1998).

Therefore researchers should structure their questions about sexual orientation in ways that do

not make participants uncomfortable, especially when researching individuals who feel ashamed

of being LGBT. Furthermore, making the research experience comfortable for LGBT immigrant

participants plays an important role in their recruitment and retention in research.

When it comes to LGBT immigrant participant recruitment, according to Zea et al.

(2003), the use of community insiders is critical. Zea and colleagues argued that researchers

should attempt to establish collaborative and trusting relationships with the leaders of immigrant

and LGBT communities in order to recruit participants, and make them feel comfortable

participating in research. These leaders often take the role of guardians and might prevent

researchers from working with the participants if they distrust them, thus making participant

retention in research or recruitment of new participants rather challenging. Research also

demonstrated that LGBT immigrants are more likely to feel comfortable participating in research

if they feel that they share racial/ethnic and socioeconomic similarities with the researcher

(Orrell-Valente, Pinderhughes, Valente, Laird, & Conduct Problems Research Prevention Group,

1999). Finally, the use of qualitative methods might also be instrumental in making the research

experience comfortable for LGBT immigrants: while LGBT immigrants often perceive survey

instruments, which are commonly used in quantitative methods, as imposing silence, qualitative

methodologies are perceived as inviting them to openly discuss their subjective experience (Zea

et al., 2003).

2.6 Study Objectives and Research Questions

This research study fills the above-identified gaps in the contemporary research literature by developing an overall understanding of acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants, as well as the challenges and barriers that immigrant LGBT people face, and providing useful implications for organizations and practitioners to help them better serve these often-overlooked communities. The main research purpose of this study is to understand the experienced process of acculturation of LGBT immigrants. The study develops an understanding of LGBT immigrants' acculturation experience by answering the following questions: (a) How do LGBT immigrants perceive their process of acculturation? (b) What impact does LGBT sexuality have on acculturation experience? (c) What (if any) are the perceived advantages of being LGBT when going through acculturation? (d) What are the perceived barriers/challenges that LGBT immigrants experience when they go through the acculturation process? (e) Which variables are responsible for the acculturation outcomes of LGBT immigrants? (f) What are the ways for organizations and practitioners to improve LGBT immigrants' acculturation outcomes from LGBT immigrants' perspectives? (g) In what way(s) do LGBT immigrants perceive their process of acculturation to be different from non-LGBT immigrants? The next section will discuss in detail methodology chosen to meet the objectives of this research study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Epistemological Viewpoint

Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005) suggested using an interpretive perspective (i.e., a pervasive lens for all aspects of qualitative research) when researching underrepresented or marginalized groups to account for the impact of race, gender, social class, religion, culture, sexuality, and geography. This exploration of the acculturation of LGBT immigrants in light of cultural and historical constructions of their identity, with linkages to gender, sexuality, and dominant discourses in the country of origin and in the Canadian context, will be framed within queer theory (Watson, 2005). Queer theory emerged in the U.S. as a form of academic and political movement in the early 1990s (Watson, 2009). It has its roots in post-structuralism, gay and lesbian studies, and psychoanalytic and cultural theories. Queer theorists, according to Watson, are not satisfied with the gay and lesbian studies that tend to base their demands for political participation and equality on the principle of identity - female, gay, lesbian (more recently starting to also include bisexual, transsexual, and transgender identities). By contrast, queer theory initiates from a critique of identity and identity politics. Queer theory points to fluidity in identity and recognizes its historically-contingent and socially-constructed nature (Watson, 2009). It represents a resistance to identity categorization and takes a defiant stance toward the rigidity with which identity categorization continues to be enforced. Queer theorists believe that "identities" are not fixed because they are comprised of a great variety of characteristics (Watson, 2005), appreciation of which is essential for the understanding of LGBT immigrant identity. Therefore, the choice of study participants went beyond sexual orientation characteristics to include such components as race, age, religion, gender, gender identity, and country of origin, to adequately cover most aspects of immigrants' identity. The modes of data

collection considered multiple characteristics of LGBT immigrant identities in order to be

effective in researching these diverse populations, as will be discussed further. Equipped with the

queer theory interpretive perspective, the author was sensitive to power imbalances at all stages

of the research. Thus, all the instruments and approaches employed in this study were carefully

chosen and/or developed with the aim of not marginalizing the participants further, but rather

respecting them (Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Study Design

Given the current status of the literature and the exploratory nature of the research, a

qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Advantages

of using qualitative methods in exploratory research include the use of open-ended questions and

probing that allow participants to respond in their own words and to explain their answers "rather

than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods often do" (Family

Health International, 2010, p.4). I chose a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a

qualitative research method, which emphasizes "the discovery of theory from data" (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967, p. 1), to obtain an in-depth interpretive understanding of the subjective experience

and perceptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ponterotto,

2005) related to the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants.

Since current scientific literature does not offer theoretical frameworks related to

acculturation of LGBT immigrants, grounded theory approach was a good fit - it is a best fit

when no theory exists (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, Hanson, Plano

Clark, & Morales, 2007; Creswell, 2007), as it emphasizes generation of theory from data

collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory design allowed developing a theoretical

framework that explains (Glaser, 1992) LGBT immigrants' acculturation experience overall, as

well as various variables that influence different acculturation outcomes. The vision of grounded

theory, suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008), was utilized in this study, as it moves grounded

theory further away from its positivist origins by incorporating multiple methods and questions

posed by constructivists, thus making it a more nuanced and reflexive approach, where the

meaning is co-constructed by participants and researchers (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3 Researcher Bias Clarification

Creswell (2007) suggested that researcher bias has to be clarified from the outset of the

study to clearly disclose the researcher's position, past experiences, prejudices, and any biases

that might have impacted the inquiry, and that possibly influenced interpretation of the data and

the overall approach to the study. Such disclosure is presented next.

I came to Canada approximately twelve years ago from Ukraine in search of a higher

standard of living for myself and my family (i.e., my parents, grandparents, and sister). I started

to self-identify as a cisgendered gay man approximately four years after becoming a landed

immigrant in Canada. I did not self-identify as gay prior to my immigration to Canada. While I

did have same-sex sexual fantasies for as long as I can remember, and even some early sexual

experimentation with my male peers, internalized queerphobia prevented me from admitting to

myself that I was queer. There were no positive references to queer sexuality in my culture. In

fact, prior to immigration to Canada, I was not aware of a possibility of self-identification as

queer that would not stigmatize or pathologize me. Homosexuality was punishable by law in my

country, and I only heard of two groups of men who had sex with men: the individuals who were

considered perverts because they chose to engage in sex with men, and the individuals that were

forced to have sex with men either in army or in prison. Both groups were highly stigmatized,

and I did not want to be associated with either of these groups.

I started experiencing a lot of shame related to my same-sex sexual fantasies as soon as I became aware of the attitude towards queer sexuality in Ukraine. I realized that my sexual fantasies have to always stay a secret and I tried every possible way to suppress them and push them away; I never acted on them since I was a teenager. I was "lucky" to be "straight-acting and straight-looking" enough and to be able to have intimate relationships with women, so I dated women and was never "suspected" of being gay. In fact, I was convinced that when I met the right woman, my gay sexual fantasies would go away and I would be able to be happily married to her. While most of the participants in my study at some point in their lives became aware of the acceptance that queer people receive in the West, such was not the case for me. Maybe that was because my denial of my sexuality was so strong that I unconsciously filtered out any information that would allow me to even entertain the possibility of me being queer; perhaps it was my unconscious defense mechanism – after all, admitting to myself I was gay would equal admitting to myself that I was not normal - a deviant, disgusting pervert. Or maybe my lack of knowledge of Western notions of sexuality can be explained by the fact that I lived in a lower socio-economic area of an industrial city, and my social circle was not Western-oriented at all and thus it is quite possible that any Western gay-affirmative messages actually never reached the segment of population to which I belonged. I never met a queer person before I immigrated to Canada. I had no idea of Canadian acceptance of LGBTs, and overall, my sexuality played absolutely no role in my decision to immigrate to Canada.

In fact, I discovered the existence of the gay village in Toronto approximately two years after immigrating to Canada. I was a Jewish activist back in Ukraine, and the community to which I acculturated originally was the Jewish community of Toronto, where I received a very warm welcome. My sexuality was not a priority in my first couple of years in Canada. I was first

focusing on finding a job, and then studying and working full-time in order to sponsor my family's immigration to Canada as soon as possible. I was busy seven days a week establishing myself in my new country; there was no time to think or go through existential crisis. Only after getting all my family to Canada and settling down, I finally did have some free time to reflect on my life and my future.

My social circle was strictly limited to Jewish and Russian communities then because they felt comfortable and familiar; I did not have even one friend from other culture or community. My unwanted sexual fantasies were still there and the shame and fear about the future associated with them started coming back even more. I was also a practicing Orthodox Jew at the time, and was experiencing a lot of guilt and fear of being punished by God. However, I now had access to the Internet and even my intense guilt and fear did not stop me from exploring endless gay resources on the web. After a few months I discovered a gay dating website and created a profile there. I was still extremely paranoid about being found out, so my profile did not contain any pictures. Despite that, two days later I made plans to meet a man from the website who invited me to his home. Overwhelmed by the combination of guilt, fear, excitement, and desire, I went to meet him after work. I had absolutely no awareness of the culture of "hook ups" and sex-positivity prevalent in gay community. I was expecting a date, talking and getting to know each other, the way it usually worked when I met women for dates in Ukraine. What happened instead was a total shock. The man opened the door completely naked and invited me directly into his bedroom. I was too overwhelmed at that point to back out so I just accepted the invitation. What followed was my first adult sexual encounter with a man, and it was mind-blowing, something I have never experienced before. We chatted after, and then I

left. Only once I was driving back home did I realize that I did not even know his name. This is
how my sexual exploration started.

Over the next few months I met men online for discreet intimate encounters and started to
get in touch with my sexuality. I still could not imagine a possibility of openly starting to self-
identify as a gay man. While I was still tortured by religious guilt and concerned with God
punishing me for my sinful actions, the shame started to go away slowly. I was meeting gay men
of different ages, socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and races. And most of them seemed to be
well-adjusted individuals, and were surprisingly comfortable or even proud of being gay. Some
of these people became my "friends with benefits." While I still was petrified to go to the gay
village, I started meeting my newly-acquired friends for dinners and drinks in the downtown
core, the area I visited probably only a couple of times in the previous two years. While I was
learning how to use chopsticks and how to order a perfect vodka martini, these dinners and
drinks also presented me with a completely different view of Canada compared to what I had
seen so far. The new friends that I met seemed much more liberal and open-minded in their
views. I was hearing from them about places, books, television shows, movies, events, and food
that I have never heard before, and that would not be normally discussed in my social circles.
And of course I was starting to understand the values and norms of the LGBT community, as
well as slowly internalizing the notion of gay pride.

As I was spending increasingly more time out of home, I had to make up a story for my
family that I was dating a woman to avoid any suspicions. The next two years were full of soul
searching and attempts to reconcile my spiritual, cultural, and queer identities, which proved
challenging. However, I was chipping away at my internalized queerphobia. The friends I met in
the LGBT community were extremely patient and supportive. The LGBT affirmative television

shows and movies that my friends recommended also played an incredible role. When I watched

the first episode of *Queer as Folk*, a show focused on a group of LGBT friends in Pittsburgh, I

was mesmerized. The opening scene of the show's pilot, where one of the main characters is

visiting the gay village (the show was shot in Toronto's gay village) for the first time and is

totally overwhelmed by what he is seeing around him, completely validated the feelings I was

experiencing. This show became my "gay bible" – I immediately obtained all the seasons that

were available and felt that my gay pride was growing with every episode. I started feeling

increasingly uncomfortable being in the closet. However, I still could not find strength to come

out because of fears of hurting my family – I knew they would be devastated by my coming out.

In the meantime, I entered my first same-sex relationship. The weekend before my

twenty-fifth birthday, my boyfriend and I watched *Mambo Italiano*, a Canadian film, shot in

Montreal, about an Italian young man trying to reconcile his sexuality with the conflicting

demands of his queerphobic culture. While it was a comedy, it did mimic my situation closely

and touched on all the main concerns I had: hurting and disappointing family, being rejected by

community and friends, and destroying my future if I were to come out. The movie had a happy

ending though – after a certain amount of struggle, the parents accepted the main character and

his partner and it looked like they were able to live their sexuality comfortably ever after. I cried

watching the movie. I was so affected by its simple but touching story, that I watched it two

more times that weekend. I came out a week after, just before my twenty-fifth birthday.

The reactions of people in my social circle varied. The first person I came out to was my

younger sister, who was incredibly mature, understanding, and supportive for her young age. In

the following week I came out to the rest of my social circle, with the exception of my religious

community. It was a huge shock to my parents; my mother and grandmother cried for many

nights because of their concerns about my future. My friends had difficulty digesting this information and felt awkward when I came out to them. However, I did not experience the rejection that I was expecting even on one occasion. All my friends continued to be my friends, and it did not kill my parents. I did have to do a lot of education and answer a lot of questions that were at times quite uncomfortable, but in a rather short period of time this part of my identity was fully accepted by the people in my life. My Eastern European friends were now mixing well with my gay friends, and the shame and guilt about my sexuality were no longer there.

The only place where I did not come out was the religious community. On a few rare occasions where queer people were discussed in my local Jewish Orthodox setting, individuals usually showed judgement and perceived it as a sinful activity. A few times I heard about a member of the community who was struggling with his sexuality, and the measures taken to help that individual. Even though I saw empathy towards such individuals on a few occasions, still the only solutions offered to them were focused on making sure they continue suppressing their sexuality and not engaging in "sinful activities." Around the time when I was coming out I heard one of the rabbis give a speech. It was a rabbi who I found to be rather liberal, open, accepting, and for whom I had and still have a lot of respect and admiration. Somehow the topic of same-sex marriage came up in his speech, and he seemed genuinely disappointed with the Canadian government for even considering such a "disgraceful" thing. At that point I concluded that as open-mined and loving some of the community members are, their religious dogma would not allow them to accept me if I were to accept my sexuality. While they would probably not reject me if I were to tell them that I struggle and they would try to help me using the method

mentioned above and feel sorry for me, it would be impossible for them to accept me as a gay man who is comfortable with his sexuality. I never went back to the synagogue.

Instead, I dove further into the LGBT community where I felt accepted and supported. My friends often joked saying that I went from being a Jewish activist to being a queer activist. However, such a statement is no longer correct. After a few years of total rejection of the Jewish part of my identity, I was able to reintegrate it back into my life. I joined the Executive Committee of Kulanu, Toronto's Jewish LGBT community. I marched with Kulanu at Toronto's Pride Parade, accompanied by my sister and over a dozen Eastern European and Jewish friends, who became strong allies over the years following my coming out. My parents and grandmother came to watch the Pride Parade, and then came to visit me at Kulanu's booth. They seemed to be proud of me and no longer concerned with my future. In fact, when I reflect back on the last eight years of my life and think about my future, I cannot help but think about how my life turned upside down because of my sexual orientation and how it dramatically changed both my internal and external worlds. The experiences that I had to go through made me a different person – more open-minded, accepting, curious, and, as cliché as it sounds, "a citizen of the world." My circle of friends includes Eastern Europeans, Jews, Canadians, and probably any other race, ethnicity, or religion one can think of. The academic, community involvement, social, and professional aspects of my life revolve strongly around the LGBT community. Overall, I feel that being queer presented me with the unique opportunity to see a bigger picture of Canadian culture and its multicultural aspects, and thus fully embrace the Canadian values of acceptance and diversity, which helped me to smoothly integrate into the Canadian society. I can confidently say that all the parts of my identity are comfortably integrated together, and I cannot imagine it happening were it not for the Canadian culture. After all, my grandmother, despite becoming a

strong LGBT ally, still says from time to time: "If you did not come to Canada, you would never become gay."

In this section I described my lived experiences as a non-visible minority gay male immigrant who came to Canada in his early twenties. It is possible that these experiences might have affected the data analysis conducted in the current study. For example, I am aware that having personally gone through acculturation in Canada as a cisgendered gay male, I might have been in some instances naturally better attuned to certain aspects of acculturation experience of gay male immigrants than of the other participants. Thus there might be some nuances that I was able to pick up for gay male participants during the data analysis that I might have missed for lesbian or trans participants. Similarly, due to my Eastern European background, I might have been able to relate better to participants from that region compared to other participants. My knowledge of the culture and mentality of that region might have made my inquiry more thorough during the interviews with participants who share my ethno-cultural background; e.g., it is possible that it allowed me to explore their answers more efficiently through follow up questions that were biased by my own knowledge and experiences stemming from that region. I am hopeful, however, that any potential shortcomings in data analysis, stemming from my past experiences and biases, were addressed through the validation strategies that will be discussed in the Trustworthiness section below. Furthermore, the peer reviewers who were engaged to assist me with data analysis included individuals of different gender, sexual orientation, or ethno-cultural background than myself. The same applies to the study participants invited to participate in member checking, thus leaving less room for my biases and previous experiences affecting the data analysis in this study.

3.4 Participants

Participants in the present study were 20 individuals who self-identify as LGBT and who immigrated to Canada and thus went through an acculturation experience. The sampling strategies discussed below allowed achieving a representative sample as can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2: Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 42 years old, with a mean age of 31 years old. They came from East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Middle East, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe. In terms of gender, participants self-identified as male, female, trans, gender queer, and open. Sexual orientations disclosed by participants were lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, straight, and other. Education level ranged from high school diploma to Doctoral degree. Finally, participants spent from 6 months to 18 years in Canada. All the names used in participant profiles in Table 2 are fictitious to preserve confidentiality of the participants. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached at 20 participants. Data saturation is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the point in data collection where new interviews add little or no benefit to the understanding of the phenomenon.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was employed through a combination of maximum variation and theoretical sampling. Maximum variation sampling is a type of purposive sampling where respondents are selected on the basis of being as different as possible from one another (List, 2004). According to List, it is a recommended sampling strategy in qualitative research when sample sizes are small (less than 30 participants) because maximum variation samples were found to be more representative at times than random samples when working with a small number of participants. Instead of attempting to achieve representativeness via equal probabilities, in maximum variation sampling, representativeness is achieved by including a wide range of extremes. Through maximum variation, diverse variations of LGBT immigrants

Table 1

Participant overview

Age			Frequency
	40+		2
	30-39		8
	25-29		7
	20-24		3
Region of origin			
	East Asia		4
	Latin America		2
	South Asia		2
	Western Europe		2
	Eastern Europe		6
	Middle East		4
Race / Ethnicity			
	Mediterranean		1
	Mix		1
	East Asian		2
	Latin / Hispanic		1
	South Asian		3
	Middle Eastern		3
	Caucasian		9
Gender			
	Trans		3
	Female		5
	Male		12
Sexual orientation			
	Straight		2
	Queer / Other		2
	Bi		4
	Lesbian		2
	Gay		10
Religion / Spiritual beliefs			
	Not religious but from religious background		4
	Spiritual		5
	Not religious		3
	Religious		8

Education level				
	Graduate			8
	Undergrad			9
	Diploma / High School			3
Professional status				
	Student			6
	Professional			14
Years in Canada				
	11+			6
	5-10			7
	2-5			2
	<2			5
Language use				
	More comfortable in			
		Same in both		5
		English / French		5
		Native		10
	With family			
		Both		2
		English / French		1
		Native		17
	With friends			
		Both		13
		English / French		6
		Native		1
Media preference				
	Both (English/French and Native)			8
	English / French			12
	Native			0

Table 2

Participant profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Region of origin	Race / Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual orientation	Religion / Spiritual beliefs	Education level	Professional occupation	Years in Canada
Heidi	24	Middle East	Middle Eastern	Male	Gay	Muslim but not practicing	Professional Diploma	Professional	3 years
Sergey	42	Eastern Europe	White/ Ukrainian	Male	Gay	Does not believe in God, somewhere between Atheism and Buddhism	Bachelor's degree	Professional	16 years
Ahmed	28	Middle East	Middle Eastern	Male	Gay	Atheist (used to be Muslim)	Master's degree	Professional	1.3 years
Yusuf	28	South Asia	South Asian	Male	Gay	Not practicing, traditionally Muslim	Master's degree	Professional	5 years
Fadi	23	Middle East	Arab/Middle Eastern/ Lebanese	Male	Open	None	Undergraduate degree	Student	5 years
Elsa	21	Western Europe	German	Female	Lesbian	Catholic	Bachelor's degree	Student	2 years

Philip	35	Eastern Europe	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Eastern Orthodox, Christian	Master's degree	Professional	8 years
Denis	40	Eastern Europe	Russian Moroccan/ Russian Arabic	Male	Gay	None	Bachelor's degree	Professional	20 years
Manuel	36	Latin America	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Jewish culturally, but not religious	Bachelor's degree	Professional	12 years
Jean	37	Western Europe	White European	Male	Gay	None	Master's degree	Professional	3 years
Lily	28	East Asia	Asian, Taiwanese, Han	CIS-gendered female	Bisexual	Christian	PhD in progress	Student	Less than 1 year
Daw	28	East Asia	South East Asian	Male	Gay	Buddhist	Master's degree	Intern	10 years
Panas	30	Eastern Europe	Ukrainian	Male	Gay	Orthodox Christian	Master's degree	Student	1.5 years
Benjamin	36	Eastern Europe	Jewish Caucasian	Male	Bisexual	Spiritual	Masters in Engineering	Student	0.5 years

Sofia	25	East Asia	White/ Caucasian	Female	Bisexual	Jewish	Bachelor's degree	Professional	16 years
Sofonda	37	East Asia	Pilipino/Asian	Trans	Straight	Roman Catholic	Postgraduate diploma	Professional	9 years
Yaron	26	Middle East	Mediterranean	Trans male	Queer	Culturally Jewish/ spiritual	High school	Student	5.5 years
Crystal	38	South Asia	Afghan	Transgender	Straight	Muslim	College	Unemployed	8.5 years
Katrina	23	Eastern Europe	Caucasian	Female	Bi	Spiritual	Undergraduate degree	Professional	17 years
Luisa	38	Latin America	Hispanic	Female	Bisexual (but maybe more Lesbian)	Raised Catholic	Bachelor's degree	Professional	18 years

Note: Participant characteristics listed using participants' self-identification.

(by age, race, ethnicity, religion, country of origin, gender, gender identity, and sexual

orientation) were documented to adequately cover most aspects of the immigrants' identity;

working with a diverse sample of LGBT immigrants allowed the researcher to identify important

common factors related to participants' acculturation experience.

Theoretical sampling, on the other hand, is an approach where sampling is performed on

the basis of emerging concepts, with the goal to explore the dimensional range of conditions

along which the properties of an explored concept vary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through

theoretical sampling, interview participants were strategically chosen to help the researcher "best

form the theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.61) by the means of an iterative ongoing sampling

process that is based on emerging theoretical concepts. This sampling strategy helped the

researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of a concept across a

variety of settings and conditions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is essential in the development

of grounded theories as will be explained in more detail in the data analysis section. Theoretical

sampling was employed during the data collection stage to help identify initial concepts and their

dimensions through selecting a homogeneous sample of participants who were similar (e.g.,

same sexual orientation or gender identity, geographic area, age). In particular, the first two

interviews I conducted were with cisgender gay men from the same country in the Middle East

who were close in age. Once the initial categories emerged, I made the sample more

heterogeneous to see what conditions were responsible for the variations on the continuum of the

property. I was able to achieve that heterogeneity by conducting the following interviews with

participants from the neighboring countries in the Middle East, then with significantly older

participants, then with participants of a different gender and sexual orientation, and so forth.

Theoretical sampling continued until data saturation was reached, which happened when twenty

participants were interviewed, a sample size consistent with recommendations for a grounded theory qualitative study (Creswell, 2007).

3.5 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed based on the recommendations for interview protocol design by Evans (2007) and Creswell (2007). Interviews took the shape of reflexive conversations to build rapport, heighten collaboration, and gather contextual elements of personal experience to establish a good understanding and enhance interpretation of LGBT immigrants' stories (Rutledge, 2007; Carlson, Siegal, & Falck, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 1994). Principles of focused interviews, where just one topic or one topical thread is explored during the interview (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990), guided the data collection. Thus, while the questions were formulated based on a close examination of the scientific literature on LGBT issues and immigrants' acculturation, as well as existing acculturation scales (e.g., Benet-Martinez, 2006; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 1998), the interview protocol only served as a framework for an open-ended interview and the participants were encouraged to explore issues and ideas that were not covered in the interview protocol and existing scientific literature.

The first part of the interview protocol attempted to assess the level of acculturation of participants based on their demographic information, use of languages, and media preferences. The interview then proceeded to explore the sexual identity of participants. After the general discussion of what it meant to the participants to be LGBT, the development of their sexual identity before and after the immigration to Canada was discussed. The focus of the interview then switched to the cultural identity of LGBT immigrants with such questions as "What cultures do you feel you belong to, share your beliefs and values with?" and "Do you feel caught, i.e., as

if you have to choose, between North American and home cultures? Explain." Finally, the

perceived impact of sexual identity on the life trajectory of LGBT immigrants was explored. All

interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Six graduate students who participated

in a qualitative data analysis workshop volunteered to transcribe the interviews. All the

transcripts were then verified according to the procedures outlined by Poland (2001), as will be

discussed in more detail in the Trustworthiness section.

3.6 Data Analysis

The interviews were coded using inductive procedures used in Grounded Theory (Strauss

& Corbin, 1990). Qualitative coding is the analytic process through which data are broken down

into separate parts, conceptualized, and integrated with the goal of forming theory (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). The analytic procedures used were based on constant comparison analysis

technique (Glaser, 1965). They consisted of the following: the researcher takes one piece of data

at a time (e.g., one interview) and compares it to all other pieces of data collected (e.g., other

interviews), while trying to understand what makes this piece of data either similar or different

from other pieces of data collected. By following these inductive procedures of analysis, the

researcher examines data critically, draws new meanings from it, and consequently generates

theory. Thus, this method is drastically different from the deductive approach that usually

defines at the outset of the study what is expected to be found. The analyses of data via grounded

theory were carried out through the processes of open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and

integrative diagram depiction (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

During the process of open coding, data were fractured into separate parts, which then

were closely scrutinized and compared in terms of similarities or differences (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Then all the pieces of data that were found to be conceptually similar in nature or that

were related in meaning were grouped under more abstract concepts (i.e., the building blocks of

theory) that are called "categories," concepts that stand for phenomena (i.e., central ideas in the

data analyzed). Open coding then is the analytic process through which concepts are identified

and their properties (i.e., characteristics of a category that define its meaning) and dimensions

(i.e., the range along which properties of a category can vary, thus providing variation to the

theory) are discovered in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the process of open coding (Strauss

& Corbin, 1990), the basic concepts were identified through abstracting data into categories and

subcategories (i.e., concepts that belong to a category, providing it with further clarification and

specification), which were named using participants' own words, by segmenting information.

Subcategories are also seen as a type of categories, but instead of standing for a phenomenon

itself, they answer questions about it (e.g., why, where, when, how, with what consequences), to

give the concept a stronger explanatory power (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each category and

subcategory contains several properties. Each property in turn contains few pieces of data to

dimensionalize the property, i.e., show the extreme possibilities on a continuum of it (Creswell,

2007). Theoretical sampling was employed during the data collection stage to help identify initial

categories and properties for the open coding through selecting a homogeneous sample of

participants who were similar. Once the initial categories emerged, the researcher made the

sample more heterogeneous to see what conditions were responsible for the variations on the

continuum of the property (Creswell, 2007). The first four interviews were coded using open

coding procedures by myself and four peer reviewers. The initial coding system emerged as a

result of a collaborative effort between me and the peer reviewers focused on the reconciliation

of initial categories. This collaborative process of reconciling and updating the coding system

continued consistently throughout the data analysis stage.

It is important to mention that during the open coding process it was not always clear which of the coded concepts were categories and which were subcategories. Such delineation was made through the axial coding, which is the process of relating categories to subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This coding process is called "axial" because coding happens around the axis of a category, i.e., categories are linked at the level of their properties and dimensions. The goal of axial coding was to start reintegrating the data that were fractured during the open coding process. Relating categories to subcategories by looking at how they link and crosscut formed more accurate and comprehensive explanations of the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once the categories and subcategories were reassembled in new ways and the linkages between them were determined, initial theories and hypotheses were formed by the researcher.

The axial coding process was followed by selective coding - the process of integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this point the researcher committed to major categories and subcategories, and refined the relationships between them using explanatory statements for each of the relationships. Integration happened by using the theories and hypotheses developed during the axial coding process to connect categories in order to arrive at a "story line" (i.e., an outline of the theoretical scheme) that explains the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants. After the outline of the theoretical scheme was complete, the researcher refined the theory by "trimming off excess and filling in poorly developed categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 161). The categories that were poorly developed were saturated by additional theoretical sampling. Finally, an integrative diagram depicting the actual theory in the form of a visual model was compiled. An integrative diagram represents a conditional matrix that interprets the socio-economic, historical, and other conditions influencing the central phenomenon (Urquhart, 2012; Creswell, 2007), allowing the researcher to think about the model

from the narrowest to the broadest perspective. At this stage, the theoretical model revealed

consistency.

Finally, it is important to mention that all the coding procedures described above were

conducted in parallel with data collection, through the process of interim analysis (Miles &

Huberman, 1984). In interim analysis, the analytical process begins during the initial stages of

data collection, and continues on an ongoing basis throughout data collection. It allowed me to

go back and refine interview questions (i.e., while the core of the interview schedule was

preserved, it was revised from interview to interview), come up with initial hypotheses, and

explore emerging hypotheses in depth. Miles and Huberman consider interim analysis virtually

inevitable in qualitative research because they believe that it is impossible for the researchers not

to start reflecting on what they hear and observe in the field once they start collecting data.

The qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (VERBI GmbH, Germany) version 11

was used to facilitate the data analysis. The software allowed the researcher to import interview

files, organize the files in appropriate groups, develop categories, code documents according to

the grounded theory procedures outlined below, create memos, utilize multiple search functions,

and present research using visual models. The MAXMAPS function of MAXQDA software

package was used to map out all the 1055 categories that came out of open coding and the

relationships between them. The code theory model of MAXMAPS was used to perform axial

and selective coding (discussed in the next paragraph). This model allowed displaying the codes

and their respective subcodes, as well as the memos attached to these codes. Such memos

captured the researcher's reactions, reflections, emotions, and observations that emerged in the

process of data analysis. The code matrix browser tool was used to visualize which codes have

been assigned to which documents. The matrix generated by this model provided an overview of

how many coded document segments from each document have been assigned to a specific category. This allowed identification of the most saturated categories and building of the theory around them. The quote matrix feature of this tool was used to create a joint display of categories and codes. Here the coded segments themselves were listed in the cells of the matrix, not only the number of coded segments for that particular cell. This facilitated ongoing comparative analysis through axial and selective coding. Finally, the code relations browser tool was used to visualize the relationships between the categories. A table generated by this tool showed how many coded document segments any two categories are attached to; the representation is similar to the code matrix browser, but in this case the number of co-occurrences of codes is shown. Co-occurrence of codes means that a segment has to be coded with both categories and the categories need to overlap.

3.7 Trustworthiness

As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), all discrete ideas, incidents, and events mentioned in this manuscript were represented in the participants' own words. According to Poland (2001), transcription is an essential part of the data verification process, and is responsible for data quality and rigor. Poland argued that transcripts should be representative of the spoken word. He believed that without proper verification of transcripts, errors would go unnoticed, thus making the trustworthiness of transcripts questionable, and consequently affecting the validity of the study's findings. Therefore, I carefully verified all the transcripts prior to coding.

Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative researchers engage in at least two validation strategies in order to establish the trustworthiness of the study. The following three validation strategies recommended by Creswell (2007) were utilized: (a) researcher bias clarification, (b)

peer review, and (c) member checking. Researcher bias was clarified from the outset of the study

to clearly disclose the researcher's position, past experiences, prejudices, and any biases that

might have impacted the inquiry, and that possibly influenced interpretation of the data and the

overall approach to the study. Peer review was used to provide an external check of the research

process in a similar way interrater reliability is used in quantitative research (Glesne & Peshkin,

1992). Four volunteers from the Coping and Resilience research laboratory at McGill University

were engaged as peer reviewers. They were cisgender (three men and one woman), queer or

straight identified, racially/ethnically/culturally diverse graduate students at McGill University in

their early twenties to early thirties. Peer reviewers participated in every stage of the data

analyses. Thus, initial coding system was compiled in a collaborative effort between me and two

peer reviewers: two first interviews were open coded by each one of us separately at first, which

was followed by a meeting between the three of us where the codes were reconciled into the

initial coding system. The initial coding system was further revised and updated based on the

collaboration with the remaining two peer reviewers after their open coding of the first two

interviews. Similarly, each of the following interviews was coded by me and one of the peer

reviewers separately at first, and then the codes were reconciled. Thus, the coding system

continued to be constantly revised based on the feedback from peer reviewers as coding

progressed. Furthermore, peer reviewers played a role of a "devil's advocate"; these individuals

were expected to ask hard questions about meanings and interpretations, and provide the

researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by being a sympathetic listener to the researcher's

thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 2007). Finally, member checking was utilized to solicit

participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. This technique is

considered to be the most efficient technique to establish trustworthiness, according to some

qualitative research experts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was accomplished by presenting data, along with the results of analyses, interpretations, and conclusions to the study participants and asking them to judge the accuracy and credibility of the researcher's account. Eight research participants were given an opportunity to examine the drafts of the researcher's work and provide feedback, including critical observations, interpretations, and missing elements. The theory that is grounded in data is expected to be recognizable to participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which was the case because the key concepts of the generated theory were deemed recognizable by participants. During the member checking, multiple participants felt that the model should demonstrate more explicitly the interaction/collaboration between the cultural and sexual parts of the queer immigrants' identity, as well as emphasize the impact of this interaction on the acculturation experience. The feedback received was integrated into the researcher's analyses, and served to further refine interpretations, conclusions, and models.

4 Results

As was discussed in the previous section, data analysis was performed using the procedures for grounded theory outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). As a result of selective coding, the process of integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the central phenomenon was identified and relationships among it and the major categories were refined to arrive at a "story line" (i.e., an outline of the theoretical scheme) that explains the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants. Finally, an integrative diagram (Figure 1) depicting this story line in the form of a visual model was compiled. An integrative diagram represents a visual representation of categories, subcategories, and their relationships (Charmaz, 2006). It demonstrates the relative power and scope of the categories and subcategories, as well as type and direction of the relationships between them. Thus, in the integrative diagram some categories that came out of selective coding were further trimmed off, merged, or split, with a goal of making a visual model that intuitively and clearly tells a story of queer immigrants' acculturation.

The story line presented in the integrative diagram emerged in a shape of a chronologically-ordered process that presented the acculturation experience of immigrants as mainly organized under the following categories (Appendix B): "Before immigration," "Decision to immigrate to Canada," and "After immigration." As I was mapping out the most saturated categories and subcategories, and refining/establishing relationships between them, it became apparent that "queerphobia in the culture of origin" was a central phenomenon influencing all aspects of the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants. The integrative diagram depicts queerphobia in the culture of origin as an overarching category that impacts all other categories and subcategories in every stage of the process, i.e., before immigration,

decision to immigrate, and after immigration to Canada. In the process of diagramming I also realized that there were two consistent and parallel subprocesses developing while forming the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants: cultural identity development and sexual and gender identity development. As the integrative diagram in Figure 1demonstrates, these two processes were always intertwined, i.e., the culture of LGBT immigrants' country of origin and Canadian culture strongly influence their sexual identity development and vice versa – their sexual identity development influences the way LGBT immigrants relate to their culture of origin and to Canadian culture. Furthermore, as I was chronologically organizing the categories, it became apparent that in the case of LGBT immigrants, the acculturation process often starts long before actual immigration and is strongly influenced by sexual identity development. Therefore, the data findings presented below will follow the process presented in the integrative diagram in chronological order by describing in detail the context (e.g., socio-economic and historical conditions) forming the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants. In the next section, we will examine in further detail, the main forces influencing the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants prior to immigration. All the participant names are fictitious to preserve confidentiality of the participants.

4.1 Before Immigration

     4.1.1 "Sexuality was there all the time". In this section I will discuss the emergence of LGBT immigrants' sexual identity in the context of the culture of their country of origin. The chapter will start from describing the process that LGBT immigrants go through as they first become aware of their sexual and gender orientation. The chapter will then explore how the initial meaning and understanding of their sexuality is formed by LGBT immigrants.
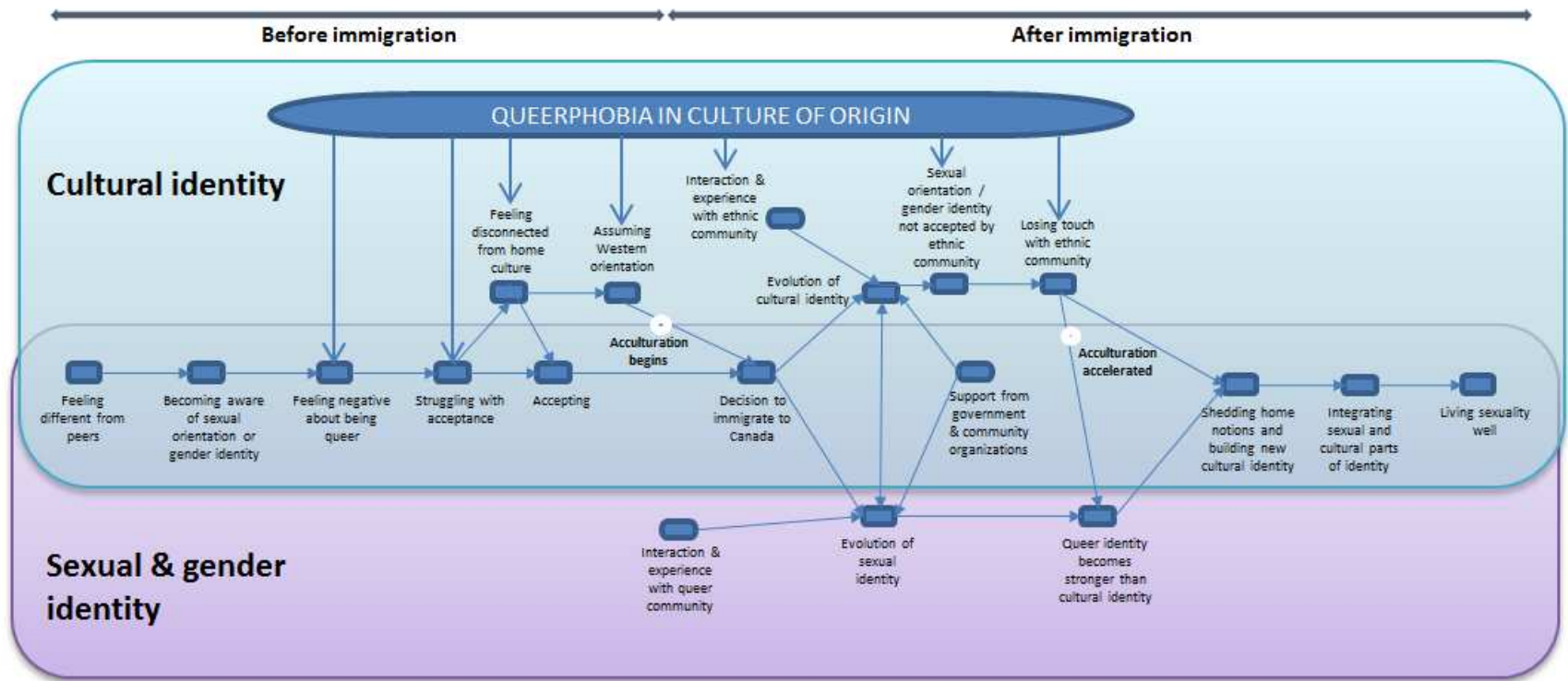
Figure 1. Intergrative diagram

Furthermore, it will discuss the role that values, traditions, norms, and beliefs from their

countries of origin play in forming their sexual identity.

Most participants shared that they were aware of their sexual orientation rather early in

their lives. The first realization came through feeling "different" than others, without the ability

to understand what it meant or label it as "sexuality." Philip first encountered this feeling when

he was around eight years old:

> I knew it even when I was back home, in [country in the Eastern Europe]. Maybe when I
>
> was eight years old, something like this, I knew that something was different. Or even
>
> before that, I knew that I was different. I felt different in a sense that what was interesting
>
> to me, was not exactly what, let us say, most of the boys were interested in. I felt
>
> different, yes, I felt different. At that time I was not able to understand it as sexuality. I
>
> just knew that something about me was different.

Quite often even the first realizations of being different were quite painful for the

participants. For Benjamin, the embarrassment that he experienced with his first realization is

present to this day:

> If I look back, I think at the early age I was already curious about boys. But I did not
>
> think it was gay. I thought it was like this for everybody, everyone is like this. But at age
>
> of fifteen, I understood that I am different. I remember my first gay experience, actually.
>
> It was when I was wrestling, and I was a little boy, I think I was five, and we played - that
>
> is my father and me, we wrestled, he was putting me on himself and hugging me, and I
>
> was getting excited. And he was noticing this - I would get aroused at the age of five.
>
> And he was - he noticed this each time, and he would say: "Go and pee! You need to go
>
> pee! Why are you like this?" You know, it was—he was pushing me away. And actually

it happened two or three times, and since then we stopped. We never wrestled. You

know, and each hug is an embarrassment. Even today, yes. I am embarrassed to hug him,

to kiss him… I think this memory from childhood - being pushed away, as if something

is wrong – it is his disappointment with me.

For Yaron, who now self-identifies as a trans male, the realization came when he first fell

in love with a person of same sex, back when he used to self-identify as a girl:

I was young and I did not know exactly what it meant to be gay, I just knew I fell in love

with this girl, and the kind of feelings I had were different than usual. They were like a

new kind of sensation in my body that was physically different.

Manuel felt that the awareness of being different was always there: "I knew I was

different, I was playing with guys, and I knew, I wanted to play with dolls .... I always wanted to

be with girls." Similar to Manuel, other participants often mentioned that gender non-conforming

interests and behaviours made them feel different at first. As in Manuel's example, this

frequently happened while playing with their peers. For example, Philip recalls:

I was not interested in playing with cars. I did feel like playing with dolls, or girls' toys. I

found it interesting to see how a girl would change a diaper of a doll or something like

this… You feel that you are different…I was not, let us say, interested in soccer. I would

play soccer, but I was not interested in soccer. But you feel that you are different in the

sense that what is interesting to you is not exactly what most of the boys are interested in.

For the trans participants, first feelings of being different were quite often associated with

gender dysphoria. Similar to Benjamin, Yaron also felt the disapproval of his gender expression

by his father, which strongly impacted his self-esteem:

When I was a little kid, I was very boyish, but sexuality does not really come into play then. It was only when I hit the age of eleven, twelve. And I remember getting my period and feeling really weird about it. And I remember having that instant feeling of "Oh, this means that my body is changing" and I remember feeling a lot of grief about that and like "holy shit, what I am going to do with this change? I do not want to change." And then I just kind of remember that it was kind of around that time that there was this sudden change with my father and him not feeling comfortable around me anymore and having this kind of silent disapproval. He did not like the way I carried myself. And dressed. And he did not like how fat I was too. So it was again about being butch and fat. I think I felt really ugly and that my dad definitely contributed to that. He did not like the way I looked at all. Yes. I mean I was always butch too. My sexuality I feel was always there. In a sense that when I was younger, it was really visible. I was a girl who was really masculine and really butch and so even before I came out, I could tell that my father and other people, but secondary people to him for sure, had this kind of disdain because of it. Because there was something about it that was not attractive, or was not proper, or was not conventional beauty. When I was a little kid, I was very boyish**.**

Sofonda seemed to identify with her mother and to assume household responsibilities traditionally associated with the different gender as a means of first getting in touch with her preferred gender:

I did not play with children, with kids outside. Instead of playing with them, I was just in the house with my mom - cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house. So I was thinking about maybe being a mom [laughs] someday. Or I felt like I was a girl. I felt like I was a boy on the outside, but inside there was a girl.I expressed it by doing things like

cleaning, things like that with my mom. I did not go out - instead of playing with those

boys, I was helping my mom doing laundry and things like that. At first I was confused

because I was still a kid but I knew that I felt like I was a girl, even though I was in a

body of a boy. But in my mind and in my heart, that is how I felt.

Sofonda was one of very few participants who felt comfortable with gender non-

conforming behaviours. Most participants even at an early age came to the realization that such

expressions were not welcomed by their surroundings and were forced to hide this part of

themselves. For example, Manuel learned very early that he had to hide this "unacceptable" side

of himself:

You know since you are a kid that you have to hide to play with dolls. You know that you

have to hide all the time. You cannot be completely honest. You start lying when you are

a kid. You start lying all the time. Because you know you cannot be transparent. I had to

lie all the time. You know, you learn since you are a kid. I remember being in the

kindergarten and wanting to play with the little dolls' house, for the girls. I wanted to go

there. And I could not. Because the other kids were extremely aggressive. So you had to

hide. I would hide, you know, to play with my sister's Barbies. But always hiding. Or

using my mom's clothes, or stuff like that. Hiding. I am talking when I was three, four.

Participants repeatedly reported feeling same-sex attraction or feelings of gender non-

conformity since an early age as another main factor that made them feel different. Many of

them felt that queer sexuality was always present in their lives. For instance**,** Sofia started feeling

"different" as her classmates were picking up on her being friendlier with girls than was

culturally appropriate:

As far back as even the end of elementary school, I remember some kids in my class teasing me saying "Oh, you know, Sofia likes girls" and stuff, and at that time I guess I never actively felt an interest towards someone of the same gender. But I guess thinking back and starting to analyze it, perhaps I was like: "Ok, maybe I was more friendly with girls than was expected or maybe, you know, I was acting in a way that I even did not consciously feel aware of but that other people, you know, observing the scene from a third-point perspective, they were like "Oh I think there is something going on there." Even though I never thought about it.

While Sofia was not fully aware of her same-sex attraction until later in her life, Manuel clearly remembers feeling attracted to men as a little boy:

All my life. I have always known. Since I was a kid. My mom told me that when I was three, I told her for the first time: "Look, mom, look at this guy, how hot he is. He is a hottie." I remember, since my first memories, I knew I was gay. I have always been gay. For me, it was never whether I was gay or not. I knew I was gay.

Sergey also has early memories of finding men sexually attractive, which made him feel like his sexuality was always there:

And then I had my buddies at school with who I hung out. And once we found pictures of these guys. And there were a bunch of guys looking at these pictures, and at some point imitating what was in the pictures. I was nine or something like that. So it was always kind of there. The sexuality was there all the time.

Participants often became aware of being different once they found themselves attracted to their same-sex friends. For example, similar to Sergey, Elsa also felt that her sexuality "always was there," as she remembers always being in love with her best friends:

Just looking back on my life, even as a little girl I was gay, I was always in love with my

best friends. It is just that I was not allowed to be gay before. After I had that moment of

realization, I looked back on my life and was like "actually, I have always been gay." It

just took me a while to have that moment.

Yaron's experience was quite similar - while he had no idea of what being gay or trans

meant at the time, the feeling was quite real, making him acutely aware of being different:

So all of those things came into my mind when I was young and I did not know exactly

what it meant to be gay. I just knew I fell in love with this girl and the kind of feelings I

had were different than usual. They were like a new kind of sensation in my body that

was physically different.

For many participants, the realization of being different came because they did not

experience sexual attraction to people of a different sex, as most of their peers did. Panas found it

scary to be different: "I was a little bit afraid that I am not like other people. Because all my

friends were interested in relations with girls. And me, I was just not interested. Did not interest

me at all." Heidi also remembers always feeling same-sex attraction and lack of attraction to the

other sex: "Oh, as I was a child. I always knew that - men always attracted me, but at the age of

eleven, twelve I just came out of the closet to myself, I knew that I had no feelings for women."

Moreover, for a few participants their first realization of feeling different was brought on

by their first sexual experience either with friends or relatives. Most participants had their first

sexual experience between the ages of five to eighteen years old, with the average age being ten,

eleven years old. First sexual experiences often felt like playing, as in Denis's story, without

necessarily being able to label such experiences as queer:

I must have been older than eight. We were sort of playing together. I went to his room, and we sort of removed the pants and he was standing in front of me, I was standing behind him, and we were pretending we were doing it. He had no clue what was going on. I mean - nothing happened, we were just standing next to each other. So I guess that was my first gay experience. But at the time I am not sure if I realized that I was gay or not, it is not clear to me. I would say by eleven, thirteen definitely I was aware that I was different… Attracted to guys somehow. So at that age I do not know if it was clear in my head that I was gay or just there was something different going on.

On the other hand, for some participants their very first sexual experiences became the foundations for internalized homophobia and poor self-esteem with long-lasting effects. For instance, Ahmed's first experiences were so traumatizing that, even after 20 years, talking about them makes him feel nervous and emotional:

Even though I started having sex very early in my life, it was not really with gay men around my age, I mean it was not with gay boys around my age - it was with men, with men who … I cannot think of them as gay people. I mean, they are mostly pedophiles. It was not really with a sexual partner, it was not like that, you know, it was not equal. It was not sex with an equal. It was sex with older men who believed … I mean even those men - my point of all of this is - even those men believed that I was, I was beneath them because I wanted men. So I mean even by my sexual partners I was not really considered as quite equal either. Which made me feel that I am the only one who had those feelings … Sorry, I am a little bit nervous, I have to say [laughs].

Manuel remembered feeling ashamed of his desires, and recalled attempts at controlling himself because he did not want to "be like that":

I always had experiences as a child. I used to have things and I would always cry after that [having sex]…Guilt… I did not want to be like that. Guilt… I could not control myself. You know, like the hormones and not having sex. You know, every opportunity I had, I could not control myself … I had a friend. He is actually not gay now. A very good friend of mine. But we used to jerk off, and do some blowjobs and stuff. But I felt guilty. So I do that, and after two months I cannot call him back. And then I call him back and then we have that again.

Conversely, the participants who were not as aware of their sexuality as children and/or whose first sexual experiences happened later in their life, often found their sexual experimentation liberating and validating. As Elsa put it – "now it makes sense":

I was so happy. I was really happy … I started feeling really bad about it afterwards but then, I had sex with a girl and that was kind of the eye opening moment, and after that night I was really, really happy because I was like "Ah, it makes sense, now it makes sense why I felt so awkward all those years."

Luisa's first experience not only helped her understand who she really was, but helped counteract the impact of strong homophobic values and beliefs that were so prevalent in her country of origin:

I explored those feelings, emotions. I must have been 14 when I had my first sexual encounter with a female. And I knew that I liked it. I knew I was gay. I knew, even despite all my beliefs from my upbringing, I knew it felt good. I guess as a young person at the time, I felt like it cannot be that bad if it feels this good though. Even though I did not put it in those terms at the time. I was 14, so it was a very good experience, I enjoyed it, and I liked it, and it was something that stuck with me I guess until now. You know, to

conclude that it is part of me. That it is who I am. So I did explore that part, but that one thing that I think I am grateful for is that my childhood was very different from most children. I knew that I did not want to live back home the rest of my life. I knew that I wanted to get away. I knew that, ever since I was eight, nine, ten, I knew that my life was not going to be there. That I have something else. That I just have to find my way to get where I want to be. And that is exactly how I engaged into that plan of leaving home. And so I did leave home, and I am grateful because here it is a bit different. Life is totally different, you know? You can express your sexual orientation, or whatever you feel without being as stigmatized as you probably would be at home right now.

Data analysis demonstrates that, similar to Luisa, other participants also associated the self-awareness in regards to their sexual orientation, which resulted from first sexual experiences, with the decision to come to Canada, as will be discussed in more detail later.

Overall, most participants found themselves well-aware of their sexuality being different at an early age, while still living in their countries of origin, due to gender-non-conforming interests, experiences and/or behaviours, attraction to the same-sex, or lack of attraction to a different sex. For trans participants, their awareness of sexual orientation often came before becoming aware of their gender orientation. For example, Yaron remembered:

Well, my sexual orientation … I think I kind of came to terms with it before I realized my gender orientation. So my sexual orientation I think was around when I was thirteen. For me then it was like realizing that I am perhaps a lesbian. I think only later that I started thinking about my gender in a different way. But I knew what lesbian was.

Data analysis suggests that for many participants, becoming aware of their sexual orientation in their countries of origin was often associated with feelings of sadness or

depression, expectations of not being understood and accepted by people around them, and feeling that their sexuality is a burden. As will be discussed in more detail later, these feelings were usually associated with negative perceptions in regards to LGBT sexuality in their countries of origin. Many participants struggled with accepting their sexuality. They often chose to hide or suppress their sexuality, to self-identify as "bi" because it is a "lesser evil", or to "cure" themselves by dating people of a different sex. Similar to Luisa's expereince, early awareness of sexual orientation often translated into the desire to leave the country at an early age. Finally, for many participants, their initial experiences were so traumatic that even after immigrating to Canada, where they felt they could be "out" about their sexuality, their true sexual orientation remained a secret to their family and friends back home**.** What made the initial awareness of sexual orientation even more burdensome for most participants was the difficulty in gaining initial understanding of the meaning it carried in their countries of origin, as will be discussed next.

Most participants came from countries where LGBT sexuality was not a topic that could be discussed publicly. Many of them spoke about a lack of resources available in their countries of origin that could have facilitated a better understanding of themselves in terms of their sexuality. LGBT immigrants often mentioned that non-evaluative terms to describe LGBT sexuality do not exist in their native languages. Moreover, with only references to LGBT sexuality coming from cultural (usually negative) norms, it often resulted in participants perceiving their sexuality as "deviant." Philip explained:

> To give you an example, I knew that people had sex. So I would ask myself: "Ok so men, they do have sex, but how?" … There is a period where you have no clue, because at that time we were living in the communism - there was no porn movies, no internet. But you

are starting to realize that you are not going to be attracted to women. You feel that you

are more attracted to men. Then at that age maybe you realize that really you are gay, but

at that time there was no information about it available. So you feel it, but you do not

know that this is gay or homosexual or whatever. You hear sometimes in conversations

that men are sometimes attracted to men. You know that the concept of it is bad. But you,

at that age, you are not able to analyze. So I would say maybe fourteen, sixteen years old,

at that moment you realized that you are gay. But you realized that you are gay but you

did not know the word, you did not know how to call it because at that time there was no

information or there was information but it was very limited. I mean you feel it, you

know it, but there is very limited information. I think when the democracy came, in

nineties, ninety-eight, I think then there were magazines, literature. So, then you start to

get information, then you can say: "Ok, now there are people who are attracted to the

same sex." This helps you realize that this is something that is happening to other people

also.

Interestingly, some participants who were from Western Europe also had difficulty

accessing resources that would help them develop an understanding of their sexualities:

Just in the beginning, I tried to get the most information that I could. At this time that did

not exist yet. So there was not anything to read. I tried to find any information, any

information I could in the books, in TV, but not really anything, not in [a country in

Western Europe].

Many LGBT immigrants gained the first understanding of their sexuality from religion,

which added an additional level of discomfort. For example, Ahmed remembered that it started

to be "really difficult" for him to deal with sexuality after first learning about it from the Quran:

So I had the feeling that I was not doing something appropriate, that is something that I cannot talk about because it is related to the taboos that my parents were constantly warning me about. You know, like, these are your private parts of the body and no one should touch them, something like that. So that is why I did not feel like it was material, like a subject I could share with other people, with anyone in my life. I was sort of practicing [religious] things back then. And I was reading Quran, and I came to one of the verses that was talking about, explicitly talking about sex between men and how bad it is and all that, and that was my first real encounter with, the explicit sex between men in any written form. I mean, even when my parents were talking about the taboos and all that, they never referred to sex between men, like that was my first time ever I was reading or hearing anything about the topic. And that is when things started to become very difficult - when I started to understand the society better, when I started to understand the terms of sex better. As you grow up, your conversations with your friends start to, especially as a teenager, you start to talk about sex a lot with your friends and you start to get this informal knowledge about sex, and that is when I realized that what I was doing was inferior to what other people were doing. And of course, from further readings I found out how this is shameful and all that, especially being a bottom.

Some participants remember finding some information that would help the understanding of their experience and even validate it through different Western culture materials that they happened upon. As will be discussed later, the Western orientation and disconnectedness from local culture, which Sergey discussed below, often became instrumental in decision to immigrate to Canada.

I mean, I was always Western-oriented, all the time. I never listened to [Eastern European

country] music, I was snobbish on that part. So I was very aware of that. People are free

in the West, so that is why I was so Western-oriented. I knew that people can be openly

gay, and there was Madonna, and there was all this crap, and gay dancers, and that.

Things gay associated with Madonna, Pet Shop Boys and all that crap, you know. Very

romantic gay images. Because I was really into fashion too, when I was there, and we did

not have enough information, so - all the little bits of information that we could get, you

know - because there were no magazines, there was no nothing, that was really

appreciated. We collected everything - not necessarily cherished it but you know - and

we would look at the same pieces of information over and over. It is paying more

attention to some things, just seeing more than is really there … It was really pop culture,

basically loops back to pop culture and sexuality. And it is not necessarily just gay

culture, it was the whole Western fashion, music, pop culture in that sense, you know,

because we did not have anything at that time. All my friends were into music …

It seems that for younger participants who grew up in the age of the Internet it was easier

to form their initial understanding of sexuality. Having access to resources through the Internet

was also useful in helping the participants feel more comfortable with their sexuality, as in

Yusuf's story:

The understanding of the issue took a while of course, but I think that is natural. But I

think I soon realized that it was, it was a fact and you cannot change it, stuff like that.

You know. So it did not take me too long to just accept myself as gay… But at first it was

a bit uneasy, but it was easy for me to understand in a short period of time, maybe, as

compared to other people. To accept myself. Two years I think. Within two years I think

I was sure of that and I stopped asking questions of myself. I studied about it. I did my

research about it and that was the basis of my understanding. I did my research online.

And of course there was no literature available, and, of course, you do not get awareness

or you do not get educated about these issues back home, so all you have to rely on is

pretty much Internet, which definitely helped.

However, for most participants, the lack of appropriate resources in their countries of

origin resulted in the participants having to form their initial understanding of their sexuality

based on values, traditions, norms, and perceptions in regards to LGBT people, which were

predominantly oppressive in their countries of origin, as will be discussed next.

4.1.2 "In my society, the worse thing for a man is being gay." As was discussed

earlier, in many instances, participants' native languages do not contain non-evaluative terms to

describe LGBT sexuality. Quite often, native languages and terms referring to LGBT sexuality

have negative connotations and tend to be stigmatizing. The situation seems to be even more

acute in the Middle East, where there are often no words to describe non-heterosexual sexuality.

Ahmed explained:

In Arabic, my mother tongue, it is like the translation of the, let me say, the street

translation of gay is abnormal. The term "gay" is quite new because for less educated

people - it is not only about less educated people - but for say people who are not quite

educated about the matter, they think that sex between men is a matter of choice, that it is

not a part of the personality of the person. So that is why the term abnormal came lately

to the use. That is because it is only lately that people are starting to realize that there are

people who are only interested in men and who cannot really have sex with the opposite

sex.

Denis described a rather similar situation in his country in the Middle East:

Even the word "gay" does not exist. It is really the word "pédé," which is "faggot," so

there is not even a vocabulary just to say that somebody is of different sexual orientation.

That does not really exist. You can say it in French, but in [country in the Middle East]

society people do not talk like that about gay people.

In Benjamin's experience in a more liberal state in the Middle East, the words referring to

LGBT sexuality were mostly used as insults: "People around were telling jokes and were cursing

each other by saying 'You are a fag, you are gay.'" Fadi could also relate to the negative

perceptions associated with LGBT-related issues:

The overwhelming majority of people in [more liberal country in the Middle East],

including members of my family, still view LGBT communities as deviant, and view

them as dirty, view them as … I mean any, you can associate almost all negative words -

that is the general approach towards a person from that community.

Participants whose language did not contain non-evaluative terms to refer to LGBT

sexuality had more difficulty accepting it, compared to participants whose language did offer

terms such as, for example, "gay" or "lesbian". Such participants often tried to suppress or fight

it by, for example, trying to date members of a different sex. Manuel's first cultural references to

what he soon found to be his sexual orientation also came first in form of insults, creating an

internal struggle within himself:

In my society, for a woman the worse thing is being, you know, a slut. And the worse

thing for a man is being gay, faggot. And when you are a kid, you know that people say

that as the worst thing. You know inside of you, you are that. And you do not want to be,

but you are who you are, so you feel hectic, constant struggle between what you should

be and what you are. You know, you know since you are a kid you have to hide to play

with dolls.

Society's attitude toward queer people, as in Manuel's example, was mentioned often by

other participants as one of the main factors responsible for making them feel unaccepted by

their society or community. Luisa felt that if one's different sexuality were to become publicly

known, the attitude toward that person would change immediately, resulting in feelings of

exclusion:

I think that it is not accepted at all. I do not know if you come from a place that is more

accepting. But you can see, you can hear comments, you know that being gay or bisexual

or something else is not accepted at all in our society. I mean, they are not going to take it

to the extreme - to hurt you, or whatever. But you are definitely going to be singled out

there. You are definitely going to be different, people are definitely going to treat you

different.

Unlike Luisa, who believes that she would not be physically hurt for being queer,

participants frequently mentioned the possibility of being physically attacked because of their

sexual orientation or gender expression. For instance, Sofonda remembered:

Back home there are a lot of strangers in the convenience stores, and they are drinking

beers and everything, it is not like here, they see some gay people - they hate the gays -

they would punch a gay person or just throw a bottle.

Overall, participants often spoke about the high prevalence of stigma and prejudice when

it comes to LGBT people. Fadi stated: "I tend to find that there is a strong stigma against the

LGBT community." Panas expressed it as: "It is not too popular to be gay in [country in Eastern

Europe]. People have a lot of prejudice. Yeah, prejudice, I mean, a bunch of prejudice toward the

- toward gay people." It became apparent that feeling that their sexuality is not socially

acceptable was almost always linked to difficulty in acceptance of their own sexual orientation

and to attempts at hiding or suppressing it. Participants often felt that if their sexuality were to

become public, it would hurt or even "kill" their parents, as will be discussed later.

In many countries, LGBT sexuality is seen as a matter of choice and is often associated

with either something deviant or with extravagant entertainers who "chose to be this way" to

attract attention. Philip reflected on his home culture:

It is cultural things. It is a cultural question. I mean, if you are gay in [wealthier country

in the Eastern Europe], it is not acceptable because most people in [wealthier country in

the Eastern Europe] think that this is a question of choice. Usually, the perception is that

if you are gay, you are gay because you want to be gay, and you want to gain more

attraction. And it comes a little bit from the fact that there are many singers, many actors

who are gay. So even some actors, sometimes it is not clear if they are gay or straight.

But once they enter the show business, they say that they are gay. So the perception is

that this is something that you can choose. And it is considered to bring more attraction.

But still, society-wise, the society is not really ready to accept gay people. It is still more

or less like most of the Eastern European countries. It is considered not very acceptable,

not very acceptable. It is not good to be gay because you cannot have children, you

cannot have family, you are different, in this sense.

Likewise, many participants mentioned that queer people, particularly gay males, are

associated with the entertainment world. Quite often these men are "stereotypically" gay and this

image seems to be the only one associated with the LGBT community. For example, Lily also

felt that in her country people understand LGBT sexuality as a matter of choice and associate it

mostly with entertainment stars, which is the extent of their knowledge or understanding of the queer community: "They may only know some stars, or entertainment people, or maybe actors, maybe talk show hosts**.** In [country in the East Asia] most of them are homosexuals and there is more of an awareness of homosexuals than bisexuals and lesbians." Overall, most LGBT immigrants felt that their cultures are rather biased and that everyday people still do not have a good understanding of LGBT sexuality. This is how Katrina explained it:

> Well, [a country in the Eastern Europe] is still very much conservative, they are not as advanced as North Americans are really. In their way of thinking, they are still very close-minded. They are still very much traditional, they are still too traditional and their culture is not something that is built on sustaining that type of a lifestyle. They do not understand it.

As was mentioned earlier, in many countries being queer is seen as something deviant. For example, Luisa recalled: "… my friend said it is a disease being gay." Likewise, in Lily's experience, people see it as abnormal:

> Most of the parents could not accept that their child is gay. I mean, is not heterosexual - it is abnormal to them. So if they know I am bisexual, they would definitely get very disappointed. They either think that there is something wrong with you, or something wrong with them, because they did not do their duty to well educate their daughter.

As will be discussed later in more detail, families play a crucial role in the LGBT immigrants' experiences with sexuality. Having a queer person in the family is often seen as shameful for the whole family, including extended family members. Yusuf shared the following: "You are going to bring a big shame to the name of the family if you, if you are doing something like that." Therefore, the whole family is quite often involved in "helping" the individual deal

with this "disease." Ahmed's family encouraged him to see a psychotherapist to deal with it and

when that did not work, his family preferred to see it as "just a phase":

> I went to psychotherapist and that was at the age of fourteen. And I told him that I did not
>
> want to feel attracted to men anymore and I did not see him for a long time actually. He
>
> was trying to make me realize that the - how can I say this - he was trying to make me
>
> consider the joy of having sex with the opposite gender. He even told me to watch some
>
> porno and concentrate on the women in there, and when my family found out what he
>
> was telling me, they just lost their mind, like are you serious [laughs], like they were very
>
> disappointed about his methods I have to say. And they said: "At the time when you are
>
> ready to be in a relationship with a woman you will just get over all that," and I believed
>
> that there is something in psychology that says that most people feel attracted to the same
>
> sex during a certain period of their lives. That is what I read in a book. I am not really
>
> sure how accurate this is, but I think that my family was acting based on that. My family
>
> members were acting based on this piece of information because they were all telling me
>
> that this is just temporary and you will just get over it.

The participants who came from regions where religion is strongly intertwined with

society's functioning tended to report religion as another important factor in forming negative

perceptions of LGBT sexuality; religion was also associated with stronger stigma and prejudice.

Jean explained: "I used to live in a region which is very Catholic, it is a very traditional region. It

was not easy to live this. So I really needed to leave the region to go other places to live."

Benjamin also felt that it is more difficult being openly gay in his country because a lot of

political power is in the hands of religious people: "And [liberal state in the Middle East] is a

religious state and it is mostly controlled by religious people. So there are more difficulties

because religion does not recognize gay rights." Religious dogma in many participants' experiences made it almost impossible for the people around them to accept their queer sexuality. Luisa shared the following experience with her mother:

They were just talking about how it is so wrong. To be honest, my mother still believes that if you are gay or bisexual or whatever, that you are going to hell. She still believes that. And there is no way [I can convince her otherwise]. I mean, at one point, she happened to come here and she met one of my good friends who is gay. And at one point, she said "Oh, that is so bad, your friend is such a nice guy. It is too bad that if he does not repent for his sins, he is going straight to hell." And I said: "Mom, you can be born like that." And there is no way… I just dropped the argument, because there is no way, you know when there is an argument, a battle you can never win. So I just stopped the subject because I knew it was not going anywhere. And they were just, when they were asking, when they were commenting about the women and the things, they were not offensive towards the women. But they were saying "Oh my god! How is that possible? How can you be with somebody that is like you?" And I am thinking - you cannot put yourself in someone else's shoes, unless you are wearing their shoes. And that is just it. I think it is mostly ignorance, you know? So that puts a very high bar for me to try to jump that bar. I do not know, once again I am standing here telling you that I do not know if I would ever be able to bring myself to tell them, kind of. Part of me wants to, and a part of me is very afraid of the outcome of that. The pain, the hurt…

Furthermore, in many of the countries where religion is strongly intertwined with government's functioning, LGBT sexuality is something punishable by law and sometimes it can even result in a death sentence. Yusuf explained the situation in his country in South Asia:

"Officially, by law, it is something that is punishable. Homosexuality is punishable. So by law you can be arrested and put in jail. Not killed, but put in jail for a few years." Denis added:

> I think even by law it is still – [country in the Middle East] is a little bit of a mild country in terms of Islamism and all that - but still it is legally, if you look into it, I think it is punishable by law somehow, I am not quite sure how.

In Heidi's home country the situation is even more tragic: "You can be gay, but not in front of the government, because if they catch you during having sex, you will be hung of course…" For many participants who came from religious backgrounds the decision to immigrate was made soon after they became aware of their sexuality, sometimes when they were fairly young. Quite often these participants believed that leaving their family and society behind and moving to Canada was the only way to be able to openly express their true sexuality. However, participants that immigrated with their parents or families reported more difficulty in dealing with their sexuality. As will be discussed in more detail later, participants felt that their ethnic communities "import values and beliefs" from their countries of origin. Most of the time, it is still not a topic that can be openly discussed with the family. Sofia explained:

> Then I came to Canada and, obviously, coming from [a country in Eastern Europe] background, my parents were very - I do not want to say very homophobic - but again, it is something that you are not exposed to over there, it is something people do not know so much and I guess it is like anything else - people are afraid of the unknown. But again, it is not something that was discussed in our household. If it ever was discussed, it was not discussed in a positive light.

Queer sexuality is not only a taboo topic in many countries, but also, according to some participants, something that people in their country never heard of. For Yusuf, this lack of

knowledge is one of the main reasons why he is only out to his friends who left his country of origin:

> Because they are more open to, now that they are out of [a country in South Asia], they are aware of the existence of gay people, you know? Back home, you cannot even imagine. I would not be surprised if some people would tell you that they do not know about it, you know? Because it is not something that you talk about. You are not educated about it, nobody tells you about it. So for most of the people it is something that is nonexistent. Yeah, it is not one of the sexualities that they will consider as sexuality.

However, numerous participants also feel that attitudes towards LGBT people have changed a lot for the better in their countries of origin. For instance, Sergey stated that people are more aware of LGBT issues and that society is becoming more open:

> I am looking at friends' Vkontakte [equivalent of Facebook in former Soviet Union], I joined the LGBT group there, and there are other gay groups. They do post a lot of gay news. I think people are aware in [a country in the Eastern Europe] now, they know exactly what is what. And I think it is even more or less open in [a country in the Eastern Europe]."

Philip also stated that younger generations are better informed and have an easier time in dealing with their sexuality:

> I think that now…most of the young people, they are well informed. So even if they are in [wealthier country in the Eastern Europe], they will accept it like something not very normal, but quite normal. So I think that the young generation more or less has information and they will digest it easier than the older generation.

Even participants who came from countries where there is a well-established LGBT community believe that things have recently changed significantly for the better. Jean speaks about dramatic changes that happened in a democratic country in Western Europe in the last 15 years:

In the last fifteen years it has changed a lot in [a country in Western Europe]. But fifteen years ago, being gay was something not easy. Especially in the province of [a country in Western Europe]. Because there was still some – from today's point of view, it looks like there was another way of thinking fifteen years ago. It looks so far from how people live now. It is very hard to explain because it was not acceptable, it was not common to admit that people could be gay. It looks weird now because in [a country in Western Europe] it is completely accepted. It is very easy now in [a country in Western Europe]. Everywhere in [a country in Western Europe]. But fifteen years ago in [a country in Western Europe] it was not. So the challenge was to admit to yourself that you are gay, then you have to be strong enough to tell to your family, to your friends. And back then I knew a lot of gays who were rejected by their family. Not anymore. Not anymore. Some families, yes. But not anymore. Then it was very common to be rejected because you were gay. It was really common in the eighties and nineties. Not anymore. Thank god.

Furthermore, some participants spoke about the possibility of being "out" now, which was not possible in their opinion even in the very recent past. According to Yusuf:

Things have changed a lot since I left. I moved five years ago and things are changing rapidly over there I believe, thanks to the media and the Internet. I think people are kind of becoming aware of it, but there is still so much religious pressure that it is going to take so long for them to accept something like this. But on a smaller scale, for example,

in your close circle of friends or in your family maybe, I know a few people who are out to their family in [a country in South Asia]. And I observed both kinds of reactions: some people - their families are okay with it, some people - their families are not okay with it.

Some participants also spoke about their countries' government making attempts to protect LGBT rights. Lily gave an example of one such case in her country where she felt that the punitive measures were not strong enough however:

One transgendered worker in a hospital just got fired by the hospital. And the hospital was fined. They have to pay penalty. I do not know how much, but it was the big issue in [a country in East Asia] last year. It was fined by government but not that much. Because they violated the gender equity law thing. We have two laws, work gender equity law and education gender equity law. So it means that you have to respect your workers' or your students' gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. So obviously they violated the rules, so they got fined. But not a huge amount. Maybe sixty or hundred Canadian dollars.

Finally, the recognition of gay marriage is also seen as an important issue taken up by the government to help the LGBT community. For Manuel, marriage equality represented an important positive change in his country of origin:

[A country in Latin America] has changed a lot. There is gay marriage, there is a lot of things. They are pretty open. And I am going –if I get married, I am going to go to [a city in the Latin American country] and I am going to get married there. I would love that. I would love to go there and get married because I got most of my friends there. People I love. Because they will not be able to come here for my wedding.

In the segment above, Manuel spoke about the importance of friends and family in his life, and his willingness to go back to his country to get married, in order to allow people who are dear to him to attend the wedding. Overall, friends' and family's attitudes towards LGBT sexuality play an important role in LGBT immigrants' experiences, as they form the basis of social support network for queer immigrants. However, due to the queerphobic values and norms in the country of origin, such support networks often become unavailable to LGBT immigrants, as will be discussed next.

4.1.3 "I must be the only person feeling this way." Whenever the topic of social support came up in the interviews, participants predominately noted that there was a lack of social support in their countries of origin. The pressures of queerphobia made processing of sexuality very challenging for LGBT immigrants. As mentioned previously, in a large number of countries, there exists no LGBT activism or community because anything LGBT-related is illegal. For example, when Heidi was asked about the existence of LGBT community, his answer was: "There is nothing there. It cannot exist because the government is against gay people. There is no gay Pride or gay village or something like that." Many of the participants who came from such countries often spoke about appreciating the existence of a well-established LGBT community in Canada. They often reported an active involvement with Canadian queer community and having a lot of LGBT friends, something that was not possible in their countries of origin. In fact, a large number of participants spoke about not only having no gay friends prior to their immigration to Canada, but also not knowing any gay people in their countries of origin. As Denis stated: "No! Never. I mean, not anybody I knew was gay."

Even the very few participants who were able to share their non-normative attraction with their friends still spoke about the lack of social support, about feeling isolated, and about feeling different due to lack of other queer people around. For instance, Yaron explained:

I just felt very alone. I thought: "I must be the only person feeling this way, this is very weird. I do not think anybody else feels this way." I grew up in a very small village so I literally think I was the only one. I did not have somebody else telling me "Oh yes I have been struggling with this too." I mean, I had friends and I did tell them that I think I am in love with this girl so they knew, but I did not have the kind of mirror. I did not have that kind of reassurance of having other people being like "Oh yes I totally know how that feels."

Quite often, the participants who spoke about not knowing queer people or not having gay friends in their countries of origin reported more frequently than other participants that they maintained discretion about their sexuality or lead "double lives," even after their immigration to Canada. Additionally, participants commonly cited lack of support from their families as a challenge in their countries of origin. It was quite common for participants to feel that they are disappointing their parents because of who they are. Yaron first started feeling concerned about his father's reaction to his emerging sexuality once he started to pick up on the way his father felt about his aunt who was a lesbian:

But I also knew that my father really disliked her and also generally did not like gays. I am pretty sure it was because she rubbed him the wrong way. Because of who she is - she challenged his comfortable spot of who he is. It was a lot to do with my feelings about myself, too, mentally… Just kind of these feelings of unworthiness, that I thought I kind of did not really deserve love and that the fact that I was a lesbian just kind of made it

even harder. For that to happen or for me to accept that I deserve love, I had a hard time

because of my father and kind of because of knowing that I am growing farther and

farther away from any chance of him being proud of me. Which is something that I

wanted and still want, and, you know, it is natural.

Numerous LGBT immigrants spoke about not even considering going to their families for

support because of how much shame them being gay would bring to the family name. Yusuf

explained:

You know, there is a big social pressure on you and because there is a big [emphasis on]

family values and all that, you cannot go against them. You are going to bring a big

shame to the name of the family if you, if you are doing something like that. So, things

like that they are really, they are really difficult for someone to get over with, or to take

them, or to put them on a side, and you know, continue on with your life. You always

have to consider that. Even now sometimes I am worried about those things, you know.

Especially about my family. I do not care about the society anymore, because I do not

live there, but my family - I still have, kind of, bad feelings and that is why they do not

know about me.

Heidi, who reported being very close with his parents, considered going to them for

support. However, because of the anxiety associated with coming out to his parents, he felt like

he had to engage the help of a therapist:

I do not think that I am telling my parents soon. Because they are paying me for my life

here so I do not want to take the risk that they stop paying me [laughs]. My father can do

everything, so who knows. It is difficult [for them to accept my sexuality], I am sure of

that. Because back in [a conservative country in the Middle East], I went to the therapist

there. I wanted to tell my parents that I am gay. So I went to the therapist, I talked to her,

and she said: "Ok, let me talk to your parents. After a few times that my parents visited

her - and she did not tell me what she said to my parents - but she told me: "Just do not

tell to them. Soon you are going to Canada, and you will be in a free country. Just live

your life, do not tell them." Maybe she thought they are elderly people, now in their

seventies, no need to tell them.

The financial cut-off, which Heidi was joking about, is probably the least dramatic of the

potential cut-offs from the family that were mentioned by participants as reasons responsible for

their inability to go to family for support. Quite often participants spoke about the possibility of

being disowned by their families if their sexuality were to become public, as Ahmed explained:

I know that lots of my family members would just refuse to see me or communicate with

me anymore. And especially those members who are more religious than the others. I

mean, unfortunately I have very dear, very close family members who are very religious

and I would just lose them if I tell them that I am gay or if I become publically known as

gay.

Yusuf also spoke of not only a high likelihood of being disowned by his family, but also

about "extreme consequences" such as being killed:

Killing could be the extreme consequence… The problem is your family, because it is

such a big shame to the family that probably they will kill you. But we are talking about

very extreme reaction. Maybe people will, for example, if they do not kill you, they can

just disown you and tell you to not talk to them or see them again. They do not want to

keep ties with you. They do not want to have any links with you … My dad could disown

me and never talk to me again.

Furthermore, what makes the issues of social support even more concerning is the fact that in many countries the stigma towards LGBT people extends not only onto their families, but also to people who chose to stay in touch with them. As Ahmed explained, society discourages any type of social support of LGBT people:

> So I think even though some people might deal with my homosexuality fine on a personal level, if I go to them and tell them that I am gay, but if I become gay openly, they would just be very careful when dealing with me. They would care about what people would think about them if they knew they were dealing with a homosexual.

The anti-LGBT stigma that extends to friends and families of LGBT people in their countries of origin does not end there. Many participants reported that even after immigrating to Canada, they continued being discrete about their sexuality with family and friends in their country of origin. The ones who chose to come out quite often found themselves completely cut-off from their family back home. As the reader will see later on, family tends to be a constant variable influencing decisions, feeling, motivations, and actions of the LGBT immigrants through all the stages of immigration. Analyses demonstrated that quite often immigration was the only way for participants to be able to express their true sexuality without bringing shame to their family. Although, they still had to limit the extent of disclosure to their social circle in Canada or sometimes to only a few chosen people.

However, even participants from the countries where homosexuality is punishable by law sometimes spoke about being able to be accepted by their close friends. Yusuf spoke about never completely hiding his sexuality and feeling that at some level, his friends knew about him being queer:

Well, there are two different kinds of reactions. One would be from my friends and one

would be from my family. My friends, I think they would not care. My good friends, I

think they still would not care because I doubt that they doubt, you know? You know,

they always doubted. I never kind of put layers on myself and heed myself. I took the

advantage of their ignorance about the sexuality, the homosexuality, because they are not

much aware of it. So that is why you did not really have to hide too much because they

are not going to take it seriously. It is a strange behaviour, but that is something I

observed there. Anyway, so my friends - I think they will be fine with it. My family, they

will not be fine with it. There can be extreme reaction from my family.

Interestingly, it was common for participants to describe the reaction of friends as "not

caring" or some type of apathy, similar to Yusuf. For example, Fadi explained: "Some have

reacted poorly, some have reacted positively, some have had apathetic reactions, most have had

apathetic reactions." Similar to Yusuf, Heidi also felt that his friends knew all along and

accepted him:

Now I am open to my friends too, I tell them, I tell everyone, to all my friends, and they

say they knew that, and they are happy with that. They kind of knew that of course, you

know. I did not have any girlfriends, and I was always talkative to people in the

classroom, and my friend - he says "you are always friends with everyone, and you are so

friendly with everyone." Usually gay people they do that, so that is why [laughs].

Except for a few instances, most participants reported not being able to find support and

acceptance among their family and friends. What made the situation even more difficult for

them, especially for LGBT immigrants that come from countries where homosexuality is illegal,

was the fact that they found it extremely difficult to meet other gay people. Certain areas called

"cruising places," areas where men would look for sex with other men, were often the only place, albeit very risky, that were mentioned by gay male immigrants as a way to meet other gay people. Ahmed explained:

> I was trying to avoid groups because homosexuality was illegal in [a conservative country in the Middle East], and if they find someone cruising another guy, it is illegal. If there were places for cruising, I was trying to avoid those because I did not want to be seen at gay cruising areas. And again, it is quite possible that police would come and arrest everyone in the area. And that could happen if there is a big group of people because they are more visible to the government. And although the government is tolerant, it is not really chasing gays, but I mean if they become too visible, then they will be put in jail.

Participants also mentioned the Internet as another, while still risky, way of meeting people in countries where an LGBT community does not exist. For Heidi, the Internet was his main way to meet other gay people:

> There is no gay Pride or gay village or something like that. [You meet other people] through Internet. Before now it was funny, it was Yahoo chat, you have a blind date, so many years ago … But now they have the websites for gays. Actually, they are blocked, but with the filters you can go on the Internet, and you can meet people. It is risky. But the risk is like ten percent. But ninety percent safe. Of course it can be a police officer that joined that site to arrest people, but I do not think they do that. It is safe. I had a few dates on that site. And even last summer I flew to [a conservative country in the Middle East], so before that I met a guy through that site, so I went to [a conservative country in the Middle East] to meet him. And we met each other and I was in love with him too.

Now I am here.But I had a nice time last summer. They have to take risk, they need to meet someone to share their life with.

Despite the severe consequences of being persecuted for anything to do with LGBT sexuality, participants often seem to assess the risk as low, similar to Heidi. This assessment can possibly be due to cultural norms and realities in regards to law and its implementation. A few participants spoke about the possibility of paying their way out in case of arrest. Yusuf explained:

By law, you can be arrested and put in jail. Not killed, but put in jail for a few years. But it almost never happens because you can just get away from it because, if you have money, you can just give them, you know, you can just bribe a policeman. It is kind of a non-issue.

It is important to mention that in contrast to what was discussed so far, there were participants who spoke of strong LGBT communities in their countries. Jean spoke about the existence of a large LGBT community in a country in Western Europe:

In [a country in Western Europe] there was and there is still a big gay community. To tell the story of being gay in [a country in Western Europe]. In 1981, the left wing, they decided that being gay is not a disease anymore, just in 1981. Then after that the gay community opened a lot of bars in [a capital of a country in Western Europe], and it was considered as one of the gay capitals in Europe in the eighties and nineties. The thing is, in the late nineties, there was this big debate about being gay because the left opened a vote for civil marriage. And so since then being gay is much easier.

Benjamin even felt that people are much more open to queer culture in his country of origin than in Canada and also spoke about the availability of support groups and large-scale LGBT events that helped him build his social support networks:

I was going to different groups in the LGBT community and self-help groups. Just, you know, meet-up groups. And I went to a great gay parade once. And actually in [a liberal state in the Middle East], I think people are much more open, because on television, you see very feminine men on television, prime time. And here in Canada, no. People hide their sexuality here on TV. And it is very politically correct, very, you know, strict. Yes, it is "everyone is free, everyone is open," but I do not feel this like I felt back home … I know that I can be gay in [a liberal state in the Middle East], too. The same way.

Some participants went for support to neighbouring countries that were more LGBT-friendly. For example, Ahmed traveled from his country to another country in the Middle East for resources:

In [a liberal country in the Middle East] there is a gay organization, like an LGBT organization, it is called HELEM. I knew many members of that organization, and I used to get some of the publications of that organization. Even a very close friend of me who lived there used to help them as well and volunteer there.

However, the situations where resources and support were available, and where participants felt that their sexuality would be accepted in their country of origin, seem to be more of an exception. The majority of participants, even the ones who came from the countries where LGBT community exists, still did not feel that their sexuality would be considered legitimate. While Fadi spoke of the existence of large LGBT community in a liberal country in the Middle

East, he still feels that gay people are ostracized and that he "escaped emotional torture" by moving to Canada:

> I think the difficulties they would face are - just being rejected by the general community. Of course there would be acceptance by their own community. There is, there is a dynamic LGBT community in [a liberal country in the Middle East]. But I think there is a dichotomy between the straight community and the LGBT community, and there is no cross communication between the two groups. They are also ostracized and put into different areas, and I just think, as somebody living in Canada, I feel relieved and I feel like I have escaped emotional torture.

Even Lily, who spoke about being actively involved as a volunteer and organizer in the LGBT community in her country, said that she could only be "selectively out" at best:

> I started to volunteer in the LGBT association. It was like a hotline, it was an LGBT hotline. In 2007 we did a lot of things, like events, like gay pride parade, or we gave lectures to community or elementary school students, teachers in elementary school… And we had a lot of workshops for LGBT people in the city I lived in. We went to the gay pride parade in [a city in East Asia] with my classmates, and my friends in LGBT association. But in my graduate school and the LGBT association, we gave workshops, lectures, in community or in colleges. Other than in community and in colleges - in elementary schools, junior high schools. But in real life, like in college, with my junior high school friends, senior high school friends, I would not tell them. Unless I knew they were gay, or they were lesbian - then I would tell them. If they are not, then I would not tell them.

For the most part, however, participants who spoke about the existence of a LGBT community in their home countries, stated that it only was "allowed to exist" in the largest city or cities, and that there is still no awareness, resources, or social networks for LGBT people outside such places. For some participants like Elsa, the fact that there was no LGBT community in her city (even though she was aware of a large LGBT community in a nearby city) made her feel that her sexuality will not be accepted by people in her country:

I come from [a city in Western Europe], which is not a small city, but not a big city either, and I did not know anyone that was gay, even the girl that I had sex with is now straight, like pretends nothing has ever happened and all my friends were severely homophobic in [a country in the Western Europe]. There has been many discussions where people were like "lesbians are so disgusting, like I would never have a lesbian friend and it grosses me out." So after that one night I just remembered all those discussions and was like "I would never want to be something that my friends hated." So I tried to be straight to not be the outcast. I guess if I had never moved here, there probably would be a good chance that I still would try to pretend to be straight because there is no gay club, there is nothing. I really do not know anyone who is gay in [a country in the Western Europe], and so, for instance, to find a partner - I have no idea how I would do it in [a country in the Western Europe]. I would be the only one of a kind, so I think it would have made it very hard on me. So I am just glad I am not there. I mean, my friends cannot be the only homophobic people in [a country in the Western Europe]. I am pretty sure, just the fact that there is no gay community kind of to me is an indicator that apparently gays are not as accepted in at least my city. I mean, the

neighboring city has got this huge gay community but for some reason in my city there is

nothing, and so I am pretty sure the attitudes of people play into that.

Participants who spoke about not having a LGBT community outside of the largest cities

in their country, often felt as oppressed as the participants who came from the countries where

LGBT sexuality is illegal. Social disapproval often was so strong that they felt that even moving

into a large city that has a LGBT community would still not allow them to openly live their

sexuality comfortably. As will be discussed later, these participants frequently reported how

much easier it is "to be queer" in Canada due to the acceptance of different sexual orientations

and gender identities by the general population in Canada. Furthermore, the perceived lack of

acceptance and stigma towards LGBT people prevalent in their countries of origin often

prevented some of the participants from connecting with other queer people, even if they were

indeed aware of their existence. Sergey explained:

> There were actually, in my city there were [queer people]. I mean, I heard about them,
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> and in my university, there was a couple of guys who were gays, but they were
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> flamboyant, you know, people are, some people have no choice, they are flamboyant, so
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> they are effeminate, there is something in them that tells they are gay. I was not
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> necessarily friends with these people because I did not want to be associated directly with
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> them, it was at the time when I did not want to be associated necessarily with these guys.
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> Because for my status in the society, the less people know you are gay, the better it is. I
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> did not want to be associated with somebody who is obviously gay … it would put me at
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> the same level as them. They were perceived kind of, they were looked upon from kind of
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> higher level, they are looked upon from above.

Another concern mentioned by participants about being affiliated with the LGBT community in their countries of origin was a fear of becoming a target of physical violence, as Yaron explained:

And gay people – gay people are enemy too. I mean, look what happened in the past five, ten years in [a liberal state in the Middle East] - suddenly LGBT is going under severe attack. Like there was a pride parade a couple of years ago, and a couple of people got stabbed. And two years ago in the summer there was a shooting that happened in a gay youth club in [the capital city of the liberal state in the Middle East]. Some guy went in and shot a bunch of people. And nobody believed. Everybody was so surprised. Is not [the capital city of the liberal state in the Middle East] the capital of gayness? Like how could that happen? I was not surprised. I was not surprised a bit. Like it was tragic. I was so, so, so sad and angry about it, but I was not surprised. Like this is what happens.

Thus, lack of social support, queerphobic values, traditions, and norms, and anti-LGBT stigma stemming from above, combined with numerous other challenges and concerns, often resulted in negative feelings about their sexuality among most participants.

The participants often reported that at first they did not experience any difficulties with their sexuality. Quite often the first feeling was "confusion" as they were starting to realize that their attraction is non-normative. Sofia described this attraction as "weird" because she just "was not raised to consider it as an option":

It was in an English class, to be very specific, and there was a girl in my class. I did not really know her, I was not friends with her or anything, it just was the one class we had together. And one day I just felt like this really weird attraction to her, like I thought she was hot and I was like "Ok, this is really weird." So then I started kind of like analyzing

how I felt about people's different genders. I guess I never thought about it, like actively thought about it before. But I realized that I am not necessarily more attracted to men than to women, I just never thought about being attracted to women, because I guess I was not raised to think about these topics this way.

However, for many participants their sexuality did start feeling wrong as soon as they were able to label it in terms of the predominantly negative societal norms and discourses. The situation was more difficult for participants who first learned about homosexuality from religion. For example, earlier I discussed Ahmed's difficulty accepting his sexuality after first learning about it from Quran and understanding it as something deviant. Similar to Ahmed, Luisa first learned about what her sexual attraction meant from religion. Throughout her childhood and adolescence she struggled with why she is not "normal" and why was this "happening to" her:

It was back home. I must have been eight, nine. I did realize that I was also attracted to females at the time, which is not the norm for the society I had been raised in. To have feelings towards your own kind, if you want to call it that way. It was not something that was normal as I saw it at the time. I did not think it was normal. I did not. I did not think it was normal because in Hispanic culture, the religion is very promoted among the people. We follow, we go to the church, we do all these things. And, as you know, at churches they preach, when it comes to sexual orientation, that sexual attraction can be only between the male and the female. That is the message that we get. There is no male with male or female with female. So my opinion as I was growing up was that that I should not be okay with it - it was not what everybody was expected to do. So at that time in my life, I did not think it was normal… [I felt] different at times and I knew that I could not express it because that would make me go against everyone else who was

normal. But it is a very interesting time in your life because you are going through a lot of emotions as a teenager I feel. There was a lot of changes happening and things that I wanted. And at the same time I was dealing with something like "Why am I like this, why is this happening to me?" That was the idea that was constantly stuck in my brain: "Why is this happening to me - why me?" As if it was something that I should not be. That was out of the norm. Why am I not normal like everybody else? That is how basically I grew up, thinking why does this happen to me? I wish I could just fall in love with a man like everybody else. I knew there was something different. I knew it was not the norm.

Similar to Luisa, the word "normal" in reference to heterosexuality and "abnormal" in reference to queer sexuality were used frequently by participants as they described the way they felt about their sexuality. Fadi explained: "I think when you are younger, you tend to feel like an outsider, you realize when you look around you that there is an aspect of normality and you are not necessarily part of that normal atmosphere." As was discussed earlier, the native languages of many participants stigmatize LGBT sexuality, making participants feel that it is "abnormal." Ahmed gave the following example: "I thought there was something wrong with me… [I wanted to change to] what is normal, because even in Arabic, my mother tongue, the street translation of gay is abnormal." For some participants, such language structures are so deeply internalized that even after a few years in Canada they continue to use the term "normal" to refer to heterosexuality. For example, Heidi used the word "normal" as opposed to "gay" when discussing his thoughts on coming out: "You do not need to be open in [a conservative country in the Middle East], to be gay, you can be like a normal man, so you do not need to say

everywhere that you are gay, to shout about it." Likewise, Denis used a similar language when describing his considerations about future lifestyle choices after his arrival to Canada:

I did not feel good about it at all. So when I came here I had mixed feelings. On one had I thought that this was an opportunity to explore my gay side, but on the other hand I thought: "I will try to have a normal life. It is like a new start. I will date a girl," et cetera.

Jean even spoke about confusing the notions of homosexuality and pedophilia:

In fact, I did not really understand what homosexuality meant. And in [a country in Western Europe] at that time, I was confused between the notion of being gay and the notion of pedophilia. In [a country in Western Europe], it was not that common. So I was confused about both notions. But I am gay, not a pedophile.

For some participants feelings of not being "normal" were associated with their sexual preferences. For instance, in a number of cultures it seems that being in an insertive sexual role (being a top) is not considered to be gay and is often normalized by the culture. The notions of sexual orientation and gender are often intertwined in the participants' cultures, thus often further stigmatizing the experience of individuals in receptive sexual roles (bottoms) because they are made to feel that they are even more abnormal than other men who have sex with men. Ahmed's preference of being a bottom made him feel beneath other men with whom he had sex:

So even by my sexual partners I was not really considered as quite equal because they were taking the male side in bed. Plus they were also capable of having sex with women. This made me feel that I am the only one who had those feelings … I mean, in the Middle Eastern community, the male is considered superior even on an unconscious level. So, when you are a man who is not having the normal, and again I refer to normal as opposite to abnormal, so if you are not having a normal male role in bed - then you are less. I

mean, although it is not really accepted by the society, but in some of the villages in my

area - they take pride of, let me use the term, fucking boys.

The data analysis indicated that the stigma experienced by participants whose first

conceptualization of queer sexuality was associated with not being normal was in many cases

related to them continuing to stay discrete about their sexuality with family and friends back

home, even after coming out in Canada. However, even for participants who did not experience

such strong stigma, the early feeling of being different was often further cemented as a result of

not having other queer people around, which often made them feel "othered." Yaron, whose

sexuality was accepted by his friends, still felt like an "odd one" in the group:

> I was always the odd one out in this group of friends, especially around that time,
>
> thirteen, fourteen years old. People started exploring their sexuality too and I always
>
> remember them kind of having conversations with each other like "Oh, that boy and that
>
> boy," and going on dates and going on group dates, the boys and the girls. And I always
>
> felt like the complete odd one out. Like where was I in that equation? I was not. I was
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> starting to have little crushes on people … I did not understand it. I remember this
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> evening where there was this slumber party and everybody played with each other's hair
>
> and gave each other massages and to me that was quite - I was part of it too and for me it
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> was - not maybe a sexual experience, but there was something about it that was arousing
>
> me in a way. That made me feel like "woah," this feeling is different. But I knew also
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> that that was not how other people were feeling about it, you know. So there were those
>
> kinds of experiences that I shared with just myself. I really did not have teenage girlfriend
>
> or relationships. I constantly wanted one but it just never really happened.

The experiences similar to the one described above by Yaron, as well as internalized negative societal attitudes towards LGBT people over time, resulted in increasingly negative perceptions of themselves for a majority of the participants. For example, male participants (both cis and male-to-female trans) often spoke of feeling less of a man or "less fit." Sergey described the reason that his younger brother went to the army instead of him:

> So since I was a flower in the family, you know, not very fit for army. I was not sporty, I was a quieter guy, very soft and soft spoken. I would have a hard time in the army, so my brother went. He said "I am going to go." Most of my other friends, and me, we were more of that X generation, we did not know what to do, we were not very fit for anything. Lots of baggage, lots of psychological trauma, and things like this.

Feeling different was often also associated with a feeling of fear among LGBT immigrants. Panas explained the feeling as such: "I was a little bit afraid. Afraid that I am not like other people." Manuel explained why the realisation of being different was so scary for him:

> Because you have to think that one day you will have to face everyone and say "No, I am different." When you are a kid, you do not want to be different. You just want to belong. Imagine, you know, when you are a teenager in school. Everybody talks about girls. You are the only one that is going to come and say: "No, I like boys." You do not want to be different. So it is hard. And I think that kids, even though I like kids a lot, they can be pretty cruel. So if you are different, it is hard. Being called fruity, sissy, all the names. It is bad. You do not feel right. And when I was a kid, I used to go out and I watched the sky and just wished that an alien came and took me out of that place because I could not imagine my life there. I knew I was different.

Data analysis demonstrated that in a vast majority of the cases the early feelings of being different over time were transformed into an overall negative attitude towards their sexuality, predominantly due to the social context in which they found themselves. Benjamin stated: "I wanted to disappear." Elsa described her feelings about sexuality in the following way:

I felt really bad and for about a year tried to be straight. I am pretty sure even if I had the slightest feeling of "Yes, maybe I am gay," that it just got suppressed from the very beginning on. And so it is not as much as I discovered that I was gay but that I just for one night was allowed to be gay, was allowed to be what was inside of me for so long but that I just suppressed for so long.

For some participants, their internalized homophobia remained quite strong years after their immigration to Canada and exposure to local LGBT community. Denis explained:

I would say that before twenty five I had this concept: "If I could just flip the switch and go to be straight, I would do it in a heartbeat," and somehow before my thirties I started to realise - and I had a boyfriend, and I had a really cool relationship - and I realised that I would not flip that switch. So, and that was slightly before, or around, being thirty. So I would not, I would not go back. But even after four,- five years of living within Canada, my opinion did not change drastically to that point of "Ok, now it is cool to be gay." I still wanted to go back to being mainstream.

Often, internalized queerphobia and heterosexism resulted in poor self-esteem, personal insecurities, shame, and feeling worthless. For the trans participants, gender dysphoria made the situation even more challenging, as Yaron explained:

It was a lot. It was a mix of things. It was not necessarily my sexuality, but it was a lot to do with the fact that I thought in my head that I am only allowed to be a lesbian if I am

attractive. I am only allowed to be a lesbian if I am an attractive lesbian. I do not know

why I thought this way. But it was connected a lot with my body image. I felt so bad in

my body, and later I kind of realized that part of that was that I was trans and that I did

not feel connected, I had such a disconnect with my body because of my gender identity,

but I also had a lot of body image issues. I was overweight, I was fat, and now I have a

completely different feeling about those things, but then I felt like I was really

unattractive and really unworthy. So ugly and a lesbian together was like too much for

me. It was like there was no way I could be fat and a lesbian … It had a lot to do with my

feelings about myself mentally. Feelings of unworthiness - I thought I kind of did not

really deserve love, and that the fact that I was a lesbian just kind of made it even harder

for me to accept that I deserve love.

The LGBT immigrants repeatedly reported feeling that their sexuality was a burden in

their countries of origin, as Luisa explained:

That is not something you would wish for your child, to be gay, because of all the

ordeals, or issues, or troubles that he is going to have to go through in life. What is that

word? Discriminated. You know, being discriminated for who you are. But once again, as

an adult, we can deal with it better, but as a child I think it can completely change the

path that you are going to live in life. So it is absolutely something that would probably

be very hard to deal with. And, being a parent, you do not want your child to be gay in a

country where that is not welcomed. It is probably very tough, something not easy to deal

with. As a matter of fact, it is very funny - my friend said: "It is a disease, being gay."

Feelings of aloneness, loneliness, and not belonging because of their sexuality were often

reported by participants. Fadi felt that his sexuality was a burden because it would prevent him

from being understood and accepted by the society in which he lived: "I felt different, I felt like I would not be understood because of the culture … I felt sad most of the time that I had that burden." Participants who saw their sexuality as a burden in many cases continued to struggle with it even after their immigration to Canada. They often spoke about the importance of and need for support groups for LGBT immigrants in Canada to ease the transition and help them deal with stigma and internalized queerphobia. For some LGBT immigrants, the effects of anti-LGBT stigma in their societies were so strong that they felt like they would not be able to survive if their sexuality were to become public. Benjamin spoke about the role his sexuality played in making life choices:

> First of all: hiding. Hiding this secret. It was very, very difficult. And all this fear, and choices I made because of these fears, fears that I will not survive. So I made these choices, I completely made the choices so that I will survive.

> The negative feelings related to their sexuality often resulted in sadness and depression in

LGBT immigrants. Benjamin explained why he still cannot celebrate his sexuality: "So, still I do not celebrate it, no, because it was a challenge, you know, I had so many sleepless, crying nights. So I cannot celebrate these nights. I feel this pain."

Despite all the multiple challenges discussed above, participants were not able to avoid the desire to explore their sexuality, as in Luisa's case:

> Even though I did not think it was normal, and I was willing to hide who I was because I was not going to tell anyone because it is not perceived well, part of me wanted just to see what it was. Explore, I guess. You know? In a very limited, I guess, geographic place. In a very limited place. Where I lived. Even though it was something difficult, even with all my limitations, that is what I wanted to say. With all my limitations - I felt like this

was not normal, this is not right - yet I wanted to explore why is it inside of me? What am

I feeling?

Thus, in light of the queerphobic norms, values, traditions, and perceptions in the LGBT

immigrants' countries of origin, it is not surprising that most participants felt that queerphobia

and heterosexism in their societies were the main challenges in accepting their sexuality. Earlier

I quoted Elsa, who felt that if she did not come to Canada, she might have never accepted her

sexuality due to the queerphobia she experienced back in her country. She spoke about the strong

heterosexist culture prevalent among her friends and the impact it had on her decision to hide her

sexuality. Heterosexism was also so prevalent during Sergey's upbringing that he could not even

imagine the possibility of not being heterosexual:

First of all, you know that gay or not gay, guys do not have sex with guys. I do not know

how to explain that .... By the time I hit the puberty, I started to have sex, of course it was

with women. You know, we were fully aware that you could not be homosexual, you

have to be heterosexual.

Many participants spoke about the pressures from family and community to court people

of the opposite sex and the various forms of unwanted attention and suspicion they would

receive from others if they did not go out with someone. Panas explained:

I have never had a girlfriend. And so my mother spoke to me several times about this:

"When will you have a girlfriend? Why do not you have a girlfriend? Maybe you are gay.

I do not want to have a gay in my own family. We have never had a gay in our family."

Stuff like that.

The pressures and suspicions would continue to grow as time passed and as participants

neared the age when they would be expected to get married. Benjamin recalled: "So as I grew

up, the pressure to meet girls from my parents also grew." For some participants, the pressures were too strong to resist. Luisa said:

> You are expected to marry and to have two kids, and to live the life that everybody lives.
> You are expected to do that but that is not what I wanted. That is not what I wanted. I was
> living the life that I was expected to live because I did have a boyfriend and I did love my
> boyfriend. But deep down, I did not think I wanted it. That is not what I wanted deep
> down.

Many other participants spoke about the strength of tradition in their countries, especially when it came to family and community values. LGBT immigrants felt that if at a certain age they were not dating or getting married, then they would stand out and look suspicious. Denis explained:

> There is the pressure of traditions, weighing heavier than here. There everything needs to
> go with traditions and so you are sort of following a trend, and your friends start to get
> married - so you need to get married, and you need to date when they start to date and so,
> if you are missing those marks, you sort of stand out. So I think that is very difficult for
> gay people, so they probably either go through some of these motions or they choose to
> stand out.

In order not to stand out, queer immigrants often had to "play along" and pretend as if they were interested in dating people of a different sex, in order to keep suspicions at bay and to make their family happy. Lily shared her way of dealing with such pressures:

> At my age, if you are around twenty, if you do not come out, you will [have to] fool your
> family. You are forced to meet people. People might arrange marriage for you. Not
> arrange. They would not force you to get married, but they will be begging you: "Please,

go meet this girl, meet this guy. You are the only one who did not get married. You are

old and we are so worried about you." Something like that. Then you have to pretend that

you are interested in this kind of meeting… And go there and come back and become so

picky, and make it not work. It does not mean that you do not like the other person, but

you know that maybe I am a gay, I am in a relationship with someone else, so what is the

point? But you do not want to make people feel like it is going to work out. So you have

to be very picky and tell people: "I do not like this guy. He is too fat. Or she is bald." Or

something like that.

Gender roles were yet another aspect of tradition that participants encountered as a

challenge to their ability to feel comfortable with their sexuality. Quite often, the gender roles in

the participants' countries of origin are reinforced more severely than in Canada, as Yaron

explained:

Well, I think for gay men in [a liberal state in the Middle East], it is really hard because

there is also these gender rules in [a liberal state in the Middle East]. The gender rules in

[a liberal state in the Middle East] are kind of really intense. I think they are pretty

different from here. I think that everything kind of leans a little bit more towards

masculinity anyway. I think that the culture of the army, and everybody going to the

army, and being tough and needing to be tough and strong, and not showing the enemy

fear - it kind of translates into how people are generally with each other. I think that in

terms of gender, I think that men really have to be really macho and really masculine, and

they get a lot of shit if they are not.

Due to a high prevalence of queerphobia and heteronormativity in the participants'

countries of origin, they often felt that if they were to embrace their LGBT identity, they would

no longer be accepted by their communities. Elsa feels that she might have never come out if she were to stay in her hometown:

> Moving away and being able to start over away from people that did not accept me the way I was. I mean, if something as basic and as fundamental as your sexuality cannot be expressed, then of course you do not feel happy. Imagine I would have had to pretend I was straight till the end of my life, that would have been horrible.

Feelings of not belonging and exclusion usually resulted in participants suppressing or hiding their sexuality. Many LGBT immigrants experienced intense feelings of fear related to people around them discovering their sexuality. Daw described his fears: "Afraid. Afraid. Afraid for people to know." Sergey also spoke about his fears of being found out, which prevented him from acting on his sexual urges:

> It is not socially acceptable at all. It is not necessarily the fact that you guys both have sex, but it is more - you were sucking him, or he fucks you, and how in social hierarchy this act places you, because you became like a social outcast, if somebody fucks you, or something. Especially I was afraid of the fact that it is going to be known. I had this guy in my class that I was really attracted to, and at some point we were really close to having sex, and he was very suggestive, and I did not do it. I did not let myself make a move because I was afraid he would do it on purpose, that he could tell other guys: "Oh, this guy is a faggot, you know."

Other participants also spoke about how the perceptions of sexual roles (again usually deeply rooted in heterosexism) often stigmatized their sexual preferences even further. In particular, participants spoke about how being a top is almost normalized by the culture because it is a traditional male role but being a bottom is associated with greater shame because it is

associated with assuming a female role. Earlier in this paper, Ahmed explained that he was perceived as inferior by other men with whom he had sex because of his sexual preference as a bottom. The fact that he was not taking "a male side in bed" was perceived as extremely shameful. Even though Ahmed comes from the Middle East and Sergey from Eastern Europe, Sergey's perception of the impact that sexual preferences and roles have on the LGBT immigrants' experience with stigma and oppression is strikingly similar:

> I think that gay people who prefer to be bottom are more stigmatized by society. Because if you are a top, you will not necessarily be perceived as gay. Because there is this notion of prison sex, and things like this. I am talking about my country of origin, the Soviet Union, and its prison culture. And you know that people in prison who fuck other guys, they are not considered gay. But if you are a bottom, you are degraded, everything to do with positions. If you are just a top, you can fuck whatever you want, it is a male culture, man can do whatever. That is the bottom part that is a problem in my understanding. This is how it works, in public psyche. Though if you are a top and are just fucking man, I think it is not viewed positively too, it is not best thing for you to do, but there is more chance of crossover, you can fuck one or the other, there is less oppression on you as a top. I think so. I might be wrong. I am sure on a practical level, in everyday life, somebody who is really homosexual but just a top and living in Russia, and trying to be open, would have as much hard time as any other, but I think it is easier for them to survive or to hide themselves.

Due to feelings of unworthiness, participants often spoke of a need to overcompensate in order to prove to others their adequacy, that they can be as successful as their heterosexual peers.

In Benjamin's words: "You [need to] prove to others that you are "ok" … because of my sexuality I needed to prove more. I needed to give extra."

Due to multiple challenges the LGBT immigrants faced in dealing with their sexuality, it is not surprising that they tended to struggle with its acceptance. Participants often shared that admitting to themselves that they are LGBT was probably the most difficult stage in dealing with their sexuality. Jean noted: "So the challenge was to admit to yourself that you are gay." Yusuf also experienced a lot of discomfort during the process: "Uncomfortable and complicated to answer myself what it is. The understanding of the issue took a while of course, but I think that is natural." Other participants described it as "Oh it was terrible," "I started to have, ahh, very big conflicts inside of me. I was not ok with my sexuality at all," "It was very hard," and "I was not accepting myself" (Ahmed, Denis, Maria, Fadi, respectively). For some participants the struggle resulted in mental health issues, as in Manuel's case:

> I was very depressed. I had so many ticks. All the time. I grew up with a million ticks. And they took me to a psychologist, and I guess she said I had no problem. And then, when I was thirteen, fourteen, I was completely depressed. It was very hard, because you start with all the sexual things, and I could not be myself. And I was depressed, I gained a lot of weight, I was fat. I did not want to leave my house. So my parents, they were in a position where they said: "Ok, we are going to take you to a psychologist."

Other LGBT immigrants also spoke about seeking some kind of mental health assistance to help them through their struggle with their sexuality. Participants often perceived their sexuality as a disease and often went to see a psychologist to "cure" themselves. Ahmed explained it in the following way:

For me it was like a disease, you need to know how to get over it, that is how I perceived

it. I started to have very big conflicts inside of me. I was not ok with my sexuality at all. I

tried to cure myself, let me use this term, in the beginning, and I thought there was

something wrong with me … Psychology was another way. I went to psychotherapist and

that was at the age of fourteen. And I told him that I did not want to feel attracted to men

anymore. I did not see him for a long time actually. He was trying to make me realize that

- how can I say this - he was trying to make me consider the joy of having sex with the

opposite gender. He even told me to watch some porno and concentrate on the woman in

there, and when my family found out what he was telling me, they just lost their mind,

like "are you serious?" [Laughs] They were very disappointed about his methods I have

to say.

Similarly, Benjamin also perceived his sexuality as a disease and felt like he needed to be

"cured." In his case, another modality of "corrective therapy" was used:

I [long pause], I wanted to disappear. I treated it like an illness, a mental disorder. And I

was trying to cure myself first. I was visualizing, each evening before I go to sleep, the

time with a woman and I am aroused and happy and we have sex. But actually, the actual

thoughts that were pushing in and making me much more happy were that I am in the bed

with a man. I was trying to understand my sexuality and why is it this way. I went to

psychology for treatment and I thought that I am gay because of my mother. And then I

thought I am gay because of my father, then a combination of the two. Then I was going

to surrogate treatment. It means that I have a psychologist and I have a female partner. So

I go meet psychologist and then I meet my female partner and her role is to recreate a

relationship. So I met her in a café, we talked about each other and the next sessions, we

were meeting in a special room where we were doing exercises for creating the intimacy, like touching and being naked, and the eventual goal was to have sex - with a woman. So it would create a positive experience for me. It was by encouragement of my mother. To completely take out [my homosexuality], become straight. It gave me certain hope to be like everyone else. To understand what everyone feels, and so I could feel the same, and to hide my secret and to please my mother and just to be happy and to make everyone happy. So it was stressful a bit, it was stressful.

Therapy was one of the many ways LGBT immigrants tried to fight their sexuality. Ahmed was hoping that religious practice would help him become "normal":

In the beginning I thought that my sexuality was a problem and I was fighting it. So I first thought of changing sex. Then when I realized that was ridiculous I tried to become normal; that is, heterosexual. I tried many ways. I tried religion because I thought that maybe if I just get a better relationship with god, then he will just help me go through that and maybe change me, make a miracle. I did not really think of changing as a miracle, though, it is not something that was impossible. So religion was one of the ways.

Yet another way to suppress sexuality, mentioned by numerous participants, was "trying to be straight" and dating a different sex. Elsa spoke about fighting her sexuality in order not to be an outcast:

I felt really bad, and for about a year tried to be straight still. And so I was here for a year and trying to be straight and pretending to be straight. And was like: "I would never want to be something that my friends hated," so I tried to be straight, to not be the outcast.

Participants frequently spoke about trying to have some kind of heterosexual relationships and about failed attempts, as in Jean's example:

I tried when I was a teenager. I tried to have girlfriends, you know, so I had girlfriends, but it did not work [laughs], it was not my destiny. I was completely gay.

Data analysis demonstrated that participants who perceived their sexuality as a disease and attempted to "cure" themselves had more difficulty accepting their sexuality even after immigrating to Canada and coming out. The way Ahmed put it: "I am at peace but I do not celebrate it." On the other hand, queer immigrants often felt that the struggles they had to go through made them stronger and better people. Participants often spoke about feeling liberated and comfortable with themselves now as compared to how compelled they felt to hide their sexuality from others back home. Some examples of past experiences with hiding their sexuality include: "I hide to everyone. I hide to everyone," "You know I had to find way to hide it," "I hide it from everyone," "My gay life - it was hidden, nobody, nobody knows," and "Hiding, hiding this secret - it was very, very difficult" (Philip, Fadi, Panas, Luisa, respectively). Manuel remembers having to lie in order to hide his secret:

You know that you have to hide all the time. You cannot be completely honest. You start lying when you are a kid. You start lying all the time. I had to lie all the time. You know, you learn since you are a kid.

Daw also spoke about having to lie when the "evidence" of his sexuality was found by his family members:

They saw my porn but we never talked about it. In Asia it is still not that open, as we would have hoped. And my Mom would not understand, she suspects though, she asked me when I was sixteen, seventeen: "Are you gay?" Then I felt awkward and I said: "No, Mom," and I knew I was, I knew I was telling her a lie.

As will be discussed later, many participants who used hiding as the main way of dealing with their sexuality continued to hide their sexuality even after they immigrated to Canada. To do so, they tended to avoid any type of discussions about their private life with their friends or family. Quite a few participants felt "no need to be open" with friends and family in their country of origin, as Heidi explained:

Straight people have secrets as well always. Everyone has a secret, but that we are gay - it is not that kind of a secret. So you do not need to tell your parents. I think even straight people have more secrets than the gay people. For the gay people - the only secret is that maybe you are gay, but straight people they have more secrets than gay people do. I think so.

Participants frequently spoke of putting their sexuality "on hold" prior to coming to Canada because they did not feel it would be safe for them to explore it. Sergey explained that he felt he needed to leave his country in order to live his sexuality openly:

I left because of my sexuality. I was 26 when I moved out so the time was running out and I needed to get out. I needed to live my sexuality and it was always on hold, it was on hold when I was in [a country in Eastern Europe]. You cannot do anything there.

Since the early awareness of their sexuality, many other participants also felt like staying was not an option, and felt that moving to Canada would be the best way for them to live their sexuality openly. For others, moving to another part of their country to explore sexuality was a temporary solution. Jean explained:

I had to leave my region in [a country in Western Europe] to live far from my family in order to live my own experience and to meet other guys with who I could live with my sexuality. Then I was strong enough to come back and say to my parents "Ok, I am gay."

Likewise, Sergey explained that even if he was not able to move to Canada, he would have left his hometown:

But if something would have gone wrong and I would not be able to move to Canada, if they would just bar me and say no, it would be a catastrophe. I would have survived but I would have moved to [a capital city in a country in Eastern Europe] right away. That was next step. Or at least [a large city in a country in Eastern Europe] - somewhere, bigger cities. And you could be more lost there, more privacy. … You are getting lost, nobody hears you, and nobody knows what you are doing. My family, and their friends, and my friends from school - it was just a total silence for years. They did not know what I was doing, I was not accountable to nobody, I could do what I felt like doing. You know what I mean? My life would have changed within the country, but I am happy that I am here.

Overall, it is common for LGBT immigrants to struggle with their sexuality. They often experience great difficulty accepting their sexual orientation at first and attempt to suppress it and hide it from the external world. Some participants even spoke about trying to "cure" themselves. However, despite all the challenges they faced, a few participants reported achieving some degree of acceptance of their sexual and gender orientation. The queer immigrants who spoke about being able to accept their sexual or gender orientation in their country of origin tended to use similar words to the ones Heidi used to describe it: "I just accepted myself – that is the way I am." It seems that acceptance went beyond just their sexuality and that they were accepting a defining part of their identity. For instance, Sabrina found acceptance easy because she felt it was "natural," that it was just about accepting "yourself":

Yes, it is easy because it is yourself. Who would understand yourself, just you, right? No one would understand you, just you, yourself would understand yourself … It felt natural,

it just came out like that. It is just, it just is normal, it is like normal person, you know. Whether I like it or not, it is me, just me - they cannot tell me what I am.

For Sabrina, it became easier to accept herself because she was able to gain acceptance from people around her. Her strategy was to be kind and do good things to people to win their acceptance despite their possible negative attitude towards her in the beginning:

They were ok but they did not know that I am really totally like that because they just though that I had a soft side. Because I did everything - I cooked for my family, not just me - for my brother, sister. It was ok with them but my dad hated gays. But he passed away when I was thirteen. So I came out more because before I was just afraid of my dad. Because I am the youngest son, or I am a daughter (laughs)… I felt shy because they were different and they were so manly but I was so girly, but they still accepted me though. At the school I was accepted because I did the decorations and everything, they accepted me. It was not difficult. But maybe for others it is difficult. Because all around me there were people who loved and supported me in everything. It is like give and take. You give, they take. They give, I take. They were understandable. They understood what it was like to be in my place.

For Manuel, it was the acceptance by his parents that made it easier for him to embrace his sexuality. Their acceptance felt like taking a "big burden off [his] shoulders":

I always thought that they, my dad, once he will have the confirmation [that I am gay], he will kick me out of the house. When I was fourteen, they took me to a psychologist. My dad is a very basic macho man. But my dad, he said something very interesting. He said: "I know why we are here. I do not want to say it, but I know. I would prefer if you were not like that because you are going to suffer. But if that is who you are, I will have to

accept it and love you anyway." So it took a big burden off my shoulders. I did not have

to leave. And when I was seventeen, I went to the States, as a part of an exchange student

program. Because I wanted to stay there. I was so disappointed. Because it was a very

bad place, and people were very narrow-minded. After that I went back to [a country in

Latin America], and I thought that I was liberated, I thought: "I am going to be gay." And

when I went there, and I saw my family and my friends, I could not. So I dated another

girl, and then after her I said: "This is over. I am not doing this." So I talked to my mom

and I said: "Mom, I am tired of fighting. I am like this." She agreed. She said: "Ok, this is

what you are. And live a gay life. We already tried to change things. It is not working.

This is it."

While quite a few participants managed to come to peace with their sexuality and accept

it, there were significantly fewer participants who were able to come out. Even among the

participants who spoke about being able to accept their sexual identity, for most, -being publicly

out seemed "almost impossible" as Sergey put it. Denis expressed why he would not be able to

be out:

No. I do not think so. I mean the whole concept of now living in [a liberal country in the

Middle East] is so alien that it is hard to imagine for me. But I would not be able to live

openly like I am living it here or like people could live it in normative in general. It

would be more maybe being open to some people, but mostly discrete about it, not living

openly.

For participants coming from countries where LGBT sexuality was banned, "coming out"

in general, back home or even after immigrating to Canada, often seemed impossible. Those

participants often decided to immigrate to Canada because they felt that "staying was not an

option," and that they need to be in a place where their sexuality will be accepted. However, even after their immigration to Canada these participants found it difficult to come out and took longer than other participants, most likely due to higher degrees of internalized homophobia. They often spoke of distancing themselves from people back home and making their life in Canada unknown to them as a condition for being able to be out in Canada.

However, other participants found various ways to be open about their sexuality. Heidi spoke about a rather stigmatizing but seemingly safe way to be out in his country of origin:

> You have to see a doctor. If you have to be openly gay in [a conservative country in the
>
> Middle East], you have to see a doctor. He is a special doctor in [a conservative country
>
> in the Middle East], like you, but is just for the gay people. He has to sign a paper, and
>
> you have to have hormone tests and everything, and if the other doctors sign that paper
>
> too, you can be openly gay in [a conservative country in the Middle East]. And you even
>
> can have sex change operation. And the government would support you, and they would
>
> pay for you, they would help you with sex change operation. But if you do not want to do
>
> that, you can be gay, but not in front of the government: so if they catch you during
>
> having sex, you will be hung of course. But with that card the government gives you, you
>
> are free from the military service, and you are free to dress as a woman, if you like to
>
> dress as a woman. [But I did not consider getting that paper], I do not like that. Because it
>
> is something that government says you have to do if you are gay, to make gay people
>
> different from straight people. I feel that this is the way for them to say you are different
>
> from other people. Is it like a diagnosis, it is like you have a disorder or disease, so that is
>
> why I do not like it.

Trans participants sometimes spoke about expressing their sexuality through gender non-conforming behaviours. Sabrina explained: "I expressed it by doing things like cleaning, things like that with my mom. I did not go out, instead of playing with boys, I did not play. Instead I was helping my mom doing laundry and things like that." Some participants found enough courage to be selectively out, despite all the perceived risks, where they would share their sexuality with people whom they trust. For Sergey that meant a full "realization" of being queer:

I had to be closed off completely except for my friends. My friends knew. I came out about a year before I left. And I came out earlier to one of my friends, and that was cool, and it was when I really realized fully that I am gay, this was the string of events that made me finally realize that yes I am gay. So I talked to one of my friends, because he was part of the group, so then everybody knew, I mean, my close friends. But then I could not guarantee who else they would tell. That was basically why you would not want to tell anybody, because you have no control as to what will happen afterwards.

Some participants were able to be out and find some degree of acceptance within their families. Ahmed remembers feeling judged by his sister due to her strong religious dogma, but while he felt she was against homosexuality, he did not feel she was "against [him]":

In the beginning actually I was wondering, I mean I thought that since I had the desires of a female in bed, then maybe changing sex would be the solution for me. That was the beginning. I mean this is how I felt about what I liked. And I shared this thought with my sister. I did not tell her that I wanted to, I was thinking of changing sex. That is not what I said, I just asked her what does Islam think about people changing sex. And since she knew me too well, she understood right away what I was talking about and she was the first person I ever came out to. And I have to say that nothing really changed in our

relationship, but I cannot say that she was not judgmental. No, I cannot say. She was

judgmental based on her beliefs. She was a practicing Muslim back then, she still is a

practicing Muslim right now, and her rejection came mostly from religion. She was

against the fact that I was attracted to men but she was not against me, that is the thing.

Participants also often mentioned that socio-economic status and geography within their

country played an important role when it came to their ability to be out. Yaron explained:

Do you have access to a computer where you could read about gay things, or do you live

in a city rather than live in a kind of little village or suburb, or whatever. I think that it

depends. I think that if you happen to be a middle class girl growing up in [a capital city

in a liberal state in the Middle East], it might not be that difficult. I mean, it also depends

on your family and your parents.

Finally, it is important to mention that some participants, usually from regions where

LGBT sexuality is not banned, were able to be completely out despite some discomfort.

Benjamin was one of them:

I told my parents and I told some of my cousins, and I told my friends, everyone knew.

And people at work knew that I am gay, and I kind of played with it. It was like a game

to me. You know if they asked me, I would say "yes." This was my game. And when

people asked me I told "yes," every time. And when people did not ask, I did not bother.

However, Benjamin's coming out experience was more of an exception and was made

possible by the liberal and accepting context in which he lived. For other participants, coming

out could result in rather drastic consequences, including the death penalty, as Heidi explained

earlier. Sergey felt that if his sexuality was to become publicly known, his "life would be over."

He provided an example of what happened to one person he knew once that person's sexuality became public:

> And so he was kicked out. And his career was over. And everybody knew him, I think he was drinking, I saw him a couple of times, hanging out with street kids, completely lost, completely lost, gone, destroyed forever. You know, the guy is there, but he is an outcast, but he is hanging out with drunk kids, and you can see that he was there for sex of some sorts, but it was very dark, and very sleazy dark situation, so that is what I did not want to happen to me. I did not want to look like that. That is one of the examples of how gays live in [a country in Eastern Europe] at that time. That is what I saw - if you come out, and if people know you are gay, you will not be able to work, people will not treat you right. And people will have a right to come and smack you and do whatever they want with you basically. This is a very dark, very negative image but that is the worst of the worst. The fear is that this would be my fate there.

Katrina also felt that coming out would result in the loss of one's social standing. She felt that the people who chose to come out "would just be looked down upon." Likewise, Daw said that "people would look at it strangely; people would still make fun of it." Fadi is convinced that he would be "rejected by the general community" if he were to come out. Sergey explained that he chose not to socialize with other queer people around him because it would result in a loss of his social standing: "I was not necessarily friends with these people because I did not want to be associated directly with these guys. Because for my status in the society, the less people know you are gay the better it is. I did not want to be associated with somebody who is obviously gay." Other participants reported that being open about their sexuality would result in losing their

social and professional standing. For example, Ahmed felt that the consequences of him coming

out would be "catastrophic" for his personal and professional life:

Although I tried to come out whenever I found a chance to certain people, not to

everyone, but saying that I am gay in sort of public way would be catastrophic because I

will be judged based on that. For example, at work I used to be a manager back in [a

conservative country in the Middle East], so I know that I would have some trust and

respect issues with people who reported to me, if I declared that I was gay. That is on one

level, on the other level I might even be fired from my work, I mean that is possible as

well. I know that lots of my family members would just refuse to see me or communicate

with me anymore. And especially those members who are more religious than the others.

Unfortunately I have very dear very close family members who are very religious and I

would just lose them if I tell them that I am gay or if I become publically known as gay.

So I think even though some people might deal with my homosexuality fine on a personal

level, like if I go to them and tell them that I am gay, but if I become gay openly they

would be very careful when dealing with me, they would care about what people would

think about them if they knew they were dealing with a homosexual.

For many other participants' families or communities, religion also seemed to be a

predictor of negative consequences as a response to coming out. The majority of the participants

who came from religious backgrounds continued staying discrete about their sexuality with their

family and friends back home even after coming out in Canada. For many participants the most

feared consequence of coming out (before and even after immigration) is the shame and the hurt

their coming out would cause their parents. Lily is convinced that her coming out would result in

her parents "losing face": "I do not want my parents to suffer that kind of pressure, feeling like

'How are we going to face our relatives?' … They may feel that they are shaming the entire

family."

It was common for participants to mention a total cut off from their family as a

consequence to them coming out. Previously, Yusuf explained that killing could be a family's

response to a family member coming out. He feels that in his case it would not be that "extreme"

of a reaction but that he would definitely be disowned by his family:

My mom could have a heart attack and my dad could disown me and never talk to me

again. Yeah, stuff like that. If they do not kill you, they can just disown you and tell you

to not talk to them or see them again. They do not want to keep ties with you. They do

not want to have any link with you.

Similar to Yusuf, other participants frequently believed that if their sexuality were to

become publicly known, it would hurt or even kill their parents. That is why Luisa feels that it is

unlikely for her to ever come out to her family:

The simple reason why is because of my parents. I know that to tell my mom about who I

am will absolutely silently kill her. My mother is a very religious woman. Extremely,

extremely, extremely. And I would not want to give that to my parents. That pain.

It is important to mention, however, that quite a few participants were able to find

acceptance of their sexuality among their close friends. They often spoke about friends having

difficulty understanding what their sexuality really meant, but still accepting them. This is how

Yaron described his friends' reactions to him coming out:

They were okay. They did not know what it meant. They are still my friends, to this day,

and they are childhood friends so they had this kind of acceptance that is like: "We do not

really know what this is but we accept you. This is not a big deal."

A few participants (usually the ones who came from more liberal countries) were able to come out without negative consequences. They found this experience to be very liberating, as Manuel explained:

I was very liberated. I never had a problem. You know, since the day I was out of the closet? That day I was completely free. And I never got a bad reaction. Nobody ever said anything bad to me about being gay. I was pretty liberated. When I came out, I started living my gay life and I got a lot of friends.

Jean also found the coming out experience very liberating. He felt that everything became "very easy" after he came out:

And after I said to my parents: "I am gay," everything became very easy because even if they were not very happy with that (they are very catholic) – they accepted it, so they did not close the doors of their home to me. And since I told them that I am gay, everything is very easy now. It was much easier for me to live it; I do not encounter any problems with that anymore.

4.1.4. Summary of pre-immigration experiences. This section explained that as a result of feeling "different" most participants became aware of their sexuality at a rather early age while still living in their countries of origin. However, due to the lack of resources, participants frequently reported struggling with developing an understanding of their sexuality. Quite often their cultural contexts made them perceive their sexuality as "deviant" and themselves as "abnormal." These feelings were especially true for the participants who came from more conservative religious backgrounds. Lack of social support was another major challenge faced by LGBT immigrants. In a large number of countries there is absolutely no LGBT activism or community and in some countries anything LGBT-related is illegal. These contexts made it

particularly difficult for the participants to meet other queer people. Furthermore, family and friends were in most cases not available as a source of social support. Participants often spoke about being completely rejected by their friends and disowned or even possibly murdered by their family members if their true sexuality were to ever become publicly known. Participants voiced concerns that being open about their sexuality would bring shame to the family name and that stigma would extend to their friends and distant family. These fears are probably one of the toughest challenges faced by queer immigrants, as family tends to be a constant variable influencing decisions, feeling, motivations, and actions of LGBT immigrants through all the stages of immigration and acculturation.

Furthermore, for many participants awareness of their sexual orientation was often associated with feelings of sadness or depression, expectations of not being understood and accepted by people around them, and feeling that their sexuality is a burden. Participants reported experiencing such feelings as soon as they were able to label their sexuality in terms of predominantly negative societal norms and discourses. Due to such challenges, the participants frequently felt that immigration was the only way for them to freely express their sexuality while not bringing shame to their family and friends. Moreover, feeling different and not fitting into their country's culture often resulted in movement toward a more Western orientation and disconnectedness from the home culture. The majority of participants felt they had to leave their country in order to be able to explore and live their sexuality. The next chapter will discuss the decision-making process of the LGBT immigrants in regards to immigration to Canada and the important role that intertwined sexual and cultural identities played in this process.

4.2 Decision to Immigrate to Canada

      4.2.1 "There is one place in the world for people like me." This section discusses the role that participants' perspectives towards their home culture and visions of immigration played in their decision to immigrate to Canada. For the majority of the participants, the roots of their decision to immigrate often go as far back as early childhood, to their first awareness of being different. As discussed earlier, participants often mentioned feeling different from everybody else around them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It seems that in response to their culture rejecting a major part of their identity, the participants quite often chose to reject their own culture as well. For instance, participants repeatedly mentioned not feeling connected to their culture and not relating to traditions and norms back home. Yusuf explained:

      To be honest, I always felt a bit uncomfortable, as a misfit, back in my country. Not just because I was gay, even before that, even before realizing that, I always felt myself to not be a part of that community. I know you would ask me why. It is just different values, different traditions. I would not agree with most of them. Just to give an example, the way the weddings happen, like everything that is related to weddings and all that. It did not make sense to me, everything did not make sense to me. All different stuff - that people would spend so much money on their wedding, like more than they can afford, and just in the name of traditions and to look better in the society, and stuff like that. This is just one example. I always felt that I would have been much better, and doing much better in a society like here .... When I came here, I was pretty much aware of what I was going to expect here and I do not associate myself with my community that much now. Even when I was back home, because I was always so annoyed by everything, I acted

kind of differently from everybody else. So I was getting that comment already back

home, that I am different.

The feeling of being different is often the reason why queer immigrants chose not to be in

touch with their ethnic community in Canada either, as they feel that people in their community

import values and beliefs from their countries of origin. This preservation of negative

perceptions, norms, and beliefs in regards to queer people tends to "push" LGBT immigrants

away from their community of origin. Numerous participants felt that the rejection they felt in

their ethnic communities significantly accelerated their acculturation: they believe that there is

no longer a need for them to fight for the acceptance by their community because they were

accepted and not judged by a broader Canadian society and chose to invest their energy there.

However, the participants experienced multiple challenges while trying to integrate into

Canadian society and characterised it as a "learning process." On the other hand, they found

integrating into Canadian society much easier than trying to find acceptance in their own ethnic

community. Moreover, for many participants, due to the rejection of the culture of their home

country, acculturation started even prior to their immigration. For example, participants often

spoke of being Western-oriented. For Sergey, Western culture was associated with affirmative

gay images and ability to be able to openly live his sexuality:

> So you know, all the major gay stuff in US and North America, and all this western
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> culture happened in late eighties. So when I was growing up, and I was a teenager, an
>
> early adult, seventeen years old, I was aware at a certain level that the gay culture existed
>
> in the free world. I mean I was always Western oriented, all the time. I never listened to
>
> Russian music; I was snobbish on that part. So I was very aware of that. People are free
>
> in the West, so that is why. I knew that people can be openly gay, and there was

Madonna, and there was all this crap, and gay dancers, and that. Things "gay associated" with Madonna, Pet Shop Boys and all that crap, you know. Very romantic gay images.

Yaron also spoke about the idealized images of Canada and North American culture:

I had this kind of idealization of Canada and the culture too. And [a liberal state in the Middle East] is becoming increasingly more Americanized. TV shows and the music and everything is in English. So I thought that is where things are happening. I am going to go to Canada, North America.

The participants explained that because of the desire to explore or live their sexuality, staying in their home countries was not an option. As such, the decision to immigrate often stemmed mainly from issues related to their sexual orientation. Luisa explained:

My childhood was very different from most children. I knew that I did not want to live back home the rest of my life. I knew that I wanted to get away. I knew ever since I was eight, nine, ten that my life was not going to be there, that I have something else, that I just have to find my way to get where I want to be. And that is exactly what I did … that is how I came up with the plan of leaving home. And so I did leave home, and I am grateful because here it is very different. Life is totally different, you know? You can express your sexual orientation, or whatever you feel without being as stigmatized as you probably would be at home right now. So I cannot say that the drive I had when I was younger was just because I wanted to explore my sexual orientation, I cannot say that, because at the time I just knew that there was something better for me, something else, and I just had to find my way to get there. So I do not know if I will ever know if it is because I knew that there was a better place in the world so that I can be who I wanted to be. My first sexual experience with a female was with my cousin. She lived here at the

time. She was living in Canada. And she came to visit home and that is what happened.

And I remember falling in love so deeply with her, and that the desire of being with her I

think made me even further increase the need to leave my country and I guess have that

American dream we have back home. Go to the United States. Go to Canada. At the time

my cousin was here, so I decided I want to move to Canada. And so I do not know if my

sexual orientation at the time, or what I thought it was, was responsible for my drive to

come here. I cannot say that for sure because a part of me always knew that I wanted to

leave home because something else was better. I used to think I can do better in life; I

have the potential to be better. And so, staying at home would not give me that. Because

you are expected to marry and to have two kids, and to live the life that everybody lives,

right? You are expected to do that but that is not what I wanted.

It was not uncommon for other participants to have romanticized visions of immigration

and North America. For example, similar to Sergey, Manuel was also inspired as a child by

Hollywood images of the Western world and of the acceptance that LGBT people received there.

He could not imagine his life in his country of origin and was dreaming of a life in San

Francisco:

And when I was a kid, I used to go out and I watched the sky and just wished that an

alien came and took me out of that place because I could not imagine my life. I knew I

was different. So I remember when I was a kid, I saw a movie, and they showed all these

San Francisco scenes. It was a movie with Al Pacino. And he was playing American

gigolo I think. So I watched that, and then I said: "Wow. There is one place in the world

for people like me." Since then I was always saying: "You know what? I am going to

grow up and go to the States, to San Francisco. I want to live there and I am not going to talk to my friends anymore." So I grew up with that feeling.

Mostly due to early dreams and visions of immigration, many other participants also reported romanticized visions of immigration in general and to North America in particular. Sergey discussed his visions of immigration and the conviction that he had about leaving his country ever since he was a child:

When I was growing up, I of course knew some stories of immigrants, and all these stories of Lenin in immigration. And all of these revolutionary people who were shut down, in exile. This is my information how people would live, how immigrants would survive. And then I had Limonov [a Russian writer whose 1976 novel It's Me, Eddie became famous in Russia for its obscene language and pornographic scenes], and he had this book in the seventies, he moved to New York, it was a first bestseller. It was about how he survived in New York, how he moved, how he arrived, and what he did to survive. And then he had a very notorious gay moment in that book, with this black guy or something. That was my source of information about immigrant life. And then I would read some sort of books from 1930s about Americans in Paris. Things not necessarily connected to true life, but that was my information that I was basing my visions on. I remember when I was in Soviet Union, when I was back home, we had this "World Overview" TV show, and they would show people in America. And I remember they showed once this guy, and he was living in Texas or something, he was a doctor. They were saying – look, this guy even thinks in English now, and he was there for ten years. So that was my goal, to actually change the way I think, to just integrate really… All my

youth basically in [a country in Eastern Europe] I was going to leave. And everybody

around knew that I was going to leave, that I was not going to stay there.

Overall, the data analysis demonstrated that sexual identity played an important role in

the decision to immigrate for a majority of LGBT immigrants, as will be discussed next.

4.2.2 "I came here because of my sexuality." It is important to mention that some

participants did not feel that their sexual orientation or gender identity played a dominant role in

their decision to immigrate. Some felt that they immigrated for the same reasons as other

immigrants. For example, some participants chose to come to Canada for quality education.

Others came to Canada because of its stable economy and career opportunities. Other reasons

included reconnecting with family members who immigrated to Canada as well as avoiding

military service in the country of origin. For Heidi, who decided to immigrate to avoid military

service, sexuality did not seem to play a major role - he felt that he could live a better life even as

a gay person back in his country of origin because of his knowledge of and ability to navigate the

local cultural landscape:

> Now even in [a conservative Middle Eastern country] if you are gay, you have much
>
> more fun than here. It is my home, it is my country. If you know your country, even in a
>
> closed-minded country you know how to have fun and how to find fun. We have gay
>
> parties and even though you are always underground, it is much more fun I think.

However, more than a half of participants cited sexuality as the main reason to immigrate

to Canada. For example, Sergey felt that if it was not for his sexuality, he would never have

consider immigrating, because, similar to Heidi, he feels life back home would be easier than

having to immigrate and go through all the challenges that accompany immigration:

If I were not LGBT, I would probably not be in Canada to start with. As I told you, I came here because of my sexuality. If I was a straight person, I would probably stay in [a country in Eastern Europe]. Because it is easy, you have all your language, you know your culture; you have your family and friends, infrastructure, family, circle of friends, all set for you. It is easier for you to continue with that, and go and proceed, you know what I mean? And I was LGBT from the beginning so I could not live this life the way they do unless I am not being true to myself.

For other participants, such as Yusuf, the main deciding factor for considering their potential destination for immigration was the level of LGBT tolerance and acceptance of a country: "While I was looking for potential destination for my studies, I had this thing in mind that, you know, it should be a place where I can be more at ease with my sexuality, where it is more acceptable." Quite often LGBT immigrants felt that immigrating to Canada would allow them to be themselves because their sexual orientation or gender identity would finally be accepted. Manuel said that he chose Canada because he envisioned it as a place "where I could be myself." Panas explained his decision to immigrate to Canada similarly: "I thought: 'I can, I can live my life as gay in Canada … I can be myself here.'" Many participants felt that they had to immigrate to Canada in order to be able to "live (their) sexuality." Sergey explained:

Well, I came here because I wanted to live my sexuality, this was one of the main points – that is why I wanted to move away from my country, so that was my goal, to live my sexuality freely here, and not to lie about anything possibly. I was aiming to be openly gay … I was twenty six when I moved out so the time was running out and I needed to get out. I needed to live my sexuality and it was always on hold, it was on hold when I was back home.

Some participants were not aware of Canada's acceptance of LGBT people and chose to come to Canada for quality education or career opportunities instead. However, Canada's attitude towards LGBT people was definitely a deciding factor in their decision to remain in Canada, as in Daw's example: "I was lucky because I moved here because of school. But my sexuality made me stay after. I know some people who moved here just because they wanted to be gay." Many other participants, similar to Daw, decided to immigrate to Canada after visiting it and experiencing its LGBT-friendly culture, or learning about it from their friends. Manuel felt that he could be free in Canada after visiting Toronto for the first time:

I went to visit my family in Toronto. It was in Toronto where I had my first grown-up gay sex. So then I said: "Hmm, it is not the States where I need to go. I need to come to Canada." It was a place where I could be myself. I started to see gay people being free, holding hands. So for me it was like – there is freedom here.

For Jean, it was also his first visit to Canada that made him realize that Canada would be a good place for him to live his sexuality, due to Canada's overall openness and embracement of diversity:

I discovered Montreal sixteen years ago and it was my first time when I could really live my gay sexuality, during my first trip to Montreal. So I decided that Montreal is a good place to be gay. And it is. And I also have to admit that I moved to Canada because of a boy. So it is true that if today I live in Canada, it is because I am gay, because I met a boy. But it is also because I always enjoyed Canada and Quebec. And it is true that in Montreal there is this big gay community so it is very easy to meet people and to live your sexuality and to make friends. I think that it is much easier than in other places. But it is also because Canada is an immigrant country, and as an immigrant country, it is

always much easier to meet people here than in old countries like France and other

places. So it is because of my ex-boyfriend, because it is very easy to live in the gay

community here, I think it is also because Canadian culture has a very open mind towards

everyone, gay or not.

Canada's perceived openness to diversity and equality allowed the participants to not

hide and to openly have same-sex relationships, which were also often noted by participants as

important reasons to immigrate to Canada. Ahmed spoke about the impact these factors had on

his decision to immigrate to Canada:

A big impact, actually. Although my ambition would be number one reason, my sexuality

would be number two reason for immigrating to Canada. I wanted, I always wanted a

relationship that is with no fear, without a constant fear that someone would find out,

without the constant fear that we are doing something against the law by just being

ourselves, and I wanted someone that I could build a life with, and that would be

impossible in [a conservative country in the Middle East]. So that is, I would say with

confidence, that this is the number two reason.

Thus, many participants saw immigration to Canada as a ticket to live their sexuality

without suffering. For Manuel, immigration was a way to prove to his parents that such was

possible:

I knew since I was a kid - I knew that to be independent, I had to leave … I needed to

show my parents, that yes, I could be happy. I could be so happy. And I could be

successful. Because my dad, he did not want me to be gay because I was going to suffer,

according to his standards. So I had something to prove, I guess, since I was a kid. That I

could be happy even though I was gay.

Overall, sexual orientation and gender identity were predominantly the main factor in the LGBT immigrants' decision to come to and stay in Canada. For participants coming from countries where LGBT sexuality is illegal, immigrating to Canada was a way to avoid harassment and possible persecution for being LGBT. For a vast majority of participants, coming to Canada was a way to avoid the pressures of heterosexism and oppression. They came to Canada to live their sexuality openly and to become citizens with the right to freely express their sexuality without a need to hide and suppress an important part of themselves. Thus, at this stage of the acculturation process, sexual identity often played a more dominant role in the lives of LGBT immigrants compared to their cultural identity. Furthermore, the role that LGBT sexuality played in the lives of immigrants did not end at the decision to immigrate to Canada. As will be discussed in the following chapter, sexuality was also responsible for an overall different life trajectory for LGBT immigrants as compared to other immigrants from their country, including accelerated acculturation outcomes.

4.3 After Immigration to Canada

4.3.1 "Culturally I am half-half." In this section I discuss the evolution of participants' cultural identity following immigration. Many LGBT immigrants avoid any contact with their community of origin whatsoever upon their arrival in order to avoid rejection and stigmatization on the basis of their sexuality. As a result, they often have to integrate into the broader Canadian society immediately after immigration. Naturally, a lot of LGBT immigrants turn to the LGBT community for support. However, language and cultural barriers, as well as racism inside mainstream LGBT groups, often prevent LGBT immigrants from smoothly integrating into the local LGBT community. Thus, due to such challenges and rapid exposure to Canadian culture, LGBT immigrants often experienced significantly stronger culture shock when they first

immigrate to Canada. Such was the case with Sergey, who, after spending a short time in his community of origin, felt that he would not be able to be open about his sexuality for the same reasons as in his country of origin. He experienced a strong culture shock when he attempted to integrate into the broader Canadian society. Sergey explained that the experience left him feeling lost and helpless:

When I moved here, it was as if I had a shock. It was a cultural shock. In my case it manifested itself this way - I was lost, I did not know what to do, I did not know how to react, as if I was born again. As if I was brought to an early stage of life where I had to learn how to communicate as a toddler. I had to learn everything again, this is how it felt … At the first stage of immigration I realized that my upbringing is very different from people who grew up in Canada. We did not have the same reference points at all. You know, I did not have the same points of reference … TV shows, cartoons, the books that they read, our reference points were completely different.

Perhaps due to the inability to get support from their community of origin, along with culture shock and the realization of how culturally different they were from Canadians, LGBT immigrants felt a strong pressure to integrate into Canadian society. Luisa believes that her successful integration in Canada was a result of her conscious effort to become a part of Canadian culture. In fact, she made it her first goal upon arrival to Canada:

I think that the number one goal when I came here was to learn English and to integrate into this culture. That was my number one goal. And I think that the decisions and choices I made in my life helped me become integrated very well here.

For many participants it took quite a while to feel fully integrated. Lily, who at the time of the interview had lived less than one year in Canada, shared her experience. Similar to other

participants, she also felt she has to integrate into Canadian society because she did not feel

welcomed in her ethnic community. However, despite her strong efforts to integrate, she still

feels rejected from time to time:

> I try hard. I am wondering if you had this similar feeling when you first arrived here.
>
> Maybe because I try hard, I have a very strong feeling that I am not getting a very
>
> positive response. Or I did not get the responses that I wish I could get. Maybe I do not
>
> try to avoid feeling rejected; I will not feel rejected if I do not try. But the thing is that I
>
> try very hard, so when I feel rejected it is hard. I try to integrate, try to put myself, fit
>
> myself into this society.

Similar to Lily, Sergey also discussed the strong feeling of having to integrate, but he

found it rather challenging due to the cultural gap between himself and Canadians. However, in a

few years he felt integrated and accepted in Canadian society as a result of acting on that feeling.

He attributed his successful integration to attempts to open his mind to the Canadian culture and

not questioning it, but rather experiencing it, even going as far as thinking like Canadians:

> When I moved, I had this idea that I have to integrate myself … I spent some time with
>
> [Eastern European country] guys when I moved here, but they were really young. I was
>
> twenty six, and they were eighteen. The first summer that I was here I hung out with
>
> these straight guys, but they were fighting people on the street so I realized - I do not
>
> want to be in touch with these guys. My desire was to integrate, to understand, to kind of
>
> get to know the life here. Not necessarily the life, but the way the mentality works … So
>
> that was my goal, to actually think, to change the way I think, to just integrate really. I
>
> wanted to know not necessarily why - because lots of people, immigrants here, they tend
>
> to say: "Oh, the local people here, they are stupid, look at these Quebecois, they are so

dumb look at their school system." All this trashing going on, lots of it. And I was, I tried

to refrain from that because that is seeing things from your own perspective, that is not

the truth, that is what you prefer to see, but that is not necessarily the reality. I wanted to

understand, I wanted to know how people think here, what is their reasoning basically… I

felt some sort of need to know the part that I did not know. And I knew that I will never

be able to get that because I am not going to become a kid again to watch all these shows

that they watched, so I can talk to them on the same level. But I was aware that at certain

level I need to know that.

The feeling of having to integrate into Canadian society, as in Sergey's example, was

expressed by many other participants. These were usually participants who, similar to Sergey,

always felt disconnected from their home culture (often as a response to the home culture's

rejection of their sexual orientation or gender identity), even prior to immigration, and who felt

that their culture's values and traditions do not appeal to them. Philip also spoke of feeling like

he had to adapt. While he in general did not feel that the differences between his culture and the

Canadian culture were that significant, he still had to go through a certain learning curve. Similar

to Sergey, in order to fit in, Philip tried to understand the cognitive mechanism behind non-

intuitive Canadian behaviours:

There are differences, but I try to adapt. But for me it takes a little bit more time just

because I have to know the reason why people act in a certain way … I have to adapt. I

have to adapt but it is a small adaptation. For me it takes time because in order to adapt I

want to know what is the reason for certain behaviours of Canadians. And it is normal.

After I find out an explanation for this, I am comfortable. I will keep my opinion if I

disagree but I will adjust my behaviour, I will make it comfortable, I will make it

acceptable for Canadians. So definitely I have to adapt … Sometimes I cannot say things that I could back home because this could cause an uncomfortable situation. It happened to me a few times. Sometimes I would make a joke that is acceptable back home – sometimes it is not even the question of it being acceptable or not – just relevant in the context of my country. So even if you tell it to Canadians, they are not really able to understand it. There are two parts: sometimes your translation is not good, and sometimes Canadians, because they have not been exposed to my culture, they are not able to understand that joke. And there are few things that you have to adjust to, certain behaviours, but they are small for me. They are really not significant. For example, in my country, or in Europe, when you go to a bus, you never line up. You just stand next to the door, when the door opens, you get in. And in Canada, even sometimes there are three people in front of the stop waiting for the bus, the bus is empty, but you still wait for the person who was in the bus stop first to get into the bus first. In my country, in Europe, it does not make sense because usually in my country you do not have to enter from the first door. Here it is different because you have to enter through the first door and the first door is small, so it makes sense to have a line up. In Europe, it does not make sense to have a line up. So here sometimes when I just came to the country, I just went in front of the line. I did not realize that there was a line up. But these are small things .... There is nothing really that significant.

Similar to Philip, many participants felt they had to adjust their behaviours and the way they express themselves in order to fit into Canadian society. Yaron spoke about changing his language and the many other ways in which he tried to be Canadian. He felt as if he had to reject his culture of origin in order to become a part of the Canadian LGBT community:

I was very good at being Canadian, and I was very good at changing my language, and then going to university and being with people my age group, and then becoming queer. I became part of the small community that is pretty tight in a way. And so at first that felt good because I wanted to reject something, and I wanted something new, and I wanted to be queer, and I wanted to be gay, and I wanted to have sex, and those things were happening for me.

Other participants also often spoke about feeling as if they had to shed all the cultural notions of their home country and rebuild their cultural identity gradually. Some degree of rejection of their home culture was often mentioned by participants as their way to acculturate into Canadian society. Sergey explained:

I kind of shed a lot of information and I built it back gradually, over five or seven years, that is what happened really. I shed all my [Eastern European country] notions; I did not see them as the temple that cannot be touched. I used maybe some of my notions but I was learning basically everything from people from here. It is not something that I thought of. It is something that I acted out, this is something that I did without being conscious about.

Yusuf felt that he had to "lose" his traditions and the way he lived for most of his life in order to properly integrate. He made a conscious effort to distance himself from his home culture and to integrate into Canadian society:

So that was my own decision to keep my distance from the community and make myself more integrated or make myself more involved with the local community. That of course takes some time. To make new friends, to lose your traditions and the way you live for over twenty years and start something new. It is a learning process, it takes some time.

Overall, the conscious decision to integrate into Canadian society was often associated with a full disconnect from the community of origin for many participants. Instead of connecting to their community of origin, they reported building a diverse circle of friends and making a conscious effort to understand the Canadian culture, quite often through involvement in the LGBT community, as will be discussed later. It is important to mention that after spending a certain amount of time in Canada and reaching a certain level of acculturation, participants experienced a desire to reintroduce their home culture back into their lives. Yaron, who was quoted earlier talking about rejecting his culture, spoke about missing it after some time in Canada, and thinking about ways to integrate it back into his life:

For the past two years, I have been going through a kind of new phase in this process. Suddenly I feel like I miss certain things in [liberal state in the Middle East], and [people from the liberal state in the Middle East], and being [a person from the liberal state in the Middle East], and I miss speaking [the language of the liberal state in the Middle East], and I miss how my personality is different when I speak [the language of the liberal state in the Middle East] a little bit. Something is different. Language changes the way that we perceive things.... I have had really forming experiences here as queer and gay person in early twenties, but also as a young child living here when I was really young. But then now there is a part of me that misses home, that I feel like I am doing a lot of work of forgiving and coming to terms with some of the trauma I had back home and realizing things that I like about myself that are connected to my culture, and wanting to be closer to my family. I do not have family here at all. Everyone lives in [the liberal state in the Middle East]. So, it is harder for me to feel completely at home here. I think. My aunt is back home, like people that for better or for worse have influenced my life heavily …

there are not a lot of [people from the liberal state in the Middle East] here that are part of

my community. And definitely not queer [people from the liberal state in the Middle

East].

Similar to Yaron, Sergey also spoke of rejecting his home culture and feeling like he had

to shed all the notions from his country in order to acculturate in Canada. Years later, however,

he experienced a feeling similar to Yaron's - he wanted to reincorporate aspects of his home

culture back into his life, and he feels that now he is able to integrate both:

What happened actually .... It was not nostalgia, but it was interest to go back to what is

mine. When I was comfortable enough in English and French, at that point I thought -

now I can go back to [language in the Eastern European country], and I can maybe start

reading in [language in the Eastern European country], you know. Because now I can

read books in English, French, and [language in the Eastern European country], so it is

not a problem. But at certain point obviously it was easier reading in [language in the

Eastern European country]. I do not know why I did it then, but now I am at ease with all

three languages, or two cultures basically.

However, not all the participants were able to reconcile both cultures and be at ease with

both. For some, Canadian values and system of beliefs are so counterintuitive that even after

spending many years in Canada and fully acculturating, they still feel closer to their home

culture. For example, Sofia, who came to Canada as a very young child, and who grew up here,

still feels closer to her home culture because she believes that her upbringing and values make

her dramatically different from Canadians:

While I can totally blend in with Canadians and with people around me, I do not feel that

we share the same system of beliefs or that we share the same background at all.

Obviously I have a lot more in common with a [Eastern European country] person than I have with a Canadian person … For example, in terms of my childhood … I did not have access to a lot of things that people of my generation who grew up here had access to. So I think people here are very privileged, which is not a bad thing but people also have a sense of entitlement to everything. They have a right to everything pretty much. Because they do not always have to struggle for everything, people do not develop coping skills in the same way. I find people can be very fragile and they can make an issue out of something that is really not that big of a deal. I do not mean interpersonal relationships because everyone approaches that differently but just like in day to day life. For [Eastern European country] people some stuff you do not really think about, those little difficulties you encounter every single day, so you do not stop to think about them anymore - just deal with them and keep going. But here people are so not used to dealing with difficulties that when they are faced with the smallest one, for them it is like a mountain and something insurmountable. And people bitch about that and this - it is not the end of the world. And people do not understand that people from other countries or other cultures do not have access to everything; do not have as many opportunities. And people here, when they do not get something, they get really pissed off and it is like: "Do you even realize there are people that do not even have half of what you have, and you do not get something that you want and you get really upset about that?" People do not feel like they should not struggle so much and that everything should be handed to them… People have that sense of entitlement. That is not part of my system of values at all so of course when I encounter people and I am faced with that argument, I am not even going to go there because I will never agree with you on this topic.

Other participants also spoke about feeling closer to their home culture because they believe that their character and cultural affiliations were formed during childhood. Panas expressed it as "I still do things in a [Eastern European country] manner, and I am thinking like a [person from Eastern European country]." European participants, especially the ones from Western Europe, tended to feel more affiliated with their culture of origin than Canadian culture, compared to other participants. Data analysis suggests that because there is less oppression or discrimination in their countries, there was less of a need for them to reject their culture in order to be able to accept their sexuality. Quite often they are very proud of their country of origin and reported taking pride in continuing to self-identity in terms of their culture of origin. Elsa explained:

The European culture, I always make a joke to my friends that I believe the Canadian culture is pretty much the American culture because to me as a European there are so many similarities. That of course is offensive to Canadians because they always consider that the Americans are so much worse in so many aspects but the political system here is slightly more American in my point of view. I mean the effects of the American political system on the community of politics are very strong compared to their effects on German or French politics. So by that I like to differentiate myself and say - no I am European, not Canadian, and I am a part of the European culture. Here in Canada, even though my friends are part of the LGBT community for instance, all my friends speak English and most of my friends are not even Quebecois, they are from other parts of Canada. So I guess all together all my friends and I, we do not feel particularly Quebecois, we are not in Quebec. Right now we live in Montreal but in a couple of years we might move somewhere else and so we do not have a relationship to Canada really. We use the LGBT

community but that is all the connection we have … I like to let people know that I am

European. So I guess that entails that I really do not want to be North American or

Canadian in a way, if that makes sense.

Participants who reported being closer to their culture of origin in most cases reported

having friends predominantly from their country or culture of origin. They felt that they could

connect best and share more in common with immigrants from their region. Quite often, as in

Elsa's case, their biggest exposure to Canadian culture is through the LGBT community. For

Sofia, who earlier spoke about not feeling connected to the Canadian culture, her best friends are

still the ones who were in her life as she was a child back in her country of origin, despite living

in Canada for most of her life:

> It is funny - some of my closest friends are from [large city in Asian part of former Soviet
>
> Union]. My friend came here in 1994, his parents came here and actually they kind of
>
> encouraged us also to apply for immigration here. So then we came here. They kind of
>
> invited some more friends to come, and we also invited some friends, so we have this
>
> whole little community from [large city in Asian part of former Soviet Union] that one by
>
> one kind of got transplanted here. Mostly all our parents either went to university
>
> together or worked together so it's people who have literally known each other for more
>
> than half their lives at this point. And for me - some of them I have known since we were
>
> kids back in [large city in Asian part of former Soviet Union]. And some I did not know
>
> back there, I only met them here, but our parents were friends, so I kind of grew up
>
> around them and some of these people are my friends till this day. Amongst other close
>
> friends that I have - I said I have some Russian friends that are not from [large city in

Asian part of former Soviet Union], for example from Moscow, Ukraine, Belarus, like

other people of Russian background.

Many LGBT immigrants, when the opportunity is present, seek out and surround

themselves with other LGBT immigrants from their country. Doing so allows them to avoid the

culture shock that is quite often experienced by LGBT immigrants as they integrate into queer

community in Canada, as will be discussed later. For instance, Heidi, who spoke about spending

a lot of time in the gay village, noted that the majority of his LGBT friends are people from his

country of origin:

> I am actually always there with my friends; with my [conservative country in the Middle
>
> East] friends .... I have other, like Quebecois gay friends, from other communities as
>
> well. But compared to my [conservative country in the Middle East] friends – [people
>
> from conservative country in the Middle East] are definitely a majority.

In fact, for many LGBT immigrants there was little choice in deciding in which

community they originally settled. Frequently they join their friends or family who immigrated

earlier, and naturally these are the first friendships they form upon their arrival. Ahmed spoke

about finding himself surrounded mainly by people from his country, which was not his

intention, and not feeling satisfied with his current situation:

> I have lots of [conservative country in the Middle East] friends here, but it was a
>
> coincidence for me, it just happened. It was not my plan to get involved only with
>
> [conservative country in the Middle East] community when I get here. The fact that most
>
> of my friends are [people from conservative country in the Middle East], that is a fact that
>
> I am not, I have to say, not really happy with. It is not because I am not proud of where I
>
> am from, or I have a problem with them. I mean, they are great people and I am glad to

have them in my life but the thing that I do not want to happen is to cross the ocean and come to a new country and then experience the same life I had before. I want people to inspire me, I want people to show me life in different point of views and that is why I care to meet people from different cultures … One of the things that I always appreciated about moving to a multicultural society like Montreal is the fact that you can meet different cultures and add to this culture as well. I would identify myself as a [person from a conservative ethnic community in the Middle East], but I would not really limit myself to this [conservative ethnic community in the Middle East] community here. I would be always keen on contacting and communicating with other cultures. My main point is that it is one of the beauties of changing countries: there would be no point of staying in the same culture after crossing the ocean. It would not make sense for me to just experience the same thing, the same lifestyle that I used to have when I was back home. That is not really what I was after when I was coming here.

Ahmed felt that the ability to learn about other cultures and meet a diverse circle of friends was one of the main benefits of immigration. It was common for other LGBT immigrants to speak about being culturally curious and open to learning about and experiencing Canadian culture. There were hardly any participants who did not discuss how much they enjoyed getting to know other cultures and meeting people from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Frequently, the participants see the opportunity to interact with other people and learn about other cultures as a means of integrating into Canadian society, which is quite often the objective for many LGBT immigrants, as was discussed earlier. Similar to Ahmed, Daw also spoke about how important it is for him to be able to learn from other people. He feels he is not connecting

with people from his region as much because he does not feel he can learn as much from them as from people from other cultures:

> I have some Asian friends too, but I for some reason do not make connections with them. I think it is just because I do not learn anything from them, so I do not care to talk to them … I have to be able to learn something from you. I have to be able to learn something new and you need to excite me to discover more about your culture. What is important to you, something that would shock me, something different? And usually I like to learn, I like to date guys from different ethnic backgrounds. I do not mind dating Asian guys, but when I talk to them I want to be able to learn something new, to be challenged intellectually. It sounds silly but for instance my first boyfriend is from Newfoundland. Christmas to him was such a big deal, to me Christmas is Christmas. Like in [East Asian country] I am Buddhist, we have Christmas there but it is just decoration, and gift stuff, but to him it just was a whole other dimension. And I was confused and amused at the same time, how far he was willing to go for Christmas, like what it means. Something that I have learned and it amused me. And how they managed money - it surprised me that you live on credit really.

Similar to Daw, many other participants spoke about having more friends from other cultures than from their own culture. For example, Yusuf put it as: "I am friends with more non-[country in South Asia] people than [country in South Asia] people." In general, participants exhibited a strong curiosity and openness to cultural diversity. Quite often the LGBT community provided them with the opportunity to encounter people from other cultures who they would not meet otherwise. Based on data analysis, it was clear that openness to other cultures is often expressed and enhanced through casual sexual encounters, especially among gay men. Despite

the fact that most of his close friends are from his country of origin, Heidi is open to meeting

men from different cultures, and uses every encounter as means to learn more about other

cultures:

> I am so open to everything. I am an open-minded guy. I am not closed to anything, I am
>
> really open, and I accept everything really. Europeans are so open-minded so that is why
>
> I think I am so open. And every time I sleep with somebody, I learn: "It is your thing – it
>
> is cool, it is nice." Most people are not as open … My friends told me: "You are open to
>
> everyone; you are always welcoming everyone in your life…"

Again and again, the LGBT immigrants spoke about their openness towards people from

other cultures, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background. This flexibility and openness in

terms of interacting with people from other cultures often helped to facilitate their integration

into Canadian society. Fadi explained:

> And I love everyone from every culture as long as they have the tendency to see things
>
> from another perspective … Even within a cultural setting you can have such a diverse
>
> group of people. I mean you have from the most conservative to the most liberal. I feel
>
> like I am able just to adapt to all kinds of people depending on the situation, not at all
>
> related to my culture … I have a Libyan friend, I have a Canadian friend, I have a French
>
> friend, I have a Mauritian friend, I have a Lebanese friend. I mean, these are the first five
>
> people that came to my head, really I do not care about ethnicity or culture, it comes
>
> down to your mental state.

Similar to Fadi, many LGBT immigrants spoke about the culture or ethnic background of

people being irrelevant when it came to their friendships. It seems that for most immigrants, the

more time they spent in Canada, the less important it became to share similar ethnic or cultural

backgrounds in order to establish connections with people. Sergey explained: "Now there is less and less importance, if I see somebody who is Russian - so what? It is not necessarily that we all have things in common, maybe, maybe not, I do not know."

Sabrina described her circle of friends as "United Colours of Benetton." Many other participants repeatedly used the terms such as "from everywhere," "from all over the world," "from all over the place," and "it is very diverse." Participants often attributed their diverse group of friends to being a part of the LGBT community, implying that such would not be the case if they were not queer. In fact, Jean feels that this diversity is actually characteristic of the LGBT community:

> Yeah, some of them are French, some of them are European, some of them are Quebecois, and some of them are Canadian. And it is something I like. It is a big mix of people. All of them come from different places, and different countries. It is a characteristic of the gay community I guess.

Interestingly, many participants mentioned that while their circle of friends is very diverse, quite often it is mostly comprised of immigrants. This is how Philip described his group of friends:

> I would say most of them are immigrants. Some of them are recent immigrants. But my friends are pretty much from all over the world. I have friends of different backgrounds - Vietnamese, Canadian, Bulgarian, Polish, Lebanese ....

This exposure to diversity that most LGBT immigrants experience in their circle of friends, and in queer community in general, often leads them to describe themselves as "a mix of a few cultures." Heidi believes that he cannot be described as either a person from his country or as a Canadian because he tends to constantly mix both cultures:

With the culture, I am half [conservative country in the Middle East] I think. My culture

is mixed. For [a person from conservative country in the Middle East], I am so open to

everything. Sometimes my mom says: "You should not do certain things because you are

[a person from conservative country in the Middle East]. What should I say to other

people?" But I never have the problem with that because I never care about other people.

I think culturally I am half-half. I am not Canadian, I cannot say that. I am an open

minded guy, I do not believe that I am [a person from conservative country in the Middle

East] or Canadian, I am an open minded guy … I mix cultures everywhere, I am not more

[a person from conservative country in the Middle East] or more Canadian.

Most other participants, similar to Heidi, feel that after living in Canada for some time,

they became truly a mix of both cultures: the one in which they grew up and the one in which

they live now. Jean described how different parts of his cultural identity manifest themselves in

his day to day life:

I say now that I am an occidental. I am not very French, neither am I European. I am

occidental. I am a French-speaking occidental. I am French because I grew up in France

but I am really European for a lot of points of my personality. But it is because I live here

and I really understand the Quebecois culture. So there is something North American in

me a little. So now I say I am occidental … I think, for example, for food I am really

French, almost completely French I would say. But for my vision of the economy, I am

more North American. If I think of the culture itself, I am more European. Because I

really do not like French music or everything that is French … I do not like it. So I take

some parts from everywhere. It depends not of the moment; it depends on what I do.

The queer immigrants often spoke about being able to pick and choose from every culture that comprises their cultural identity. Katrina explained how some aspects of her home culture appeal to her more than the Canadian culture, and vice-versa:

> I am influenced by both Canadian and [Eastern European country]. I combine them. I mean I find aspects of the [Eastern European country] culture that I can relate to. But there are aspects I disagree with, that I find in the Canadian culture and that suit me better, or that follow closer to my belief system.

It is important to mention that many participants who feel they are a mix of a few cultures still spoke about the importance that their culture of origin plays in their cultural identity today. Ahmed, who self-identifies as a mix of cultures still described himself as "predominantly [person from a conservative country in the Middle East] in many aspects of my life." Panas laughed saying: "I think I am always more [country in Eastern Europe] in all kinds of situations." On the other hand, Philip self-identifies as Canadian whose origin is Eastern European:

> I am [a person from Eastern European country], but since my work is in Canada, since I have been here for eight years, if I have to answer the question "What is your hometown?" not in sense of where I was born and not what is my background, I would say Montreal because I keep in touch with people who live in Montreal, I work in Montreal, so I am related way more to Montreal than to my hometown in [Eastern European country]. So in this sense, I will define myself as Canadian, but of course my background, my education, my cultural values, my perceptions, everything - this was all built in [Eastern European country]. So, I am trying to adapt, but at the same time, I cannot dramatically change, because I want to keep my [Eastern European country] language, my relationship with the country where I was born. But I realize that now I am

in Canada. I work here - I am a part of the Canadian society. So I really feel myself like a

Canadian whose origin is [Eastern European country].

In fact, there were a few participants who, similarly to Philip, felt they were more

Canadian in terms of their self-identification. Denis lived in two countries prior to his

immigration to Canada. Still, he feels Canadian because he feels that the Canadian society

reflects more of who he is, compared to the two other countries that are also a strong part of his

background:

I would say Canadian, Canadian or even, even more and more Quebecois. I felt that quite

early, that I am more comfortable here, this society reflects more of who I am than either

the [Eastern European country] or the [liberal Middle Eastern country] society. If I had to

choose between [liberal Middle Eastern country] and [Eastern European country],

probably I would say [Eastern European country] I feel closest to. But still, I am, I do not

feel [a person from the Eastern European country], I do not feel [a person from liberal

Middle Eastern country], but I do feel Canadian. It happened quite early in the process, I

mean, after a few years in Canada I felt like "yeah, this is my place."

Sergey spoke about feeling more Canadian because Canada's values were more

appealing. He explained that whenever he is faced with a moral dilemma, Canadian values would

definitely prevail in his decision making:

I mean, I understand to certain degree now – even though it has been a while since I

moved, since I left - the way people look at things in my country of origin. If you go

there - the life is very different. The cleanliness and everything is so sterilized here, and it

is more like a rough reality there. I have that part in me too, that I can work around that

and adapt to the mentality back home if I have to, but at the same time, I am used to

being honest, or for example, leave my bike outside. Things that you do not do in my

country of origin, for example, leave your door open when you go somewhere, just not

locking it. I would do it here because it is possible, my boyfriend does it, but I would

never do it there. I find myself adhering more to values of Canada, and in the case where

there is an incompatibility between how these things are perceived here and in my

country, if it is different - I am on this side. I am not identifying myself anymore with the

old ways. If it is a clash, you know …. Yes, more with Canadian values, whatever

Canadian values are.

Like Sergey, most of the participants who self-identify as more Canadian than their home

culture often spoke about their values not being aligned with the values back in their country of

origin. The majority of participants spoke about various things they do not like about life back

home and noted that they would never consider returning to their country of origin. Most

participants reported feeling more comfortable and accepted in Canada, especially in light of

their sexuality. For many LGBT immigrants it was the first time that their sexual identity was

accepted by the society in which they live. With sexuality continuing to play a dominant part in

LGBT immigrants' identity development, they often perceived the challenges associated with

acculturation as worth it in order to live their sexuality. Daw was one of the very few participants

who was somewhat open to going back to his country due to his career orientation, but even in

his case it seemed unlikely:

I do not see myself living in [East Asian country] anymore because … I just cannot live a

certain lifestyle. It is not just being gay, it is everything together - the personal space is

very close in [East Asian country], you do not have personal space, your privacy does not

exist. And even if I am approaching thirty, my mom will still not going to allow me to go

out at night [laughs], and go to a bar. She still would not let me. It is a lifestyle, not just

being gay itself, it is my freedom … So it is this lifestyle that I have to keep up. And the

things I eat have changed, like it is not just [East Asian country] food anymore, and I do

not have friends in [East Asian country]. And in terms of professional development,

which to me the most important thing in life, in the field where I am, I cannot transfer it

to [East Asian country]. And I am not going to work there - you get paid like nothing

there, unless you own a company. I would consider going back if I owned a business. But

I would not work for a company in [East Asian country]. Because of their work ethics -

they work six days a week and they are not efficient. I worked there in the summer, and

they are not very efficient. But they work long hours, and that is the norm, and I worked

on Saturdays. In terms of productivity, you get even more here, but over there that is

what they do and they get paid like nothing. They do not have a life, so, unless I own a

business, I would never consider going back. But now at this point in time – it is better

here, in terms of professional development … Culturally, I am half and half at this point

anyway. I used to be more [a person from an East Asian country], now it is more

Canadian than anything else. Because I lived here so long, I do not interact a lot with my

community of origin .... Also, when I graduated, I might have gone back right away, but

just the fact that you can be openly gay here is what is holding me here.

The multiple parts that comprise the LGBT immigrants' cultural identity sometimes clash

with one another making them feel torn between their home culture and Canadian culture. Fadi

described this feeling as: "I definitely feel caught, it is actually a great word for the feeling. I

cannot explain it necessarily but to answer your question - yes I do feel caught." Luisa spoke

about having to manage a few separate groups of friends because of how difficult it can be to bring them together due to cultural differences:

> There are a few occasions where my friends tell me: "Oh, I do not want to go because your friends always speak Spanish." You know, when you are surrounded by a lot of Spanish-speaking people, we have a tendency to always speak in Spanish. So I now know that. I do have my groups - like this is English group, and this is my Canadian group, and this is my Spanish group. And sometimes we mix, but when it comes to the reality of it, yes, I think that we have groups. I do not feel like I have to choose between these groups but I think different people think differently, and sometimes it has happened that friends are so different from each other that you do not really want to mix them. It is a bad combination sometimes. You know, they do not get along, or they judge each other, unnecessary things.

The queer part of the cultural identity made it even more challenging for LGBT immigrants to navigate and keep in harmony various parts of their identity. Some participants felt that while their sexual orientation and gender identity were accepted in the queer community, they often would have difficulties being accepted in terms of their cultural identity. This seemed to be the case especially for individuals who were more comfortable with their sexuality prior to immigration. Unlike many other immigrants for whom sexual identity exploration was a pressing priority, such participants had already dealt with sexual orientation issues to a certain degree and were more attuned to other parts of their identity, which often became challenging when dealing with the queer community. For Yaron, it was the political situation in the region where his country is located that made it difficult for him to feel accepted in the queer community in Canada due to an implicit set of values that comes with being "a radical queer." He explained:

So there were really amazing things about discovering this queer community here … So on one hand I suddenly found a community that I felt part of because I was queer and because I was gay and here is a community that is queer and gay …. Suddenly all of these feelings I had when I was young - they received context, a name. Another part of me was like: "OK, I am queer and I am gay but I am also [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East]." So that part of me did not have a place, I did not feel like I had a lot of place as the [person from a liberal country in the Middle East] in that community. I did not know how to express my experience. Like how I fit in, like how my experience could be something that could be utilized. That could be an asset. Coming from a small town and being [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East] and doing political work in that sense. I could not find … I still cannot find my place here … I feel a little bit more critical about Canadian culture. Or of what I have experienced of Canadian culture. Like kind of Anglophone Montreal. Canada is huge. But I feel like at times the way I express myself is kind of … I think people frown upon it a little bit, like I am a little bit too much in your face, like too abrupt or too passionate, words that are usually kind of used to describe Mediterranean people. So I have also kind of experienced a bit of rejection in that sense. I have felt accepted because I am trans and I have received a lot of support here in terms of my transness, but not a lot of support for being [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East] … So to be radically queer here means you have to be Pro-Palestinian, maybe a vegetarian … there are always these things that I was not expecting. That are kind of part of a membership club or something. And that was surprising to me. And I am still not able to understand … I cannot really find myself in that. I feel like a bit of an oddball in that. I have always felt like a bit of an oddball. I have always been the

odd one, out of it a little bit, the way I talk, the fact that I am a [person from a liberal

country in the Middle East]. Every time there is a war in Ghaza, people immediately ask

me what I think. And if I do not say how pro-Palestinian I am … and it is

funny…because in [the liberal country in the Middle East], I was so radical…but I feel

like here I need to prove to people that I am a good [person from a liberal country in the

Middle East] because I did not go to the army, and because I was so politically involved

and because I am so pro-Palestinian. But in fact, it is more complicated than that. I am

pro-Israeli as well, I just think that as a [person from a liberal country in the Middle

East], it is really important to be critical of your government and of your culture. And

mostly I care about what is happening in Palestine because I am a human, but also

because I have experienced on my flesh what happens to people and to a culture in

general that promotes that kind of oppression. Like there is just a lot of self-oppression

happening. There is a lot of this kind of decay from within, people losing their humanity

in a sense … So I feel very caught here between radical, political communities here, and

my cultural identity, and then back home I am caught between my cultural identity and

my politics as well. In a different way because in [a liberal country in the Middle East],

you got to be right wing or you better shut up. There is a community of radical people in

[a liberal country in the Middle East] but it is hard to be a leftie, like being a leftie in [a

liberal country in the Middle East] is a curse word. Like no one wants to claim they are a

leftie anymore in the political map. Like everyone is either center or right. So I just

constantly feel caught, you know? … Sometimes I feel very schizophrenic in that way. I

could go to a party, a queer party, and suddenly I fit in so well or something. I am queer

and my English is perfect and I have had experiences. And I have had over five years

here now. So I am not new. I know a lot of people in the community and I have gone to

university and I have done some studies here, and I live in a neighborhood that is pretty

queer too …. So sometimes I feel like: "Wow I am so Canadian in that way. And

sometimes, especially when I hang out with my [liberal country in the Middle East]

friends, I kind of get this slap of reality. We speak [the language of a liberal country in

the Middle East], and suddenly we speak of things I am so passionate about, and it is

usually politics, and the situation back home, and how we do not feel part of here. So

suddenly I feel this kind of very [person from the liberal country in the Middle East]

because I do not fit in, in some ways. It is hard for me to encompass both things I have

had experiences of being both [a person from the liberal country in the Middle East] and

Canadian, and now because of the language thing, and because of all my experiences here

of being queer and trans and all of these formative things I have gone through here, I am

very much this *melange* of things. But it is still hard for me to see that completely

working harmoniously. I still feel a bit torn between different cultures and environments,

and it is very dependent on the context.

Unlike Yaron, there were a few participants who did not feel caught between the cultures.

The majority of these participants came from non-religious backgrounds and from countries

where the culture was not as dominant. While Denis admitted that sometimes he consciously

adjusts his behavioural expressions to respect certain cultural norms and traditions, he does not

experience the internal discomfort of having to choose between the cultures. In fact, he feels he

did not have to change or adjust all that much when he came to Canada:

No, I do not think so. I think it is this sort of blend, or I probably pick up a few

behaviours from here and there. No, I do not think so. I do not think I behave differently

…. Except, for example, when I would not do certain things or I would do certain things because I am in [a liberal country in the Middle East] society. I know that people do things there in a certain manner. Like when you greet somebody, you first ask "How are you?" and then you ask about the family and "How is your aunt et cetera, et cetera?" even though you do not give a shit about the aunt, it is just the way people communicate or behave. But I do not change my persona when I interact with people on my [liberal country in the Middle East] side, and I am not more [a person from a country in Eastern Europe] when I deal with people on my [country in Eastern Europe] side - I would say I am pretty even. I guess it is because the whole weight of the culture has not been so big in the family. I mean, from a religious side, my parents are not religious at all, so that does not exist. I was never big on thinking that [people from a country in Eastern Europe] do it this way or [people from a liberal country in the Middle East] do it this way. I mean, there is nothing inside the family or my surroundings that sort of tears me apart. I do not think there were a lot of ethnic behaviours that I needed to change when I came to Canadian society. And my family came here as well, so maybe they adapted as well. I do not feel like I need to do things to satisfy my other sides, either [a country in Eastern Europe] or [a liberal country in the Middle East].

Data analysis demonstrated that the participants who felt they did not have to change were the ones most comfortable with integrating multiple parts of their cultural identities. These participants often spoke about adhering not to a specific culture, but to a universal set of morals to guide their lives. Philip was one of these participants:

I probably would say modern society. Because for me - the spiritual values like being tolerant to other people, to be able to talk, to express ourselves, to say what we think, and

to respect other people's beliefs – it is what I believe in. So that is why I am saying, modern society, because for me - modern society is to be open, to accept the ideas of other people and of course to be able to express your ideas without hurting anyone. If you want to express your ideas, you need to do it without hurting other people … So I do not think my personality changed in Canada. These are the values that always were important for me. I think that if we compare [a richer country in Eastern Europe] and Canada, there is not going to be a big difference. Generally speaking, we share the main values in [a richer country in Eastern Europe] and in Canada. So for me, it is not difficult to keep the both cultures inside me. There are differences, but they are not dramatic. They are really not dramatic changes for me culture wise … There are plenty of differences, but they are not extremely big, important, or very significant. It is easy to adapt, because it is more or less European culture here.

Overall, cultural curiosity, openness to diversity, diverse circles of friends, and self-identification as a mix of cultures were related to easier integration of multiple parts of cultural identity among LGBT immigrants. The mentioned factors also helped participants navigate the complicated and often conflicted relationship with their ethnic community in Canada.

While it is natural for immigrants to first acculturate to their community of origin after their immigration to Canada, it turned out not to be the case for the majority of the LGBT immigrants. This phenomenon can be explained by the LGBT immigrants' perceptions of their ethnic community in Canada and experience with it. When discussing their experience with their ethnic community in Canada, LGBT immigrants often focused on the impact that their sexual orientation would have on their ability to be a part of their ethnic community. In particular, one of the main reasons why LGBT immigrants chose to cut themselves off from their ethnic

communities was because they would not be able to be open about their sexuality. Ahmed felt

that people from his country "import their thoughts" from their country of origin and therefore

his experience would be identical to what it was back home, thus preventing him from feeling

comfortable about his sexuality:

> People from my country who move as a family or as a community, who try to connect
>
> here as a community, they just import all their thoughts from back home, so you are just
>
> suddenly in a mini-[conservative country in the Middle East], you know – it is not
>
> different from what it was there so I would not be able to openly declare my sexuality or
>
> come out.

After spending some time within his ethnic community, Yusuf also came to the

conclusion that his experience would be similar to what it was back in his country of origin, and

made a conscious decision to distance himself from his community and integrate into Canadian

society:

> Well, initially, I was close to some people from [a country in South Asia] at school. It
>
> took me a long time to realize that I am going to have the very same experience here if I
>
> get too involved with the community. I will not feel much different than being in [a
>
> country in South Asia], so that was my own decision to keep my distance from the
>
> community and make myself more integrated or make myself more involved with the
>
> local community.

Denis explained that the way his sexuality is perceived in his community feels like

bullying. He feels that being himself is a real effort in his ethnic community, especially

compared to the ease with which his sexuality is accepted in the broader Canadian society:

It would be tough for me. It just bugs me that because of somebody else I cannot be who

I am and it is a little bit like bullying - if I cannot tell somebody who I am it is like he is

bullying me into being somebody else, so because of that. I could be out with them but it

will take a conscious effort, it would not be as easy and as normal as if I would meet with

a Canadian and he would ask me about my girlfriend and I would say: "No, I am single"

or "No, I have a boyfriend and I am gay," whatever. They would be "oh, ok" and would

just move to another topic. So for me it would be more difficult with my home

communities. I think I definitely would experience discomfort. Let us take a scenario: if I

meet a person from my country, and he does not know I am gay, and let us say that he

does not work with me, but he does know family, I would still be uncomfortable saying

that because it is obvious to me, I mean it is pretty clear what is the perception in the [a

liberal country in the Middle East] society. So it would still result in discomfort - it is also

the whole social thing - and I know the perception in the community.

Yusuf also spoke about not being able to be himself in his ethnic community. He felt that

it would be impossible for him to be out if he were to stay in touch with his community, and he

made a conscious decision to distance himself from it:

When I moved, I kind of decided not to be in touch with people from my own country. I

just wanted to start from scratch, or start a new life where I do not have those feelings, or

I do not have to deal with the same thing that I was dealing with back home. You know, I

would still have to pretend with them, with people from my own background, I would

still feel uncomfortable and I would still pretend that I am not what I am. So that is what I

did not want to do. So here I wanted to be what I am, so that kind of required me to not

see them that much and to keep my distance from them … If you are in touch and are part

of [South Asian country] community, then you will still be hiding yourself. So you still

would not be able to be out. You still will not be able to be out with your community …

within your community.

Other participants also shared feeling as if they had to choose between their cultural and

their sexual identities. For instance, Lily felt that it would be impossible to be open about her

sexuality and stay accepted in her community of origin. She also felt that she would have to keep

"pretending" to be straight if she chose to stay in touch with her ethnic community. Similar to

Yusuf, Lily was convinced that she would have to cut off all ties with her community in order to

live her sexuality:

 You would have to have a double life. Otherwise you would be excluded. You have to

choose one. I think that maybe, probably in the future, that would be even more difficult,

I would have to have a very double life. A double life - means that in front of them you

have to try and pretend that you are heterosexual. Or always stay in the closet. You can

never bring your girlfriend to a meeting with them. It was difficult. It is such a small

community, so you cannot do that. Then think about how difficult it can be if you are

lonely in the foreign country, and you cannot be honest with yourself, you cannot bring

your girlfriend to all the gatherings, all the meetings with your friends, or you have to

pretend you are just friends. That will be difficult. That might be very difficult for an

LGBT immigrant from my country. But you may also just cut off the connection with

people from your country and see if there is any other place that is more friendly or safe

for you. But I am just saying that if you choose to keep the connection, then you have to

choose to always stay in the closet. Just keep them far away from your life circle. Or do

not let them know about it at all and just leave.

Philip was one of the few participants who did not think he would be abandoned by his friends in his ethnic community if his sexuality was to become publicly known. However, he still chooses to avoid the topic of sexuality in his discussions with them. He repeatedly reiterated how uncomfortable it would be for him to discuss his sexuality with his straight friends:

It is not the fear, it is not the fear. Simply I do not want to because I prefer to avoid the discussion of my sexuality. For me, when I say "avoid the topic," it is because when they start asking why you are not married or things like this, I usually do not give them a clear answer. But for me, for example, now I can make gay jokes, things like that. I can say what I think, and I can hear people saying what they think about gay people, what they think about lesbian people, because they do not know that I am gay. And it does not hurt me, but I think that if they know that I am gay, they will, first of all, think what they can say in front of me about gay people. Their attitude towards me would change. Not in sense that I lose them like friends, but they will be careful what to say in order not to hurt me, or in order to avoid the topic. So I am not so scared that I will lose some of my friends. I am not scared, but I do not want to - every time when we touch this topic, some of them, they will be curious to know how gay life is, how come that you are gay – I just do not want to have this conversation. That is why, for me, it is easy to keep it like this. If… if one day they understood that I am gay, I would be ok with that. But if you go, and if you tell someone that you are gay, so then that person will ask you "how come"… I simply do not need this type of conversation. So for me it is easier not to be out. If they know, they will try to avoid the topic, for me it is pointless to talk about, or to discuss with my straight friends. Most of the time it is that I just do not want to answer or be the subject of gossip: "Do you know he is gay? We did not know." If they learn it somehow,

I do not mind. But if they hear it from me, it is another thing. Because if you go to

someone and then if you mention that "I am gay," then the person who you told it to, it is

natural for them to ask questions. When you tell someone, this person will ask you, he

will tell another person. And at one moment - imagine you have fifty friends in Montreal.

So every time when they see you, the first thing will be: "Oh you are gay," and this is

something that you have to repeat a hundred times - the same answers, and they will go

and ask you the same questions. I think that with time, if they understood it somehow, it

will be less difficult and less disturbing, uncomfortable …

Many participants also chose not to be out in their ethnic communities because of the

uncomfortable feeling of having to educate people from their community about their sexuality.

Sergey explained that his previous attempts to educate people from his community made him

feel that they would not be able to understand:

It is most of the time that I do not believe in the good faith of my community. I do not

think they will understand. And I do not want to start repeating, to explain the story, how

it works. I am not interested in explaining. I did a couple of times, explained how gay

things work, and how we are attracted and what is what but not interested in explaining to

everybody. If I know that this community is straight and not interested in gays, but is

more rooted in Eastern European traditional values, I am not going to talk about it, unless

I want to confront them.

Daw simply felt that coming out to people in his ethnic community would make them see

him as some kind of "exotic animal at the zoo" due to their strong focus on his sexual

orientation:

It is just that I feel more comfortable opening up, talking about it [with Canadians], and I feel that they are more accepting, and they understand, whereas people from [an East Asian country], they look at it as – it is almost like a zoo. Like a zoo! With Canadians it is just ok I find. When I talk about gay stuff [with people from my ethnic community], it is like a running gag, the reaction going to be like this [gestures and dramatically enlarges his eyes].

Likewise, other participants spoke about experiencing a dramatic change in attitude and communication style once they disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to other immigrants from their country. Sergey described it as: "I notice sometimes their reaction, how their attitude changes, and people are like: 'Oh you are gay, oh ok …'" Yaron felt that as soon as his gender identity became apparent, a "wall" would immediately come up and destroy all the connections he had previously established:

I feel worried about coming out as queer because that means I am less part of the community or something. Like I am a [liberal Middle Eastern country citizen] but I am a defective [liberal Middle Eastern country citizen] you know? [Laughs] Like broken, like not working properly. I obviously do not feel that way about myself and about other queer people but I feel like it is the same kind of response I get from people when I come out to them as trans. It is like - at first they see me and if they are from my country too - you know, I meet somebody and they are talking to me and I can see they are so into me. Like - this young guy from our country and he is living in Montreal, and I am also from there and we can connect. But then if I say something about my queerness or something about being trans, there is just like this wall. "This person is the other. This person is different. This person is not part of my value system; this person is not part of

community." It is like we are not from the same country anymore. But it is partially

because my country is so divided too – there are so many subcultures there and so many

people with such different value systems. Like beliefs about how to live your life – there

is a lot of segregation I think, a lot of hate talk.

Yet another major concern expressed by the participants was the impact their coming out

would have on their family back home. As was discussed earlier, quite often LGBT immigrants

chose to stay discrete about their sexuality with their family in their country even after coming

out in Canada. Many participants said they would never be able to be out in their ethnic

communities in Canada because of the fear that "people will talk," as Philip put it, and the

information would travel back to their country of origin.

[Eastern European country] community here in Canada, it is connected with community

in [an Eastern European country]. So if I come out, then the local [Eastern European

country] community here - they will know that I am gay. Maybe, sometime, this

information will come to my relatives, my father, my grandmother. I do not want them to

know that I am gay.

As will be discussed in more detail later, many other queer immigrants chose not to come

out in their ethnic communities, because of the fear that their coming out would cause shame and

stigma to their families. Thus, due to the multiple challenges and negative consequences their

coming out would cause, LGBT immigrants chose not to be in touch with their ethnic

communities. Ahmed feels that because he can find acceptance in other communities in Canada,

it is not essential for him to try to gain acceptance from his own ethnic community. In fact, the

rejection by his ethnic community accelerated his integration into Canadian society:

I would not be persecuted for it, but again socially I would not be accepted. Sometimes I think that I might just get to a point where I do not really care whether I am accepted in this society or not since I am now in a country where the [conservative country in the Middle East] society is not the only component of it. And although I might be rejected by my ethnic community, I will not be by other communities so I am not as dependent on acceptance of this community as I was when I was in my country.

As was discussed earlier, for many participants the rejection of their home culture started even before immigration, and their Western orientation was responsible for the disconnection from their ethnic community in Canada, as in Benjamin's case: "If I reflect now, I do not see myself in [two Eastern European countries] communities. I do not feel connected to these people; I do not share their values. I think my culture is just Western culture." Yusuf also reported a strong Western orientation and always felt that Canadian society would be a better match for him. He believes that gaining the "freedom" of expression in Canada facilitated the weakening of his community ties, as a response to the stigma he experienced in his country of origin:

> I always felt that I would have been much better, and doing much better in a society like here … When I came here, I was pretty much aware of what I was going to expect here and I do associate myself more with Canadian society, I do not associate myself with my community that much now. Because now I am kind of losing the ties, and I am not practicing anything, including religion or traditions. It is not that I just stopped doing it, it is just that now I have freedom and choice to do stuff that I want. So that kind of makes your ties to your home country or home society a bit weaker. I think it is kind of a reaction from my time back home.

On the other hand, participants often spoke about the important role that sharing language and culture plays in their ability to connect with people. While they had challenges connecting to or receiving acceptance from people in their ethnic community, they managed to achieve feelings of connection by building close friendships with a few people from the region. Manuel's closest friends are from his hometown and are fully accepting of his sexuality:

[I do not connect with people from my region] as a community. My best friends are from my city. I got my three best friends, who are from [a Latin American country]. And we see each other twice, three times a week. We talk every day almost. They are straight. For me, at this time of my life, it is not an issue being gay. And for them it is the same. It is not really important. At this point of my life, being gay is just me. We talk every day and see each other a lot, and I got other friends … So I do not need to be in contact with a community. When I first came [to Canada], maybe it could have helped but at this point of my life I got my life pretty much settled. Like I said, I got my group of friends from my country … I always say, when I speak English, I can relate to someone, of course. French is closer to Spanish so it is more me, when I speak it. Then, when I find, when I meet someone who speaks Spanish, I am closer. Because we … it is hard to explain, but the language defines a lot. So I am closer when I find someone who speaks Spanish. Then, when I meet someone that comes from [home city], it is "wow." At least from my country, it is crazy. It is like "wow." And then imagine with my friends, that we come from same city, same age. We share a lot. We listen to music, we always remember places. We share a lot of things.

Though connection through shared language or culture was meaningful, the participants often spoke about how the importance of being in touch with people with whom they share a

similar language and culture becomes less and less significant over time. The more acculturated into Canadian society they became, the less important it was. Sergey explained:

> I do not participate in [Eastern European country] community .... But I have actually a friend, I met him when I came here, I was learning French, there was a group of people from Soviet Union. I am definitely attracted to people from my linguistic region, definitely. Now I notice that it is becoming less and less important. But before, when I saw somebody, I knew that I had something to say to these people or at least I was projecting that there was something. Now there is less and less importance, if I see somebody who is from my region, so what? It is not necessarily that we all have things in common, maybe, maybe not, I do not know, but before it was more accentuated.

It is important to mention that while most participants felt they would have to deal with similar stigma towards LGBT people in their ethnic community as they had back home, most of the queer immigrants felt that people from their country were slightly more accepting in Canada than back home. For Example, Ahmed felt that he was able to come out to his uncle in Canada and not receive a negative reaction because his uncle was previously exposed to the existence of the LGBT community:

> I came out to other family members as well. One of them is my uncle who is a dentist … so he was more open minded, like it is not something, I was not the first gay person he was talking to.

Furthermore, there were a few participants who felt that the Canadian culture had a positive impact on their community of origin in Canada, making people more open-minded and accepting. Fadi illustrated it by sharing his experience in a Middle Eastern student community:

There are so many people here that I have met from my community from [a liberal

country in the Middle East] that have had an open mind, and had just like "Dude, what is

that like?" reactions. I think it just comes down to the individuals. The people from my

country who come here to get educated, who come here to open their minds, I think if

you were to put them back into [a liberal country in the Middle East], these same people,

they would still have their same personalities, their same ideologies, the only difference

would be - their education would be different. So I think maybe the education in Canada

has opened their minds more, but I think those people had a natural affinity towards being

more open-minded and being more accepting.

There were some participants, however, who were able despite multiple challenges and

concerns to be open about their sexuality when interacting with immigrants from their country.

Sergey was able to achieve this after a few years in the country by "placing" himself on the

Canadian side of the fence. This is how he explained what enabled him to be out in his ethnic

community:

Because I am here, because I am placing myself on this side of the fence again, so there is

nothing they can do, you know. It depends where. If I meet people at my level - then yes,

I will be openly gay, I will not hide it. But if it is meeting somebody on the social level,

not necessarily my level - my cousin or my aunt or somebody, then I would not

necessarily be open with them, depends on the context. With aunt - yes, I am open with

them. Well, again, you know, if it is her friends - then they do not need to know anything

about me. They just know that I am a nephew. And that is all they need to know. They do

not need to know I am gay. Because it is not their business, and you know, maybe it is

going to cause troubles to my aunt .... It is very hard to answer your question properly

because in the actual circumstances when I was forced to disclose my sexuality - I would

say I am gay, or I would say I am not interested in women. I am trying to be consistent

with what I say; I try to live with what I say to people. I came here to be openly gay, so I

am trying to be openly gay in this situation.

Denis also spoke about an increased tolerance towards LGBT people in his ethnic

community compared to his experience in his country of origin. However, he feels that this

tolerance remains on a surface level because queerphobia is still a strong part of his culture:

I think it would be more "advanced," honestly, but either it would be more advanced or

they are going to be more superficially polite-slash-respectful about it. I mean, they are

probably not going to have a negative reaction because they live in Canada, they know it

exists, et cetera. But deep down, it is not something that is acceptable in our societies.

Yusuf shares Denis's opinion about the strength of queerphobia and heterosexism in his

culture of origin. Yusuf realizes that it would be extremely difficult for an immigrant from his

country to be out if he were to immigrate to Canada with family for the same reasons as back in

his country of origin. However, he feels safer and more comfortable in Canada because of the

protection he believes LGBT people receive from the Canadian government:

I moved by myself here, so I think it was much easier for me to just change my lifestyle

and be open about everything. But if you move with your family or if you live with your

family here, then I would assume that it is still difficult for you to be open. Again, it is the

family thing. It is the family traditions, and the family values … for the very same

reasons. But here, of course, your family will not go to that extreme of killing you, here

you are protected by laws so you can feel more at ease here. But I can imagine that

someone living here with their family would still not be open about their sexuality … that is possible.

Moreover, some LGBT immigrants continue to be involved and to help their community even despite the lack of acceptance there. Sabrina described the philosophy that allows her to continue helping her ethnic community with a goal of building awareness and increasing acceptance of LGBT people there:

I did fundraising at the LGBT community center. I was Miss [East Asian country] in 2009. I fundraised like three thousand dollars. And I raffled my dresses - my stage dresses, my gowns, everything - because I do my own dresses. So I raffled them and then I raised like three thousand dollars for the LGBT community center … But I do not really feel accepted in my community because some people are like old, their mind is still like back home. So they think: "Oh my god, he is so gay," they think like you have AIDS or something like that. I do not go to [East Asian country] community events; I just went once when it was in Philips Square [in Toronto]. I just performed, and they were happy. That was my first and last time ... but I still help them though. Because I want them to be open – they are already here, you know. So they would understand what you have back home needs to just stay there – do not bring it here. It is different here. They bring it here – they still hate gays. But for me – if you hate me, it is even better for me - because haters love you. Because they are always talking about you, why are they talking about you - you do not even know them. They like you; they love you because they want to talk about you. The more you hate the more you love.

Overall, in most cases, LGBT immigrants tend to distance themselves or have very limited connections with their community of origin. Since many participants often reported

feeling closer to their home culture, especially at the first stages of immigration, this distancing from the community of origin was often more of a necessity rather than a choice. Indeed, many queer newcomers immigrated in order to escape anti-LGBT stigma in their countries of origin, with a goal to openly live their sexuality. However, quite often interactions with their ethnic communities in Canada resembled participants' negative experiences back in their home country. These experiences led many queer immigrants to create a distance between themselves and their ethnic communities of origin, which allowed them to direct their energies into integrating into Canadian society, often through the Canadian LGBT community. Thus, many of the LGBT immigrants started integrating into Canadian society virtually immediately after immigration. Furthermore, many participants felt disconnected from their culture even before immigration; they reported that the values and beliefs of their country did not appeal to them, and thus they were motivated to try to integrate into Canadian society upon their arrival.

As with other aspects of the LGBT immigrants' experience, family also played an important role in their ability to be out in their ethnic community in Canada. In many instances, the LGBT immigrants felt that they could not come out in their ethnic communities because of the shame it would cause their families and fracturing of relationships if the information about their sexuality were to travel back home. Luckily for many participants, they were able to counterbalance the rejection and stigma in their ethnic communities by finding acceptance in local LGBT communities, as will be discussed next.

4.3.2 "It is like *Queer as Folk*." This section discusses participants' processing of their sexuality in the context of Canadian LGBT communities. To begin, it is important to mention that, in general, participants felt that typical immigrant concerns took priority over sexual identity exploration immediately after the immigration. For example, Sofia felt that immigrants

have to almost "put their sexuality on hold" until they reach a point where they are sufficiently

settled in, in terms of other immigrant priorities, such as looking for a job and learning the

language. She also felt that a certain level of acculturation is required in order to be able to

integrate into the LGBT community:

> [Your sexuality] is not the first thing you tell people about yourself. The first things
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> immigrants would be concerned about are learning the language and finding a job. And
>
> you know, you would define yourself in terms of your profession. For example, "My
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> name is Isis and I am an engineer." Once you have settled all those more important points
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> and once you are able to provide for yourself and stuff, then you work on interpersonal
>
> relationships and you start realizing: "Oh, people are cool with knowing I am gay, they
>
> do not have a problem with this." So at that point you probably see it as a relief. So once
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> you have started to settle in, and then you also realize that here it is not a problem that I
>
> am gay or whatever. Then that is more liberating, it is like: "Ok, I can blend in more, I
>
> could have a better interaction with people." … But that very first step of acculturation or
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> integration into the local society - you have to, I do not want to say you have to put your
>
> sexuality on hold, but it may not be as easy when you are fresh off the boat to integrate
>
> into that [LGBT] community. Because there are all the challenges that are more urgent.
>
> When you just get here, you have to get settled in other ways first.

However, even the participants for whom their sexuality was the main reason to

immigrate spoke about feeling as if they are the same people in a different context. Sergey spoke

about how strongly he was influenced by notions and experiences from back home, especially by

negative notions about sexual roles, that prevented him at first from being able to disclose his

sexuality to people, despite his intention to do so:

Nobody starts from scratch when he moves somewhere else, you know, they are still same people, but at the same time the context is different … When I came here, I had all the sex notions that I had in [a country in Eastern Europe], that people do have in [a country in Eastern Europe]. There was never such a sexual revolution, so certain things are not viewed as here. I was kind of shocked - I go to a bathhouse, and I see people fucking everywhere, you know. That was shocking for me to see. But now it is not shocking. Because when I came here, I was afraid of this and that, I did not want to get fucked, I did not want this. There was the whole thing that I would be perceived even more negatively for that, for being fucked - that particular point …. I had to go over certain shading, letting go, so I can do that, because for me it was stigmatized, as if I was lowering myself in a way. So it would take some time. And then I realized – it is bullshit, nothing bad happens to me basically, it is fine to engage in this sort of behaviour, and it is fine. You are not becoming what they make you be afraid of … In the first years in Montreal, whenever there were a couple of accidents when I had to talk about my sexuality, I did not say that I was gay. I hid it or something, I do not remember what was the context, but I remember that I was questioning myself - how come, I am already here, it has been a couple of years in Canada, and I am still behaving the same way, I am still hiding my sexuality.

Because of deeply internalized negative values and perceptions of LGBT sexuality in their culture of origin, participants often mentioned that they maintained their same coping strategies in regards to their sexuality that they had in their country of origin. Thus, participants also spoke about internalized queerphobia manifesting itself in them through continuing to suppress their sexuality, in the same way as it did back home. Daw explained:

And when I came here, people told me that there was a gay village. Again, I got excited, but I never would go there until I was twenty-two, twenty-three. Part of me just hoped that I could be straight. I was afraid that if I go there - I would never come back. I was afraid to face reality. I did not accept to myself until I had my first boyfriend, at the age of twenty-three.

For many participants the impact of internalized queerphobia is so strong that it takes years for them until they are able to entertain the possibility of Canadian society not being as homophobic as that in their country of origin. Fadi came to Canada as a student, but he feels that it took him a few years until he stopped projecting homophobia onto people around him. His way to deal with his sexuality was exactly the same as back home - he continued to be discrete about his sexuality:

I had not realized that Canada was more comfortable with sexuality. Yes, I had lived here at that point about two or three years, and I guess because I was so uncomfortable with my sexuality, I projected that onto other people and I just assumed that they would be uncomfortable with my sexuality. So I tried to remain as discrete as possible, all the while not being discrete due to my lack of sexual interaction with girls, or at least openly sexual interactions with girls.

Some LGBT immigrants made a conscious decision to stay discrete and to lead a double life because they believed it was easier than being out to other immigrants from their country. For Philip, the discussion of his sexuality is so uncomfortable, that he still chooses to stay discrete about his sexuality:

I prefer to avoid the discussion … For me, when I say "avoid the topic," it is because when they start asking why you are not married or things like this, I usually do not give

them a clear answer. I am not so scared that I will lose some of my friends. I am more

scared, I do not want to, every time when we reach this topic, to deal with their curiosity.

It is difficult to have a double life but I simply do not want to go through this

conversation. That is why, for me, it is easier to keep it like this. I reached the conclusion

that it is better to keep it like that.

Participants often spoke about cultural and familial pressures remaining present in their

lives even after their immigration to Canada. Luisa explained the importance that her parents'

opinion and cultural expectations would have on her ability to be open about her sexuality:

The family probably is the biggest challenge. They all have to do with the fact you are

raised very close to your parents, and your parents' opinion matters to you so much, as

well as your parents' point of view – it is a big, big part of [country in Latin America]

culture. For my family, relatives, and the friends that I have, your parents' opinion counts

a lot. And so I feel that here the biggest challenge for any gay or queer, or whatever you

are going to call it here in Canada, is to face your parents … If I were to tell my parents

back home right now "Oh, by the way, I am also attracted to females, and if I ever meet a

female [who I love] - I am going to marry her." They will probably die. And I think

perhaps the challenge for a gay man, considering what I have observed in my life, my

brother was raised to be a macho, the man of the house. So I think also a part of the

challenge for any male will probably be that. Facing the father and saying you are not the

macho, you are not the man of the house. So that probably would be another challenge.

Yet another pressure is internalized cultural beliefs regarding sexual preferences. Earlier I

discussed certain cultural norms that stigmatize sexual preferences of being a "bottom" among

men who have sex with men. For some participants these norms are so deeply internalized that it

took a long time for them to embrace this side of themselves without feeling ashamed of it.

Ahmed disclosed that he is still not entirely comfortable with his sexual preferences:

> I am not as comfortable with the fact that I am a bottom, I have to say, it is still a little bit
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> problematic for me. Well, actually, I felt even worse about it when I came to Canada
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> [laughs]. The reason is that most of men in Canada are actually bottoms looking for tops,
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> so basically the chance for me to meet someone is less in Canada. Which is different in
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> the Middle East, by the way, there you will find more people who identify themselves as
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> top … I am becoming more comfortable with being a bottom and doing it in bed, but
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> before it was very problematic for me to define myself as a bottom in my online dating
>
> profiles.

For some bisexual participants, the fact that they could be attracted to more than one

gender became a challenge in its own. Because the internalized negative norms of queer

sexuality as being "not normal" are still present after immigration, some bisexual participants felt

that they should try to get in touch with the "heterosexual part" of their sexuality. Benjamin has

been in a committed relationship with a same-sex partner for a while now, but he is still

questioning his sexuality and choice of partner. He spoke about feeling as if he has to "push

himself" and get in touch with his attraction to a different sex:

> I do experience [challenges] because my sexuality changes. It changes. It goes through
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> changes and it confuses me even more. Because now it is less focused, it is less clear than
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> it was before. I do not have any more beliefs about this sexuality. And today I understand
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> that my happiness does not depend on it. I understand that the happiness is in me. It is my
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> responsibility to be happy. So, after all, these beliefs that – very, very strong beliefs that I
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> believed that I cannot be happy in a relationship with a female - today I understand that

yes, I can be happy. It depends on me, it depends on how I take things, how I look at things, how I take my complaints, how I take complaints of my partner. So, I understand that there is no complete truth, ok? There is no complete truth. And when there is no complete truth, I always question. The questions come very easily, and what I have now, for example, with my partner, when I move in with him, I would prefer not to have these questions now. I would prefer to have the complete truth as I had before. I want these beliefs again; you know, that I cannot be happy with a female. I would prefer to have all these stupid beliefs that I cannot have sex with females. Because I would have fewer questions now, and less doubts, more certainty. So this is the challenge, this is what I am facing now. The sexuality brings a lot of uncertainty now; a lot of questions are raised again, different questions. And the questions that I have now, it is like I cannot allow myself to be happy, just enjoy the moment. I question and I question. Why should I not push the limit and be with a female partner? I can push the limit, I can try, you know. I can work it out … Because I think I still believe that gay is not natural. I still believe. I think I did not accept it, eventually, but everything that I experienced is natural, right? It is in me and I am nature. But I still I have this idea that this is wrong. It is still there. It still feels wrong. It does not go away … I am questioning whether it is wrong or right. Why not push the limit again, you know, why not to push myself out of the comfort zone again and to be natural. So maybe there is a reason for this feeling of being wrong being gay. After I came to Canada I found my partner. So before this I was living in this fantasy, I was hoping that I will find a prince on a white horse and when I see him, I will just know. And he will know. And we both will know. And the things will be wonderful and everything will be ok, and I will understand everything, and it will be clear to me.

Everything will be clear to me when I meet him, this special guy, this special man. So, this fantasy was there from when I was twenty eight, twenty nine, thirty, so I am thirty six now. So it is seven years or more that I lived in this fantasy that I meet this guy and everything will be perfect and wonderful and all my questions will be solved immediately. But, you know, I came to understanding that it is not the case. New questions arrived immediately. So the questions arrive again and again. So this feeling of being wrong, here it came back again because there, in [a liberal state in the Middle East] and before I came to Canada and before I met my partner, I had lived in this fantasy, so this feeling of gay being wrong was "Well, it will be solved, it is not an issue." I did not pay attention to it. I did not notice it. Because I will meet this perfect guy … and everything solved … I have uncertainty and doubt. I have questions. I was imagining that it will be this "I am sure" state, "I am sure about everything" state. That I will be sure and that I will be complete, I will be happy most of the time and I will be full of energy, you understand how strong this fantasy was? And when I met my partner, I had this connection. I saw something in him, something mine, part of me. And despite of these feelings being very new to me.... Because until now everyone was a stranger, I was sleeping with strangers. I was dating for three months, and the person was a stranger to me. And this one, he was not. And still I have questions, I have doubts, and "Oh my god, you have questions, you have doubts, not everything is solved," so maybe he is not the right guy, you should look for - you should keep on looking, and I understand: "Oh my god, no." I am not going to look again, I am not going to entertain this fantasy again. This is just more voices, my voices, right, and my thoughts. You do not put me again in this search, in this looking for the perfect guy that might not exist. I want to be in a

relationship. So, actually, my partner noticed this, that I had an inner fight. I had this

inner fight in myself and he was telling me: "I feel like I am your dusk, like you want to

be with me but you do not want to be with me, and you force yourself to be with me."

And it was true. I had two voices. One saying: "Ok, you saw something, you see him, and

he is not a stranger. Here you can build a relationship." And the other voice says: "No."

However, virtually every participant, after spending some time in Canada, was able to

reach significant improvement in terms of comfort and acceptance of their sexuality. This

comfort was often attributed to a strengthening perception that Canadian society is accepting of

LGBT people and also due to a well-developed queer community. Feeling less stigmatized and

more accepted in Canada helped queer immigrants start taking their first steps in exploring and

accepting their sexuality. In fact, many participants believe that they were able to get in touch

with their sexuality and accept it only because they moved to Canada. Luisa believes that she

would continue to be discrete and would "not act" on her sexuality if she had not immigrated:

> I cannot say that sexuality was what made me move, but a part of me knows that it helped
>
> to be here, to explore who I am now. To come to accept who I am. For instance, for me it
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> has been a process to accept first the fact that - even though I knew I liked women, even
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> though I liked a female, I was never going to in my world act upon it. I thought it was
>
> always going to be something hidden from everybody. I only would know about it.
>
> Nobody would ever know because in the country that I was raised, that is what I think
>
> was expected of me. And that is probably what I would have done had I stayed there. But
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> I think the fact that I am here is what has helped to come to terms, I can say: "Well that is
>
> okay if you like a female that is okay, there is no harm in that."

Data analysis suggests that participants who immigrated to Canada at a younger age had an easier time accepting their sexuality and acculturating into Canadian society. Elsa believes that she had an easier time dealing with her sexuality because she was a student:

And the age. I have a feeling that when you are young, and you are a student, just living the student life, it is easier to meet people and to acculturate than when you have to work and you do not have as much of free time as I do for instance.

Sofia also felt that it is easier for younger queer immigrants to deal with their sexuality. She spoke about being educated about the various sexual orientations in school, and even taking on an advocate and educator role when her parents would use homophobic language to refer to someone. She feels that because of the education she received, it was easier for her to accept her sexuality without experiencing much turmoil, compared to many other LGBT immigrants:

And going to school here, going to elementary school, especially going to immersion, teachers explain to you how everyone is equal, how you have to be tolerant and accept everybody. So my sister and I, once we came to Canada, we were exposed to the idea of tolerance. So whenever my parents would say something homophobic at home about whomever, you know, like a colleague, my sister and I would go: "No, you cannot say that. It is not because they are gay that they are any worse than you are." We would sort of do that work on our parents that we got worked on at school … I was not scared or did not have a lot of self-doubt [about being bisexual] - it was just like, I was just kind of curious like: "Ok, this is weird." And I also felt surprised how I could have not realized this before. I was sixteen, seventeen and I felt like I should have picked up on this sooner … But I felt fine about it. I was like: "Ok, actually women are very attractive," perhaps more so than men. As a side note, being an art student and having started college at

fifteen, I did see my whole share of naked people of all genders in art class. But you do not see them in that kind of light though. I do not want to say you see them as an object but they are just modeling, you do not see them as a sexual object, you just see them the same way as you would a vase or something in a still life, you just look at them in terms of shape and light and whatever. So even then I never kind of actively thought about that in a sexual way because that is not how you look at a person in art class … Well, I think amongst the people that I know who came here at, let us say, underage, so they went to school here, they were more sensibilized, is that a word? They were taught that sensibility and that tolerance towards people of different orientations is important. We, as the younger generation, still have retained our culture and stuff but in terms of our values, we have become westernized, we are more open, we are more tolerant.

Other participants also spoke about the important role that the attitude of tolerance and acceptance in Canadian society played in helping them accept their sexuality. Elsa explained:

As soon as I made friends here and realized how everyone is totally cool with gays and lesbians here, and that there is even a village, it became really easy. Being far away from those bad friends I guess too, so it is the experience of being far away and then in the society where I could start over and where gay people were so accepted in my point of view anyway.

Numerous participants noted that the fact that there was a vibrant gay area in the city was another important factor that helped them feel accepted and positive about their sexuality. Philip feels that it is easier to be gay in Canada, and the existence of a gay village where you can meet other gay people is one of the things that makes it easier:

I think that in Canada it is a little bit easier to, how can I say it, in Canada it is a little bit easier to be gay. In sense that there are many people who are gay and they are openly gay. There is a place like the village in Montreal, where you can meet other gay people.

Overall, participants perceived the self-acceptance of their sexual orientation or gender identity as a gradual process. They often had to let go of a hetero-normative vision of the future and shed some layers of internalized homophobia in order to be able to embrace their queer identity. Queer immigrants had to build a stronger sense of self and resilience, as well as develop a feeling that they would survive even if they were to be rejected by their ethnic community. Luisa described her process of acceptance of her sexuality in the following way:

Accepting your sexuality has not probably been the same for everybody, but for the way I have experienced it, I have slowly, slowly been coming to terms. And I think the more as I am evolving as a human being, the more I am accepting that so be it. If you do not want me or you do not want me around because you do not accept who I am, that is ok, I can deal with that, I can live with that. And I am thinking in terms of being part of a community and because they find out that I am different from them, they would exclude me or single me out. I feel like at this point I have been very frank with some people, with people that I thought I would never be able to tell them that this is who I am and this is who I like. I think that this is a process for me. It is not something that is probably has happened right away or in one shot, like for some people. I am going to give an example of my gay friend who told me that for him it was telling his parents about him being gay. It was a process as well, but once it was out, he became okay with it and content with the decision and all that. And I am thinking that for me it has been a process that is an ongoing process, and slowly, slowly I have been accepting. At first it started with me

probably not accepting: "Why am I like this? Why? If I was straight, I probably would be different, I would have a happy life, I would be in a happy couple with the kids and the family. Yet, accepting that it was not me and that it did not happen to me, and that it is okay that I am a bit different and I do not want all those things, or that I do want them but there is a part of me that always wonders.

Many other participants also perceived the process of acceptance as a gradual process. While some of them feel that they are still in the process of acceptance, others felt that they reached a point where they were completely comfortable with their sexuality. Sergey was one such participant:

It took several years, several years, I do not know exactly. It was really gradual, but you know, at certain point, I just hit the point when I felt free, and I realized that there is no moral that keeps me anymore.

Ridding oneself of internalized homophobia and concern about ethnic communities' judgement was required by many participants in order to feel comfortable being open about their sexuality. Luisa described the feelings of fear associated with being out about her sexuality. She believed the process to be a transition from fear and hiding to being open and accepting of her sexuality:

I felt as if it is a transition from all your life living in this fear, in this bubble of hiding and not wanting to say who you are because everybody or the people that surround you will look at you differently or weird, as if you are an alien. And so now, coming here, into a country where you can explore a little bit - you kind of feel fear a bit, you feel afraid, because I was so used to hiding till the age of twenty. And then I got married, and I continued hiding who I really am. And so the fact that I can now open up - it can be a

bit frightening, because you do not know what is going to happen to you, or the outcome of your life.

There were a few participants who reached a point of full acceptance of their sexuality and who self-identify as "out and proud." Elsa spoke not just about being fully open about her sexuality with everyone, but also making sure that people are aware of it as soon as they start interacting with her in order to avoid possible heteronormative behaviours:

Everybody knows now. I am out to my family, I am out to those friends I had in [a country in Western Europe] that were homophobic, everybody knows, and I am out and proud pretty much. I guess if I had never moved here, there probably would be a good chance that I still would try to pretend to be straight. So I am just glad I am not there… It is a fairly open-minded place. Even my professors know that I am gay and every laboratory that I have worked in, I always made it a point to, in the first couple sentences just to let them know that I am gay … It is important so that there is no assumptions made about me being straight. You know how people are, or at least I have felt very often, people eventually will ask: "So do you have a boyfriend?" and I hate that because it is the twenty first century. I think I expect more of Canada, let us say it that way, given that it has such a big flourishing well represented LGBT community, that people should finally be aware of just asking: "Do you have a partner?" or "Do you have a special someone?" or something non-gender specific so that you as a respondent have the choice of stating whether you are gay or not. So anyway, just before anyone could make the mistake of saying: "Oh, by the way, do you have a boyfriend?" I just let them know: "Oh, by the way, I am seeing someone right now and I am seeing a girl" or "I have a girlfriend" or something like that. That is very important to me. And so also I guess as a

way of testing people, just in case anyone would not be cool with it, that I am gay, so that

I would know from the beginning, so I can either do something about it or leave the lab

for instance.

Sofia is also completely out and has been comfortable with her sexuality for years. As

was discussed earlier, she spent most of her life in Canada and it was easier for her to accept her

sexuality than most of the other participants. While she always talks about her sexuality openly,

she no longer feels she needs the validation from her family or environment; she lets them

conceptualize her sexuality in any way they want to in order to avoid any unnecessary

discomfort with them:

> I mean, to me it is not something that I necessarily broadcast to people. I do not think that
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> also being bi – it is not something that is very easy for people to pick up on. Say some
>
> lesbian girls, who are very butch, they do not have to do much, it is very noticeable, they
>
> do not have to say it or express it in any way. They do not have to verbalize it; people
>
> pick up on that easily. I think that in terms of being bisexual, it is not something that
>
> people pick up on as easily. But I never hide it from people. I would talk about it openly
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> but it is not something that I also broadcast, I am not literally like, the first time I meet
>
> someone, I will not be like: "Hi, I am Sofia, I work at an insurance company, I am bi" …
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> I do not really discuss it with my mom at this point … I mean, I have been in a
>
> heterosexual relationship for over three years so it has not really come up. I do not think
>
> we had discussed it that much afterwards because for me it was like: "Ok, she wants to
>
> think it is not true, she wants to think it is a phase, I am going to let her think what is
>
> going to be easier for her to think, because for me, at the end of the day, I just want to be
>
> open and honest with my mom." But if she does not want to hear it or if she reacts

negatively, well, that is unfortunate, that is too bad. But at the end of the day, what will it change for me to hammer the point home again … I do not think it needs to change my relationship with my mom so I was like: "Ok, you know what, you can think what you think, and that is fine."

In Sofia's case, as was discussed earlier, she immigrated to Canada with her parents and through the impact of her and her sister's schooling, her parents were exposed to positive views of LGBT sexuality, and thus became more tolerant. Other participants also spoke of the advantage of having parents who immigrated to Canada and the impact of immigration on their tolerance. Luisa explained her choice of not being out to her parents back in her country of origin, and why it might not have been the case if they were here:

The biggest challenge for any queer … is to face your parents, to tell the truth about yourself. Even though there is an advantage of having parents that live here because it is more accepted here, because it is more known if we can say it. A quick example is - a friend of mine is from [a country in Latin America]. She is a lesbian. She has told her parents that she is a lesbian but her parents say it is just a phase that she is going through. She is now 35 years old, engaged into a relationship with a woman, and has brought her female partners to her house when she used to live with her parents, but her parents still say: "Oh, they are friends." See, they do not want to accept. But deep down they know their daughter will never marry a male. But she has an advantage. If I were to tell my parents back home right now … they will probably die. Whereas my friend, her parents are okay with it. Well, not okay with it, but in acceptance. Just to give you an example - more accepting, but with two fingers over their eyes … With most of my friends I am [open], yes, but my parents – I am not. They live back home.

Katrina, whose parents are also in Canada, is still not out to them. She decided to come out to them only if she gets married to a same-sex person. However, similar to Luisa's friend in the example above, she also felt that eventually her parents would be able to accept her sexuality:

I do not think anything would happen, I do not think that they would kick me out, I do not think they would go as far as to do that. But I think that it would, you know, it would hurt them, but they would get over it and they would accept it. And they would find a way to live comfortably with it. Well, they would be shocked, it would be a shock to them, they probably would be confused and saddened and everything, but I think that, you know, I am the only child, so they would accept it. They would accept it. You know, they would grow to become comfortable with it.

Also, there was a common perception among the participants that leaving the country of origin will make other immigrants from their country more tolerant. Similar to Luisa, Yusuf is also out about his sexuality in Canada and feels that people who had left his country of origin are more tolerant and understanding of queer sexuality. He explained that while he is not out to people back home, he is able to be out to his friends who also left the country, and that the increased comfort with telling them can be accounted for by the fact that they also left his country of origin:

I have not officially told any of my friends back home. I have friends who were from [a country in South Asia] but they moved, and they are living abroad, like in different countries, and most of them know because I was more at ease to tell them. Because they are no more in [a country in South Asia] so I thought it would be much easier for them to understand my viewpoint and luckily all of them understood it and they are still friends. But back home - nobody knows … Because when you grow up in a certain society, you

are brought up with different values, you have been told all that stuff. Of course you did

not learn it, it is just, it was told to you. You have to behave and live life in a certain way,

so the moment you try to deviate from it, your mind alerts you and makes you conscious

of anything you do. I trust my friends but I think there was an element of trust when I told

my friends. I think I trusted them, I trusted them more than the people that I have not

told. I think the trust would be a decisive factor. Trust was a decisive factor for me to tell

them. And plus they were not back home so that is another factor, as I told you, which

made me more at ease to tell them, because they are more open to, now that they are out

of [a country in South Asia], they are aware of the existence of gay people, you know?

Back home you cannot even imagine … I would not be surprised if some people will tell

you that they do not know about it. Because it is not something that you talk about, you

are not educated about it, nobody tells you about it. So for most of the people it is

something that is nonexistent. It is not one of the sexualities that they will consider as

sexuality. My friends who are out of [a country in South Asia], I feel more at ease with

them. That is the case. I have not told to anybody in [a country in South Asia]. Even

though they are maybe the same level of friendship as compared to the ones that I have

told, but it is just that I did not take a chance.

Some participants developed an implicit "don't ask, don't tell" policy to help them deal

with their parents' discomfort around their sexuality. Daw explained that he obviously avoids

any conversation that pertains to sexuality, and his mother seems to be completely comfortable

with that:

Still today my mom does not know. Because I do not live there anymore, I left when I

was fifteen, and I never share with my sister. So we never share about our day to day

lives, we hardly talk, so I do not feel like I can share with her, because if I tell her - there

has to be a follow up, but I never talk to her, during the year I only talk once in a while.

You know, twice a year on the phone. I talk to my mom every two weeks or so. I just do

not feel like it. And I do not think they care, as well. I think they care about my

professional life, career is the first thing, and love life - when they ask me, I just tell them

nothing serious. My mom usually asks, my sister does not ask. My mom also asks: "Are

you dating anyone there?" and my response is: "Nothing serious" and she is ok with it.

Just avoid. At this point I am not planning on going back and telling my mom: "I am

gay". But I ask myself - if she asks me: "Daw, are you gay?" I might say yes. I am not

going to hide it, I am not going to lie, if she asks, I will. If she does not ask, I am just

going to avoid it at all costs.

In the segment above, Daw stated that, unlike back home, if his mother were to confront

him about his sexuality, he would give her an honest answer. This feeling is common for

participants. After spending some time in Canada and feeling more comfortable with their

sexuality, participants no longer feel the need to hide their sexuality as strongly. In fact, quite

often, there is a large part of them that wants to share their sexuality with their parents. Luisa

spoke about wanting her parents to know who she really is. For her, hiding her sexuality from

them felt like lying:

I do not want to say that I would never do it because, if I were to, hypothetically

speaking, fall in love with a woman – because obviously to tell them I am in love with a

man, that is so easy, that is not a problem - the issue for me would be to tell them that I

fell in love with a woman, that I want to marry, that I want to spend the rest of my life

with her. That would be an issue obviously. Now I do not want to say that is never going

to happen because I am not sure what I would feel at that point, and would I have the courage enough to tell them so that I could be happy with my partner? Would I be courageous enough, because of what that means in my life at that moment, that I could deal with mom. I think a parent is always going to love you no matter what. And I think that the part of hurting my parents does not work well with me. I do not want to hurt my parents. But at the same time, I wish that they knew who I am exactly. I want them to know who I am. I do not want to hide anything. I feel like I am a deceiver, a liar, when I do not tell them. The other day, for example, I just came back from home; I went home for two weeks. I came back last Thursday. I went to see my parents. At one point they were watching a show, and there was this thing about women that were lesbians, and they were talking about it. And everything that I could think of was: "If only you knew, my god, I have also engaged in sexual encounters with women. And I enjoy it." And as I am thinking that, I feel like I am lying to them. I feel like I am deceiving my parents. And that is not who I am. For the most part, I am honest with my life. I do not feel the need to hide who I am. I mean, in parentheses, except with my parents. I can bring myself there. Would I ever bring myself there? I do not know.

Negative reactions from family and the possibility of the dissolution of family relationships were the most commonly-cited feared consequences of coming out among LGBT immigrants. Quite often, while they felt comfortable enough to be out in Canada and even to some people back home, family remained the only part of their life in which they were not out. Ahmed explained that if he were to come out, he would be completely cut off by most of his family members:

I know that lots of my family members would just refuse to see me or communicate with

me anymore … I am still thinking actually about writing a novel about homosexuality in

the middle east - and I always had the problem that if I would publish it under my name,

it will have all the consequences of coming out to the society in [a conservative country

in the Middle East], and again, I will have family members just cutting me off and all

that.

For many participants, the concern was not just about being cut off, but also about

bringing shame onto the family name. As was discussed earlier, anti-LGBT stigma in some

cultures extends to families and friends of queer people. Therefore Yusuf is still not able to come

out to people back in his country:

You are going to bring a big shame to the name of the family if you are doing something

like that …. I do not care about the society anymore, because I do not live there, but my

family - I still have bad feelings, that is why they do not know about me, about my sexual

orientation.

Another major concern, often mentioned by queer immigrants, was a fear of devastating

their parents. Numerous participants explained that they cannot come out to their family back

home because of the fear that their actions will actually impact their parents' physical health or

even possibly kill them. For example, Yusuf said that if he were to come out, his "mom could

have a heart attack." Daw also felt that the consequences of his coming out would be extremely

damaging to his mother's health:

Because, well, my dad passed away, and my mom, she is not very healthy. I am more

concerned about her physical being, that if I tell her - it is going to affect her health

greatly. There was an incident where my sister did something to my mom, she ran away

to England to be with her boyfriend, and her [my mother's] health went downhill. She ended up in the hospital for eight months. Emotionally it got to her, she had heart issues, cholesterol, and low blood pressure, everything coming all together. So I am afraid of that too, I think this is a bigger deal than my sister running away.

Overall, however, with the exception of a few typical concerns described above, most participants reported feeling increasingly positive about their sexuality the more time they spent in Canada. Some participants attributed it to being removed from the "source of anxiety": their country of origin. Being free of queerphobic norms and morals was experienced as liberating by participants. Sergey described it as having removed a "layer of oppression":

Over the years, I was removed from the source of my anxiety, which is my community, so being accepted or not in my [country in Eastern Europe] community - whatever. When I moved here, I moved from them. I moved by myself .... I think it is the morals, and these moral values and sets of certain behaviours, that are polarized in the society, and if you are not conforming to this ideal, you feel down, you fell that you are not worth it, that there is something wrong with you because you are not doing that. So being here, removed from my community, and finally accepting or doing whatever I really want, it removes that layer of oppression. I do not feel any constraint by morality or anything like that because I just do not believe it is valid. I think it is made for a certain purpose, it should work for certain places, but for me personally, the way I look at it, it is not necessary. I do not have to live by the God's law, that is how I feel.

For some participants, positive feelings about their sexuality were associated with meeting a diverse group of people in the Canadian LGBT community, and finding people with whom they could identify. It is important to mention that certain forms of internalized

queerphobia were still present among the majority of participants. For example, the most common one among gay men was discomfort with effeminate, "stereotypical gays." Numerous participants, even the ones who are currently out and fully accepting of their sexuality, still displayed a certain level of discomfort with the aforementioned group. Fadi was one such participant. While he is comfortable with his sexuality currently, the stereotype of what it means to be gay was something that was preventing him from being able to accept his sexuality. Only after finding other, "non-stereotypical" LGBT people, was he able to start identifying as gay:

> I felt different, I felt like I would not be understood because of the culture, I felt sad most of the time that I had a burden, but I think that slowly started to go away as I got older and more comfortable with myself. I think I started to realize that there were other people of different sexualities that were not stereotypically LGBT. That for me was a way of identifying within that group of people and not feeling ostracized even within a specific group of people, which for me allowed not only to get comfortable with myself but to be comfortable, more open with people. I guess I just started to identify [as gay] and that was extremely important. Because I think when you are younger, you tend to feel like an outsider, you realize when you look around you that there is an aspect of normality and you are not necessarily part of that normal atmosphere. So as I grew older, during my teens anyways, I felt alone, and I think it was important just to know there were others out there that identify with the process of being open sexually, being gay.

Participants repeatedly stressed that queer sexuality became an important part of their identity over the years, slowly but surely replacing the internalized homophobia of their culture of origin. Ahmed expressed it as: "It is just who I am. I cannot claim that I am one hundred percent comfortable with my sexuality, but I have crossed a long way towards that. Now it is not

really something that is bothering me." Manuel stated: "But it, it would not be me. If I were not gay, it would not be *moi* [me], it would not be me, because I am gay. It is a very important part of who I am. It would not be me." While some participants felt that sexuality was a big part of their identity prior to immigrating to Canada, it was usually associated with negative feelings due to experiences with oppression and queerphobia. For Panas it was actually the ability to freely express his sexuality that made him feel positive about it: "Well, here I can express it; in [a country in Eastern Europe] I could not do so. So I feel better here. I feel freer. Free. Free. Free to be myself. I am comfortable. I accepted it and I feel great." Even some of the participants who spoke about experiencing great discomfort with accepting their sexuality felt positive about it after spending enough time in Canada. Denis was quoted earlier explaining that he would "flip the switch" if he was given a choice to become heterosexual even a few years after coming to Canada. However, the way he feels now is significantly different:

> Somehow, before my thirties, I started to realise – I had a boyfriend then, and I had a really cool relationship, and I realised that I would not "flip that switch." And that was slightly before, or around being thirty. So I would not, I would not go back.

Many LGBT immigrants felt that having to integrate the sexual and cultural parts of their identities, and all the challenges associated with it, made them grow as people. Benjamin felt that, despite all the pain, it made him a stronger, better person:

> It was a challenge, it was difficult. But I feel a certain amount of gratitude because it pushed me all the time out of my comfort zone. It has created somebody else; it has created a much bigger person, much smarter, braver, and stronger. So, still I do not celebrate it, because it was a challenge, I had so many sleepless, crying nights. So I cannot celebrate these nights. I feel this pain, but there is a certain amount of gratitude

because I did things, I accomplished things and I gleaned it fully because I pushed myself

out of comfort zone all those years.

Thus, a vast majority of the participants felt that sexuality played a major, sometimes

even a defining, role in the development of their cultural identity in Canada. In particular, a vast

majority of participants attributed it to their integration into the local LGBT community, as will

be discussed next.

Jean described his experience with his local LGBT community to be similar to *Queer as

Folk*, a television show that focused on a group of friends in Pittsburgh, whose lifestyles evolve

mostly around the local LGBT community. Jean felt that the life he had ever since he immigrated

strongly resembled that of the characters of the television show:

I would say it is like a television show because it is a place where everyone knows

everybody so when you know a group of people, other people come into that group. It is

like a TV show where you always meet the same people in the same places, and life is

concentrated around a few places with a group of people, and that group of people meets

other guys, meets other guys … there are some couples that bond, other couples separate.

And exactly like a TV show, exactly. Like a TV show made in the Toronto community,

Queer as Folk. And this is exactly the life I had the last three years.

Fadi characterized his experiences with the local LGBT community as "overall they have

been mostly positive," and such seems to be the case for most participants. For example, Sabrina

described her experience as "It is positive – there is some negative, you know, but mostly

positive." Lily felt that she was met with friendliness in LGBT community because of their

openness and embracing of multiculturalism:

They are very friendly. They are very nice. I like them very much. I am not sure what

percentage of their friendliness can be attributed to "Oh we are all gay people, we are all

non-heterosexual." But anyway I think all in all they are very friendly to me not just

because I am bisexual, but because they are really more open to multiculturalism, I guess.

Probably because the bisexual people, or the ethnic people, we are all minorities, so they

are more open and more tolerant, more supportive towards minority people, like me.

Overall, most participants reported a true appreciation of Canadian LGBT communities.

They often used the following words to describe the local LGBT community and their

experience with it: "great," "flourishing," "I like it," "I enjoy it," and "positive experience." For

many participants it was their first exposure to a queer community, with no previous frame of

reference. As Yusuf put it, in comparison to the situation back home, all his experiences in the

Canadian LGBT community have been positive; he described his experience as:

I would say fairly good. Again, the only comparison that I have is from back home so it is

like comparing two different extremes. So everything compared to that would look good

to me. So far my experience has been – it has been a good experience. I mean, I have

never had any discrimination based on my sexuality or any bad experience. No, I have

never had any bad experience based on that so I would say it is good.

However, even for the participants who had prior experience and interaction with a queer

community, the Canadian queer community was rather impressive. Manuel described his

experience with Montreal's LGBT community:

Intense - when I came out in [a provincial city in Latin American country], I started going

out to gay places there. And I was crazy about it. Then I went to [a large capital city in

Latin American country], and it is huge and I was even more excited. And then I moved

to Montreal, and I was like "Wow!"

The participants often felt that people in their local LGBT community were free and

open-minded. Moreover, Fadi felt that local queer people are more open-minded compared to the

general Canadian society. However, Benjamin felt that open-mindedness went beyond just the

LGBT community, and that it is a characteristic of the entire Canadian society, which allows

queer people to live free:

Actually I think I envy a little bit the community here because they have less complexes,

you know, inner complexes. They are more open. I think it is not just to say they were

spoiled by destiny. No, I think they benefit from what Canada gives to them, and they

have full rights. I envy this. They benefit. All these quality of rights and ability to get

married, and all this support that they get from the official government, and from the

media, and from the society, you know. The society that says that "everyone is equal"

and everyone allowed to lead the life the way they want. I think this is the banner of

Québec society: to be free. They always want to be free, you know, and "live your life" in

French, right? Live your life as you want it, I see the similarity - this is what is important

to them. Not like in my country: live life in security. So they benefit from the general

state of mind here that encourages being free and everyone has their rights, and they

benefit from this state of mind. I think it is very healthy state of mind.

LGBT immigrants also often spoke about the diversity they encountered in the Canadian

queer community. Jean described it as: "It is a big mix of people. All of them come from

different places and different countries. It is a characteristic of the gay community."

However, many participants did not seem to idealize the local queer community and spoke about certain challenges they encountered there. Fadi felt that his local LGBT community was like any other community and one can encounter all types of people there: "… just like any other community – there is a lot of really cool people, and then there is a lot of really not cool people." Benjamin, who had a previous experience with an LGBT community in his country of origin, felt that queer people in Canada had very similar issues and challenges:

It has its issues, it is like being gay everywhere. It is all the same. When I went online, I thought it is all the same. It is like in [a liberal country in the Middle East] completely: when you are gay, we all have the same issues everywhere. You know, about how we look, and what people think about us, and the need for positive feedback. I saw it here as well.

For some participants even the concept of a queer community seemed foreign. For Sergey, it was the lack of cohesion that he observed among local queer people that made him question if a local community even existed. He expected his life experiences and challenges to be more aligned with those of local queer people, which turned out not to be the case:

LGBT community – it is very hard to establish what it is. Because when I came here, I thought that there will be more of a community - but there is none. Because you know – it is just people. There is less cohesion than I thought there will be. Because I thought people would be more similar to me. I had my personal drama, growing up and having all these fears - I thought that everybody pretty much had to deal with that when I came here. But here I realized that "no, it is not true." Some people do have it, and some people do not. Especially people from Canada, they do not have the same drama, they do not - they just live normally, they do not necessarily want to kill themselves or something like that,

it is not everybody. So I do not know what is a community, is it people in the same club?

We are not a community. It is hard for me to locate the community sometimes.

Other participants also experienced a certain degree of disillusionment with the local

LGBT community upon their arrival. Similar to a few other participants, Ahmed feels that local

queer people are not mature when it comes to serious relationships, and that they are spoiled by

the abundance of options of sexual partners:

Well, it is nice to walk in the street and not be afraid, it is nice, relieving. But on the other

hand it was not exactly what I was expecting. I was a little bit disappointed, I have to say.

I was expecting that by having more freedom and legal support to gay people like we

have here in Canada, people would become more mature when it comes to relationships.

But what I found that relationships are not that mature, relationships are "open"

relationships and people are just so overwhelmed by how many options they can have

that suddenly the community turned into a sort of supermarket for men: you know, you

go there, you find lots of brands, of products, and you choose this product one day and

then the next day, which is really sad. I was expecting more humane aspect of

relationship between men to appear in an open environment.

Daw has a similar perception of the local queer community. He feels that people are not

professional and are not interested in forming an intellectual connection and are just preoccupied

with sex:

I will say first thing that comes to mind - sounds ridiculous - but it is not professional. A

lot of them I know live pay check to pay check … And for me - I have to be able to

engage into some sort of intelligent conversation with them. But sex seems to be the first

thing that they are looking for, that is the common interest that people have.

In fact, the sexual freedom, prevalent in Canadian LGBT communities, was often quoted by participants as one of the main reasons that made them feel as if they do not belong. It often took years for participants to recover from the initial culture shock they experienced after their first interaction with their local queer community. Sergey explained:

When I came here, I had all the sex notions that I had in [an Eastern European country], that people do have in [an Eastern European country]. There was never such a sexual revolution, so certain things are not viewed as here. I was kind of shocked, I go to a bathhouse, and I see people fucking everywhere, you know. That was shocking for me to see. But now it is not shocking. Because when I came here, I was afraid of this and that, I did not want to get fucked, I did not want this, you know what I mean, there was the whole thing about being fucked - that particular point .... I had to go over certain shading, letting go, so I can do that, because for me it was stigmatized, as if I was lowing myself in a way. So it would take some time. And then I realized – it is bullshit, nothing bad happens to me basically, it is fine to engage in this sort of behaviour, and it is fine. You are not becoming what they make you be afraid of … It gradually went away. [After] several years, I do not know exactly, it was really gradual, but you know, at certain point, I just hit the point when I felt free, and I realized that there is no moral that keeps me anymore. After seven-eight years in Canada I realized that.

Since sexuality was a defining feature that brought queer immigrants into Canadian LGBT communities, participants frequently reported that their first encounters with the local queer community revolved around sex. Such was the case with Denis. He compared his first sexual encounter with his initial contact with local LGBT community. Both made him question himself and resulted in feelings of not belonging in the community. Moreover, he was turned off

by certain ways local people expressed their sexuality, and similar to Sergey, it took him years to

start feeling a part of the community:

> The first contact was a little bit weird in the sense that I felt—I was not sure I belong. Ok
> it is a little bit like my first gay experience. I met this guy - I did not dare go to the village
> when I was twenty - so I met this guy, he had this ad in this newspaper - and I met with
> him and he was not my type. We sort of had sex, kind of, and I did not like it and I
> actually remember getting out and thinking "Oh my god, now I have my confirmation
> that I am not gay." So this first contact was similar to the contact with the gay community
> in the village, I would say. First couple of times I went there, I did not feel like I
> belonged, I did not feel like we were alike, I felt. I felt like this is not my thing, this is not
> my ecosystem, this is not my network. So the first couple of years - it took me a couple of
> years to get in and just, I guess, start having gay friends that I can relate to. And I just
> realized - I just became integrated in the LGBT—what you called the "LGBT
> community!" … The first thing was that I felt a lot of gay people extremely extrovert and
> let us call the spade a spade - effeminate. That was my first observation. They were loud,
> the way they talked, the way they - the gestures and all that, I do not know, I was not
> attracted to it, and I was not attracted to some of these guys because of that, even though
> physically I could say "Hey, that is a handsome person" but because of his mannerisms
> .... They were just a big turn off for me. I do not know, this whole feminine side was a big
> thing, it sort of pushed me aside, and after that maybe I just picked up some of things by
> osmosis. But I did feel like - not like I did not belong - but it is not my thing, I just did
> not blend in I guess. I think in the beginning I would have described myself, how do you
> say it in French? "*Hors ghetto*." That was in my twenties. Do you know the expression

"*Hors ghetto*?" "*Hors ghetto*" is, literally it is "outside of the ghetto," ghetto in the sense

not the physical ghetto, but more the community, and now no, I would not describe

myself "*hors ghetto*." I do not go to clubs anymore a lot, like once or twice a year, but

even though I do not go to the clubs, I do not consider myself "outside of," I do not

consider myself that I do not belong. I feel extremely comfortable in the village and in

the clubs, or on the street with people, with LGBT people.

Participants often spoke about the barriers they experienced when integrating into their

local queer community at first. Sofia felt that a certain acculturation level to Canada's

mainstream society is required in order to be able to acculturate to local queer communities:

But I think that initial, that very first step of acculturation or integration into the local

society, you kind of have to, I do not want to say you have to put your sexuality on hold,

but it may not be as easy when you are fresh off the boat, to integrate into that

community.

Many participants described their acculturation into the local queer community as a steep

learning curve. The things that were unfamiliar to them and that they had to learn ranged from

different forms of sexual expression to relationship modalities to mastering an entirely new

vocabulary. Yaron explained:

I mean, I came here and my first year here I did not do anything but work. I was still so

scared I did not know anyone. My English was not as good and I felt like I did not know

how to even begin. But once I went to university and I started meeting other gay people

my age, or queer people my age, or trans people my age, then a lot of doors opened for

me I feel. I started going out to parties. I feel like queer community here, around my age

anyway – where queers meet, where you socialize, where you get together and are queer

together, it is like a party. You know? Like there are other things but it is definitely the first thing that I noticed. I need to start going out. I need to be part of this community. I need to start going and do these décor parties and then I started going out and then I met my first girlfriend. I met her at a party. And that is kind of what really opened this queer world for me. Because she was really active in the queer community and she was an organizer. And she organized queer parties, and she gave kinky sex workshops, and she studied sexuality in university, and she did all these things that were, you know, advocating, like she did safer sex project and all these things. That was like a year or two of my life here where I just got bombarded, where I just felt like I had all this new vocabulary. Like "safe space," and like "consent," and "boundaries." [Laughs] I did not know how much meaning those words had before meeting this kind of particular Anglophone queer community of Montreal. Like it is very particular I think. Part of it was really good because I started talking about sex. And I started having sex and I was just like … it was incredible for me. It was really important. I did not have it before. So there were really amazing things about discovering this queer community here … I had to change my language in a way. It was not even conscious, it was just, you know, people speak in a specific way and things that people care about like the activism around certain issues are a particular behaviour, the way you interact with people is particular. Like when I started dating my first girlfriend, she was in a poly-amorous relationship. And I did not even know what polyamoury meant … I thought it was … I did not really know what it meant. And she wanted to be in an open relationship and all these things. And I realized that people were like doing a lot of that. Open relationship and sleeping with each other and three-ways and four-ways and all of these things. And part of me was

really intrigued. And I felt like it was this place where I could explore and another part of me was just like: "I do not know how I fit in here." I guess what I am trying to say is that I also kind of in retrospect feel like the queer community could also kind of be a little bit homogenizing. You know what I mean?

Similar to Yaron, other participants also felt that the local LGBT community can be homogenizing at times. They felt that the emphasis placed on sexual orientation or gender identity in the community is overdone, and in some ways, segregates the community from the rest of the society. Ahmed explained:

Actually, that is the thing there, I mean, I never been to the parade for example. And to be quite honest with you, I did not feel much attracted to the parade. I think that the parade is somewhat overdoing things because I believe we are gay but this is what we prefer in bed. This does not make us a cult, so that is why I do not really believe that we are very distinguished from the rest of the society.

Other participants also spoke about not having a need to emphasize their sexuality as much. For example, Fadi feels that the fact he is no longer interested in identifying as a member of the LGBT community is actually a confirmation of how comfortable he is with his sexuality:

I have gay friends, I mean this all sounds like I have a problem with my sexuality but I think it is the opposite. I think I am no longer interested in having that be part of my external-slash-important identity of mine. I just kind of placed it in the category of who I am, and so, I do not necessarily see myself as needing to be involved in LGBT events or anything like that.

It is important to mention that quite often participants' definition of what it meant to be part of the community was limited to involvement at the volunteer or organizational level. For

example, during the interview, many participants initially answered that they are not involved with the LGBT community, and immediately after spoke about frequenting LGBT venues and socializing predominantly with LGBT people. Sergey explained his ambivalence around his understanding of what it means to be involved with the community:

I feel that there is a certain segment of population, but I am not involved in certain activism… Yes, I go to Pride, but I go there just to check out guys, I do not go there to support community. I go there because it is an occasion to see people who are not there or hook up with somebody. Sex basically. It is not community-oriented in any way. I do have some friends, and I have friends who are obviously LGBT community. And on the other hand, there are guys that I know, people I sleep with, or friends of the friends, you know. Yes, there are gays and lesbians but I do not perceive them as a community, I more perceive them as friends, and it just kind of happened - gays hang out with gays most of the time. Or the friends that I have through my boyfriend, it is like mix - lesbians and gays together. Not necessarily just guys or girls.

Benjamin felt that going to LGBT venues and socializing with LGBT people allows him to enjoy the gay life, but does not make him a part of that community. He feels that only giving back to the community would make him a part of it:

What would make me feel a part of this? No, I do not feel … Because I do want to do some volunteer work in schools, maybe, and this will make me a part of the society: when you give, when I give myself to the community, right? When I give my time, when I give my effort. This way, I will feel the part, but now, no, I do not feel a part because I do not give anything to them. I just live near them .... This lets me enjoy the gay life, but I think being gay and part of LGBT community is to give something to this community.

Similar to Benjamin and Sergey, many other participants spoke about the importance of volunteering, though very few participants reported having any type of volunteer involvement with the local LGBT community. They usually attributed this to their busy work schedules and the language barrier. The vast majority of them come from countries with non-existent queer communities. Since participants often felt that only activist community involvement makes them a part of the community, the interviewer often had to provide other examples of what could potentially make them a part of the community, such as attending queer venues and socializing with queer people. Once the definition of what being a part of the community meant was expanded, it became apparent that for the majority of respondents, involvement with the community revolved around attending LGBT venues and events and socializing with LGBT people. Jean explained what makes him feel as a part of the LGBT community in Canada: "Because I go in the same places as everyone. I mean I go to the same clubs and the same gym as the other guys, and the same bars. And I know a lot of people so yes, I am a part of the community here." Elsa also felt that going to lesbian venues and events makes her a part of the queer community: "Yes I go to many lesbian bars and lesbian parties and I went to Pride and stuff like that." Overall, across all gender identities and sexual orientations, LGBT community involvement revolved predominantly around gay villages, LGBT bars, and major events like Pride parade. These venues become the main way for LGBT immigrants to meet other queer people. Philip was one of the participants who originally said he was not a part of the LGBT community. However, once the expanded definition was offered to him, he responded:

> In this sense, yes – I am a part of the gay community because I like to socialize with gay
>
> people. I like to talk; I like to meet other people. For me it is important. I need it. It is
>
> something that I find important even if I am not crazy about the village. I think that the

place like the village is important, that is where gay people or lesbian people can go get

together, and socialize with other gay and lesbian people. So for me it is important to

have it. Yes, I need it. Yes, I need it in sense that it is nice to realize that there are people

like you. So for me, people are human creatures that live in a community. In order for

someone to be more or less happy, for most of the people, my perception is that people

are happy when they feel like they are part of a community. Everyone needs to be part of

some type of a community. Some people need to be part of religious community; some

people need to be a part of family community … and for me, it is important to have

people like me, with same sexual orientation.

Despite some of the challenges related to integrating into Canadian LGBT communities,

for LGBT immigrants, gay areas often become a safe space, a place where they can be

themselves. Therefore, participants often reported spending most of their time in LGBT venues

surrounded by other queer people, as in Heidi's example:

In a gay village you can be yourself, so that is why. I am actually always there with my

friends, with my [conservative country in the Middle East] friends, so we laugh, we feel

well there, we are not stressed, we feel relaxed, we talk, and even sometimes we go at

eleven pm to the Second Cup [a local coffee shop] to have a cup of coffee or tea. It is

kind of relaxing area, and I like it, I feel happy.

For many participants, the LGBT community became the main community to which they

acculturated. Participants often described their social circle as predominantly limited to queer

people, as was the case for Benjamin:

Most of my friends are gay here. Actually I think all of my friends are gay or bisexual.

And yes, I go to – I am not a party person, I do not party even once a month, it is not my

way – but yes I go to the village and I enjoy being around gay people.

Similar to Benjamin, other LGBT immigrants frequently reported that they surround

themselves mostly by other queer people because they feel that they have more things in

common and their lifestyles are more compatible with other queer people. Sergey explained:

I will be more at ease communicating and having human relationship with an LGBT

person than with somebody who is totally straight with kids et cetera because I have a bit

of a problem with that. Sometimes I can push myself and communicate with people but it

is not going to be my reality, it is going to be theirs. That is why I stopped

communicating with straight people. Because I do not know what they talk about, kids, I

do not have kids. I think lifestyle is very different. And people my age, if they are

straight, they do not go to clubs, they do not have hangovers on Saturday mornings and

every Sunday, it is a different lifestyle. Gay people, even though they do not all do same

thing, not everybody is going out dancing, the lifestyle is more similar.

The participants often spoke about the acceptance and support they received in the

Canadian LGBT community that made them feel like an essential part of it. Yaron was one of the

few participants who was able to maintain some type of connection with his ethnic community.

Still, he felt that the queer community was his "welcome card to Canada":

In terms of community and feeling a part of something, the first community that I have

felt a part of here in Canada was the queer community. You know, it was a double

whammy. Like not only do I feel a part of the queer community, finally I am queer and

finally I can be queer with other queers but also, oh my god, I found a place in Canada. It

is a huge place, I do not know anybody, and I do not have any family here. I really do not

… I am not feeling able to connect with the Jewish community here, which I also tried

because I was like: "Oh, Jewish community - that could be my community too." And that

is a community that I am part of but more peripherally. Like I worked in the Jewish

community and accessed services in the Jewish community, but the first community that I

felt fully integrated, it was like a welcome card to Canada too - was the queer community

as well. So it was major for me. Because not only am I queer but also I have a place in

Canada. Like "Oh, I can meet people. I am meeting new people, people are interested in

me." You know, I am building friendships through this community and I am going out

and I am finding work and I am finding apartments. The queer community and that

network of people has helped me find a job in the past, find health care practitioners,

helped me transition, has helped me find a place to live, has helped me figure out where

to buy needles.

A large number of participants felt that because they were queer and open about it at

work or in social situations, it automatically made them a part of the queer community. The way

Heidi expressed: "If you are gay, of course you feel that you are part of the gay community!" For

Panas, the fact that he was able to openly express his sexual orientation in Canada made him feel

like he is a part of the Canadian queer community:

To be gay in Canada, it makes me a part of LGBT community. It is difficult to explain. It

is an internal feeling. Nothing precise, but I feel I am part of it. It is related to the fact that

I feel free to be gay. So when I feel free to be gay, I am a part of LGBT community. I can

freely express my sexual orientation, who I am. So it makes me part of this community.

Even Sofia, who spoke earlier about not feeling like her LGBT identity is a dominant one and who is not actively involved in the community, explained that because she self-identifies as bisexual, it automatically makes her feel as part of the community:

I think it would be best explained in an analogy, and this kind of goes with what I said about not being militant about sexuality. But you know, for example, I am Jewish, I define myself as a Jew. I am not a soldier, I do not serve in an Israeli defense forces and I am not actively defending Israel in a day to day life but if something happened I would be ready to drop everything and advocate for Jewish rights or whatever. So this is kind of the same thing for me, I do feel like this is a part of my identity, I do interact with individuals from that community. I do not know, kind of random, but for a long time I went to get my hair done at a LGBT salon which is really focused on that kind of clientele. I do interact with the community sometimes but it is not something that is central to my life, but if I felt that LGBT rights were threatened in our society, if everyone was getting mobilized, if it was something really big, I would not watch it from the sidelines, I would join in with everyone else and take part in the action but I do not feel the need to wave the Pride flag in my day to day life.

Overall, while participants often reported difficulty integrating into the Canadian LGBT community at first, after a certain period of time and after experiencing a learning curve, all of them demonstrated a certain degree of acculturation into the Canadian LGBT community. Feeling like they were not accepted in their ethnic communities often made them try harder to find another community of which to be a part. Because they were queer, they often chose the LGBT community. Despite the initial difficulties of integrating into Canadian queer community due to cultural and language barriers, and following the steep acculturation learning curve, all

participants were eventually able to find acceptance there, and to label it as a safe space. As a result, they often found themselves spending most of their time in LGBT venues, surrounded by individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The next chapter will discuss the impact this phenomenon had on the perceived role that sexuality had on defining the trajectory of queer immigrants' lives in Canada.

4.3.3 "Being queer allows you to see a larger part of life." This section discusses the role that LGBT sexuality played on the life trajectory of LGBT immigrants to Canada. Participants differed in their opinions concerning the role that sexuality played on their life trajectory in Canada. Some participants felt that sexuality did not have any major impact on the way things turned out for them in Canada. They believed that all the main elements that define their lifestyle would be similar if they were not queer, and therefore their life trajectory in Canada was not affected by their sexual orientation or gender identity. Heidi explained:

I do not believe in that, that if you are a gay - you are another person. If you are gay or straight - you are same people. Straight people go the bars as well, they go clubbing as well, and they study as well, they eat as well, there is no difference … It would be the same, exactly.

In addition, some queer immigrants felt that their immigration experience would be the same as it was for non-LGBT immigrants because the culture shock remains the same, regardless of sexual orientation. Yusuf noted:

My life would not be different. It might have been a little bit boring, but that is it [laughs]. That is how I see it. That is how I see it, for me I do not see any difference of being straight or gay, of any gender here or sexuality. It would have been pretty much the same for me … It would be the same for a straight person too. To come from an Eastern

community to a very Western, open community. It is a cultural shock for many people.

There are cultural differences, their values are different. It takes you a while sometimes to

integrate with that.

A few participants believed their life in Canada would be quite similar were they

heterosexual because their sexuality is secondary to their social and personal life. Daw

explained: "Most likely I would keep the same lifestyle because of the fact that I am career

driven: I go where the jobs are. What I want to do is most important, that comes first and

personal relationships after." Denis felt that if he were to be in a relationship with a woman, the

main difference would be a lifestyle, mostly due to perceived constraints that come with being

heterosexual and having a family:

> I am not sure if it would be different honestly. Let us say I was seeing a girl or I was even
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> having a kid, I would still not go back to the [liberal country in the Middle East] values
>
> and traditions. I do not think it would be that drastically different, aside from the fact that
>
> I would have less me time, less I do what I want, less things that come with the gay life. I
>
> would be more constrained because of the family thing, that is how I put it.

In fact, similar to Denis, numerous other queer immigrants believed the main difference

their sexuality played on the trajectory of their life in Canada is the "alternative lifestyle" they

live. This lifestyle is usually characterized by more personal freedom, bohemian attitudes, and

overall, significantly less constraints due to non-conformance to conventional norms and lack of

demands from having a family. Sergey explained:

> I know people who came here with families, they came all together, they do not touch
>
> any of this alternative lifestyle that I did. For instance, I have sex with strangers, that is a
>
> different communication point. So these people do not have that at all. But straight people

who are bohemian of some sort, who live my alternative lifestyle, they do. Because I

have friends, they are artists, they are not gay, but they kind of live similar lifestyle in a

way that they are not set into conventional forms, they are free to do whatever they want,

like me basically. Because I am not constrained by anything basically except for money, I

do not have kids, I do not have obligations, basically I can do whatever I want, and this is

what I cherish. This is always a point, I was always forced to do this, that and the other,

in school you have to do homework, and you have to do this physical education, had to

go to physical education classes - and I never wanted to do that. I just wanted to be free. I

do not want to owe anybody for anything because in my country of origin you have to do

this, you have to do that. I think it is the same for any culture. If you are in that culture -

you have to do things for a lot of people, every culture is like this. This is basically my

experience here; I am detaching myself from all of that.

The perception of having fewer responsibilities and more personal time compared to

heterosexual immigrants was one of the most commonly-stated benefits of being queer in

Canada. The participants repeatedly compared their lifestyle to that of their heterosexual peers

and noted the freedom of not having familial responsibilities. Denis described it as: "I would not

be travelling twice a year. I would not be indulging myself like: 'Oh, I want to go to the gym, I

want to take a Portuguese class.' I mean, I would have more obligations I think." Philip

explained how being queer provided him with more freedom compared to other immigrants from

his country:

I would not be able to spend and to have so much free time as I have now. And career

wise, it would be something different, because if I was straight with family, I know that I

would have many more responsibilities because of the family. You have fewer

obligations without having children, without having family. You are gaining more

freedom … because being gay, it is the freedom that you have … For two gay people, the

priority is not going to stay at home, to cook, to clean, to change diapers, or even if those

people exist, this is a very small percentage.

Overall, many participants perceived LGBT people as having more fun due to sexual

freedom and being exposed to various activities and events in the queer community. Heidi spoke

about the dating/sex-focused social networking mobile applications that allow gay men to have

"fun;" that is, opportunities for sexual encounters:

They miss the gay Pride [laughs], and the gay activities. I think the gay people are really

cool. They are cool, they are more outgoing people compared to the straight people in

Canada. But the only thing that straight people miss is having fun with other people … I

am going to be frank about it. In the iPhone there is so many applications for the gays,

but they do not have it for the straight ones, or just one or two. But for the gays, there are

so many applications for the gays.

In fact, many other participants felt that being queer provides them with the opportunity

to meet local people and to get to know the local culture faster through sexual encounters and

"partying." For example, Sergey felt that "promiscuity" becomes instrumental in helping gay

men integrate faster into Canadian society that is not usually experienced by heterosexual

immigrants:

I could easily come into contact with people through sex and be more intimate with

people, faster … I do not know how to explain it but I think that part facilitates the

communication, assimilation process, because you are gay, and you have sex with lots of

different people. Especially if you have a boyfriend, right away you arrived and you have

one. I always had somebody here, a person I was seeing, and my first serious boyfriend - I had problems communicating with him. He was a francophone, but bilingual, and was living with this girl who was from Ontario, so she was English, and he was French, and I had to speak French with him, and English with her and with everybody else, and it was very hard to switch from one language to the other. Communication with two of them at the same time for me was almost physically impossible because I could not switch my head around. My French was so little and I had problems communicating with that guy. But I got a lot from this relationship. My levels of communication went up; I met people, even though my communication was really, really slow. We actually split because of miscommunication a lot of times, and other things too but I think it facilitates the assimilation, the communication is faster … In my experience, I felt, even in the first years I felt that I am more integrated because of my visits to the village, meeting people, you know, because in my country, my culture, you bond with people when you are drinking, so I was kind of doing that. Even though I was not necessarily focused on that, it was just more getting drunk in the bar with strangers, you know, but still. The friends that I had in the language classes, they did not do that, they were not doing same things, they were not going to bars, they were not hanging out with strangers. They were more constrained. They have kids so they could not do whatever they wanted … I think the difference between normal people, I mean straight people and gay people, is in the way they integrate - gay people have more facility; they integrate faster than other people, due to promiscuity in a certain way. It puts you more into intimate contact with people. It is not necessarily always a positive thing, some people do not say a word when you have sex, but most of the time you do talk. So even if it is a little bit of communication, it still

is communication. If you are here, and you are a straight person with your family, you are

closed off in your own circle.

A vast majority of participants believed that another strong advantage of being LGBT

was the ability to meet people and make friends in the new country, compared to their non-

LGBT peers who are often "stuck" in their ethnic communities. Jean explained that being queer

allowed him to see a larger picture of life due to his ability to meet a large variety of people, and

not to be stuck in his ethnic social circle:

I think that the advantage of being gay is that you meet easily a lot of people. And I think

that it is one of the advantages. And you meet people from every walk of life – it is easy

to meet directors, managers, and barmen. That is a big advantage of being gay. And I like

it. I like it. I think that we are lucky to be gay for that compared to straight people

because straight people stay more in their social circle. I think it allows you to see a

larger part of life. You see more things in life because you meet more different people.

Even if they are all gay, you have the opportunity to meet more different people than

being straight.

Other participants also felt that the ability to meet people and make friends easily was

extremely helpful during their adjustment in Canada. Philip felt that having an LGBT community

was a great advantage that queer immigrants have when it comes to building social networks:

"Honestly, I would say that gay people have an advantage, because there is a gay community,

and you can belong to something. And you can easily meet people and easily find friends." Elsa

felt that having friends was the most important aspect to make her settlement successful. She

believes that once you have friends and build a support network in your new country, everything

else becomes easy. Thus she felt that being a lesbian definitely gave her additional opportunities

to meet new people:

> Maybe it would have been hard finding friends. Just as I mentioned before, going to those
>
> online dating sites and looking for friends, specifically from the LGBT community. And
>
> mentioning to people that I first met that were lesbian, for instance, or gay people, that I
>
> am new here, and I have never been involved in the gay community. I think everyone
>
> made an effort to make me meet people. But I guess when you are straight, it is not the
>
> same angle of meeting friends. You cannot use online sites; dating sites are only for
>
> dating for straight people. Maybe it would have been hard making friends … and then
>
> also when you are gay and you want to go out, you look for gay bars, right? So, of
>
> course, there is also a smaller pool of bars that you can go to. And then specifically if you
>
> look for a lesbian event or a lesbian bar, there is even less places you can go. So in a way,
>
> as much as it is potentially limiting, it is also freeing in a sense that "Oh, I do not have to
>
> choose between millions of bars, I have one, two, three, four options." So there we go.
>
> We go to either A, B, C, or D. So in a way, especially in the beginning, when you do not
>
> know all the bars, and you could not possibly chose one because there is just so many of
>
> them, then at least you have a few options, and you will just chose between four, for
>
> instance. I think that is easier in the beginning especially … The biggest challenge always
>
> is finding friends. Finding a community whether you are gay or not, or from a specific
>
> religious group or a specific cultural heritage, it is always finding friends because they
>
> make you feel like you belong or they make you stay comfortable because if you have no
>
> friends then you go to work, you go home, you sleep, you go back to work, go home, you

sleep … So really it is the friends that make all the difference, so as soon as you got that figured out I guess everything becomes fairly easy.

Similar to Elsa, Manuel also believes that being queer and having an LGBT community made it easier for him to make friends: "When you immigrate, you need a group of reference. You know, to make friends. For me – it is easy: if you go to the village, you start meeting people. You know, like we met. You start meeting people." Ahmed also felt that being gay gave him an advantage over his non-LGBT peers in terms of meeting people and making friends. He believes that being gay means that you already have something in common with other queer people in a new city, which makes building friendships easier:

> Well, one of the benefits of being gay is that it gives you the opportunity to meet lots of people whenever you travel. It is easier to communicate when you are gay. You have something, you already have something in common with any other gay in a city you are visiting for the first time and this gives you the advantage of meeting people, experiencing the city in a different way than someone who does not know anyone would experience the city. So as a gay I had the chance to make friends quickly and this has helped me a lot in establishing my life … it helped me to integrate in a better way with life here.

However, while queer immigrants often spoke about the benefits of being LGBT when it came to adjusting to life in Canada, some felt that their immigration was more complicated than that of heterosexual people. While they often spoke of the benefit of not getting stuck in their ethnic communities, which helped them to integrate faster into the Canadian society, they also felt that the initial adjustment in Canada was much tougher for them because they did not have access to support from their ethnic community. Denis explained:

Well, the difficulty is, the additional difficulty is I guess that the immigrants, they can blend in together in this, they have a support network, cultural support network, so [people from a liberal country in the Middle East] tend to blend with other [people from a liberal country in the Middle East] that arrived here a few years before, so they create that network. I could not, honestly, I could not blend in. I mean, I saw a bit of that through my family, because my family came with me, but I could not benefit from that, I could not just go "Oh yes, I am going to contact the gay [people from a liberal country in the Middle East] that came here and…." I do not even think that something similar existed, so I did not have that support network when I came. So I guess that was maybe the additional difficulty.

Lily also spoke about not being able to utilize the main support resource that immigrants usually have at their disposal: their ethnic community. While she continues going to her ethnic church, she still does not feel she can see it as a support resource because of her concern that she will be rejected if her sexuality were to become known to other community members:

I feel like here the main support is from people who came from the same country as you. Like, the main support here is [people from a country in East Asia], [people from a country in East Asia] graduate students, people in Chinatown. I do not have much connection with people or community in Chinatown, but I am presuming that they may be your main resource for support … I am Christian but I have a complex about my religion. I go to church. I still go to church every Sunday, but people I am meeting there, I always have this concern: "Do you accept LGBT people? Are you friendly to LGBT people?" Because church might be a strong support to immigrants, they are open to

people, they are friendly. You can meet a lot of people who are very friendly there. But

the thing is that you cannot tell them you are gay.

Whereas some participants had difficulty feeling comfortable in their ethnic communities

due to their sexual orientation, others often spoke about difficulties related to integrating into the

local LGBT community. Luisa felt that the experience of queer immigrants is often more

challenging because they cannot utilize the support and resources of their ethnic community;

while at the same time, they face the difficulty of being accepted into the local LGBT

community. She explained that often queer immigrants' expectations of being welcomed in

Canadian queer community are not met, and instead they face yet another rejection if they do not

fit community expectations of what it means to be queer in North American culture:

> No matter where you go, in any country, because of the fact that you are different, you
>
> are still going to have to face challenges. A straight person has it pretty easy, you come
>
> here, you adapt, you go in life and you have your kids, and you go to school, like that.
>
> But I think for a gay person who comes here, I think perhaps the integrating part of it
>
> would be a challenge because in my opinion every society or every community or every
>
> group has their own rules already. You know, their own type of rules that they live by.
>
> And here in Canada, the gay community, I am not judging, however, this is what I hear
>
> from my gay friends. That it is very superficial. The men are very superficial. The men
>
> are very into the way you look, the way you present yourself. And they are very into that.
>
> And that is a big part of it. And I do not know if that is true but this is what I hear from
>
> them. Very superficial, very into the appearance, more than what is in the inside of the
>
> person. So I think for a gay man or a bisexual man that comes from a country like my
>
> country, perhaps the expectation is that life is so beautiful, that I am now here in this

country that accepts. But perhaps they do not realize that every country has their own rules that you kind of have to adapt to, or learn to live with or accept them. That would be the challenge for a gay person living here because the truth is, and this always goes back to that comment that I normally hear from my friends, here it is a bit … the gays here have their own way of being. Presenting themselves and anything other than that would not be accepted. It probably would be very challenging finding someone then if you do not fall into that category. So I would assume that that would be a challenge for someone adapting to your own kind or your own people when you realize that after all it is not as beautiful as I thought it would be, or as welcoming as I thought it would be – you have to kind of adapt to that .... And that on top of all other challenges, especially for somebody that comes alone. You know, it would be very hard to integrate and then to face the fact that you are not even well accepted because there is so many rules, which you did not think of back home, for example, being really fit.

Other participants also believed that their double minority status resulted in experiencing challenges of both LGBT people and of immigrants, thus making their adjustment to Canada significantly more difficult. Benjamin believes that not being mainstream in terms of his sexual orientation and in terms of his ethno-cultural background made the immigration more challenging for him:

They have also the difficulty of being LGBT. It is not like you are mainstream. It is always difficult not to be in the mainstream. It is a bit of a challenge to be different. It is like being a Black man when everyone is White. So, I think they face more difficulties generally, not during the immigration. So on the one hand, I do not think immigration adds more difficulties, but it also does not take away the difficulties … just being

different. Being different; not being mainstream. It is more in the personal relationships. I do not know, the need to explain yourself, the need to prove yourself more, the need to be better in order to be accepted, to work harder … In life I was always not the mainstream. I was always not like everyone else. So for me it was that I need to study harder, to work harder, to be better than others, because, for example, you are in [a country in Eastern Europe] and you apply for a job, so [people from a country in Eastern Europe] might get the job with less capabilities. But you need to work; you need to be good in order to be accepted. Because you are Jewish, you need to be really, really good, because they will, if you are the same level, they will prefer a [person from a country in Eastern Europe]. So here let us say two, three people come to an interview: the Quebecois who was raised here, who speaks two languages, French and English, and comes somebody from Asia, and he also speaks French and English, and they have the same degree from Concordia University, the same year, the same marks, the same experience, everything the same. Who do you think will be accepted? I think the Quebecois will be accepted. I think because he is the mainstream and if the company is not international company, if it is mostly a Quebecois company, I think it will be healthier for them to hire a Quebecois person. So maybe it is my own racism. My own - because I would prefer people like me. So I believe that other people would prefer people like them.

Although encouraging possibilities emerged as a result of moving to Canada, some participants felt that their immigrant status can often negatively impact their employment chances. Also, due to their sexual orientation, they felt that they were also cut off from the resources available to their non-LGBT peers in their ethnic community. Similar to Benjamin, Yaron perceived that his chances of getting or maintaining a job are lower because of his

sexuality, and that he has to be able to offer more than his peers with similar qualifications to compensate for his double minority status:

> I have definitely had a harder time at work. See my first job here that I had in Canada was working at a [main religion in a liberal country in the Middle East] Elementary Private School – and I definitely got that job because I am [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East] and because of my language skills. And I walked in, and I had my CV that I had just translated into English, all of my experience was from [a liberal country in the Middle East] and I went in there, this young [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East] girl and got the job. I started as a lunch monitor but I ended up having a full position there as a kindergarten teacher and extended program supervisor, and a substitute teacher. And that was a really good job especially as my first job here. I made $17/hour. I do not make that money anymore here. Like that is still the best job I ever had, you know? I feel like the Jewish community kind of takes care of [people from a liberal country in the Middle East] here in some ways. But it got harder once I was way more authentic in terms of who I was. The way I presented myself, my sexual orientation, somebody asked me if I was in a relationship and I would say I had a girlfriend. The thing was that my relationship with that school was actually a long-term one. The first time I worked there, the first year I worked there, I was a new immigrant [liberal country in the Middle East] girl. Then I left to go to university, and then after two years, I came back because I needed a job and they had an opening. By then my presentation was quite different. But I was not transitioning yet physically, like medically I was not taking any hormones, testosterone yet, I did not have surgery, but I was just very masculine presenting. And they knew me, so they welcomed me back but it felt different. Suddenly,

the kids started asking all the questions and the parents did not really know what to do with me, kind of. A lot of them were kind of like: "Mmm? Who is this?" I became such a weird phenomenon at school. Like young, queer-looking employee. But the [main language in a liberal country in the Middle East] thing saved me. The [being a person from a liberal country in the Middle East] thing always saved me there, like I am [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East]. Look, I am speaking [the main language in a liberal country in the Middle East]! I am teaching your kids to speak [the main language in a liberal country in the Middle East] and I am doing it well too! I am getting them interested and I am good with kids so people did not know how to take me in. And then, I left again and then I came back again. And that time, it was already, I was already transitioning. I started having stubble on my face but I did not come out to them. I did not say that I was trans. I just showed up. My voice started changing. Parents that did not know me from before started calling me in male pronouns. Every day I went to work, there was some kind of gender mishap, some kind of gender mishap that was so awkward or weird. Like a kid having to correct their parent that no, their teacher is a girl, they just look really, really masculine because that is what I had told the kids because I did not want to come out to them. But for the parents it was just so confusing that at some point I was just like, I love the kids and this is a good paying job but I cannot do this anymore. It is just way too much. So maybe in terms of answering your question, I do think that if you are [a person from a liberal country in the Middle East] and you are queer, it is harder here to access support, to feel part of the [liberal country in the Middle East] community, and maybe in terms of getting work. I think that one of the first things you think about when you come to a new place is - will I be able to find work and will I

be able to sustain myself? And it is really a double challenge because depending where you work, I mean I think Montreal is fairly open-minded, but I think you may still have trouble depending on where you work. Like if it is a conservative environment, then being an immigrant and being queer, you have to really, really prove yourself or have a really amazing CV or something. I can only just speak from my experience, which is why I told you about my experience at that school, but I think it probably would have been a bit easier for me if I just was not queer and I just continued working there.

Overall, participants felt that they were less secure and had less support compared to their heterosexual peers. Philip felt coming to Canada without family as a single immigrant made him lose the support and security of having a partner. Furthermore, he did not feel that having a same-sex relationship would solve this problem due to his perception of the instability of such relationships. Thus, he feels that being queer makes him forego a very important mechanism of support that is usually accessible to other immigrants:

To have a family and children is something very important for me. But there is a very, very low probability of that happening. Because just the fact that you can marry and a girl, and you have children for the sake of having family and children, for me, it is not worth the effort. Taking into account that now two gay people can adopt a child, for me, it is not very acceptable either, not the best idea because for me, a child needs two parents. In the best case scenario, it is to be his natural parents. I mean, man and woman. But I do not mind anything. If a gay couple feels that they are capable of taking care of a child, why not? But I do not think that I will be able to find the person that will be in mood to have children and to create a gay family. So, there are too many complications. And, for me, the child, in order to grow and to be happy, it has to be in more or less a

good family because being gay, the freedom that you have makes you a little bit maybe more … I think that for two gay people, the priority is not going to be to stay at home, to cook, to clean, to change diapers, or even if those people exist, this is a very small percentage. It is not typical, and in gay couples that I have seen till now, after a few years they become an open couple. And imagine if there is a child involved in that. The biggest problem is that the child wants time. And, if a gay couple becomes an open couple, and if they have a child, I simply do not think that they will have the time for this child. Maybe there are exceptions, but generally speaking, that is my concern. Usually a relationship between gay people that lasts for more than five years, they are very rare. I am not saying that they do not exist, but we have to look at the statistics sometimes …You are losing the security, the pleasure to have family and children. Being alone in Canada, I think it is more difficult than having someone with you. So if a family immigrates to another country, in sense that you are not alone, the immigration, I think it is easier. I mean, although with family they have plenty of other problems that they have to solve: if they are with children, they have to find a kindergarten, a good school, to understand how the system works here in order to be able to choose or to do the right thing for their family and for their children … But at the same time, you are not alone. You can talk to someone who is already part of your family, who is somebody that you can rely on. In this sense, the immigration for a family, it is easier.

Despite multiple challenges, however, participants felt that being a queer immigrant and having to go through all the difficulties of balancing various parts of their identities made them grow as a person. They often felt that it made them the people they are now, stronger and wiser. Luisa explained:

I think it probably would be different because I do believe that who I am right now is because of the experiences I lived in life that has made me who I am right now. It is not a problem, but all the trouble you go through, the fear of being in love with somebody that, what most people call it, is not the standard. It makes you a different person. It makes you struggle with different things. I think that if I were to be straight here, I do not think that I would see life the same way. I do not see it now. I see life different because I have lived different experience. I think it would be completely different … Because I had to learn to live with things that I myself had no control over. And I had to learn to live with that. And sometimes it is just suppress and let go of certain things, or accept them in a way that you do certain types of things for the better of others and not for yourself …

Furthermore, many participants felt, as was discussed earlier, that sexuality has not only strongly defined the trajectory of their life in Canada, but the decision to come to Canada. Sergey explained that everything he went through in Canada simply would not have taken place if he were heterosexual:

If I were not LGBT, I would probably not be in Canada to start with. As I told you, I came here because of my sexuality. If I was a straight person, I would probably stay in [a country in Eastern Europe]. Because it is easy - you have all your language, you know your culture; you have your family and friends, infrastructure, family, circle of friends - all set for you. It is easier for you to continue with that, and go and proceed. And I was LGBT from the beginning so I could not live this life the way they do unless I am not being true to myself.

Similar to Sergey, many other participants felt that they would not be in Canada in the first place if they were not queer, and thus the choices they made after immigration were in some

way predetermined prior to immigration. In particular, as a result of data analysis, it became

apparent that participants often made a conscious choice of not being in touch with their ethnic

community and focused on integrating into Canadian society and building a diverse circle of

friends instead. They were comfortable with adopting a "queer lifestyle" as they often came to

Canada "to live [their] sexuality." While these participants often felt they were acculturating

much faster compared to their non-LGBT peers, they also discussed the difficulties they

experienced due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Canadian LGBT community

and to the overall cultural shock, which they perceived was more extreme than the experience of

their non-LGBT peers. Therefore participants stressed the importance of the involvement of

Canadian government and community organizations in helping LGBT immigrants navigate an

unknown and possibly dangerous new culture. For example, queer immigrants arrive often

uninformed of potential dangers of unsafe sexual behaviours and health risks, and quickly put

themselves at risk. The next section will discuss the ways, suggested by participants, in which

the Canadian government and community organizations can help LGBT immigrants get better

oriented in their new country and make the settlement in Canada more comfortable.

      4.3.4 "Government needs to promote the acceptance." The most important

observation in regard to the role of the Canadian government and community organizations in

the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants that came out of the data analysis was that a

vast majority of the participants were fully satisfied with the help they received in Canada. Most

participants struggled at first when asked about what the Canadian government and community

organizations could do in order to make the integration of LGBT immigrants more comfortable.

However, it is important to keep in mind that, as was discussed earlier, most LGBT immigrants

came from countries where being LGBT was either illegal or strongly discouraged: therefore,

just the fact that LGBT people receive equal treatment in Canada was already significant for

most participants. For example, Philip felt that the government is doing enough in terms of

helping LGBT immigrants because there is no discrimination during the immigration process:

> Honestly, I think that the government of Canada is doing enough. There is no
>
> discrimination, if you are gay or straight, I think that the immigration process is pretty
>
> much the same. Maybe you get more points if you are married and you got children. But I
>
> find it fair because Canada needs young and healthy people, this is the logic. So if you
>
> have a family with a child, they are bringing a child that will be most likely grown and
>
> educated in Canadian way. The advantage that this family can have compared to gay
>
> people – it is normal, there is no discrimination. And I think that the government is doing
>
> enough for the adaptation of gay people.

Many other participants also felt that there is a total fairness when it comes to the equality

and legal rights of queer people in Canada, and thus, there is not much the government can do to

help queer immigrants. It is important to note that while most participants were satisfied with the

work performed by the Canadian government, the participants from Quebec were particularly

adamant about how efficient and helpful the government of Quebec was. For example, Jean felt

that the fight for equality is over because in Quebec gay people are "accepted by everyone and

the law":

> I think that gay marriage has been voted a long time ago now. So being gay is very
>
> accepted by the population. And today, I do not believe there are many things left to do
>
> because the fight has been won, which is not the case in France for example [this
>
> interview was conducted in 2012, prior to France's passage of marriage equality]. I think
>
> that here all the fighting has been done. So, do we need to do something more? I am not

sure. Maybe we need to fight for trans people because I am sure they are not so well accepted by straight, or even by gay people. But for being gay in Canada, in Quebec especially, maybe not in some other provinces of Canada, but being gay here in Quebec is so easy, it is so accepted by everyone and the law. We are really equal. So all the fighting has been done. I feel it.

For many other participants, similar to Jean, the fact that the Canadian government legalized same-sex marriage several years ago was a major sign of its support for LGBT rights. For example, while Daw feels that there is still room for improvement and that the Canadian government is "not go[ing] out of their way" to help LGBT people, he still feels that it is doing the best it can, and the legalization of same-sex marriage is a testimony to that:

I do not think they have to make it any easier, I feel like they have in general a supportive policy. I think they are being as supportive as they can. I do not think they go out of the way to help gay people, but they are very open and very understanding about the situation. And of course there is room to improve but they are going in the right direction, slowly but surely. They helped people and they support gay rights … I think they are doing the best they could. They allowed gay marriage in Canada. I think they support but I do not think they go out of their way to help gay people.

Another area of support frequently praised by participants was the way Canadian government is continuously building awareness around LGBT issues. Luisa described it in the following way: "I must say, I am impressed by the way things are handled here in terms of promotion, especially in Montreal, towards the gays." Similarly, many participants, especially Quebec immigrants, expressed a great appreciation of Quebec's immigration and adaptation programs, and the consistency with which they build awareness and promote acceptance towards

LGBT issues. Benjamin felt that there is nothing more the government could do to help the integration of LGBT immigrants:

> Nothing. I think they were amazing. First of all, I went to Franconisation [immigrant settlement program in Quebec], and in Franconisation they talk about same-sex marriage, it is amazing. And they talk - when there are Muslim people in the class - and they talk about it. And they say: "This is the way we live in Quebec." You know? And, before you come to Quebec, you get this *Apprendre le Quebec* ["Getting to know Quebec" information booklet], and you read it, and there is a section on Quebec culture, and in Quebec culture they say: "We speak in French," all other kinds of stuff, and "we have same-sex marriage." So, I do not know what else they can do. They teach new immigrants that come here: "We are tolerant towards gay people." And as a person, what I am lacking - the health system sucks, but it does not matter if I am gay or not, it is the same for everyone. But just for the gays, I do not think they can do anything else.

Yusuf also believed that there is not much else the government can do. He believes that the government already protects LGBT immigrants via its laws so ultimately individuals are the ones who should be responsible for making decisions about their new way of life:

> To be honest, I do not see any official government involvement in making your stay or making your life any better here if you are a gay immigrant. It is because the challenge, the difficult time that you go through, is a very personal experience. It is actually you who is facing that, and making decisions about your new way of life. So because the gay people are already protected by law - you can feel much safer based on that. So I do not really know how the government can make it any better here.

An aspect of the Canadian government's policy that was frequently discussed in a positive light by the participants was the fact that they accept and support LGBT refugees seeking asylum in Canada. Heidi felt that allowing LGBT people from his country to come to Canada and receive asylum here is the most important thing that the government could do to help queer immigrants. Heidi also believed the government is doing "more than enough" because LGBT refugees are automatically entitled to financial assistance from the Canadian government:

> But I know that Canada, the Canadian government, they accept gay refugees, so that is the main thing actually. So it is a good step. They go on welfare and the government of Canada pays them actually. It is more than enough … I know the government of Canada, they accept gay [people from a conservative country in the Middle East] refugees.

Some participants even expressed concerns about LGBT immigrants receiving "special treatment" in regards to the outcome of their refugee case. For example, Fadi explained it in the following way:

> I do not think it is their job necessarily to do that. I mean, I know people can claim asylum and that is great, that is great for people who are feeling like they cannot live in a specific society anymore, and I support that, but I do not necessarily support any sort of litigation or law that would give LGBT immigrants any priority over other people.

Some other participants expressed a similar ambivalence about how sexual orientation or gender identity is a valid basis for being granted asylum. While Sergey did acknowledge that LGBT people in his country are often persecuted, he hesitated about that being sufficient grounds for asylum. He was not sure if sexuality was an important enough reason for seeking refuge because he feels that many other segments of the population also have their sexual needs

repressed. In Sergey's opinion, LGBT people might sometimes be overemphasizing the

importance of meeting their sexual needs:

> The only thing is - maybe they can accept more gay people from [a country in Eastern
>
> Europe], especially when they are being persecuted. But it is hard to quantify. You know,
>
> they are persecuted, but then again – it is such a difficult question. They are persecuted
>
> for what - sex? A lot of people do not put as much stress and importance on sex. Some
>
> say - just repress it. Even in straight couples it happens - there are a lot of marriages,
>
> religious communities, where people are not necessarily happy, but they just conform,
>
> and live the way they are supposed to live. And sex is not important, or they find ways of
>
> dealing with it. There is always ways. And gays, in a way, have a maximalist point of
>
> view - have everything with no restrictions.

However, there were participants who felt that the Canadian government should take on a

more proactive role in regard to helping LGBT people in countries where they are persecuted.

Sabrina felt that considering Canada's orientation towards diversity and tolerance, there is still

room for improvement when it comes to accepting LGBT refugees' asylum claims:

> I just watched a documentary about gays from Brazil. They apply here as immigrants
>
> because they are killing the gays there. They should help those, not just in Brazil, like all
>
> the gays .... Because they are more open here …. You want them to die or what? If you
>
> are in that situation, what are you going to do? You have to feel what that person feels.

Other participants felt that governmental support of LGBT immigrants who come from

countries where queer people are persecuted should not stop at just helping them cross the

border. Many of them spoke about the effects of internalized homophobia that do not go away

after crossing the border, and of the importance of disseminating the message of tolerance and

acceptance among immigrants. Luisa felt that it is significantly more comfortable to be LGBT in Canada than in other countries. She suggested that the government should put more emphasis on communicating that message to new immigrants, who are often unaware of what Canada has to offer:

> So perhaps for somebody that is new, coming from a country such as my own country, I think promoting the message that you are well accepted, that we recognize that you are different or that you are basically different from the norm, but we accept you no matter what. I guess that would be promoting the acceptance. I guess the government could be more involved, although I am not saying they are not. I think from what I have seen, this country and Montreal do really well in that sense. From what I see, being gay in Montreal is not that bad. It is not that bad. So for a new immigrant coming here, that message I think will be very beneficial perhaps, that it is not that bad being gay. I mean here, it is not such a crime to be gay. I personally think that for a lot of people this may be a burden, something that they are carrying because of wherever they lived. And let us pick a country where it is absolutely not acceptable - there you will probably die if you come to terms with being gay, they will probably kill you. There are countries like that. So when you and people from your ex-country come here, [the government] should let them know that all you have been hiding, suppressing inside of you - it is not a crime and we will accept you just the way you are.

Yusuf similarly stressed the importance of communicating to LGBT immigrants that they are "no different from anybody" in Canada when it comes to their legal rights. He suggested that LGBT immigrants should be offered a short orientation session to tell them about resources available in Canada to ease their settlement:

If the government wants to help, when you arrive and you are very new, they can give

you kind of short orientation session or something, just to make you feel more at ease.

Just to tell you that you are no different than anybody here. So it may actually accelerate

the process of the settlement of the gay immigrants, because in the beginning, at least for

me, it was a bit difficult, well, I do not want to use the word difficult, it takes a while to

get settled in a new community.

Many participants felt it would be important for the government to include information

about resources for LGBT people into the standard packages of educational materials that are

provided to immigrants when they arrive in Canada. Denis explained how helpful such resources

would have been for him upon his arrival to Canada:

I guess the first step when you are in your new country – it is good to have some

visibility about what resources as a gay person you could have. When I immigrated, it

was pre-Internet era, so things are drastically different now. But I had no idea what or

who could help me slide into my gay life in Canada, what type of support is available,

what type of organization, what type of this-and-this-and-that, I had to slowly discover

this really by myself and it took time. And I guess if all this was in that famous brochure

or that famous documentary that Canada shows about "Hey, this is Canada, it is

wonderful," if there was a section for single women, for gay people, for this, for this, for

this, for that, what type of resources you can access. I think just informing ahead would

help. Maybe it exists today, I do not know. But at the time, nothing similar existed. Just

an "FYI: this is what is already available." I think that would go a long way even before

building additional things for gay people.

Some participants stressed the importance of specialized settlement services for LGBT immigrants due to the risks associated with the LGBT lifestyle that queer people outside of Canada are not aware of. For example, Ahmed felt that immigrants are often less aware of the dangers of unsafe sex and are less concerned with safer-sex practices, and thus they become a group at risk in terms of contracting HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections. He explained that most of the immigrants from his region were not able to discuss any health concerns with their doctors due to the fears of being outed and other negative consequences. Therefore, Ahmed felt that LGBT immigrants need to be made aware of the existence of LGBT-friendly health care resources:

I think awareness would be very important. Although I previously said that I am not hundred percent comfortable with my sexuality, but I mean, I am at least ninety percent comfortable with my sexuality. But that is not the case for most of people who come from [a conservative country in the Middle East] to Canada. Lots of them have issues; lots of them do not really have the awareness, most importantly the health awareness. In [a conservative country in the Middle East], the HIV, for example, the HIV issue is not that serious because the percentages are way lower than here. So people are not as careful when they have sex with others. But if they have the same mentality when they arrive here, chances are they will get HIV in no time. So they need to know this, they need to feel more comfortable with pointing out their issues to doctors. Because I am one of the people who could never go see a doctor with certain health issues in [a conservative country in the Middle East] because I was afraid that the doctor would find out that I am having gay sex in life - I did not really want to go through that embarrassment. So people

have to be reassured here that it is fine to address their issues, to speak about them and

seek healthcare or any other help they need with their sexuality-related problems.

Benjamin felt that peer support groups would be helpful to LGBT immigrants in order to

help them deal with internalized homophobia and facilitate their acculturation in Canada. He also

felt that the government should make an effort to target ethnic communities that come from

queerphobic countries:

Actually, they can create groups for immigrants … They can really make a support group

on a steady basis, once a week, twice a month. This group will discuss different subjects -

no matter what, but it will be open to immigrants, to LGBT immigrants. Support group

like this. Where people can come and talk … Because Canada knows which countries are

not friendly towards gay people. And Canada knows which people come as gay refugees,

as sexual refugees from these countries. So, they know. I think that everyone knows that

in Columbia you cannot be openly gay, and everyone knows that in Brazil it is much

more open … I think here might be needed a little bit of support. You know, with

acculturation. I think an advertisement, like in Russian newspapers or Arabic newspapers.

That advertises that there is a group for gay immigrants. I think it would make huge, huge

difference. Putting an advertisement in these newspapers, targeting certain communities

and of course, having an online presence. Advertising that there is a meet up group to just

meet to speak and discuss how it is going for everyone. And so people could meet people

like them; they can support each other in the process.

Other participants also spoke about the need for specialized mental health support

services to help LGBT immigrants navigate and integrate the different, and often conflicting,

parts of their identities during the settlement process. Sofia explained the need for social workers

who are well-versed in both LGBT and immigrant issues:

> I know we had a lot of assistance from JIAS [an immigrant-focused community agency]
> but I do not think that is what they are called now, now it is a division of CJA, Ometz I
> think it is called now, could that be possible? They have a whole division that assists
> [people from a country in Eastern Europe] Jewish immigrants with different things, in
> terms of settling into their life. I really have not had to use their resources in many years
> now, but a lot of the services they offer focus on helping people find jobs: how to look
> for a job and how to get a job in your field. A lot of them assist with job search and a lot
> assist also with sort of Jewish learning because again a lot of Soviet Jews were not really
> in touch with being Jewish, so they give them opportunities to learn more about that. I do
> not know if they have something that targets specifically people of non-heterosexual
> orientation, LGBT people. To the extent of my knowledge I do not think they have
> anything of that sort. So I think that could be a gap to fill in because people from that
> background, whether it is Uzbek or Soviet or Jewish, none of those cultures are extremely
> welcoming to LGBT people. I think they could have something that would allow people
> to reconcile these different parts of their identity because people definitely sometimes
> feel like they have to choose. People think: "Ok, well, I cannot be gay and Jewish
> because that does not work. When I go to synagogue, I am told we do not accept gay
> people here but I am gay. But I am also Jewish." I think they could have social workers
> who are trained in terms of dealing with LGBT issues and LGBT identity …

Elsa also felt that the government should be targeting people from ethnic communities,

especially the ones where LGBT sexuality is traditionally stigmatized or where religion plays a

strong role. She explained: "If they cannot be out at work or they feel that their religious beliefs contradict their orientation – I am sure that for those populations it would be way harder to integrate themselves into society for a whole range of reasons." Katrina also felt that there is a need for programs designed to cater specifically to the needs of LGBT immigrants during their integration process:

> All the immigration programs they set up for immigrants, I think that a division of that should also relate to LGBTs. You see those advertised settlement programs for language, finding a job, or learning skills .... They have some sorts of other instructional programs for assimilating or getting comfortable with the culture of Canada, and there should also be a program that is accessible to LGBT immigrants.

> Furthermore, many participants spoke about the importance of the utilization of modern technology as a means of reaching out to the segments of population that are hard to reach because they are not openly LGBT and thus would not have access to resources that LGBT people usually have. Ahmed acknowledged it as a problem. He reasoned that if government could have known the sexual orientation of the immigrants, it would be easier to help them; however, he noted that would be unrealistic for a number of reasons. He believed that making use of dating websites and mobile device applications to target new LGBT immigrants would help to reach those populations that are usually more difficult to reach:

> That is a tough mission because, of course, it is out of question that the government asks for the sexuality in the immigration application – it really does not make sense. Lots of people would not feel comfortable, and whoever would feel comfortable to declare that they are gay - then they already have crossed half the way. The government will not be targeting the people who really need the support. I believe that most of the people who

come from the Middle East would use Internet to date. So maybe by having sort of

announcements in dating websites, dating gay websites, to direct people, maybe even

having sort of agreements with these dating websites to guide people, not only give them

space to meet other guys... because I know that any gay man who comes will start

looking for sexual dates through the Internet, in the beginning at least.

Similarly, Sofia believed that technology can be instrumental in making the settlement

for LGBT immigrants more comfortable. She suggested that there is a wide array of useful

resources available, but that a better job can be done in making these resources known to LGBT

immigrants:

I think for people, when they come here, again I am talking about people who do not

come from such technologically-advanced countries as Canada, I think the Internet

becomes a great resource for them, and they realize that there are communities out there

and they meet people online who are also of the same sexual orientation. In their country

it is not possible, they do not have those kinds of resources, they might not have dating

sites at all or they might not have dating sites that cater to LGBT folks … They could get

more people access to resources. In 1996 the Internet was sort of in its stages of infancy,

but now there is so much potential to direct people like: "Ok, here is where you can go

either online or over the phone." There are so many more resources now but people are

not being pointed in the right direction. I think there is definitely a gap there that could be

filled.

Overall, LGBT immigrants were satisfied with the help given by the Canadian

government in terms of settlement and integration. The majority of the participants came from

countries where LGBT sexuality was illegal or strongly stigmatized, with non-existent or not-

well-developed queer communities, and where LGBT people did not have similar rights as the rest of the population. Quite often, the participants immigrated to Canada in order to avoid the discrimination and oppression back in their countries of origin. Therefore, coming to a country where LGBT people are protected by law and have the same rights as the rest of the population, including the right to get married, was an enormous positive change for most queer immigrants. Often they felt that the government was already doing enough and it is up to individuals to take advantage of all the opportunities and resources made available to them in Canada. In terms of areas of improvement, the participants often spoke about the need for governmental settlement agencies to identify, target, and service LGBT immigrants as a distinct population due to the unique challenges they face as a double minority.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Summary of Findings via the Emerged Grounded Theory

The goal of the current study was to understand the process of acculturation of LGBT immigrants to Canada. I used the grounded theory approach to obtain an in-depth interpretive understanding of the subjective experience and perceptions related to the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants. Data analysis demonstrated that "queerphobia in the culture of origin" was a central phenomenon influencing all aspects of the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants. As was mentioned earlier, the emerged grounded theory presents the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants in chronological order. The Findings section described two consistent parallel subprocesses responsible for forming the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants: cultural identity development and sexual identity development. Queerphobia in the culture of origin played the most dominant role in the development of cultural and sexual parts of the LGBT immigrants' identity. These two processes are always intertwined, as is demonstrated in the integrative diagram (Figure 1). Thus, the culture of LGBT immigrants' country of origin, as well as Canadian culture, strongly influenced their sexual identity development before and after immigration, and vice versa – their sexual identity development influenced the way LGBT immigrants relate to their culture of origin and to the Canadian culture before and after immigration. Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail below, the emerged grounded theory suggests that in the case of LGBT immigrants, the acculturation process often begins long before the beginning of the actual immigration process, as LGBT immigrants often assume a Western orientation as a response to queerphobia in their culture of origin. This section will describe the role of queerphobia in forming LGBT immigrants' acculturation experience, and the impact it has on the intertwined development of sexual and cultural identity.

5.1.1 Before immigration. The findings of the current study that describe first awareness of the participants in regard to their sexual orientation and gender identity are consistent with early research on queer identity development, e.g., Cass's (1979) gay identity model. As was discussed in the Findings section, the participants often became aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity rather early in their lives. The first awareness usually came as a result of feeling different from their peers, without being able to label what it is that makes them different. For some participants, it was gender non-confirming behaviours or interests. For example, some participants who were born male reported liking to play with dolls or assuming household chores traditionally associated with women in their home culture, while some participants born as female spoke about expressing themselves as a "tomboy." The participants also spoke about an "unusual" interest and attraction towards individuals of the same-sex and usually a total lack of interest towards a different sex, which made them feel different from their peers. The heteronormativity and strongly-defined gender roles experienced in the home countries often made the participants aware of being different as early as five years old. For example, the LGBT immigrants often spoke about their peers being aggressive towards them due to their differences, and feeling that they could not express their interests openly due to fear of being bullied or excluded. For many, these experiences were their first encounters with queerphobia in their culture of origin – it was a first clash between the cultural and sexual parts of their identity. Early in their lives, LGBT immigrants had to develop awareness of the behaviours and ways of expressing themselves that made them different and try to hide or suppress these parts of them in order to fit in. While the participants often could not label their difference in terms of sexuality, quite often this was the starting point of feeling "othered" in their culture. As the participants were growing up and becoming increasingly aware of being different, they often experienced a

need to understand their sexuality. However, most LGBT immigrants reported not having access

to any resources that would help them better understand their sexuality – this was not something

taught at school or discussed in magazines or television. In a vast majority of the cases, there was

no LGBT community or any social support resources available to LGBT people. Therefore, the

participants often learned about what their immerging sexual orientation meant from the

perceptions of LGBT sexuality and attitudes toward it from the people that surrounded them, as

well as values, norms, and beliefs in their culture of origin. Most of the time, such perceptions,

values, and norms were severely queerphobic. For example, in many countries, any expressions

of LGBT sexuality are considered illegal and punishable by law. Many cultures see queer

sexuality as a matter of choice or as something deviant, a certain type of mental health disorder.

LGBT sexuality is not something talked about and people tend to not be educated in regard to it

in many of countries from which the participants originated. Some participants first learned to

understand what their sexual orientation meant from religion, thus understanding their sexuality

and therefore, themselves, as something sinful and perverted. Furthermore, most participants

reported that their native language stigmatizes queer sexuality. For example, many languages do

not contain non-evaluative terms to describe sexual orientation or gender identity that are not

heteronormative. Terms used to describe LGBT sexuality usually have negative connotations and

are often used as curse words or derogatory terms. Thus, at an early age LGBT immigrants often

conceptualized their sexuality as something shameful that needs to be kept in secret from others,

further internalizing the queerphobic values of their culture. These findings are consistent with

the research by Kaufman and Johnson (2004), who argued that queer identity development was

strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors, such as, for example, social stigma that LGBT

immigrants faced. Lack of social support was another major challenge that the LGBT immigrants faced, as will be discussed next.

Due to the prevalence of queerphobia and in some cases anti-LGBT legal measures, the participants often had no social support to help them deal with their emerging sexuality. Most of them came from the countries where there was no LGBT community, so meeting other queer people with whom they could share their challenges and concerns was often a challenge. In fact, a number of participants reported never meeting other queer people or not having any queer friends prior to their immigration to Canada. Moreover, they were not able to receive support from their heterosexual friends due to fears of rejection and stigmatization that would result from disclosing queer sexuality. Family was also not available as a source of support – the queer immigrants were not able to share their sexuality with their family due to fears of disappointing their family, bringing shame to the family name, and ending of familial relationships. Some even spoke of the possibility of being killed by their family members due to the shame their sexuality would bring to the family name. Furthermore, in many countries, anti-LGBT stigma extends to people who stay in touch or support queer friends or family, thus making the issue of finding support for LGBT immigrants even more challenging.

Thus, due to internalized queerphobia and external queerphobic pressures of their culture of origin, the LGBT immigrants tended to feel negatively about their sexuality throughout their formative years. They often spoke about being afraid of the implications of being different and felt concerned about their future. The participants listed such feelings associated with the awareness of being queer as shame, guilt, and loneliness. They often perceived it as a burden and would have changed their sexual orientation to heterosexual if they were able to. These feelings often resulted in participants feeling disconnected from their culture and country of origin. Quite

often, the only affirmative references to LGBT sexuality they were able to find were in Western

pop culture, such as music, film, and magazines. For many participants, the discovery of these

affirmative references was an eye-opening experience – these were first instances where their

sexuality was not considered deviant and stigmatized but instead was accepted and validated.

This was a turning point for numerous LGBT immigrants in terms of rejecting their culture of

origin and assuming a Western orientation. Finally, they realized that there is a place in the world

where they could find acceptance. Thus, they found validation of their sexual identity in Western

culture and rejected their non-affirming culture of origin. In fact, many immigrants felt so

disconnected from their culture of origin and became so Western-oriented that they started

acculturating even before immigration to Canada: they would only watch movies and television

shows, listen to music, and read books produced in the West; they would behave and express

themselves in the way they perceived people in the West to behave and express themselves.

At this point, their sexual identity was strongly influencing the development of their

cultural identity: the more they embraced their sexual orientation or gender identity, the more

they rejected their queerphobic culture of origin. Sometimes such rejection was not fully

conscious in terms of linking the rejection of the culture of origin to the queerphobia prevalent in

it. This rejection of the culture of origin was in many instances instrumental to LGBT

immigrants' desire to immigrate and their integration into the new culture. For example, LGBT

immigrants repeatedly spoke of a desire to leave their country of origin since an early age. While

at an early age they were not able to establish a conscious link between the desire to immigrate

and their sexual identity, being different from their peers made them feel disconnected from their

surroundings. Such feelings of disconnectedness from their culture of origin grew stronger as the

LGBT immigrants dealt with the challenges associated with emotional, cultural, and social processing of sexuality.

The participants explained the challenges associated with heteronormative pressures to live "normal" lives. For example, being single beyond a certain age and not following the traditional life trajectory of dating somebody of a different sex and then getting married and having children was looked at with suspicion and raised questions. These queerphobic behaviours and social contexts made many participants fearful of being discovered. Moreover, almost all the participants spoke about the difficulties accepting their sexual orientation at first.

Many participants reported experiencing mental health problems as a response to the struggles of negotiating their sexual orientation or gender identity. For many participants, this struggle manifested itself in anxiety, depression, weight gain, and self-esteem issues, among other mental health challenges. In fact, some participants reported conceptualizing their queer sexuality itself as a mental health disorder, and going to see a mental health professional to get "cured." Often, these therapies were initiated by the participants' parents as means of helping them become "normal." The LGBT immigrants in many cases eagerly attended the therapy to make their parents happy and in hopes of changing themselves. Frequently, the participants tried to "be straight" or date members of a different sex in order to try to change their sexuality, but usually without the desired outcome. Other participants tried to suppress their sexuality, to keep it inside of themselves and hide it from the external world. Some even made life and career choices to help them better hide their sexuality from friends and family. Even among the participants who achieved a certain level of acceptance of their sexuality, they still did not feel they could explore their sexuality in the place where they grew up. They often moved to other parts of the country, to bigger cities, where nobody knew them and where they could be more

accepted. While for some participants this move turned out to be helpful in terms of their further acceptance of their sexual orientation or gender identity, most found that queerphobic values and norms, prevalent in their country, were still very present in other regions, which made them feel even further disconnected from their culture of origin. For some LGBT immigrants this was a final confirmation of the inability to receive acceptance of their sexual identity in their culture of origin, and the need to immigrate in order to live their sexuality. Furthermore, even for the participants who, despite all the challenges, were able to accept and be at peace with their sexuality, being out and living their sexuality was virtually impossible. While in some countries being out would literally mean death as LGBT sexuality is punishable by the death penalty, many participants felt their life would be over anyway if they were to come out in their countries of origin. Being openly out for many participants meant giving up all their rights and power because coming out would immediately result in judgment, interpersonal rejection, and loss of professional and social standing. Finally, coming out would also cause major challenges when it came to the LGBT immigrants' families due to the shame it would bring to the family name, which would likely result in them being disowned or cut off from their families. Therefore, for many participants leaving their country of origin seemed like the only way to live their sexuality - "staying was not an option" for most of them. In fact, many of them reported that their experience with queerphobia was the main, and sometimes, the only reason for their immigration to Canada.

      5.1.2 Decision to immigrate to Canada. While there were some participants who felt that their sexuality was not instrumental in their decision to immigrate to Canada, most felt that immigration would not be something they would consider were it not for queerphobia: They would have no reason to leave their country of origin, where they were well adjusted and had

strong family and support networks, in order to start from scratch alone in the new unknown

country. However, the need to live their sexuality and have it accepted by people around them

prevailed and was instrumental in their decision to immigrate to Canada. The participants often

spoke about either hearing about the large and well-established LGBT community in Canada or

having travelled to Canada themselves and discovering the LGBT community there. Such

discoveries were liberating for participants, as they were validating and affirming of their sexual

orientation or gender identity. The LGBT immigrants felt that immigrating to Canada would

present them with the opportunity to escape the queerphobia of their culture of origin and to be

able to live their sexuality comfortably, including forming a long-term relationship and even

marriage. Thus, for many LGBT immigrants coming out of the closet was equated with coming

out of their culture of origin. However, the role of queerphobia in the culture of origin on the

acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants did not end with the decision to immigrate. As

will be discussed next, it continues to play an extremely important role in the development of the

cultural and sexual identities of LGBT immigrants following immigration.

5.1.3 After immigration to Canada. Even though LGBT immigrants often have some

understanding and preconceived notions of what life in Canada is like, they still reported

experiencing a culture shock upon landing in Canada. The participants often found themselves

lost and not knowing which direction to take upon landing in their new country. Soon after

immigration, the LGBT immigrants became aware of cultural and language barriers that they

would have to face. However, most participants reported making a conscious decision to

integrate and acculturate to Canadian society due to their strong orientation towards Western

values and lifestyle, which developed prior to immigration. As was discussed earlier, often the

LGBT immigrants came to perceive the Western lifestyle and values as superior to those of their

culture of origin and, therefore, were eager to understand the way Canadians live and to adopt

their lifestyle. They often spoke about the process of acculturation in terms of shedding the

notions and values of their home culture, and adjusting their behaviours and ways of expressing

themselves to the Canadian lifestyle in order to build their new identity. While there were some

participants who still felt closer to their home culture after spending a few years in Canada, most

reported feeling like they had integrated both their home culture and Canadian culture, due to a

strong initial emphasis on acculturation. A majority of the participants reported enjoying learning

about other cultures and having a diverse circle of friends in Canada, thus not limiting their

social circle to their community of origin, which they often perceived to be the case with their

non-LGBT peers. They perceived the opportunity to meet people from different cultures as a

way of expanding their understanding of life in Canada and as a means to further integrate into

the diverse culture of their new country. Some participants even spoke of feeling more Canadian

after spending a few years in Canada because they feel that Canadian society's values and beliefs

are better aligned with theirs and because they feel more comfortable and accepted as a queer

person in Canadian society. Queerphobia in the culture of origin, which is often preserved in the

Canadian immigrant community, was usually responsible for the further disconnect of LGBT

immigrants from their culture of origin and their accelerated acculturation into Canadian culture.

In fact, most participants reported choosing not to be in touch with their ethnic

community after immigration to Canada due to experiences with queerphobia similar to those in

their country of origin. As the participants were growing increasingly more comfortable with

their sexual identity, the need for the acceptance of their sexual orientation or gender identity by

people around them was also growing. The development of sexual identity was influenced by the

perceived Canadian values of acceptance and diversity. The participants' cultural identities thus

further shed the internalized queerphobic notions and began to internalize the values of pride and

acceptance of their sexual identity, which facilitated a further disconnect from their ethnic

communities. While the participants acknowledged that their ethnic community is more

accepting of their sexuality compared to the community in their country of origin, they still did

not believe in the good faith of their community. The LGBT immigrants felt that people from

their country become more tolerant because they are more exposed to the existence of the LGBT

community in Canada and are aware that LGBT people in Canada are protected by law.

However, participants felt that tolerance and acceptance in their ethnic immigrant communities

are not genuine; rather, their ethnic communities "pretend" to be tolerant but in reality "import"

their queerphobic values and beliefs from their countries of origin and preserve them in Canada.

Therefore, the participants often reported feeling uncomfortable with being openly queer in their

community of origin in Canada and continuing to hide their sexuality, even though they were out

everywhere else. The LGBT immigrants felt that the attitude and the way of communication of

the people from their country of origin changed dramatically as soon as the participants disclosed

their sexual orientation or gender identity; they reported feeling judged and not genuinely

accepted, with the focus shifting solely to the sexual part of their identity. The participants felt

that being out about their sexuality in their community of origin resulted in them becoming an

object of gossip and stigma and being excluded from the social life of their ethnic community.

Overall, in many instances participants felt that their experiences within their ethnic communities

were very similar to their experiences in their country of origin, which was often the reason for

immigration to Canada. The participants often felt as if the integration of both parts of their

identity would be impossible if they were to stay involved with their community of origin;

LGBT immigrants felt as if they have to choose between their sexual or cultural identity – many

chose their sexuality and therefore, unlike most immigrants from their country, they did not acculturate to their community of origin in Canada. Instead, they acculturated to the LGBT community, as will be discussed next.

Integration into the LGBT community was not always as smooth as the participants had expected. First of all, participants' internalized queerphobia did not evaporate once they crossed the border. Furthermore, the LGBT immigrants reported experiencing yet another culture shock due to the culture of sex positivity and overall openness in terms of sexual expression prevalent in the Canadian LGBT community. For example, some of the realities of Canadian queers, such as polyamoury, open relationships, or bathhouses, were counterintuitive and difficult to comprehend for many participants. Internalized queerphobia made it even more difficult for some of the participants to accept their new reality. For example, many participants interpreted sex positivity as promiscuity, something that is looked down upon in their cultures, which made it challenging for them to relate to Canadian queers. Other participants spoke of feeling like the LGBT communities in Canada are "overdoing celebrating sexuality," referring to such events as Pride parades and other events targeted at celebrating queer sexuality. Therefore, a number of the participants did not feel like they belonged in the LGBT community at first, like it was a foreign ecosystem. But the need to further explore their sexual identity and the lack of acceptance in their community of origin continued to be strong motivating factors in working through such challenges.

Thus most participants reported working through the cultural shock and finding their social circle within the LGBT community fairly quickly. In fact, with the exception of the challenges mentioned above, the queer immigrants reported having mostly positive experiences with LGBT communities in Canada. To begin with, most participants did not have an LGBT

community in their countries of origin, so finding a large and well-established queer community in Canada was significant on its own. The participants found the community flourishing and diverse, and seeing that queer people are accepted and respected in Canada was validating and encouraged them to get in touch with and explore their sexuality. The LGBT immigrants often praised the education and awareness in regard to LGBT issues offered by the Canadian government and community organizations. They spoke about feeling safe in queer areas of their cities, and even outside of them, and finally not having to be afraid about being attacked on the basis of their sexuality. They found acceptance, social support, and meaningful connections with other LGBT people, which allowed them to feel understood and validated. Many LGBT immigrants felt that they can finally be truly themselves and still be accepted and appreciated, which was dramatically different from their experience with their ethnic communities due to the queerphobia prevalent there. The ability to finally be open about their sexuality and feel accepted made many participants feel like they no longer need to be in touch with their ethnic community, which was often seen as a reminder of the challenges they had faced prior to immigration.

Moreover, the LGBT immigrants felt that they often had an advantage over their heterosexual peers due to the unique opportunity to meet a diverse circle of people in the LGBT community and get immersed into the Canadian culture. Unlike many other immigrants who acculturate to their communities first and take longer time to get integrated into the mainstream Canadian culture, LGBT immigrants often started integrating immediately after the immigration. They felt that the acceptance they received in the LGBT communities in Canada was instrumental in helping them work through their internalized queerphobia and accept their sexual orientation or gender identity. After a few years in Canada, the vast majority of the participants have replaced self-hating queerphobic notions and beliefs with the perceived Canadian values of

acceptance and diversity and now feel like equal members of the society. Many participants report being "out and proud" and attributed it mostly to their immigration to Canada. In fact, the majority of the participants felt that their sexual orientation or gender identity played a major role in defining the trajectory of their life in Canada and helping them acculturate successfully and at a faster rate. They felt that being queer presented them with the unique opportunity to experience life in Canada to a larger extent compared to their heterosexual peers. The participants spoke about not being "stuck in the ethnic ghetto," as is the experience of most immigrants at least in the first stages of immigration, but instead integrating into the larger Canadian society immediately after arrival. The vast majority of the participants felt that they had a significantly easier time in terms of building a diverse circle of friends and seeing the larger picture of life in Canada due to the exposure provided by the LGBT community.

It is important to mention that the more acculturated the immigrants became, the more the internalized queerphobia stemming from the culture of origin was replaced by the Canadian positive affirmative values encouraging sexual and gender diversity. Once this level of external and internal integration was reached, the need to reject their culture of origin significantly decreased. Many participants reported missing and appreciating certain aspects of their culture of origin once they achieved a level of self-acceptance of their sexuality and integration into Canadian society. Thus, the need to reject their ethnic community and culture lessened and they were able to successfully reintegrate some aspects of their culture of origin back into their life. The few participants who reached this point in their lives found that the ability to integrate their ethnic, queer, and Canadian parts of their identity was gratifying.

To summarize, the emerged grounded theory demonstrated that queerphobia in the culture of origin was instrumental in shaping the processes of development of sexual and cultural

identities of LGBT immigrants, two intertwined processes that comprised the acculturation process of LGBT immigrants. In particular, the early cultural identity of LGBT immigrants, strongly influenced by the queerphobic culture of origin, resulted in participants struggling with acceptance of their sexual identity due to both internal (e.g., internalized queerphobia) and external (e.g., stigma) challenges. However, the inability to silence their sexual identity and the increasing need to explore it made the participants challenge the values and norms of their culture of origin in regard to LGBT sexuality. LGBT immigrants often found the validation of their sexual identity in Western values, something that was virtually impossible to find in their culture of origin. As a result, participants' sexual identity development played an important role in the development of their cultural identity - they often rejected their culture of origin and adopted a Western orientation, therefore starting to acculturate even prior to immigration. In many cases the choice to immigrate was dictated by the desire to live one's sexuality, which was not possible in many countries.

The "collaboration" between the sexual and cultural parts of LGBT immigrant identities continued after immigration: the more they internalized the perceived Canadian values of acceptance and diversity, the more they shed their internalized queerphobia. Furthermore, the queerphobia preserved in immigrant communities made the participants choose the queer community as their community of initial acculturation. The immersion into the diverse Canadian culture they received through acculturating to the LGBT community had a strong impact on their cultural identity development: unlike their heterosexual peers they were not limited by their ethnic community, but instead were integrated into Canadian society often immediately after immigration. In turn, as the perceived Canadian values of acceptance and pride were internalized and replaced internalized queerphobia, the participants no longer needed to reject their culture of

origin in its entirety and were able to reintegrate the positive aspects of their culture back into their lives, thus successfully integrating the cultural and sexual parts of their identity.

5.2 Links to Previous Knowledge Base

The objective of this study was to understand the process of acculturation of LGBT immigrants. The grounded theory approach was chosen for this study because the literature review did not identify any previous studies exploring the experience of LGBT immigrants as they go through the acculturation process. Therefore, no direct links can be established with the previous knowledge base in regards to the main theory that emerged from this research study. However, the development of the sexual identity of LGBT immigrants was a major component of this research study. This section presents the links to the previous knowledge base, mostly focused on sexual identity, that emerged from this study.

The current study's findings on LGBT identity development are consistent with queer identity theories (e.g., Cass, 1979; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). On the other hand, my study's findings on queer immigrants' identity development are somewhat different from Kuntsman (2003). She explained that LGBT immigrants often have to go through various stages of discovering and determining their personal sexual identity. They quite often have not had an experience of self-identifying as LGBT prior to immigration because the majority of them never considered their identity in terms of sexuality. Such was not the case for the vast majority of the participants of this study; most of the participants were well aware of their sexual identity prior to immigration. In fact, their sexual orientation or gender identity was the main factor in their decision to immigrate to Canada. However, the findings of this study do support previous research studies that suggest that there are no references to the possible existence of LGBT people in many cultures (Boulden, 2009). In addition to noting the lack of cultural references to

LGBT people, the participants in this study spoke about the non-existence of terms to describe one's queer sexuality in their languages, as well as the negative impact this lack of affirming or neutral language had on their sexual identity exploration and development. To make matters worse, numerous participants explained that every word used in their language to refer to queer sexuality either stigmatizes or pathologizes it.

Furthermore, the literature review demonstrated that strong communities, supportive families, and spirituality and religion act as key protective factors in immigrant populations (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). For LGBT immigrants, however, family, community, and religion, which serve as the primary protective factors against the effects of racism and anti-immigrant discrimination for heterosexual immigrants, become primary reasons for rejection and discrimination based on sexual orientation (Boulden, 2009). The findings of this research study confirm the above-mentioned phenomenon. Most of the participants spoke about their inability to receive any type of social support from their ethnic or religious communities as soon as their sexual orientation or gender identity was disclosed. Furthermore, for most participants, their family became their largest source of anxiety instead of being a supportive resource. First of all, the disclosure of queer sexuality would often result in rejection from the family. Secondly, the LGBT immigrants often had to deal with intense feelings of guilt and shame because of the perception that, were they to come out, they would hurt their family and damage the family name. On the other hand, Boulden's findings suggest that LGBT immigrants try to manage the multiple parts of their identity by "living in several worlds at once" (p. 148), where they are thus forced to constantly bounce between their heterosexual immigrant communities and LGBT mainstream communities, relentlessly having to deny some aspects of their identities and emphasize others. The findings of the current study contradict Boulden's

findings. The participants often reported choosing to fully disconnect from their ethnic communities due to not being able to be open about their sexuality. Most participants in this study chose the local LGBT community as their main acculturation community and thus avoided the struggle described by Boulden. Thus, the findings of this study support Kuntsman (2003), who argued that immigration is often seen by queer immigrants as a discovery of LGBT identity, detachment from home country culture, and re-grounding in the host country's queer community. The narratives of Kuntsman's participants' acculturation stories usually reflected a personal transformation process, which was often accompanied by a geographic move in search of a new, queer home; they saw immigration as a way of transitioning into their new LGBT identity. The participants in this research study similarly spoke about moving to Canada as means of leaving queerphobia behind and building their new queer identity in Canada. This finding is aligned with the research of Bianchi et al. (2007), which suggested that many Latino gay men reported immigrating to the U.S. to escape homonegativity and to acquire greater sexual freedom.

Furthermore, many studies in the literature review discussed the racism and discrimination with which immigrants are faced. A number of researchers who employed a post/anti-colonial perspective suggested that instead of being liberating, immigration often ends up simply changing the basis for discrimination (Lee, 2009; Manalansan, 1993; Acosta, 2008). Thus, instead of being discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation in their country of origin, LGBT immigrants are discriminated based on their race and ethnicity in Canada and its mainstream LGBT community, which are often still strongly influenced by colonial/imperialist makings of the Canadian empire (Lee, 2009). Thus, immigrants' expectations of finding a new home and creating a family of choice apart from their family of origin in the queer community are often not met. Instead of finding romanticized intertwined networks of protection and

acceptance (Acosta, 2008), the new queer homes and identities are often labelled in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. Some authors believe that for many LGBT immigrants, White queer spaces become yet another place of exclusion due to their race or ethnicity, and therefore, complicate the matter of LGBT identity integration even further (Manalansan, 1993). However, none of the participants in this study shared any experiences with racism or discrimination or with difficulty integrating into the Canadian LGBT community. Perhaps the difference between the literature and the current findings can be attributed to the fact that the research literature cited was looking at experience of LGBT immigrants to the U.S. While the participants in this study did talk about experiencing culture shock and facing certain challenges integrating into the local queer community, none of them felt that they were excluded or not welcomed due to their race and ethnicity. Conversely, participants spoke about the orientation towards diversity and acceptance they found in the Canadian LGBT community, and about finding acceptance and support there.

5.3 Limitations and Assumptions

The main limitation of this research study is related to the challenges in attaining access to queer individuals who are closeted and not in contact with local queer community. While the participants of this study varied in their levels of outness, and some considered themselves closeted for the most part, still they were quite accepting of their sexual identity and "out enough" for me to be able to gain access to them and to even agree to participate in this study. As was mentioned earlier, research on closetedness reveals that less-disclosed individuals are significantly more likely to be ethnic or racial minorities (Catania et al., 2006). For example, Catania and colleagues' findings suggested that immigrant men who have sex with men (relative to non-immigrant men who have sex with men) are likely to be closeted because of increased

exposure to racism, anti-immigrant discrimination, or fears of being "othered" in their ethnic communities. There are many LGBT immigrants who are closeted and whose only interaction with the LGBT community is through anonymous and discreet sexual encounters. Such individuals usually have little exposure to mainstream LGBT culture and are often still conflicted in regards to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Quite often these are immigrants coming from strong religious backgrounds, who feel tormented between their sexual desires and their religious beliefs that conceptualize queer sexuality as sinful. While some of these themes emerged from participants, most participants were fairly out and had come to embrace their sexual orientation. As such, this study did not include participants who were closeted, which likely affected the results.

Another limitation of this study is related to treating LGBT immigrants as a homogeneous group. In order to generate a grounded theory, the study focused on identifying trends and themes that are common across various groups of LGBT immigrants. However, it is important to keep in mind that LGBT immigrants to Canada are a diverse group and there are multiple unique features that define individuals' acculturation experience and outcomes. Such features include the country of origin, age of immigration, time spent in Canada, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion or spiritual beliefs, among many others. For example, the sexual identity development and the acculturation path of gay men can be significantly different than that of lesbian women. As this study demonstrated, gay men attribute their accelerated acculturation rates to the culture of sex-positivity in the gay community. They spoke about the ease with which they found sexual partners as soon as they arrived in Canada, and how such encounters often led to friendships and relationships with diverse groups of LGBT people. Lesbian immigrant women, on the other hand, spoke of meeting most people in bars and

private lesbian parties, and sexual encounters were never mentioned by any of the lesbian participants as a means for developing one's social circle. The country of origin also played an important role in defining the acculturation experience of LGBT immigrants. Thus, immigrants coming from countries in the Middle East and Eastern Europe seemed to have higher degrees of internalized homophobia compared to individuals coming from Western Europe. Finally, age of immigration was also an important variable: the younger the LGBT immigrant was when he or she came to Canada, the easier he or she found the acculturation process to be, along with the acceptance of her or his sexual identity. Thus, due to the reasons explained above, the fact that the LGBT immigrants were often treated as a homogeneous group in order to generate the grounded theory presents an important limitation.

Furthermore, this study focused on the acculturation experience of queer immigrants to Canada, and thus some aspects of the presented model might not be fully representative of the experience of an important segment of LGBT newcomers to Canada - queer refugees. The fact that most of the participants of the current study came to Canada through either professional immigration or a study program and thus possessed a certain level of qualifications and education might suggest that they had more resources to assist them through their integration in Canada compared to queer refugees. Also, LGBT immigrants do not face the challenges presented by the asylum system in Canada, while such challenges have a strong impact on stress, mental wellbeing, and overall acculturation experience of LGBT refugees. Thus, the important limitation of the acculturation model presented in this paper is that it might not fully cover some of the acculturation realities of this segment of queer newcomers to Canada. In the Implications for Future Research section, I present some suggestions for addressing the limitations presented here.

5.4 Implications for Counselling Psychology

Research by Zea et al. (2003) presented in the Research Approaches section above has revealed that understanding the role of culture is essential when developing or adopting theories and methodologies for researching LGBT immigrants. The feedback received from the participants of this study suggests that the understanding of the role that culture of origin plays in the acculturation of LGBT immigrants is as essential when designing interventions and doing clinical work with the LGBT immigrants. Thus, LGBT immigrants' cultural scripts need to be examined by mental health practitioners to understand the ways they influence queer immigrants' self-identification, sexual behaviour, and safer-sex attitudes. This understanding will help ensure that interventions account for the role of cultural factors in shaping LGBT immigrants' experiences. This section explores interventions at micro and macro levels that address multiple challenges LGBT immigrants face in their acculturation process.

5.4.1 Interventions in ethnic communities and immigrant organizations. The study demonstrated the importance of integrating cultural nuances into every kind of work with LGBT immigrants. The scientific literature offers multiple ways of achieving this. For example, Boulden (2009) found that it is important for mental health professionals to be from the same culture and/or speak the same language as LGBT immigrants in order to achieve positive outcomes of therapy or outreach programs, mostly due to the importance of integrating cultural and language nuances of the LGBT immigrant context in the interventions. Furthermore, the LGBT immigrants in this study identified the queerphobia in their immigrant communities as their biggest challenge. They felt that there is no place for them in their ethnic communities as anything related to queer sexuality is usually stigmatized and perceived negatively. Boulden suggested addressing this challenge by creating visibility in immigrant communities and

establishing LGBT role models in these communities. Similar to Boulden's findings, the

participants felt that there are multiple organizations that work with immigrants but most of

them, however, fail to acknowledge the existence of the LGBT community. On the other hand,

mainstream LGBT support groups are often not able to meet the needs of LGBT immigrants. The

participants of the present study stressed the uniqueness of the challenges that LGBT immigrants

are faced with and the importance of customized mental health support services for them. This

finding is in line with previous research studies. While LGBT immigrants in Boulden's study

acknowledged that regular gay or lesbian support groups are "better than nothing," they did not

believe that these groups addressed the issues with which LGBT immigrants typically struggle.

For example, similar to Boulden's participants, it was common for the participants of the present

study to not come out because they fear shaming their family, which is not as typical of non-

immigrant LGBT people, and therefore is usually not given as much attention in mainstream

support groups. Overall, the research study demonstrated that family-centered values play an

important role in defining LGBT immigrants' attitudes toward their sexuality. Colon (2001)

offered the following recommendations in regard to this phenomenon.

Considering the strength of family-centered values, whenever possible, the family

members of LGBT immigrants should be actively involved in the delivery of health and human

services (Colon, 2001). It is beneficial to use family members as guides and facilitators for the

member receiving the services when possible. Some researchers (e.g., Boulden, 2009) even

suggest involving individuals who are well respected in immigrant communities in delivering

psycho-educational interventions and building awareness. Colon (2001) also identified a need to

create educational and support services for older LGBT immigrants, who do not have a strong

command of English and therefore, often do not have access to LGBT informational resources or

support groups. However, the existing research exploring interventions at the level of the ethnic community and immigrant organizations (e.g., such as the ones proposed by Boulden, 2009, and Colon, 2001), does not identify practical ways to facilitate the introduction of such educational and support programs in organizations and communities. Scientific literature also seems to ignore those LGBT immigrants who are a part of predominantly-religious ethnic communities and whose dogma considers any expression of queer sexuality sinful and does not allow for discussion on this subject.

The participants of the current study felt that it should be the role of government and community organizations to facilitate the introduction of such programs into various ethno-cultural communities. They spoke about requiring specialized settlement services that provide education and awareness regarding the unique challenges this double minority population faces in Canada. Such settlement assistance programs would offer queer immigrants help in navigating their way in Canada and provide them with useful resources and services that are customized for this population, and that take into account the specific nature of its needs. These programs could be rolled out by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) through existing immigrant settlement agencies that it funds, leveraging already existing and well-functioning infrastructure. Currently, Canadian immigrant settlement agencies already offer a multitude of programs that are customized for specific segments of immigrants, e.g., services targeting elderly immigrants, programs focused on introducing immigrant women without prior work experience into the workplace, services engaging immigrant youth in community involvement, among many others. The program design of such services can be leveraged to design and implement programs and services that target LGBT immigrants. Such services could be advertised through media and newspapers of these ethnic communities in their native language. This would allow not only

accessing LGBT immigrants in such communities, but also educating the rest of the community

about the acceptance of queer people in Canada. Furthermore, as was explained earlier, many

participants chose to distance themselves from their ethnic community, and to acculturate to

local LGBT communities. Such LGBT immigrants could be accessed through the community

centers that are located in the areas of the city with a large density of queer individuals and

venues. CIC could partner with such community centers in Canada's cities with a large LGBT

community and roll out settlement assistance programs thus targeting queer immigrants who

started to settle outside of their ethnic community. Finally, the participants of the current study

felt that information about such settlement programs, as well as other resources that could be of

use to LGBT immigrants, should be included into the standard information packages that all

immigrants receive upon their arrival to Canada. This will not only help queer immigrants better

orient themselves in their new country, but will also make them feel welcomed and accepted in

Canada.

        5.4.2 Initiatives to address the impact of queerphobia, discrimination, and stigma.

This research study found that internalized queerphobia continues to affect the LGBT

immigrants even after their immigration to Canada. Multiple participants of the current study

spoke about the effects of internalized homophobia that do not go away after crossing the border,

and of the importance of disseminating the message of tolerance and acceptance among

immigrants. Diaz (2000) found that social marketing initiatives promoting anti-homophobia

messages tend to be effective in addressing the negative psychological and behavioural

consequences of experiencing anti-LGBT stigma. Many participants in this study shared feeling

that the tolerance and acceptance of LGBT people is significantly higher in Canada compared to

their countries of origin. However, they suggested that the Canadian government should put

more emphasis on communicating that message to new immigrants, who are often unaware of

what Canada has to offer. According to some participants, internalized queerphobia in queer

immigrants can still make them feel as second-class citizens even years after immigration.

Therefore they stressed the importance of continually communicating to queer immigrants that

they have the same legal rights as other citizens, and will not be discriminated on the basis of

their sexual orientation or gender identity. The participants recommended utilizing modern

technology to disseminate such affirmative messages. In particular, suggestions often included

using dating websites and smart phone applications, as these are often the first tools queer

immigrants use to meet other queer people once they come to Canada. In fact, the participants

felt that these tools could be also used to build awareness among queer immigrants about other

important aspects of LGBT lifestyle, such as, for example, health risk and safer sex practices.

Yet another advantage of the use of such tools was attributed to the fact that they are also used

by closeted queer people, the ones who stay away from LGBT venues. Thus utilization of dating

websites and applications can provide a unique opportunity to reach these hidden segments of the

LGBT population with queer-affirmative and preventive messages.

Another approach that was found to be effective in addressing the impact of internalized

queerphobia focused on involving family and friendship networks in prevention work. For

example, research identified that, due to family-centeredness of many LGBT immigrant cultures,

those with low levels of family support are at high risk for HIV contraction (Yoshikawa et al.,

2004). Yoshikawa's findings suggested that facilitating and fostering discussions about

discrimination in family and friendship networks is important in order to reduce HIV risk

behaviours among LGBT immigrants. Such findings are well aligned with the findings of the

current study. Virtually every participant noted the important role family and community played

in the development of their sexual identity. Therefore family and friends should be included in interventions whenever possible by mental health service providers.

5.4.3 Culturally-competent practice. As was discussed earlier, cultural views have a strong influence on how entire immigrant communities as well as individuals perceive and experience sexuality. Acevedo (2008) found that for the mental health practitioner working with LGBT immigrants, it is essential to keep in mind the power of culture in delivering appropriate services to this double minority population. The concept of culturally-competent practice means that within the act of providing care, mental health professionals need to understand and attend to the total context of the patient's situation. The queer immigrants in this study repeatedly stressed the importance of having access to specialized mental health services to help them navigate and integrate the different, and often conflicting, parts of their identities during the settlement process. Mental health professionals working with LGBT immigrants need to understand the complexity of their clients' double-minority status. Their cultural competency should be multi-dimensional, i.e., cover immigrant, ethnic, and queer parts of LGBT immigrants' identity. The participants discussed the importance of having a mental health professional who will not only be sensitive and aware of their culture of origin, but will be knowledgeable in regard to the realities of the queer community in Canada. For example, the participants felt that they would benefit from exposure to LGBT-specific resources, as well as education and awareness to help them better navigate the realities and complexities of LGBT lifestyle. Furthermore, cultural competence requires practitioners to accept and respect cultural differences, maintain ongoing self-analysis in regard to their own cultural identity and biases, and build awareness of the dynamic of differences in ethnic clients, as well as the need to acquire additional knowledge and resources in order to work with them (Lu, Lum, & Chen, 2001). Some researchers (Matthews &

Peterman, 1998) argue that cultural competency goes beyond "awareness of," "sensitivity towards," and "knowledge about" different cultural groups and populations. They see it as a skill-based model of service delivery that utilizes the skills of scientific mindedness (i.e., critical thinking), dynamic sizing (i.e., ability to avoid stereotyping members of a particular immigrant community while at the same time being able to appreciate the importance of culture), as well as culture-specific expertise (i.e., having an understanding of one's own worldviews as well as knowledge of client's culture). Also, it is important to note that even within each of the cultures there are large inter-group differences that need to be recognized by mental health practitioners (Acevedo, 2008). For example, Acevedo argued that one "Latino culture" does not exist, but rather it originates from multiple cultural experiences from various Latin American countries. While some cultural characteristics of these countries might be overlapping, they also possess distinct cultural phenomena. Therefore, in order for the work with LGBT immigrants to be effective, practitioners need to be aware of intra-group differences. Thus, in addition to being sensitive to ethno-cultural intra-group differences, mental health practitioners should be aware of the diversity within queer culture and its multiple subcultures. For example, the participants of the current study clearly demonstrated that some aspects of LGBT immigrant realities can be dramatically different between gay men and lesbian or trans participants. Culturally-competent model of service delivery is equally important in work with LGBT refugees and asylum-seekers, which will be reviewed next.

5.4.4 Counselling with refugees and asylum-seekers. As was previously discussed, refugees and asylum-seekers comprise a separate group of LGBT newcomers, which requires specialized interventions and understanding by mental health professionals. One of a very few criticisms shared by the participants in regard to the role of Canadian government in helping

LGBT immigrants was related to queer refugees and asylum-seekers. The participants felt that

Canadian government should be more supportive when it comes to accepting LGBT refugees'

asylum claims. For example, a mental health professional working with an LGBT refugee, who

is seeking asylum based on persecution as a sexual minority, faces tough choices under the

current Canadian immigration system for the following reasons. The current law requires

asylum-seekers to be recognizably and undeniably LGBT (Keung, 2007); therefore, being able to

present stereotypical characteristics of these groups increases the possibility of receiving a

refugee status. Heller (2009) argued that mental health professionals should not act as extensions

of the oppressive asylum systems and encourage clients to reverse-cover. However, she

acknowledged that it is important to keep in mind that reverse-covering may on the other hand

provide LGBT asylum-seekers with an advantage when it comes to the reality of asylum hearing.

Furthermore, the participants spoke of the importance of having support groups for LGBT

refugees due to multiple challenges they face upon arrival to Canada. As was discussed earlier,

LGBT refugees usually have experienced serious trauma, have scarce financial resources, and

are exposed to linguistic, racial, and cultural oppression. The participants felt that such support

groups would provide a safe space for queer refugees to deal with the many challenges they face

as they navigate the complicated asylum requirements in Canada.

Additionally, it is important for counselors to be aware of how their own worldviews,

perceptions, values, beliefs, and cultures influence the way they see their client, according to

Heller (2009). Trying to be in touch with their own reactions to the client can potentially give

them a better sense as to how the immigration officials might perceive their client (Grose, 2006).

These insights can be helpful in working with the client and constructing narratives that will be

acceptable to the client and at the same time favourably viewed by immigration authorities.

Counsellors need to establish an agreement with their clients as to how the latter would like to present in the immigration court (Heller, 2009), because the asylum hearing is quite often the main priority of the client, thus making all other concerns less significant. Some clients, on the other hand, might find it impossible to openly embrace LGBT identity or find it uncomfortable to re-enact stereotypes, which have virtually no connection to their real identity, according to Heller. All of these challenges present a wide range of opportunities for interventions, which can include psycho-education related to availability of asylum, as well as therapy focusing on emotional challenges that are triggered by the asylum process. However, according to Heller (2009), macro-level policy changes are required in order to truly address the difficulties that LGBT asylum-seekers face under the current immigration system.

  5.4.5 Macro-level interventions with refugees and asylum seekers. Heller (2009) argued that in order for the challenges that LGBT asylum-seekers face to be fully addressed, macro-level policy changes need to be introduced, wherein psychologists should act as social justice agents to push for asylum standards that are sensitive to sexual diversity expression, especially considering the degree of diversity among asylum-seekers. According to Heller, psychologists need to play an active role in educating policymakers, immigration judges, and the public about the negative effects of reverse-covering on LGBT immigrants' mental well-being. Given counselling psychologists' values of battling oppression and establishing equality, along with protecting vulnerable groups, changing the asylum policy to remove covering and reverse-covering requirements can become natural goals for them.

  Another macro-level change might focus on changing a definition of persecution to include covering demands (Heller, 2009). In many countries covering demands exist because of the threat of bodily harm, and therefore, should be seen as persecution according to current law

(Hanna, 2005). One might argue that countries like the U.S. and Canada should be providing asylum to immigrants who can prove that they were forced to cover in their home countries. For instance, most participants in the current study felt that covering was the only option for them to survive because not covering would most likely result in bodily harm or even death due to the context of cultural, legal, or religious climate in their country. However, it is important to keep in mind the degree of potential difficulties that would arise if such changes were proposed. If the policy that would make it easier for LGBT people to immigrate and acquire the benefits of refugee status were to be proposed, it might not be given widespread support, according to Heller (2009). Detractors can potentially argue that the country will be flooded by gay immigrants. It might also be extremely challenging to work through the legislative channels to change immigration law because of politicians' fears of repercussions from anti-LGBT or anti-immigrant constituencies.

5.5 Implications for Future Research

This section will discuss main areas of research on LGBT immigrants that need to be studied further in order to provide scientists and practitioners with a well-rounded understanding of this population. Prior to discussing specific areas of research that warrant further investigation, it is important to note that, as was mentioned earlier, the vast majority of the literature reviewed and cited in this paper was produced by U.S. researchers and focused on LGBT immigrants to the U.S. While for the purposes of this paper many aspects of LGBT immigrant experience were assumed to be similar for the immigrants to North America, considering the multiple cultural, political, and socioeconomic differences between the U.S. and Canada, it is likely that important differences exist between the experiences of immigrants to Canada and to the U.S. Thus, counselling psychology will benefit from cross-cultural studies

between Canada and the U.S., as well as further research, specific to the Canadian context, that will identify and address these differences.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that LGBT immigrants to Canada are a diverse group and there are multiple unique variables that define individuals' acculturation experience and outcome, as well as challenges they face. Such variables include the country of origin, age of immigration, mental health, education level, time spent in Canada, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion or spiritual beliefs, among many others. It is important for future research to identify unique risk factors, as well as factors facilitating coping and resilience, associated with these variables in order to design culturally-competent interventions. Furthermore, it is important for future research to identify the segments of LGBT immigrants who are most at risk based on such variables. Doing so will allow researchers and clinicians to design customized culturally-competent micro- and macro-level interventions to specifically target the segments of LGBT immigrants most at risk.

Moreover, the Limitations and Assumptions section discussed the challenges in getting access to queer immigrants who are closeted and not in contact with local queer community. The individuals who belong to this segment of LGBT immigrants tend to spend most time in their ethno-cultural community and usually have very little exposure to mainstream LGBT culture. Often, such individuals still feel conflicted in regards to their sexual orientation or gender identity, which negatively impacts their mental health, as was discussed earlier. Furthermore, because it is more challenging to reach this segment with messages preventing risky sexual behaviours and promoting safer sex practices, they become even more of a group at risk compared to other LGBT immigrants. Future research should attempt to find ways of accessing

this hard to reach segment of LGBT immigrants in order to understand its unique challenges and design customized interventions to address their needs.

Finally, as was discussed earlier, qualitative methods allow exploring constructs and identifying unasked questions, which facilitate theory advancement and hypothesis generation. Quantitative research can be used then to test the hypotheses that were developed by the use of qualitative research methods. For example, the natural next step coming out of the current grounded theory could be the design of a quantitative study that compares the acculturation levels of queer and heterosexual immigrants at various intervals following their immigration (e.g., one year, three years, five years, and ten years), as well as identifies the variables responsible for respective acculturation outcomes. Such quantitative research could allow testing the theory presented here by collecting and analyzing data from a significantly larger, representative sample of participants.

5.6 Final Summary

This research study resulted in the construction of a grounded theory that describes the process of acculturation of LGBT immigrants. The study identified the perceived challenges and advantages that LGBT immigrants experience during the acculturation process. It also determined the perceived impact that LGBT sexuality has on the acculturation experience. Finally, it identified variables responsible for the variety of acculturation outcomes for LGBT immigrants, as well as suggested ways for organizations and practitioners to help LGBT immigrants.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee ID:

Complete the questionnaire below together with the interviewee in the beginning of the interview to collect basic demographic and acculturation information.

Questionnaire

1. Demographic information:

   - Age: ____

   - Country of origin: _____

   - Race and ethnicity: _____

   - Gender: _____

   - Sexual orientation: _____

   - Religion/spiritual beliefs: _____

   - Highest education level achieved: _____

   - Professional occupation: _____

   - Years in Canada: _____

2. Language use:

   - In which language can you express yourself better (i.e., English vs. native tongue)?

     _____

   - In which language(s) do you usually speak to your family?

_____

- In which language(s) do you usually speak to your friends?

_____

3. Media preference:

   - Which newspapers/magazines do you read?

   _____

   _____

   - Which TV shows do you watch?

   _____

   _____

   Interview Questions/Themes:

1. Introduction

   - In a few words, what does it mean for you to be LGBT?

   (If the person starts discussing the meaning of LGBT referring to him/herself (as opposed

to what being LGBT means in general), then follow up with the next two questions)

   - When did you first realize you were LGBT?
   - Did the way you feel about your sexual identity change over the years? (If yes) Could
     you please describe those changes for me? (Make sure the person describes how he or
     she felt about his or her sexual identity at first, how it changed over the years, and
     why?)

2. LGBT identity before immigration

   (If interviewee discovered LGBT identity prior to immigration, start with the following

two questions):

   o How did you "deal" with your new-found sexuality in your country of origin?
     What were the main challenges in accepting your sexuality?

- o   Were you involved with LGBT community in your country of origin?

- Would you be able to (were you able to) be open about your LGBT identity in your country of origin?

- What difficulties/challenges do LGBT people face in your country of origin?

- What impact (if any) did your sexuality have on your decision to immigrate to Canada?

3. LGBT identity following immigration

(If interviewee discovered LGBT identity after immigration, start with the following three questions):

- o   How did you feel about your sexuality at first? How did it change over the years?

- o   How did you "deal" with your new-found sexuality? What were the main challenges in accepting your sexuality?

- o   Why do you think you were able to discover your LGBT identity only after immigration to Canada?

- Are you able to be open about your LGBT identity in your ethnic community?

- What difficulties/challenges do LGBT people face in your ethnic community?

- Are you involved with the LGBT community, i.e., do you attend LGBT events, bars, clubs, volunteer for LGBT-related causes, have LGBT friends? Explain why or why not.

- How would you characterize your experience with LGBT community?

- Do you consider yourself to be a part of the local LGBT community? Explain why or why not.

4. Cultural identity following immigration:

- What cultures do you feel you belong to, share your beliefs and values with?

- Do you feel you tend to combine the cultures or to keep them separate (e.g., do you feel as a mixture of both countries or do you feel more Canadian in some settings, and more [country or origin] in other settings?) Explain.

- Do you feel caught, i.e., as if you have to choose, between North American and home cultures? Explain.

- What are the ethnic backgrounds of your friends?

5. Life trajectory in Canada:

- Do you think your life in Canada would be different if you weren't LGBT? How?

- What additional challenges and/or opportunities, compared to other immigrants from your country, did you encounter because of your sexual orientation? Explain.

- What can government and community organizations do, in your opinion, to make the adjustment of LGBT immigrants from your country more comfortable?

Thank the individual for participating in this interview. Assure him or her of confidentiality of responses.

Appendix B: Code System

- Before immigration

    o Emergence of LGBT identity

        ▪ Awareness of sexual orientation

        ▪ First experiences

    o Queerphobia in the culture of origin

        ▪ Lack of resources to form understanding of sexuality and gender

        ▪ Values, traditions, norms, and perceptions of queer sexuality

    o Social support

        ▪ Lack of social support

        ▪ Limited opportunities to meet other LGBT people

        ▪ Finding acceptance among close friends

        ▪ LGBT community in the culture of origin

    o Feeling about sexuality

        ▪ Comfortable at first before understanding that it is "abnormal"

        ▪ Further realization of being different

        ▪ Feeling negative about sexuality

    o Emotional, cultural, and social processing of sexuality

        ▪ Challenges

        ▪ Struggling with acceptance

        ▪ Accepting

- Decision to immigrate to Canada

    o Always feeling disconnected from home culture

- ▪ Being Western oriented

    o Visions and perspectives concerning immigration

        - ▪ Wanting to immigrate for a long time

        - ▪ Romantic vision of immigration

    o Role of sexuality on decision to immigrate

        - ▪ Sexuality had an impact

        - ▪ Sexuality had nothing to do with the decision to immigrate

- After immigration to Canada

    o Interaction with ethnic and LGBT communities in Canada

        - ▪ Evolution of cultural identity following immigration

        - ▪ Experience/interaction with ethnic community in Canada

        - ▪ Experience/interaction with gay community in Canada

    o Integration of sexual and cultural parts of the identity

        - ▪ Processing of sexuality

        - ▪ Role of sexuality on life trajectory in Canada

    o Role of Canadian government and community organizations

        - ▪ Nothing else government can do, they do enough already

        - ▪ Make immigration easier for LGBT people from queerphobic countries

        - ▪ Build awareness

        - ▪ Support groups for LGBT immigrants