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Examining and Understanding Social Connectedness and Social Engagement Among Muslim Lebanese Canadian Older Adults

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

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Abstract

With the projected increase in the older adult population and the rise of immigrants to Canada, there is a critical need to explore immigrant older adults' experiences of ageing. The objectives of this study are to: understand what it means to be an ageing, Muslim Lebanese immigrant in Canada by understanding their experiences of social connectedness and engagement. Constructivist narrative inquiry was used to provide direct insight into the diverse lived experiences of two men and two women who came to Canada during the 1960s and decided to stay and age in Canada. Participants were involved in two in-depth narrative interviews in which they narrated their experiences of connecting with others now and over time. *Past shaping present* experiences and the importance of *finding place* were two key themes that emerged from the four narrative accounts, which have informed a deeper understanding of social connectedness and social engagement.

Keywords

Social Connectedness, Social Engagement, Loneliness, Older Adults, Arab Culture, Muslim Lebanese Canadian, Family Interdependence, Immigrants in Canada, Narrative

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Dedication

Before I began my Masters study, my grandfather passed away. He was my best friend, a beloved father and grandfather to 27 grandchildren who all grew up in his backyard. I dedicate this work to my grandfather Chams Chams, who had sparked a passion in my heart to study this topic. His presence in my life was invaluable and his life story has empowered me to continue exploring and listening to the stories of others throughout my life and academic career.

Grandfather, I miss you. Your words echo in my heart every day and I will never forget them, as you always said to me “Nada, you are the veins of my heart”. This thesis is for you.

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What Sparked My Interest

When I was 22, my grandfather suddenly passed away from a heart attack and left me with the memory of his life story, which changed my life forever. Since then, some of my happiest days consist of me piecing together his narrative and finding deeper meaning in many of the things he said and did. That was when I knew I wanted to study ageing and immigration. What follows is a small narrative I pieced together of my own thoughts and interpretations of my grandparent's story.

Mdoukah, Lebanon is a small dusty village East of Beirut, where farming was the largest and most common occupation during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. People worked hard and helped each other out like one large cohesive family. There was a strong sense of community and belonging that created feelings of comfort and contentment. However, life in Mdoukha, Lebanon was extremely labour intensive. In the 1950s and 60s it was the cultural norm for children not to go to school, as it was their job to help their family farm the land. Regardless of this fact, my grandparent's village did not have a school nearby, so trying to get there in the first place with no transportation was an added burden. Children were seen as important and a much-needed source of help, outside and inside the house. Male adolescents started their occupations as farmers and females attended to household chores and family. People there lived each day in preparation for the next. Then, families became larger, responsibilities increased and people began to struggle. I saw this as a place of humble beginnings; a place where my grandparents were born and raised.

After having their first child (my father) my grandparents decided to immigrate to Canada because they had relatives there who told them that it was a place that provided bigger and better career opportunities and most importantly a place where their children could receive an education and not have to live the life they did. My grandparents immigrated from Mdoukah to London, Ontario in 1965, with high hopes of starting a new chapter in their lives.

Ambitious and as enthusiastic as they were, my grandparents struggled finding affordable housing, and had troubles integrating and forming social connections because of social barriers. They found it difficult to adapt to Western culture, however this did not deter them from striving and establishing themselves within society. My grandfather worked at Ford Motor Company for 30 years and retired comfortably at age 65. My grandmother worked various factory jobs, all while raising six children.

Once their children married and moved out of the house, my grandparents spent most of their day walking around their neighborhood, not only getting their physical activity intake for the day, but they also spent time socializing with each neighbour. I recall asking my grandfather, 'Jadoo, why is it that you have to talk with every single neighbour? We are never going to make it home!' He told me something I will never forget; he said that these are your neighbors, people who work together to build a friendly community for one another. It is out of respect that you make sure they are doing well, as everyone brings a wealth of experience, things people can learn from each other so we can create a closer neighbourhood. I slowly began to realize the importance of social connectedness and social engagement, especially among immigrants and immigrant older adults, as this creates meaning for them. Interestingly, after spending so many years in Canada, my grandparents became socially connected and engaged within their society during the later stages of their lives, as they worked towards building close relationships inside and outside their ethnic community.

Chapter One: Introduction

Canada and the United States, along with many other developed countries around the world, are currently experiencing both an ageing of the population and a profound rise in ethnic and cultural diversity from changes due to immigration patterns. There are approximately five million people over age 65 and 6.2 million immigrants¹ in Canada, encompassing 16.1 percent and 19.8 percent of the Canadian population respectively (Statistics Canada, 2007a). In 2011, almost 19.6 percent of immigrants in Canada were 65 years of age and over (Statistics Canada, 2011). Furthermore, in 2004, one in 43 immigrants who arrived in Canada was an older adult (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Many (63.7 percent) immigrants to Canada come from European countries, while 22.8 percent come from Asian and Middle Eastern countries (Statistics Canada, 2011). Looking closely at immigrants coming to Canada from Middle Eastern countries, according to Abu-Laban (1980; 1999), Canadian immigrants come from 22 countries of the League of Arab² States. These countries include Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (Profile: Arab League, 2015). In 2011 there were over 300,000 people of Arab and West Asian origin living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). In Canada, the most rapidly growing visible minority groups are Arab, Filipino and West Asian people (Statistics Canada, 2011). In addition, according to the 2011 National Household Survey, 1,053,943 people in Canada identify as Muslim, which is 3.2% of the population, making them the second largest religious group in Canada.

¹ Leaving one's native country to live in another country permanently.

² In this study, "Arab" refers to individuals who trace their origins to the Arabic speaking countries of: Arabian Peninsula, Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa.

Taking a closer look within the Arab-Canadian community, Lebanese are the largest group (Statistics Canada, 2007a). In 2001, 41 percent of those with Arab roots identified as Lebanese, while 12 percent were Egyptian, six percent were Syrian, six percent were Moroccan, six percent were Iraqi, four percent were Algerian and four percent were Palestinian (Statistics Canada, 2007a). The immigration rates of Lebanese people began to increase in the 1960s and onward (Abu-Laban, 2008). As of 2001, the Lebanese population in Canada was the sixth largest non-European ethnic group (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

The rapid growth of diverse older adults in Canada raises several important questions as to whether their current and future needs are being met by the right policies, programs and services, as immigrating to and living in a new country presents individuals with many opportunities and challenges. Challenges arise for immigrants who come to Canada in their young adulthood years and in their later years as well. These two groups may potentially experience major shifts and changes in their social and cultural spheres when adjusting in a new society, which may make them vulnerable to social stressors and depression (Lee, 2007; Peralin, 1989). Immigration is a major life transition for individuals, as immigrants are involved in the process of acculturation, where they learn about the social, cultural and behavioural norms of their new country and try to make sense of them (Berry, 1997). New immigrants go through identity transformations and changes in their values, behaviours and attitudes (Berry, 1997).

Social connectedness and social engagement present major sources of positive support, especially for new immigrants who are trying adapt to their new environment (Kim, Jang, David & Chiriboga, 2012). Social support is a profound factor that can assist in mitigating stress, which may stem from the acculturation process (Sirin, Gupta, Ryce, Katsiaficas, Suarez-Orozco & Rogers-Sirin, 2013). An immigrant's close family relationships and informal relationships are critical in helping newcomers access information, resources and emotional support needed to settle, adapt and integrate into their new setting (Couton & Gaudet, 2008). In order to better understand the challenges older immigrants experience,

researchers must pay attention to the relationships between factors such as culture, language, and religion, that may facilitate or hinder feelings of belonging. For example, in communities without language support, immigrants may experience feelings of social isolation, loneliness and social exclusion, leading to intergenerational strains and pressures within their family (Berry & Williams, 2004; Beiser & Hou, 2001; Rumbaut, 2005; Wu and Penning 2015). Both old age and immigration are linked to experiences of social isolation, sense of displacement, disruption of social ties, and feelings of loneliness (Ajrouch 2008; Couton & Gaudet, 2008; Becker, 2003; Papillon, 2002). These social conditions impact an individual's well-being, quality of life and overall health status (Becker, 2003; Gierveld, Van der Pas, & Keating, 2015; Kim, Sangalang & Kihl, 2012; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002). As the proportion of immigrants in Canada who are 65 years of age and older has increased, exploring the social conditions presented above is one step towards implementing appropriate measures to address their social needs.

There is a critical need to explore how immigrant older adults experience ageing in Canada, in particular people who have come to Canada in their young adulthood and who have decided to stay and age in Canada. Given the proportion of older immigrant adults in Canada, and that immigration is a life course transition that may influence how one builds social connections with family, friends and communities as they try to navigate new territory (Treas & Batalova, 2009), examining and understanding the experiences of connectedness of this group is critical. The literature focusing on understanding experiences of social connectedness and social engagement, particularly shaped by ageing and immigration among Arab Muslim men and women, is limited. Studies focusing exclusively on Muslim Lebanese men and women's experiences of transitioning from one country to another, while observing the ways in which they integrated into the new society, are rarely conducted. Additionally, the factors that may facilitate or hinder becoming and staying socially connected and engaged within society among Arab Muslims are infrequently investigated, especially among older adults who immigrated to

Canada in their adulthood period and aged in Canada. Further research may have the potential to guide services and programs for diverse ethnic groups including but not limited to Muslim Lebanese older adults. Such research could also offer insight into the barriers and facilitators that new immigrants currently face.

Policy Frameworks in Canada on Ageing and Social Connections

Older adults make up the fastest-growing age group in Canada; approximately five million Canadians were 65 years of age or older in 2011 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). This number is expected to double in the next 25 years, equaling 10.4 million older adults by 2036 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). Over the last half-century, public, private and non-profit sectors in Canada have established a vast system of programs and services that aim to increase the well-being and quality of life of seniors (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). Several policy documents emphasize the importance of addressing social connections and engagement among older adults. For example, in 2005, the federal, provincial, and territorial ministries responsible for older adults endorsed a framework for action towards healthy ageing by the Public Health Agency of Canada (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011). The framework identified five priority areas for policy and program change: **social connectedness**, physical activity, healthy eating, falls prevention, and tobacco control (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011). Most recently, in 2010, the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation held a series of discussions across the country to discuss issues affecting Canadian older adults (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011). One important health promotion factor that was discussed, as people age, was improving the **integration of social care across a continuum** (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011). Along with improving the integration of social care, the report emphasized the importance of **community supports**, proper housing, formal and informal caregivers, **and social connectedness and engagement**, all of which play a critical role within an older adult's life course (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011). The report also discussed the

opposite side of the continuum, that being social isolation. Although living alone may provide independence, “it can affect senior’s financial status, housing affordability and degree of isolation and quality of life” (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011, p. 72). In addition, Ontario’s Action Plan for Seniors drew on the World Health Organization’s age-friendly communities framework to emphasize the importance of age-friendly communities in addressing the needs of seniors within eight key areas: outdoor spaces and building, transportation, housing, **social participation**, respect and **social inclusion**, **civic participation** and employment, communication and **community support** and health services (Warth, 2015). In addition, the National Seniors Council of Canada created a report entitled, “Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors”, (2014), which suggests that social isolation among older adults can cause communities to suffer as a whole, due to a lack of social cohesion. This leads to higher social costs and loss of experience that older adults bring to their families, neighbours and communities (Report on Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014). The prevalence of social isolation, linked with evidence-based research on how it affects an individual’s health and wellbeing, strongly supports framing social isolation as an important public health concern. The report on Social Isolation of Seniors (2014) also identified several groups who are at greater risk of social isolation: older adults with physical and mental health issues, living with low income, of Aboriginal descent and **who are newcomers or immigrants to Canada** (Report on Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014).

These frameworks suggest that policy makers in Canada are aware of the importance of social connectedness, participation, inclusion, support and engagement among older adults. These frameworks also identified social isolation as a negative experience that needs to be addressed. With rising immigration, ageing of individuals who previously immigrated to Canada, and immigrant older adults’ risk of experiencing social isolation, a better understanding of social connectedness and social engagement in this population is profoundly important. Thus, the present study took an exploratory approach and examined the experiences of older Muslim Lebanese men and women, who

immigrated to Canada during their young adulthood years. Specifically, the study examined their experiences of connecting and engaging with others now and over time and the factors and conditions that shaped each participant's experiences of social connectedness and social engagement.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. In chapter one I have provided background information including what sparked my interest and a summary of each chapter, a brief introduction to the research topic and a summary of Canadian policies on ageing and social connectedness. In chapter two I draw upon a wide range of qualitative and quantitative literature including key definitions, an overview of the importance of social connectedness and engagement among older adults in general, immigration in Canada, immigrating during adulthood and staying in Canada and older Arab immigrants and their experiences of social connectedness and engagement. I also describe the life course perspective as a tool for understanding social connectedness and engagement throughout the life course, in particular the idea of interconnectedness of lived experiences within one's own life and with the lives of others who share the same ethnicity and religious background. I then summarize the gaps I found in the literature and provide a rationale for the study. Chapter three outlines the research purpose, narrative methodology used in the study, paradigmatic underpinnings, subjectivity and reflexivity, methods, data analysis, quality criteria and the ethical considerations. Chapter four presents the participants' narratives, while chapter five presents the key emerging themes. I analyze each theme and subtheme in detail, which were consistent in most or all narratives, while considering the diversity in experiences. In chapter six I discuss the findings through my own reflections and in light of other research, address challenges I faced during the study, and discuss limitations of the research. I also discuss future research implications and contributions with respect to Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adult's experiences of social connectedness and

social engagement. I end the thesis with some personal reflections and concluding remarks.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

Defining Key Terms and the Importance of Social Connectedness and Engagement in the Life Course

In this thesis, social connectedness is considered to be a multidimensional concept that includes both the quality and quantity of social relationships (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Coleman, 1998). For example, social connectedness is linked to social capital (Grieve & Kemp, 2015), it can be measured objectively to the number of social ties an individual has (Goswami, Kobler, Leimeister, & Krcmar, 2010) or by the frequency of social interactions and participation in activities (Rafnsson, Shankar & Steptoe, 2015). Social connectedness also has subjective components related to the quality of the relationships and social interactions between older adults (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Buckley & McCarthy, 2009; Williams & Galliher, 2006). Looking at the opposite end of the spectrum, social isolation is defined as “a state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships” (Nicholson, 2012, p. 1346). Dupuis-Blanchard, Neufeld and Strang (2009) further state that, “Humans are social beings in need of a variety of social relationships. These relationships have vital intrinsic values central to self-identity, self-confidence, and overall health and well-being” (p. 1186).

Social engagement is closely related to social connectedness, and can be defined as “a person’s involvement in activities that provide interaction with others in society or the community” (Levasseur, Richard, Gauvin, & Raymond, 2010, p. 2148). Engaging in meaningful activities such as volunteer work, religious activities, and social activities is health promoting and significantly reduces mortality risk for older adults (Lennartsson & Silverstein, 2001). For example, volunteering promotes health and well-being of older adults (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008). An increase in social engagement among older adults is connected with a greater quality of life (Levasseur, Desrosiers & Noreau 2004). It

can also act as a protecting agent against functional ability decline (Avlund, Lund, Holstein & Due 2004; James, Boyle, Buchman, & Bennett, 2011). Social connections and social engagement are inter-related and each can promote the other; social ties provide opportunities to engage in social activity, which helps to reinforce social relationships or build new ones, providing a sense of identity, meaning and value (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000). These are all aspects of life that are critical for immigrant older adults to develop and maintain.

Social connectedness and social engagement are two experiences that change throughout an individual's life course, which strongly influence well-being (Cornwell, Laumann & Schumm, 2008). These experiences can provide feelings of comfort and familiarity, but for some social connectedness and social engagement may lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness if the quality of their relationships is poor or if the person does not feel included. Maintaining meaningful warm protective relationships with others is argued to be an endless human goal (McClelland, 1987). The depth of an individual's social connections is a determinant of subjective-wellbeing (Pilkington, Windsor and Crisp, 2012). Thus, one's ability to identify with others through common social roles constructs a sense of connectedness (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Older adults report multiple benefits of social relationships, such as having a sense of value, belonging, control, and self-efficacy, especially when participating in social relations (Avlund, Lund, Holstein & Due, 2004). As individuals age, many are faced with life changes such as retirement, loss of a spouse, mobility constraints, or immigration, which affects their social networks and make social ties hard to replace (Cornwell et al., 2008).

Research also shows that some types of social ties may be more beneficial than others. For instance, one study found that high quality relationships relate to improved self-esteem and well-being and are more likely to provide older adults with a sense of belonging (Fiori, Antonucci & Cortina, 2006). Stronger and closer social connections represent alternative routes to valuable social resources in times of struggle and need (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, &

Brashears, 2006), which can reduce a sense of social isolation (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Park, Jang, Lee, Haley & Chiriboga, 2012, Shaw, 2005). Furthermore, research on social networks suggests that individuals who are a part of voluntary associations show an increased level of interdependency between social ties (Cornwell et al., 2008). Aside from formal community connections, social connections are also developed among neighbours. Strong ties with neighbours can reduce a sense of social isolation and provide access to informal assistance among older adults (Shaw, 2005). Some older adults are involved in religious organizations, which is an effective way of integrating into the community because they are central locations for local networking (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006). Older adults with more social ties or those who are more socially integrated tend to live longer (Antonucci, Ajrouch & Birditt, 2013).

Immigration in Canada

The first half of the 1960s, for Canada, signaled a movement toward the removal of government preferences for immigrants based on country of origin (Segal, Elliott & Mayadas, 2009). This removal happened because there was a decrease in European immigration to Canada after World War II (Tator, Henry, Mattis & Rees, 2000). The White Paper on Immigration was a document commissioned by Prime Minister Lester B. Person to evaluate immigration legislation and create recommendations to restructure Canada's immigration policies (Tator, Henry, Mattis & Rees, 2000). This document was the basis for the new immigration policies of 1967. Racial discrimination was removed as a basis for immigrants to Canada and applicants were assessed on education, training, personal qualities, adaptability, motivation, initiative, knowledge of English and French and occupation in Canada (Segal et al., 2009). Canada began to notice a change in the ethnic composition at the start of 1968 as a result of their new non-discriminatory immigration policies (Isajiw, 1999). In 1969, Canada began to accept refugees from Cambodia, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Tibet, Uganda and Vietnam (Tator, Henry, Mattis & Rees, 2000). In order to address the volume of immigration in Canada, immigration was discussed in the House of Commons,

known as the Immigration Act of 1967, which was implemented in 1978 (Tator, Henry, Mattis & Rees, 2000). This framework was changed numerous times throughout the 28 years of implementation, thus, the Immigration Act (1976) was changed to present three classes of immigrants: family, refugees and independent immigrants, which were selected on the basis of a points system; and assisted relatives, who were distant relatives sponsored by a family member in Canada (Segal et al., 2009). In 1994, the Canadian federal government held another discussion on the future of their immigration policy in order to adjust to the changing socioeconomic and political situations at the time (Segal et al., 2009). The group created a report entitled *Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration*, which entailed 172 recommendations that were incorporated in Bill C-11 passed on June 13, 2001. Bill C-11 replaced the 1976 Immigration Act, which specified the principles of equity and freedom from discrimination and to strengthen refugee protection (Segal et al., 2009). Since then, many people from all around the world have immigrated to Canada due to push factors, when individuals decide to leave their country of origin due to worsening economic or social conditions, and/or pull factors, when people are attracted to a country due to the opportunities offered for economic betterment and social mobility (Segal et al., 2009). These policies have made Canada one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world, with more than 200 different ethnic origins reported in the 2011 National Household Survey. Its ethno-cultural composition has been shaped by different waves of immigration and their descendants, with each new wave adding more diversity (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). The vast majority of the immigrant population reside in large urban centers such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015).

Immigration has been a part of Canada's national story and families have come to Canada for centuries, in hopes of starting a better life. Several changes, such as to the economy and social structure, have influenced the ethnic and racial composition of Canada as a result of the waves of immigration. Even though for many families the decision to leave their country may be linked to

poverty or lack of social mobility, each family has a unique story to tell about why they decided to depart from their native country (Alba & Foner, 2015).

Immigration is often linked to multiple changes and complex challenges in the new environment, raising the question of “how to integrate immigrants and their children so that they become full members of the societies where they live now” (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 1). For example, new immigrants often have challenges with language, navigating the system, acculturation, employment, finding a supportive network and experience stress or culture shock (Gierveld, Van der Pas & Keating, 2015). Becoming a full member of society means having the same work and educational opportunities as everyone else in the country and also gaining a sense of belonging, acceptance and inclusion among society (Alba & Foner, 2015). Furthermore, because immigrants are often classified as racial minorities they often experience discrimination, which has implications for an individual’s wellbeing (Ajrouch, 2017). Although each experience of immigration is unique, becoming and staying socially connected and socially engaged has become a fundamental goal.

Kelagher, Potts and Manderson (2001) mentioned that social support can influence immigrants’ feelings of belonging, connectedness and isolation. However, immigrants face several diverse challenges in obtaining social support, which negatively affects integration (Bomar, 2004). Some immigrants may have family in the host country to which they are immigrating, and these social relations and the receiving community tend to be supportive; however, roles, expectations and conflicting values within family structure maybe seen as burdensome and can lead to feelings of isolation (Yeh, 2003). For new immigrants, social ties and maintaining social connections with family and people with the same ethnic background enables access to resources and helps to maintain a connection with their homeland (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Time of immigration is a large factor which can also greatly shape an immigrant’s life course.

Experiences of Immigrating During Young Adulthood and Staying in Canada

Young adulthood is an important period in life, as it involves exercising one's autonomy and life decisions more than in earlier life periods (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). Young adults face the important task of thinking about where they belong in society. Immigration during young adulthood is one factor that can shape their development during this period of life, including experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. It is important to understand that young immigrant adult's beliefs and behaviors are shaped by family obligations, as they tend to still feel dependent on family needs and social expectations (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002).

People who immigrate during their young adulthood years may find themselves in a shocking new world, which may come with forming many new social relationships (Fangen, 2010; Flaherty, Kohn & Levav, 1988). Forming a sense of connectedness with others begins during the adolescence period and expands throughout one's adult life. It is critical to be able to maintain companionship and social affiliation in order to feel comfortable within a larger social sphere (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Being able to identify with those who perceive you as different than themselves, as many young immigrant adults try to do, gives them the opportunity to take on responsibility and a meaningful social role in life (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Becoming and staying socially connected and socially engaged in a new community as a young immigrant adult is extremely important as social support activities are able to reduce stressors associated with acculturation (Fangen, 2010; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Thomas & Baek Choi, 2006).

The stress of adjusting to a new culture places immigrants at risk of depression and anxiety (Boyce & Fuligni, 2007) as they learn new cultural rules and negotiate differences across cultural boundaries, and at the same time try to maintain their old culture while incorporating aspects of the new (Berry, 1997; Sirin & Fine, 2007). Studies have consistently discovered an increase in stress,

morbidity and decreased levels of social support among new immigrants which tends to be related to experiences of social isolation and feelings of loneliness (Ritsner & Ponizovsky, 1998). Especially for first-generation immigrants, navigating through new and unfamiliar culture without their parents for guidance brings forth more challenges (Sirin et al., 2013). Social support has been found to play a profound role for first-generation immigrants who need help navigating their new surroundings, securing finances and finding emotional support (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Young immigrant adults may include themselves in social networks as a form of social capital, which may act as a protective factor from discrimination and maintain well-being (Almedom, 2005; Fangen, 2010; Oppedal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004). Thus, it is critical to consider how social support is connected to various outcomes of young immigrant adults who decide to reside in their new country (Almedom, 2005), as this is a time in their life where they begin to develop independence and identity reflecting upon their Arab and mainstream culture (Abu-Laban & Abu-Laban, 1999). There is a considerable body of literature that has explored the challenges young immigrant adults face when settling, adapting and integrating in their new environment as presented above. However, there is a lack of research on this group in relation to how they continued to stay and age in their permanent residence and how their immigration status shaped their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement over time.

I ask the question of how Muslim Lebanese immigrants connected with others over time and now in their older adulthood period. Foucart (2003) mentioned that ageing and old age are historically and culturally determined. For example, growing old can be seen as a privilege in a particular time, whereas in a different time it can lead to social isolation. In other words, an older adult's status and well-being is the result of the connection between cultural norms and social pressures (Nassar-McMillan, Ajrouch, & Larson, 2014). In relation to this idea, ageing in a cultural sphere can be understood and experienced differently. The study of ageing tends to draw an individual's attention towards the later part of the life course. In North America, independence, choice and autonomy are in

high regard, where individuals are expected to support themselves more so than receiving support from others (Bourbonnais & Ducharme, 2010). Countries located in the Middle East place more value on interdependence, with family, friends, neighbours, communal achievement, parental involvement and the extended community expected to provide individuals with support (Amer, 2002; Haboush, 2007). It is important to consider the potential impact of these factors on the perceptions of ageing and experiences of social connectedness and engagement when ageing in place as immigrants.

Older Muslim Arab Immigrants and Experiences of Social Connections and Engagement

Incorporating various ethnicities into studies on ageing is a newer area of research (Ajrouch, 2017). It is critical to approach this type of research, on ethnicity in relation to ageing, as socially constructed (Torres, 1991) because it identifies that ethnicity changes and is a dynamic process (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998), which also considers the influence of culture throughout the life cycle (Brubaker, 2004). I believe that one major area of ageing research, where ethnicity and culture may be relevant, is the study of social connectedness and social engagement, as these are two aspects which consider community, family values, social relationships, social ties, and how the larger society community may influence their lived experiences and social interactions.

Similar to the experiences of many other immigrants, Muslim Arab immigrants have experienced various challenges in relation to acculturation and adjustment (Goforth, Oka, Leong & Denis, 2014), which in turn can profoundly affect their experiences of building social connections. Arab immigrants, along with many other immigrants, come from a culture that values family orientation as opposed to individualistic focus (Bomar, 2004). Examining the family dynamic and social relationships of immigrant Arab older adults is particularly important given the differences from the Canadian culture and its implications for social relationships (Rasmi, Daly & Chuang, 2014). In Arab culture, family is the most important and critical unit of society (Britto & Amer, 2007), which I observed

continues to play a critical role in experiences of social connectedness and social engagement among Arab, Muslim Lebanese Canadian immigrant older adults. This allows for parents to age in multigenerational family settings and receive any needed support from their adult children (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). As immigrants age, they may value maintaining their social connections or discover new meanings in their life course (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996). For example, one study found that the perception of Arab older adult's life satisfaction and happiness was shaped by the quality of their social relationships, maintaining their support role, transmitting cultural and religious values and their ability to maintain cultural expectations (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014).

Theoretical Underpinnings

This thesis is guided by a life course perspective that aimed to understand individual's present circumstances by taking into account the social experiences which have operated through their life course. Glen Elder is best known for work on the life course perspective, which he described as a paradigm which emerged from a variety of disciplines such as psychology, sociology and history (Elder, 2003). A life course perspective supports a holistic, interconnected approach to lived experiences, rather than examining age segments individually (Moen, 1996), and provides a framework for studying human experience in connection to developmental trajectories and social change. The life course perspective is understood as dynamic and process-based approach and is able to understand ageing by exploring how lived experiences are socially constructed and progress overtime (Elder, 1999). The personal and biographical level of lived experiences can be examined with consideration of timing, social institutions, and policies within a historical time, which is what this thesis explores. The life course perspective emphasizes the importance of studying life events (e.g. immigration) and life periods (e.g. old age) by examining previous social experiences (Elder, 1999).

Within Elder's (1999) conceptualization of a life course perspective, there are five general principles. Three out of the five principles are especially relevant

to this study. The principle of life-span development sought to understand the developmental process of humans and the ageing process, which is seen as a life-long process, one that does not end at the age of 18 (Elder, 2003). According to this principle, data can be collected on lives and environmental changes, like relationships, occupations, school and communities (Elder, 2003). For this study, immigration is seen as a major life transition that challenges and shapes identity, social connectedness, social engagement, cultural norms and ageing. These aspects are explored through four narratives shared by the participants of this study. The principle of agency involves in the idea of individuals constructing their own life course through their own decisions, choices and actions they make when opportunities and challenges arise (Elder, 2003). The current study frames participants as the owners of their stories and their stories have revealed the depths to which they were able to exercise their choice and autonomy and how those choices shaped their experiences of social connectedness and engagement. The principle of linked lives involves the idea that individuals live their life depending on one another, with socio-historical influences playing a large role in their network of interdependent relationships (Elder, 2003). For this study, social relationships and networks shape an individual's life and foster their change in behaviour, which may push them to become more socially engaged in their community.

Drawing on the life course perspective, I attempt to explore the dynamic processes of immigration, ageing, cultural age-related transitions, how ageing is shaped by social contexts, cultural meanings, and how time and place shape the ageing process specifically among Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults. Recent older immigrants in Canada and long term immigrants, who decided to stay and age in Canada, have had different life experiences, which in turn shape their experiences of social engagement and social connectedness. The life course perspective can thus focus attention on ageing and the variety of previous life experiences that may impact social connectedness and engagement among Muslim Canadian older adults.

Locating Myself in the Study

As a young child, I remember struggling with the task of determining my identity. I knew that I came from grandparents who were born and raised in Lebanon, however my parents have a different story. My mother was born in Venezuela and lived there with her mother and father until she was 11 years old, and then moved back to Lebanon, where she lived for the next 14 years of her life. My father on the other hand was born in Lebanon, but came to London Ontario when he was nine months old. I found that my mother embraced more of her Muslim Lebanese side, while my father identified more with his Muslim Canadian side. One major influence which shaped my parent's identity was the place where they were raised. With my father identifying more so with his Canadian roots and my mother identifying with her Lebanese roots, they taught each other cultural traditions and I received a balance of both.

I was born and raised in London, Ontario and grew up with most of my Muslim Lebanese relatives, which was where I observed and adopted most of my Lebanese culture because I spent almost every day of my life with my grandparents or relatives around me. Thus, I realized how much my family and relatives valued interdependence and connectedness. With most of my relatives living in London, and in close proximity to one another, we formed close relationships and connected each other with our own friends and each other's friend group, which was one way we expanded our social network. My identity began to take shape through the people around me, and even though I have yet to visit Lebanon, I find that I strongly identify with my Lebanese roots.

I am able to make sense of social connectedness and engagement through several experiences living among a larger Lebanese community. I do not know what it is like to be an immigrant, however I got a small taste of what it may be like when I went to Montreal for a Gerontology conference. I have never been on a plane or a train and have lived in London, Ontario my entire life (with a few family trips to Niagara Falls and Ottawa). When my father and I arrived in Montreal and for some odd reason I remember feeling anxious, nervous and

overwhelmed. I think I felt this way because I have always been in London surrounded by my whole family. It was an odd experience for me to be this far away and only with my dad. When I arrived in Montreal I experienced some form of culture shock. Even though I was with my dad something about it still frightened me. We arrived at the hotel and we went out later that night for dinner. My father and I were not familiar with the streets and so we aimlessly walked around until we found an area filled with small restaurants. As we walked towards a Lebanese restaurant there was an individual who asked us for some money, however we did not have any and expressed that to him politely. After we ate dinner and started to walk back to the hotel I noticed that same individual, who asked us for money earlier, was following us and then he asked if he could talk to us, but we did not feel safe and so we started walking faster and ignored him. All of a sudden, he yelled and then threw change at us. After that took place I remembered feeling extremely scared and felt a shooting pain in my chest. I thought he would follow us into the hotel, but my dad reassured me everything would be fine.

I remember not being able to sleep that night because of my nerves. Even though it was one small experience, it made me question my safety being in Montreal. I felt uncomfortable and just could not wait to go home. However, as the days passed by, I remember gaining feelings of comfort and truly enjoyed the atmosphere. Even though there was a language barrier, as my father and I did not know how to communicate in French, I found that most people there knew how to speak English and so I did not find language to be a major issue. Experiencing this small situation, which I laugh about now, I cannot imagine what a new immigrant or refugee may experience when coming to a new country, coping with the hardships of establishing or reestablishing themselves, seeking social and financial status, and especially learning to live in a place where the language is not your own.

As a 23-year-old Muslim Lebanese Canadian female, who has never traveled far and has limited experience with the participants of this study, I

studied the topic through literature and observation. I asked myself the question of where do I fit in? I wanted to think through the perspective of cultural and ethnic identity because that is how I am most closely related to each participant. As mentioned earlier, developing my own cultural and ethnic identity or just identity alone has been something I have tried to understand and piece together since childhood. After completing my Master's degree, I will continue to develop my own identity and it had made me think deeper about the family I come from. My great parents and grandparents all come from very large families, with 13 children per family. One of my great grandmothers had 14 children. I personally have four brothers and two sisters and my grandparents have 27 grandchildren all together. I do not ever recall a time feeling lonely because I was always surrounded by my family. In fact, there were times I would get extremely annoyed because I never got any privacy, but now I do not mind it at all, my family has become a part of me and now I am used to having so many people around me.

By reflecting upon my own life and from my own personal experiences of being the granddaughter of Lebanese immigrants, I understood my culture through social connections with others and social engagement with my own family and people within my Arab, Muslim community. Reflecting upon this further, this would not be the case if my grandparents did not decide to sponsor over 25 of their family and friends to come to London from Lebanon. I found that as the Lebanese community began to grow, they formed their own social and ethnic enclave in London, where they were able to maintain their culture and religion and find comfort and belonging in one another. The fear of being alone or feeling isolated diminished for many as my family formed their own 'mini Lebanon' here in London. Their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement were shaped by several factors including family, proximity, neighbours, services and so much more. Social connectedness and social engagement are two significant factors that influence a Muslim Lebanese older adult's life course and it is important to understand the need for research with Arab Canadians in order to enhance the understanding of this population among research scholars and policy makers.

Gaps in the Literature and Summary of Study Rationale

As mentioned earlier, immigrant older adults are among five groups who are at most risk of becoming socially isolated (Report on Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014). Research on social isolation among immigrant Arab older adults in Canada is very limited and no studies have assessed meanings of social connectedness and social engagement within this ethnic group and age group. In addition, most studies have been conducted with Arabs in general and not with specific Arab ethnicities or religious groups in Canada (Goforth, Oka, Leong & Denis, 2014; Hamdani, 2014; Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). The very few studies conducted on people of Lebanese origin often categorize people of Lebanese descent with people of Syrian descent. Much of the literature said, “Lebanese-Syrian”, “Syrian-Lebanese” or just “Syrian”, again generalizing two uniquely different groups (Abu-Laban & Abu-Laban, 1999), indicating a lack of attention to specific ethnic identity (Suleiman, 1999).

Most studies focus on immigrants or combine immigrants and refugees, with little to no research addressing the implications of social connectedness and social engagement within group diversity. Despite increased attention on Arab families in Canada the Arab spring, there is still little research on this population (Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012). For example, I find there is a lack of research in late-life compared to earlier life immigrants, first generations in relation to second generation, and ethnic differences. Researchers have conducted studies related to social connectedness and engagement with other immigrant groups such as South Asian, Korean and Polish older adults (Al Abed, Davidson & Hickman, 2014; Lalji, 2012; Lagace, Charmarkeh & Grandema, 2012; Park, Roh & Yeo, 2011; Kim, Sangalang & Kihl, 2012; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002). Previous studies of Muslim Lebanese immigrants have focused on topics including family structure, health care needs, different age groups, religion and function of Arabs (Ajrouch, 2017, Hamdani, 2014; Wilke & Marcon, 2013). Also, no studies have looked at Muslim Arab or Lebanese immigrants who immigrated as young adults and decided to stay and age in place in relation to their experiences of social

connectedness and social engagement. Overall there is limited literature on Arab and Muslim Canadian older adults, and a lack of complex understandings about their experiences (Ajrouch, 2005; Hasnain & Rana, 2010).

Over the past two decades, the Lebanese population has grown and has a profound cultural presence in Canada, and London specifically, which has directly contributed to the diversity of the Canadian and London populations. Immigrant older adults could potentially have experienced and continue to experience difficulties in settlement, assimilation and integration and research is needed to better understand their experiences and needs. I asked myself the question, do I think Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults living in London, Ontario are experiencing social isolation? With no literature for evidence, and based on my own observations I would assume that most of them seem to be well connected. However, I did not know this for sure as there are several dimensions of social isolation and each person faces unique challenges, which tends to be hidden by generalizing. Instead of labeling the Muslim Lebanese population in London as socially isolated and searching for answers, I decided to adopt an exploratory approach, looking to examine and understand their experiences related to immigration and ageing and how these experiences shaped their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. This approach has allowed me to address the gap with an open mind.

I decided to narrow the focus of this study on Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults because they represent a large population in Canada and in London and at one point 41 percent of people coming to Canada from the Middle East came from Lebanon (Statistics Canada, 2007). In addition, Lebanon is the Arab country with the largest history of emigration (Migration Policy Center Lebanon, 2013). My interest in exploring these narratives also stems from being Muslim Lebanese myself, coming from generations of immigrants. Not only did I share a piece of each participant's identity, but I have also established a strong trusting relationship with the Muslim Lebanese community through previous initiatives and interactions. Thus, I assumed that this would help make the recruitment

process easier, however there were limitations which will be unpacked in chapter six. I assumed that studying a population that I claim I know well, would give me automatic rapport, which I assumed would allow me to collect richer data. By focusing on one group, my intentions were to be able to gain a deeper understanding of their diverse understandings, instead of generalizing their experiences under the term 'Arab'.

Although there are a large number of people who identify as Lebanese, a thorough review of the literature on Canada's ageing population has indicated a research gap on social engagement and social connectedness in relation to older Arab immigrants. Given that each Arab sub-group encompasses a rich and unique culture and tradition, being based on diverse experiences, these are not effectively understood when categorizing all Arab groups as one. The lack of research on the factors that shape experiences of social connectedness and social engagement among Muslim Lebanese Immigrants makes it difficult to understand the needs of this population. There is also a lack in consistent data from government sources in order to make comparisons in Arab descent demographic profiles. This highlights the need to focus on specific ethnic and cultural groups in this area of study, given the uniqueness across cultures in construction of social connectedness and engagement. As I am personally embedded in this research topic, being a part of the Muslim Lebanese community, I see and have heard the need from Muslim community representatives to study this population further, as they are looking to implement initiatives to keep Muslim older adults socially involved. These gaps in the literature presented above have confirmed my interest and is why I wanted to explore this research question further.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I address the study's research purpose, narrative approach and paradigmatic underpinnings and the methodological reasoning for deciding to use a narrative approach. I then go on to introduce and discuss subjectivity and reflexivity, as it pertains to the use of narrative as the methodology for this study. In the second part of this chapter, the key methods used for this study are described: setting, participant selection, the narrative interview, collecting narrative accounts, and the narrative question. Lastly, narrative analysis, quality criteria and ethical considerations and issues are discussed.

Research Purpose

The overall aim of this study is to deepen the understanding of how immigrant older adults make sense of their lives through social connections. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore and understand what it means to be an ageing Muslim Lebanese immigrant in Canada by examining and understanding their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement, as particularly shaped by ageing, immigration, culture and ethnicity. Through their stories I gained a better understanding of what the facilitators, barriers and motivators were that helped to shape their experiences when socially interacting with others within and outside their community.

Narrative Approach and Paradigmatic Underpinnings

Like Kramp (2004), I note

“The objective of narrative inquiry is understanding- the outcome of interpretation- rather than explanation. Narrative inquiry changes the question the philosopher Richard Rorty identified as the epistemological question that has historically reoccupied Anglo-American philosophy, (p. 104) from “How do we come to know the truth? to How do we come to endow experience with meaning” (Bruner, 1986, p. 12)

Narrative is able to give meaning to lived experiences, which is a part of human life. Using narrative as a research approach provides an operational way to start the *“Systematic study of personal experiences and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects”* (Riessman, 1993, p. 70).

Barthes (1995), listed the universality of narrative form, noting where it can be located:

“Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting..., stained glass windows, cinema comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative” (p. 65).

The word story is typically used when speaking in a familiar, informal, personal or conversational way (Kramp, 2004). The word narrative is more related to a specific genre with formal aspects (Kramp, 2004). Narrative is often synonymously used with “story”, where the narratives or stories individuals share can be used as a means to study a research question (Riessman, 2008; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zibler, 1998). By using narrative and story interchangeably throughout this thesis, as Kramp (2004) stated “you can capture the experiential quality of “telling story” (p. 106).

For the purposes of this study, narrative is understood as the story participants tell, based on their subjective experiences of the world, as a means and method to investigate and understand ageing Muslim Lebanese older adults’ experiences in Canada in relation to social connectedness, social engagement and their immigration story. In this sense, this study adopts the epistemological assumption that people make sense of their lives through stories. Riessman (2008) stated there is no simple or clear definition of narrative that can address all applications, however, she described “essential ingredients” (pg. 3) used to

understand narrative. One way Riessman (2008) described narrative was on a continuum, where the middle of the continuum represents personal narratives consisting of long sections of talk that develop over a single or multiple research interviews. Drawing on this idea, the middle of the continuum is used to ground the methodology and define the concept of narrative for this research study.

Narrative focuses on the uniqueness and complexity of human experience based on the subjective understanding of the world (McCorquodale & Kinsella, 2015). According to Lieblich Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, (1998), a narrative approach “advocates pluralism, relativism and subjectivity” (p. 2). Therefore, narrative research assumes that there is no single absolute truth in human reality nor one correct interpretation of a text (Lieblich et al., 1998). Narrative allows for a co-construction of knowledge in the moment, which would be interpreted by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This narrative study re-presents experiences through the stories that individuals live for and tell (Clandinin, 2006). In this study, the participants are considered active agents who are not only describing their life events, but are actively negotiating and reconstructing their story by choosing, interpreting and emphasizing different aspects of their experience (Sallinen, Kukkurainen, Peltokallio, Mikkelsson & Anderberg, 2012).

For this research study, I used a Western genre of narrative presented by Labov and Waletzky (1967) and as Wengraf (2001) stated, “leaving open the question as to whether this genre is a universal for all cultures or whether story telling in other cultures may be organized differently” (p. 114). According to Wengraf (2001), “In Western culture, when asked to tell the story of their life, normally socialized adults have a culturally developed sense of what is required by the genre” (p. 114). I used the Western culture genre to guide the study because I assumed that the participants of this study may have adopted the Western culture, given they have lived in Canada for a long period of time.

For narrative research, a constructivist paradigm is commonly used (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006). In relation to narrative methodological assumptions

and narrative inquiry, constructivists believe in a context-dependent created reality with the emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln's, 2003). Hence, in this perspective, I adopted the idea that reality is understood as subjective, perceived and experienced individually and co-created between the researcher and participant (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). A constructivist point of view is aligned with the concept of narrative meaning, that is, the belief in multiple truths, refuting the existence of an objective reality. More than one story can be told about each participant's experiences of connecting socially as ageing immigrants and there is more than one way of listening to a narrative, which is something constructivist researcher values. For example, a participant's story of immigrating and staying socially connected and engaged may change over time, after having more life experiences. A researcher may understand and listen to a story differently if she was male and an immigrant compared to myself, a female non-immigrant, which would ultimately lead the researcher to re-tell the story through a different lens.

I chose to use a narrative approach to address the purpose of this study for several compelling reasons. Narrative research is able to examine various periods of one life cycle (Clandinin, 2006). Across these various life span periods, there is a wide range of social influences on an individual's narrative, from very emotional, interpersonal influences to community, institutional and political influences (Clandinin, 2006). Within narrative approaches, communities, social groups and subcultures are able to tell their stories with words and meanings that are tailored to their way of life and culture (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). A narrative approach is able to capture an individual's dynamic and unique life experiences, such as their immigration story or how individuals became socially connected and engaged in society. This is heard through their own voices, filtered through what they can remember from the past, present or envision for the future. I noticed that narrative approaches may come across as very individualistic, however these personal stories may become legacies for many and survive among generations, creating history (Clandinin, 2006). Furthermore, narrative accounts are able to rebuild actions and perspectives to

signify place, time, and the participant's motivation, with narrative connecting these aspects in time and meaning (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Narrative research is useful for gaining valuable insight on certain events in an individual's life and how those events shape their experiences and social lives (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006). Therefore, to understand narrative is not to simply follow events in chronological order as the story is unpacked by the participant: it is also to become attentive and acknowledge its non-chronological breadth (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). I support and adapted the ideas presented above for this study, as I worked towards rebuilding four perspectives and unfolding meaning behind the participants' lived experiences.

Subjectivity and Reflexivity for Narrative Approach

In qualitative research, there are two important components to grasp: subjectivity and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Subjectivity is valued in a qualitative framework because qualitative research is understood as a subjective process, where researchers bring in their own histories, values, assumptions, perspectives and politics into the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Subjectivity can be found in the topics researchers find interesting, in the way they ask questions about the topic, and how certain aspects of the research may bring forth excitement to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, it is important to consider that any knowledge produced is going to reflect the subjective perspectives of the researcher and participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In qualitative research, subjectivity and humanness can be used as a research tool (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, this study is subjective in nature as each participant is asked a broad question to prompt their story about their personal feelings, thoughts, opinions and perspectives on their lived experiences. In order to conduct qualitative research well, and to use subjectivity as presented above, it needs to be well thought out and reflected upon. Engaging in reflexivity helped me to achieve this (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Reflexivity is a critical requirement to achieve rigorous qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reflexivity can be understood as a thoughtful analysis,

based on the researcher's discipline and on-going self-evaluation during the research process (Finlay, 1998). According to Finlay (2002), reflexivity is often confused with reflection and in much of the literature these two terms are used interchangeably. Both concepts can be viewed on a continuum, where both ends play an important role across the entire study. Reflection can be understood as thinking about something, which takes place before and after the event (Finlay, 2002). At the other end of the continuum, reflexivity "taps into a more immediate, continuing, dynamic and subjective self-awareness" (Finlay 2002, p.533). I have applied both concepts in this study, which has strengthened my awareness of my own assumptions and perspectives.

There are two types of reflexivity- functional and personal (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Functional reflexivity is understood as paying close attention to the way research tools and the process of the study have influenced the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, it may consider the participant's stories about immigration and ageing, which might be influenced by the method the researcher chooses to use. Data collected from a face to face interview may be different than a phone interview, which also may impact what the participants share (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Personal reflexivity in research is understood by bringing the researcher into the research, making that person visible, hence a part of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For this study, both functional and personal reflexivity were employed, which is done by acknowledging my position as a researcher and considering how factors such as my own perspectives and assumptions may influence and shape the knowledge produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By incorporating both forms of reflexivity in this study I have gained a deeper understanding of what I, the literature and the participant bring to this study. For example, I use functional reflexivity by understanding and thoroughly planning what research tools I chose to use when conducting this study. Since I wanted to collect participant stories on the topic, I chose narrative as a methodology and conducted face to face interviews to gain a better understanding of their environment and to observe their actions and expressions

as they spoke. I also used personal reflexivity by incorporating my perspective and reflections as data, making myself visible throughout the study.

Engaging in reflexivity and reflection was an exciting part of the study for me, especially when going back to re-read my reflexive notes and seeing how my assumptions, perspectives and ideas developed over time. Before each narrative interview, I recorded my thoughts using a recording device, outside the home of each participant. I made note of the setting, observing neighbourhood characteristics, and talked about my excitement and nervousness before entering their home. Once I completed the first interview, I recorded my thoughts again. As I continued my day I could not help but reflect, thinking more about the participant's story, in relation to what was said and how it was said, constantly writing down thoughts in my notebook. I used this strategy for each interview, feeling very immersed in the data, and I found that this material assisted when it was time to re-write each narrative account.

Methods

In the next sections I will unpack and discuss the setting, participant selection, inclusion and exclusion criteria, narrative interview and narrative question I used when conducting this study.

Setting.

All interviews took place in London, Ontario which is home to 76,585 immigrants, representing 21.2 percent of the total population (City of London, 2013). In London's Immigration and Ethno-Cultural Diversity census document, there was no information available on the different Arab ethnic groups who reside in this city. They are all categorized under the common term "Arab", which makes up 16 percent of the visible minority population in London, with almost one in 20 people living in London self-identifying as Muslim (City of London, 2013).

Participant selection.

I recruited two men and two women and this decision was made for several reasons. First, I decided to recruit four participants because narrative approaches often focus on one or a few participants. Intensive study of a few stories can produce an abundant amount of scientific value. Secondly, I wanted to examine the experiences of males and females in order to compare and contrast gendered perspectives. Within the Arab and Muslim culture, from my own observation and in support of research done by Nassar-McMillian et al. (2014), I noticed how social connectedness, social engagement and immigration tend to be gendered experiences, which brought forth rich diverse stories for this study. In addition, one important goal of this study was to give voice to those whose stories have been previously unheard (Creswell, 2008; Chase, 2005). As immigration is one major life transition, research has already investigated immigration settlement, adaption and integration, however research is lacking regarding ageing immigrants, who have decided to stay and age in Canada. This major life transition, which took place in their adulthood, is an important piece in shaping their lived experiences and is underrepresented in the literature. This particular population was chosen because there is a lack of research on Arab immigrant older adults, with no known studies on Muslim Lebanese Immigrant older adults in relation to social connectedness and social engagement.

Further inclusion criteria for the study were:

- being Muslim Lebanese Canadian;
- 60 years of age and over;
- immigrated in early adulthood and decided to stay and age in Canada;
- ability to express one's self verbally in English or Arabic; and
- having an interest in sharing their immigration story in relation to social engagement and connectedness within and outside their community.

Specifying an age range (60 and over) and particular arrival period in Canada, helped in identifying participants with possible generations of family growth and family history that would help to understand social connections and engagement over a long period of time. Therefore, younger men or women were excluded as their experiences of immigration, meaningful social engagement and social connectedness may be different. Age 65 is considered 'later life' in North American society (Statistics Canada, 2015), however I later became more aware of Arab cultural norms around the ideas 'later life' and 'older adult', some participants identified as 'older adult' through the North American definition, while others did not see themselves as old yet, especially if they were able bodied and healthy. Therefore, I decided to use 60 years of age and older for this population. Although all four participants spoke mainly in English, using some Arabic words, they were given the option of choosing to speak in Arabic or English because I wanted to make sure each participant could express themselves in which ever language they were most comfortable in, to avoid any loss in meaning.

The exclusion criteria in this study were people who migrated as refugees and people who came to Canada for a short period of time and then returned to their country of origin and then came back for a short period of time. Refugees were excluded because their migration is forced rather than voluntary (George, 2002; 2006), and contrasts with those who have immigrated due to push or pull factors and who see themselves as immigrants and not refugees. This study focused on participants who have come to Canada in their adulthood and who have decided to stay and age in Canada, for a majority of their life cycle.

Participants were selected based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to strategies in which the researcher exercises his or her judgment about who will provide the best perspective on the topic of interest and then intentionally invites those specific individuals to take part in the study (Abrams, 2010). The sampling process is directed by predetermined criteria and the purpose is to select participants who provide high quality rich data in relation to the research question (Patton, 1990; Wengraf, 2001). Purposeful sampling is

utilized in in-depth studies, particularly when the study purpose depends on information-rich findings (Wengraf, 2001). I was able to identify people who could provide rich data by using purposeful sampling.

Following ethical approval ([see appendix A](#)), the recruitment process began by emailing the Imam of the London Muslim Mosque and Imam of the Islamic Centre of Southwest Ontario, requesting to meet with them and place a recruitment poster ([see appendix B](#)) in the mosque. I met with the Imam from the London Muslim Mosque and he allowed me to place a recruitment poster on the front entrance community board. The Imam from the Islamic Center of Southwest Ontario did not respond, which was not a setback as narrative sample size is typically small and is mainly dependent on data-rich participants (Creswell, 2008; Wengraf, 2001). I did not have much success with the strategy of waiting for participants to call regarding the recruitment poster in the mosque. I believe that the recruitment poster in the mosque did not work because I noticed that the community board attracted youth and young adults, rather than older adults. I found that older adults tended to just pass by and not take the time to look at the board. I also think that it is a possibility that not all Muslim older adults are looking to find opportunities to participate. I believed a more direct form was needed to gain their interest. I then began to use snowballing as a sample method in order to find participants who fit the criteria. I did this by asking friends to forward my recruitment flyer to anyone whom they thought would be interested in sharing their story. I asked my friends to find people who they thought would be able to provide me with a rich story. Once participants called, we had a telephone conversation to discuss my motives for conducting the study to discuss what the study was about. I asked a few questions to understand if they met the inclusion criteria. As I asked these questions all participants automatically told me a little bit about their life and so from this I could see they had a lot to talk to me about. I then asked them to choose a day, time and place of their convenience to conduct the first narrative interview. Before starting the interviewing process, I obtained informed consent from each participant and also applied process consent throughout the interviewing process.

The group of participants who ultimately participated in this study immigrated to Canada in the 1960s. They were all relatively young when they first immigrated to Canada, ages ranged from 15 to 25, which is what I considered young adulthood to be. Two participants decided to stay and age in Canada and traveled back to Lebanon only for vacation, while the other two participants moved to different places in Canada before settling in London and went to Lebanon for vacation. I looked for participants who could speak in English or Arabic as those are the two languages I could understand best. Three participants spoke in English for a majority both interviews, using some Arabic words, while one participant spoke in Arabic for the second interview. As I grew up with Arabic speaking family in my household, I was able to speak Arabic and understand Arabic and so I used my knowledge and skill set of the Arabic language to interpret the Arabic words the participants used. As I mentioned earlier, one participant spoke in Arabic for one full interview. I listened to this interview several times and translated every word she said in English in order for to help me and my supervisor understand what was being said.

The Narrative interview.

The narrative interview is classified as a qualitative research method and is considered to be a form of unstructured, in-depth interview with specific characteristics (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Riesman, 1993; Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). For this study, Wengraf's Biographic-Narrative-Interview was adopted as a framework to structure the design of the narrative interview (See Table 1 below for overview of study format).

Table 1: Overview of study format

Meeting	Content	Method	Outline
1	Gathering the story	Biographic Narrative Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing myself and the study, gaining consent • Explaining a narrative approach and my role as a listener

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking for permission to record the interview
2	Completing the story: Learning about Immigration, Engagement and Social Connectedness	Narrative follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking about the participant's experiences with previous session, gaining consent, informing about today's session • Clarifying the story based on a list of topics raised in the first session, respecting order and content of story • Semi-structured interview, focussing on immigration story and experiences of social engagement and social connectedness, based on preliminary analysis of individual narrative and research questions
3	Discussing the written story	Collaborative approach, using client centered methods to enable criticism and expression of opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining consent • Evaluating, changing and validating the re-written narrative
Flexible	<p>Discussing ethical issues with participants, on-going throughout interview as opportunities arise</p> <p>Interviews one and two were recorded verbatim with the consent of the participants.</p>		

After the introduction, I started the first narrative interview with an initial narrative question, which was structured to elicit a broad narrative. For this study the interview question induced the participants to describe particular life events such as immigration, social connectedness and social engagement now and overtime. The first interview continued for each participant until they clearly

indicated they had nothing more to add to their story (Wengraf, 2001). In order to prepare for interview two, I completed a preliminary analysis in which I read through transcript one a few times highlighting the gaps and areas that need further questioning, in data gathered from the first interview (Wengraf, 2001).

Part two of the narrative interview is the narrative follow-up (Wengraf, 2001). The purpose of part two was to ensure that the participant's voice was given enough space in the study and the participant's stories were represented accurately, from the perspective of the researcher (Wengraf, 2001). During this interview, I came with a list of questions, tailored for each participant. I asked open-ended questions that emerged out of interview one. These questions were needed in order to better understand the participant's narrative (Wengraf, 2001). This narrative follow-up was meant to allow the participant to expand about the topic which was initially spoken about (Wengraf, 2001). During part two, the participant gave the directionality of the conversation and I continued to note down the topics as they arose for further follow-up during the same interview (Wengraf, 2001). I then asked questions I was interested in and questions which arose for myself through what was told and not told in part one (Wengraf, 2001).

Part three was the final part of the narrative interview, where participants were given a re-written narrative account of their story, in the form which would be presented in the thesis. I sent each story by mail and spoke with participants on the phone, discussing their stories in a collaborative way to ensure each participant was comfortable with what is included in this thesis (Wengraf, 2001).

Collecting narrative accounts.

The narrative question.

To explore social connectedness and social engagement among ageing immigrants, I sought to understand and examine the motives, facilitators and barriers they faced and are facing now. During the first narrative interview, I asked each participant the same broad question, as mentioned above, that being,

“I would like you to tell me your story about immigrating to Canada and then continuing to live here. Once you settled here in London, Ontario, how did you get to know people around the community? What sorts of social activities do you do with others in the community, including your family and friends and others?”

This question allowed each participant to develop a long story through past, present and future events (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). [See Appendix C for the narrative interview guide](#). This narrative guide acted as a guiding framework as I used for each interview, with slightly different wording for each participant. Immediately after each interview, I transcribed the interview verbatim and completed a preliminary analysis. After each preliminary analysis, my supervisor and I worked together and formed a set of questions based on the participants' first interview, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their story. Questions were drawn from very specific examples within their stories, often including direct quotes or paraphrasing their ideas and thoughts to invite them to elaborate further. Other questions were developed to elicit further narrative about areas that had not been covered during the first interview. During the second interview, I asked each question, prompting them to share more of their story. Here are a few examples:

“You talked a lot about the importance of the mosque and the Islamic center and how it's not only a mosque but a lecture, a culture, religion, education and a convention. A place where people got together to talk and cook and a place where the younger generation can find friends and talk, as well as a place where refugee come to for help. You also said it's a place for the entire Muslim Ummah. Can you talk about what the mosque means to you now, and other places or spaces in your neighbourhood that are important or meaningful to you? In what ways are they meaningful to you?”

“You talked about presenting the best self you can in front of Canadians, can you talk about what that means? Why is it important?”

“Can you tell me about your life right now, the people you see, the places you go and the things you do?”

These questions helped to elicit more narrative and allowed me to explore ideas the participants mentioned in the first interviews. [Specific questions for each participant can be found in appendix D.](#) I collected four narratives, capturing aspects of the participants’ lives now and then by using Wengraf’s Biographic-Narrative-Interview to structure the narrative interview and Lieblich et al.’s (1998) framework to structure narrative analysis (further discussed below in the section on data analysis).

During each interview, I used two recording devices in order to preserve the verbal component of the interview for later analysis and to avoid the loss of valuable data, in case one of the devices malfunctioned. I was able to pay full attention to each participant as their life story unfolded, while taking brief notes when appropriate. Smythe and Murray (2000) mentioned that the main data collection instrument in narrative research is the research interview, which is most often conducted in a naturalistic setting over a long period of time. I made a conscious effort to show active and empathetic listening, minimal interruptions, by keeping eye contact and nodding my head (Sallinen et al., 2012). In addition, if there was a long pause during the interview, I used this moment to ask a question to clarify something I may have misunderstood previously or ask the participant to continue on the same note. I found that this helped to assist in expanding and deepening the story telling process (Guillemin & Gillan, 2004). In addition, withholding judgment is something I employed, in order to create a safe and open environment (Guillemin & Gillan, 2004). I did this by thinking through the perspective of the participant in regards to what was being said and captured this dynamic nature through reflexivity (Guillemin & Gillan, 2004). I also withheld judgement by keeping my expressions happy or neutral most of the time and avoided showing an exaggerated expression with my face and paying close

attention to how I reacted to certain experiences they shared, and to what I said or how I replied.

Building rapport.

When collecting narratives, the quality of the relationship between the participant and the researcher is important, as it has bearing on the specific collaboration that occurs during the story telling process (Wicks & Whiteford, 2003). For example, the researcher becomes aware that if the participant notices the researcher's genuine and sincere interest in their stories, then the participant is more likely to become comfortable, open and honest (Wicks & Whiteford, 2003). Walking into each participant's home, I paid close attention to the way they spoke and how I responded. For example, as one participant shared her story I noticed how she indirectly indicated she was married for the second time. I wanted to ask about her divorce, but knowing that the term "divorce" is a disrespectful term to use within the Arab culture, I refrained from asking. I initially listened to see which language they spoke in, which ultimately indicated the language they chose to share their story in. I also paid attention to body language so that I was aware of any discomfort they may be presenting, so that I could be sure they were as comfortable as possible. Another example is when one participant began to cry, after giving her some time, I mentioned that she did not have to continue, however she mentioned that she wanted to for herself.

I especially paid attention to how I presented myself as a researcher, one coming from the same cultural and religious background as all the participants. I paid attention to cultural remarks, religious words spoken in Arabic, in which I would respond to in Arabic out of respect. For each interview, I gave my undivided attention, averting eye contact only to make a note when appropriate, and nodding my head saying utterances such as "Mhm" or words such as, "yes", "continue", "what happened next/after". I also made sure trust was not abused, such that when participants shared deeply rooted emotional events, I never questioned why or judged their actions. I found that participants noticed these

behaviours and seemed to feel comfortable. I believe that this helped to build strong rapport.

Coming in as a young Muslim Lebanese Canadian female I found that there was an automatic connection between the participants and I before starting the interview. I felt each participant not only shared their story but gave advice and educational talk on many topics (history, problem solving, religion, Canada and more), which I appreciated. I found that sharing a part of their identity, increased my level and their level of comfort and helped develop stronger rapport.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a narrative approach.

There are no general criteria that exist regarding how to analyze qualitative research, therefore researchers can borrow and combine techniques (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). Lieblich et al. (1998) mentioned that “narrative materials can be analyzed along a myriad of dimensions, such as contents; structure; style of speech; affective characteristics; motives, attitudes, and beliefs of the narrator; or her or his cognitive level” (p. 9). Essentially, the goal of this narrative analysis is for the researcher to discover the most compelling way to tell the story and to persuade the audience to think deeper and reflect upon the meaning of the study (Janesick, 2000). For this study, I adopted the holistic content approach presented by Lieblich et al. (1998) and considered the content, motives, attitudes and beliefs of the narrator as I analysed each transcript.

Stage one of narrative analysis: transcribing and reflexive comments.

As mentioned earlier, once the narrative accounts were collected, I transcribed the recordings verbatim. Within each transcript I included non-verbal information such as pauses, coughs, laughs and non-speech utterances such as “Ahhh”, “ummm” and used extra letters at the end of words if participants enunciated the ending letters of a word for a long time, like “yelllllll”. By doing this my intentions were to capture certain emotions presented by the participant in order to give the reader some depth and understanding presented in the raw

quotes. Non-verbal information and speech utterances were included in the transcripts and thesis because I wanted to show the reader how I paid close attention to the way things were said, in order to conduct the narrative analysis through a holistic approach. With that I found deeper meaning in each story proceeding into the analysis further. Once I fully transcribed each recording, I wrote a reflexive entry after each transcript of my initial thoughts pertaining to each story. My reflexive entries consisted of my own reactions, thoughts, knowledge and emotions certain content triggered in relation to particular aspects of the stories. My supervisor read through each transcript along with my reflexive notes and added comments in places where I could expand my thinking. My supervisor also gave her insights into certain quotes or comments, which tremendously assisted me in understanding concepts further and clarifying any missed or misunderstood points. Some concepts found in the transcripts and ideas I made note of were on family values, language barriers, making friends, learning how to trust again, occupations, time of immigration, setting, social environment, discrimination and more. This process ultimately helped in identifying my assumptions and beliefs, removing any close-minded thoughts or assumptions I held before.

Stage two of narrative analysis: holistic-content perspective.

The next step was a detailed analysis of each transcript and I prepared for this by asking myself the question, how does one analyze the narratives of Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults? I began this adventure by reading work from several qualitative narrative authors, searching for the best type of analysis that would best suit this study. I discovered Lieblich et al.'s (1998), Holistic-Content Perspective, a type of narrative analysis in which the researcher utilizes separate parts of the story, "such as the beginning and ending sentences of the narrative, the researcher then analyzes the meaning of the part in light of content that emerges from the rest of the narrative or in context of the story in its entirety" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 13). I began this analysis process by reading each transcript over several times, "reading carefully, empathetically and with an open

mind” (Lieblich et al.,1998, p. 62). I also listened and re-listened to recordings to uncover underlying themes in the data. As I was reading and listening, I believed that I had the ability to detect meaning in the text which essentially brought the text to life (Lieblich et al.,1998). As I was reading, I also highlighted key quotes that sparked thought related or unrelated to the thesis topic and made notes of contradictions, unusual remarks and events which upset the teller. These highlights were tagged with a comment so that I could go back and analyze my thought development, which profoundly assisted me in discovering emerging themes, patterns, genres and the main foci of each narrative account, especially when re-writing the narratives.

With most qualitative work, it is important to think about the analysis step as a process which requires constant checking and cross checking with others so that the researcher does not miss something he or she may have not seen. Once I organized the emerging themes and sub-themes, my supervisor met with me on several occasions to assist me in organizing and condensing my ideas further and she showed me how I could integrate and merge many of the themes and sub-themes into others that were similar. I began with 15 themes, and several subthemes under each theme. I also discussed emerging findings with my advisory committee members and received valuable feedback. After working with my supervisor and advisory committee members I was able to outline two main themes, with five subthemes for the first theme and two for the second theme.

Stage three of narrative analysis: interpreting and representing the stories.

Qualitative data analysis is about ongoing discovery, which is understood through identifying themes, developing concepts and propositions (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). With this idea in mind, my interpretation of the data began by understanding that narrative researchers analyze the participant’s stories by retelling or “restorying” them into a framework that makes sense (e.g. chronology plot) (Clandinin, 2006). In order to do this, I asked myself a set of questions presented by Lieblich et al. (1998) before restoring each narrative,

“How does the story begin?”, “What are the key parts of the story, and which are emphasized by the narrator? Are there signals of emotion in the telling?”, “How does the story end?”, “What seems to be the moral of the story?”, “What does the speaker seem to be doing by telling the story”? As I thought about these questions in relation to narrative structure, I did not necessarily think about forming these narratives temporally, but thought more about what the special foci of content was, what was emphasized, meaningful, or intertwined throughout the story. Before I started to write out each narrative, I created a summary chart for each narrative outlining key ideas. I did this for myself and so that the reader would be able to keep track of the differences between each story as they read through the four narratives.

Re-writing the stories.

“Our belief is that life stories and their readings are as multilayered and complex as human identity” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 167). I found all four of the participants’ stories to be intricate, multilayered and dynamic. I view these four narratives as constructions of the participants’ lives and life histories, with each story tied to deeper meanings and culture. I noticed that each story came with a unique tone, feel, melody and loudness. The stories embodied different content and form, all uniquely interwoven by themes, structure, and coherence, including where each participant decided to start and end their story. These stories revealed a diversity of meaning.

When re-writing the story of each participant, I strived to write it from their perspectives, trying my best to capture how it was told and by also being descriptive. My intention with presenting all four stories through descriptive writing is to allow the reader to feel as though they were right there as the story unfolded. I framed this study in a constructivist paradigm, with a strong belief that there are multiple truths to each participant’s story. I was the narrative interpreter of each story, which adds to the idea of the existence of multiple truths. I also present this dynamic relationship through each story, trying to capture the multiplicity of voices.

One main voice is the participant's, and another voice is my voice, the researcher's. I put these two voices together and co-constructed each narrated account. I created each story based on what the participant said, but with a focus on their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. I did this by looking for elements of aging, social connectedness and engagement within each transcript, such as immediate or outside community participation, social relationships, religious gatherings, neighbour friendships, family networks, cultural traditions, work experience, and much more. The four personal narratives presented in this study consist of past, present, and future experiences and thoughts. I intended to represent the individuality and uniqueness of the storyteller filtered through their memory and interpreted through my perspective.

I found that during the first interview, once I asked the key broad question, all participants began to share their story in a chronological order. I believe that participants did this because the first part of the key question was "I would like you to tell me your story about immigrating to Canada...", and so I believe that prompted each participant to start from when they first arrived in Canada, and continue from there. I noticed that during each participant's second interview, the stories did not unfold in a chronological manner. For example, some participants moved back and forth between different timeframes of their lives and spoke about different friends and family along the way, which emerged very naturally and flowed beautifully.

While re-writing each story, I considered several different concepts that could help to interpret and understand the stories. These included the participant's place of immigration, genre, main themes, major activities, contextual features and taxonomy of reminiscence. In this narrative research study, the term genre refers to the particular style, organization and content of each story as it was told (Shiro, 2003). For example, a narrated account can be shared as a moral tale, fairy tale, horror or romance, all depending on the perspective of the storyteller and in relation to the cultural expectations in which the story was told. Wolf, Moreton and Camp (1994) explain genre as,

“socially invented linguistic spaces that encourage different forms of human exchange, varying in the roles they suggest for speaker and listener, the amount of revelation they permit or forbid, and the way they open up or limit the range and intensity of emotion and/or intimacy carried by the act of narrating” (p. 291).

Genre is therefore closely linked to the language that storytellers use. Evaluative language, the linguistic expressions related to emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and affect, add to the expressive purpose of the story (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972). In what follows, I use genre to enable a deeper understanding of each participant’s story. I have also pulled out the main themes of each story. The themes are also the focal point of the story or the re-occurring ideas that emerge or are intertwined throughout the narrative account, which work to connect pieces of the story together. In all four stories, each person shared information about some of the activities they were involved in throughout their lives, which worked to construct unique meanings within each story. I considered how these activities shaped each person’s life and how they related to some or all key themes. Contextual features refer to specific contexts in each story, which influence the participants’ experiences of social connectedness and engagement. Each story had its own unique contextual features, which set the scene and made each story distinguishable. These concepts are identified in the overview tables below, and woven into the participant narratives.

I also used Wong’s and Watt (1991) taxonomy of reminiscence to better understand each story. These authors developed six functions of reminiscence among older adults: *integrative reminiscence*, aimed at “the achievement of a sense of coherence, meaning and reconciliation with one’s past” (p. 195); *instrumental reminiscence*, in which “one draws on one’s past experiences to help solve a current problem” (p. 195); *transmissive reminiscence*, which involves “teaching others a lesson one has derived from one’s own life experience” (p. 195); *narrative reminiscence*, “the telling of descriptive accounts of the past to convey biographical information or simply for pleasure” (p. 195); *escapist*

reminiscence, which involves “exaggerating the happiness and success one had in the past and devaluing ones present situation” (p. 195); and *obsessive reminiscence*, which involves preoccupation with problematic or disturbing past experiences and the negative feelings associated with those experiences” (Clandinin, 2006 p.195). I found that many of the participant’s re-storied accounts fell under one or more of the six types, which emerge from the themes and are outlined in each overview table.

In the four stories, words or phrases in italics are direct quotations from participants, with no alterations, which have come out of interview transcripts. I used [sic] which is short for “thus was it written”, which indicated that the participant made a grammatical error. I used .., to indicate a short pause, ..., to indicate a medium pause, and [pause] indicate a large pause.

Stage four of narrative analysis: identifying emerging themes and subthemes.

In order to highlight these various evident themes and subthemes, I used Quirkos, a qualitative software program which helped to organize, sort and manage the data (Quirkos, 2017). I read through each transcript placing pieces of data in themes and sub-theme categories, all organized by a colour scheme. Once I completed this step, Quirkos put together a full report of all eight transcripts, which consisted of all the tagged and coded quotations organized under each theme or subtheme title. By looking at this report I was able to compare themes and sub-themes across all eight transcripts, which made it easy to see which themes were prominent and the themes that were not as apparent. I also found this to help me in comparing recurring themes and patterns across transcripts. I was also able to see how interconnected each theme was to each subtheme and this could be seen through a colorful visual representation of how all themes and subthemes were linked to one another. I then worked with the generated reports and went back to each transcript as needed, to collapse, merge and expand original themes, subthemes with the help of my supervisor and by doing this I also identified new themes and subthemes.

As I interpreted the data and wrote out each story I used direct quotes and drew on Patton (1990) who mentioned that using direct quotes from the participant transcripts assists in revealing the depth of the teller's emotions, which can be seen in the way participants organize their words, thoughts, experiences and perceptions. I used direct quotes to help illustrate the diverse perspectives. I found that I used this as a way of coding and breaking down each story. Using the report generated from Quirkos I was able to see all quotes participants said under each theme, which allowed me to see and deconstruct content, attitudes, perspectives and beliefs. As Riessman (1993) mentioned, narrative accounts are situated in social, cultural and institutional frameworks, which is important to be aware of and consider when interpreting narratives. By not referencing the cultural and social discourses related to social connectedness and social engagement among immigrant older adults, Arab older adults and Muslim Lebanese older adults, I believe that the connections between the ideas and concepts would be missing.

Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research and Narrative

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asked "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to (p. 290)?" Thus, to promote quality of this study I cited the work of several authors as I planned the study and afterwards to evaluate the quality of this study. Below I discuss in detail two quality criteria: rich rigor and sincerity. Each quality criterion I present has related sub-quality criteria.

Rich rigor.

As there is no standard definition of rigor in relation to qualitative research, rigor can be examined by the contexts surrounding it in relation to research. For this study, as it is qualitative in nature, I used rigor in the sense of reliability, which is in relation to "consistency and care in the application of research practices, which are reflected in the visibility of research practices, and a reliability in our analysis and conclusions, reflected in an open account that

remains mindful of the partiality and limits of our research findings” (Davies & Dodd, p. 280). These were all aspects I applied to this research study. For example, I applied consistency and care throughout this thesis by always making sure I took the time to write a reflexive entry in my journal every day, and especially before and after each participant interview. Thus, I was able to examine potential impacts I had in the field. My field notes included self-reflexive commentary about sense making and any subjective feelings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001).

I agree with Porter (1993) as he said “rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effect of the researcher, reflexive researchers try to understand them” (p.18). Understanding is achieved through thinking deeply and critically about hidden assumptions and goals. Since reflexivity gives the researcher the opportunity to be open in expressing their negative and positive thoughts, I found that I was able to express strengths and shortcomings with little hesitation. By this, I want the readers to see how I came to write this text through honesty so that they can see my point of view. I was able to practice reflexivity in a qualitative research class and throughout this Master’s program, as they encouraged students to write every day. I found that reflexivity helped in preparation and practice, which gave a sense of comfort and openness to wanting to share my thoughts. My supervisor and advisory committee members especially helped with the reflexivity stage because whenever I expressed my thoughts or opinions to them they would listen intently and always asked me open ended questions to further my thinking. They would also suggest I write down most of the ideas I spoke about as a part of my reflexive notes. As I am not use to writing out my thoughts every day, the reminders from my advisory committee was extremely helpful. I found their suggestions to be very helpful as I was able to make more sense of my thoughts and ideas when I went back to read them. I was very open in my reflexive notes, speaking about personal situations I was in, in order to make sense of my point of view.

I constantly reflected upon what participants said almost every day and sought the opinion of others to help further my understanding and expand my

thought process. I constantly analyzed the transcripts in detail adding new reflections, and comparing and contrasting the data. I provided rich descriptions and explanations of each participant's narrative account, as I re-storied their experiences. I also constantly read up to date literature on the topic in relation to social interactions, needs of older adults, Arabic culture and several other cultures, immigration worldwide, narratives on immigration, refugees, indicators of health and wellbeing, the ageing process and so much more. By immersing myself in the literature I was able to compare perspectives and ideas across several aspects of this thesis topic, which allowed me to make sense of my own topic. I was able to remain mindful of the limits in the findings reflecting upon and writing down struggles I faced during this Masters study and when conducting the thesis research. I also researched limitations in narrative research and was able to identify whether this study pertained to some of the limitations discussed in the literature. After I conducted a thorough literature review on most parts presented in the topic, I found that previous research findings from many other quantitative and qualitative studies were consistent with the themes and claims I made, which allowed me to interconnect the literature with the research foci, methods and major findings.

Rigor can also be recognized through “exploring reflexivity, subjectivity and social interaction of interviewing” (Davies & Dodd, 2002 p.281), which was also how I planned and evaluated this thesis. In addition, in this study, I established rich rigor by first asking myself four key questions a rigorous researcher should carefully consider proposed by Tracy (2010): “Are there enough data to support significant claims? Did the researcher spend enough time to gather interesting and significant data? Is the context or sample appropriate given the goals of the study? Did the researcher use appropriate procedures in terms of field note style, interviewing practices, and analysis procedures?” (p. 841). Further reflecting upon these questions, the first question was one I thought about a lot after the data collection phase. Did I conduct enough interviews and did I find enough data to support my research objective?

I have reflected upon the data collection process, where I conducted two in-depth narrative interviews with the participants and most participants spoke for hours. Even though they provided me with rich and descriptive details of their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement throughout their life course, I believe that if I had conducted one last interview I could have received more detail and I would have asked more questions. However, I was able to find strong results, by just conducting the two interviews, which were consistent with existing research. I believe there is always more that can be told, as this was a study that only explored the older adult life stage and some of their younger adulthood years. I did not collect a complete and detailed life history and so evaluating the idea of “enough data collected” was difficult. Reflecting upon question two, I chose an interesting topic that has not been studied before among Muslim Lebanese Canada older adults and I decided to account for their immigration experiences as a major part in this thesis. In order to capture the readers’ interest more I refer to Tracy’s (2010) definition of resonance as the “researcher’s ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience” (p. 846). When presenting each re-storied account, I used rich descriptive sentences, action and emotional words, with the intention of capturing the reader’s attention and drawing them into the participants’ lived experiences and emotions of the teller. I wrote in an evocative manner not only with the intention of tapping into the reader’s emotions, but to promote empathy among readers who do not have direct experience with the topic and promote a greater mutual sense (Tracy, 2010).

I also found peer debriefing to be a major part of achieving rich rigor for this study, as it “explores one’s analysis and conclusions with a colleague or other peers on continuous basis” (Robson, 1993, p. 404). I utilized peer debriefing by meeting with my supervisor every step of the way throughout this entire research study process. After I fully transcribed interview one for each participant my supervisor and I met to unpack each interview and openly spoke about our interpretations, opinions, and next steps. I was also in contact with my advisory committee members through email and meetings at important intervals

in the study. Both my supervisor and advisory committee members discussed how to best apply my methodological approach, providing positive and critical feedback during the analysis process. This was a great help because these meetings gave additional perspectives and explanations at each stage.

I have also presented this research study at four conferences, presenting findings and implications to the public. I found that many people expressed their sincere interest in the topic and were especially interested in the idea of immigration and how immigrants build and maintain their social connections. Some people expressed to me their own experiences of loneliness and mentioned a few ways they maintained their social connections. For example, one older woman talked to me about how she decided to go back to school and attend lectures to keep her mind sharp and more alert and this was a way she made new friendships with younger people, which changed her life. She mentioned that all her friends have passed away and making new friendships with the younger generation kept her from feeling lonely. Another attendee, who was a public-school teacher, asked me about what I found from each story, and that my findings have helped her come up with ideas to implement where there are many immigrant and refugee children. For example, I discussed with her the idea of all participants wanting to fit into society but without losing their cultural and religious roots and so they were constantly involved in community and cultural events. She agreed and we talked about ways in which she could incorporate cultural events for her students to help facilitate a sense of belonging. Several attendees encouraged me to continue my research further and to study immigrant older adults who have immigrated to Canada recently and to compare different ethnicities in relation to their experiences of social connected and social engagement. A few attendees also spoke to me about how their parents were immigrants and how they grew up with the difficult task of identifying who they were ethnically and culturally in society. I found that all of their comments helped to emphasize the relevance of the study (Long & Johnson, 2000), again giving additional perspectives, which allowed me to gain validation for the importance of this research.

Sincerity.

By being self-reflective and reflexive I was able to achieve sincerity. As Tracy (2010), said, “sincere researchers are approachable rather than self-important and friendly rather than snobbish. They consider not only their needs but also those of their participants, readers, coauthors and potential audience. Sincere researchers are empathetic, kind, self-aware, and self-deprecating” (p. 842). The time I spent with each participant demonstrated my sincere interest in them and what they had to share. I spent one month searching for participants. The time I spent with each participant was in their complete control, as I waited until they decided for our meeting to come to a natural end. Given the objectives of this study, using narrative as the methodology made the most sense, as I wanted the participant to be at the heart of the study. By collecting their stories, I was able to re-present four intricate narrative accounts. These stories were complex and unique, as readers are able to see the dynamic nature of each narrative account.

Each participant interview varied in regards to time. On average, I spent about two hours with each participant for each interview. Once each interview was complete some participants asked me more about my life and I was more than happy to share my story with them. Spending quite a bit of time with each participant and meeting their family members throughout the interviewing process, I began to build an emotional attachment to each participant, feeling extremely privileged to be given the opportunity to sit next to them and listen to their incredible life stories. By the end of the data collection process the participants mentioned that I should keep in touch with them and not be a stranger and of course I honored this by sending them a letter with an update of the study. Prolonged involvement and persistent observation among the participants and being immersed in the data enhanced my sensitivity to any presumed meanings I held and provided opportunities to explore explanations (Long & Johnson, 2000). I also found deeper meaning emerging from simply being within their environment, which allowed for concepts to unfold revealing

any potential implications (Long & Johnson, 2000). For example, I was able to gain a first impression and observe their personalities as they spoke to me and their family who were around them, which also assisted in re-writing their story. I was also able to see how they decorated their home, helping me understand that their home was a place with meaning and not just a space. I was able to see how participants shared their home with other family members, which allowed me to make sense of their personal social interactions among family members.

Ethical Considerations and Issues

Ethical approval for this study was obtained through Western University's ethics board on September 1, 2016 prior to commencing the study. A formal ethics approval protects all participants from any potential of harm, deception, and conflicts of interest, and protects participant's privacy and confidentiality (Smythe & Murray, 2000). [See appendix E for the letter of information.](#) Smyth and Murray (2000) mention:

“Methodologically, narrative research is an essentially interpretive enterprise in that the researcher is engaged actively in formulating meanings for participants’ narrative expressions, often in quite different terms than the participants themselves would. Thus, narrative researchers often are conflicted ethically about how to do justice both to their own and their participants’ very different understandings of their life experiences—indeed, how to maintain any balanced ethical perspective in the context of such an intrusive style of research.” (p. 318).

Consent is a key ethical issue within research studies. An informed consent form does not do justice or capture the dynamic processes of interpretation and authorship (Smythe & Murray, 2000), which is why I requested consent from each participant at the beginning of both interviews and after they read the completed summary of their story, giving them the opportunity to exclude any data. Therefore, for this research study I used process consent, which is often recommended in qualitative research because it entails a

negotiation process, which is ongoing throughout the course of the research (Symthe & Murray, 2000). Furthermore, before writing out each story, I carefully and open-mindedly considered how my interpretation would impact the participant, trying my best to re-present their story as close to what and how they said it as possible. All four participants agreed to using their direct quotes from recordings and including their re-written story in the thesis.

One ethical issue that arose was during the participant recruitment process. Since London is home to many of my own cousins and relatives I found that many individuals who called me to express their interest were related to me through family. Of course, I had to say no to my relatives, as this posed a conflict of interest. I searched for potential participants who were of no relation to my family. This took much longer than I expected, over a month, however I found participants who suited the study very well by taking a longer time.

In order to maintain an ethical balance between my position as a researcher and the participant's story, I clarified my position as a narrative interpreter at the end of every interview. I then discussed with participants that I planned on re-writing their story with the use of themes and literature. The participants were given the opportunity to read my interpretation of their story and approve or disapprove the story. If any participant disapproved my interpretation, I would have made immediate changes to reach a mutual conclusion. This was not the case for any participants.

Once the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, I marked them with code numbers and stored them in a secure room. No one other than myself listened to the recordings, while my supervisor read the transcripts and the advisory committee members read reflexive notes and the re-storied accounts. During the process of re-storying each participant interview, I had to think of several ways to hide their identity. I did this by replacing their names and any family and friend's names using pseudonyms. I also did not include the names of their work places or work titles. I found that by removing these

identifying markers, it would be difficult for anyone to identify them. In addition, three participants expressed wanting me to use their real names as this was something they were proud of sharing and would want readers to know the real name behind their story. However, I had to express that I was doing this for their own protection and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Presenting the Stories

In this chapter, I will introduce four stories owned by Mahmoud, Aya, Ali and Nabila, who were the participants in this study. I will achieve this by presenting a condensed version of their stories, re-written and interpreted by myself, the researcher. For each participant, I will first give a brief outline of some of my thoughts and reflections on how I decided to structure each story, to give the reader a better understanding of my viewpoint. I then provide an overview of the key elements of each story in table format, and finally present the narrated account.

My Reflections: Mahmoud Abba's Story

Sitting in the bus on my way to university, I remember reflecting on how I would go about re-telling Mahmoud's story. I assumed that it would be easy, however when it came time to write, I remember sitting at my desk, staring at a blank Word document, watching the cursor appear and reappear for a while before getting started. I remember feeling overwhelmed and asked myself many questions. Am I over thinking this? How am I going to do this exactly? Where do I even begin? I want to write a story that will captivate the reader from the start to the end but how do I begin? What is the focus of the story? What did he emphasize? What was not emphasized? I remember feeling a sense of fear thinking about how I would be able to capture all the things Mahmoud spoke about. After talking to some colleagues, I understood that I did not have to include everything, and that I am also an active voice in this process, bringing in my own perspective.

Tensions began to build when I thought about wanting to write Mahmoud's story in a way that would make him feel good about himself when he read it. I knew that this should not be my underlying motive, and I believed it would make more sense and ring true to the reader to just write the story how he presented it to me, filtered through my own interpretations and observations, capturing the multilayered truths and perspectives within Mahmoud's story. Since Mahmoud's

story was full of rich content, I remember having so much trouble finding a starting point that I decided to create a summary chart that included some key points from his narrative before I began to write, which gave me an overall feel of what I was going to write about. What stood out the most for me was how he spoke about his mother. From my understanding, she was his foundation, the reason why he turned out the way he did; I finally found my starting point.

Overview of Mahmoud’s story.

Participant	Mahmoud Abbas (pseudonym)
Immigration	From Lebanon to London Ontario
Genre	Success story and moral tale
Main themes	Mother, determination, Islamic history, belonging, religion, community involvement, knowledge translation and youth
Major Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment: Factory work, hotel owner, variety store owner • Lead member in establishing the first London Mosque • Lead members of Syrian/Lebanese Club • Lead member in the Canadian Moslem Benevolent Society • Community/Political meetings • Community organizer and arbitrator • Mall walking and house work • Coffee with friends
Contextual Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming from a large supportive family • Mainstream media on Islam • “Hijack Islam”
Taxonomy of Reminiscence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmissive reminiscence • Narrative reminiscence

History in the Making: A Story of Inspiration and Success

Mahmoud's story.

Walking into Mahmoud's home I remember the unforgettable smile on his face. His wife and granddaughter greeted me with warm and inviting smiles and hugs. With such a warm-hearted welcome, talking came so naturally between everyone. I noticed how Mahmoud's big smile never faded for a second, as we spent the next few hours sitting across the dining room table from each other, by a large window, with the view of his beautiful grand backyard. I noticed on the table a large pile of newspaper clippings, government letters, certificates, booklets, pamphlets, photos and magazines, which suggested to me that he would be using these to tell his story, which he did.

Mahmoud mentioned that he first immigrated to Canada in 1949. Over a delicious Lebanese lunch his wife made for us that afternoon, Mahmoud passionately spoke about being one of six children born to a mother who was known for her religious embrace and wisdom. Mahmoud told me that she became a widow at age 29 and raised six children with unconditional love and emphasized the significance of religion to all her children. Mahmoud remembered a lot about his mother and emphasized the importance of her role throughout his story,

"We learned to be kind, love and care and that's what Islam teach [sic]..,"

I remember how Mahmoud pointed to her picture in a book and I could see the resemblance, I noticed that they had the same smile. He told me how he remembered his mother instilling morals and values in all of her children, teaching Mahmoud and his siblings to work honestly and to never leave a job unfinished. Mahmoud talked about how she instilled curiosity and taught her children that it is completely fine to question anything and everything that comes to their minds.

Mahmoud's oldest brother had the desire to go to university in Canada and as Mahmoud described, that was when his migratory journey began. Mahmoud mentioned that his sister was already in Canada, making the immigration process for her family members less difficult. With a big smile on his face, and his eyes glistening, Mahmoud mentioned that not only did his sister help his family but she was known as someone who welcomed newcomers to the country, something Mahmoud seemed very proud about, as he pointed to her picture in an old faded black and white newspaper clipping. Mahmoud, his mother and his brothers came to London a few months after the visa approval.

“And within a few days I found a job and my brother found a job but my younger brother was still 15 I think...”

Mahmoud remembered being surrounded by family and received immediate community support, as he spoke about working and attending English classes twice a week when he first arrived in London. Listening to him describe his young self, I understood Mahmoud's character as someone who was full of energy and life and someone who took no breaks. I noticed how his curiosity drove his passion to seek knowledge. He talked about attending night school for five years until he was ready to move into the trade business, which showed me how he truly took his mother's words and worked hard to build a life for himself. During this time, Mahmoud mentioned that the city had a small group of Muslim and Christian Lebanese people who all shared one common goal, that was, assisting others in finding their place in London and contributing to the greater society any way they could. Mahmoud spoke about a small Lebanese, Muslim community that was here prior to his arrival, that he called the 'pioneers'. He spoke with such passion and respect about them, which led me to understand that this small group of pioneers were the foundation, the driving force behind innovation, especially when it came to understanding and figuring out ways to make the community a better place for all.

“I was proud of them of the humbleness and kindness they wear”

“because I was proud and honored to met them [sic] pioneer and give us experience they went through. Because things were not easy like now...,”

“pioneers they establish good foundation...,”

“these people they made us feel welcome. They didn’t ignore us they make it [sic] feel comfortable and they said “Canada is the best country you are lucky.., you are with us now and you are gonna [sic] to have a tough time to adjust for the language [sic] or the weather but we went through too [sic] so..., just keep on going”.., you know they give you that lift and they make you feel proud we are very fortunate...,”

Mahmoud described an abundant amount of love and encouragement from everyone around him, which motivated him to become a part of the Syrian Lebanese Club, the Canadian Muslim Benevolent Society and the Leader of the Arab Society, all local and not-for-profit clubs. They worked together and Mahmoud’s brother wrote the charter on behalf of the Canadian Muslim Benevolent Society and submitted it to the provincial government. This alone was a significant milestone in London’s history, as Mahmoud described with a contagious smile on his face.

At these clubs, Mahmoud mentioned that people gathered to talk about life in Canada, economic opportunities, politics, their homeland, and ideas for enlarging and improving the small Muslim/Arab community, and how to make the community more comfortable for people. From my understanding through Mahmoud’s rich descriptions, the aim of these clubs were to establish a common place of worship for the growing Muslim community as well. Mahmoud was and still is inspired by these pioneers. He believed he could be the driver of change like the pioneers were.

Once Mahmoud finished telling me his story, I soon realized that this was just the beginning of something incredible. As I understood, they set out to build a religious and social community for themselves and for future generations of

Canadian Muslims in London for Mahmoud. He talked about leading countless community events, where he ended up photographing significant moments, capturing history as it unfolded. I noticed how it was a personal passion of his to capture important community events on camera. Connecting people is something I noticed Mahmoud embodied throughout his life, something he continues to live for.

“After we registered, and we start and newcomer start coming in ‘55, we had the first convention in London. We had 1000 Muslim attending and it was the best-ever we had in Canada. But 7 to 800 Muslim came from the US, New York, Michigan, Ohio, Iowa because 200 Muslim from Windsor, London, Toronto...”

He described this incredible group of people as leaders who worked together cohesively, educating and supporting each other through times of struggle. A short while after the convention, Mahmoud mentioned how the Canadian Muslim Benevolent Society decided to buy a property in London to house the first Mosque, which at the time, would be the second Mosque in all of Canada.

“And umm..., that give us the courage and the people were attending the convention and motivate us more to do something. So, we bought a house, a nice building, big building..., on Oxford street and we turn into 1957 [pause] we turned it into a mosque. But still the community small. We did a lot of renovation and the people..., the elder people that the business people [sic] they all donate little bit to buy put down payment [sic].”

As Mahmoud spoke about his life during the time of building the mosque, I noticed how his efforts to improve the Muslim community in London were finally beginning to come together until he talked about how the Mosque burnt down due to a fire in the kitchen. Devastated as they were, with a smile, Mahmoud mentioned that they did not waste any time and re-built a new mosque, on the

same soil, which still stands today. With an even bigger smile on his face Mahmoud said,

“We finished the new mosque in 64 and it been add an extension now...,”

“A school now and the have a gym now.”

Mahmoud remembered how happy and excited the children were because they could connect with each other, in a comfortable and meaningful place, giving them a sense of belonging. Mahmoud mentioned that women found comfort at the Mosque, giving people the feeling of home away from home.

“And the Muslim especially and then when we had [sic] the mosque they made it plus. So the female women they find they are at home. They have people talk to them in their language, they help them understand, help them out and make sure their children some of them are comfortable. They are not going to be lonely, because it was very difficult for the one who came before us [pause] you see.”

For Mahmoud, I could tell by his bright eyes and passionate voice that the mosque was more than just a place of worship.

“And this is what’s the great thing that can happen because the mosque is a lecture, a culture but it’s a religion, an education, it’s a convention you call it or a meeting every week. So every Friday it’s important for the Muslim because when they meet even 1400 years ago, prophet days, peace be on him, the Friday umm speak the Imam [sic] lecture because it’s a conference but it’s actually not just a conference to talk business.., it’s to learn about the religion, about the holy Quran, about the messenger and his companions and how the Islam flourishes [sic] and be kind to others because it use to be very bad in the old days. So in all the prophet and all the messenger were born in the middle east. In our country!

His rich descriptions about the mosque allowed me to understand that the Muslim community grew and the mosque transformed into a place where people could connect, feel safe and cared for. Grateful for being in Canada and being among family and friends, Mahmoud, with the help of others, organized a Lebanese village reunion, gathering 1,100 people from all around the globe to meet in Lebanon, in the village he grew up in. Mahmoud described it as an unforgettable atmosphere. He remembered how the culture that day flourished, and remembered the president of Lebanon saying, "We need more people like the ones in this village". I could tell that keeping his people connected with each other became Mahmoud's heart's desire and a part of who he is. Community gatherings were not enough for him, so Mahmoud said that he went ahead and created the first directory of all the people who lived in his home village in Lebanon, and distributed hundreds of copies. I understood that people used these directories to stay connected with each other. Mahmoud showed me what each directory consisted of, that being, a list of hundreds of names in alphabetical order, with their current geographic location and phone number.

"I feel I bring the people together ok..., because I don't want them to be isolated..., I am want them to be proud about where they came from...,"

When I asked Mahmoud why he did all this he said,

"Because I'm proud of where I came from!, I'm proud of my religion, I'm proud from my culture!"

In a loud, angry, passionate voice, Mahmoud expressed how upset he was when Muslims and Arabs are labelled as "terrorists" in the media and feels as though he is obligated to share their history and show people how Islam is a religion of peace and not what they see in mainstream media. To combat this perception, he also created pamphlets pertaining to the history of Islam, always with the thought of assisting Muslim youth to find their place in London, reminding them of how things all began and how it is up to them to continue this legacy.

Mahmoud loved to preach about Islamic history. His granddaughter called him “The walking history book”. New arrivals came to him for help and he also showed them ways they could contribute. I noticed that with every brilliant endeavour, Mahmoud used the teachings of Islam to guide his every move.

“Islam teach us “the hand you give by the hand you receive”. We learn to give learn to give [sic] but we know by this older gentlemen who speak on Sunday they talk and translate from the holy Quran...,”

“To be kind, humble, to your family to your neighbour, to the children and to the needy person..., you know...,”

As Mahmoud described the importance of always lending a helping hand to anyone in need, I could tell that he lives by the idea that no matter where you come from or what you do in life, everyone has the potential to make change. As he described, it does not matter what your religion is, if someone has fallen, giving them that lift, Allah will reward you for helping. I understood that it was more than just helping the other person get back up for Mahmoud, it was about motivating them to participate in their community and help make a difference.

“So we appreciate it but we are not going to forget our religion, our culture, we gonna work on it. I mean I not university student [sic] I didn’t go to university but we..., [sic] Allah gave everybody brain to use..., give us—we thank him for vision, we smell, we taste, we talk, even mentioned in the holy Quran. That’s a gift! Allah gave us all that.., we can hear you know...,”

“I mean you can’t eat and your neighbour suffer..., it’s not fair not in Islam! Islam teach us to help, be fair.

Mahmoud talked about how he worked eight different factory jobs, and experienced many sleepless nights, but he said that he could never miss an opportunity to get involved in the community. Mahmoud said that his motivation to get involved was sparked by seeing the devastation that took place in the

Middle East, and watching his people suffer on television, prompted him to get involved in politics. Mahmoud mentioned that any chance he could get he attended political events and meetings, voicing his opinion to top leaders at the time, and getting them to see how Canada should help countries like Syria.

Mahmoud talked about being 86 years old now. Contently, Mahmoud said that most of his friends have passed away and now he spends a lot more of his time with his friend's children, his own children and grandchildren and of course his wife of 56 years. Mahmoud talked about keeping himself busy by doing yard work, meeting his friends at the mall or walking around the block. When I asked how long he's been living in his house, I remember asking twice because I thought I heard wrong. 40 years Mahmoud said and remembered raising his grandchildren in his own backyard.

I noticed that Mahmoud never mentioned feelings of loneliness, but has over 1000 pictures and videos of memories he looks through every so often. He recently retired from volunteering at a hospital after 17 years, as a translator and friend to everyone he looked after. I noticed how Mahmoud did not forget anyone and did not forget about Lebanon, even though he lived in Canada for most of his life. Mahmoud described how he took the initiative to send two forty foot containers of medical supplies to his home village in Lebanon just because he wanted to help.

"I took two 40 foot containers medical equipment..,[sic] she pack the stuff (his wife) from London to the Village in Lebanon"

"That how I felt when I wanna [sic] do something I'm going to do it on my own."

"I shipped them. And now they have a hospital they didn't have to go to the city far away they walk in.., hospital in that village..."

As a trusted member of the community, Mahmoud talked about also being a community arbitrator, helping people solve their personal problems. He told me

that he was able to mend many broken relationships and helped married couples through difficult problems. I remember there was something about Mahmoud's enthusiastic tone that told me he enjoyed doing this because he was a well trusted member of the community.

Mahmoud showed me pictures of people he was trying to form a social committee with, but he talked about having difficulties finding people who wanted to commit. Then I noticed that with everything he has done, to this day he is still trying to do more. Sitting at home on the couch watching television was never an option for him. Mahmoud mentions that he loves absorbing every newspaper and magazine clipping because it helped him generate more ideas on how to make this community a better place for all. Mahmoud expressed how he lives by action, not by problem management, but by problem solving through action. Smiling from ear-to-ear, Mahmoud said,

"If you make the move and you get the support you can do lots. But you need your mom your dad your brother your sister your cousin you need the family support you feel good inside too when you get the family support."

As he described his young 17-year-old self at the time he arrived in Canada, I could tell that he did not know where life would take him but he was more than willing to explore and make mistakes. He expressed how he never lost hope and did whatever it took to turn his dreams into reality. Mahmoud's eyes began to water once he finished telling me about how proud he is of all the hard work the pioneers and his family put into building two mosques. I understood that his tears were of accomplishment, success and knowing that all of this started from 11 people who had a passion. Most importantly for Mahmoud, he wanted people to learn from those accomplishments and build on them and make a difference in their own community.

My Reflections: Aya Abdul-Karim's Story

After Mahmoud's story, exploring how to write Aya's story came more easily to me. Before I began to unpack her story, I remember asking myself, what are the focal points of her story? What are the major themes in her narrative? Something that stood out for me in her story was how she immigrated to Canada when she was 19 years old, expecting to receive attention and support from her family who had already been living in London for a while. She received less support than she expected, leading her to feel lonely. This made me reflect upon my 19-year-old-self three years ago; leaving London to travel was certainly something of interest but if it ever came time to do it, something would stop me, not just cultural and religious norms, but also fear.

Aya took matters into her own hands and built a life for herself on a rocky foundation. Aya left her family at age 19 and it was not easy for her but she was raised to be strong willed and responsible. I thought about starting her story with how she became a shop manager at age eight. I also remembered how much Aya spoke about her father and how he was a large influence on the way she lived her life and raised her children. With numerous ways to start and end Aya's story, I remember thinking that I would want to capture her story the exact way she portrayed it to me, however, I reminded myself that it is not about being "exact", because each story is multilayered and co-constructed.

Aya's story is one that shows her character, one that I truly admire because she was able to cope with and come out of times of struggle. In order to help myself overcome this challenge I read through all of the reflexive notes I made in relation to meetings with Aya, which helped me form ideas. I recall wanting to start her story by bringing the reader through her childhood because from my understanding of how she was raised, the responsibility she was given at such a young age helped to shape who she is as a person now.

Overview of Aya's story.

Participant	Aya Abdul-Karim (pseudonym)
Immigration	From Lebanon to London Ontario
Genre	Survivor story
Main themes	Resilience, overcoming barriers, strong will power, determined, friends, family
Major Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewing and clothing alterations • Mall walking • Baby-sitting grandchildren • Hosts family dinners • Being a mother and grandmother • Cooking for the mosque • Work: store manager, dietary aid and factory work
Contextual Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little family support when first immigrated • Tug of war when raising her children in Western Society but still trying to instill Islamic/ cultural values • Strong neighbour friendships
Taxonomy of Reminiscence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative reminiscence

Trying to Fit In: A Story of Survivorship and Finding Place

Aya's story.

Aya talked about her father who is of Palestinian origin. She described how he worked endlessly to build a life in Palestine until one day he lost everything he worked for in a vicious war. When she mentioned this war, it made me think back to when my grandparents told me stories about how Palestinian families came to Lebanon during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war to find refuge. Along with many other families at the time, Aya's father came to Lebanon as a refugee. Aya described how he had to live in a tent and from his tent, he traveled from Syria to Lebanon selling wheat to make ends meet. Slowly but surely, as Aya

described, he began to re-establish himself. With a smile on her face, while holding her coffee mug tightly with two hands absorbing the warmth, Aya said,

“He build in 1957 he build a [sic] house for us it was a big house it was the best house in that village of Lebanon and it was beautiful home”.

Aya said that in 1965 her father had saved up enough money and built a small three level house, and started his own local grocery and home appliance store. However, Aya mentioned that the local people rejected him, questioning how someone of Palestinian origin could come to Lebanon and build all of this. Aya turned her face and looked away from me for a moment, I could tell this upset her but she sprung back and said,

“But he was a very hard working man!”

Regardless of this rejection, Aya remembered how he still pushed through and opened his first business. Aya began to tell me about her young self. When Aya was a young girl, she was interested in helping her father with the business and that she did. Aya described running after school to her father’s business to take over.

“I wake up at 4 o’clock in the morning, by 4:30 I walk..., This is back home there is no cars..., I walk to the store open the store by myself and I stay there my father would come in umm around 8 he would just come and umm look at things you know...,”

With the way Aya described her young self, running after school to take over, not caring much about having a social life, waking up before the sunrise, I could tell she worked hard just like her father to help keep the business running and I sensed that she felt obligated to continue this good work.

Aya described running the entire shop on her own and she liked it that way. However, Aya understood that this was not something she wanted to do for the rest of her life.

“So I’m at the store, take care of everything and finally I got tired of this life...,”

“I didn’t want to do that anymore [sic] my sister here in Canada she wants me to come here and I just wanna [sic] see something..., New! Thinking you know I’m going to Canada you know! Who doesn’t wanna [sic] come to Canada!”

“I wanna [sic] go to Canada I wanna [sic] go see my sister I wanna [sic] I wanna [sic] and I kept nagging at his head [sic] he said “You think Canada is better than here you’re working with us bokra (tomorrow) you get married here you stay” no no no [sic] I wanna [sic] go. I came single, he finally I kept talking he finally said ok fine go. So she applied for me and I came.”

Smiling, Aya spoke about her father reluctantly agreeing to let her go and how her family advised her not to trust anybody and to always be aware and careful wherever she went. Aya expressed this as a profound move for her, as leaving her family at age 19 and coming to Canada as a single Muslim female, was something that went against cultural norms. After Aya’s sister sponsored her to come to Canada, Aya mentioned that it took six months and then she was off to reunite with her sister and, from my understanding, find a new sense of place.

“She kept saying come and visit me I’m lonely I wanna [sic] see you guys I want sister in my— in Canada it’s like this is what drag me the umm umm [sic] the umm because I’m I’m [sic] feeling so umm missing her so much because I missed her so much I wanna [sic] come and see her and I wanna [sic] see different country it wasn’t like— I wasn’t thinking of what’s in Canada, I just wanna [sic] see my sister I wanna [sic] go see different life.”

Once I understood how Aya grew up, I sensed she was ambitious and independent. However, Aya mentioned that she did not quite understand the

gravity of coming to a new country and living in a language and a culture not her own. Knowing how to run a business, Aya came to Canada with high expectations for herself, yet she remembered at first feeling pressured and confused, not knowing where to start. Three days after she settled in Canada, Aya said that she went to the unemployment office to look for a job, and only found jobs that she seemed to feel were beneath her abilities.

“I’m working for other people you know I find it very hard in the beginning even when I work as in housekeeping at the hospital how could I tell them I’m working in housekeeping.., they are gonna [sic] think..., what are they going to think of me you know..., you know how it is back home”

“It’s just like what did I do what do I tell my father...,”

I understood that finding a job with what she perceived as a respected title was a major obstacle for Aya. After taking on responsibility and becoming independent at such a young age, Aya described being furious at the fact that she had to take orders from others and could not stand having less control. She began working in factories, which Aya saw as beneath her abilities.

“I was shocked I’m like you know..., it’s a beautiful country no doubt about it and everything but when I had to go work we had that business and I come to work for people! That made me you know I couldn’t deal with it..., you know what I mean?”

“When I work back home I worked with my father we own our own business [sic] and I was kind of umm in-control of everything.”

“So I couldn’t find..., I find it hard to take orders.., so I failed that way [laughter]”

“I didn’t do good..., I didn’t.., obey.., you know the— I didn’t know how to you know someone would tell you do this you know listen to certain things you know...,”

“My father use to say “You the one in control you do everything, I’m use to nobody boss [sic] me around [sic]”

Laughing at how she was when she was younger, Aya said that she knew what she wanted but she had to settle for less, securing her first job in a factory making cushions and couches. She described herself as unhappy when she told me about her struggles trying to communicate with others in English at her work places. Only knowing a small amount of English, she told me how difficult it was for her to work among others. Wanting to make friends and eager for a social life, as Aya described, I sensed that she found herself voiceless and misunderstood.

“It was Ramadan and actually they (co-workers) did want me to go for coffee..., the coffee break and I couldn’t say fasting..., I kept telling them it’s ok it’s ok and they kept saying “come on you don’t have to work come on”..., I understand what they are saying but I could not say the word [pause] and they just left me and one of the girls came with a coffee in her hand a little bag of tea and she said “Coffee or tea” I said no no no nothing, can’t eat no [laughter]...,”

“That upset me a lot you know..., so that’s it I said I have to go to school and I did come home and I thought ok I’m going to finish the week and I’m going to look for it— going to school and that’s how I went to Windsor...,”

Aya tells me that her aunt insisted she come to live with her in Windsor and learn English in a six-month paid program, so Aya did. For Aya, I understood that it was not just a place where she learned how to speak English, but it was a place where she began to build her social circle, connecting with others who shared similar life experiences.

“And we use to sit in groups and talk about— you know the teachers use to set us in groups so we can try to speak English and we laugh about the stories...,”

“It was fun and it was kind of made fun of each other”.

After completing the six-month English program, she came back to London. Aya mentioned that even though she lived among her family, she was far from happy, in fact she was feeling misunderstood and helpless. She talked about looking for support and comfort and also found herself trying to make sense of where she was and what she was doing all on her own.

“No I I [sic] did feel lonely a lot because they were kind of..., I don’t know how to explain like my sister was busy with her family...,”

“Her life and that didn’t— pay attention to me much she did—Her expectation was me helping here..,”

“Instead of I came to this country I needed— like her expectation was I should know better. If there is of the way of living here the way they do things that— it’s different from back home [pause] you make one mistake they laugh, make you feel uncomfortable instead of.., telling you this is how it’s done.., this is what you should do..,”

As Aya was always advised not to trust anyone by her father, she began to tell me about how she found it extremely difficult to make friends and that it scared her to build social relationships because she did not know how to trust people. Feeling lonely, embarrassed, undermined, and shocked by the cultural differences and trying to fit in so badly but not knowing how to, as Aya described, she told me that she got through everything by letting go and giving people a chance.

I began to understand that that was the time she began forming good, warm and close relationships with her neighbours, relationships that changed her life forever. Once Aya got married she talked about moving into a new neighbourhood. She worked several different jobs but stopped working for 12 years once she started having children. With a big smile, Aya began to share how she became friends with her neighbour, who was of different ethnic background and religious beliefs as herself, but they soon became inseparable.

“She was wonderful we really hit it off from the beginning umm she was always in my house you know”.

“she was every day every day [sic] in my house in the morning. The kids go to school I put the coffee on, the sweet and we sit and have coffee and every day!”

As Aya described this incredible bond, I understood that they became best friends and sisters and formed an incredible warm protective relationship, keeping each other happy. Aya remembered meeting up with her every morning, after dropping the kids off at school, something that kept on going for 24 years. I could tell that their relationship soon surpassed a friendship, I sensed that Aya thought of her neighbour as family. Aya often said that she treated all people equally and that she embraced the idea of making friends of different cultural backgrounds. From this I understood that the ethnic and religious differences made things fun and were part of what brought them closer. Aya described an unconditional acceptance of one another.

“They are your neighbour they are like.., I don’t even consider her as a neighbour she is a sister to me.”

“But I never consider her— always considered her as a sister because she wasn’t like she’s not an old fashion.., she’s good she’s open minded..,”

“And I I [sic] had a lot of problems and she helped me through that a lot she took me to the doctor more than my sister and I she was there for me yea so it was very when I start meeting the people and that like Suzanne, Jane all my neighbours you know, my God you my neighbours know they always use to say I taught them how to.., to have you know— to be good with families...,”

“She’s the one who use to take me and sit with me [pause] not my sister. She’s the one. And my sister wasn’t that far away from me.”

Sitting there and listening to Aya, I remembered how her eyes would widen and she would begin to smile whenever she talked about her neighbours. Aya mentioned that her neighbours said that she was their family role model. As she expressed this she humbly looked down and away, I could tell that this meant a lot to Aya because she could give back to them just as much as they gave to her.

“She use to help me a lot she use to come to me sometimes with like she told me once when the kids of course the kids when we moved to that neighbourhood my daughter was two and my friend’s daughter was three. So they were always together. As they grew older and she came over umm she eats at our house and my daughter goes there..., she use to eat there too you know and they know that there is no lard”.

“Letter! On how we taught her how to be loved with family and how to be loved together and which is like maybe we do have that in our but you know but they taught me how to be open and to me and to be social and to be you know they taught me a lot so and I said if it wasn’t for you guys I wouldn’t be of.., I wouldn’t be like open minded like this and try to you know they help me with my shyness and to be break out [sic] of my shell you know..”

When Aya talked about her neighbours she often referred to one quote by Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) and that was,

“Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) said to be good and kind to your neighbour and you’re more than a neighbour.”

Aya said this over and over, a quote which I could tell resonated with her heart, one that I could tell she lived by to live by. Aya also talked about finding her home at a local mosque, where she joined a lady’s club cooking for the mosque every Friday.

“So I joined that, I was with the ladies club and we were doing stuff for the Jimmah (Mosque) the Jimmah [sic] the mosque and umm we cook make dinners, they are the ones who taught me how to.., not my mom I told you I never was in the kitchen in Lebanon...,”

“Didn’t even know how to clean or anything. I was always at the store.., at the helping my dad...,”

“So when I came here I didn’t learn how to cook, I didn’t know how to clean my house or anything. So.., I start going with the ladies of course they were all holding the Jimmah (Mosque). So we were all working really hard at the Jimmah making fatoyar (bread stuffed with potatoes and meat) making zatar (pizza with zatar spice) umm dinners, everything!”

“And that’s how we learned and I got to know people that way...,”

Aya talked about becoming a well-known member in her Arab/Muslim community because she helped to organize bazaars and mosque dinners, and she cooked for the homeless initiatives every Ramadan.

Aya mentioned how she continued her community involvement as she was raising her children. I asked Aya to describe her life to me after her children left her home. I expected her to say that it has not changed much because they are all living in close proximity to her. However, to my surprise she gave me a different answer.

“Oh well yea of course you do face challenges because when the kids are living at home your life is full and you cooking, cleaning, making sure that their umm their ok and their umm life is full you want to make sure you guide them the right way and there’s a big challenge especially when you come from back home to this country it’s a huge challenge you actually want to keep your culture and you want to keep your religion but there a huge fight... with the media and with the kid and the back—you know you keep pulling and their friend are pulling”

Aya talked about being determined to raise her children the way she wanted to, where she instilled Islamic morals and values and not allow mainstream media to shape their lives but also allow her children to integrate in the Western culture. I could tell that this was a major challenge for her, as she talked to me about not being fully comfortable with Western norms yet herself. Aya said that it came to the point where she knew she was going to stay and raise her children in Canada and so she tried her best to adapt to the good it brought. Aya described that as a mother something in her was telling her that it was going to be fine to let go just a little. She did not want to lose her own culture and religion, however, letting go was the only way she could move forward in life. I sensed that finding that balance was often difficult. Aya moved back to talking about her experiences when her children left the home.

Aya said that when her children married, and left the house, her mind was constantly with them, worrying about their every move. As the years passed by it became easier and her job as a dietary aid at the hospital kept her busy, along with participating in community initiatives. Now at age 63, Aya talked about going out for coffee with her friends and shopping at the mall. Her grandchildren keep her busy as she talked about looking after them a few times in the week.

“And you fill up your life, you fill your life and the kids come, then kids come..,”

“You fill you find a way like if you if you’re active just wanna [sic] go and we go to the mall we umm every 8— every day at 8:30 we use to go we stop going this year because of my granddaughter, we baby-sitting so that filled us..,back”

“We find a lot of people there up on second floor they walk and you meet people there, we talk to them”

“I need to keep going you know. You know, sit you know, come for coffee, they come we have they spend the day here”

I could tell that one way Aya identifies as a Muslim is by wearing the head scarf, also known as hijab. This was a relatively recent achievement of hers, she mentioned, happening about 10 years ago. Despite the fact that she could be easily identified as a Muslim woman wherever she went, this did not bother her. Things were often hard but she told me, in a stern and strong voice, that this never bothered her. When she said this, I had nothing but admiration for her. I remember how it made me reflect about the person I hope to be someday, that is one who can freely express her identity without any restraints.

Aya had worked as a dietary aid, and she talked to me about how she and her friend faced some discriminatory comments at work, but Aya was never afraid to voice her opinion. Aya recounted an interaction with a co-worker, who was also Muslim.

“She hung her lunch bag on the door knob and she went to the bathroom, she came back and one girl she told her “is that your lunch bag”? She said “yes”, she said “Is there any bomb in it?” She got upset she came to me with the tears in her eyes, she told me “so and so told me this”. I’m like why didn’t you answer her I can’t believe you, why didn’t you say something. She said “I didn’t answer who cares”. I went to her and I said how dare you, since when does she carry a bomb I said I should be afraid of you, not you should be afraid of me! I said what makes you think you are better than us! I said for the last 24 years we have been working.., you don’t know us yet. She apologize, [sic] right away. I said that wasn’t very nice at all. They know, they said don’t step on her foot.., feet [laughter].”

Aya described another discriminatory event took place in a parking lot.

“He goes “Why don’t you go back to your own country?” and I’m like are you talking to me? He goes “Yea” he didn’t say nothing he just looked and just changes I said believe it or not this is my country, I been here longer than what I was— this is my country.”

“And then he just walked away”

Aya described another situation during a community epilepsy run, when she felt a strong sense of fear in relation to her identity as a visible Muslim female, for the first time.

“Yea! See when umm when we were standing, I told my friend we were experiencing something funny because you know we facing a lot..,”

“But I’m not the one who gets scared but that day I did.”

“I was standing this guy he’s nice, young. Probably in his 30 [sic] he was just looking at me like this, and then my friend, and looking at me. I turn away and we were talking busy talking and then all of a sudden I recognize he’s watching us I felt my heart jump, I said ok I better calm down, I don’t want to show him I’m scared or anything.

“Maybe he do [sic] something to us because we are Muslim. I just looked at him and I smiled and I walked away. Turn around, I didn’t tell my friend because I know she would freak out and she was busy of talking.

“and all of a sudden see him looking at us again. I’m like ok that’s not coincidence it is something, maybe in his mind he wants to say something or I’m like oh ok, I told my sister-in-law she said just ignore him, I said I am ignoring him but he’s kind of bothered or impress we are there.”

Even though Aya knew she would have to deal with Islamophobia, she told me how she never let that get to her. She said that she never changed who she was or what she stood for, for anyone. I could tell that Aya stood by her religion, as it was a major part of who she was. For Aya, I could also tell that presenting her best self in front of others within and outside her community meant a lot to her, something I have come to understand through her words, that stems from her religious upbringing.

“To me it means a lot because we living in a Christian society, we are living in a country that they don’t understand us, especially with time of we living in.”

“To me it means a lot to present myself, under the Islam shade and the Quran taught us”

“To be good to everybody to show them that Islam is not what they look at it has better, Islam is like a treasure in people’s eyes in everybody’s eyes this this [sic] is a treasure God gave us through Muhammed. People don’t understand it. But us., it’s how we present it to them..., if you’re gonna be [sic]— even if your gonna [sic] lower yourself a little bit from your right to just try to always present yourself the best you can and Allah God will take care of us. Always will.”

“God have created prophet Muhammed have taught us, we do something wrong you pay for it. You do— you make sure that you correct it.”

“We cannot just let it go that way. And subhanallah (Praise to God) you knew it always come back when you represent yourself the best of you can with your own religion people will respect you more. You will earn the respect.”

“I am obligated. I’m obligated for my religion and for my my [sic] behavior and my way of living here in in [sic] this country and it’s like I feel we are here in this country between Christians for a reason.”

“To do the best of we can, even if you with your behavior if you win them..., it’s a good thing. It’s a good thing it’s like you winning them toward you you know with your., way”

With this positive contagious attitude Aya not only looked after her work friends but also her friends in the community. Aya described how one of her good friends was critically ill. Aya described spending countless hours on the phone

and on Skype, motivating her to do daily life activities. Aya mentioned that she knew her friend was feeling depressed and lonely, so Aya tried her best to help her. As Aya shared this, she became expressionless almost appearing to be numbed by how her friend's life turned out this way.

"I help her a lot I make sure she's ok I call her every morning every morning [sic] when I wake up first thing I do I send her a message"

Aya gave her friend a much-needed boost of energy whenever she could. Helping her friend was something that kept Aya busy and it made her feel good about herself, as she said,

"Sometimes charity is good. Charity is the prophet Muhammad said "Charity is everything you do in life". Even to pick a glass off the street this is a charity."

"The smallest thing and the things that you do and you feel like you helping someone.., it's good to do it."

As Aya spoke about going through times of struggle, I noticed how she seemed to have a mature outlook on life and desire to spread goodness however she can. Aya spoke about the Mosque with enthusiasm, and talked about how it was a significant place for her.

"It's our religion and I like to keep in touch there and I like to be able to help and be there for them and be there for my religi— my my [sic] religion and do the best I can."

Aya said that she spent most of her time with her grandkids, whether that be playing outside, walking to the parks, going to the store or dancing to traditional Arabic music at her house every once and a while. She showed me a photo album her grandchildren made for her, containing beautiful pictures of her children and grandchildren. Watching Aya talk about her grandkids, it was easy to notice the spark in her eye.

“With my family we did go to umm what they call it saga....Wasaga beach?”

“Blue mountain and to the beach and all that it was beautiful., Canada is beautiful yea..,”

“Yea that was a gift from the kids two years ago my children it was a Eid day, we celebrate the Eid and went for 5 days and umm we do activities like now we ran for the umm epilepsy, me and my brother and friend., that was last week we did that. Was it last week or the week before? [pause] Just two weeks ago.”

Family was just as important as her neighbours. Even though her neighbours of 24 years moved away, she keeps in touch with them by phone or when they come to visit. Aya also formed new relationships with her new neighbours. I asked Aya what open mindedness meant to her and if she could describe it and she said,

“Best behavior of judgement you cannot just judge the people of the way they look., it’s very important for you to make sure that you understand them and you listen to them and you make sure that that [sic] when you’re judging the person you’re not of what you see from the outside it’s from the inside., that’s umm what it means”

“But you yourself you judge who you’re going to be strong relationship or [sic]. Like I had so many friends we use to sit and have— talk and laugh and have coffee together”

“But when it came to personal things it was only my one friend cannot have more than one”

“It’s the quality not the quantity.”

“But you cannot shut everybody off because you don’t have it doesn’t reach to your quality”

When Aya arrived in Canada in 1954, as a 19-year-old Muslim girl, she told me that her father said one thing to her. What he said described the strong, resilient person she is today. Before she shared with me what he said, Aya paused for a second, I sensed that what she would say next carried a lot of meaning for her, her father said,

“You know what, I’m not going to ask you to be good. I know what I raised”.

Aya had a difficult time trying to find herself in London. Coming to a new country at the age of 19 came with a lot of hardship but she survived and persevered because she had faith in herself, which helped her find ways to overcome barriers.

My Reflections: Ali Hussein’s Story

Before I began to write Ali’s story, I thought about how I would write it by recalling all the interesting lived experiences he shared with me. Something I noticed Ali emphasized was strong feelings of home whenever he was in London. He compared all of the other places he has lived in and said that there is something about London, an indescribable feeling that makes him feel like he is home. He traveled a lot between Lebanon and London and mentioned that he loves both places equally but always wanted to come back to London. I sensed that he has a strong sense of place in both locations but leans more towards London because he feels more accepted and people are willing to listen.

I also thought about bringing in the word retirement because he expressed that a lot throughout the interview as something that he has long been waiting for. Since Ali’s narrative was a little harder for me to follow, I remember thinking about how I will talk about social connectedness and engagement. With that, I thought about bringing in the importance of his family and what they meant to him. I also thought about his clients who became good friends to him during the time he ran his business, family support, being a mayor (which he described as his contribution to society) and living in a good neighborhood.

Something I also saw in Ali's narrative was how much he expressed living a good and easy life now. I sensed he emphasized this because, being a retiree, he now carries less burden and he can freely make his own decisions without any factors weighing him down. I noticed that instead of feeling obligated and having to do things related to work, he seems to now be able to choose to do or dismiss anything he feels like. For example, when Ali described the responsibilities that came with being a mayor, a lot of the time he dealt with numerous problems and obstacles, so now, from my understanding, he feels happier now that he is retired and does not have to deal with those types of issues anymore.

Overview of Ali's story.

Participant	Ali Hussein (pseudonym)
Immigration	Lebanon to the Province of Nova Scotia to Windsor Ontario to London Ontario, to the Province of Nova Scotia to Lebanon to London Ontario
Genre	Finding Home Story, Moral Tale, Success Story
Main themes	Leadership, success, determination, life satisfaction, family, friends, retirement, autonomy
Major Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor and teacher • Being a father and grandfather • Business owner • Coffee and cards
Contextual Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Away from Home • Civil war • Social Climate • "Backwardness" in Lebanon • "Can't do anything, they won't let you" • Proudness • Education and teaching • "I can do whatever I want" • Space and Place "people make their comfort not places, people"

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lebanese community in London and outside that community
Taxonomy of Reminiscence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative reminiscence

Determining Where You Stand: A Story of Dedication and Leadership

Ali's story.

I remember seeing Ali for the first time and he was dressed up in a suit and tie. He invited me into his beautiful home, as we greeted each other with the typical Salaam and 'How are you?'. I remember sitting at his dining room table facing the backyard window and I recall Ali sitting back in his chair quietly waiting to be asked about his life story. With his hands placed on top of the table, calmly waiting, I turned the recorder on and I began to talk. After I asked the key narrative question, I remember forming an expectation in my head, thinking that he would talk about the hardships of immigrating to Nova Scotia at the age of 20, surprisingly Ali talked about feeling the opposite.

"Not a shock..,"

"It was a culture difference..,"

"But not a shock kind of.., umm like I didn't feel I was rejected in any way."

"Yea you feel at the time actually you feel umm helped from people like they the more you don't know umm about about [sic] something the more help you get from people at the time..,"

"I have had like every-time I needed help from the general public or whoever and umm I got it..,"

"Like people help people they cooperate they give you a chance. Even umm like if you at the time I don't know now I'm not really quite involved now..,"

Ali mentioned, like many children in his home village in Lebanon at the time, his parents owned a small grocery store and grape orchard. When I asked if he helped with his family business growing up, Ali mentioned that he would lend a helping hand every so often but his parents emphasized the importance of education and pushed Ali and his siblings to focus on that.

“Yea..., partly like everyone else [pause] but umm the emphasis was on education yea...,”

“When I was there only thinking about umm continuing my education”

Ali said this with a stern yet confident face, indicating that he is a strong believer in education for children. Completing one year of university in Lebanon, Ali came to Canada due to simple curiosity. Knowing that he had many relatives already settled and established in Canada, Ali mentioned that this was one more reason to go. He said that when he arrived in Ontario he stayed with his relatives, while continuing his education and worked in a restaurant as a dishwasher. I could tell that he had a lot of family support, which helped Ali settle in comfortably. Ali began talking about working for a few insurance companies along the way. Ali described feelings of comfort, a strong sense of home and saw endless opportunities in London, so he opened his first clothing business in 1975.

“So I came back to London..., where..., I had a lot of relatives and friends..., and umm I opened my own business..., clothing..., jeans and stuff..., in 1975..., and stayed in London for a long time..., umm I like it..., like it very much..., and I had a lot of friends and relatives as I said...,”

“And umm I enjoy being in this city because it’s a city but it has a climate of a of a [sic] little town or a village...,”

Ali expressed finding his home away from home and how much he loved the social climate he was surrounded by.

“The social climate for us is umm is like umm is excellent actually.”

“know a lot of people...,”

“that came from the same village in the same area umm enjoy being with them on the weekend and umm spend time and umm like umm I never felt stranger or something in London, I almost felt like it’s my home town.., umm you get that feeling in London.”

When I asked Ali why he felt this strong sense of home, Ali paused and said,

“Just a feeling that London is my home town.”

Ali said that it was something that does not have a description, just a strong feeling from the heart.

“It’s a feeling you go to places maybe maybe [sic] they are the best places in the world but they don’t feel you belong”

“That I’m home.”

“The only place I feel home here in in [sic] is London”

Taking a moment to think deeper, Ali paused as though he was not done answering my question. As I waited, Ali said, maybe it could be that because of the large sense of community, maybe it could be the large Lebanese community or maybe it could be knowing that there are people here who come from the exact same place he was born in or maybe even the beautiful greenery all around. Ali was not sure of the answer, but I sensed that it was much bigger and deeper to him, something that was indescribable, like he said.

“Yea umm actually there is more of my home village here than anywhere else than in my home village”

“Because umm London has its own umm beauty or its umm umm umm [pause] [sic] things that make you feel at attracted to it”

“But umm like you you [sic] the feeling about London is its umm a city..., and a village at the same time. Village village [sic] umm climate and social climate and a city at the same time. So I umm umm [sic] take advantage of both. And all in all I feel I feel I belong to London”

“this is a true feeling”

“That I really belong to London and then I..,”

“Like when I’m in Lebanon.., I just wanna [sic] come to London”

Passionately talking about London, I could tell that Ali found his home away from home. A place, I could sense, he never got tired of. For Ali, he still felt that it would feel like home even if he did not have family or friends around. After he said this I remember asking again if he said “did not”, because it was to my surprise that he felt so strongly connected to London, even if he did not have family with him. This certainly gave me a new perspective. Never feeling like a stranger and always feeling accepted, as Ali expressed, he got used to the city and decided to stay, opening more businesses. When I asked Ali if his businesses gave him the opportunity to make more connections with people, he said yes.

“Business I had a lot of friends.., a lot of customers..,”

“Yea it keeps you more involved and umm [pause] actually yea it makes you happy...,”

With his businesses helping to expand his social network, Ali mentioned that he did not know it would lead to so many problems. One thing Ali expressed, which he has learned from his long experience in retail, is that the more you get involved with people the more problems you may expect to have.

“Well the more people you know the more ummm problems you might create for yourself ummm”

“If you know how to cope and how to be with people umm all comes under control like depends on how you treat things...”

“I been able to umm to to [sic] have regular relations with..., everybody at umm a certain pace...”

I understood Ali gained invaluable experiences from his businesses, and with life looking so great at the time, when he was running his businesses, an unexpected change of events took place. In a calm and content voice, Ali said,

“It was a successful business at the beginning..., and then umm [cough] at the end there was a lot of pressure umm the interest rate went up to 25 percent at the time so it was hard on umm a small businesses [pause]”

“So I had to sell umm my business..., I sold it...”

Once he told me that he had to sell his business, I expected Ali to show a little more emotion, however he came across as unbothered and very content. I sensed that he was the kind of person who viewed change as a good thing and took it in stride. He talked about selling his business and then moving back to Nova Scotia in 1985, but not being able to keep many friendships. When he departed from London, voicing his concern, Ali mentioned that he was afraid to go back and re-open a business because of how high the interest rate was and that smaller businesses were getting hurt at the time. Ali did not stay in Nova Scotia for long and decided to go back to Lebanon, in the summer of 1985, with his wife and children. When asked about this further, Ali shrugged his shoulders and said,

“at the time it was like everybody that came to Canada umm umm before thought like would stay sometime here make some money and go back”

“To Lebanon, that was the thinking at the time..., that’s all”

Ali talked about making this move with the intention of immersing his children in the Arabic culture, teaching them how to read and write Arabic. He

also expressed feeling nostalgic to visit the place he grew up in for 20 years. But this was not the only reason. Ali expressed his desire in wanting to bring as much knowledge and positive observation he acquired during his time in Canada and implement it back in Lebanon to better help his society.

“Yea all of that..., no no just I wanted to go back to..., umm to my umm to my home town [sic] that’s all”

“Where I was born and umm I lived umm there until I was 20”

Arriving in Lebanon in the summer of 1985 with his family, Ali mentioned that at the time Lebanon was recovering from a civil war. Ali remembered the difficulty and struggle he and his family experienced with electricity and water shortages, as he described this in a still expression looking down. I sensed that it was hard for Ali to think back to that time, to see his country of origin in turmoil and having to look after his family at the same time must have been devastating.

“Umm it was difficult to start over again there”

“The country was umm umm just umm coming out of a civil war”

“It was devastated umm no services to speak of like electricity, water, roads it was just..., devastated like I said”

“So but we umm managed we managed our way”

When I asked Ali how he managed to raise his family there, Ali said one word,

“Determination.”

With his family struggling at the beginning, Ali mentioned that they managed to make things work for them. Ali described the passion he had for his homeland and wanting to stay to help make things better. He decided to get

involved in politics and the education system, at the time, where he and his wife found fulfilling jobs as teachers.

“I got involved in umm in umm in umm [sic] life there like in politics”

“And education I I umm [sic]..., started working at umm big school there teaching..., and umm so I..., was working and my wife was teaching also”

“And got involved and stayed”

Working in his homeland as a teacher is something Ali described as fulfilling, something he enjoyed doing. Along with being involved in politics and education, Ali was also deeply involved in community and social events, which kept him very busy. From my understanding, at the time, it was very common for parents in Lebanon to send their children to Canada, where they had family, to give their children a better education than what they would receive in Lebanon. Ali did just that. He decided to send his two sons back to Nova Scotia to live with his brothers so they could complete their education and look for jobs there. Throughout this time, Ali mentioned that he and his wife would come to visit their children in Canada for three months in the year to help them settle. His two sons then came to London to complete university degrees. With businesses running in the family, Ali told me that his two sons soon opened their own used car dealership business in London. With Ali visiting his son's year after year he decided to bring his family back and settle in London, going to Lebanon every so often.

“I go back and forth. I go to Lebanon in the summer time and come back here and umm fall and winter, spring.”

Dividing his time between Lebanon and Canada, I could tell that Ali's involvement meant a lot to him and being able to bring knowledge and perspective back to Lebanon was important to him.

“Made me feel that umm I’m a part of the society and I could contribute..., a lot [cough] because of umm but what I’ve seen here, what I’ve learned here, I had different.., approach to things different you know this is umm very sophisticated society here..., it improves your thinking your outlook and..., so..., I [cough] I had umm some thoughts..., and umm I was able to do something for the society”

Despite his desire to contribute his new perspectives, Ali expressed that bringing this knowledge and change of perspective back to Lebanon came with a lot of difficulty and he found himself struggling to implement any kind of change, especially when he was just a member of society, with not very much power.

“Yea we couldn’t I brought it over there but you couldn’t..., they wouldn’t let you..., take them into.., progress that far”

When I asked Ali about why he thought that was, he said one word,

“backwardness...,”

I noticed how Ali’s eyes widened and he began to use a stern voice, it was easy to see this was something that upset Ali and something that was out of his control. He added,

“Not only that it’s their mentality I’m talking about”

“So they won’t let you go far with your ideas.., to..., progress or to make them progress”

“You shouldn’t be surprised if they stop you”

Talking about trying his best to implement new ideas in his home village in Lebanon, leaning forward, Ali mentioned that if you see things a certain way and try to express it to them, it is something people, back in Ali’s home village, could never imagine and so this led to a lot of disagreement. Justifying why this happened, Ali said,

“You see them against it”

“Because your thinking is different”

With this stubborn way of thinking, as Ali described it, that many political leaders in Lebanon had at the time, he could not help but feel sorry for his people and found it extremely hard to work with others of higher political status to implement change. Trying his hardest to voice ideas best suited for his village, Ali found himself powerless. Frustrated at the time and not willing to give up on helping his people, Ali decided to run for mayor, knowing that this would be the only way he could implement solutions. Ali described successfully winning the election and that is when his involvement turned into meaningful responsibility.

“So for example when I was a mayor..., I did umm they umm..., the road..., to the village..,”

“The main road with sidewalks on the side”

“Trees were there but some of them were bad we took them out we we [sic] planted new trees, we made the side walk asphalt, we made umm umm services on both sides so they don’t cut the road because there they like to cut the road..., they someone want to bring here they bring water from this side to that side they cut the road”

“And we built umm town hall, we re-built the mosque, we did the umm umm village umm what do you call it Saha (town square) what you call it in English”

“We put trees there umm we put interlocks umm you know different things”

“To look nice. Umm [cough] we put cameras [cough] umm..., nice nice [sic] things for the village”

In a happy upbeat tone and with a big smile of achievement on his face, Ali said,

“The village looks beautiful now”

“Clean ok. Cleanliness, I stressed on that cleanliness, so you see nothing on the road”

“Umm we out umm garbage boxes on the walls, we gave them garbage boxes to their to the house like here so we did many things that were not popular there umm but they were major projects to to [sic] make the to to [sic] upgrade.., once and for all the whole village so it’s beautiful now”

“Yea now it’s everybody talks about the village now”

Giving major credit to everyone who helped during his mayor-ship term, Ali said, looking away with a smile, that the municipal council in Lebanon is now doing some of the same things he implemented and are building on what Ali and his team worked so hard towards.

“Yea it means a lot I like I’m I’m [sic] satisfied like umm like you say the village is still in good hands”

“And it’s going forward it’s— it never go backwards backward”[sic]

Being the mayor, Ali was able to set out a plan to re-furbish and expand the mosque in his village as well, which is something I sensed was near and dear to his heart. Now at age 65, Ali is happily retired living with his wife, son and grandchildren.

“I’m retired now I don’t do anything.., except having coffee and playing cards.”

Ali expressed how he could do more, but he has come to a point in life where he just wants to relax and not have to work so hard. With a smile, Ali expressed he is retired now, over and over again, indicating a sense of relief, comfort and most of all I sensed that he feels he has earned his retirement.

“I don’t umm get involved in any of that”

“That’s it, retired retired. [sic]”

“Yup, having coffee everyday with friends”

Since Ali was so involved in politics, from my understanding he later felt he had a stronger sense of control when it came to who he becomes friends with and talked about avoiding people who may cause him problems. Even though he made many friends through various occupations, Ali expressed that having so many was not always the best thing.

“But like now.., I don’t umm bother with people who have umm who who [sic] may may [sic] cause problems I stay away..,”

“Yea I don’t have to bother if I see there’s umm umm problem in having umm relations with some people I stay away.”

“But when you are young and involved and umm everything in politics and everything business and you have to put up with things but now you don’t have to put up with a lot of thing...,”

Never feeling a sense of loneliness or isolation, when Ali’s children got married and moved out he expressed that nothing had changed for him.

“No because you’re involved in umm in seeing how they are doing”

With his children living close and one son living with him, Ali expressed a sense of relief knowing that he raised good children who are able to take responsibility and think for themselves.

“Umm..., but we like we.., I never felt that were not a big family anymore we are still the same”

“Now everyone— you can’t think umm umm for them they think for themselves”

“Yea that makes me feel umm comfortable very comfortable”

When I asked Ali to think back and talk more about the cultural differences he experienced, he emphasized how society gave people a chance to implement their ideas and there was no feeling of rejection ever occurred. Ali also talked about Canada being more multicultural, giving people a feeling of acceptance, Ali said this generally, speaking on behalf of others as well.

“You’re not an immigrant anymore. This is what I mean.”

“You don’t have the feeling.., I never had the feeling to tell you the truth”

“I have never had the feeling of immigrant.”

“Ok.., I’ve always felt like I belong here. Even though I have came [sic] when I was umm I came to Canada when I was umm 20.”

“I had my education there.., I went to university there.., like.., I..,I [sic] I am from there.”

“Yea, yet! I never felt strange here..,”

Ali remembered never feeling out of place in Canada from day one, with certainty Ali mentioned that Canada has become a much more accepting society, however he said that not everyone is ready to blend in, pausing and thinking deeper.

“Like the society.., welcomes everybody but not everybody is ready.., to blend in..,”

“It’s.., it’s not the society that’s telling not to blend in it’s it’s [sic] welcoming but you don’t takes you time to [pause]”

“Like the society here umm gives you all the necessary welcomes to observe to get you in but because of your cultural background or you being new you know it takes you time to get in”

“It depends like on each person how long it takes umm him or her to blend in.”

Speaking for himself and for others, Ali mentioned that people are given rights and can freely exercise them when necessary. When I asked if he felt like he had to blend in, Ali said,

“I wanted to blend in”

“I wanted to umm because there’s no sense living in a society..., umm and thinking somewhere else umm there is an an umm [sic] an old saying that “When you are in Rome do what the Romans do”

“So you have to have to [sic] blend not only blend in you should blend in you should, it’s advisable to do that”

“Because it makes your life easier umm your living in a in a [sic] society you might as well be a part of it why why [sic] do you want to be a part of another society when you live in one”

“That has all the umm umm it..., umm the good things in life and it has all opportunities everything you want”

Expressing his thoughts in a confident tone, Ali said that he did not have to change much and lived his way of life the way he wanted to. Ali did not consider blending in to society negatively, from my understanding. Ali believes that learning the language of the country you plan on living in for the rest of your life would make an immigrants life a lot easier. Ali expressed this as something that would help any individual thrive, while keeping their roots.

“The this [sic] country did not ask me to change my heritage”

“Canada does not ask you to change, actually Canada [sic] umm encourage you to keep your heritage and your language and if you know another language”

“Like multiculturalism here is strong and they believe in it it’s not something that they umm they they [sic] umm they like to do, it’s something that they have chosen to be”

“It’s a beneficial thing”

“Because everybody here came from somewhere”

Ali has lived in his current home for nine years, and talked about how much he liked his neighbourhood.

“Yea.., it’s nice quiet neighborhood”

“Everything is nearby”

“Tim Horton, restaurants, Food Basics, whatever..., Shoppers Drug Mart you have a lot of services there”

Ali picked up his granddaughter and gave her a big kiss. He talked about how much he loved spending time with his grandchildren and helping out his sons with their business. He mentioned that these two things keep him busy in life now. Being retired now, Ali said that he is able to spend more time with his family and that is the most important thing to him.

“Yea actually this is the most important thing in life your children are umm normal..,”

“Like umm you feel umm happy and umm you did what umm what you’re suppose to [sic] do”

“Like money or anything I don’t care about that can be reachable..,”

“But I care about their ethics and their umm to me I’ve umm we’ve raised umm decent people let’s say..,”

“So I’m happy for that [pause] I think that’s the [cough] main reason I’m umm quite satisfied..”

I sensed that Ali’s strong feelings of support, belonging and finding his home made his experience that much better. He worked hard to implement the ideas he acquired from Canada and apply them in his home village in Lebanon. He mentioned that he learned a lot through his journey, which I understood helped him find balance in life with good quality friendships.

My Reflections: Nabila Nasir’s Story

Thinking about Nabila’s story, the first thing that came to my mind was when she described how her five-year old brother died in her arms when she was nine or ten years old. She told me that he died of hunger and sickness during war in Lebanon. Her entire story was full of deeply rooted emotions and hurt. When she described her experiences, I recall feeling like I was standing right there with her at the time she left her children, to the time where she was deciding between visiting her sick mother and going to her daughter’s graduation. I remember that during the first interview, Nabila seemed to be holding back. She was telling me general experiences. During the second interview, she began to describe her life story in detail and cried throughout, almost like the pain was new, almost like she had just experienced everything all over again. I sensed that she was not “over” or “past” these experiences and it almost seemed like she cannot go a day without thinking about her past.

Thinking back to what she shared, Nabila mentioned that she never went to school as a child and started working right away at age 15 to help support her family. She took on a lot of responsibility at a young age. I can see that her experiences in the past have shaped a lot of her present life and future perceptions. I remembered that Nabila talked about identity and religion a lot. She began to wear hijab recently, which I sensed was not something she wanted to do but felt she had no choice because of cultural norms. Nabila experienced a lot of hardship and struggle; however, she still managed to somehow keep going.

She experienced living through war, which I found to be a very significant life changing time for her. Her story is one of survivorship and love. What intrigued me most about Nabila is the person she has become today out of everything she went through. She is very kind, caring and open. I struggled less with the process of writing Nabila’s story because I had the practice of writing three others before hers.

Overview of Nabila’s story.

Participant	Nabila Nasir (pseudonym)
Immigration	From Lebanon to the Province of Alberta to Lebanon to London Ontario to the Province of Nova Scotia to London Ontario
Genre	Finding Home Story, Moral Tale, Success Story
Main themes	Belonging, relationships, family, struggle
Major Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a mother and wife • Being a grandmother • Work: Pastry chef, shoe store work associate • Caregiver • Babysitter
Contextual Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Now better life” • “Find life easy now” • “Brother died in my arms when he was five” • Husband’s onset of Alzheimer’s • Forced to wear hijab because of cultural norms • Lived in war and lost three siblings to starvation
Taxonomy of Reminiscence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative reminiscence • Obsessive reminiscence

Born Before Their Time: A Story of Seeking Approval and Searching for Home

Nabila's story.

I remembered watching Nabila look around the coffee shop where we had our first interview. I sensed she was fascinated by everything and everyone around her, because I noticed how she would not stop smiling and observing people around her. I noticed how Nabila was fixated on people's interactions. She watched strangers laugh, talk and sip coffee. I could tell she was thinking deeply. Nabila almost appeared as though she was lost in her own world of thought, yet there was something about her fascination that told me a much deeper story, one that could possibly be deeply rooted in emotions. I remember thinking I hope she will share some of her thoughts.

Nabila described how she was born and raised in a small dusty village of about 300 people. I understood that her destiny was shaped for her by powerful cultural and religious norms at the time. Nabila took a deep anxious nervous breath, and exhaled quickly. She said,

"I was living in a village..., where there was 200, 300 people [pause]. There were 300 and everyone would learn and they would educate the boy and not the girl"

From my understanding, Nabila meant to say that there was a school in her village but the cultural norm favoured educating boys and not girls. However, Nabila mentioned that the wealthy parents and the parents who understood the importance of education for girls would send their daughters to school.

"Because of this the wealthy, the ones with the wealthy parents and the understanding parents, they educated their girls."

"And especially the poorer people didn't teach their daughters..."

"Because the boy, if the girl got educated [laughter] they say she would write a letter to her sweet heart [laughter]"

Nabila's laughter seemed infused with anger and disapproval. She said that people at that time, in her village, would not educate females because they feared that they would be in contact with the opposite gender and this was seen as forbidden, which was a part of the culture at the time. Nabila mentioned that she was not able to go to school because she came from a poorer family, and she remembered how she helped raise her four siblings and worked on her parents' farm, as many children in her village did at the time.

"Work on the farm"

"We have an old farm you know"

"My mom and my and dad have a farm [sic]. It's the farm up there it's nothing like the farm here."

"Only wheat"

"And grapes"

Nabila paused, then described how war began in Lebanon, and how life became a game of survival.

"And there was war, like separated all of us. We don't know where the hit (bomb) is going to come from. Days we would sit in our home, days we would run to the farm,"

"We go to farm..., when the war started the plane they put bomb [sic], some animal they kill, some people you know [sic]"

"But the most thing, houses would collapse"

Nabila said that the village she grew up in was falling apart right before her eyes. She talked about how homes would collapse to the ground from bombs and screams filled the air. Nabila remembered how some homes had a strong

foundation and so those would be the homes that people would run to and feel safe in from bombs.

She said that some houses would even collapse from the piercing noises of bombs when they detonated in the sky or on land. In a serious voice, and a painful expression on her face, Nabila closed her eyes and talked about hearing a powerful air-cutting high pitched, thunder-like sound, the sound of airplanes passing by, instilling fear in people who stood beneath. She described how this noise indicated when the next bomb was coming.

“When we heard some vibrations, we would run away from home. Some houses would collapse from the noise, the noise is loud, there were a lot of houses [pause] collapsed, but the houses that were back in the day are not like the houses now. The houses were old like one floor.”

When asked how many siblings she had, Nabila said,

“We were five”

“Three passed away, see what I mean?”

“From the war, from starvation, from trauma, from anger, from sickness, over there the doctor needed a lot of money to help anyone”

“And he give you the medicine and you find the child very sick, people didn’t know how to cure the sicknesses we find today”

“To give the medicine, any kind of medicine, you give to the child, there are some children who chance is to live, and others chance is death”

I could tell that saying this was difficult for Nabila, because she kept looking down to one side, and I noticed how her words would get stuck in her throat, taking a deep breath every so often. I could never imagine what it would be like to live through war. I have only ever heard stories from my mother and grandparents who have also lived through war when they grew up in Lebanon.

When Nabila spoke about living through war, her words came out as if she was re-living this traumatic life event all over again.

“My little brother died as I was holding him in my hands, he was only five year’s old”

“Five years old.”

“I was holding him, feeding him because he was sick”

“I was feeding him [pause] and he died”

“I started to cry and scream [tears]”

“I was about 9 or 10 years old, something like that [tears]”

“I would cry and scream and yelllllllll [sic] yell yell yell Uncle! Brother of my father! [pause] he didn’t hear me”. [tears]

“My neighbours came over and found me screaming and crying [pause] she took the boy from my hands and told me it’s ok. She gave me water and made me drink. [tears]. The lady was crying with me.”

“I’m crying I’m screaming. She told me”

“Go its ok sweet heart he will get better don’t worry he’s going to wake up” [tears]

“Don’t worry he will wake”. She yelled for her husband and kids to who took me away from beside my brother. [tears]. And I was crying saying no no I don’t want to leave him”.

“In the farm. My mom came and we stayed in the home for 2 weeks and nobody was talking to anyone. My mom, brother and me we started fighting”

As she was telling me this, Nabila began to cry. I could not believe she told me that she lost her little brother in her arms. I also began to cry because it was difficult to hold back my tears. It made me think about my younger brother and how protective I am of him and cannot begin to even imagine something like this happening to him. Nabila described this as the hardest thing she has ever faced in her entire life, something she still thinks about to this day. Being the oldest sister, Nabila said that there would be days where she would imagine talking with her little brother and playing with him.

"This is the most hurt ever"

After losing three siblings to the war, Nabila mentioned that her family decided to move to Canada, where they lived in Alberta for six years. Nabila talked about immigrating to Alberta in 1963 when she was 14 years old.

"1963. When I'm 14, the life..., completely different than now. Now better life. We we [sic] first we came like very hard the language. The people nice, very good, kind, but the language very hard with me. [sic]"

She expressed to me that her family had no financial assistance from the Canadian government. Nabila remembered finding it very hard to live in a country and a language not her own. Nabila talked about finding herself working very hard at a young age, to help support her family with finances.

"We came to Canada I started work..., when..., 15..., almost between almost 16 [laughter] sorry. First we start in the umm work I start dishwasher..., in small coffee shop"

"The government never help us. First we came, the government never never [sic] help now I'm glad now the people coming now [sic] you find nice home..., good food..., lots of car..., first we came we never had a bus."

"No no help from the government"

During that time, Nabila mentioned how her mother became very sick and suffered from a stroke. In order to assist her family, Nabila worked two different jobs trying her best to support her family financially.

“I never come home I working two jobs because my mom sick we help her, pay for the doctor at the time, we pay for the hospital”

Nabila mentioned that her mother asked her father if they could go back to Lebanon because if she were to pass away, she would want to do so in the county she was born in.

“My mom she’s happy back home. [sic]”

“We stay six years in Alberta and my mom said “Oh no I’m, if I’m pass away I like to die where I born, in Lebanon”

With her father reluctant to going back to Lebanon, he finally agreed to go back and he took the entire family. Being in Lebanon again, Nabila talked about the struggles of living in her village, where electricity was always a problem.

“Different life than this, everything handy, you have a heat in the house, you have umm hot water in the house, different you know.”

I expected Nabila to tell me that she got married during her teenage years, as I knew it was the cultural norm back in her time, however to my surprise she talked about getting married when she was 25 years-old to her first cousin. This was an arranged marriage. Nabila mentioned her father and uncle had a close relationship and so it made sense for them to “give away” their children for marriage to each other. Nabila said that soon after she gave birth to two beautiful healthy babies. Nabila described her life as tough because conflicts would arise too often with her husband and mother-in-law.

“My uncle and my dad were like this” (crossed over her fingers indicating they had a tight relationship)

“So my dad never wanted me to leave my husband or my uncle”

“Like how are we as a couple going to live everyday fight fight fight [sic]”

“And his mother use to fight with me a lot (husband’s mother) do you see how? Because of this I got sick of life and I left him”

“From under the head of his mother I said either your mom, your sons, or you? He said “No, my mom and kids”. I said ok take them [pause]”

“You want your mom? Take her. I said can I take the children with me to Canada, he said “No you can’t take the children with you”.

Nabila described this event in an angry voice, but I remember seeing her look away in sadness. I sensed that there was more to come. However, she then began to tell me something I did not expect. Nabila continued to tell me how she decided to run away and come back to Canada. She managed to escape by boat and came to Canada to live with her brother, leaving her children in the care of her mother-in-law and mother.

“My brother before me one year here. I want to come stay with my brother.”

“That’s the best life..., I ever have it [sic]. Me and my brother we live together for one year no fight, no bother, we going to movie, we go eat out [sic]”

“We have..., a great time, the best time of my life”

Feeling free and happy for the first time in so long, as Nabila described, she never wanted to leave this peaceful lifestyle with her brother.

“When it was just me and my brother, we would go, come back and nobody would tell us where are you? Where were you?”

Nabila mentioned she knew that she would not be able to live like this forever, especially because she was not getting along with her brother's wife. Later in life Nabila married again and moved to live with her new husband in Nova Scotia where she stayed for 35 years. It appeared that things finally started looking up for Nabila as she also gave birth to a baby girl. I could tell that her life revolved around her daughter as she raised her with nothing but love and tried her best to give her the best life. Nabila talked about moving from job to job. She worked as a pastry chef for 26 years and helped run her husband's shoe store on the weekend.

"I worked from six in the morning to 1 o'clock, when lunch start I'm leaving, because the kitchen small kitchen [sic], doesn't fit more people [sic]"

Smiling, Nabila said,

"I wake up 4 o'clock in the morning, I have the key my own key for the restaurant"

I could tell that this was something that made Nabila happy, knowing she was given the responsibility and trust to open the restaurant on her own. I could see that this was a time where she felt like she had her life under control and that it meant a lot to her to have people trust her.

"I working with the chef for 26 years. The chef smart chef tell me he teaching me first how he make it [sic] own dessert. I say ok..., how much flour. Put in picture."

"I working for 26 years by picture."

"So I open it I do the and— cake by myself"

"After I finished if I have a time..., I can cook soup for the chef when he coming [sic]"

"I fast worker see not too many people fast"

When she had her daughter, Nabila said that she took on a different job, one where she was able to work from home and take care of her daughter. Nabila began to tell me her opinion on how parents should raise their children. She talked to me about how children used to play outside and enjoy the snow, but now they resort to television or the computer. I noticed how Nabila started to tell me all of this out of the blue, which confused me, however I sensed that she was talking over other feelings she truly wanted to express to me. I could not seem to figure this out what other feelings she was trying to mask but I let her continue talking without interrupting her hoping that it would lead to a possible reason. Soon I realized that Nabila was basically telling me how she would live her life, if she was ever given the chance to start over again. As she continued to speak about children and parents I noticed how her eyes filled with tears when she began to reflect about her life.

“I’m a mom. And I, they took away my kids from me. Their father took them from me.”

“When I see a mother buying toys for her kids, or when she buys them toys, or telephones, I get hurt from the inside.”

“When I see a mom walking with her daughter, I get hurt on the inside. Because my daughter is not beside me.

“When I see a father walking with his sons, I look around and see a shadow and say where are my sons?”

When I asked Nabila if there was anything she did to help her forget about these painful memories, Nabila said,

“Days umm, I would go outside and walk around.”

“Days I would open the window and sit on the balcony.”

“Days I would open the TV”

“I like walking by myself, if I screamed and cried, no one would know”

“I like walking when no one is near me, when there are no people on the roads”

“There are days I walk..., and I cover my eyes because my eyes in these days, I told you before how no more tears fall out, but the questions you are asking me I can’t help but cry today”

“I would ask myself questions”

“Like I mean, why did this happen to me? Why is my life like this?”

Nabila talked about never forgetting about her home in Lebanon and her children she left. She would call her mother and father every so often, sending her sons child support. When her two children from her first marriage grew up in Lebanon, Nabila spoke with them on the phone, but she told me how they gave her the cold shoulder, accusing her of never supporting them.

“They would say “No!, you never sent a thing, we don’t know anything you sent” [sic].”

“I said here are the receipts, look at them [pause]. They would say “Yes but not in our name, you would send them to your mother and your mother-in-law, what do we have to do with it?”

I noticed how Nabila relaxed her shoulders and took a deep breath, almost appearing as helpless. As a metaphor Nabila said,

“But now the story of my life is like Chinese food” [big smile]

“We put in the salt, we put in the spices, we put we put [sic] when the ingredients in the pot became bigger, it started to boil over”

“We come to taste it and it taste bad”

“There is no taste of food, the taste is gone”

“I didn’t have control at all”

“And even until now I have no control” [pause]

“Days I would think back” [Tears in her eyes]

“And days I say, days I say God curse the devil, whatever left won’t come back.”

“I’m good, I’m surviving. When my cup is full, I will go to my lord.”

I noticed that whenever Nabila wanted to talk about the positive side of things, she spoke about her daughter and how she raised her. Nabila talked about providing the best life she could for her daughter. Like many of Nabila’s friends, they would purchase clothing for their children from second-hand stores but, in a calm voice, Nabila mentioned that she did not have the heart to do that. I could tell that Nabila’s daughter meant the world to her. When Nabila’s daughter grew up and got engaged, Nabila told me that her daughter said that she wanted to move away and live with her husband in a different country. When I asked Nabila how this made her feel, Nabila said she was hurt and tried to make her daughter stay with her but her daughter did not agree. Nabila mentioned that her daughter told her to visit whenever she wanted to.

Although to Nabila it seemed like things could not get any worse, her husband became sick and was recently diagnosed with the onset of Alzheimer’s disease. With her daughter leaving and her husband not doing well, Nabila mentioned that she decided to leave Nova Scotia and bring her husband to London, where most of his and her immediate family and relatives lived. Even though Nabila lived in Nova Scotia for 35 years and formed some great relationships with her neighbours this was an important move for Nabila, as she did not want to live in Nova Scotia anymore because her daughter was no longer there with her. She said that she would rather be among people from her home

country she grew up with and thought that this would be a healthy move for her husband.

“When I married off my daughter, I wanted to leave from there because I was alone, I have a lot of close friends but not like family. See what I mean?”

“That is it when I was in Nova Scotia, there is no place more beautiful and I still love it and love the people there but to go back and live there no”

“I go to smell the fresh air, I go to visit, but to go back and live there, no.”

“If my daughter was still in Nova Scotia I wouldn’t have come to London, where my daughter goes I would go”

When I asked Nabila if she missed anything in Nova Scotia, she talked about missing a few good friends and missed the grocery and clothing store she lived by. Now living in a new city at age 67, Nabila feels happy to be among family. Looking back and comparing her past with her present Nabila said,

“Yes. Now the life is pretty. In everything”

“From the people. From the education. From the understanding. From the work. From the money”

“The people who stay happy live among those from their village. You reminisce about the past together, the son of your country, you live together, umm at weddings you are dancing together, you are happy [sic]”

“We play cards, we play with everything and we are all happy is what I mean”

“See the children of my country, my village, we were raised together and drank from the same water and we walked on the same road”

Despite these feelings of happiness, Nabila mentioned that because she has been in London for only a year, she has not yet built close relationships with her neighbours.

“also the Canadian here you can’t knock on their door every hour and say here you go eat”

“See what I mean? Over there the people in Nova Scotia.., we know each other”

“I would come and knock on her door or she would come and knock on my door, we would see each other every day”

“We would come over to each other’s house. We would say oh we cooked extra food today you don’t need to cook today”

“They would eat and say “Thank you”, there are some who would bring to me and give me they would say we can take you anywhere if you need to go somewhere because you don’t have a car”

Nabila expressed that she would like to make new Canadian friends and friends outside her immediate community because she loves them just as much as she loves her own people.

“But here I haven’t yet gotten to know Canadians a lot, understand?”

Nabila mentioned that she enjoys going to weddings, bridal showers, community picnics and dinners because during these gatherings she is able to see family friends and connect with others around the dinner table.

“I get happy, there is a debki (traditional Arabic dance), and dances”

“Old times yea”

“Yes I reminisce the old times and you see new people”

"It comes once in your life. For someone to go outside and smell the air."

Nabila also enjoys spending time with a few friends she trusts the most. I could sense that making friends and keeping them meant a lot to Nabila, as she tends to feel lonely especially with her daughter not being around anymore.

"Like you see them, I have two friends or three friends, they are my close friends"

"I go to their house and they come to mine"

"I have two relatives from my mom's side"

"I see them whenever I want, I don't have to call or anything, I knock on their door and I walk in"

With a smile, Nabila talked about how much she enjoys video-calling her daughter and grandchildren every so often. She also calls her brother who lives in a different country.

"When I talk to my daughter, and my daughter's daughter, son on Skype, I like playing with them"

"I give them my heart. I feed them"

"I get them whatever they favour they like to eat"

"All of them live far"

When asked if she feels well connected, Nabila takes a second to think and said,

"Sometimes I feel lonely"

"Because I don't have brothers or sisters and I don't have anyone from my immediate family"

“On my father’s side, all of them far away, my friends now are from my husband’s side, but there are two who are from my side”

“I trust them and talk with them, and go with them, like I don’t go outside with them, they both are looking after their families but we go drink coffee together and talk and keep each other company, and we reminisce the life we were living before”

“I feel lonely here because..., the friends I had from 53 years ago, I mean we were always together, we would always talk on the phone, we would be cooking and talking on the phone, a phone in their ear and a phone in mine. I didn’t have any problems you see what I mean? But yea sometimes I see myself as one because the life is with the brother and sister. And after the brother and sister there are no more relatives, see what I mean?”

“You get happy when you spend time with your sister and brother, not with your 3^d cousin, you know what I mean?”

I could tell Nabila would love to live with her daughter or even go back to live near her brother again, but she puts her husband first, acting as his wife and caregiver.

“But my mind work..., with him. He put in something in the house. He come use the water, never shut off or he’s sleeping or he’s going I can’t leave, you know, like my mind work all the way.”

Nabila cannot help but think about the past.

“I get hurt [pause] I get hurt a lot and because of how much I cried in my life, my tears have dried up”

“I don’t have any more tears that fall”

“But where do they sit now? In my throat. Some days I choke, and I take the puffer”

“There is a lot on my mind. Thinking about my daughter.”

“I think about my children”

“I think about my father who is living alone”

“I think about my brother who was sick”

“How is the person not supposed to be angry and upset”

Suffering from her past experiences, seeing her immediate family helped Nabila let go of some of her emotional pain. Nabila mentioned that her favorite thing to do is watch movies because she is able to forget about all her worries in the world and immerse herself in the story. Nabila has not been able to let go of many things that have happened to her in the past. I could tell that these experiences have lived with her everyday of her life, but she is able to do the best she can with what she has. I could tell that Nabila appreciates the kind of life she lives now. She is still thankful for everything, as she constantly thanked Allah for everything. I could sense that her kind and giving character keeps her going in life, something I could see that had helped her get through everything.

Narratives Woven: The Power of Story

Famous for his short stories, Rudyard Kipling (n.d) said, “If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten” (A quote from The Collected Works, 2017). Thus, through narrative, people are “passing down beliefs, traditions and history to future generations” (Hamilton & Weiss, 1990, pg. 1). Through storytelling, identities also take shape. Yuval-Davis (2006) points out “identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who are (and who they are not)” (p.28). Identity is dynamic and fluid, “always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong” (Yuval-Davis, 2006 p. 28).

There were several key features that defined social connectedness and social engagement found within each participant's story presented above. For example, in relation to social engagement, Nabila spoke about how much she enjoyed attending weddings, village dinners and bridal showers because she got to know more people and she loved the cultural atmosphere. Ali similarly spoke about loving the social climate in London because "it feels like a small village". With most of the people Ali grew up with in Lebanon, living in London now, he mentioned that there is always something to do with them, whether that be coffee and cards or dinner. Mahmoud talked about Muslim, Arab conventions, clubs he helped to implement and became a community organizer, and stressed the importance of involvement. Aya discussed how much the mosque meant to her because it was where she became a part of the lady's club, along with many social activities she was involved in, one was the epilepsy run, while the other was an initiative for homeless people around London. I found that all participants participated in Muslim community events, except for Nabila. Nabila mentioned that she would like to do more but her only mode of transportation would be the bus, which tends to be exhausting for her and she is her husband's caretaker, which hinders her ability to become socially engaged in the community.

In relation to social connectedness all participants expressed feeling better connected in London now than they were when they first arrived in Canada. All participants emphasized the importance of close family relationships and family interdependence now and over time, which greatly shaped their experiences of social engagement and social connectedness. For example, Ali mentioned that during his business and political work he had no choice but to become friends with everyone. However, because he is retired now, he focuses more on the quality of the relationship than the quantity and has a small group of close friends he always sees for coffee and cards. Ali also spends more time with his children assisting them with their own business by always being there to address any questions or concerns. Ali loves spending time with his grandchildren and plays with them in the backyard and enjoys taking them for walks.

Mahmoud also spends more time with his grandchildren now. He mentioned that when he worked, he would kiss them goodnight and wish them a good morning but barely ever got to see them during the day. Now that Mahmoud is retired he told me that he loves his grandchildren more than his own children because now he gets to see his grandchildren more. Nabila formed many close relationships with her neighbors in Nova Scotia, where they made meals for each other and went out for ice cream and movies with their children. However, with Nabila only being in London for a year and starting to build new relationships with her neighbors, she told me that she misses having close relationships with her neighbors like she used to and hopes to form those again in London. Nabila talked about having two close friendships, which is all she needs. Aya also formed many close relationships with her neighbors like Nabila. These were the relationships that helped her get through many struggles in her life. Aya told me that her and her neighbours relied on each other to help solve family problems and constantly assisted each other with health-related issues. They also drove each other around and saw each other every morning for 24 years.

All participants spoke about the quality of the relationship over the quantity. Even though some made friends with others who were not of the same ethnic or religious background, none were bothered or found any problems in their relationships. In fact, participants enjoyed sharing differences and expanded their social network. In what follows next, I will address each participant's narrative in relation to each theme and sub-theme.

Chapter Five: Results and Thematic Analysis

In this chapter, I will explore two main themes that were generated through a thematic analysis of the co-constructed narrative data: *Past Shaping Present* and *Finding Place: Home Away from Home*. Embedded in each theme are several sub-themes. I will explore each theme and sub-theme, interweaving scholarly literature, participant quotes, and my viewpoint as a researcher. The intent of this strategy is to present a deeper and more cohesive understanding of the study findings, focusing on the participants' experiences of social connectedness and social engagement and the conditions that shape these experiences.

McAdams (1987) mentioned that the stories individuals create from their lives are pieced together from cultural myths, images, settings and plotlines, which are learned from family, community, literature, media and art. Thus, individuals continually revise their life story over their life-cycle, critiquing and applying interpretive knowledge (Clandinin, 2006). This narrative research study primarily examined one period of an individual's life-cycle, that being older adulthood. However, that is not to say that their stories only revolved around being an older adult. Each participant shared experiences from all periods of their life-cycle, which included childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and middle adulthood. These shared experiences from other periods of time helped to bring further understanding to the older adult period by providing context leading up to how they aged in Canada.

Past Shaping Present

All participants shared many experiences from their childhood upbringing, which I later found played a profound role in sculpting their identities as social beings and their experiences connecting and engaging with others. As I have always been captivated and intrigued by stories and cultural tales, when each participant spoke about their childhood upbringing I found it thrilling because I was interested in seeing how their stories compared to my grandparents' story,

who were also Muslim Lebanese Canadian immigrants. I found many similarities and even more differences, which were amazing to hear, especially since the stories came from four fresh and unique new voices I have never heard before.

Each participant shared their story about how they were raised by their parents, and their unique family structure, as they each grew up in different small villages in Lebanon before coming to Canada. There is no question that parents impact a child's life, and most of the time the impact continues when the child leaves the home (Cunningham, 2001). I found that each participant spoke about how their parents instilled certain beliefs, morals and values, which had a profound influence in shaping almost every period of their lives. Each participant described certain ideas their parents emphasized in their upbringing, whether that be the importance of education, gender role expectations, Islamic knowledge, honest work ethic, volunteering one's time, community involvement or strategies to cope with certain life challenges. I found that each participant embodied and weaved many of those parental teachings into how they went about raising their own children and into how they interacted with friends, family and community members. In addition, I noticed how all participants incorporated past experiences, emerging from several periods of their life-cycle when developing their identities, which in turn influenced their interactions with others. There were four overlapping sub-themes that emerged in relation to the first theme *Past Shaping Present*: the importance of family in Arab culture, gender roles and patriarchy in Arab culture, work ethic and work experience, and education; and two sub-themes related to the second theme *Finding Place: Home Away from Home*: power of language and being a Muslim in Canada.

The importance of family in Arab culture.

Mahmoud, Aya, Ali and Nabila all shared unique past experiences related to cultural values. I found that these cultural values shaped their identity and experiences of social connectedness and social engagement, which seemed to revolve around close family relationships and interdependence as well as strong

work ethic. Family values and traditions are important organizing factors of Arab culture, especially for immigrants, as most of the time they act as the only connection between their country of migration and culture of origin (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). Being able to maintain certain meaningful pieces of their culture provides them with feelings of connectedness and belonging (Lijtmaer, 2001).

Identifying cultural and family values emerging from each story and their involvement in shaping their past and present experiences of social connectedness and engagement provides an important context to better understand the participant's narratives. Beitin, Allen and Bekheet (2010) identify common family values among Arab families, which include: religion, parenting, large and extended families, collectivism, relational development, patrilineality and clearly outlined gender roles. Most of these values were found within each participant's story. In Arab, Lebanese, and Muslim culture, there is typically an emphasis on close family relationships and family interdependence (Nassar-McMillian et al., 2014, Wilke and Macron, 2013, Ajrouch, 2017)

All participants came from large families and decided to have their own large family, but this was not a coincidence, as it is a cultural norm for Arabs to come from and have their own large and extended families (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). In Arab culture, I noticed that having a big family is one main ingredient to fostering close family relationships and family interdependence. As children's identities are shaped by the relationship they have with their parents, the parents tend to facilitate high levels of closeness (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014) with each child. From my understanding, parents also teach each child the importance of keeping a close bond between each of their children, because the sibling-sibling relationship is seen as critical for fostering strong family interdependence. Having more children is often a way of giving each child a sibling that is close in age for support and friendship is something I have observed and understood among the Arab Lebanese culture I come from. I also noticed that within Arab families, children are typically given the responsibility of

looking after each other and the older siblings are expected to help raise their younger siblings, which is one way many Arab families begin to instill the importance of close family relationships and family interdependence. From my understanding, these are all aspects that can also be applied to Lebanese families as well.

Mahmoud grew up with six siblings, Aya had five siblings, Ali had nine siblings and Nabila had four siblings. I also come from a large Arab family; my grand-parents and great grandparents had up to 13 children each, and I have six siblings. Many of my relatives came to live in the London area because my grandfather, along with many other families who lived in London around the 1960s, sponsored family members, cousins, neighbours and distant relatives from Lebanon to come to London, where there was ample opportunity to work and educate their children and stay close to one another, in comparison to Lebanon at the time. My family members stayed in close proximity to one another because they valued these connections as well as the financial security such closeness also provided. Like Mahmoud said, that is what many people did. In support, Cohen and Savaya (2003) mentioned that traditional Arab families tend to live in close proximity to one another, which helps to foster meeting social needs, social economic support, and cultural and religious preservation, which are all important factors to facilitating social connectedness and engagement. These reasons help to understand the decisions of Mahmoud, Aya, Ali and Nabila to stay and age in London. These living arrangements can also provide social and economic support (Khalifa, 1988); this appeared to be the case for all four participants.

When I began to speak about coming from a large family of four brothers and two sisters, Mahmoud jumped in and said that he had also lived in a home with his mother and seven other family members. Laughing, Mahmoud mentioned that there was only one washroom and that his mother would always be the first one there every early morning to pray Fajir (the morning prayer).

Along with the importance of living together, Mahmoud mentioned that his mother made sure that they immigrated together.

“She won’t let us come to Canada without her, we all come together.., [sic]

When Mahmoud said this, I thought about my own family and how I am currently living with nine other family members under one roof in a smaller home. Living in a smaller house among nine people can get frustrating at times and it is very easy to fight, however in my case I found that it has helped to foster close family relationships among all my siblings, mother, father and grandmother. Now I cannot imagine living with anything less than what I have, as we do almost everything together as a family such as attend community events, weddings, and dinners and meeting at the park to play soccer. As my uncle would say, each family in the house of Chams has their own soccer team.

Mahmoud also spoke about being inseparable from his siblings and living with his mother and siblings and children under one roof. He told me that the women would prepare the children for school, while the men in his household would wake early and go to work. His mother, sister and wife took on the traditional female role and did not work. Mahmoud supported this idea because he feels the woman’s most important role is raising children. Mahmoud said that everyone made it work by working through everything together.

I could tell how much Mahmoud adored his siblings because he spoke a lot about them throughout his entire narrative, showing me pictures of all of them and telling me about their accomplishments. Pointing to a picture, Mahmoud said,

“Here is when we bought the mosque (showing picture from book). Here is all of us when we had 1950 we started the Muslim Benevolent society...,”

“and my brother who first – he’s the one who did the Athan and he’s the one started it [sic]”

“He was the first chairman because his English was good”

Mahmoud’s brother gave him a camera, which was the best gift Mahmoud has ever received, as he described, because he was able to capture history in the making and save these memories for the next generation.

“make me feel good umm my brother gave me [laughter] camera I enjoy it but I’m not gonna [sic] leave it on the shelf. Ok, so I use it when opportunity comes even for my grandchildren I save some picture for them in the camera [sic] equal to that one so they can have it, so they can use it for good deed...”

I remember seeing Mahmoud’s eyes glisten as he spoke about how everything started and how his brother was the lead of many clubs and community events.

“So we start in the basement of London Muslim Mosque, London Muslim Canadian Arab Society, my brother was the first president and then before 6 months we start Canadian Arab Federation and the president was from my village...”

He pointed to a picture with his brother speaking to a crowd of people at the park, during a community event. His brother also spoke at the reunion they organized together, bringing over 1,100 people to his home village in Lebanon.

“I didn’t speak, my older brother spoke when he was speaking and watching the people crying you don’t believe...[he began to cry a little]”

“You don’t believe, my cousin from Brazil both of them start crying... Oh my god [laughter] [started to cry]”

“because everyone was so excited...”

From that time, people in Mahmoud's village continue having the reunion every year, which facilitated social engagement and gave people the opportunity to expand their social network.

"Umm the society they have it every year you know the organization the culture society they call it in the village in Lebanon."

Mahmoud and his brothers always worked towards improving their society by suggesting ideas. For example, Mahmoud's brother noticed how far away the hospital was in his village in Lebanon, and noticed how people were suffering.

"My brother told umm the head of the benevolent society of the village the Canadian Benevolent society of my village in Lebanon he said "Why can't we do something this clinic is far away the village in the mountain" so he said "What, don't you have land"

That was when Mahmoud took the initiative and collected hundreds of hospital items and sent them off to his home village in Lebanon, as described in his narrative.

Presently, Mahmoud spends some time calling his siblings and he mentioned that they still take the initiative to help families in need who are coming to Canada now. They work together and organize funds for Syrian refugee families. Mahmoud also mentioned that he loves having all of his grandchildren over for dinner. He requests that each child place their cell phone in the living room while they eat together as a family so that there will be no interruptions because he values family time.

Mahmoud was not the only participant who emphasized the importance of close family relationships and family interdependence. Nabila also talked to me about the importance of living among her family and how she wished she was living close to her brother. In speaking of her father, Nabila described him as being very strict about everything she did. For example, he would not allow her to go out to many social gatherings, or stay out late at a wedding. He would also go

shopping with her whenever she needed something. I wanted to know if that has shaped her social experiences in the past and now, so I asked Nabila to tell me a little bit more about her father and his strictness. I was expecting her to tell me negative experiences, however she began to tell me that it was tough love and nothing more.

“My dad spoiled me a lot.”

“A lot. But I mean, he would tell me I mean “When you go to weddings at night, you are not allowed”

“Because there are young men who dance and hug. He was an old man he knows about life.”

“if we go to the restaurant he would take us”

“If we ever wanted to buy something he would be with us and if you want a couple of items he would get them for you, he wouldn’t say no but if he didn’t like it in his opinion he would say “This is not for you”

I understood that her father valued the idea of collectivism and close family relationships. Nabila also told me that when they moved to Alberta her parents relied on her to work and also support the family financially at age 14. When Nabila moved to Nova Scotia to be with her second husband, she told me that she would always send her parents money and support whenever she got the chance. To my surprise she told me that her father is still alive and lives in Lebanon now, and is 107 years old. She told me that he would call her and tell her to come visit him before he passes away, which is something she planned on doing in the near future. I sensed that she did not want to talk about her father further, and so I let it go and we moved on.

I could tell that Nabila’s past experiences of coming from a poorer family, having a strict up-bringing and having to save almost every penny is something that has followed her up until now. She mentioned to me that she enjoys going to

community dinners but it would depend on how much they are, which is another factor that hinders her ability to stay socially connected and engaged. Nabila has always lived a minimalist lifestyle. I asked Nabila to share with me why she enjoys going to weddings and she said that she is able to get to know people, however what she said next took me by surprise. She said,

“There are people who pass by, me and them used to be good friends, they pass by and put their head in the ground. And they don’t speak with me. I was friends with them since I was little, I mean like in Lebanon”

I asked Nabila why she thinks that is and she said,

“I mean I don’t know. They pass by me and only say hi. I like inviting them to my house.”

“Yea inshallah tomorrow, inshallah tomorrow!” If you like me, whatever work you have, you can stop work and you can come see your friend for 10 minutes”

“Or 15, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, you don’t have to stay for more than 20 minutes”

“Here there isn’t a community anymore”

“Like you see them, I have two friends or three friends, they are my close friends”

Nabila could not understand why some of her friends treated her in such a way.

“I go to their house and they come to mine”

Even though I found that that having many social connections provides an individual with various resources such as social and financial support or cultural connectedness, I could tell that Nabila was more invested in the quality of the

relationship over the quantity and especially values her relationship with her sibling. She told me that whenever she wanted to visit her brother, he would purchase her plane ticket and always take good care of her. Even though she lived among most of her relatives now, Nabila does not feel as connected as she thought she would be living in London, as she spoke about feelings of loneliness in her narrative. It is clear that Nabila feels closer to her immediate family, as presented in her narrative, and that she feels a sense of disconnection because she does not have immediate family in close proximity. Nabila believes that,

“The people who stay happy live among those from their village. You reminisce about the past together, the son (meaning the child) of your country, you live together, umm at weddings you are dancing together, you are happy [sic]”

“See the children of my country, my village, we were raised together and drank from the same water and we walked on the same road”

Even though Nabila mentioned that she does not get along with some of her previous friends, I understood that she did not want to let go of the idea that they were raised drinking from the same stream, which was meaningful to her. As much as Nabila wanted to be close with her family members and share the common cultural value of interdependence, she finds it hard when both her daughter and brother live in different countries. I found that the relationships she made with her neighbours when she lived in Nova Scotia for 35 years, who were of different ethnicity and religious beliefs, acted as a substitute, which provided her with a feeling of interdependence. However, having to start new social relationships is something Nabila wished had a ‘fast forward button’. This was not the case for Aya, as she has lived in London since she was 19 years old.

When her grandchildren are visiting Aya loves to play Arabic music and teaches them how to dance the traditional Arabic way. Every Eid, as a family her children put together a family trip for Aya and her husband, as she told me she spent last Eid camping at the beach. Aya’s children still depend on her for advice,

as she told me that her son and daughters call every so often asking what they should do.

Like Aya, Ali also lives among many of his close family members in London. He lives in a big house and is allowing his son's family to live in his house as well. When I walked into Ali's home I noticed baby toys scattered everywhere, along with bottles, highchairs and colorful books. Ali is surrounded by his family every day, where he spends a lot of time with his grandchildren. His other children also live in London and come to visit him every so often. His daughter is also helping to raise her nieces, which is all helping to foster interdependence among family members and building strong social relationships.

Having these friendships, social networks, family ties and community connections can be a major source of support in all stages of the life-cycle. Arabs, including Lebanese Arabs, come from communities that value collectivistic culture and interdependence and therefore give and receive diverse types of support from one another (Nassar-McMillian et al., 2014). Family is seen as a social and financial resource within Arab culture (Abdulrahim, Ajrouch & Antonucci, 2015). In Lebanon, ageing is associated with larger networks, bringing more positivity to one's life (Abdulrahim et al., 2015). For ageing Lebanese immigrants, socialization and social support within immediate and extended family is encouraged, and seen as an importance resource, and is understood as "the axis of Lebanese values, beliefs and culture" (Farhood, Zurayk, Chaya, Saadeh, Meshefedjian & Sidani, 1993, p. 1566). I found that being able to identify with the cultural community played a profound role in shaping participants experiences of social connectedness and engagement, as I found participants used it as a source of resilience, belongingness and connectivity. Family ties are even more critical for older Arab adults, as family relations tend to be their main source of security in later life (Farhood et al., 1993).

However, for some, relocating may impact one's ability to obtain this sort of support, as in the case for Aya and Nabila in particular. Even though social

relations and social capital can be acquired at any point in life, it can take time and effort to develop new social ties. It can become a life goal for immigrants to re-build new friendships, as these play an important role in their wellbeing and shaping their social activity. It has become clear that social contact varies in relation to immigration status. For example, Aya came to Canada and already had immediate family living in the country, but they were not as supportive as she expected them to be and so she struggled at first making social ties. Once she became involved at the local mosque she made friends and retained those active community and neighbourhood connections by constantly being engaged in voluntary initiatives and socializing with her neighbours consistently. In contrast, Nabila made many close friendships when she lived in Nova Scotia for 35 years, however she lost those connections when she more recently moved to London, Ontario, as of last year. Since the mosque is not a place where Nabila often goes she depends exclusively on close neighbour relations and family members for social interactions.

I question how older immigrant adults, particularly Arab and Muslim Lebanese individuals, maintain interconnectedness and close family ties. In this study, I found that volunteering for Mahmoud and Aya helped to facilitate intergenerational connections beyond family, which promoted a sense of purpose and utility. Mahmoud mentioned that he sees more and more younger people coming to the mosque, which makes him very happy, because he believes that the youth are the future generation and should work towards promoting and improving the Islamic community. Mahmoud maintained interdependence by forming close relationships with his deceased friends' children and always being at the mosque communicating with people about its history. Mahmoud also maintained connectedness in other ways, such as donating several books he created on the history of the Arab, Muslim community in London, along with directories and photos of people who helped establish the Muslim community, to the central mosque for people to take or read. Ali on the other hand, does not involve himself in mosque activities. He maintained his social interdependence by constantly interacting with his family members who are also living with him in

the same house and visiting Lebanon once a year to be with his friends and relatives.

Results found in a study conducted with Muslim elders indicated that there was an astounding emphasis placed on community social connections to prevent loneliness (Ajrouch, 2017). An Imam from this study noted,

“Also there are many who feel loneliness in the community. Even if they have family support, you expect family support, but loneliness from the community is more likely... Muslims need other Muslims. Christian family members can’t offer them Muslim support on spiritual issues. We need other Muslims to be concerned, and give to our elders that which they can only get from us...” (p. 139)

This narrative shows the general concern that community connections are critical to overcome loneliness for Muslims, recognizing that family cannot address all social needs. In Nabila’s case, because she is unable to make community connections due to her transportation difficulties, and with her immediate family living in different countries, she said that she finds herself lonely at times. Nabila tried to maintain interdependence by using Skype to see her daughter and grandchildren and she mentioned that she also calls her brother every so often, but he does not know how to use Skype. Aya also uses Skype and Facebook to stay in contact with her friends and family. Similarly, Ali uses Facebook and Instagram to stay connected with his immediate family and community in London and in Lebanon. In contrast Mahmoud only uses the phone to stay in contact with his friends and family, and mentioned he is unable to use the computer. Even though face-to-face communication and family interactions cannot be replaced by technology, the findings along with other literature support that individuals are able to maintain a unified relationship using these technologies (Liu, Guo, Xu, Mao & Chi, 2016).

For all participants family values and interdependence were two major factors that shaped their experiences of social connectedness and engagement.

For most participants family acted as an important source of social support during their acculturation process. Family also worked towards helping one another become involved in their community, as most participants socially participated in community events and initiatives with their family members.

Gender roles and patriarchy in Arab culture.

From the moment we are born, a gender belief system is enforced on us (Jarviluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö, 2003). Expectations are imposed on men and women to follow the cultural ideal of gender and to “become intelligible to, and accepted members of their community” (Harris, 2004, p. 14). Gender roles may constrain or facilitate an individual’s social and physical involvement in society. In addition, “the sociocultural possibilities implied in being a man or a woman, and what is socially expected of each, vary enormously depending on place, period and personal situation” (Jarviluoma, et al., 2003, p. 3). In the current study, participants negotiated expected gender roles in a variety of ways, with resulting impacts on their social connections and social engagement.

Nabila described the cultural norms around females receiving an education during her time, specifically growing up in her village, when she was a child. I could tell Nabila hated this idea by her bitter tone of voice and an angry expression on her face, but she tried hiding her emotions by smiling quickly. Nabila said,

“There were 300 and everyone would learn and they would educate the boy and not the girl. Because the boy, if the girl got educated [laughter] they say she would write a letter to her sweet heart”

I understood that this was not for all girls; some families would allow their daughters to go to school, depending on their beliefs. Unfortunately, Nabila’s parents could not afford to put her in school, nor did they want to go against cultural norms.

In contrast to Nabila, Mahmoud described how his mother placed all of her children, boys and girls, in school and encouraged them to keep questioning and learning. She did not follow the traditional Arab cultural norms when it came to expected gender roles. She also emphasized the importance of working hard in order to become independent and Mahmoud said that she especially stressed always lending a helping hand to anyone in need. Mahmoud said that his mother had the same expectations for her sons and daughters, and did not see them differently based on their gender.

“Even my both sister [sic] they finish Quran when they were 9 years old read it...”

“And when it get [sic] dark everybody home! Boys and girls [laughter] you know?”

When Mahmoud said this, I sensed he wanted to emphasize how his mother did not raise her children under traditional Arab patriarchal views. Joseph (1993) described traditional Arab patriarchal societies as a hierarchy based on gender expressions, social connectedness and age, not gender alone. She suggested that patriarchy empowers cultural and structural relationships that facilitate self-development, which emerges from connectedness among and within family relationships (Joseph, 1993). Men and elders tend to express and structure the lives of youth and women, which is done in a way to facilitate interdependence (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). Furthermore, gender roles tend to differ in their expression from home to home, which are influenced by age and degree of expression. For example, Mahmoud’s mother took on the role of being the mother and father after Mahmoud’s father passed away and so that changed Mahmoud’s entire family dynamic. His mother decided to treat all her children equally. Aya also experienced a unique gender role expectation, where she was given the role of taking care of her father’s business when this would be seen more as a male’s role. She was also given permission to leave and go to Canada as a single Muslim female, which is completely out of the ordinary when it comes

to following Arab cultural norms because from my understanding of Arab gender roles, the traditional Arab culture expectations for females is that they stay at their parents' home until they get married. I found that gender norms in the Arab culture that the participants lived in presented constraints on education for females. I found that gender roles were embedded for many participant's from childhood, however they exercised them differently in later life when it came to their children. For example, even though Nabila never went to school and learned to drive a car at a later age, she mentioned to me how her daughter went to school and how she taught her daughter how to drive at a young age.

The uniqueness and complexity of each participant's family structure challenged the literature that labels the Arab culture as patriarchal, ignoring the complexities and intricacies of relations in Arab families. Gender is considered a critical factor that determines social experiences in old age (Abdulrahim et al., 2015). I found that each participant's experiences pertained to some aspects of traditional patriarchal Arab culture. For example, even though Mahmoud mentioned how his mother gave the same responsibility to both her sons and daughter, he spoke about how his mother, wife and sister raised the children while he and his brothers worked. He also talked about how he preferred it this way more because he believed that mothers play the most important role in a child's upbringing. I also noticed how Mahmoud and his brothers took on lead roles when socially participating in their community, while the women helped to coordinate and organize events. Nabila expressed how her father arranged her first marriage and how she was not permitted to attend school because was not the norm in her village, which was a part of traditional Arab culture at the time. I found that this affected Nabila's ability in the future to build her social connections and become socially engaged in her community because she found herself unhappy and lonely at times. Nabila did not participate in any voluntary positions or help to organize community events, as she mentioned that she was the care taker of her husband and could not leave him alone without her supervision. Aya on the other hand was given more of a "male's role" when she was in charge of running her father's business. I believe that this made her into a

stronger and more capable individual, where she built strong social connections and engaged in community events, regardless of her gender.

Studies show that men and women report similar patterns in relation to quantity and frequency of social relations within and outside family relations (Antonucci et al., 2013; Chemaitelly, Kanaan, Beydoun, Chaaya, Kanaan & Sibia, 2013). I also found this to be characteristic of the findings in this study. Mahmoud, Ali, Nabila and Aya all mentioned the importance of quality relationships, and having few close friends and spending time with their grandchildren. Interestingly I noticed that Mahmoud and Ali took on more leadership roles when engaging in community initiatives, while Aya preferred to be a member participating 'behind the scenes', aligning with traditional Arab gender roles. All participants spoke about the importance of being with their grandchildren, but I found Aya and Ali had the opportunity to spend more time with them face to face.

In relation to gender roles and patriarchy in Arab Culture, hijab also played a role in shaping Aya and Nabila's experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. It was not a part of my study to observe hijab, it was to my surprise that both women wore it. Yet I knew that being a Muslim woman living in Canada, wearing hijab was a significant part of their identity. I did not ask if hijab affected their daily life activities, however I noticed that it was something they automatically spoke about in their narratives.

Later in her life Nabila decided to wear hijab, not because she wanted to but because she felt pressured into it by gendered-cultural expectations. The Islamic hijab is an ongoing debate all around the world among Islamic religious leaders. Nabila believes,

“But the religions that came down did not say for the woman to cover her head, or wear revealing clothing”

“And me, the faith in my heart is not in the covering of my hair, not in the clothes I wear, not in anything, the faith is in the heart”

I observed Nabila remove her hijab when we sat in the conference room before we started her interview. She unwrapped it aggressively and threw it to the side of the room and then unzipped her sweater and sat back comfortably in a t-shirt. From my observation and understanding based upon what she said about hijab, she wore it to fit in culturally. I asked myself how this must have shaped her experiences of social connectedness and social engagement, and I realized it is all a part of fitting in with her Lebanese, Muslim community, or she would be seen as an outcast. I did not ask Nabila if hijab affected her life in any way, but through implicit evidence, among the Lebanese Arab community I live in, I noticed that if a Muslim woman, who is past the age of 50, has not yet put on the headscarf she is talked about and seen as an unfortunate and shameful case. Both Aya and Nabila talked about being taunted by their Muslim, Arab community about not wearing the head scarf sooner.

Aya on the other hand mentioned that she wished that she wore hijab a long time ago. With Aya being 63 and putting hijab on nine years ago she told me that,

“People ask me why did I wear the hijab now, all these years why just now,”

“I’m like ok I was always a Muslim I I [sic] prayed, I worshipped God but now I understand it better”

“I feel like I should have wore it”

“It’s never too late for me and I wore it and I think it’s the best way and people accept me the way I am”

In relation to social connectedness, for Aya and Nabila, I sensed that hijab provided them with a sense of belonging and cultural identity in the Arab, Muslim

sphere. Since most of Aya's friends and family members also wore hijab I sensed that it made her feel even more connected because she was able to identify among others of the same religious beliefs and dress. Nabila's friends and family members also wore hijab but she did not speak about it further. In regards to social engagement, Aya mentioned being able to participate in whatever she wanted to freely and that there was only one time where she felt scared, which was mentioned earlier in her narrative account, in regards to the epilepsy run. The epilepsy run was one event she talked to me about that happened outside her immediate Lebanese, Muslim community and was more a part of the London community as a whole. This made me reflect upon her negative experience and made me question if that would be one reason as to why she did not participate in events outside her community. For Aya wearing hijab affected her experiences at work but it did not affect her social relationships outside of her work place, in fact, she told me that she got compliments for wearing it. Aya spoke about wearing hijab and going to work before she retired. In a strong voice Aya said that she still went to work and she had no sense of fear when she left the house to shop or get groceries. However, Aya seemed confident in wearing hijab, while Nabila seemed annoyed by it because she did not truly believe in the practice. Aya spoke more about hijab in regards to her surrounding social environment. For example, Aya would usually experience discrimination after the media released a story on a violent attack in relation to Muslims or Islam. In relation to social connectedness, Aya was not able to get along with many people at work and found it difficult to work in a previous place of employment because of the tension and arguments that took place due to discriminatory comments said to her by her co-workers. When Aya expressed to me she recently retired, she rolled her eyes back and waved her hand, indicating she was happy to leave her job because she did not enjoy the people she worked with.

Overall I found that patrilineality influenced some participant's experiences of social connectedness and social engagement more than others. I also found patriarchy to be more complex than just male domination, it is also related to social connectedness and gender expressions. In support of this, Joseph (1993)

suggested the term patriarchal connectivity, which permits for cultural and structural relations that facilitate self-development through family ties. This was also the case for all four participants, as they saw patriarchy as a way of forming more social connections.

Work ethic and work experience.

Work ethic was another important factor that Ali, Mahmoud, Nabila and Aya's parents emphasized during their upbringing. I noticed that all participants applied what they were taught by their parents and worked hard to establish themselves financially through work. Their jobs not only brought them financial support but also provided them ways of becoming more socially connected.

Nabila said that she was able to gain a good work ethic from working on the farm and was able to learn new things faster than most people. Feeling confident in her skill set, Nabila said,

"They would never dare to laugh at me. At my age now, place two people with me, who are educated in the kitchen, in the farm, in cleaning, I can place them on the tip of my baby finger"

She implied that she is very good at cooking, cleaning and farming, and that anyone with an education, who does not know much about these occupations would not have the skill set she had, but she feels that educated people tend to think they know how to do everything and that people who did not get educated know nothing. I could tell that this was something that bothered her, I understood that maybe she was not respected for her skill set or maybe she felt pressure from societal norms where her skill set was looked down-upon.

Aya became an independent young lady at the age of eight years old. Insistent on helping her father run his small local village business in Lebanon, her father trusted her and gave her the opportunity to do so. Aya remembered running to her father's shop after school ready to switch shifts with him. While she described the scene, Aya smiled, coming across as delighted and proud in a

sense. I thought about why she smiled so hard, maybe because she was given this opportunity out of all her siblings or maybe because this allowed her to become closer to her dad.

“When I work back home I worked with my father we own our own business [sic] and I was kind of umm in control of everything”

Whatever the reason may be, I sensed that Aya found more than just happiness through this childhood experience. From my understanding, working for her father helped her gain better communication skills and a stronger sense of control. This experience also allowed her to become independent and build a trusting relationship with her father, while instilling the importance of responsibility. I remember that these were all skills I gained working in retail at the age of 15. I remember it gave me a feeling of empowerment, maturity and ownership knowing I was trusted to do tasks that I perceived were meant for people older than me and I could tell that Aya felt the same way. I noticed how she used and developed these skills further, which helped her become the strong, trusted and resilient person she is today. She also applied many of these skills at her workplace and formed warm protective relationships with her co-workers at her there, neighbours and people she worked with when organizing and implementing events for the Muslim community.

Looking back, Aya remembered when her father reluctantly let her go to Canada to be with her sister. She turned 20 in Canada and she described never forgetting her father's words when she had troubles settling and integrating into the community. With her father, always being by her side giving her advice, she remembered how he would always push her to try and try again whenever she failed at something.

“Just always used to say try the best of you can”

“I will remember his words yea I will remember that he said I'm he knows he's, I'm not going to fail him”

“But it did it did [sic] help me through always being on the right track. Every time like I’m going to do something is not right I said no no no my father [sic] said that you know, especially when you young you know”

“Because you always kept the value of the way which I’m we go to the bottom line of how you raised your children”

“My father was always hard working man and he always..., use to tell us to., try again try again [sic]”

Aya described keeping her father’s words very close to her and implementing what he taught her with her own children, as she decided to stay and raise them in London.

“Used to tell my daughter people who makes mistakes people don’t do nothing in life, don’t ever be afraid ashamed of your mistakes”

“And he— she use to be very afraid umm scared embarrassed with her mistakes”

“So I had a big sign on the fridge, people who don’t do mistakes people don’t do nothing”

“If you make mistakes that means you’re trying and to make mistakes and stop that’s bad”

Similarly, Mahmoud explained how his mother instilled a good work ethic in him and his siblings by teaching them the importance of independence. Ali on the other hand pointed towards the help of his uncles and teaching himself.

In relation to work ethic, all participants applied what they were taught, growing up with their families, to their work experience in Canada. Employed Canadians who are of Lebanese origin are currently likely to be employed in management positions, scientific and technical occupations, and in sales and service jobs (Statistics Canada, 2007). I found this also to be the case for Aya,

Mahmoud, Ali and Nabila, as they all shared their work experiences in Canada with me. Aya and Ali were the only participants who talked to me about working in their country of origin when they were younger, while Mahmoud and Nabila began to work in Canada when they first arrived. All participants are now retired. Each participant spoke to me about the very first job they began working to the one they ended up retiring from. I noticed that all participants associated their work experience with a sense of establishment in Canada, which ultimately allowed them to integrate into the larger community. Their work experiences were also related to their social connectedness and engagement, in several unique ways, which will be unpacked in the following paragraphs.

Mahmoud started working at the same time he was taking English classes. He began to learn about trade and continued to go to night school for five years, while continuing to work.

“I went to trade school and I learned blue printing [sic], learned welding. I mean this helped me get the good jobs [sic]”

He said it was easy for him and his brothers to find a job because factories were hiring during that post war time and the ‘community pioneers’ also helped Mahmoud and his brothers during this process. For immigrants, coming to Canada and building social networks and connections opens the door for job opportunities (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013). Associational membership with a shared identity and interests are found in informal groups (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013), just like the one Mahmoud had with the Lebanese community in London. This group helped to establish social relations and create social capital. Having contacts with family and friends is important for access to jobs (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013), as I noticed this to be the case for my family as well. Since my father came to London when he was nine months old and my grandparents decided to stay in London, my dad was raised in London and so he worked at many different places building all sorts of social ties. As my grandparents sponsored other family members to come to London from Lebanon, once they

arrived, my father would help them find jobs, as he was already a well-known worker at many factories. A vast majority of my aunts and uncles found positions because my father provided a reference for them.

Mahmoud also worked at eight different factories and said that working in these factories helped to further establish his skill set and enhance his employment prospects. Later, he was able to save enough money and learn about business, eventually becoming the owner of a variety store and hotel. Mahmoud spent a majority of his young adulthood and adult life working. He expressed to me that he worked with men and women, where he heard all sorts of stories. In a loud and proud voice Mahmoud said,

“I was here in Canada only four years and I was a foreman and I had 6 Canadian young men work for me and 32 girls...”

“I had a variety store for 9 months my wife used to bring me lunch on the bus because I couldn’t even go to the restaurant”

With his eyes widened, Mahmoud mentioned that during the time he owned the variety store, women would ask if they could smoke inside as it was seen as shameful for women to be seen smoking in public. After telling me this Mahmoud pointed out how much things have changed, in regards to gender equality, since that time. I found that Mahmoud connected to the wider community through his work experiences. These men and women Mahmoud worked with became his good friends. He also formed many close friendships with his clients, who still meet up with him at the mall to have coffee and reminisce about the past. I noticed that Mahmoud relied heavily on his network of past co-workers and clients, since most of his Lebanese, Muslim friends have passed away, as he finds happiness in old friendships he had from his past occupations. Even though people tend to seek friends who are like themselves in a few ways, it has become clear that shared ethnicities are not sufficient bases for all close friendship (Ryan, 2011). For example, Mahmoud made friends with many Christian Canadians, which he also saw and treated like his own brothers.

He mentioned to me that he is still close friends with one and that he was his best man at his wedding.

Aya's path was different. She had many different jobs, and often quit because she did not like taking orders from others.

"I didn't do good..., I didn't..., obey..., you know the— I didn't know how to"

"My father use to say "You the one in control you do everything, I'm use to nobody boss [sic] me around [sic]"

"So I didn't realize I'm doing something wrong here the first experience I got upset because the supervisor was mad at me because I didn't do something right and then I'm like why she talking to me like this.., so I left [laughter]"

"That's what happened..., finally the second job it was the same thing..."

When Aya talked to me about her work experiences after she immigrated, she did not mention forming any meaningful relationships. Since she was going from job to job, I found that Aya did not seem to prioritize making friends as she was still figuring out her place in London. In addition, because she felt like her credentials were not recognized she often would not get along with her co-workers. For many immigrants, the recognition of credentials is important as it helps to reinforce their identity and matters significantly for status attainment (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013). After 12 years, Aya returned to work when she felt her children were mature enough to be on their own. In 1988, Aya worked for two different companies at the same time.

"I was doing alterations for them and sales on the sale and after that they weren't paying much money you know minimum wage so I was looking for a bigger you know I want something more. I went to the hospital and I work housekeeping for a bit and dietary aid."

This was a big step for her. I noticed how her smile would not fade when she mentioned this and she was looking down, almost shy to show how happy she was when she was finally able to get a job with a respected title, a job at a well-known hospital.

“And that was the best I did yea [laughter]”

Aya worked as a dietary aid for 26 years and had recently retired from the position. She mentioned that she loved the work aspect of it but she did not get along with many people who worked with her. She said that people at her work place often took advantage of new workers by blaming them for mistakes they did not make and that if one was not able to stand up for oneself, one could easily get fired. She formed one close relationship at work with a woman who was also Muslim and wore hijab, just like herself. However, her friend unfortunately ended up leaving because she could not take the competitive nature and negative work environment. Even though her friend left work, Aya was still in contact with her. Now that she was retired, Aya expressed feeling more relaxed and spent a lot more time with her grandchildren.

Ali's work experience was interesting. He began working as a dishwasher and busboy at a restaurant while he was completing university. Once he completed his degree Ali worked for two different insurance companies during different times. With his uncles owning their own business, Ali added that they told him to open one as well and that they would be there to help, and that is what Ali did.

“I had my own business and I was well off for a while and I had opened umm more stores..”

When Ali had to close his stores, he moved to Lebanon and became a community organizer and a teacher. Seeing the devastation in his home village in Lebanon after the civil war, Ali said he had to stay to help put his village back together.

“it was difficult to start over again there”

“It was devastated umm no services to speak of like electricity, water, roads it was just..., devastated like I said”

Even though it was tough for his family, it became his mission. Ali described this experience as fulfilling. Sending his children back to Canada for education, Ali spent a lot of his time traveling back and forth between Lebanon and Canada.

One year Ali decided to run for mayor in his home village in Lebanon. He said to me that he was tired of seeing people struggle in his village and tried very hard to implement change but it was not working at his level of involvement, which is why he decided to run for mayor. Once Ali became mayor, he was able to implement most of his ideas, which included repairing the main road and installing sidewalks as mentioned in his narrative earlier. When Ali expressed the changes, he implemented, I could hear the enthusiasm in his voice. I sensed that this was a large achievement for him. Through this experience, Ali met many people. He told me that he made hundreds of friends and social relationships throughout his political involvement in Lebanon and his businesses in London, however Ali expressed this became somewhat problematic. The more people you know the more problems you will most likely have, as Ali puts it. I understood that because Ali had so many friends it became hard for him to maintain all of his friendships and so I understood that he became overwhelmed and had to let some friendships go. However, I sensed that he is happy knowing he does not have to deal with so many people anymore and he became more interested in forming quality relationships over focusing on the quantity of friends. Like Aya and Mahmoud, Ali is now retired and spends most of his time with his grandchildren and giving advice or helping his children.

Just like Ali, Nabila worked as a dishwasher in a small coffee shop when she came to Canada. However, Nabila had a very negative experience there. She explained that since she could not speak English, nor did she understand it

very well, she was taken advantage of by her co-workers. She explained that they taught her how to say derogatory words, and ordered her to say those words to the manager they worked for. When she told me this, I noticed how her face turned red, which indicated to me that she was still embarrassed by that experience. After her manager addressed what she said to him, she realized they were teaching her inappropriate words, Nabila told me she worked very hard for 15 months straight and never used those words again. She then asked her manager for a raise and he gave her an extra 50 cents an hour, which Nabila said was considered a lot during that time. In relation to social connectedness, and forming social ties at work, this experience influenced her social interactions with her co-workers, as she told me that she stopped talking and listening to them because she could not trust if they would be telling her the right thing. She mentioned that she worked with people younger than herself, who were in university at the time, and she enjoyed watching them grow and get good jobs.

When Nabila moved to Nova Scotia, she worked at her husband's shoe store on the weekends and as a pastry chef on the week days for 26 years. Working as a pastry chef was Nabila's favorite job because she was given the responsibility of opening the restaurant in the mornings and was able to make beautiful cakes. She took pride in being able to make tastier cakes than the chef.

"Chef is educated two to three years as a cook"

Nabila pointed out that she made many friends working in these two jobs. She mentioned that her customers would see her at both places and even on the bus, which was something she absolutely loved. Nabila had retired from her positions and was spending most of her time with family and her husband. When I asked Nabila how she feels now that she has finished working she said,

"Umm now I'm relaxed"

"I miss work but I don't have any more complaints"

“And I like work, I’m the kind that likes work, I like people and I like to get to know people.”

“Yes I miss it.”

I asked her what she missed about it and she said,

“I miss the people I used to know”

“I miss the cake I used to make”

“I mean not a lot really, from how many cakes I made I got frustrated”

Now that all participants are retired, I understood that Nabila missed having social connections at work, while Ali, Mahmoud and Aya replaced their old connections with new ones or maintained older friendships. I found that the workplace was an important setting for developing larger and more diverse personal ties. For all participants, work-related social relationships acted as an important source of social integration where they were able to exchange ideas and experiences, which helped to strengthen their sense of connectedness (Ryan, 2011). I also found that keeping work-related personal ties continued to serve as a valuable addition to other personal relationships. For example, I understood that their work experience played a critical part in their identity and continued to do so after retirement. New relationships outside the work context may only know them as “old retired people”, while work mates know them by their work titles and personal story. As a result of keeping close relationships, replacing old mates for new friendships or making new ones after retirement, I found that this helped to enhance their social lives.

Studies have found that older adults who retired and replaced their work friends with new friends or retired and stayed socially engaged through community activities, clubs, and events lived a happier and long life as they grew older (Davidson & Vaillant, 2016; Vaillant & George, 2012). In relation to work, social capital and having social ties at your workplace is key to productivity and

improves happiness (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013). I see this with Mahmoud. I reflect about my grandmother who raised six children all alone in Lebanon, while her husband worked in a different country. From my understanding, she went through a lot of stress, anxiety and even depression because there was war happening at the time. My grandmother broke down many times and she was in Canada when she received the news that her husband passed away from a heart attack. Thinking about how hard and stressful my grandmother's life was and seeing how now she has Alzheimer's disease, I cannot help but think stress could have triggered an early onset of dementia in her case. It makes me appreciate how social connectedness, engagement, participation and good quality relationships can change your life around not only emotionally but physiologically, most of the time contributing to positive experiences.

Education.

There are many aspects of education, including supportive networks of peers and professionals, which help to promote social capability and acceptance (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). Within Arab culture, there is not only a strong emphasis placed on the family unit, but also on education, which is something that works to enhance one's economic success, which in turn allows people to provide financial support to their family back home (Ajrouch, 2000; Aly & Ragan, 2010). Education was not a free choice for all participants. Ali was the only participant who attended university, while Mahmoud and Aya went to public school growing up in Lebanon but did not continue, and Nabila did not go to school at all. Aya did not talk about education, which is why the next sections are only speak to Mahmoud and Ali's experiences. I understood that education also helped to shape their identities and their experiences of social connectedness and engagement in several different ways.

Ali was born and raised in a small village in Lebanon, where his parents owned a grocery store and grape orchard. From my understanding, many of the people in his village came from generations of farmers, where farm land was passed down to the next generation. Ali remembered helping his parents, as

every child was obligated to help their parents with the outside chores. Growing up, Ali's parents emphasized the important of education, which was a big reason why he decided to complete a university degree.

"Yea..., partly like everyone else [pause] but umm the emphasis was on education yea"

Just as Ali's parents emphasized the importance of completing his education, Ali also emphasized the same thing to his six children. Ali told me that both of his sons completed post-secondary degrees, and are now the owners of a car dealership. He told me that his daughter successfully published a book and is working on the second while completing her PhD. When Ali said this, I noticed the big smile on his face, I sensed he was happy knowing his children are well established, as I understood that Ali sees their successes as major accomplishments for them, and also for himself. For many people, happiness is derived from fulfilment of needs, feelings and desires (Munawar & Tariq, 2017). Reflecting upon this further, from my observation, many Lebanese social gatherings start off with parents discussing their children's education and careers. If anyone expresses feelings of stress towards finding a job, a lot of the time people at these social gatherings help each other out by referring them to jobs or sharing advice. Ali said,

"I think the right way that makes me actually more umm satisfied umm

"Yea actually this is the most important thing in life your children are umm normal..,

"Like umm you feel umm happy and umm you did what umm what you're suppose to [sic] do"

"But I care about their ethics and their umm to me I've umm we've raised umm decent people let's say..,"

“So I’m happy for that [pause] I think that’s the [cough] main reason I’m umm quite satisfied..”

For Ali, his education helped him further his experiences and gave him the opportunity to apply for higher paying jobs. As a result, this gave Ali more ideas and opportunities to open his own businesses where he made many friendships among people who shared the same interests and encouraged him to continue his work.

Mahmoud on the other hand mentioned that he did not receive a university education, however, for him that did not mean he was not able to make a difference for his community.

“I mean I not university student [sic] I didn’t go to university but we..., [sic] Allah gave everybody brain to use..., give us— we thank him for vision, we smell, we taste, we talk, even mentioned in the holy Quran. That’s a gift! Allah gave us all that.., we can hear you know...,”

Mahmoud pointed out how Muslim, Arab parents worked hard to make sure their children got the opportunity to go to university. Mahmoud mentioned that if he and the pioneers were able to make such a profound change for the community without a university education, than youth who have a degree should be able to do much more.

“Because we didn’t have the university degree ..,we not very fortunate like them. Now there parents work hard to make sure you and him and her go to university because mom and dad didn’t have a chance to go to University..,”

Even though Mahmoud did not go to university, his children and grandchildren attended university and that was good enough for him. Laughing, Mahmoud mentioned that his last name is on every university diploma anyway. For Mahmoud, he associated university with community involvement. He believes that gaining more knowledge, especially through a university degree

should motivate people to apply their knowledge and become more socially engaged within their community and work towards implementing ideas to better improve the space for everyone. When Mahmoud came to London he began going to school, which taught him how to work in the trades. Gaining this experience allowed him to build social relationships with others of similar interests and most of all to also work alongside the pioneers. This helped Mahmoud form close social ties and to strengthen his sense of community interdependence.

I found that the participants' past understandings played a large role in shaping their present experiences, influencing their social relationships and community involvement. This theme was discussed and found through family interconnectedness in Arab culture, which I found to be a critical component in shaping their experiences of social connections and engagement, as each participant expressed their strong beliefs in family support. Gender roles and patriarchy in Arab culture was another subtheme which was instilled in many of the participant's childhood upbringings and shaped their experiences of social engagement. Work ethic was one characteristic all participants learned from their past experiences of growing up with their parents, who also worked hard to teach their children the importance of hard work. Most participants were able to form social connections at their workplace, which also shaped their experiences of social engagement, as participants expressed forming quality relationships at their workplace, while others mentioned how their work mates would cause them problems. Education was the last subtheme discussed, as each participant shared their unique thoughts and experiences on education. I found that education was important to each participant, but their circumstances shaped whether they emphasized it in their story. It became evident for some participants that education shaped their experiences of social connectedness and engagement, as they used it to their advantage to stay involved and socially active in society. Finding a place to help facilitate their experiences of social connectedness and engagement was an important part of their journey.

Finding Place: Home Away from Home

Throughout its history Lebanon has experienced five main waves of emigration. Before 1975, a vast majority of emigrants from Lebanon were Christian. After 1975 there was an increased number of Muslim Lebanese who left Lebanon for work (Tabar, 2010). Lebanon has the largest history of emigration among Arab countries (Migration Policy Center Lebanon, 2013). Two major reasons for this continuous history of emigration is downfall in Lebanon's economic development and political conflicts (Tabar, 2010). This long history of migration has led to the development of Lebanese communities all around the world, including a sizeable population in London, Ontario.

Mahmoud, Aya, Ali and Nabila all migrated from Lebanon to Canada at different times during their young adulthood years. Young adulthood is a critical period for immigrants, as they face the task of psychological and emotional maturation as well as the behavioural and psychological alterations involved in acculturation (Sam, Vedder, Ward & Horenczyk, 2006).

Aya and Ali arrived in Canada on their own, while Mahmoud and Nabila came with their family members. I noticed how arriving single or with family came with a unique experience for each participant. Shakya, Guruge and Hynie, (2012) wrote that following migration, youth face many challenges adjusting to a new culture. These challenges are multilayered and take place in various contexts, such as school, community, home life and within family. Each participant talked to me about various challenges, thoughts and feelings they encountered when they first immigrated and even when raising their own children in Canada, as they were still trying to adjust themselves, yet provide their children with a comfortable environment. Each participant described the unique journey he or she took when trying to find a balance between their heritage culture and Western culture for themselves and their families. Even though finding home in Canada was a struggle for some participants, I noticed that the pros outweighed the cons and that the struggle was worth the challenges they faced. They all wanted to stay in Canada for the reason of more opportunities in regards to work

and many had family who pulled them to come to Canada in the first place. In discussing the theme of Finding Place: Home Away from Home, I describe each participant's process of finding place in Canada and then move on to discuss two overlapping sub-themes that emerged from this theme: power of language and being a Muslim in Canada.

All participants shared friendships with non-Muslims and non-immigrants when they worked to build a life for themselves in Canada. They talked about people in Canada being very warm and inviting. Mahmoud, Ali and Nabila especially expressed their happiness and how lucky they felt to be in Canada, in comparison to other countries they saw as not so accepting of multiculturalism.

Mahmoud arrived in 1949 because his brother said that he wanted to attend university in Canada and so his mother and other siblings also came along. Mahmoud never spoke about missing Lebanon and that he was always in touch with people there by phone. I even recall Mahmoud having to get up from the interview several times to answer phone calls because his family members were calling, I could certainly see that he was popular. Prior to coming to Canada, Mahmoud already had a sister in the country who had established herself in the community as a person who welcomed newcomers and was very hospitable to immigrants, as she ran many charity events. Throughout both interviews with Mahmoud, he expressed to me how the pioneers made him love Canada more, especially when they helped him and his family get through tough times in regards to language, jobs and the weather. Mahmoud expressed his love for Canada and continued to tell me how grateful he is to be here.

“So they make you feel proud to be—and lucky! to be in this country.”

“That’s why I was proud of this Lebanese club because they show us..., how good Canada and we show us [sic] to be good citizen, to be good to our family, our neighbour and to Canada because they open the door for us.”

“We are very fortunate. Canada opened the door and they are not prejudice to any religion, any culture and we are lucky just like Islam [pause] we all equal. Blonde, black hair, black person..,”

“Canadian people very kind they help newcomers.”

“And even the Syrian refugee when they came the mosque and the center they invite them and give them dinner and member of parliament came and spoke to them and told them you are Canadian now..,”

Mahmoud did not talk about any challenges he faced when he arrived in Canada and settled. I am not exactly sure why, but maybe he did not face any, or since he had close family by his side always, along with the pioneers, both factors could have helped with a smooth transition. In a very confident voice, Mahmoud spoke to me about the importance of not forgetting where he came from, his religion, and culture when coming to Canada, which was a major reason, from my understanding, as to why Mahmoud became very socially engaged and worked so hard to create clubs and events for the Muslim community.

“So we come to this country, the country open the door [sic]. So we appreciate it but we are not going to forget our religion, our culture, we gonna work on it.”

“I want the people come [sic] not to drift away..., like a melting pot..., I want them to be involved and do better than we did..,”

I could tell that Mahmoud valued the idea of sticking to his original Muslim Lebanese culture, yet still accepting and respecting the Canadian culture he lived in. I also understood that Mahmoud knew how easy it was for newcomers to lose their own culture and religious beliefs and blend in. In the process of adapting, migrants are somewhat expected to let go of their distinctive cultural and social characteristics, to become indistinguishable from members of the new place they live in (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). Members of the immigrant community tend

to get absorbed into the prominent society (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014). Immigrants are placed in a difficult position when they begin to negotiate qualities of both cultures while trying to develop their identities and raise their families (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2014).

I noticed that it became Mahmoud's mission in life to spread Islamic history and Lebanese culture in London, so that it would not fade, bringing a small piece of his home to his new home in Canada, which helped Mahmoud find his place. Sitting at the dining room table, Mahmoud got up and grabbed a large three panel board from the floor. As he unfolded the board, I noticed small books attached to each side. He told me that these were directories he created himself, which contained the name, location and phone number of family, relatives and neighbours who came from Lebanon. These directories also entailed the Arabic alphabet and numbers, along with clippings of Islamic history and Arabic poetry. I remember thinking to myself, that this was true dedication when it came to connecting others and preserving his Islamic beliefs and Arab culture. I recall seeing one directory, which was also one I see lying around the phone at my house. I could not believe that this was the very book my mom and dad used when they wanted to call their relatives in Lebanon, and it was created by the man standing next to me; I felt star-struck in a sense. When I asked Mahmoud what these directories meant to him and why he decided to create them, Mahmoud said,

"I feel I bring the people together ok..., because I don't want them to be isolated..., I am want them to be proud about where they came from..."

Mahmoud incorporated Islamic and Arabic history into every book he wrote and in what he said because he wanted the youth to be proud of their history and know that many famous inventors were Arabic or Muslim. Mahmoud said that he wanted Muslims to always be open to sharing their beliefs to their non-Muslim neighbours to show others what Islam is truly about.

“So our children know this Arabic— I tell many people in the meeting when I go to the meeting Canadian.., I said when you look at your computer you watch remember the Arabic numeral..,”

“So the Muslims should be proud and work harder to make sure his children, his neighbour understand that [pause]”

Since Mahmoud found his place, it became his mission to help other Muslims also find their sense of place in London. Aya came to Canada a little later.

Aya arrived in Canada in 1973, at the age of 19. Aya decided to come to Canada because her sister already lived here with her family and so she wanted her to join. Aya said that her decision to emigrate did not have to do with Canada being more beautiful than Lebanon, she said that it was because she wanted to change her life around and try something new.

When Aya arrived in Canada she said,

“It’s a shock!”

“It takes a while to get use to these little things...,”

“And anything you—you come from back home anything embarrass [sic] you. You want to fit in so badly and you just find a big gap...,”

Aya went on to explain what she meant by the “big gap”.

“Yea, the gap is like all my friends all my cousins they spoke English..., I didn’t. I did speak English but of course I always wanted to speak Arabic you know because I feel...,[sic] I felt more comfortable”

“You know like like [sic] they feel like we are old fashion but it not it’s a culture and you just [pause]”

“But when you come from back home everything to you is wooo [sic] you know [laughter]”

I understood that Aya was overwhelmed by the differences and at first, could not fathom the idea of London becoming her home. Aya even told me she questioned if leaving Lebanon was the right move for her. Aya did not find the support she was looking for from her sister and found herself very uncomfortable most of the time. However, Aya told me that she knew she had to be more open minded and learn to accept and work with the new changes in her life because she wanted to stay in Canada. When I asked Aya if she faced any challenges when her children moved out of her home she said yes, as mentioned in her narrative. Like Mahmoud, Aya said,

“and there’s a big challenge especially when you come from back home to this country it’s a huge challenge you actually want to keep your culture and you want to keep your religion but there a huge fight..., with the media and with the kid and the back—you know you keep pulling and their friend are pulling”

In many ways, the challenge is also transmitted to the following generations that pursue to find a balance between their Canadian roots and their parents’ origins. Intertwined in the social integration process challenges arise when trying to preserve cultural, religious and ethnic identity, which was the case for Aya. Aya told me the importance of always staying positive whenever she faced a challenge. I found that she also used this coping method to alleviate many stressful situations she went through.

“Challenges always you have to [sic] make sure be positive all the time”

“Then you’re gonna [sic] feel down. We always have to [sic] feel positive, and yea I’m going to be able to do it and if I don’t its ok to its ok [sic] to to [sic] not umm make mistakes nothing wrong with that”

Ali arrived in Canada in 1971 when he was 20 years old. He told me how he came alone and lived with his uncles for the first few years, who helped him settle in comfortably. To my surprise Ali told me that he felt a sense of home right away, especially being in London.

“I’ve always felt like I belong here. Even though I have come [sic] when I was umm I came to Canada when I was umm 20.”

“I had my education there.., I went to university there.., like.., I..,I [sic] I am from there.”

“Yea, yet! I never felt strange here..,”

“There is an obstacle or something.., I never felt it here..,”

Ali pointed out that he did not feel shocked when he first arrived, but rather, he calls it, “culture difference” and that he felt at home right away. He found everyone to be very supportive and by everyone he means his family who already lived in the city and people outside his Muslim, Arab community. I asked Ali if he still felt the same now living in London and he said,

“every-time I needed help from the general public or whoever and umm I got it..,”

“Like people help people they cooperate they give you a chance.”

“it’s more multicultural now than it used to be..,”

Ali told me that he never felt like an immigrant living in Canada, he said that he has always felt like he belonged in London and did not see himself fitting anywhere else. From my understanding Ali felt supported and admired how people were selfless.

“I never noticed that anyone thinks that this is mine..,”

*“Someone here saying this is my country and what are you doing here...,
No you don’t get that feeling...,”*

From my understanding, I later realized Ali was comparing Lebanon to London, when he began to tell me how his village in Lebanon has a corrupt system, where he found it very difficult to implement helpful solutions to problems. Ali expressed how Canada in general is a place that encourages people to implement their ideas, whereas in his village in Lebanon, he felt people were discouraged. Being given this sense of freedom Ali believes this could be one reason as to why he feels at home in Canada

“Like when you come here you are like everybody else you have all the rights umm you can vote..,”

“you can umm open any business you can do anything that an existing person here for umm can do like there is no difference between people this is just society [sic]”

“that’s what actually make this Canadian [sic] this society is different it’s a just.., everybody gets their right.”

“Umm they don’t care who you are it’s it’s your right it’s your right.”

“Canada does not ask you to change, actually Canada [sic] umm encourage you to keep your heritage and your language and if you know another language”

“Like multiculturalism here is strong”

Nationwide, Canada is known for its multiculturalism. Immigrant communities are usually seen as ethnic minorities and among these ethnic groups there is an emphasis on multiculturalism in regards to retaining their distinguishable traits. I noticed how Ali enjoyed speaking on behalf of everyone who lived in Canada, as he said,

"We are more open now..,"

"Like the society.., welcomes everybody but not everybody is ready.., to blend in..,"

"takes you time to [pause] To adapt"

"Like the society here umm gives you all the necessary welcomes to observe to get you in but because of your cultural background or you being new you know it takes you time to get in"

After Ali said this, I asked him if that was the case for him. Did he feel as though he had to adapt in order to fit in? He said,

"yea for me"

"It depends like on each person how long it takes umm him or her to blend in."

Reflecting upon this further, even though Ali said that Canada allows you to keep your culture, he contradicts himself by saying he also changed to blend in.

Ali expressed to me that he loved the social climate of London. I asked him to expand on what he meant by that and he said,

"I never felt stranger or something in London, I almost felt like it's my home town.., umm you get that feeling in London."

"And in my opinion when you live in London for a while or you are born in London you've gotta [sic] come back to it someday..,"

I then asked Ali why he felt this way about London and what he meant by London "almost feeling like home", he concluded,

"Just a feeling that London is my home town."

"It's a feeling it's not a description"

"It's a feeling you go to places maybe maybe [sic] they are the best places in the world but they don't feel you belong"

"London I feel I belong"

I remember thinking I wanted Ali to tell me more, especially as to why London gave him such a feeling, could it be because he has his family and community here? I then asked Ali why and what it is that gives him that feeling, he said,

"Could be umm the large community that umm umm we have here"

"And Lebanese community"

"we came from the same umm places"

"Yea umm actually there is more of my home village here than anywhere else than in my home village"

"Could be because all my family is here"

"Because my children my grandchildren the whole family is in London"

I remember feeling anxious for an answer but Ali could not give me one. He began to use words like "could" and "maybe" and that he is "not sure", then I realized that not everything has to have an answer or a reason, I sometimes need to let things be. Reflecting upon this further, I also carry certain beliefs, which I do not have explanations for either. Ali has expressed to me in detail that London is his true home, more so than the village in Lebanon he was born and raised in. Interestingly, Ali mentioned to me that he traveled from Lebanon to London several times throughout the years, yet he still feels his home is in London. I can certainly see that he has found his home away from home, a place

he is very much attached to because it gave him a cozy feeling, one he always wanted to come back to when he traveled to Lebanon.

When I asked Ali if there is a place in London that is meaningful to him he said no and that he believes,

“that people make their comfort not places, people”

Ali’s answer took me by surprise. He associated people in the place not the environment. Place and space are a lot more complex and can be uniquely defined by an individual.

Nabila came to Canada in 1963 when she was 14 years old. Nabila paused at this moment and said that her family decided to leave Lebanon all together after the war because they lost three children to starvation and sickness. I understood that coming to Canada for Nabila’s family was a way out, a way to forget or suppress their negative experiences during the war, but the struggle was far from over for Nabila and her family.

“First we came, the government never never [sic] help now I’m glad now the people coming now [sic] you find nice home..., good food..., lots of car..., first we came we never had a bus.”

“So the people coming right now to Canada, I tell them they lucky people [sic].

“Good people, lots of help. I wish..., when we first we came to Canada everybody help like that. No help from nobody. You can’t live anywhere.”

Nabila did not tell me that she has found her home or a place where she feels most comfortable. I sense that she is still looking because she tends to place the needs of others before her own, which puts her in an uncomfortable position. For example, Nabila told me that she would love to go live with her daughter overseas, however her husband is unable to travel on planes and needs her attention most of the time because of his Alzheimer’s. Thus, Nabila

decided to move to a place where she knows her husband has more social connections, thinking it would best for him to be close to his friends, and that was the move she made. I noticed how Nabila associated a sense of place with the people who are in it, just like Ali. She lived in Nova Scotia for 35 years, and when her daughter got married and left the home, Nabila could no longer stay there knowing her daughter was no longer there.

Among many other challenges immigrants face when trying to fit in a new country, developing satisfying relationships is critical to finding a sense of place in a new country. In support of this, social networks have been found to be a key element in facilitating the settlement process for immigrants (Edwards, 2010). These social relation relations may provide financial support, accommodations, and opportunities for occupations, resources and emotional support (Boyd, 1989). Aya, Ali and Mahmoud brought their own cultural traditions with them and expressed them freely, while adapting the good to form a sense of place in Canada. Even though Nabila brought some cultural traditions with her, I understood that Nabila was still searching to find home. All participants went out and formed their own relationships with the Muslim, Arab community and found their neighbours to be supportive and friendly. A strong social support system, where they are able to receive immediate assistance from their neighbours or close family members helped in developing a strong attachment to Canada.

Power of language.

It was incredible to see the profound impact communication had on the lives of all participants, specifically the importance of learning English when they came to Canada. Beyond understanding new cultural norms, forming new social relationships and developing identities, migrants strive to acquire the new language of the country they have moved to in order to help facilitate their development in society. Many of these life transformations presented above happened through social interactions, taking place within the new environment (Doucerein, Varnaamkhaasti, Segalowitz & Ryder, 2015).

Mahmoud mentioned that in Lebanon he learned how to speak French and Arabic. It was just a natural thing for Mahmoud to take English classes when he came to London because he knew it would help him in the future when it came to looking for jobs.

“See another thing I speak French”

“When I went to English school in London me and my brother he said “You have to drop French”, I thought Quebec, Ontario same!”

“He said “No”, my teacher said “Forget the French, now you in Ontario” [sic]”

Once Mahmoud learned how to speak, read and write English, I noticed how he used that to his advantage whenever he created a book or pamphlet. He said that he would always have the English translation in the book for anyone who did not know how to read Arabic. It was great to see how Mahmoud spoke English so beautifully during both interviews, as I could sense he took pride in being able to speak in two languages he had common with me.

Mahmoud also used his English to keep himself socially engaged in the community by being a voluntary translator at the hospital for 17 years. He acted as the communication bridge for people who were having difficulty. I believe this is one position that kept him happy and because he was able to build and keep many social ties with people he helped and volunteered with, as he mentioned that he volunteered with health professionals who adored him. He showed me several thank-you letters from the hospital and I noticed he could not stop smiling. I saw that helping others became a part of who he is as a person. He does not do it to show off but he does it for fulfillment purposes.

Aya on the other hand struggled with English. Aya pointed out that she understood some English, which she learned in Lebanon, however she could only speak a little. Aya said that she faced many communication barriers when

she worked in Canada, which hindered her ability to make social relationships with those who did not speak Arabic.

“I understand what they are saying but I could not say the word”

“The communication and we do speak a little bit— I knew little bit of English but here you have to get use to the people how they work and how we not use to social like communication...,”

“that upset me a lot you know..., so that’s it I said I have to go to school and I did come home and I thought ok I’m going to finish the week and I’m going to look for it”

In order for Aya to be qualified to go to school to learn English and get paid for it, she told me that she had to lie and say that she could not understand English nor speak it.

“I told them I don’t speak English and I pretend I didn’t understand what they are saying to me and I went for six months and they paid me for six months...,”

When Aya said this, I remember feeling surprised that she lied because it went against her morals and values. However, her own aunt told her to do this and so I wonder if she possibly felt pressured by a superior figure? Whatever the reason may be, Aya began to form her first close friendships during the English classes.

“And we use to sit in groups and talk about— you know the teachers use to set us in groups so we can try to speak English and we laugh about the stories”

Even though Aya knew basic English, she expressed to me that at the time she felt like she still needed even more for the purposes of raising her children in Canada. She wanted to be there for them through both languages, English and Arabic.

“You still need more English I mean umm you need to go deeper for your kids sake for umm there here”

Aya understood the gravity of learning more English when she realized her daughter was struggling in school.

“she speaks good Araby (Arabic) she speaks good Arabic but we weren’t concentrating on English so”

“So she faced trouble in school”

“It made me feel bad because my daughter was going to school and I didn’t realize she was facing that until it was a little bit late umm in my eyes but she was only in kindergarten”

Next Aya told me a story that I will never forget.

“They told me that the kids the teachers that decided to go to [the] park”

“So the teachers they walk I don’t know if it was done I don’t know how it was done why you know, I mean you taking five years old to, not even 5 she was in kindergarten she was”

“her mitten fell”

“So she didn’t know [sic] how to she— tell them she knew English”

“And she told them it’s frost bite because she was crying her hand hurt”

“But I didn’t know any better back then I didn’t complain for that I felt it was my fault”

“She knew little bit English but they said she never spoke to the she never told them that her mitten fell until it was too late. So she had in her both hands frost bite.”

“But they never called me to say look your daughter had frost bite”

“But if it does happen now I would freak out”

“But back then I was kind of.., thinking you know it’s my fault like she’s not being able to explain, you know it didn’t it didn’t [sic] click to me you know that’s their responsibility too”

“I said can I talk to her teacher? She came and she said “It’s her fault she didn’t know how to.., tell us that she— her mitten fell. You need to talk to her more in English”. I’m like oh my god I didn’t go any further because I was hurt she was sick now! Both hands are, I took her to the doctor”

“the doctor and he said “Put mitten on her and let her sleep don’t send her to school tomorrow, she’s going to have a rough night”. If the blood goes up to.., it’s going to hurt when the blood is going”

“I was holding her all night you know it was just I was trying to wrap her hand make sure she’s ok and then they blame it on me talking to them Arabic. “You should talk to them English”.

As Aya told me this sad story, she expressed it in a manner where it felt as though she was reliving that painful memory all over again. She closed her eyes and took deep breaths and I could tell this was something that still upset her to this day. Aya was still learning English and was still trying to acquire new cultural traditions at the same time when this happened to her daughter. Luckily, her other children did not face too many problems with their English, as Aya told me she made sure of that by teaching herself more.

Ali on the other hand did not speak about how he learned English but he mentioned the importance of adapting the language of the country you want to spend the rest of your life in. Ali said that it would help people adapt better and would give them an advantage when it comes to finding jobs and blending into society, in a positive way.

Nabila was the only participant who did not take any English classes when she came to Canada. She picked up some English words up from television and working at her jobs. Even when she worked as a pastry chef Nabila said,

“He write the recipe for me I say listen, I’m not reading English I want you to put picture, if flour you have to put flour, if sugar you have to put sugar, you know show me the bag”

Reflecting upon this, I question how can one go about not being able to communicate clearly at work? At this point in my life, I am personally trying to learn a new language and find it very frustrating when I cannot respond properly, especially not being able to get what I mean entirely across to the other person. Nabila told me that she would get her neighbours to read her mail for her.

“I would ask them if they could read my mail because I don’t know how to read English so I would get them to read it for me”

“And I trust them when they read it.”

“Some of them say “You trust us to read your mail?”

Nabila formed good quality relationships with her neighbours in Nova Scotia, that she trusted them when it came to helping her with private matters. When I asked Nabila if she ever thought of going to school to learn English she said that yes she had thought about it and she tried bringing over a teacher to her home, however she was unable to put the words together, only pronounce them.

“When the time came to teach me English but I couldn’t understand”

“but they put me in a high-level class and my first language is Arabic”

“And if I went to school now at my age nothing will stick in my head”

Acquiring a second language occupies a very important position in most acculturation accounts. It is an important predictor of adjustment in a new country (Vedder & Virta, 2005; Kang, 2006), and that is what Mahmoud, Aya, Ali and Nabila realized once they knew they wanted to stay and live in Canada. I also found that Aya, Nabila and Mahmoud experienced communication related stress, which did not only impact their well-being but also their social integration, sense of connectedness and social engagement, into the mainstream community. All participants used English to their advantage and had social relations with people outside their immediate community, with people who only spoke English, especially in workplaces. Learning English for Aya was especially important as she expressed wanting to always be there for her children as they went through English based schooling. All participants were able to expand their social network to because English gave them opportunities to meet and connect with more people.

Being a Muslim in Canada.

For many Muslims, living in a non-Muslim society comes with many challenges and difficulties as expressed by Mahmoud, Aya and Nabila. However, all participants expressed their gratefulness towards Canada being such a welcoming and multicultural country, where they feel safe to practice their religion. In Canada, there has been a shift in religious diversity among immigrants, and one noticeable shift is more Muslims arriving in Canada (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). For Muslim Lebanese immigrant groups, Islam plays a key role in their country of origin, which greatly helps when it comes to organizing social life (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Canada is known as a Christian country, which is why many Muslims in North America actively engage in identity recognition, through awareness events and social interactions to legitimize their identity and integrate more comfortably (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). This was especially the case for Mahmoud and Aya.

A major reason why Mahmoud loves being in Canada so much is that many people are open and accepting of Islam and he pointed out how Prime

Minister Justin Trudeau broke fast at the mosque with the Muslim community. This one small action on behalf of the Canadian Prime Minister meant a lot to Mahmoud. It gave him happiness knowing that Canada had an open and caring government when it came to accepting all faiths. I also remember seeing this. There was an image of Justin Trudeau sitting on the ground in the mosque, surrounded by Muslims who were all laughing as they watched him scoop rice with his hands and eat it, just like the tradition. I remember thinking how significant and especially reassuring it must have been for Muslims to see that.

“now we have the best prime minister he broke fast twice in Ramadan in Ottawa. That’s what we need!”

Mahmoud sees a need for government leaders to counteract negative images and actions related to Islam. In an angry, loud voice Mahmoud spoke about his anger towards people who claim to be Muslim and go around killing people or animals.

“They hijack Islam”

“And they don’t represent us these people. They don’t represent Islam. And they don’t represent the Arabs.”

“Never been in middle east..., I don’t want someone like that to present me or present Islam.”

“if some fanatic who he wanna [sic] to go fight in the middle east where war is there these people who in the war they don’t care for religion or human being..., no religion allowed kill innocent people![sic] Or even animal...,”

“And these people what they are doing is against all the religion not just Islam, against Christianity against Jewish this is wrong..., so that’s why sometimes we try harder to be united more some of the young people maybe busy with the books with the university but want them to be proud

where they came from how their parents work hard to make sure they go to university to make sure they get the education. To make sure they be good citizens...,”

Mahmoud sees a need for the Muslim community to counteract negative messages about Islam as well, and does so through strengthening the Muslim community and reaching out beyond it. He emphasized over and over again how Muslims should be proud of where they come from because many of the prophets originated from the Middle East and that Muslims are lucky to be a part of such rich history. Mahmoud stresses the importance of keeping Muslim history going by becoming active members of the London community through social participation and engagement. Mahmoud pointed out the importance of representing Islam under a good light and once Muslims do, they are automatically representing the hard work their parents and grandparents put into getting them this far.

“If we don’t plan to show we are nothing!”

I understood that Mahmoud knows that most of the time Muslims are represented in a negative light, often being labeled as “terrorists” and so to combat this idea Mahmoud stresses the importance of youth knowing their history so they can speak about it and use knowledge as a defence mechanism. He does not see himself as an independent Muslim. He associates himself with the entire Muslim world and so he believes everyone represents each other. The actions of one Muslim represent the entire Nation. Self-representation as a Muslim in front of others such as neighbours was extremely important to Mahmoud. I understood that this is important to him because he feels he is obligated as a citizen to help diminish negative stereotypes against Arabs and Muslims.

“we want the neighbour to be happy with us., we want our children to enjoy this country and the grandchildren...,”

“We proud from our religion [sic], our culture, all the prophets and the messenger came to our country. We should hide and the neighbour, the people should know.”

“Where we come from, why we are like that, why we generous, why we care, for even animal’s human being we care..., we were taught that way”

Mahmoud appears to want to connect with non-Muslim Canadians, to help them better understand Islam.

Through personal experience I have noticed that many people have tried to put an incorrect, negative or twisted definition on Islam and what it means to be a Muslim and so Islam has been under a negative light in the eyes of many for centuries. However, many Muslims believe that we have currently reached a very terrible time to be a Muslim because of what is happening around the world with recent terror attacks. Many Muslims are afraid to leave their own homes, especially ones who wear hijab. Mahmoud strongly believes that Muslims and Arabs should take any opportunity they get to participate in the community and be a positive voice for the Muslim people.

Similarly, Aya sticks up for what she believes in and voices her opinion when it comes to Islam. Aya protected her Muslim co-workers from discrimination. Being a Muslim you must always be mentally prepared to face some kind of discrimination and so Aya said that you need to portray a strong attitude, one that will not be threatened by someone else’s ignorance. For Aya, I understood that it was important for her to always stand her ground. For example, she told me that when her family went to the airport to fly out for her daughter’s wedding, it was a few days after a major terrorist attack. Aya knew they would be facing some troubles at the airport but she stayed calm and followed procedures as her and her family were randomly selected for full body searches. Aya said that even though it was something that bothered her a lot, she did not let her frustration get the best of her that day and put on a fake smile.

Aya also feels obligated on behalf of her religion and all Muslims to represent Islam under a positive light through her own behaviours, words and beliefs. Instead of reaching out and expressing her cultural and religious norms, others would openly reach out to her asking her questions. For example, Aya told me that her daughter's public school teacher asked Aya what fasting and Eid were. As Aya was telling me the story, her facial expressions said it all. She was beyond happy, smiling and giggling.

"Explain fasting to me", I did explain it and I said tomorrow is our holiday and blah blah blah it was the first time in that school the next day they wish the Muslims happy Eid."

"It was the first time. And my daughter came and she said that's the first time and my other daughter they were so happy. I said that's because it made a difference"

Among her non-Muslim friends, Aya was never afraid to talk about her beliefs. This was important for her as it helped to strengthen the quality of her friendships. For example, Aya mentioned that her neighbour was hosting an anniversary party and Aya and her husband were invited. Aya mentioned that she was worried because she knew people would be drinking alcohol, which made her nervous and she questioned whether she would be able to eat any food as she had a few Islamic food restrictions. To Aya's surprise her neighbour prepared several halal food items for Aya and her husband, again which shows others respecting her Islamic beliefs and reaching out to her.

"I was shocked that she has three four different things with chicken and meat and beef that we can eat..., [sic]"

"She took us by hand and she told us "You can have this you can have this and you can have that doesn't have lard".

"Yea it is so kind..,"

Aya was not shy to tell her friends her true thoughts and what she believed in religiously. Aya pointed out that her friends wanted to purchase bottle of wine for an old friend. However, as a Muslim, Aya believes in the idea that she will not give her friend anything that will harm her. Even though Aya's friends laughed when she said this, they eventually agreed and accepted her beliefs.

Mahmoud, Ali, Nabila and Aya conveyed the message that being a Muslim in Canada is enjoyable, because they have the freedom of choice and expression, in comparison to countries like the United States or other Arab Muslim countries, where many are controlled by social law and political agendas. In Canada, many practice their faith freely, that many Muslims enjoy and that people are more multicultural and accepting. However, what comes out of the findings above reflects the complexity of being a Muslim in Canada. Participants in general expressed how welcoming Canada is to all religions and they talked about building great relationships with non-Muslims. At the same time all participants expressed an awareness of the negatives views towards Muslims in Canada. It is not easy for Muslim men and women to express their religion in a non-Muslim space, as it comes with individual challenges, where not all non-Muslim and even Muslim members are accepting of it. Yet participants worked towards counteracting negative views as well as strengthen the Muslim community. Participants are aware of potential for discrimination as they self-identify as Muslim. This can affect an individual's participation in society, but I noticed that all participants portrayed a strong and resilient attitude towards this idea, and learned to not let discriminatory comments influence their daily life activities. I noticed that as individuals migrated to Canada they were able to assert their Islamic identity by talking about their religious beliefs and practices with their friends, neighbours and colleagues. All participants showed acceptance towards anyone and everyone of non-Muslim practice as well, which facilitated building more diverse social ties.

Finding their home away from home was a unique journey for each participant. I found family and friendship networks encouraged their movements.

Language also played a critical role in finding their sense of place. Being able to understand and communicate among their neighbours and co-workers was critical for some participants, as this also gave them more opportunities to expand and build a diverse network. Being a Muslim in Canada was interesting to hear about, as they all expressed Canada to be a safe and comfortable place to express their religious beliefs. Religion not only kept some participants socially engaged and connected through mosque activities, but it also facilitated or hindered experiences of social engagement and connectedness in the work environment and community involvement.

Chapter Six: Reflection and Conclusion

In this final chapter, I reflect on the study findings I have reached during this journey. Firstly, I discuss the findings in light of the research questions. I then highlight ways in which this study adds to the understanding of social connectedness and social engagement among Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults. This will be done by discussing the literature in relation to the findings of this study. Furthermore, I revisit my positioning as an insider and outsider and reflect upon insights I have gained. I also unpack the challenges I faced during the interviews and address the limitations and strengths of the research study. In addition, I suggest future directions for further exploration of this topic. I then discuss the potential contributions of this research study through research, practice and policy. Lastly, I provide some concluding thoughts.

Reflecting on Study Findings

As I decided to study the Muslim Lebanese ageing population in London, I found this population to be complex, since the process of growing old is “dynamic, interactive, subjective to the twists and turns of life, chance, change and compilation” (Phoenix, Smith & Sparkes, 2010, p. 1). As the participants expressed what facilitated their social relations, some mentioned the mosque, community events, and close friendships, while others found themselves to be more socially engaged because they were influenced by their family members to become involved. I was able to put these ideas together with the help of narrative, which allowed me to construct four realities of being and organize the participants’ experiences in relation to social connectedness and social engagement. Thus, I agree with Atkinson (2007) when he says,

“We are storytelling species. Storytelling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experience, and restore value in our lives. Life stories can fulfil important

functions for us, and as we recognize now more than ever everyone has a story to tell about his or her life, and they are important stories” (p. 224).

I found that participants were able to express their experiences in the form of stories. As mentioned in chapter three, participant’s stories were not shared with me in chronological order, however I was able to make sense of their experiences by putting together a short narrative of what they shared with me during each interview. I structured their narrative based on genre and theme, which helped me construct a social mosaic of each lived experience. Each participant made numerous decisions in their lives that influenced their course of action, when they decided that they wanted to stay and age in Canada. For example, even though Aya spoke Arabic and connected with many Arabic speaking women at the mosque, Aya knew she was not going to spend the rest of her life around Arabic speaking people in London and found it frustrating that she was not able to understand her English speaking co-workers and so she decided to take English classes. Little did Aya know, once she started taking English classes, she would form many friendships, which facilitated her sense of social connectedness among the wider Canadian community. Learning how to speak English allowed Aya to build more friendships of diverse backgrounds, as she was able to express her feelings and thoughts more clearly to everyone around her, whether that be with her neighbours or co-workers, and Aya became happier. I found that this enabled her to feel and gain a stronger sense of belonging, something she was missing when she first arrived in Canada. Now, Aya finds belonging and connectedness among her neighbours, as she expressed to me that her neighbourhood works together like a family to take care of each neighbour, which is something she values and looks for.

Nabila on the other hand had a different story when it came to connecting with others. Leaving her children behind in Lebanon was difficult for Nabila, but she felt like she had no choice and so she depended on her brother for social, emotional and moral support at the time. As mentioned in her narrative, it was the best year of her life living with her brother, as she was finally in control.

Nabila knew that she could not live with her brother forever and so she lived an independent life alone until she married again. During this major transition for Nabila, life was not that easy, as she described working several jobs and was never able to do things for herself. Unlike Aya, Nabila did not take any English classes, however she picked up on a few words as she worked among English speaking people her entire life. I found that regardless of this, Nabila was still able to form many social ties, as I noticed she used more expressive gestures and common English words. For example, she formed close relationships with her Canadian neighbours in Nova Scotia, as they exchanged delicious dishes of food every so often. Giving was something that made Nabila happy, especially knowing that others showed appreciation towards her kind gestures, as she told me her neighbours always expressed how appreciative they were of her. She told me they would say things like “anything you need you can have from us” or “we will drive you wherever you need to go just let us know”. With only being in London for one year at the time of the interview, Nabila knew that forming trusting relationships with her neighbours would take some time, but she enjoyed thinking about the potential close friendships she was hoping to develop.

Neighbors played a profound role in shaping Aya and Nabila’s experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. Mahmoud and Ali on the other hand did not speak about their neighbors, but they did speak about how much they enjoyed living in their neighborhoods, as they both live in areas that are close to shopping centers, grocery stores and great to walk around. For Mahmoud, once he realized his potential to implement changes for his Muslim, Arab community, as he was influenced by the hard work of the pioneers, he and his family members took the initiative to become socially engaged in the community, which gave them more opportunities to connect with others. This move changed his life significantly, as he became involved and participated in any way he could, and connecting others and mediating problems became his mission in life. Unlike Mahmoud, Ali decided to go back to Lebanon, which entailed a significant change in his life, after he closed his business in London. This move influenced his experiences of social connectedness and social

engagement as Ali formed most of his social relationships in Lebanon, spending most of his time there trying to help put his village back together after the civil war. That was also the time where Ali became most socially involved, as he took the position of mayor.

As discussed above, language, place, work and neighbourhood, were some of the profound influences that uniquely shaped each participant's experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. I also found that their faith in Allah and religiosity was one major factor that pushed them towards becoming more socially connected and socially engaged among their family and community. For example, Mahmoud talked about some of the verses of the Quran, such as giving to others who are in need, making sure your neighbour never goes hungry, and supporting your family and community. Mahmoud expressed how his strong beliefs in what the Quran presented and his belief in Allah, who he believed has helped him accomplish many of the initiatives he implemented for his community in London and in Lebanon, has given him the energy and reason to continue engaging in the community. Ali, on the other hand, did not talk about his religion, but shared with me his story of how he worked towards reconstructing the mosque in his village in Lebanon when he was mayor. I understood that this became a religious and occupational obligation for Ali. Like Ali, Aya also talked about the significance of the mosque and expressed how that was not only a meaningful place where she could practice her religion, but where she met many women who also made her feel at home when she first came to Canada, which I understood gave her a sense of belonging. Aya stayed socially connected to her neighbours and formed close relationships, with the religious belief of being good to your neighbours and treating them like family. For Nabila, the mosque was not a place she spoke much about; in fact, she did not go unless her neighbour or family member was able to help her get there. Nabila spoke about accepting all religions and forming friendships with anyone and everyone regardless of their beliefs. She viewed Christians as her sisters and brothers, as much as Muslims were. This religious

belief allowed Nabila to form friendships and connect with others in her workplace and neighbourhood.

Along with religion, family interdependence was one of the most talked about aspects in the participants' lives, which influenced their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. As immigration is a major life transition for many individuals, all participants expressed how they depended on their family members for support and assistance when first arriving in Canada, which reflects upon the importance of the collectivistic Arab culture. Ali, Nabila and Mahmoud received strong social support from their family members when settling and integrating into their new home in Canada, while Aya expressed feeling lonely at first because her family expected her to adjust smoothly. As all participants transitioned into their new place, most participants expressed how their family members were able to show them ways to become socially engaged in the community. For example, Aya and Mahmoud both had family members who were involved in the community through voluntary positions, which ultimately pushed them towards becoming involved community members as well. I found that their community involvement gave them more opportunities to be able to connect to more people in and outside the Muslim, Arab community, helping them to expand their social networks.

At the time of the study, Mahmoud was 86 years old, Ali 65, Nabila 67 and Aya 63 years of age. At that time they all lived in London and spent most of their time with their grandchildren, longtime friends and friends who are older in age. I noticed how certain social connections such as friendship ties, neighbourhood cohesion, mosque gatherings, cultural events and religious connections were related to and fostered individual resources of knowledge, choice and autonomy. Maintaining close ties through family cohesion, neighbourly and friendship support were major indicators of feeling connected and belonging. I found that a sense of cohesion, meaning and being able to transfer cultural values, while still adopting new ones, helped to strengthen social ties and their overall comfort level throughout the participants' life stages. Maintaining contacts with the ethnic

and host community for all participants was an important aspect of their lives, as it provided social supports for coping in times of stress, strengthened resilience, and helped to mediate acculturation and integration. All participants expressed the importance of focusing on the quality of their social relations over the quantity and that they preferred having two to three close friends, with whom they shared most of their personal experiences, rather than having a larger group of friends. Nabila was the only participant who expressed feelings of loneliness when I spoke with her, while Mahmoud, Ali and Aya all seemed to be well connected and happy. It was incredible to see how unique, multilayered and complex each participant's narrative was. I found it fascinating that I was able to see so many similarities in their immigration, social connectedness and social engagement experiences, yet each story was distinctive and special in its own way. Conducting this study has been an enriching life experience for me, as it has allowed me to think deeper about who I am as a person and what I value. I learned more about my own culture and I realized how social connectedness and social engagement are two important life factors, especially for older adults. I noticed how it helped them maintain independence and interdependence and remain in the community setting, overall working to prevent social isolation. Thus, I understood that it is important to investigate factors that may assist individuals develop and maintain strong social relationships as they move through their life.

Discussion of Findings

This research study contributed to the growing but limited research on Muslim Arab Lebanese men and women's lives in Canada in relation to social connections. Since few studies have focused on individuals who immigrated in their adulthood and decided to stay and age in Canada, this study is able to shed light on experiences that are not commonly found in the literature of this particular group. Even fewer studies have explored the intersections between culture, ethnicity and immigration between Muslim older adults and the wider Canadian society and Western nations. In addition, there are no known studies in Canada that use narrative to understand the lived experiences of Arab Muslim

older adults. Not only does this research add to the literature on this particular population, but it also adds to the field of identity development, acculturation, ethnicity, gender and religious constructs.

In this study, after re-storying the four stories I noticed how identity development was a lifelong and fluid process and entailed many diverse facets, as expressed by each participant. I found that each participant spoke about their identity in some way, as their identities took shape based upon their social experiences and interactions in their setting. For example, when Mahmoud first immigrated to Canada and observed the ways in which the pioneers became involved in social and political activities, he became inspired by them and strove to embody and practice his social involvement and participation in the community. Helping others and showing them ways to become more involved in social activities has become one of his lifelong goals, something I also noticed to be a big part of his character as well. Growing up, Aya did not socialize with others and did not have many friends, as mentioned earlier she was more involved in helping her father and taught not to trust others. As Aya grew older and experienced troubles integrating into her community due to trust issues and language barriers, she worked towards overcoming those barriers. Now Aya is very social and has many social connections and was very involved in her community. Many studies support this conceptualization of identity as a fluid process, as Ajrouch (2000) and Briotto (2008) mentioned identity development is a socially negotiated and complicated process involving the individual and their environment (Al-Khatib, 2000). Among all participants I found that a critical component of their identity was their sense of belonging to a particular group (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). I found all participants identify more with their Canadian side and preferred to be in Canada instead of Lebanon. Ali expressed not feeling like an “immigrant” anymore, while Aya mentioned how Canada is her own country now.

In light of the importance of social connectedness and social engagement in the lives of older adults in general and ethnically diverse immigrant older adults

(Bath & Deeg, 2005; Cornwell, Laumann & Schumm, 2008; Kim, Sangalang & Kihl, 2012; Nawyn, Gjokaj, Agbenyiga & Grace, 2012, Treas & Mazumdar, 2000; Yoon & Lee, 2010), the present study sought to identify and understand social experiences of Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults. Social connectedness and social engagement are particularly important among groups who are at risk of experiencing social isolation such as older ethnic immigrants (Park et al., 2015; Report on Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014). Literature suggests that older immigrants of various ethnicities are profoundly connected within the boundaries of ethnic enclaves (Barry and Miller, 2005; Chiswick & Miller, 2005, Lagace, Charkmarkeh & Grandena, 2012), which not only serves as a primary basis for support to combat social isolation and feelings of loneliness (Levy-Storms & Wallace, 2003), but it also shapes their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement (Abdulrahim & Ajrouch, 2014; Ajrouch, 2005). I also found a similar pattern among all four narrative accounts, as each participant expressed how their family and Muslim, Lebanese community expanded over the years, forming their own social enclaves. I found that these social enclaves consisted of family members, neighbours, people from the Muslim community and people outside their immediate community. This group worked to facilitate social interactions and build close quality relationships. I also found that each participant relied on people in the same age cohort and family for social support in their community. Mahmoud, Ali, Nabila and Aya all looked towards their close family and friends, within and outside their social enclave, for social support and emotional support. This finding is consistent with the literature as immigrant older adults tend to stay more socially connected and engaged with people of the same language and ethnic background, allowing them to share their emotional struggles with each other more comfortably (Ajrooch, 2017; Fiori, Antonucci & Cortina, 2006; Fiori, Consedine, & Magai, 2008). Overall, I found that this study added more depth to what others studies found. For example, I found that it did not matter to participants whether their friends were of the same ethnic or religious background, what mattered most to them was placing their time and

energy into relationships that made them happy and relationships that gave them purpose and drive to participate socially.

Along with identifying and developing connections with people of similar ethnic background and with others of different ethnic background, participants wanted to get socially engaged and involved in their immediate Arab, Lebanese, Muslim community. In order to do this, it was important for some participants to learn how to speak English as well. Language was a large influence on the participants' experiences of social connectedness and engagement, as learning English provided more opportunities to expand their social network. Learning English also helped them become more comfortable in their work places among other English speaking co-workers and gave participants confidence in wanting to stay and raise their children in Canada. This finding is consistent with previous research that showed that language difficulties can create barriers to civic engagement in an individual's community (Baer & Number, 2008; Beise & Hou, 2001; Berry & Williams, 2004; Gele & Harslof 2010; Huot, in press; Rumbaut, 2005)

Most participants in this study expressed the importance of getting socially involved in order to become active and engaged members of their community, which in turn gave them the opportunity to become visible in society and express their beliefs and values to other diverse groups. Similarly, a study conducted by Jang, Park and Chiriboga (2016) found that Korean American older adults who were actively participating in social activities could potentially have increased visibility in the community, which lead to higher chances of becoming a social leader. This was likely the case for Mahmoud and Ali as they both became politically and socially involved in their communities, which allowed them to take on leadership roles, expanding their social network and social interactions.

In light of some studies that suggest social support exerts a positive influence on well-being (Ajrooch, 2013; Pilkington, Windsor and Crisp, 2012), Park, Roh and Yeo, (2012) also found that having more social network ties and

older adults who are in constant contact with family and friends are associated with greater feelings of life satisfaction. A study on older Korean adults found that exchange support (i.e., receiving and giving support within their social network) facilitated greater quality of life, which was found to be in line with their traditional values that underline the importance of interdependence (Kim, Hisata, Kai, & Lee, 2000). I also found exchange support in Mahmoud, Ali, Aya and Nabila's narrative accounts of interdependence. Thus, all participants spoke about the importance of being able to give and receive support and expressed how fast their social enclave grew. The growth of social enclaves is also consistent with studies completed with older Korean immigrant older adults, which found that they depend on large family and ethnic community church members for support (Wong, Yoo, & Steward, 2005).

Mahmoud and Nabila expressed supporting their parents and all participants spoke about staying socially connected with their friends and family who lived far away, through technology. Similarly, Palmberger (2017) also found participants stayed connected with their relatives, who lived in far geographical locations, through technology including phone, Facebook, Instagram or Skype. Palmberger's (2017) study also found the daily routines of Muslims older adults included religious holidays celebrated with family members, with the older adults feeling responsible for children's well-being even after their children moved out of the family home (Palmberger, 2017). They also reported that visiting family members was an integral part of everyday life, with cultural, religious and political associations being something they actively participated in and visited. These associations gave them a place to meet and socialize, outside their family sphere. The mosque was also found to be a place where they could meet with their friends and have the freedom to play cards and chat (Palmberger, 2017). This was also seen in Mahmoud and Ali's narrative account.

For most participants in the current study, I found that religiosity shaped their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement, which is consistent with findings of prior research on various religious groups (Lalji, 2012).

For example, a study conducted by Park, Roh and Yeo (2011) found religiosity to have a positive impact on life satisfaction and social support for older Korean immigrants. They found religiosity to contribute to social support, which acted as a protective factor for older Korean immigrants facing acculturative stresses and lack of social connections (Park, Roh & Yeo, 2011). I also found similarities among all four narratives, as all participants expressed reaching out to family in times of settlement and integration stress. In addition, Lalji (2012) conducted a study examining social capital among South Asian Shai Muslims, and found four key themes: community bonding, support for settlement, centrality of faith, community engagement and faith for health, which were all linked to building social capital among participants in her study. This was interesting as I also discovered similar themes among the four narratives. I noticed that participants searched for a sense of belonging and found it through community connectedness, religious affiliation and settlement support, as I found all of these themes to be core values for Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults and related to their sense of connectedness.

Family values and support were two critical factors in Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults' sense of belonging and connectedness. Wilke and Marcon (2013) conducted a study on the family's role regarding the older adults from the perspective of Brazilian and Lebanese older adults, which found that family became a direct source of informal support for Muslim Lebanese Brazilian older adults, as each participant expressed how their family members help each other out in the interest of collective well-being. Among the four narratives Wilke and Marcon (2013) also found Lebanese families to be characterized by their size and living in close proximity to one another, forming large communities. Their study emphasized the importance of interdependence for financial support as well as physical and mental autonomy (Wilke & Marcon, 2013). Mahmoud, Ali, Nabila and Aya also emphasized family interdependence and relied on them for support. Interestingly, I also found that all participants still played an active role in supporting their children in regards to health and social support. For example, Aya mentioned how she was taking care of her son, who was married with

children, because he had health problems. She also mentioned that her children often came to her for advice.

Consistent with the literature, Nabila, Mahmoud, Aya and Ali's narratives showed that family acted as the key foundation for socialization as young immigrant Muslim Arabs, as family is seen as central to an individual's life that provides them with morals, beliefs, culture and social ideas (Wilke & Marcon, 2013). I found that family dynamics were shaped by their culture, beliefs and values, which were passed on to the next generations. Young immigrants are obligated to maintain cultural traditions, with older people in charge of teaching the traditions to the younger generation (Wilke & Marcon, 2013). Thus, these learned beliefs, values and cultural traditions influence one's social life throughout their life span (Wilke & Marcon, 2013). The idea of family staying together is important to Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults, as they work hard to teach their grandchildren and pass on family life values in a Muslim environment (Wilke & Marcon, 2013). Arab families try their best to maintain cultural background, which is somewhat challenging when living in a Canadian context, as was expressed by Mahmoud and Nabila.

I noticed how social connectedness and social engagement were two concepts in this study that overlapped. Social connectedness and social engagement are interrelated and one can be used to access the other and vice versa. After completing this study, I found that both terms are able to return back to the initial definitions presented in chapter two, where social connectedness focuses on the quality and quantity of social relationships (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Coleman, 1998), while social engagement focuses on a person's involvement in social activities (Levasseur, Richard, Gauvin, & Raymond, 2010). I also found that this study was able to add to the conceptualization of social connectedness and social engagement because participants took part in reconstructing these concepts when sharing their lived experiences. For this particular population in this study, I found that they embedded Arab cultural traditions, values and identity into each definition, expanding the meaning of both concepts. Social

connectedness is more than just the quality and quantity of an older adult's social relationships, it is connected and can be facilitated by people in their cultural and ethnic sphere. Participants also related social engagement to involvement, participation, sense of purpose, and life satisfaction which facilitated their role in society as contributors. I also found that all participants constantly looked for ways to become more socially integrated in society and found social connectedness and engagement to facilitate their integration process. Participants first looked for help from their immediate Arab Muslim Lebanese society when first coming to Canada and then connected with people outside their community, minimizing their sense of displacement. I found that regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion participants spoke about socially connecting and engagement with people in the community as a whole and did not see it as involving separate communities. They did not limit their social ties to only people of the same cultural or ethnic background, and participants were interested in getting along with everyone.

This study was conducted with four Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults, living in London, Ontario who constructed their own stories of immigration, living in between cultures and experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. This analysis points to the importance of further exploration and understanding the social context and lived experiences in depth.

Revisiting My Positioning

I began this study with interests, assumptions and beliefs drawn from my childhood and adulthood experiences of being the granddaughter of Lebanese immigrants. From there my interests expanded to ageing immigrants in Canada. Growing up in London, Ontario, with hundreds of my Muslim Lebanese relatives, I understood my heritage to a certain degree through the daily interactions of living within my ethnic community. I grew up going to the mosque for community events and attended many massive family reunion dinners. I noticed that these events not only presented a warm and inviting cultural environment for people to enjoy, but they also fostered ways in which people were able to stay socially

connected with their friends, family and relatives. I especially noticed how much the older adults of the Lebanese community enjoyed socializing with members of their community, sharing personal stories and experiences with everyone around them, regardless of age group.

This observation made it clear to me that many older Muslim Lebanese adults valued interconnectedness. However, this observation also made me assume that Muslim Lebanese older adults seem as though they are well connected and far from feeling lonely or isolated. With no known studies in Canada to give insight into this observation, on this specific population, I recognized the importance of furthering my understanding of social connectedness and social engagement on an individual level. With several authors pointing to the profound impact of social connectedness and social engagement as an important aspect of ageing (Cornwell et al., 2008; Lee and Robbins, 1995; Liu et al., 2016; Pilkington 2012; Ryan, 2011; Papillon, 2002; Lee & Woo 2013), there is a growing need to recognize how immigrant older adults experience ageing and how their lived experiences shape their social connections. These observations and inferences stem from using reflexivity throughout this research study. In relation to the life course perspective, reflexivity has allowed me to become more aware of social practices and how they influence self and identity (Giddens, 1991a).

Although I am Muslim Lebanese myself, and have been involved with the greater Lebanese community throughout my life, I was born and raised in London, Ontario, which has largely shaped my lens in understanding social connectedness and social engagement through a Western perspective. By thinking through this lens, I found that it narrowed my understanding of these two concepts and I did not think about how Arab, Lebanese and Muslim cultural traditions may be deeply rooted in how these older adults became and stayed socially connected and engaged within and outside their community. When I revisited my insider-outsider status, I became more aware of my privileges as a

Muslim Lebanese Canadian, studying other Muslim Lebanese Canadians. As Dwyer (2009) says,

“Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation” (pg. 55).

This study has expanded my understanding of Muslim and Lebanese traditions by opening my mind to the prominence of social relations among family, friends, neighbours and even other Muslim strangers. For example, I noticed how the fact that participants also knew I was Muslim allowed them to express their thoughts in more detail and connected with me through the experiences they shared. I noticed how all of these relationships helped to facilitate a sense of belonging for each participant throughout their life course.

My inclusion of Muslim Lebanese women’s and men’s voices and stories works towards valuing and understanding the local culture. I argue that being an insider has allowed me to give more value to the research. For example, as I am conducting a study on people who I ethnically and culturally identify with, I am able to gain deeper insight into their lived experiences. This has allowed me to better reflect upon their experiences given that I can make sense of some aspects they speak about, like gender dynamics or family interconnectedness. Having some insider knowledge of the Arab, Lebanese, Muslim culture was extremely important because it helped to facilitate the research study process. I understood that being an insider made me more aware of what I would ask, how I would ask it and how to interpret the answers. Since I grew up in a similar cultural sphere as the participants, my insider status helped us to co-construct the data, as I am more aware of cultural traditions, certain phrases and words and boundaries for questioning.

Three participants spoke in English and using a few Arabic words throughout, while one participant spoke in English for her first interview and Arabic for her second interview. I found that this gave the data authenticity, as most people of Arab origin who know how to speak English as well, speak in a very similar manner as the participants. Also, giving them this option meant that no meaning was lost in translation. I found that my ability to speak and understand their languages added to my insider status. I was also able to draw on my own and my family's experiences to demonstrate my insider status and help create rich interview data. Before starting each interview, I was mindful that I needed to allow the participants to share as much as they could with minimal interruptions from me. I found I sometimes would share my experiences, opinions, and perspective with each participant, and at some points I did not. I would sometimes share my own experiences as an insider, for example Aya mentioned how she enjoyed playing Arabic music in the house when her grandchildren came over and taught them how to dance in the Arabic traditional way. I also mentioned to Aya that my family would do the same thing when I was a child. I remember we laughed about it, as it was something we shared because we came from the same ethnic background. Another example was with Ali, when I noticed he took some time to share his experience with me in regards to how his family struggled when they moved back to Lebanon right after the civil war ended. He paused a few times, struggling to put his words together, and so I decided to share a small story about when my father went back to Lebanon after being away for 26 years. I found that this helped Ali to continue his thought, as he used my story as a comparison to his experience and continued to share more details. Also, the participants and I did not just share certain cultural experiences but also experiences that were not related to culture or ethnicity. For example, we could all relate to the experience of working at a young age and what that meant to us. As a researcher working in familiar territory I found that my familiarity helped me form a greater understanding, with no cultural or linguistic barriers (Atkinson et al., 2003). This element of insider status allowed

for a relaxed and open atmosphere, which is reflected in the quality and quantity of the data (Mannay, 2010).

I also think it is important to address the taken-for-granted cultural experience that came with my insider status. As mentioned earlier I entered each interview with preconceived knowledge and with the participant already thinking I understood their experiences. I even remember feeling super confident, thinking I would be able to understand all of their experiences. The research I conducted was interpretive and as described by Mannay (2010), such research

“Aims to investigate the invisibility of everyday life but when the researcher is working in familiar territory there is a danger that their findings will be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding (p.98).”

I recognized this possibility after the first interview, when I realized I do not know as much as I thought. After that realization, I expanded my ideas and became more aware of my preconceptions and tried to walk into every interview with an open mind, in order to generate new knowledge. I also followed the same strategy before tackling the narrative analysis process. I acknowledged that it was important to make the familiar strange and I tried to do this by centering on the past and present experiences of social connectedness and social engagement, with a focus on the setting, culture, gender and immigration narrative. As Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) explain,

“Narratives and interview accounts are examples of social action. People do things with words, and they do things with narratives. They use biographical accounts to perform social actions. Through them they construct their own lives and those of others...Such accounts are certainly not private, and they do not yield accounts of unmediated personal experience. If we collect spoken (and indeed written) accounts of “events” or “experiences”, then we need to analyze them in terms of the cultural resources people use to construct them, the kinds of interpersonal or

organizational functions they fulfil, and the socially distributed forms that they take (p. 117).”

For this study, the participants constructed their own biographical accounts and shared experiences of interactions with others, when expressing how they developed and maintained their social connections. As the quote mentioned above, I then analyzed the participants’ narratives through the lens of Arab, Lebanese culture and tried to make sense of their social constructs around them such as the mosque, community events, neighbourhood characteristics, cultural and religious gatherings, places of social value, and family and friend interactions.

Although having an insider status can be very advantageous, as I was able to find common ground among all participants, I found that this status created some impediments. I felt that participants assumed I would be able to understand and therefore did not always bother explaining their individual experiences in full detail. For example, Aya was one participant who used the phrase “you know” multiple times when she was sharing her story. I did not exactly know what she meant several times, as I remember feeling like an outsider with some experiences participants shared. If I noticed that I was unable to understand what a participant meant in the first interview, I made a side note and asked the participant to describe the meaning further during the second interview. For example, because I was born and raised in London and have not travelled much, I could not fully relate to the participant’s experiences of immigration.

Being able to research my own culture and religion was an incredible feeling but also a heavy responsibility. For example, after the participants thanked me, I wondered what sort of expectations they held of me once I mentioned to them that I would be staying in touch to have them approve their final story for the thesis. Each participant asked me what I planned on doing with their story afterwards, and once I told them they expressed excitement and delight knowing that they would be able to add to the limited body of literature.

Overall I did not view being my outsider status as a downfall, as I know not all populations are homogeneous and so I expected there to be unique differences, which I found made things more exciting.

Reflecting on the Challenges and Limitations of the Research Process

In this section I discuss challenges I faced throughout this research study and problems I became aware of after I completed the study. I remember making the assumption that finding participants for this study would be a process that would not take much of my time because I was already connected to the Muslim Lebanese community. However, this was not the case; in fact, most individuals who wanted to be a part of the study were my own relatives, which posed a conflict of interest. Since most of my Muslim Lebanese relatives live in London, it took more time than I anticipated to find participants who were not related to me. Once individuals began to call me and express their interest in being a part of the study, I talked to them about the inclusion criteria. For the individuals who did not fit the inclusion criteria, I remember feeling hesitant at saying no and tried my best to give a clear and mannerly explanation as to why they could not take part in the study. Once I confirmed the two Muslim Lebanese men and two Muslim Lebanese women for this study, during the confirmation phone call, participants asked me to tell them a little more about the study I intended to conduct. Thus, the participants had an idea that the study was about social connections and immigration, but they did not know the exact interview questions.

I came into each interview with the idea that I will not interrupt the participant and let them continue sharing their story until it came to a natural end. However, as this was the first time for most participants being interviewed using narrative methods, I found that I naturally facilitated and gave positive feedback as they were sharing their story. I would use say “Mhm”, “Yes”, “continue”, while also using attentive facial expressions. I found that some participants paused indicating they did not know what to talk about next. Once this happened, I would repeat parts of the initial research question and then they would continue. I also took brief notes throughout the first and second interview of thoughts participants

shared with me. If I noticed the participant paused looking for something to say, I would repeat one of my notes and they would continue from there. As noted above, some participants shared a great deal of detail, while others chose to be brief and to the point. Mahmoud, Ali and Aya shared somewhat happy stories, while Nabila's second interview was full of emotions. Once Nabila started to cry I told her that she did not have to continue with the interview, however she insisted that she wanted to continue because it was an outlet for her. I personally found it very difficult to keep my emotions under control, as Nabila described many deep traumatic experiences she faced, I found myself also tearing up during her story and tried my best to pause and give her time to collect her thoughts. At the same time, I felt it was appropriate for me to share my emotions as I found it built an even stronger connection between us, where she shared more of her experiences in detail.

As a researcher, I knew that I had to be cautious not to show whether I agreed or disagreed with their viewpoint. I found this to be difficult as during the first participant interview I did express my agreement with Mahmoud's thoughts. I noticed that some participants asked me who else I was interviewing for this study, but I made sure not to mention any names or experiences participants shared about the same issue. It is possible that some participants gave me answers that would be reflective of the common cultural viewpoint, rather than an independent and personally constructed answer. However, I found that all participant's gave me individual and personalized answers and so I did not notice that they gave an answer 'I wanted to hear'. This lead me to further reflect upon another potential limitation of this study; I asked participants to share some of their lived experiences, which could raise sensitive issues or uncomfortable memories, depending upon what the participant chose to share. Since the first question I presented to them was broad and had some structure, participant's shared anything that came to their mind. I also noticed that one participant asked me what I meant by certain words as I asked her questions in the second interview.

I found that some narratives may reproduce biases and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. In support of this, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) said,

“Narrative inquirers know in advance that the task of conveying a sense that the narrative is unfinished and that stories will be told and lives relived in new ways is likely to be completed in less-than-satisfactory ways” (p. 166).

Thus, a participant’s narrative is subject to change depending on the time.

Next I reflect on the perceptions the participants could have potentially held about me as a researcher and how this might have influenced their responses. For example, both male participants did not share many challenges they faced. I found this to be an obstacle in this research study because I was unable to gain a complete view of their stories. This could be due to my position, as a 23-year-old Muslim Lebanese female. Reflecting upon this further, I know that within the Arab, Lebanese culture and Islamic religion and within the community I drew the participants from, men and women are usually separated by gender. There is a strong level of formality in the interactions between males and females in the vast majority of Arab Muslim cultures. I felt and noticed this with one male participant more than the other. Thus, if I was a Muslim Lebanese male speaking to the Muslim Lebanese male participant, I believe the participant would have been more comfortable and willing to talk in more detail. I also believe that being 23 years old impacted what all the participant’s shared with me. I noticed that most participants were highly aware of my age as some also asked me how old I was and if I was married after the first or second interview. I noticed that older adults in the Muslim Lebanese community tend to give positive advice and share more positive experiences rather than negative experiences, especially to a person who is significantly younger than they are. Three participants may have viewed me as a young woman who would not want to hear emotionally driven scenarios they experienced or an experience that may influence my thinking, as to them I may be seen as young and easily influenced

by what is said. Yet as mentioned above, this was not the case for Nabila, as she shared many emotionally driven experiences with me. Reflecting about Nabila's decision to share more of her emotional experiences, I believe that Nabila and I built a stronger rapport as we spoke about personal life for a few minutes before starting each interview. She was able to get to know me more on a personal level. I also remember she told me that when she first met me, she said an old Arabic saying, "you went right through my heart", meaning when she met me there was something about me that echoed with her heart. I am not exactly sure why that is, but I remember feeling very close to her and wanting to listen to her story, as I felt during the first interview not very many people gave her the chance to talk and be heard.

The final challenge was the fact that this is my first time conducting a study. Forming the first broad interview question was difficult as I had to make sure I used words that the participants would understand. After I conducted a practice interview, I remember the participant expressed how they could not understand what I was asking and so I switched the wording and structure of the entire question. Looking back, I realized that I could have potentially added the word "story" in my first research question, which may have prompted the participants to share their experiences in more of a story form. Furthermore, I remember finding it difficult not to ask the participants questions using "why". I felt doing so may come across as though they had to justify their answer and so using narrative wording such as "continue", "expand on that note", "tell me a little more", "what does that mean to you", was more appropriate but was harder for me to naturally use during the participant interviews. I remember training myself and saying those narrative probes aloud before entering each interview just so I would remember.

Reflecting upon this further, in being a novice researcher, I found that I would make firm conclusions, as I analyzed the narratives and so I had to work towards being more aware of the words I used. For example, I would use the words and phrases such as "certain" or "completely understand". I remember

writing things like “what Mahmoud meant by this or Ali meant”, when I was actually making an assumption based upon my understanding. After multiple meetings and edited drafts of my thesis with my supervisor and advisory committee members they made me aware of my wording and assumptions. In addition, making sense of the data once I collected all four stories was a complicated and difficult phase for me. I knew that the four narratives were rich and full of detail, however, I remember finding it difficult to start writing about the emerging concepts because this the first time I have used narrative as a methodology.

Quirkos helped me organize quotes into themes and subthemes, and it produced a report which gave me a good visual of what themes were emphasized. I then discussed the organization of the data with my supervisor who helped me collapse many themes and taught me the importance of interconnectivity between all themes. Next, I wrote several drafts before becoming comfortable in writing through a narrative lens. I remember struggling when trying to find a balance between incorporating scholarly literature, participant quotes and my reflexive notes. I found that I would use formal language when discussing scholarly literature and then informal language when discussing the participant quotations and reflexive data. I also would write each part in categories and I did not know how to make all three parts flow together. For example, I would first write about scholarly findings in relation to the quotation, I would then move on to providing participant quotes and at the end I would add in my personal reflections. My supervisor noticed my struggles with finding a cohesive flow and provided me with several strategies. For example, she worked very closely and asked me what I noticed emerging from the data, as I was speaking out loud she would write down the concepts and show me how they interconnected, which made me more aware of how I could find a balance. She also made several open suggestions and questions, which tremendously helped further my understanding and thinking.

Strengths of the Research

In this section, I present positive aspects of the research study. Ruth and Kenyon (1996) discussed the importance of narrative within ageing studies by emphasizing that narrative gave a strong medium for exploring the similarities and differences of ageing over the life course. Narrative research is known to be a valid approach for gaining an in-depth understanding of lived experiences and gives voice to unheard stories (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2001; Riessman 2008; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber; Clandinin 2007). This study, along with many others is not fully conclusive, as each study can be open to interpretation and further exploration. I found that the four narratives were able to portray dynamic complexities found in experiences of ageing and the construction of identities over the life course (Ruth & Kenyon, 1996). These narratives revealed how cultures, subcultures or family dynamics are reflected in the life of the narrator and showed how each participant was able to adapt or test the opportunities and limitations based on the historical time in which they live (Ruth & Kenyon, 1996). For example, some participants spoke about how easy it was for them to find jobs when they first immigrated to Canada, and they expressed how in the time they are living in now, they notice how finding jobs has become harder for many. Thus, I found the narratives were central in facilitating a deeper understanding of personal and social processes of ageing and assisted in generating interpretations of social interactions and involvement over the life course, representing the intricate uniqueness of an individual's life. Using narrative as a methodology also helped to shed light on the identities of the participant's and how they see themselves.

Many commonalities can be found in the culture and religion among Arabs, it is important to look deeper and conduct research studies based on country of origin and specific religion because each ethnicity and religion shape an individual's experiences of everyday life and cannot be grouped under one general category. This study tried to understand a specific group in depth by focusing on Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults. Along with focusing on one

distinctive group, another strength of this study was the fact that I interviewed both men and women. With both women recently putting on hijab this was something that also facilitated comparisons between both women. While I was able to focus on one group, I was still able to get some diversity within this group, which helped to facilitate comparisons. Altogether, including both men and women helped me draw upon gender comparisons in regards to their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement.

A further strength of the study was that the commonalities we shared acted as a starting point for all participant's. Coming into their home, each participant asked me where I was from and they appeared thrilled knowing I also identify as Lebanese and that we were both Muslim, as most participants portrayed their religious life to be an intimate part of their everyday lives. I found their stories to be rich and full of detail but at the same time I found many more ways of extending this research since their stories left me with many more ideas after the final interview, which further increased my passion for this field of study.

Another strength of this study is that participant's were able to choose to speak in either Arabic or English. I found this to be an important aspect to the study because participant's were able to speak in the language in which they were most comfortable. Once they knew I could understand both languages I found that some participants would say phrases in Arabic, which facilitated further meaning making between me and them. Language is one marker that affects the experiences of the insider-outsider status of both the researcher and participant. The choice of language can imply who feels more of an outsider or insider. I found that both myself and each participant found a balance between both languages, which helped to create a more balanced relationship, lessening the power difference between the researcher and the participant. I found that because I was able to speak and understand both languages they used, they could have potentially seen me as "one of them".

Also all interviews were conducted in places the participant's chose. This was an important factor as most participants enjoyed showing me around their homes and I found that this made them more comfortable. It was also a lot more convenient for most participants that I conduct the interviews in their home, as they talked about being busy with grandchildren and family and having to be at home most times. Mahmoud, Aya and Ali's first and second interviews were conducted in their own homes. This was also an advantage for me as I was able to paint a picture of their home life and observe their neighbourhood. Some participants took me around the house showed me areas they have fixed and places where their grandchildren play and so that gave me a sense of some of their daily occupations. Some participants spoke about when they moved into their homes, what they like about their neighbourhood and pointed to their neighbours when talking to me about connecting with others. This gave me a great visual of place and distance between each neighbour. For Nabila, the first interview was conducted in a coffee shop and the second interview was conducted in a library conference room. I did not see this as a downfall, as I was able to observe how she interacted with people and noticed how much she enjoyed meeting new people, which made sense when she expressed to me that she is able to make friends quickly.

All participant's, at the end of the second interview, asked me how they did and expressed how much they enjoyed my company. I saw this as a strength because everyone expressed their happiness and felt a sense of pride knowing they were a part of a study. Of course, it was an honour to be seated in front of them and to have the privilege of hearing their stories and so I expressed how they each did a wonderful job. Some participants expressed that they have never been in a study like this but are excited to see the results. After I sent each participant their re-written story, and requested that they call me back if they noticed any mistakes, once they had a chance to read through their story, I had four incredible phone calls with them, some lasting for 40 minutes. They expressed to me how much they enjoyed reading their story and read out loud certain parts they loved. Some participants caught mistakes I made and so I

changed them right away. During these phone calls participants talked to me about their personal lives and what they have been doing since I last spoke to them. For example, some participants spoke about more social activities they were involved in, while other participants talked to me about spending time with their grandchildren. All the strengths presented above add to the overall strength of the study helping to confirm its credibility and quality.

Implications for Research, Practice and Policy

In this section I present the implications for research, practice and policy.

Research sphere.

This study enhances understanding of Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adult's experiences of social connection and social engagement and the ways in which cultural values, gender roles and patriarchy, hijab, work ethic, education and language shape these experiences. As I worked on this research study, I noticed several areas in which the subject could be explored further, potentially opening new topics. For example, I noticed how their stories varied in regards to their reasoning for coming to Canada and so I believe it would be important to research social connectedness and social engagement among immigrant older adults who are coming now and as refugees, who come to Canada due to push factors. By exploring the lives, social relations, education of older men and women who are trying to settle, adapt and integrate into their new community and what it means to be an ageing immigrant or refugee in Canada, researchers could gain a deeper understanding of their needs. In addition, I believe it is beneficial to conduct comparison studies of Arab Muslim Lebanese older immigrants or refugee men and women and others from different ethnic groups and religious beliefs. For example, doing a comparative study and collecting the narratives of people who are of South Asian descent, who are either Muslim or Christian would provide information on how social connectedness and social engagement are similar or different according to class, reasons for immigration, religion, family dynamic and cultural traditions. Examining and understanding the

reasons behind the similarities and differences between different groups could potentially reveal important findings and topics for future research exploration.

Conducting narrative studies on different Arab groups of older men and women in different regions across Canada would provide more insight on their role in their community and in society. Conducting comparative studies between immigrant groups of first and second-generation Arab Muslim men and women, or of diverse nationalities, to highlight the differences and similarities in terms of forming and maintaining social connections. I think it is important to understand how generational contexts overlap, through the examination of culture, ethnicity, language, identity, religion and history. Looking at how Arab Muslim females or males compare to other Arab Muslim females or males of different or same age groups, would provide viewpoints about the interrelations between their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement.

Some participants expressed the importance of keeping and transferring cultural traditions to their children. I think it would be significant to see how they dealt with identity transformations being a Muslim Lebanese and Canadian, as I was able to hear how each participant worked towards re-shaping their identity. Thus, a focus on building social relations, family dynamics and community engagement among Canadian Arab older adults could potentially provide novel findings on how they constructed their identity as immigrants in Canada. I also believe it would be interesting to explore intergenerational conflict and how that affects experiences of building social ties. I also believe it is important to research how social connections are built and maintained among the various generations of Arab immigrants to address any issues the population may be facing such as social isolation and shed light on diverse generational social perceptions in various contexts. In light of this,

“Attention to generational differences is important for an understanding of how notions of culture, Islam, and community are neglected, as well as social processes and institutions that are contested, produced and

performed in a variety of contexts, and in relation to others' contexts"
(Cayer, 1996, p. 181).

These are all potential suggestions for qualitative narrative researchers who seek to conduct detailed and evocative studies.

Practice in society.

This research study can also contribute to practice in society in several ways. When I talked to the Imam at the London Muslim mosque about this study, he asked me how this study would be able to contribute to the Muslim older adult community, as he told me he felt like the older adults are the forgotten ones. He told me that he notices that the mosque does not have many activities for the older adult population and that he notices some of them are lonely. The Imam also mentioned that he would like to get some projects going for this population and try to create more engaging activities for them. After completing the study, I plan on sending the Imam a summary of the thesis as he expressed his interest in the study results. I believe that the results and four stories of this study will invite the Imam to consider how these participants come to understand themselves as they do today and how change happens in behaviors and social relationships in order to understand oneself.

This narrative study provides insight into the structure of everyday life, especially how people in the Muslim Lebanese culture develop meaning in diverse experiences throughout their life. Through these findings the Imam will see how participants coped in times of struggle, hardship and happiness, which provided an opening for deeper reflection on their lived experiences. These stories can function as a starting point for practice in multicultural mosque communities, as they were able to shed light the importance of social connectedness and social engagement in older adults' lives. The Imam may also find different meaning in these stories and be able to assess alternative interpretations to better facilitate future initiatives for the Muslim older adult community and compare their stories to others he has heard and think of ways to

facilitate their social interactions. For example, the Imam may utilize these findings to consider the social barriers and facilitators each participant experiences and use this to better understand what new immigrants may also be facing. In my future work, I proposed to help the Imam and become a part of the Muslim mosque community and assist in implementing activities for the older adult population. The mosque could also hold social gatherings or information sessions on interesting topics such as heart health, for older adults once a month. I believe that this study will be able to bring awareness to community leaders about the social needs for immigrant older adults. For example, transportation barriers for older adults can be discussed or language barriers, as some of the participants expressed these two aspects as barriers. Most older adults in this study talked about spending time at the mall, meeting with their friends in the morning. I found the mall to be a meaningful place for older adults, especially in the mornings, as they are able to shop and socialize with others. A potential idea could be to implement activities for older adults in the mall during the hours they spend there the most.

Also, while seeking participants for this study, I spoke to some of my friends who expressed to me their interest in seeing what I would find from each narrative. They also spoke about their grandparents and how they noticed that most of their grandparents stay at home and are not involved in much other than family gatherings. I believe that the findings could be useful to family members of older Muslim Lebanese adults, to help them become more aware of the importance of social connectedness and social engagement in the lives of older adults. In the four narratives, they could see how each participant derived unique and rich meaning to their everyday experiences. I believe that people will become more aware of the critical need for social interactions among older adults, as they are a population who are at risk for experiencing social isolation. I believe that these stories and findings could be shared with the municipality of London, Ontario to gain a deeper understanding of Lebanese cultural background and what they value in relation to building and maintaining social connections and engaging in the community. The findings may invite them to

compare other stories from other cultures in the London community, which may identify strengths and weaknesses to provide programming for older immigrant adults of all diverse ethnicities. For example, incorporating more culturally appropriate activities that can be found online or in the newspaper would be one important step to getting older immigrant adult to participate.

Policy.

After a detailed analysis of these action plans presented in the introduction, I noticed that all older adults in Canada are grouped together under the term “senior”, with The National Seniors Council of Canada Report being the only report discussing the status of immigrants. The study I conducted has shown that immigrant older adults do have specific diverse needs in regards to social connectedness and social engagement as their culture and religion play a significant role in facilitating their sense of belonging and connectedness to the wider community. As more immigrant older adults continue to arrive in Canada, I believe it is important to understand and examine how immigrant older adults, who came to Canada in their adulthood, and decided to stay and age in Canada have progressed. These findings could also potentially be useful in resettlement of newly arriving older immigrants.

With the policy reports presented in the introduction, it is clear that the development of approaches to increase older adults’ overall participation in the community and quality of life has been a newer, yet critical component of recent Canadian government policies, with social connectedness and integration being two priority areas (Dickens, Richards, Greaves & Campbell, 2011). Unfortunately, these policies often have not been developed or implemented in a culturally competent manner (Dickens, Richards, Greaves & Campbell, 2011; Kalich, Heinemann, & Ghahari, 2015). The lack of culturally appropriate services can somewhat be attributed to the lack of research available on divergences in immigrant social experiences and involvement in Canada. As such, to create appropriate and effective policy and services for ageing immigrants, further research is needed on ageing immigrants in Canada, and on their experiences of

social connectedness and social engagement as compared to their Canadian-born counterparts.

In conclusion, there needs to be more in-depth research that explores the stories and life-histories of Muslim Lebanese older adults to bring a deeper understanding of how social connectedness and social engagement affects their life course. Thus, I believe there are endless possibilities for research in this topic area not only for Arab Muslims but also for people of different nationalities, ethnicities and religions.

Concluding Remarks

This research study contributes to the ongoing discussion of immigration, ageing, social connectedness and social engagement; specifically, it contributes to the growing literature on Muslims and Islam in Canada. It examined four stories, which allowed the reader to look past potential assumptions they may have had about the population. It reveals how these four Muslim Lebanese Canadian older adults positioned themselves in society now and over time, in their own unique ways and how aspects in their story shaped their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement. The older adults in this study described experiences of social connectedness through the concepts of past shaping present experiences, family in Arab culture, gender roles and patriarchy in Arab culture, education, finding place, language and being a Muslim in Canada, which provided a rich understanding of the quality and quantity of their social ties and how culture, religion, ageing, family and immigration experiences shaped their everyday lives and experiences of social connectedness and social engagement.

Participants talked about several concepts in relation to social connectedness such as; experiences at the mosque, neighbourhood characteristics, occupational status, sense of place, feelings of loneliness, presenting your best self forward, formation of identity and religious beliefs. When looking at social engagement, participant's spoke about weddings, community events,

involvement with the mosque, community participation and political events. I noticed that their experiences of social connectedness and social engagement were interconnected. From these lived experiences presented above, I found that participant's connected their story to challenges, coping, sense of belonging and sense of establishment to the wider community. I understood that these findings lead to their overall life satisfaction, sense of pride and finding happiness in what they do and in who they are as a human being. These factors shaped their immigration experience, as I noticed social connectedness and social engagement were two profound factors which shaped their life story.

Conducting this research study was a fulfilling process and gave me a stronger sense of life purpose. Seeing the interconnectedness between the concepts and experiences made me think of how each participant is the owner of a beautiful colorful glass mosaic. Since I asked them to share their experiences, I felt as though I started putting together diverse pieces of colored glass and created something meaningful. Even though the mosaics are not finished yet, they are the start of something new that people can admire, relate to and imagine their potential. Conducting this research also helped me develop my own identity further and question what social connectedness and social engagement meant to me and to the people around me. I reflect on what my grandfather and grandmother told me, that people live for people. I was able to find and gain knowledge and insight within the stories of people in everyday life.

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Appendix A

Ethical Approval



Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED]
Department & Institution: Health Sciences/Occupational Therapy, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108283
Study Title: Examining and Understanding Social Engagement and Social Connectedness Among Lebanese Muslim Canadian Older Adults

NMREB Initial Approval Date: September 01, 2016
NMREB Expiry Date: September 01, 2017

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol	Received August 22, 2016	
Letter of Information & Consent		2016/08/22
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Poster	2016/07/15
Instruments	Narrative Interview Guide	2016/08/12

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.



Appendix B

Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Lebanese Muslim Canadians have long been a vital part of the London, Ontario community. We would like to find out about their experiences engaging and interacting with others, now and over the years.

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study that will look to uncover the experiences of staying socially engaged and connected in relation to the immigration story of Lebanese Older Adults in London, Ontario.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in 2 one-on-one interviews. The interviews will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you. You will also be asked if the interviews can be audio-recorded.

- Are you 65 years of age or older?
- Do you currently live in London, Ontario?
- Did you immigrate to London, Ontario in the 1960s?
- Have you lived in your neighbourhood for at least 1 year?
- Are you able to converse in English?
- Would you be able to talk about your experiences?
- Are you Lebanese Muslim?

If you answered YES to these questions and would like to find out more information or volunteer to participate in this study, please contact:

Appendix C

Narrative Interview One and Two Guide

Interview 1- Narrative Interview

Firstly, I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day to help me with this study. Before I begin, I would like to share my story as to how I became interested in the topic and then I will talk to you about the purpose of this study, is that ok with you?

The decision I made to study Lebanese Canadians stemmed from my personal experiences as the granddaughter of Lebanese immigrants. This sparked a fascination with the ways in which social engagement and connections keep us happy and healthy as we go through life. My interest began to expand further after my grandmother shared her story about how her and my grandfather immigrated to Canada. I became intrigued by how my family built their own mini Lebanon here in London by bringing over their relatives to start a new life in London, Ontario.

I also noticed how loneliness can be bad for our health. Once I reviewed some information on population again in Canada, it became evident to me that very few studies place emphasis on understanding immigrant older adults and their experiences in terms of community engagement, participation in socially meaningful activities, emotional connections with people in the community and quality of social relationships of older adults.

For this study I have decided to use narrative methods, which is a way of collecting people's stories about their experiences. People tell stories about events in their lives all of the time, it is one way in which people make sense of their lives. I chose this approach because I like how it places the people being studied at the heart of the study process. Does that make sense?

In this part of the interview, I will let you take the lead in telling your story, and

won't be asking directed questions.

I will be taking some notes as you talk, to help me organize the second part of our interview in which I'll follow-up on some of the issues or events you talk about.

Before you begin, I would like to inform you that your personal information will be kept confidential, along with any names you provide when telling me about your experience.

Primary prompt: I would like you to tell me your story about immigrating to Canada and then continuing to live here. Once you settled in London, Ontario, how did you get to know people around the community? What sorts of social activities do you do with others in the community, including your family, friends and others?

Additional Prompts:

1. "Could you tell me more about ... [topic identified by participant]?"
2. How have your social relationships/social activities/interactions with others changed over time?

Interview 2- Narrative Follow-Up

Since I will not know exactly what these questions will be until after the preliminary analysis of the first narrative interview, here are a few general questions that will act as a basis.

1. Can you please tell me about how...happened...the/your story of your experience of...?
2. All those events and experiences which were important to you, how it all developed until now...
3. You could start around the time...began for you personally...The period in your life when...became personally important when you started...

Appendix D

Narrative Interview Two Questions

Questions for Interview 2: Mahmoud

1. You mentioned that the pioneers made you feel at home and showed you how great Canada is. What do you mean by 'at home'? What does it mean to be at home presently?
2. You talked a lot about how proud you are of the first convention conference which took place in London, Ontario. You said that the greatest thing you found out was that Muslims are all supporting each other, since hundreds came from all over the map. You said that it gave you the courage and motivation to do something more. Can you tell me about the people around you and in your community now?
3. You have talked about coming to Canada, raising your kids, and then they have grown up. What was your life like then? How did you connected with others, what was challenging, what was helpful?
4. You mentioned that you worked 8 different factory jobs and that the people were very kind and welcoming and that everyone helped each other out. In particular, you mentioned Lebanese people all help each other out. That was then, I was wondering if you could tell me how it is now? Do you still feel a though Lebanese people are well connected and help each other out? Not just young people but what about the older adult population? Do you also want to ask about how connected he feels to other Londoners?
5. You talked about how you brought 1,100 people from all over the world to your home village in Lebanon. You said that the president of Lebanon at the time said we need more people like the ones from your home town. You brought a lot of people to one place where they were able to connect and be happy. With your role in the community as a community organizer, bringing people together, I wanted to know why you did this, what supporters you had and still have now and what sorts of challenges you faced?
6. You touched upon one neighbourhood activity, that being the annual picnic. You also mentioned how important it is for you to stay involved because you don't like just sitting around and watching TV. I would like you to expand a little more for me on some of the social activities you did and are doing now.
7. You talked a lot about the importance of the mosque and the Islamic center and how it's not only a mosque but a lecture, a culture, religion, education and a convention. A place where people got together to talk and cook and a place where the younger generation can find friends and talk, as well as a place where refugee come to for help. You also said it's a place for the entire Muslim Ummah. Can you talk about what the mosque means to you now, and other places or spaces in your neighbourhood that

- are important or meaningful to you? In what ways are they meaningful to you?
8. You worked so hard on creating all of these wonderful directories. What do they mean to you?
 9. I noticed how passionate you are about getting the youth involved. You emphasized several times that you want the youth to be involved. What does this mean to you and what does involvement mean to you? What are you doing now to get the youth involved and what challenges have you faced or have faced?
 10. Lastly, you said that you need family support whenever you do something because it makes you feel good. What does family support mean to you?
 11. You mentioned that you came to Canada in 1949. Why did you decide to start your life in London, Ontario? Was there something here that attracted you to come?
 12. You mentioned that you started learning English, when you came to London, two nights a week. It sounds as though learning the English language meant a lot to you, I was wondering why that is?

Questions for Interview 2: Aya

1. You have talked about coming to Canada, raising your kids, and then they have grown up. What was your life like then? How did you connected with others, what was challenging, what was helpful?
2. You mentioned that you worked at a couple of clothing alteration places and dietary aid and that the people were very kind, but you faced challenges with discrimination. That was then, I was wondering if you could tell me how it is now? How connected do you feel to other Londoners? What challenges have you faced doing so?
3. You touched upon some community activities such as the mission and the epilepsy run. I would like you to talk a little more for me on some of the social activities you did and re doing now, that are important to you. In what ways are they meaningful and why?
4. You talked a lot about the importance of the mosque and the Islamic center and how this was a place where you learned how to clean and cook, a place where you made many good friends. Can you talk about what the mosque means to you now? What about other places or spaces in your neighbourhood that are important or meaningful to you? In what ways are they meaningful to you?
5. You talked to me about communication challenges you faced when you first came to Canada. After you experienced not being able get your message across in English to your co-workers trying to explain to them that you were fasting, that was when you said that's it I have to go to school. Once you went to school and learned English, how did that help you as you go through life?
6. Other questions:

- a. You talked about presenting the best self you can in-front of Canadians, can you talk about what that means? Why is it important?
- b. You mentioned not trusting others when you arrived. Could you talk some more about how you build trust with others?
- c. You mentioned feelings of fear when you have been out in public, like when the man was looking at you at the epilepsy run. How do you stay safe, how does this affect what you do and how does it make you feel (may say no effect, does what she wants)?
- d. You talked about how close you were with the neighbours you lived beside, then the new neighbours who were so similar to the first ones. Is it important to you that you have someone nearby/next door that you are close with? In what ways/why?
- e. Do you feel like you belong in your community? In what ways? (can ask about her different communities, eg. mosque, neighbourhood, London generally, etc)
- f. You mentioned that your friends helped you to become more opened minded. I was wondering what open minded means to you and if you could describe that a little more?
- g. You mentioned how surprised you were that your neighbours had a bunch of food you could eat at their anniversary party. Could you talk some more about your expectations you may have with others?

Questions for Interview 2: Ali

1. I would like to start off by making sure I have a full understanding of your story. So you came to Canada in the summer of 1971. How old were you then? Did you complete your education in Lebanon? How was your life in Lebanon growing up?
2. And then stayed in Nova Scotia for 6 months, then moved to Windsor for three years. After Windsor, did you move straight to London? How old were you then? When did you open your first business and where? What other businesses did you open, when and where? When did you get married? Was that in Lebanon or Canada?
3. You talked about coming to Canada, raising your kids, and then they have grown up. What was your life like then? How did you connected with others, what was challenging and what was helpful?
4. You mentioned that you opened many businesses in London and that you met a lot of people when you were doing that. Could you talk to me about the relationships you had through your businesses? Could you tell me about your life right now, the people you see, the places you go and the things you do?
5. You mentioned that you play cards and have coffee with your friends. Could you tell me about that? (who do you play cards with? Where? What do you enjoy about it? Do you see yourself continuing to do this? What are some things that might stop you?)

6. You mentioned that you are very involved in the lives of your children and grandchildren. In what ways are you involved?
7. Tell me about the spaces and places in your neighbourhood that are important and meaningful to you? In what ways are they meaningful to you? (how long have you lived in this house for?)
8. You said that when you came to London it automatically felt like home for you and that it is almost like your home village in Lebanon. Can you describe what home means? What were some of the things in London at the time and now that give you the feeling of "Home"?
9. You also said that you did not feel rejected at all and that people were always cooperative and willing to give you a chance. You also said you're not an immigrant anymore and that you always felt like you belonged. Can you describe to me what that means to you? What sorts of things, whether that be in the community or outside your community make you feel like you belong now?
10. You mentioned that people outside your community were always there and willing to help and that you faced no challenges. What about people within your immediate community? Did you face any challenges there?
11. You mentioned that you are "not willing to put up with things", what thing's do you mean exactly?
12. You also talked about how "not everybody is willing to blend in", what do you mean by this exactly? Can you give me some examples?

Questions for Interview 2: Nabila

1. You talked to me about how you would walk to the bus stop which would be really far away. And that you would work the night shift and you would end up walking home for 30 mins. Then you said you are happy now and you love this life now because everything is close. You mentioned the people changed, I want to know how the people changed?
2. You talked about how strict your dad was, how you never had a choice and that you had to do exactly what he said, how was it for you growing up? What was your family and household like?
3. So you came to London last year, did your husband and daughter also come with you?
4. You mentioned how you are always friendly with people and it is easy for you to make friends. What do you do to make you friendly, could you give me some examples?
5. Since you came to London have there been a lot of weddings and showers and get together? What do you enjoy about them?
6. You know so many people in the community. Do you meet up with any of them? What do you do with them? Does anyone come with you on walks? Do they live close by to you? How about your neighbors? Are you connected with them? How often do you see them?
7. You mentioned that you are always giving. When you make food you sometimes make for 2 and other times you make for 6. During the first

- interview you said she would come and you would give. Does this happen often? Is this person your friend?
8. So when we talked about places you go, you said the mall. Do you do other things there other than shop? Meet with friends? Coffee? Shop?
 9. You talked about raising your daughter in Nova Scotia, how many children do you have? Were they all born in Nova Scotia? Are they living in the same area as you? Could you tell me about your life when you were raising your children, including the people you knew, and the activities you did?
 - a. How did you connect with others? how did you get to know people? How often did you do that? How often did you see them? Also, did you feel like you belonged in your community?
 10. You mentioned that life was good and hard in Nova Scotia. Can you tell me about that? What was good and what was hard? What are some examples?
 11. You worked for many years of your life. 26 years as a pastry chef and you also worked in your husband's shoe store on the weekends. Could you talk about the relationships you had through the family business and working as a pastry chef?
 12. Can you tell me about your life right now, the people you see, the places you go and the things you do? You mentioned that you like walking, shopping, watching movies, can you tell me about that? Who do you do these things with? What do you enjoy about it? Is this something that you see yourself continuing to do? What might stop you from doing it? Are there other things you would love to do but are not able to? What stops you?
 13. Are you involved with your children? If so, in what ways?
 14. Can you talk to me about the places that are important to you, in Nova Scotia or in London? You mentioned earlier that you miss Nova Scotia but your family is in London. You mentioned you missed Nova Scotia. What do you miss about it?
 15. After being in Alberta for 6 years and going back to Lebanon for four years, what made you decide to come back to London and live with your brother? do you feel like you belong in London? Why do you feel that way?
 16. You mentioned that there is a lot of good help now. What were some challenges you faced before, when there wasn't much help in Alberta and Nova Scotia?
 17. Did you ever want to take English classes being in Canada?
 18. You touched upon some activities such as some dinners and weddings. I would like you to expand a little more for me on some of the social activities you did and are doing now.

Appendix E

Letter of Information

Examining and Understanding Social Connectedness and Social Engagement Among Lebanese Muslim Canadian Older Adults

Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in a research study about your experiences of social engagement and social connections with others, especially in relation to your experiences as an immigrant in Canada. You are being asked to participate because you responded to a study advertisement and you meet the study criteria.

Why is this study being done?

Meaningful social engagement and connectedness affect our lives in many ways. We would like to find out more how Lebanese Muslim older adults stay socially engaged and connected in their communities.

Who is being asked to participate in the study?

To participate in the study, you must:

- be aged 65 years or older
- have immigrated to Canada in the 1960s
- currently live in London, Ontario and have lived there for at least 1 year
- be able to converse in English
- be able to talk about your experiences through storytelling
- be a Lebanese Muslim

How long will you be in this study?

We expect you will be in the study for about 1 month, and up to 2 months, participating in two to three separate sessions scheduled a few weeks apart.

What are the study procedures?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete two interviews. The first interview will be 1 to 3 hours long and the second interview will be about 1 hour long 0 minutes. The interviews will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you. You will also be asked if the interviews can be audio-recorded. For this study, audio-recording is mandatory for participation. With your consent, we will use unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research. You will also be asked to review one document summarizing your interviews. The document will be sent to you by encrypted email, regular mail or the researcher can bring the document to your home. If you wish to discuss the summary of your interviews, you will be asked to schedule a phone call or an in-person meeting with the researcher, at a location of your choosing.

What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. There may be a potential for discomfort as a result of discussing difficult memories. If you experience any distress and desire support, please consider accessing one of the resources listed at the end of this document. All meetings will be scheduled at your convenience, and you can request to reschedule or shorten meetings for any reason.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but the study results will help us to gain a deeper understanding of how immigrants experience social engagement and connectedness.

Can participants choose to leave the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

How will participants' information be kept confidential?

Your data will not be shared with anyone except with your consent or as required by law. The data will be kept securely at Western University. All personal information such as your name and address will be removed from the data and will be replaced with a number. A list linking the number with your name will be kept in a secure place, separate from your file. The data, with identifying information removed, will be securely stored in a locked office in a locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer server at Western University. If you choose email as an option to review your narrative account, an encrypted PDF file will be sent to the email address you provide. This email will then be followed up by a phone call to verify your identity. During this phone call the researcher will provide a secure access code. The secure access code will allow you to unencrypt the email document containing the re-written narrative account.

Representatives Western University's Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your name on the consent form may allow someone to link the data and identify you. The data for this research study will be retained for 5 years, after which paper documents will be securely shredded and electronic files will be erased. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity or address will be released or published. We may use personal quotes obtained during study interviews in future publications.

What are the rights of participants?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study and you can withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If the request is made, it is guaranteed that the information will be removed. If you wish to have your information removed, please let the

researcher know. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

List of Social Service Providers

Cross Cultural Learners Center (CCLC)

505 Dundas Street, London, Ontario

Telephone: 519-432-1133

Email: cclc@cclc.org

Islamic Center of Southwest Ontario

951 Pond Mills Rd London, Ontario

Telephone: 519-668-2269

Email: info@islamiccentre.ca

London Muslim Mosque

151 Oxford St. West London, Ontario

Telephone: (519) 439-9451

Email: secretary@londonmosque.ca

**Examining and Understanding Social Engagement and Social
Connectedness Among Lebanese Muslim Canadian Older Adults**

Consent Statement – Participant Copy

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research **YES** **NO**

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research **YES** **NO**

Print Name of Study Participant Signature Date (DD-**MMM**-**YYYY**)

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent Signature Date (DD-**MMM**-**YYYY**)

**Examining and Understanding Social Engagement and Social
Connectedness Among Lebanese Muslim Canadian Older Adults**

Consent Statement – Copy for Study Records

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research **YES** **NO**

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research **YES** **NO**

Print Name of Study Participant
(YYYY)

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent
(YYYY)

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Nada Chams

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Bachelor of Health Sciences, Honors Specialization
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2011-2015

Master of Science, Health Promotion
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2015-2017

Related Work Experience: Graduate Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2016-2017

Graduate Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2015-2016

Undergraduate Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2014-2015

Health Promotion Lead
The Heart and Stroke Foundation
London, Ontario, Canada
2013-2013

Volunteer Experience: Intensive Care Unit Liaison
London Health Sciences Center
London, Ontario, Canada
2016-2017

Western Student Research Conference Judge
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

March 2015

Heart and Stroke Volunteer
The Heart and Stroke Foundation
London, Ontario, Canada
2011-2015

Health Promotion Lead
The Heart and Stroke Foundation
London, Ontario, Canada
2013-2013

Banting House Tour Guide Volunteer
Banting House Museum, Canadian Diabetes Association
London, Ontario, Canada
Fall 2014

Conferences:

Canadian Cancer Society University Bureau Blitz
Presentation, Awarded First Place
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
March 2017

Health and Rehabilitation Science Conference
Poster Presentation
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
January 2017

Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference
Poster Presentation
Montreal Quebec
October 2016

**Certifications/
Award:**

Nominated for the Graduate Teaching Assistant Award
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
June 2017

Tri-Council Policy Statement
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
October 2015

Teaching Assistant Training Program Certificate
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
August 2015