Youth Experiences of Cultural Identity and Migration: A Systems Perspective

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Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed significant changes in patterns and trends of global migration of women, men, children, and youth. The focus of this chapter is on youth's cultural identity in Toronto, a large multicultural and immigrant-receiving metropolis in Canada. Both immigration and multiculturalism are part of official Canadian policies. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*'s purpose is the "preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada" (Minister of Justice, 2017a). The Immigration and Refugee Act identifies specific objectives for immigration and refugees (Minister of Justice, 2017b). For example, the Act's objectives with regard to immigration include: 3(1) "(a) to permit Canada to pursue the maximum social, cultural, and economic benefits of immigration" and 3(1) "(b) to enrich and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of Canadian society, while respecting the federal, bilingual and multicultural character of Canada." Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine the interdisciplinary scholarship in Canada on the effects of the Acts on Canadian society, we recognize that proponents and

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opponents of the multiculturalism discourse have referred to inclusion and exclusion outcomes of diverse populations in Canada (see Raphael, 2016).

The importance of cultural identity and its connection to youth's mental health, well-being, and resilience is well documented (Chapman & Perreira, 2005; Khanlou, 2008a; Khanlou, Koh, & Mill, 2008; Theron et al., 2011; Williams, Aiyer, Durkee, & Tolan, 2014). From a life-course perspective, identity formation is a critical developmental task of adolescence, and cultural identity is an important aspect of this developmental process (Khanlou, 2005; Khanlou & Crawford, 2006; Liebkind, 2001; Phinney, 1990). Erikson's (1963, 1968) particular focus on adolescence and identity as part of the human life cycle led to its recognition as an important construct (Best, 2011; Kroger, 2007). Applying a developmental perspective and influenced by Erikson's seminal work, youth's ability to resolve the psychosocial dilemma of identity crisis continues to be regarded as an indication of adolescent mental well-being. While identity may be understood as a psychological experience, Erikson (1963) regarded it within youth's historical and social context as well. However, research conducted with youth subsequent to Erikson's work has often focussed on the psychological dimension and given less heed to its social aspect, of which culture may be considered one dimension (Khanlou, 1999; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011). As Phinney and Baldelomar (2011) explain, youth's "developing sense of self is inevitably entwined in, and reflective of" youth's cultural context (p. 161).

The notion of cultural identity, rather than ethnic identity, has been suggested as more inclusive of the diversity of identities through which immigrant youth may define themselves, including ancestral, national, hyphenated, racial, and migrant identities (Khanlou & Crawford, 2006). Cultural identity is located mostly within acculturation studies and is conceptualized as "an aspect of acculturation that focuses on immigrants' sense of self" (Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006a) have comprehensively addressed the psychosocial and socio-cultural aspects of acculturation, adaptation, and cultural identity based on a large study of immigrant youth and their families in 13 different countries from North America, Asia, and Europe. The authors point out that although all youth are challenged by new experiences, immigrant youth in particular are exposed to additional challenges due to their intercultural status. This means that youth live in culturally plural societies where they need to "work out how to live together, adopting various strategies that will allow them to achieve a reasonably successful adaptation to living interculturally" (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006b, p. 305). Hence, cultural identity is a complex and changing concept, particularly for youth.

Main Body

A Systems Perspective on Youth Cultural Identity

Multicultural settings provide opportunities for becoming aware of one's cultural identity, not only in comparison to a dominant majority, but through ongoing contact with a variety of cultures (Berry & Hou, 2016; Khanlou & Crawford, 2006).

This perspective has shed light on cultural identity as being context-bound, and on the idea that cultural identity manifests in the presence of culturally different other(s) (Khanlou, 1999). That is, "an individual who through living in a multicultural context, as a member of a major or a minor group, and through daily contact with other cultures, is aware of the cultural component of the self" (Khanlou, 1999, p.5). Cultural identity refers to more than the group category or label that one chooses, rather it involves a sense of belonging to one or more cultural groups and the feelings associated with membership in those groups (Phinney, 1990).

Recognizing that geo-sociopolitical environments also influence youth's cultural identity, in our work on youth cultural identity we have applied a systems approach to help account for the multiple influences on this complex and fluid phenomenon. A systems perspective is a step toward problematizing the notion of cultural identity and expanding its exploration beyond a psychosocial perspective only. In particular, an ecosystem's view emphasizes the interactive and bidirectional relationship between an individual and their environment (Waller, 2001). More specifically, it stipulates that an individual cannot be studied on their own but that research must acknowledge the complex and dynamic interactions between a person and their biological, physical, and social environments. Bronfenbrenner (1979), who originally conceptualized the ecological framework for human development, suggested that the ecological environment is comprised of the five interconnecting systems, including the individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (see Fig. 1).
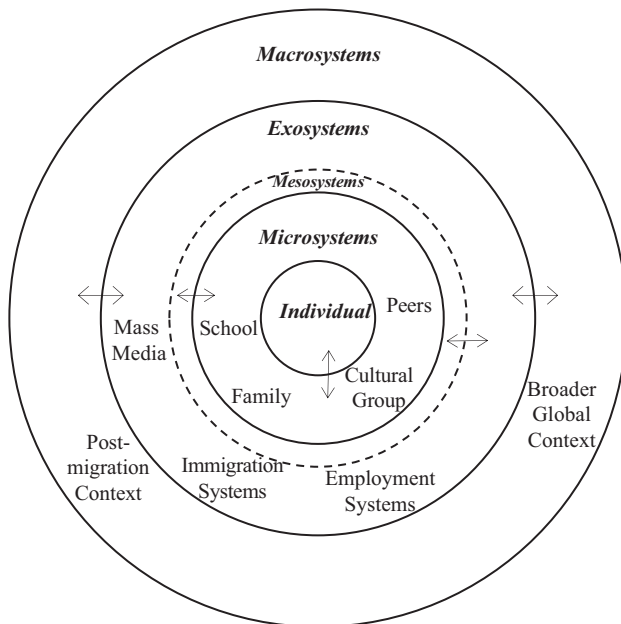

Fig. 1 *Ecological systems model* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

In order to elucidate the dynamic and context bound nature of cultural identity through a systems perspective we draw from our Immigrant Youth and Cultural Identity Project (IYCIP). We have described IYCIP's sampling strategy and data collection methods elsewhere and reported on our findings on cultural identity of Afghan and Iranian immigrant youth and their experiences of prejudice and discrimination (Khanlou et al., 2008). We have also examined the findings of IYCIP in the context of second and third generation racialized youth's psychosocial integration in Canada (Khanlou, 2008b). Below we provide a summary of its methods and sample.

IYCIP Methods and Sample

IYCIP consisted of a mixed methods study with a comparative design that explored youths' experiences of migration, cultural identity, and self-esteem in Toronto. The comparative design allowed for a study of youth from traditional source countries of immigration (Italy, Portugal) and new source countries (Afghanistan, Iran), and took place between 2003 and 2007 in Toronto. IYCIP was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2003–2007) and ethics approval for the project was attained from the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board. Utilizing a prospective, longitudinal design, qualitative (focus groups, interviews, journals) and quantitative (questionnaires) data was collected. Field logs were also kept and participant focus group evaluations completed. The participants consisted of 45 English-speaking youth (23 females; 22 males). A total of 11 Italian, 8 Portuguese, 17 Iranian, and 9 Afghani youth participated in the study. Details of demographic characteristics of the participants by cultural group are provided in Table 1. Participants were recruited using a two-part non-random

Table 1 Participants' demographic characteristics by cultural group

	Afghani $N = 9$	Iranian $N = 17$	Italian $N = 11$	Portuguese $N = 8$
Gender	66.7% female 33.3% male	41.2% female 58.8% male	36.4% female 63.6% male	75% female 25% male
Age (mean)[a]	20.4 years (range 18–25 years)	18.24 years (range 17–20 years)	19.55 years (range 19–21 years)	20.25 years (range 17–22 years)
Level of education[b]	Grade 12 (range Gr.11 – university Yr. 4)	Grade 12 (range Gr.11 – Gr. 12)	University (range university Yr. 2 – Yr. 3)	University (range Gr.12 – university Yr. 4)
Born outside of Canada	100%	100%	0%	12.5%
Length of stay in Canada	7.4 years (range 2–17 years)	1.8 years (range 0.5–2.5 years)	N/A	N/A

[a]One participant was a 25-year-old undergraduate student; however, given his interesting experiences and perspectives he was included in the study
[b]Level of education at time of entry into study

sampling method through contacting community-based agencies and key cultural community groups.

Focus group sessions were held separately with each cultural group over a one-year period, resulting in a total of 16 focus group sessions. Individual interviews were also held with one male and one female representative from each cultural group to gain further insight to the issues raised during the focus group sessions. A total of nine participant interviews were conducted during the study. Participants were also invited to keep a journal while participating in the study in order to document any issues or ideas related to cultural identity and their participation in the study; 21 of the 45 participants completed a journal over the course of the study.

Analysis followed a collaborative and iterative process, with the transcripts of each being approached dialectically, that is as whole and particular parts in relationship to each other. Cultural identity was the major theme of the data and several related sub-themes were also identified. From this, an initial conceptual framework that applied a systems approach of cultural identity was drafted. Triangulation of the data sources occurred by integrating each cultural group's data from focus groups, interviews, and journals in one comprehensive summary for each of these groups. All four group summaries, including quotes and interpretations, served in formulating an overall analysis of themes and developing the final conceptual framework for immigrant youth and cultural identity.

Recognizing that there are ongoing debates in the literature regarding criteria to assess *rigor* of qualitative research studies (Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski, 2015), we applied several strategies to maximize the study's rigor and enhance trustworthiness. Given the longitudinal design of the study, trustworthiness was increased through prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Polit & Beck, 2012). Trustworthiness was also enhanced through the triangulation of data collection methods, data sources, and investigators to increase the objectivity of the data analysis (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Member checks were conducted with the focus group participants at the final group session to give participants an opportunity to comment on the major themes generated from their discussions and to clarify intended meanings of concepts (Polit & Beck, 2012).

Cultural Identity, a Fluid, Complex, and Contested Concept

Efforts to define cultural identity by the participants in all cultural groups first began with quick concrete definitions of culture, and the feeling of belonging that seems to come with such tangible understandings. For example, an Afghani youth described culture as "… like our cultural heritage, our cultural position, food we eat, certain festivals we celebrate," and one Italian participant offered "folklore music or opera… cinema, new forms of art, different types of architecture that still have to be brought here and appreciated" as examples of culture. However, the discussions soon evolved into more detailed accounts of the complexities and fluidity of cultural identity, particularly when one resides in a multicultural place, and was born in another part of the world or to parents who were. Across all data sources, participants addressed

theoretical ideas about cultural identity, but perhaps more notable was how much they spoke, in story form, of personal life examples to explicate these abstract ideas, which seemed to reflect the importance of lived experience in understanding and explaining cultural identity. The migration and settlement experiences of the newcomer youth (Afghani and Iranian) were powerful in shaping their identity during their post-migration adjustment to their new Canadian home, just as the stories of parents' and grandparents' experiences as immigrants affected identity for Italian and Portuguese participants.

Out of such lived experience, two participants critiqued the notion of identifying with only one culture, suggesting that to do so leads to restrictive labeling and the creation of barriers. While being interviewed, one of these participants adamantly resisted the labeling that goes with identifying oneself by a particular culture:

> I think that in general the society looks at everyone as, you know, which category do you fall into and it's just because it is easier, the easy way out, instead of, you know, having to spend the time to actually get to know the person (17-year-old Iranian male).

While acknowledging the inescapable necessity of cultural labels, this youth also questioned their meaning: "If I say I am Iranian, then how are you going to define that? If you say you're Canadian, how are going to define that? If you want to be in the middle, what's the difference?"

While he described himself as becoming Canadian, he also wanted to be seen "as an individual," a view he tries to hold of others. Another participant similarly resisted "reducing" herself to one identity label and suggested that a cultural label on one's identity is too confining and irrelevant, since we have no control over our birth place: "I think that's the problem over all the society and… the world in general that we always have to identify ourselves with something. I mean when it comes down to it, what really is an identity?" (20-year-old Afghani female). These quotes suggest that a singular and predetermined view of cultural identity is problematic for immigrant youth as it fails to capture the many dynamic factors that influence identity, running the risk of labeling based on culture and ignoring the individuality of the person.

More specifically, the study findings, in support of the literature, emphasize that we cannot separate culture from identity, and cultural identity itself cannot be reduced to one fixed definition. Rather, it is multiple, overlapping, and evolving. The notion of multiple identities allows for a better understanding of the phenomenon, particularly among immigrant youth in multicultural urban communities. Furthermore, the findings illustrate that multiple identities are constituted in part by the systems in which they are formed. They are also constituted through positive and negative experiences within these contexts, and in one's understanding and responses to them. A particularly poignant example to arise in this study was that of the experience of discrimination, which is discussed further in another paper (see Khanlou et al., 2008).

Youth Cultural Identity Through a Systems Perspective

Among the *individual factors*, the participants highlighted the unique aspects of the self that influence identity, such as physical attributes, race, gender, and sense of personal responsibility. The importance of appearance was emphasized by one

19-year-old Italian male participant's comments, "I was going to just say in regards to appearance you can look around this table and we are all pretty much dark hair and dark featured…." Another young man stated, "I do think that there is a distinct Italian race. What constitutes a race? Are there physical features? Is it DNA? Technically, there are so many different race mixtures that you can't even classify it. But people still classify it and it has been such a problem in Italy" (19-year-old Italian male). But discussions generally did not linger long on physical appearance or biological characteristics, but rather shifted more often to social practices and personality traits. "I think you should go by what you feel and by what you feel is more an indicator than going into your body and taking DNA and saying that is what you are…" (21-year-old Italian male). Personal responsibility was also a notable individual factor in the Iranian and Afghani groups. One Afghani young woman said, "I definitely feel responsible when it comes to Afghani culture and the Afghani community…" (p. 36). An Iranian participant explained that they don't "passively receive" cultural values from parents and "blindly or unreflectively" follow them; rather individual choice is involved.

The *microsystem* or the immediate social world includes family, friends, and school and community groups. This level represents how cultural identity is learned and maintained, as well as expressed behaviorally (e.g., clubs and school). Parents and other family members such as grandparents and siblings are central elements in the microsystem both in terms of the migration stories they tell and the rules they set for family life. For Italian and Portuguese participants, parents and family play an important role for teaching youth born in Canada about their cultural heritage, as indicated by the following quotes:

> "I have never lived in Portugal… so I rely on my families' experiences" (22-year-old Portuguese male).
>
> "… I get culture through my family mostly right, and my experiences with like Italian culture. Like how I living with Italian people right and that is how I identify with the culture through those experiences with my family that is living here now and my family from back in the country" (19-year-old Italian male).
>
> "It is important to know where you are from, where your parents are from and to trace family history roots. I think it is interesting, that is what makes it human" (19-year-old Italian male).

Families also play an important role in preserving cultural heritage for newcomer youth. For example, one participant discussed how his parents insisted on his brother attending Persian school, revealing the power of parental decisions and their strategies to preserve and reproduce their culture: "… so that is the decision my parents make. No one can stop it" (18-year-old Iranian male). The parents of these youth took a direct role in balancing concern for maintaining home culture with learning Canadian culture, "my parents they don't mind if I learn the Canadian culture too, if I have the Canadian friends too, as long as I keep my own culture for myself" (18-year-old Iranian male).

Friends also play a significant role in an individual's life and identity construction, both in terms of having friends from one's home culture and making new friends, be they Canadian or immigrants from other countries. Making new friends

was seen by Iranians as a challenge though less difficult with those from one's own cultural group. Specifically, participants stated that making friends with people who are different is difficult, yet the difficulty in crossing cultural boundaries does not preclude doing so; they discussed how having friends of other cultures is a valuable way of learning about other cultures.

The *mesosystem* includes the larger Canadian post-migration factors of immigration systems and policies, employment systems, and mass media. Canada's national initiatives regarding multiculturalism were highlighted as important in facilitating the openness and ease with which participants felt they could discuss, display and embrace their cultural heritage. In all focus group discussions, the Canadian "multicultural mosaic" was mentioned as part of a positive context for cultural identity. Specifically, Portuguese and Italian youth spoke of Canada's multiculturalism as creating a space for maintaining and proudly expressing their dual cultural identities, as described in this quote from an Italian youth: "… in a country that encourages multiculturalism where a country encourages you to put that prefix in front of Polish-Canadian, Italian-Canadian, it encourages that. That is your one distinguishing feature or your recalling your past heritage, your culture where you came from that gives you… something different" (21-year-old Italian male).

The newcomer youth (Afghani and Iranian) also highlighted their family struggles related to settlement in Canada as an immigrant. One of the major challenges highlighted by both groups was their parents' struggles to secure employment according to their professional qualifications and training. It is important to note that several of the Iranian participants arrived in Canada as an economic classed migrant, implying that their parents had particular education and skills that were in demand in Canada. However, despite this demand, many parents were not able to secure employment in their profession, as described by this participant:

> … when we go home and we see the parents the jobs that they had back home, they lose that because of us. The opportunities that they had they lose because of us. And they cannot find that [job in Canada] and it is really hard for them… they are my parents so I am feeling for them (18-year-old Iranian male).

The *macrosystem* signifies broader factors such as language and religion, as well as the global sociopolitical context. Language, while referenced often in all groups, was tied to cultural identity in distinctly different ways between the participants who had immigrated themselves and those who were descendants of immigrants. Learning English was not explicitly discussed by Iranians and Afghanis as a part of identity per se, but rather as a pragmatic challenge of settlement that affects identity—a necessity of integrating and requirement for feeling a sense of belonging in a new culture. And, while formal language classes are necessary, these participants emphasized their encounters with others in the everyday routines of living as the crucial component of learning the language. It was seen as key to fitting in and feeling comfortable in social situations. Speaking English was described by these youth as a struggle, not easy, yet very rewarding when communication happened. For example, one Iranian female participant spoke of the good feeling that came from being able to communicate in English in school specifically, and many of the Afghani and Iranian youth referred to the increased opportunities for meeting people as their English improved.

Language was also important for the second and third generation participants. For example, being able to speak Italian was equated with a higher degree of "Italianess." It was seen as a way to "differentiate" and "define" people (19-year-old Italian male), as "the most noticeable" (20-year-old Italian female) factor and crucial in cultural identity. In fact one participant framed the discussion as "the idea of language *as* identity" (19-year-old Italian male) (italics added). One participant pointed out that language also becomes a way of judging others, giving the following example: "within the Italian culture we define ourselves… through the languages that are spoken or the parts of the provinces you are from… where in some cases,… there was still that prejudice between those two dialects" (21-year-old Italian male). As children of immigrants, learning the Italian language was critical to their connection to Italian culture. The distinction in how language was discussed, however, between these youth and those who had migrated lies in the reasons for learning another language. While English was seen as a necessary challenge of fitting in for Iranians and Afghanis, learning Italian for this group was "like a hobby." As one participant pointed out, simply learning Italian in order to travel to Italy "is not what makes a language live," nor does it mean that it becomes part of one's cultural identity in the sense of "passing that [language] on to [one's] children or to other people" (19-year-old Italian male).

Although there were different levels of personal religious practice among cultural groups, religion frequently emerged as having a significant impact on identity. For the Italian participants, religion, particularly Catholicism was clearly understood as central to Italian culture "… like grandmothers and rosaries go hand in hand…" (19-year-old Italian female). Likewise, an Afghani participant claimed that for Afghanis "culture and religion kinda go together" (18-year-old Afghan female). This particular participant felt that her faith assisted in her adjustment to Canadian culture when she arrived 8 years previously. However, one Iranian youth made the distinction that regardless of how religious one is, religion still has an effect on cultural identity, "Like my family we are not really kind of religious people but it is going to affect you…" (17-year-old Iranian female). Another youth explained that religion serves the purpose of setting limits for behavior. "There are certain limits that you do need to set… if religion did not have any restrictions then it would not be religion" (19-year-old Iranian male). Some participants emphasized that over time the values derived from religion become part of secular society and in fact may no longer be understood as having any religious implication per se; what was seen historically as part of religion has become "embedded in culture" (19-year-old Iranian male).

Finally, participants of this study expressed remarkable knowledge of the historical and political environment of their home and/or ancestral countries, as well as broader global current events. For the second and third generation Canadian-born Italian and Portuguese youth, understanding Italy and Portugal's location on the global stage today as well as the countries' histories seemed to influence their sense of connection to their culture. To further this knowledge, and ultimately enhance identity with the culture, several participants had taken university courses to learn more about their cultural heritage. As one participant explained,

I knew I had this Portuguese background but I never did anything about it. I just knew it was my background. But you come to university and there are so many options and so many things available to you. So I thought…. I'm going to take some language classes… and there was a course offered… it was a Portuguese history and culture. So I took that (20-year-old Portuguese female).

The connection of knowledge of historical and political environment was not unique to Canadian-born youth. Afghani and Iranian participants also revealed their knowledge of the history and politics of their home countries during the focus group and interview discussions. This is illustrated by one Afghani participant, "twenty years ago, it [Afghanistan] was basically as open as a European city… And now it's worse than a third world city with everything that has changed" (25-year-old Afghani male). In addition to understanding their home country's history and politics, participants also discussed broader global politics. Discussions in the Afghani, and to some extent Iranian, groups included war as an influence on one's cultural identity. While not mentioned in all groups, war bears attention given its profound effect on individuals and whole societies and its significance as the immediate catalyst for the migration of the Afghani youth in this study and their families. Furthermore, data collection with the Afghani youth began 1 year after "9–11," when "the war on terrorism" and a US military presence in Iraq had begun, pushing the Middle East and Afghanistan to center stage of Canadian and international media. These particular global events were also raised in the Iranian focus groups. Specifically, several Iranian participants noted that they deliberately referred to themselves as Persian to avoid discrimination that came with others' confusion between Iraq and Iran, at a time when Iraq's political unrest was regularly in the news.

Cultural Identity: Multiple Identities

Individual and systemic factors shaping the emergence of multiple identities are varied and multifaceted, so too is cultural identity itself (Fig. 2). Multiple identities are temporally and spatially determined, and they exist within any one person's experience and understanding of his/her own identity. For example, in the Afghani focus groups they referred to themselves interchangeably as "Afghans," "teens," "Muslims," and newcomers to Canada in the process of adjusting to a new culture, and in all groups several explanations of cultural identity were given using examples that drew comparisons between being a girl or a boy which emphasizes the gender dimension of identity construction and identification. While there are innumerable day-to-day experiences that shape identity, this study focused on the significance of the experience of migrating and settling in Canada. The notion of multiple identities came forth in the data through discussions of the fluidity of culture and the use of self-descriptors that included hyphenated labels.

Youth's multiple identities, while impacted by individual and systemic factors distinctively form in the process of everyday living, they also evolve as individuals actively live them and transform them. Culture was viewed by many participants as

Fig. 2 Multiple identities and experiences of migration and settlement
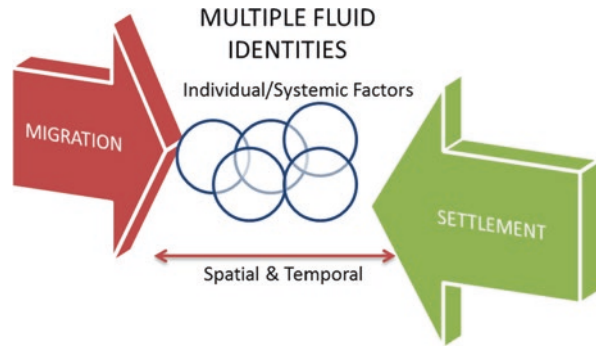
ever-changing and dynamic, or as one Italian participant phrased it, "ever-evolving." It is not restricted to one nationality, geography, or location, as illustrated by the following participant comments: "You don't have to be in Iran to be a Persian" (19-year-old Iranian male); "Changing the culture is something that happens in every culture. Iran is changing every time, every century, every generation" (18-year-old Iranian female).

During the interviews, more personal reflections revealed fluid understandings of cultural identity. For example, the female participant cited above knew she was Iranian, but was hard pressed to explain how she knew: "I don't know, I just feel that, I don't' know how to explain it, but I just feel I am Iranian." And another participant invoked notions of identities changing over time: "right now especially since the two and a half years have gone by, I just don't think when I say I was born in Iran that defines anything about me… I'm still waiting for another six months after which, if when they ask me, I can say I am Canadian" (17-year-old Iranian male). However, other participants did feel that cultural identity is determined by one's place of birth and principal culture. Both clearly viewed themselves as Iranian and did not believe that this will change in the post-migration context of Canada.

Another indicator of multiple identities was the use of hyphenated cultural self-descriptors. All focus groups discussions, at some point, included a sorting-out of participants' personal identity labels, with some describing themselves, for example, as Italian-Canadian, Portuguese-Canadian, Afghani-Canadian, Iranian-Canadian, and even Persian-Canadian. This hyphenated conception of cultural identity played out in various ways. Iranian youth spent some time distinguishing the Iranian-versus-Persian labels, the meanings of each, and how important it was to hold on to either or both of these descriptors as they became Canadians. The Italian youth spoke of their "Italianess." That is, while they all identified as Canadian without hesitation, their cultural identity also involved how much or how little they felt or thought of themselves as Italian. The Portuguese youth similarly assessed their cultural identity based on their knowledge of Portuguese culture, and they too articulated hyphenated Portuguese-Canadian identities according to this awareness.

Of note is that while hyphenated identities may contribute to feeling a connection to both groups, they may also alienate an individual from either group. One Portuguese female participant illustrated this point:

> … a poet came and talked during this Portuguese culture week…. He did this talk about his struggle between whether he considers himself Portuguese or whether he considers himself Canadian and he felt he never fit either one…. He wrote all this poetry about his inner quest to figure out who he was…. I don't know personally but I can imagine it would be that way. I understand that completely (20-year-old Portuguese female).

This sense of alienation as a result of a hyphenated identity was also seen among the Italian participants who articulated experiences of feeling like cultural outsiders when visiting Italy. It is important to note that this sentiment of not knowing which group to identify with was not expressed by the Afghani or Iranian youth, highlighting the possibility that while cultural identity is more than simply identification with where one resides or where one was born, these factors are still a fundamental part of one's sense of belonging, in terms of both the immigration process itself and in how family stories of immigration are kept alive from generation to generation. It may also be possible that Iranian and Afghani newcomers, not yet feeling fully integrated into Canadian culture did not perceive the hyphenation as problematic because they identified so strongly as Iranian and Afghani first and foremost and to a lesser extent as Canadian.

Experiences of Migration and Settlement

The distinctions made between where participants were born, where parents were born, and where families resided before and after settling in Canada emphasizes the complex nature of cultural identities when considering the experience of migration and settlement (exemplified as arrows in Fig. 2). Migration and settlement are experientially inseparable. The physical move to a new place is only the beginning of an intrapersonal and interpersonal process, a shifting in life circumstances that is part of what may be termed "settlement," and that (re-)shapes one's identity. Migrating from one place and settling into a new place are integral to one another and to one's identity. This was eloquently addressed in the study through the theme of "becoming Canadian versus being Canadian." For example, one participant was born to Afghani parents outside of Afghanistan, and she had never identified with her country of birth. Another participant had never thought of himself as European even though he spent years growing up in a European country. Yet since arriving in Canada, both these participants did describe themselves in some way as Canadian.

Becoming Canadian while maintaining one's home cultural identity was particularly evident in the Iranian and Afghani groups, youth who were newcomer immigrants themselves. Becoming Canadian refers to the process of learning about, and identifying with, a new post-migration culture. This is affected by the actual lived experiences of migration and settlement; making efforts to fit in while at the same time consciously preserving the cultural beliefs and practices from one's home country. For the Afghani and Iranian groups, there was an expressed concern for striking a balance between *becoming* Canadian and *being* Afghani and Iranian respectively. One Iranian participant categorized two groups of immigrants to describe the general approaches that people take to settling in a new country:

> There are those who prefer to stick with everything that they had back there and try to recreate another… and the other group who might say, "ok, I want to forget about everything there was and start a whole new thinking and of course it is not always black and white, they have the grey in the middle—people who keep something and are open I guess at least to new thinking (18-year-old Iranian male).

Furthermore, integration means change. Homesickness, culture shock, "holding on" to something and "opening up to" new things, and "getting comfortable" are all aspects of change.

Homesickness was expressed by an 18-year-old female Iranian in a description of the difficulty of leaving her friends in Iran, "From the first year that I came here I really missed them… they still had each other, but I don't have anyone." Some participants coped with homesickness by maintaining a tie with family and friends in Iran, and in some cases, even returning to Iran to visit. In her journal, one female participant focused her writing on her personal experience of leaving Iran, and her family and friends. For her, leaving these people is one of the most prevalent challenges of migration and settlement.

This was contrasted with experiences of Italian and Portuguese participants. Their discussions highlighted the notion of *being* Canadian, while maintaining the culture of previous generations. Being Canadian means the preservation of a Canadian cultural identity while learning about, and identifying with, one's ancestral culture and aiming to preserve that in some secondary way. For these participants, being Canadian was tempered by family stories of migration and settlement, formal education about the ancestral home, and travel to that particular country. They acknowledged their mixed heritage and spoke at length of being Canadian of Italian and Portuguese descent. For them, an already-established dual cultural identity was apparent. This was evidenced in the following quote from a male participant: "I can't say that every time before I do something I think that I am Italian so I should do it this way… because I do identify a lot as a Canadian as much as I do an Italian."

A final note on the importance of multiple identities is that simplistic and often prejudicial views of a person are created when we think in terms of only one cultural label (country, politics, race, or religion). Explicit attention must be paid to the fact that multiple identities are shaped by experiences of stereotyping and discrimination, which were clearly articulated, in varying degrees, by all four participant groups. The argument more fully elaborated elsewhere (Khanlou et al., 2008) is that these negative experiences may in fact arise in part from singular, reductionist thinking about culture, which leads to generalizations about whole groups of people.

Limitations

Three key limitations of the study are outlined here. One limitation is that all participants were enrolled in school (high school or university) at the time of entry into the study. Although being a student was not an inclusion criterion, recruitment of youth

occurred in part through school related contacts, such as settlement workers within the high school or cultural interest groups within university. This had an impact on the findings in two ways. First, all youth were educated and well-informed, which may have contributed to their remarkable awareness of global politics and knowledge about their countries of origin, which may not be typical of all immigrant youth. Additionally, youth who were not in the sample, that is, those who have dropped out of high school or have not gone to university, may have important different perspectives on cultural identity, and further research should include such youth. Another limitation lies in the fact that all participants were still living with family, which also raises important questions. What about youth who may be living in shelters or are separated from family? How does leaving home early affect understandings of cultural identity?

Finally, the nature of the study design (i.e., focus groups, interviews, and journals) may have appealed more to youth who were already interested in discussing issues related cultural identity. As a result, this may have led to an active sample of youth who are particularly aware and expressive of their cultural identity. As a result, while these findings may resonate with many young people's understanding of cultural identity, they do not represent a generalizable conceptualization of it for *all* immigrant youth.

Discussion

The systems perspective on cultural identity presented in Fig. 3 is a framework that explicates the interpretation of cultural identity as being a complex of multiple identities shaped not only by the external environmental factors of various social systems and the individual factors that make up a person, but also through a set of particular lived experiences that influence and are influenced by these factors and an individual's responses to them. These dimensions of environment interact with each other, influencing individual human development and functioning (Germain & Bloom, 1999; Waller, 2001), or what may be understood as intersectionalities of influence (Guruge & Khanlou, 2004).

The framework also extends the findings from previous research by Khanlou (1999) with regard to the orthogonal cultural identification model. The youth in the current IYCIP study did indeed understand and express cultural identity beyond place of birth or parents' cultural backgrounds, and all expressed identification with more than one cultural group as well as a personal sense of individuality beyond ethnic labels. The themes identified in the microsystem, such as the influence of school supports, family rules, and friendship, and the experiences of migration and settlement serve as reminders that culture is lived out in the day-to-day relationships. In this sense, culture refers to more than nationality or ethnicity. Multiple identities may include, for example, the cultures of women or men, adolescent culture, high school or university campus culture, or the cultures of different socioeconomic classes. While this study more directly targeted ethnic and immigrant
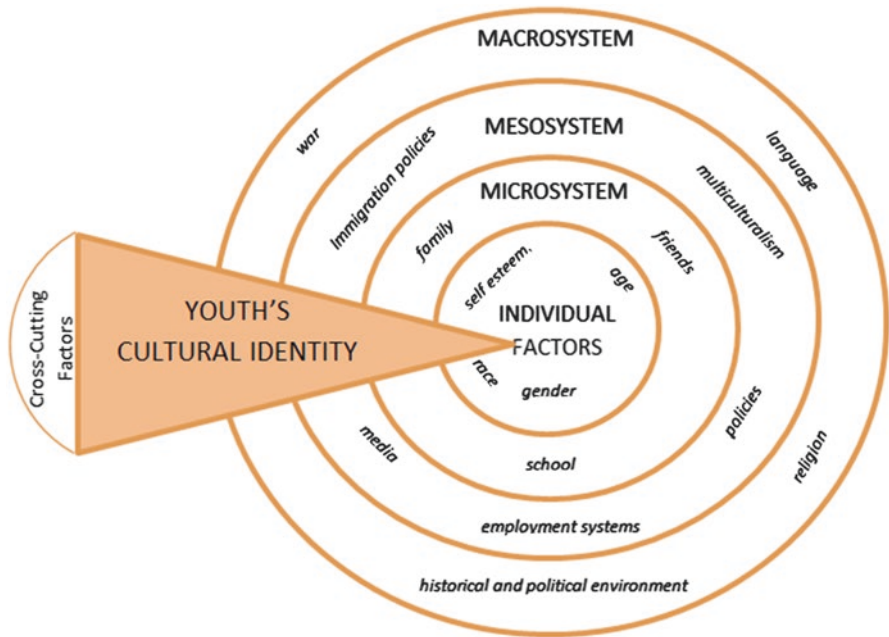
Fig. 3 Youth's cultural identity in a systems context

groups, consideration was given to questions of gender, developmental age category, and social status as part of multiple identities within these groups. Overall, the framework emphasizes the embeddedness of cultural identity. Systemic and individual factors are not separate discreet entities, but rather intersect dynamically with each other producing many possibilities for multiple identities within one person.

The current study also highlights that regardless of the temporal and spatial differences of their migration stories, all study participants had developed or were developing notions of multiple cultural identities related to immigration. Youth in this study challenge essentialist approaches to cultural identity by explicitly arguing on the impacts of "fixed" categories on their everyday lives. Implicitly, youth's narratives speak of performativity and power relations and express an open criticism to identify with only one culture. Youth's narratives speak of embedded power relations that are at stake when they define their own identity. Questions that still remain to be answered are: What is the meaning for racialized immigrant youth to be related to notions/identities that belong to the less empowered groups? How do these youth view their racialized identity and negotiate their identity insertion into mainstream and less socially empowered categories of identity?

In our study, cultural heritage was not only tightly held by the first generation immigrants but it was also highly valued by subsequent generations. For this reason, it would be helpful to explore how descendants of immigrants (i.e., second and third generation immigrant youth) understand multiple identities in light of family stories of migration, and if and how they continue to carry an "immigrant" label as part of

their identity. In addition, several questions are raised through the experiences of two participants who were not born in their parents' home countries or Canada, and did not in any way, identify with the place of their own birth. First, the experience of refugee youth is unique in understanding cultural identity and psychosocial well-being. Refugees, unlike the general label of "immigrants," are forced by situations beyond their control to leave their home country and often journey through several places before arriving in a new home country. Though the journey may involve several stops of varying duration along the way, these stops do not constitute a destination; they may not "settle" in the intermediary places and, therefore, these places do not get taken up as part of one's identity in the same way that "homes" (new and former) do. Second, the developmental stage of adolescence alone can put many youth in an in-between migrant category. They are neither refugee by definition, nor have they actively and voluntarily decided to immigrate. Many immigrant youth, unlike adults, do not freely choose to move, but rather do so based on choices made by others in their lives, usually their parents.

Implications for Practice and Research with Immigrant Youth

In addressing questions of cultural identity, youth-focused professionals' practice and research may develop in more effective ways to promote understanding of immigrant youth's self-esteem and overall psychosocial wellbeing. Implications of conceptualizing cultural identity as multiple identities may be structured within the micro, meso, and macro systems of the conceptual framework presented in this paper. *Implication 1* (micro level): One micro-system implication is the importance of friendship in psychosocial and emotional health. Friendship is important both in terms of the sense of belonging that grows from making friends within and across cultural groups, and in recognizing the often unarticulated loss of friends that occurs through the process of migration that may fuel homesickness and a sense of alienation. Community and school-based programs that foster cross-cultural friendships *and* those within the same cultural group cultivate a sense of belonging. Programs might also consider including various forms of grief support that explicitly address the relationship losses youth have endured through immigration that may otherwise not be talked about yet may have significant impact on identity. Also, studies addressing such issues as homesickness or other experiences of loss may provide insights into how best to structure settlement services that are balanced between integration in new setting and remembering former settings.

Implication 2 (meso-level): An important factor in the meso-system is that of employment. This study highlights that the psychosocial wellbeing of youth is tied to parent's employment status. With more attention currently being given to immigrant employment issues related to professional education and expertise, it behooves us to also consider this problem from the perspective of youth. Programs that assist adults in obtaining employment appropriate to their training and credentials not only benefit these parents but also their children. Research that examines

such benefits more specifically is needed. *Implication 3* (macro-level): Macro-level recommendations may consist of ensuring inclusive policies for all youth organizations that explicate values of diversity and strategic directives with such aims as promoting the integration of multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-faith identities for youth.

Response Section

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I respond to this chapter in light of my experience as an immigrant artist working with immigrant and first and second generation Latino youth living in the Greater Toronto Area, and elaborate on the key role of art in youth's development. From my perspective, art is a perfect tool, it is a universal language, that—as I have witnessed—is helping children, youth, and their immigrant parents to face the cultural shock and language barriers they face when arriving to Canada. Art can be a great tool to help them to navigate the complex process of integrating into the Canadian multicultural society, as well as the many challenges they face. My key statement is that art can be used to promote positive social change in society.

Canada's ancestral violence against Aboriginal communities has been a driving force to Canadian multicultural society divided. Even though as a Mexican I promote my own culture, I always emphasize the relevance of the existence of multiple cultures in the GTA. I think this is relevant to break barriers and divisions among the many cultural communities inhabiting this city. As a universal language, art allows us to establish a dialogue in multicultural contexts. Through art we can communicate with members of different cultures. Art is also a useful vehicle for youth to be able to explore their identities, and most importantly to be able to communicate and exchange their ideas, ideals, and views with their peers from other cultural backgrounds. The role of art goes beyond the possibility to build on youth's artistic skills to be able to paint a painting or to build a sculpture; it is a way to communicate complex ideas in their process of integrating themselves or their parents into Canada.

I have been working with youth in a theater group that also includes members of different generations. I have seen how theater has helped youth to develop individuals' abilities that otherwise they would not be able to build in other contexts such as the school, at work, or at home. Through theater the individual develops and grows their sensorial skills, human and emotional development. Their interaction with older generations gives youth a sense of responsibility and trust. I have witnessed how art can transform the lives of immigrants that enter with trauma from violence and political repression.

I have witnessed how art teaches youth the value of their ethnic background. In our Center, I organize the summer art camp "Latin-American Seeds," an interdisciplinary art program that includes painting, theater, dance, music, and poetry. The

idea is that Latino youth and children start to approach their cultural roots. Sometimes first and second generation youth and children that start the camp are ashamed of speaking Spanish. They tell the camp leaders that they do not want to speak Spanish and they are angry at the program for having them to speak the language. At the end of the program we see how proud they are of speaking the language because it gives them a feeling of belonging to their roots, and that makes them feel good about themselves and their immigrant parents. In these camps youth develop team work skills and tolerance. They need to belong to something; they need to interact with peers with whom they have something in common. I remember when I met a former summer camp student who was proud of sharing with me that he was going to enter into College and that he was planning to take a course on Latin American history. I could see how proud he was of wanting to learn about his culture. Art was a way for the participants to connect with their culture, and therefore with themselves and their families.

I work in the Day of the Death collective which is a community-based organization that organizes this Mexican celebration in Toronto. In 2003, the UNESCO declared the Day of the Death part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It is a ritual, a cultural expression, and a strong component of our cultural identity. My experience working in the collective has taught me that I can communicate with members of other cultures through art. For example, it would be difficult for me to communicate my thoughts to other cultural groups through religion. However, through art it is possible for me to open up a dialogue with members of different cultures, to have a human interconnection and exchange.

In globalized capitalist societies art is devaluated. In our society art is not seen as something that can be applied to increase the world economic progress. Art has lost its place in society, and this undervaluation of art is one of the worst human tragedies. I think it is time to see in the arts an important tool that may help immigrant youth to better face the multiple challenges they encounter in Canada. It can help them to deal with trauma or the difficult situations they come from. Art has a therapeutic power and we should make use of it. It helps to raise our own self-esteem. Art is a tool to empower minorities; it would be impossible to accomplish that without the help of art and culture.

It is in light of its powerful impact that we need more funding for this area, within schools and also in grassroots organizations that try to help newcomer youth in their multiple needs. It is important that the institutions allocating funding also deliver workshops to teach how to design an art project, what funds are available out there and how to apply to them. I know that the City of Toronto and the provincial and federal governments have funds to promote art; however, it is important to make sure this funding reaches vulnerable newcomer and immigrant youth.

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