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# The Experiences of Youth from Immigrant and Refugee Backgrounds in a Social Justice Leadership Program: A Participatory Action Research Photovoice Project

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The Experiences of Youth from Immigrant and Refugee Backgrounds in a Social Justice  
Leadership Program: A Participatory Action Research Photovoice Project

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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## Abstract

Research about the negative experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds commonly emphasizes a lack of English language proficiency, criminal activity, and underachievement. More recently, a strengths-based, resilient, and social justice lens has been used to look at this historically oppressed population. In this research, I examined the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth in their involvement in a social justice leadership club in a secondary school in Calgary, Canada. I drew from Iris Marion Young's theoretical framework using her five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence; and her four normative ideals of a deliberative model of democracy: inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity. I used photovoice and semi-structured interviews as part of the research design to work collaboratively with six female high school youth between 16 and 17 years of age to share their social justice initiatives with educational powerholders. The themes of identity and belonging, advocating for social justice, mental health awareness, and aspirational stance to dream emerged from photovoice participant analysis and interview data. I share the overarching themes of resiliency, self-efficacy, and empowerment; troubling Islamophobia; and reshaping the narratives of the school and community despite pressures to conform to the dominant culture. I also present future directions and recommendations to support youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in their social justice endeavours.

*Keywords:* minoritized, immigrant, refugee, youth, leadership, social justice, photovoice

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## Participants' Poetic Voices

These two poems were written by Nawaz and Tina, participants in this research study. They were courageous to perform them for the entire school population. They also presented them for the final celebration of learning at the end of this research study.

### *Shackles of Racism, by Nawaz*

Mahogany, mocha, ebony . . . Black.

Porcelain, pure, alabaster . . . White.

Light and dark, desired and undesired.

The variance in the color of one's skin has given rise to this toxic mentality we've all acquired.

Ever-present dichotomies that label and determine, classify and categorize.

Slowly and lethally stripping away individuality and encouraging conformity.

One race. Multiple prototypes. And yet only one notable archetype.

Our fixation with the prolongation of this prejudice, this discrimination will only result in our ultimate ruination.

We have become accustomed to our sight being enshrouded by all of this bigotry -- all of this negativity.

Accustomed to living in a world where worth is determined not by the quality of your personality,

but rather where you fall upon the skin tone spectrum of superficiality.

We live in a world where Martin Luther King's "I Dream a Dream" falls upon deaf ears.

Where each step towards progress is shadowed by regress.

Think Rosa Parks and then think Charlottesville.

Daca Dreamers and then the Infamous Wall that threatens to tear apart the believers.

Black lives matter and then all lives matter. Correction: blue lives matter. White lives matter.

In our world, a cry of outrage and injustice is silenced by those that are privileged.

In our world, the length of your sentence is determined by the color of your skin, not the severity of your crime.

If you're brown you're a terrorist, and if you're white you're mentally ill.

In our world, we are slaves to the stereotypes, chain shackled through systemic oppression.

Relentless resistance to our condition has stained our wrists crimson.

Bound by preconceived notions that conceal our true worth, our skin tone acting like a label from birth.

Whether it's at airplane terminals, or at a job interview, discrimination originating from our outwardly appearance hold us captive.

Borderline deceptive.

Bending and breaking us to the fit the whims of normality, of our intolerant and biased society,

where abnormality is akin to criminality.

And yet by arming ourselves with acceptance and love as our trusted weapons, can we strike at racism's essence.

After banishing away the hate and animosity, only then can we preach of equality and bountiful opportunity.

And when we finally achieve the cessation of all segregation, surely then we have found humanity's salvation.

### ***Society Is War, by Tina***

Roaming this battlefield alone  
Looking for home  
Where I know I can escape this war-zone  
And know I won't have my heart torn

All they taught us was to criticize  
And now all we do is idolize  
This concept of fitting in  
But there all lies  
Now we must rise

They call us incapable and worthless  
Now we walk around mirthless  
This society is merciless  
Throwing insults at you until you're breathless

They say they run the world with democracies  
But all I see are multiple hypocrisies  
And so many attacks through terrorist conspiracies  
With people creating their own theories

Accusations thrown back and forth  
Like nobody has any worth  
We just meander this Earth  
But now it is time for our rebirth

Because in this age  
There is no range  
Of what we cannot change  
So join me and rage

Against this society  
That took away all the fairness and equality

And filled us with all this insanity  
March on with loyalty to humanity  
Leave behind this life of vanity

Stop watching for every little mistake  
That others make  
And instead ache  
For others to wake  
And realize that their reality of life is fake  
And full of hate

Start looking at your own actions  
And end these contradictions  
As well as these addictions  
Of pointing out little imperfections

Because we were all made different  
And we are all god's children  
In his eyes there is no top ten  
And every man is equal to every woman

End this war  
With no feelings of abhor  
This society is done for  
And so is this war

## Chapter 1: Introduction

My family came to Canada as government sponsored refugees. We fled Vietnam in January 1979 and lived in a Malaysian refugee camp before arriving in Canada several months later. Although I was born in Vietnam, I am of Chinese ancestry and identify as a Chinese Canadian. I am grateful for being given the chance to be raised in Canada, as I have had access to public and higher education. In my home country of Vietnam, being in a poor family, I would have had minimal years of schooling. Therefore, I would not be where I am today if my family had stayed in Vietnam. I am thankful that Canada took in my family in a time of greatest need. On the other hand, growing up I felt marginalized due to the intersections of my identity. I felt disenfranchised due to various factors, including but not limited to language barriers, being female as part of a minoritized group, and absence of parents and parental involvement at school. My parents did not find comfort in settling in Canada and moved back to Asia, leaving my siblings and me with our extended family. My mother came home when I entered junior high school, but she remained emotionally absent.

Although it was not a daily ordeal, I also experienced some forms of racism, such as being called a “chink” at school and having teachers tell me to keep my Cantonese language at home. Additionally, I had to assume the role of language broker (Tse, 1996) for my family given that many of them did not speak English. At times, I felt invisible and powerless at school and lacked the confidence to speak up for myself; however, at home I was outgoing and outspoken in my first language, Cantonese, as I was able to converse easily with my family. This dichotomy of emotions and behaviours has made me question the intersections of my identity, and more specifically my Chinese identity as a young child.

Presently, I am a privileged and educated individual. Although formerly a child refugee, my privileges include that I am a heterosexual, able-bodied, and fully funded doctoral student who lives in a middle-class neighbourhood. Others respect me for my educational accomplishments and turn to me for expert advice about counselling psychology and education. I am a registered counselling psychologist and often work with marginalized individuals, couples, and families in an agency that does not charge clients for counselling. I am an instructor for an undergraduate program in education and teach courses pertaining to literacy, language and culture, and diversity in learning, with a social justice and advocacy focus. I have taught comprehensive school health, where students learn about mental and physical health. I also teach counselling courses at the graduate level, including culture-infused counselling, health psychology, and counselling skills. In the 2017–2018 academic year, I was the director of the peer mentor program at my university, pairing current and new graduate students so the latter would have a mentor to support and guide them in their first year.

With these experiences, I need to be cognizant of the privileges I hold when working with immigrant and refugee youth. I also need to be aware that my experience as a refugee child is not the same as what immigrant and refugee youth face today. These experiences help make me who I am, and I need to journey with care not to assume all immigrant and refugee youth share these life experiences. Therefore, exploring my positionality within this research project was necessary so that I did not inadvertently exert power over youth participants. I needed to be cognizant of how this research could benefit them, or even harm them, by inviting their voices to be shared with educational powerholders.

With this context and my leadership experiences as a doctoral student, I wondered about the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth in a social justice leadership program. In this

study, I had the honour of working with six female youth (ages 16 and 17) in Grades 11 and 12 in Calgary, Canada, to hear their experiences, see their photographs, and listen to their stories about their participation in a social justice leadership club for a four-month period. To protect the confidentiality of the school and the participants, I have not included the official name of the club in this dissertation. In this chapter, I provide an overview of this research and discuss the background, purpose, research question, theoretical framework, methodology, study significance, limitations, assumptions, definitions, and a summary.

## **Background**

Canada's population includes 6.8 million foreign-born individuals, who account for over 20.6% of the country's population expansion (Statistics Canada, 2013). In other words, one in every five individuals is foreign-born. In 2011, 78.2% of the immigrant population reported a mother tongue other than the officially sanctioned languages of French or English (Statistics Canada, 2016). In that year, immigrant and refugee youth between the ages of 15 and 24 accounted for 4.5% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2013). Given this percentage, a need exists to consider how best to support these youth during their adolescent and young adult years.

For the purposes of this study, an immigrant is an individual "who has moved from their country of origin (their homeland) to another country, for example, Canada, to become a citizen of that country" (Newyouth, 2016, para. 2). Refugees are individuals who are "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017, p. 3).

Resettled refugees in Canada comprise 11.8% of migrants, and they include government sponsored, privately sponsored, blended sponsored, and protected persons (Government of Canada, 2015a). Many refugee students who are new to Canada, with English as a new language, face poverty, discrimination, a reduced ability to access resources, peer pressure, and they are at risk for criminal activity (Asadi, 2014; Choo, 2007). Some refugee youth may have had minimal schooling experience (especially in the English language) before coming to Canada (Asadi, 2014; Stewart, 2011). Others may be from war-affected countries, where they have had to grow up quickly in order to survive (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988; Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, & Kelly, 2010). Despite these setbacks in life, Stermac and colleagues (2010) found that refugee children can excel academically once they are in a new and safe country.

Some immigrant youth relocate with their families for economic and financial gains, whereas others come to Canada as dependents or under family sponsorship (Chen & Tse, 2011; Stewart, 2011). As of 2015, 62.7% of immigrants were accepted into Canada for economic reasons as they arrived to earn a living as skilled trade workers or entrepreneurs; some were self-employed before coming to Canada (Government of Canada, 2015a). In contrast to refugee children, the children of these immigrants usually have had more schooling in their home country. Having explored the context of immigrant and refugee children arriving in Canada, it is not possible nor ideal to generalize the experiences of these students as each group may have substantial unique differences in lived experiences and conflation of these two groups is not acceptable nor the aim of this study. For example, their literacy level when entering Canada may look very different depending on their formal education in their home country. Nonetheless, it is important to support youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, so they will have a sense of belonging and feel that their “multiple and intersecting cultural identity” is embraced (Collins,

2010, p. 247; Tecele & James, 2014). For this writing when I use the words “immigrant” and “refugee” before the word youth, it is due to necessity of sentence structure and not because these social locations define youth’s experiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds are unique because they have to constantly negotiate their ethnic culture with that of the host culture. At times, the values and belief systems differ between the cultures, rendering conflict within the individual (Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Tecele & James, 2014; Zine, 2000). This conflict can cause rifts in family relationships and can affect their psychological well-being as they work to integrate into Canadian society (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). As a former teacher with Little Red River Cree Nation and the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), and now as a registered counselling psychologist, I have learned that youth from all backgrounds need to be acknowledged, have a sense of belonging, and know that their ideas matter. In my observation, immigrant and refugee youth who are new to the country may not be encouraged or inspired to join in leadership endeavours at school due to some school professionals not seeing that they have the funds of knowledge; this is the view that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006, pp. ix–x).

Literature has been growing about youth activism in the United States (Macias, 2013; Seif, 2011; Terriquez, 2015) and youth working on anti-racism initiatives in Canada (Lund & Nabavi, 2008); these studies reveal that youth are inspired to lead to create social change within their schools and community. Despite these studies, not a lot of literature has explored youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds who engage in leadership activities in their secondary

schools within western Canada. Hence, I worked with six such youth to understand their experiences participating in a social justice leadership club in their secondary school. This club, led by sponsor teacher, Ms. M., has been in operation for over 20 years. Its current aims are advocating for diversity, addressing human rights issues, and promoting volunteerism by providing students opportunities to engage in the school and community (Ms. M., personal communication, January 25, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

My research focused on youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds and their experiences in a school-based leadership program. The objective of this research was to use a strengths-based approach by delving into the resiliency of these youth and their desire to lead for social change. Therefore, the research questions were as follows:

1. How does participation in a social justice leadership club impact youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds?
2. How does their participation in a social justice leadership club impact the school and community?

### **Theoretical Framework**

I drew upon Young's (1990) theoretical perspective outlined in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* to understand the nuances and complexities of immigrant and refugee youths' positioning. Young (1990) was inspired by the works of postmodern writers (such as Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and Kristeva), who argued for the "positive sense of group difference and politics that attends to rather than represses differences" (p. 7). She proclaimed that "Marxism, participatory democratic theory, and Black philosophy" (Young, 1990, p. 8) also informed her work. Young's (1990) perspective starts from the premise that a just society is one that moves

beyond distributive justice, where the focus is about the distribution of resources, to underscore the realities of oppression and domination. Distributive justice entails the equitable distribution of profits, resources, and opportunities to those with the highest need (Rawls, 1971). For Young, distributive justice is insufficient in attaining a just society because individuals do not have the same starting place in life due to socioeconomic status and cultural identity, among other factors. This reality can result in structural oppression of these individuals. Structural oppression derives from the “vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms” (Young, 1990, p. 41). In other words, there need not be an obvious oppressor ruling over a group of people for structural injustice to occur. For example, structural oppression can be evident when employers hire employees who have English names, while those with ethnic names, even though equally qualified, may be left out of the hiring pool; this example is a form of implicit bias.

**The five faces of oppression.** Young (1990) stated that “all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs” (p. 40). Young’s (1990) perspective aligned well with this research because youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds have historically experienced oppression due to the intersections of their identities (Este & Ngo, 2011; Terriquez, 2015). Adults may not see that these youth possess abilities and strengths and have the potential to become capable citizens who can make positive contributions to society (Giroux, 2003; Macias, 2013). Young (1990) noted that when some social groups are advantaged while others are oppressed, social justice entails unequivocally recognizing and attending to these perceived group differences to challenge oppression. A social group is a “collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group

by cultural forms, practices, or way of life” (Young, 1990, p. 43). Young (1990) proposed that the oppression of certain social groups has five faces: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. I explore these five aspects here.

***Exploitation.*** Oppression occurs when one social group benefits due to the labour efforts or work of another social group, and the “have-nots [continue to remain that way, and in turn, enhance the power of the] haves” (Young, 1990, p. 50). For example, women and racialized groups face exploitation due to women’s labour often profiting men, and where minoritized groups are more likely the ones performing menial labour to earn a living (Young, 1990).

***Marginalization.*** Young (1990) stated that marginalization is the most dangerous form of oppression because entire categories of people can succumb to deprivation of material opportunities. For example, in the United States, these groups can experience marginalization: senior citizens, Black and Latino youth, Indigenous peoples of America, single mothers and their children, physically disabled people, and those with mental illness (Young, 1990). Marginalized people may need to depend on government services to survive; this dependency is not a cause for respect and can even be demeaning (Young, 1990). In fact, Young (1990) argued that a society that is less individualistic and more collectivistic will be more compassionate to those who are marginalized.

***Powerlessness.*** Young (1990) described the many tiers of society and indicated that there is a power difference between professionals and non-professionals. She conveyed that professionals are privileged in that they are likely to have a college degree, have more work autonomy, and receive respect as others listen to what they have to say; they also have some level of influence or authority. She indicated that nonprofessionals suffer from “powerlessness” (Young, 1990, p. 56) because they are rarely recognized for their work, lack work autonomy, and

are less respected compared to professionals. She further stated that the powerless take orders and seldom have a chance to give them. In the United States, these two groups often live in segregated neighbourhoods and spend time with their own group (Young, 1990).

***Cultural imperialism.*** Cultural imperialism is the seeming “universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture and its establishment as the norm” (Young, 1990, p. 59). Further, sometimes not entering into awareness, these dominant groups “project their own experience as representative of humanity” (Young, 1990, p. 59). Those who do not fit into this dominant group become marked as the Other, become stereotypes, and are rendered invisible (Young, 1990). Young (1990) provided examples of how certain groups are perceived as inferior and deviant; these groups are women, Jewish people, homosexual individuals, American Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and nonprofessional workers.

***Violence.*** The groups who are oppressed and marginalized often experience violence such as sexual assaults, attacks, beatings, humiliation, and so forth (Young, 1990). For instance, in the United States, violence against Blacks by police officers and violence against gay men and lesbians by heterosexuals is common (Young, 1990). Young (1990) defined violence as “severe incidents of intimidation, harassment, or ridicule purely for the goal of humiliating and degrading or stigmatizing group members” (p. 60). The systemic problem of violence is dangerous because members of a group (e.g., women) are more regularly targeted (e.g., sexually assaulted) simply because they are members of that group (Young, 1990).

**The four normative ideals.** Having reviewed the five faces of oppression as presented by Young (1990), my starting assumption was that the intersectionality of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds would make it more likely they would experience oppression. Therefore, Young’s (1990) five faces of oppression guided the themes that arose from the data.

Having said this, youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a leadership program will have positive experiences by pushing back against the five faces of oppression; therefore, I use a strengths-based lens and incorporated Young's (2000) work.

Young's (2000) book, *Inclusion and Democracy*, furthered her early contributions by considering how to include marginalized populations within the public sphere. Young (2000) communicated the importance of "differentiated social segments [in a democratic society] struggling and engaging with one another across their differences rather than putting those differences aside to invoke a common good" (p. 18). In other words, Young (2000) was referring to the need for individuals to see and understand one another's differences rather than setting aside their uniqueness to fit into a homogenous society. From this position, Young (2000) proposed that a deliberative model of democracy is needed so that participants are given an opportunity to offer their voices for how to best negotiate problems and their solutions. A deliberative process entails "normative ideals" (Young, 2000, p. 23) of inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity in order that relational deliberation is possible, and I explain these concepts here.

***Inclusion.*** It is important to include all individuals who are affected by the democratic process in order that they are free to participate in it (Young, 2000). Further, inclusion "allows for maximum expression of interest, opinion, and perspectives relevant to the problems or issues for which a public seeks solutions" (Young, 2000, p. 23). It is based on the premise that the ones most affected by these specific issues are also the ones most likely to be speaking out more strongly.

***Political equality.*** Those affected by decision-making need to be included on equal terms (Young, 2000). This means that equal opportunity is needed so that individuals are free to

question and criticize others' perspectives openly. Therefore, "freedom from domination" (Young, 2000, p. 23) is necessary if this form of political equality is to occur.

**Reasonableness.** Young (2000) shared that reasonableness is not about suppressing senseless ideas; rather, it is about the willingness to listen to others' ideas with an open mind. Hence, individuals who are quick to judge without listening to "others who want to explain to them why their ideas are incorrect or inappropriate" (Young, 2000, p. 24) are being unreasonable. Reasonable people are ones who arrive at discussions with the goal to solve problems and reach collective assent (Young, 2000). Moreover, reasonable people know that dissent "produces insight" (Young, 2000, p. 24) and are open to challenges so that the aim of reaching an agreement can be possible.

**Publicity.** The conditions of inclusion, political equality, and reasonableness involve participants interacting in a decision-making process to create a public that "holds one another accountable" (Young, 2000, p. 25). A "publicity consists of a plurality of different individuals and collective experiences, histories, commitments, ideals, under a common set of procedures" (Young, 2000, p. 25). Therefore, taking into account these differences, it is necessary for members to explain their perspectives so that others can understand where they are coming from in order to consider whether to accept their ideas. A deliberative exchange involves "expression of puzzlement or disagreement, the posing of questions, and answering them" (Young, 2000, p. 25).

According to Young (2000), the above four normative ideals are crucial to participate fully in a deliberative process. Young's (1990, 2000) theoretical principles helped frame the themes as applied to the lived experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in this study.

## **Photovoice as Methodology**

I used photovoice as my methodology. Photovoice is fitting for marginalized populations as participation does not depend solely on a formal research process such as interviews, which often relies on fluency of the dominant language to construct meaning. In photovoice, participants come together as a group with a common idea, share their photographs, choose those which best relay an intended message, and co-construct meaning behind the photos. The intended aim of photovoice is “a) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, b) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and c) to reach policymakers” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). I invited youth in the social justice leadership club (herein referred to as the Club) to participate in this photovoice project to share their experiences in focus group discussions. From the focus group experience, each participant was invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Briefly stated, I worked collaboratively with a teacher who is an inside facilitator of the social justice leadership club (Wang & Burris, 1997) and six youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds between 16 and 17 years of age enrolled in a secondary school in Calgary. Specifically, I invited youth whose guardians and themselves consented to engage in this project. Many of the youth who participate in the Club are immigrants and refugees arriving from various parts of the world. Some were new to the country and did not speak English fluently. I spent time with Club members over a four-month period, attending their meetings, was a part of their sharing of their photographs, and speaking to them individually to get to know their stories and lived experiences.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, Canada is increasingly becoming a more diverse country. It is estimated that by 2036, one out of two individuals in Canada will be either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant (Statistics Canada, 2017). Second, it is important to better facilitate positive integration so that youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds may thrive in their host country. This process could entail delving into the well-being of these youth and supporting them in having a sense of voice and agency. Finally, little research has been conducted regarding their opportunities for leadership participation beyond the formal curriculum and youth leadership activities (Macias, 2013; Seif, 2011). Given that educational policy is becoming more inclusive and respecting of the diversity of the student population (Alberta Education, 2017; Howard, 2007) and that youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds' leadership is not well studied in Western Canada (Lund & Nabavi, 2008), there is a need to understand the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth in order to empower these marginalized voices.

Lund and Nabavi (2008) noted the importance of further studies of how “young people engaged in activism on a broader range of oppressions . . . for curriculum development, professional development for educators, teacher educations, educational policy, and government anti-racism polices” (p. 15). Additionally, a strengths-based approach looking at immigrant and refugee youth in the Canadian context is lacking (Este & Ngo, 2011). Therefore, it is significant that adults working with marginalized and minoritized youth in youth-led initiatives support them in making their schools and communities safer, healthier, and better (Checkoway, 1998; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yee, 2008). The potential impact on participants can be powerful as they may further see themselves as having agency and knowledge to contribute to the betterment

of their schools and community (Gonzalez et al., 2006). Therefore, I wanted to explore the lived experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a leadership club to acquire a more complex picture of what matters to them regarding social change.

My rationale for conducting this study was that there is a lack of research about students participating in social justice clubs at school. I argue that these clubs help youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds develop their identity and counter racism through their organizing, activism, and civic engagement efforts. Recently, some researchers have looked at advisors and administrators' experience with gay–straight alliance clubs (Graybill et al., 2015; Steck & Perry, 2016) and have quantitatively explored whether adolescent-led school groups reduce the stigma of mental health (Murman et al., 2014). Further, studies have been conducted on immigrant youth and activism (Macias, 2013), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) youth participating in gay–straight alliances (Terriquez, 2015), and youth involved in anti-racism initiatives in Canada (Lund & Nabavi, 2008), as well as East African youth participating in civic involvement and environmental clubs to explore their ethnic identity and self-efficacy in Tanzania, Uganda, and the United States (Johnson et al., 2012). In the Canadian context, my research with youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a social justice leadership club has added to this body of work on youth leadership and their experiences speaking out against injustice and inequality and working towards social change.

The theoretical contribution adds to a body of work on anti-oppressive education and inclusion; meanwhile, the practical significance for school professionals is that they will have a better understanding about immigrant and refugee youths' lived experience and the factors that give rise to their participation in a social justice leadership program at school. Educational powerholders may use the findings of this project to inform practice and create guidelines to

provide more support for youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in order that they may have the desire to take on leadership roles in secondary school. These guidelines may contribute to Alberta Education's (2010) innovative initiative of "inspiring education" for 21st-century learners, which highlights the "engaged thinker, ethical citizen, and entrepreneurial spirit" (pp. 5–6). An engaged thinker is one who uses critical thinking, is a lifelong learner, and is able to adapt to change (Government of Alberta, 2010). To be an ethical citizen, students care about relationships by being compassionate, being open-minded, and working in collaboration with others to contribute to the community. Entrepreneurial spirit is about achieving goals through perseverance and striving for excellence while taking risks, even when facing adversity. I argue that research with youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds engaging in leadership in secondary school helps to achieve the objectives that the Government of Alberta (2010) has set forth.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. All participants in the study were female youth in high school; therefore, they do not form a diverse cultural group. Having said this, as a qualitative and photovoice project, this study was not meant to be generalized to a larger population. I believe the photographs, poetry, and stories cultivated through this project honour participants' voices at a specific school within a defined geographical area at a particular period of time.

Further, due to the time limited nature of the study and the hectic schedule of the participants, the group discussions were not as lengthy as would be warranted. However, the individual interviews and finale celebration gave participants a space to dialogue more about the photographs as well as the deeper experiences of the Club.

## **Assumptions**

It is important for researchers to know themselves and be aware of their assumptions and biases in the research process. Here, I share some of these assumptions so that I am transparent in who I am and what I bring to the project. As a teacher and counselling psychologist, I assumed that youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds enter leadership initiatives because they believe it is a positive endeavour and are altruistically motivated. As a past leadership teacher in a secondary school, who also shares a refugee/immigrant past, my students voiced that they partook in the leadership program in order to plan and organize events and to raise money to help those less fortunate. The students who remained in the program throughout the school year voiced that giving back to the community inspired them to continue to participate in social change.

I also assumed that youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds choose to lead in order to give back to the local and wider community. In my experience teaching in a diverse, lower socioeconomic status junior high school, I have worked with youth who aim to contribute to their school because of their compassion for others. For example, my leadership students have volunteered for the breakfast program to serve those who come to school hungry. Despite Canada being a developed country, many students in the school participate in these programs because they lack nourishment at home. The leadership students contributed time in the mornings to support their peers and to be a part of a stronger school community. In another example, the youth and I planned a school dance to fundraise money for a country that had experienced a devastating natural disaster. We raised quite a sum considering that the school is in an area where families are financially struggling.

Finally, I assumed that taking part in a youth leadership program would provide these youth with a strong sense of identity and agency. For instance, undocumented immigrant youth in the United States experience belonging and connection when they are a part of activism and social change (Macias, 2013). They become aware of oppression, gain confidence about who they are, and can push back against the five faces of oppression (Macias, 2013; Young, 1990). In Canada, youth came together to create a commercial to combat racism; this project was one initiative to contribute to anti-racism and activism (Lund & Nabavi, 2008). In summary, I aimed to be cognizant and reflective of these assumptions as I worked with youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in this study.

## **Definitions**

The following definitions are provided for the purposes of this study:

- *Discrimination*: “An action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age, or ability” (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013, para. 1).
- *Ethnicity*: A constantly transforming and dynamic part of an individual. Ethnicity is the “product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture; ethnicity is also constructed by external social, economic, and political processes” (Nagel, 1994, p. 152).
- *First generation immigrant*: Immigrant children born abroad (Portes & Rivas, 2011).
- *Host country*: The country where the youth move to and settle in (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001).
- *Identities*: “Traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who we are” (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012, p. 69).

- *Minoritized group*: “A social group that is devalued in society. This devaluing encompasses how the group is represented, what degree of access to resources it is granted, and how the unequal access is rationalized” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 226).
- *Powerholders*: Educational leaders, teachers, school counsellors, decision-makers, stakeholders, and policymakers.
- *Social justice*: A societal vision whereby each person will have the right and support to access goods, services, education, and work opportunities needed or desired despite gender, class, ability, religion, and sexual orientation; “the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression” (Young, 1990, p. 15).
- *Second generation immigrant*: Children of first-generation immigrants born in the host society (Portes & Rivas, 2011).
- *1.5 generation*: Children who are born abroad and brought to the host society at a young age; they are “sociologically closer to the second generation” (Portes & Rivas, 2011, p. 220).
- *Racism*: “The belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, that a person’s social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics” (Anti-Defamation League, 2017, para. 1).
- *Youth*: “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of interdependence as members of a community” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017, para. 1). My own addition to this definition is that youth has increased agency at they gain life experience and it is important to view youth in a holistic way beyond the

developmental conception of youth.

- *Youth leadership*: “Young people empowered to inspire and mobilise themselves and others towards a common purpose, in response to personal and/or social issues and challenges, to effect change” (Kahn, Hewes, & Ali, 2009, p. 6).

### **Thesis Outline**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the theoretical and conceptual knowledge about youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds as it relates to youth leadership. In Chapter 2, I present a critical synthesis of the literature that addresses theoretical and empirical findings that informed the project. In Chapter 3, I outline photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and discuss the research design that includes data collection and data analysis; in addition, I elaborate on the ethical considerations for conducting this research. In Chapter 4, I share findings and themes derived from the photovoice project. In Chapter 5, I discuss the overarching themes, connecting them to the theoretical framework and literature. In Chapter 6, I conclude the journey as well as offer implications and recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

A body of literature has uncovered the experience of immigrant and refugee children (Portes & Rivas, 2011; Tienda & Haskins, 2011) as well as second generation immigrants (Chen & Tse, 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). I argue for the need to explore the leadership experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in Canada to broaden the understanding of the experiences of these youth (Lund & Nabavi, 2008). Although I examined literature based on Canadian immigrant and refugee youths' experience, I included research from other countries to help illuminate the intricacies of the resettlement experience. This decision was due to wanting to explore the "multi-faceted nature of resettlement" (Dachyshyn, 2014, p. 129). I use the terms *minoritized* and *minority youth* interchangeably with *immigrant* and *refugee youth* as all four terms were found in the literature. I recognize there are nuanced distinctions between the terms as the word *minority* is used in American literature, whereas *immigrant* and *refugee* are used in the Canadian context. *Minoritized* is a newer term that points to how people in this group are undervalued in society due to the way they are viewed and represented by dominant groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

In this literature review, I first discuss the historical and political context of immigration in Canada to locate the history of selective migration policies (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998; Suárez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011). This context underscores the experience of certain immigrant and refugee groups who are of non-European origin and the educational responses to these groups. As it is not possible to discuss the entire history of immigration, I focus on the major waves of immigrant and refugee groups who have entered Canada. These groups are the Chinese railway workers, Vietnamese boat people of the past, and the Syrian refugees of today. Following, I present a strengths-based framework that draws upon a resiliency perspective when

working with immigrant and refugee youth and the interventions that support youth to flourish at school and beyond.

### **Historical and Political Context of Immigration in Canada**

I must preface this section with the acknowledgement that the First Nations people are the First Peoples of Canada. Due to the limitations of this research project, although I do not specifically address the history of European colonization, it is vital to acknowledge the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people's foundational place in Canadian history and the issue of how they are often conflated with other minoritized groups who arrive from other countries. Theirs is also a story of displacement; however, the displacement is from their own homelands. For the scope of this study, I chose to stay within the confines of students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds because other scholars are better positioned to examine First Nations students.

Over the past 150 years in Canada, there has been a massive shift in the demographics of the immigrant populations who have arrived with hopes of a brighter future. This shift in the increased numbers of ethnic immigrants contrasts with a predominantly Anglo-Saxon group who were the first group targeted to immigrate to Canada (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998; Troper & Lambert, 2015). For instance, in 1867, 79% of the population of Canada was born in Canada (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). Over 1.5 centuries later, the demographics of Canada have changed dramatically, and Canada promises to continue on its path to becoming a more diverse society.

An entire historical review of immigration policy and trends is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I discuss and examine some key historical periods in Canadian history related to immigration and how school jurisdictions have responded to waves of immigration. The reason for this focus is the importance of understanding the ways in which educational policies and

practices have historically responded to immigrant and refugee students. This understanding will form a foundation for the changing emphasis on immigrant and refugee students' well-being in Canadian schools at present. Below, I discuss the historical context of Canadian immigration from the 19th to the 21st century.

**Nineteenth-century Canada.** In keeping with a colonial agenda of nation-building, due to the economic development in the late 19th century and increased demand for Canadian goods, there grew a need for more immigrant workers to further stimulate economic development (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). In the late 1800s, then-Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's governing body had plans to expand Canada to encompass the prairie provinces and wanted agricultural settlers from places other than Northern Europe, the British Isles, and the United States; this initiative was due to the desire to encourage more immigrants to settle in Canada for economic gains (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). Despite this initiative, from 1896 to the 1930s, the colonial powerholders in Canada continued to prefer immigrants who were English-speaking (Troper & Lambert, 2015). According to Troper and Lambert (2015), preference was given to

British and American agriculturists, French, Belgian, Dutch, Scandinavians, Swiss, Finns, Russians, Austro-Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians, Poles . . . [rather than] the less desirable (e.g., Italians, South Slavs, Greeks, and Syrians) . . . at the very bottom were Jews, Asians, Roma people and Black persons. (para. 16)

The preference for English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon immigrants is indicative that minoritized groups at the bottom of this list would face various forms of oppression (Young, 1990).

In response to the government directive to bring the above immigrant groups to Canada, the educational policies of public schools in Canada needed to consider how this impacted

curricular objectives. For instance, in 1896, a school superintendent in western Canada asserted the following assimilatory message:

If these [immigrant] children are to grow up as Canadian citizens, they must be led to adopt our viewpoint and speak our speech. . . . A common school and common tongue are necessary if we are going to have a homogenous citizenship. (as cited in Titley & Miller, 1982, p. 132)

Educational policies reflected colonialist aims, whereby the powerholders of English-speaking Canada had a goal to promote a colonial society based on a notion of a British nation-state (Gereluk & Scott, 2014). Notably, the French would resist this homogenous approach. Broadly speaking, European settlers were preferred to those of other ethnic groups, and this type of preferential practice would foreshadow subsequent Canadian educational policies and practices.

Canada implemented its first Immigration Act in 1869 in order to attract more immigrants to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, or what then–Prime Minister MacDonald envisioned as his route to nation-building (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). This act was economically driven, and those who have power continue to have control over the powerless (Young, 1990). The Act claimed to ensure the safety of immigrants from their home country to Canada. However, immigration was granted only to those who were able and healthy, while those who were “sick, blind, criminal, or ‘otherwise undesirable’” (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998, p. 87) were refused entry. Despite active recruitment in the late 1800s, the goal to attract more immigrants was unsuccessful as more people emigrated from Canada than those who immigrated to Canada (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). Thus, over the next 25 years, many individuals came to Canada only to cross the border into what would become the United States (Ninette &

Trebilcock, 1998; Troper & Lambert, 2015). The dilemma of a shortage of labourers had Canada expanding its efforts to include those individuals of non-Anglo-Saxon ancestry.

During the 1880s, approximately 15,000 Chinese labourers were brought to Canada to work on the railway; this decision was made due to the perceived convenience of the location of China and the passage to western Canada (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). Despite the initiative to ensure the safety of migration, the living and working conditions for the Chinese railway workers, once in Canada and working on the railway, were atrocious; workers were forced to live in work camps between 1903 and 1914 (Bradwin, 1972). Dangerous and unfair conditions included contaminated and unhygienic living quarters, low pay, and meagre medical facilities; many workers were treated unfairly and suffered abuse, while the government showed little concern for their well-being (Bradwin, 1972). For many of these workers, these experiences contradicted the dreams of a better future. This form of maltreatment parallels what Young (1990) would label as violence faced by marginalized groups.

Chinese workers were perceived to be more subservient and thus willing to accept wages that were 30 to 50% less than those earned by White labourers (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). As history reveals, many of these Chinese labourers were treated harshly by White labourers and/or supervisors; at a societal level, anti-Chinese groups were formed, accusing the Chinese of being immoral, diseased, and dishonest (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). These workers were exploited to benefit those in power, marginalized as they faced deprivation of basic human rights, and remained powerless due to the need to earn a living (Young, 1990). Then, Prime Minister Macdonald communicated to the Canadian public that he opposed the “Mongolians becoming permanent settlers” (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998, p. 94), yet the workers were needed as the building of the railway was prioritized over all else.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, immigrants of Asian ancestry faced “head taxes” (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998, p. 102) and landing taxes, among other restrictions, which strictly limited their immigration into Canada. At this time, female Asian immigrants were refused entry and settlement for fear that Asian men who settled temporarily would produce families and remain in Canada permanently (Troper & Lambert, 2015). Once Asian women were allowed entry, the racial slur “yellow peril” (Troper & Lambert, 2015, para. 22) was used to label the next generation of Asians. This slur is an example of cultural imperialism that many minoritized groups faced as Canada expanded its colonial aims (Young, 1990).

In subsequent years, with the amendment of the Chinese Immigrant Act by 1903, in order to restrict the number of Chinese immigrants coming to Canada, each Chinese immigrant had to pay \$500 to enter Canada, which was an appallingly high price to pay as compared to other immigrants (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). At the time, this was an amount that would have made many Chinese barely make ends meet. This illustration speaks to the racial divide of Canadian immigration policies. Children of immigrants were expected to assimilate into Canadian society. For example, textbooks such as *We Are Canadian Citizens* written in 1937 had a primary message that being a Canadian entailed adhering to the ideals of the British Empire (Gereluk & Scott, 2014). Therefore, immigrant students learned that if they were to succeed, they would have to learn to assimilate into the dominant White culture.

**Twentieth-century Canada.** In the 1960s, the point system was established for those who wished to come to Canada, whereby points were awarded based on education, age, English language proficiency, and demand for the particular skill of the applicant (Troper & Lambert, 2015). The objective was to attract more skilled professionals to contribute to the Canadian economy. In 1971, then–Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced that multiculturalism was an

official government policy. The declaration was made in an effort to recognize the contributions of diverse groups in Canada (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). Said policy was due to the growing pushback of minoritized groups to have their voices heard and identity acknowledged (Gereluk & Scott, 2014) and is an example of some minoritized groups using publicity to ask for inclusion and political equality (Young, 2000). This move was a major step in recognizing the rights of some minoritized groups; they demanded freedom of access to services and the protection of identity and belonging in the private and public sphere (Gereluk & Scott, 2014). The multicultural policy arguably drew upon the broader political principles of liberal multiculturalism:

States should not only uphold the familiar set of common civil, political, and social rights of citizenship that are protected in all constitutional liberal democracies, but also adopt various group-specific rights or policies that are intended to recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and aspirations of ethnocultural groups. (Kymlicka, 2007, p. 61)

The intent was to interrupt the discourse that Canada could be a homogenous nation-state, and instead an effort was made to recognize the various ethnocultural groups that make up Canada.

In 1976, Canada decided to admit more refugees to offer political and social support for those displaced by negative circumstances within their homelands (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998). Consequently, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Canada welcomed refugees from Southeast Asian, mostly from Vietnam. This group was labeled the “boat people” (Troper & Lambert, 2015, para. 37) because refugees escaped Vietnam in scanty boats and lived in a variety of refugee camps throughout Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Thailand before crossing over to another country, such as Canada, that would welcome them.

This historical period is well noted as researchers and educators became interested in supporting Vietnamese students and Vietnamese students of Chinese ancestry (as there were many Chinese who lived in Vietnam) in Canadian schools (Manitoba Department of Education, 1980). For instance, in Manitoba, the Education Department's objectives explicitly stated that schools were encouraged to foster greater awareness by learning about Vietnamese students' customs and culture as well as how to increase Vietnamese immigrants' self-esteem (Manitoba Department of Education, 1980). Although the Manitoba Department of Education (1980) warned against the generalization of an ethnic group, it wrote that "as a group, Vietnamese children are described as being anxious to learn, quick learners, industrious, and very adaptable" (p. 7). The intent of the document was to support teachers to understand the lived experience of Vietnamese students so that they would be able to help students "integrate" (Manitoba Department of Education, 1980, p. 3) into Canadian society. This educational response was perceived as progressive, with the aim to support the learning needs of a new group of immigrant and refugee students. I argue this response was aimed at the inclusion and political equality (Young, 2000) of these students where they were beginning to gain recognition in the school system.

In 1985, the conception of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act is another key moment in Canadian history where the multiculturalism policy of Canada was created. One of the first tenets of the Act is to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage" (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985, s. 3[1]a). The intent behind the act was a positive one to help provide legitimacy for the diversity of minoritized groups and provide the ethical lens through

which to acknowledge and recognize minorities in Canada (Gereluk & Scott, 2014). It was symbolic in its ethical stance but limited in providing the legislative protection for these groups and ultimately ignoring the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples (Gereluk & Scott, 2014). Despite this intent, some have critiqued the Act in that *multiculturalism* has been an umbrella term claiming acceptance of the diverse cultures of immigrants and refugees in Canada, while the underlying motive is to compel people to continue to assimilate if they want to thrive in Canadian society (Day, 2000; Eiserman, 2009; Fleras, 2004). Day (2000) argued that diversity “does not exist; [however, there is a possibility of a life for those who are] trying to be Canadian” (p. 5). In other words, Day contended that ethnocultural Canadians continue to have to assimilate and adapt to the dominant colonial powers as differentiation continues to be negotiated within a contested political space. Hence, political equality and inclusion (Young, 2000) continue to need troubling in this space.

Although Canada is one of a few nations, including Australia, to have adopted a multicultural model in its governing policies, some have contended that the purpose can often be regarded as the preservation of the status quo to help ethnic immigrants to assimilate into the dominant society (Lund & Nabavi, 2008). The challenge of this model as put forth by Lund and Nabavi (2008) was that the multicultural initiative did little to trouble structural injustices. Fleras (2004) stated, “Put bluntly, official multiculturalism was not about celebrating diversity, but primarily about neutralizing differences to remove disadvantage and ensure integration” (p. 432). For instance, when individuals over 14 years of age become Canadian citizens, they must take an Oath of Citizenship, in either English or French, and within the text, they must swear to be faithful and “bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second Queen of Canada” (Government of Canada, 2015b, para. 4); this demonstrates that to become a Canadian, one has

to agree to be faithful to the British empire, which in present-day terminology is a continuation of colonialism.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act is a way for “others” to “fit in” (Eiserman, 2009, p. 69) to the Anglo-Franco cultural traditions. Consequently, even though the tenets of the multiculturalism policy had the aim to support a more diverse ethnic population, Day (2000) stated, “Multiculturalism will remain a slave to the history of Canadian diversity . . . to escape the limitation of the modern-colonial nation state, those who would be Canadians must traverse the fantasy of unity” (p. 4). Similarly, Hébert (2013) voiced that integration as a complex principle of multiculturalism continues to be assimilatory in nature in present-day Canada. Specifically, Lund (as cited in Nabavi & Lund, 2012) voiced that “there is a kind of paternalism at play and an assimilative function that underlies even the best of these [ESL] programs. . . . The faster these [immigrant] kids ‘fit in’ to ‘our’ culture, the better off they’ll be” (p. 178). Nabavi, a scholar whose research focuses on student diversity, immigrated to Canada from Iran with her family when she was a child, made the point about segregation and multiculturalism poignantly:

While experiences of discrimination continue to be present, newly immigrant youth have outlets that were not present when I immigrated to Canada. While I think this is great, it troubles me that the key positive experiences for these youth are in pragmatic and institutionalized spaces, such as an immigrant club, for them to feel they belong. Such spaces not only perpetuate differences based on language, culture, and country of origin but also send conflicting messages of the nation’s “multicultural” identity, which emphasizes difference regarding integration and belonging. The challenges of how immigrants fit into the boundaries of the nation need to be troubled. (as cited in Nabavi & Lund, 2012, p. 184)

Here, Nabavi conveyed the significance of delving deep into structural injustices affecting immigrant youth instead of simply focusing on cultural celebrations, in what amounts to a surface acknowledgement of multiculturalism.

Singh (2004) critiqued multiculturalism in that despite the recognition of a multicultural Canada, the difference-blind liberal approach is used to theoretically enshrine belonging and political inclusion. This traditional liberal approach is “chiefly concerned with achieving inclusion and belonging through neutrality or impartiality” (Singh, 2004, p. 446). Although multiculturalism has the aim of inclusion and is an important development in Canadian history, the belief that there is neutrality where no specific identity is favoured is unrealistic; the consequence is that cultural practices become relegated to the private sphere since the public sphere is “culturally neutral” (Singh, 2004, p. 447). Singh’s words are significant regarding how immigrant and refugee students may feel at school when their identity may not be properly acknowledged (Eiserman, 2009). This situation can be detrimental to students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds as they may feel the need to hide their identity given that there are only neutral identities at school. Li (2003) concurred, arguing that integration into Canadian society parallels conformity by viewing immigrants in a “monolithic cultural framework that preaches tolerance in the abstract but remains intolerant toward cultural specificities deemed outside the mainstream” (p. 310). For example, the 1985 Alberta Art curriculum is void of cultural meaning, and the vast majority of resources are derived from Western design traditions (Eiserman, 2009). In fact, the Alberta curriculum underscores the western ways of thought, and it has taken 25 years for significant changes to be proposed (Eiserman, 2009).

Further, when minoritized groups are practicing their celebrations and festivals, they are encouraged to do it in the private sphere for fear of disrupting the “status quo” (Eiserman, 2009,

p. 73). Therefore, from educational policies and practices, the critique is that multiculturalism, although well-intended, does not fully transform into schools where celebrations of ethnic cultures remain at a superficial level and the curriculum continues to privilege the western way of thought (Eiserman, 2009). Thus, where students' cultures are being recognized in the form of festivals and celebrations, there is a need to widen the curriculum to include the range of materials from the viewpoints of marginalized groups that have been historically silenced (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). Hence, Lund argued that multiculturalism's focus on celebration and cultural retention negates the more pressing issues of privilege and power (as cited in Nabavi & Lund, 2012). Therefore, more work to delve into inequities is needed to ensure that students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds will feel the sense of inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity (Young, 2000) in order to achieve the normative ideals in a just society.

**Twenty-first-century Canada.** After September 11, 2001, and the destruction of the Twin Towers in the United States, the fear of terrorist threats propelled Canada to change its immigration policy with the idea of protecting the citizens of Canada (Troper & Lambert, 2015). Henceforth, Islamophobia became a widespread social problem in schools and the broader global community (Zine, 2000, 2001). The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2001 (2015) was passed with a continued objective to strengthen the Canadian economy but also to receive refugees who were displaced from their homelands. Despite the seeming change in priorities, the result was that higher-skilled, multi-skilled individuals and entrepreneurs were given priority as they were admitted to Canada at a greater rate (Troper & Lambert, 2015).

In the 21st century, educational policies and practices have progressed in that minoritized groups have received accommodations to support students' ethnic and cultural identities (Bosetti

& Gereluk, 2016). One example can be found in Ontario; accommodations were made in a public school that had over 90% of students who were Muslim to allow them to pray at school instead of having them leave for a nearby mosque and not return to school (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). However, other Christian and Hindu groups protested that it was not appropriate to allow Muslim prayers in a public school (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). Henceforth, in 2011, the Ontario Ministry of Education developed and approved the report, *Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (as cited in Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). This initiative was implemented to safeguard students' sense of inclusion (Young, 2000) and to attempt to reconcile the complexities of an all-inclusive framework. Yet Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) found that not all minoritized groups collaborate to provide specific groups' accommodations. The protests by the Christian and Hindu groups illustrate the use of publicity (Young, 2000) to speak out for what they inherently believe in. This example reveals the intricacies of inclusion in a democratic society.

Most recently, owing to the political conflict in Syria and surrounding countries, Syrian refugees began arriving in Canada between 2015 and 2016 in large numbers (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies [AAISA], 2016). As of January 2, 2017, Canada received 39,671 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2017). In the first year of living in Canada, Syrian refugee families are provided with financial, language, as well as other supports in order to integrate into Canadian society (AAISA, 2016). However, after the first year, many of these supports disappear, and these families have to find ways to support themselves (AAISA, 2016).

Alberta Education (2017) is responding to the diversity of students by introducing the principles of inclusive education, where it is central to “accept, value and support diversity and

learner differences” (para. 4). An example is the Literacy, English, and Academic Development (LEAD) program for newcomer students, with a focus on English language development for students who have experienced interrupted schooling and speak little English (CBE, 2016). However, the LEAD program focuses primarily on students learning the English language and needs to be further developed to help new students become more involved and engaged at school.

In assessing four major school boards in Calgary asking how English as a Second Language (ESL) students and parents experience cultural diversity in Alberta, Ngo (2012) found that participants provided “mediocre assessments of school responses to cultural diversity in most areas except interactions with school personnel” (p. 219). Moreover, parents and children rated their experience as least favourable when they voiced their opinions about heritage language encouragement and availability of culturally focused services in schools (Ngo, 2012). Using the University of Michigan Health System framework, Ngo (2003) defined cultural competence as “actively seeking advice and consultation and a commitment to incorporating new knowledge and experiences into a wider range of practice” (p. 12). He further noted that cultural proficiency involves “holding cultural differences and diversity to the highest esteem, pro-activity regarding cultural differences, and promotion of improved cultural relations among diverse groups” (Ngo, 2003, p. 12). Even though progress has been made in the last few decades, Ngo (2012) found the four school boards had not achieved cultural competence or cultural proficiency as defined by the University of Michigan Health System framework.

In summary, immigration policies in Canada have had two priorities: first and foremost, immigration was encouraged to promote economic development of the time that undergirded a colonial agenda; second, Canada also addressed key humanitarian crises by allowing those in

threat to enter the nation. The beginning of the 19th century saw a preference for European immigrants. However, in the 1960s, there was a change in the Immigration Act to open Canada to more non-European individuals and families. Due to the tensions and nuanced complexity of the historical and political context of immigration in Canada, there continue to be policies and regulations to enforce strict rules to ensure who may come to settle in Canada to promote nation-building initiatives. Still, educational policies and practices in Canada, and in Alberta in particular, continue to need development in order to support immigrant and refugee student engagement and growth. To do so, powerholders need to focus more on immigrant and refugee youths' strengths. In the next section, I examine the literature pertaining to the resilience of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds.

### **Resilience of Immigrant and Refugee Youth**

In the last few decades, emphasis has shifted from a deficit model to a strengths-based and resiliency model when conducting research with immigrant and refugee youth (Este & Ngo, 2011; Ungar, 2005). When researchers examine resiliency, they tend to do so within the context of trauma, violence, at-risk behaviours, and/or causes for the deficits. I want to preface that there is tension in the interdisciplinarity between education and psychology and know there is discomfort in labelling and identifying factors in an interpretive lens. Nonetheless, in this section, I first discuss risk factors that may affect immigrant and refugee youths' well-being. Then, I explore protective factors that can help immigrant and refugee youth become more engaged in school and resilient. Last, I present specific interventions at school and in the community that cultivate resilience. Although there are many definitions of resilience, I used Este and Ngo's (2011) assertion that resilience is the "ability to bounce back, recover, or successfully adapt in the face of obstacles and adversity" (p. 28).

**Risk factors.** Being at risk is understood to mean exposure to conditions of danger, trauma, or harm; resilience, on the other hand, is the attainment of positive outcomes from difficult circumstances (Stevens, 2005). Minoritized children living in poverty can experience developmental risks (Felner & DeVries, 2013; Luther, Coltrane, Parke, Cookson, & Adams, 2011). Developmental risks are environmental due to poverty and disruptions in development, and the concept of risk is “a conditional statement about the probability that any member of a given population or subpopulation will develop later disorder” (Felner & DeVries, 2013, p. 111). In an American study, youth at risk for non-participation at school were found to be generally African Americans, Latinos, the poor and those living in single-parent households, the children of the foreign-born, women, those with low educational aspirations, those living in non-competitive or low-turnout political environments, the non-religious, those who are not attentive to news media, students who avoid or simply are not exposed to discussions of politics, and those who dislike their government-related courses and otherwise doubt that school authorities treat them fairly. (Gimpel & Lay, 2006, p. 10)

Further, these risks follow these populations into adulthood, where these individuals tend to become disengaged in society (Gimpel & Lay, 2006). One Canadian study found that risk factors were associated with criminal activity and related to “home country experience, acculturation, strains in community interactions, socioeconomic disparity, negative media influence, and interactions with the criminal justice system” (Ngo, Rossiter, & Stewart, 2013, p. 54). Individual characteristics (previous trauma, mental health concerns or illness, and drug use) as well as relationships (criminal activity in peers and domestic/family violence), and societal factors (socioeconomic status) are predictive of how likely immigrant youth are going to be at risk (Ngo et al., 2013).

Levels of acculturation may correlate with risk, as acculturation is “the process of adapting to a new culture” (McQueen, Getz, & Bray, 2003, p. 1737). In McQueen and colleagues’ (2003) study, they found that Mexican American youth, when more acculturated and independent from their families, are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour and substance use (McQueen et al., 2003). Further, when they are more exposed to stress and peer pressure to conform to the dominant culture, immigrant youth are more likely to use alcohol (McQueen et al., 2003). Generational status may be another contributing factor towards delinquency (McQueen et al., 2003). Second- and third-generation Latino youth, when more acculturated, may be more likely than first-generation youth to engage in risky behaviour such as criminal activity, risky sexual behaviour, and drug use (Luther et al., 2011).

**Protective factors.** Whereas risks are factors that can lead to vulnerable behaviour among immigrant children, other researchers have looked at protective factors that may support immigrant children. Protective factors, commonly viewed as affordable housing, optimal health care, and well-connected communities, where children have positive role models, can alleviate risks and cultivate resilience (Zigler, 1990). There are also protective factors that prevent criminal activity: “family support, the strengths of ethnocultural community members, community engagement and civic participations, and access to social services” (Ngo et al., 2013, p. 54). In the United States, immigrant and refugee youth who receive higher grades are less likely to engage in risky behaviours such as smoking cigarettes, carrying a weapon, using alcohol, engaging in sexual activity, and watching excessive television (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Further, in two studies of resilient African American adolescent girls, Stevens (2005) found that these girls are likely to have strong social attachments. For example, they are connected to programs and institutions that cultivate their identity, which in

turn helps them develop leadership skills. In looking at Hispanic (lower socioeconomic status) and Asian American (higher socioeconomic status) immigrant youth, Portes and Rivas (2011) found that even though immigrant families from low socioeconomic status face barriers, their children can overcome challenges through learning the English language, learning the cultures of the host society, and having the ability to preserve their own customs, language, and values. One protective factor is to provide at-risk immigrant youth with volunteer programs and other of out-of-school assistance to help them stay in school to break the cycle of poverty (Portes & Rivas, 2011). Consequently, social support is found to be a facilitating factor to resilience (Lyons, 1991).

Strong family relations cultivate resilience in youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. In working with 57 adolescent Cambodian refugees, Rousseau, Drapeau, and Rahimi (2003) found families who were exposed to more political violence in their home country reported more positive social adjustments and less mental health concerns. In this 4-year study, they found that high expectations of Cambodian caregivers toward their children's conservation of traditional cultural values explained the connection between the families' exposure to political violence and the adolescents' positive psychosocial adjustment in the host society. This prospering was despite the Khmer Rouge's efforts to exterminate them. Rousseau et al. (2003) noted that when Cambodian adolescents feel the need to repay their parents and also feel pressure to appease them, they are more resilient than those who feel no obligation to their parents. Further, Latino youth who have close family ties, or *familism*, are more likely to succeed in school and life due to their families' cultivation of their well-being and support of their success (Luther et al., 2011).

**Interventions.** Prevention models of intervention can support at-risk immigrant youth so that they have a greater chance of flourishing. For example, Ngo et al. (2013) explored the prevention model of intervention for immigrant youth who have encountered trouble with the law and discussed primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of crime prevention strategies. At the primary level, programs and policies that promote social harmony through education and cultural exchange, such as cultural orientation and language training, are optimal. At the secondary level, government programs, social services, and even corporations can help immigrant families access community- and school-based supports when they need it. Last, at the tertiary level, when immigrant youth have been involved in criminal activity, they benefit from programs such as access to support services to promote positive reintegration into the community (Ngo et al., 2013). All three levels of prevention are significant to help immigrant youth integrate into the Canadian culture in positive ways.

Viewing youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds from a strengths-based perspective is necessary in order to nurture their resilience. In their work with child migrants in Africa, Hlatshwayo and Vally (2014) found that youth who experienced trauma before arriving to South Africa faced “xenophobia and violence, alienation and deprivation, and resilience and solidarity” (p. 268). They interviewed 120 refugees using face-to-face individual and group interviews. The findings indicate the importance of seeing migrant students as having strengths, to provide them a chance to thrive at school by offering support to those in need, as well as working with migrant parents to foster migrant students’ success (Hlatshwayo & Vally, 2014). In the study, it was evident that the migrant students wanted to feel safe and obtain an education in order to help other refugees and asylum seekers. Despite the barriers and adversity they have

faced in their short lives, the youth group, when perceived in a positive light by others, has given back and supported other newcomers.

When youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds feel they belong and their value is recognized, they become more engaged and resilient. For example, in Canada, Zine (2000) noted that Muslim youth in Ontario public schools feel they are a “foreign cultural import” (p. 295) and not part of mainstream Canadian society. On the other hand, Muslim youth who are a part of in-school Muslim Student Associations (MSA) are empowered to challenge the Eurocentric public education and have a sense of belonging to an Islamic subculture within schools (Zine, 2000). Further, school programs to bridge and build relationships between immigrant and native-born youth are fundamental to strengthen group membership and cultivate resilience (Reitz, Asendorpf, & Motti-Stefanidi, 2015). Immigrant youth who feel a sense of mastery and have higher self-esteem have a decreased perception of discrimination and are able to thrive in the host society (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998). Consequently, it can be significant for powerholders and native-born youth to work collaboratively to ensure newcomer youth are realizing their full potential and are able to contribute meaningfully to society (Este & Ngo, 2011; Ungar, 2005).

When young people feel interconnected within their school and community, they are more likely to thrive at school and beyond (M. Greene, 1995). One way for youth to be interconnected is to ask and involve them in making decisions that matter to them. Young (2000) discussed the importance of including everyone in the democratic process. In the present political climate where youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds continue to be marginalized, it is important for youth to have a sense of agency and political equality (Young, 2000). The intersection of youths’ gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, ability, and perceived racial group

is important to acknowledge and recognize to address oppression (Young, 1990). Hence, it is significant for youth to have agency to question who holds power in society and not to simply accept things as they are. When people begin to ask questions about what can be better, rather than accepting what is, society will continue to evolve and progress in its democratic process (Freire, 1970; Young, 2000).

In summary, factors that contribute to the risk behaviour of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds include poverty, lack of English proficiency, negative influences by peers and the media, acculturation, and generational status. On the other hand, protective factors and interventions can cultivate resilience in youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, such as learning English and being encouraged to preserve their own culture. Further, when youth feel connected to their families, schools, peers, school professionals, and programs inside and outside of school, they become more resilient. Hence, I argue for the importance of immigrant and refugee youth participation in leadership programs where teachers and peers value their voice and contributions.

## **Summary**

Historically in Canada, immigrant and refugee populations have focused on survival, adaptation, and integration upon their arrival to the host country. Within a Canadian context, youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds may have experienced aspects of the five faces of oppression in their previous homeland and again in their host country (Young, 1990). On the other hand, in the latter half of the 20th century and beyond, educational responses in Canada have supported youth to gain access to the four normative ideals of a just society (inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity; Young, 2000). In this literature review, I have presented the evolving debates and shifts in research towards youth from immigrant and refugee

backgrounds using a strengths-based and resiliency approach. This research builds upon international research in looking at youth empowerment to contribute to a body of work about the experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a Canadian context. In the next chapter, I present the methodology of this research study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I describe my research methodology of photovoice and semi-structured interviews. First, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings that inform photovoice. Next, I provide a rationale for the suitability of photovoice and interviews and how they informed my research questions. I then present a detailed research design that includes data collection and data analysis. Finally, I offer ethical considerations that were applicable throughout the study.

#### **Theoretical Underpinnings of Photovoice**

Photovoice is a participatory methodology that involves a community to affect change (Wang & Burris, 1997). The use of photographs helps researchers establish a relationship and rapport with participants and humanizes the portrayal of participants (Gold, 2007). Specifically, I was interested in participatory action research (PAR). McIntyre (2008) stated the underlying tenets that inform a majority of PAR projects are

(a) a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem, (b) a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation, (c) a joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved, and (d) the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementing, and dissemination of the research process. (p. 1)

Thus, through this collaborative approach to inquiry, youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds were invited to take pictures, and through dialogue, voiced their experiences and opinions about social justice in a leadership program. This approach is appropriate for promoting educational and social change (Reason & Bradbury-Huan, 2013).

In the last few decades, visuals have become prevalent in private and public spaces and visual methodology in qualitative research is taking up visual methods to understand this phenomenon (Gold, 2007; Prosser, 2011). According to Prosser (2011), visual researchers use the term *visible* ontologically referring to imagery and naturally occurring phenomena that can be seen, emphasizing the visual dimension and disregarding their meaning and significance. *Visual*, however, is not about an image or object in and of itself but more concerned with the perception and the meanings attributed to them. (p. 479)

Therefore, how people make meaning of visual data is important to visual methodology. In a more seeing world—that is, a world where visuals become more prominent—the relationship between word and image can be powerful (Prosser, 2011).

Prosser (2011) contended that the earliest documented examples of visual research was pioneered by John Collier in the mid-1950s, as he used photo elicitation to rouse interviewee responses. Photovoice as a participatory methodology also speaks to John Collier’s work with Indigenous people; he indicated that questions need to come from:

participants’ own area of need [and he coined the terms] action-research, research-action [to signify that the] surest way for improvement was to allow people who would be affected by change to decide where change is wanted and what action is most likely to effect it. (Hinchey, 2008, p. 294)

As a visual ethnographer, Schwartz (2007) learned of the power of words taking precedence over visuals. This is because academic writing continues to dominate research and renders images to be secondary. Schwartz was “working to make pictures prime, to invest in them in such a way as to insist that viewers read what the images have to say” (2007, p. 320); in this way, words do not take away the power of the pictures.

Photovoice is a methodology that involves giving cameras to participants as an act of empowerment to generate social change that may directly influence policy (Prosser, 2011). Giving the cameras is the first step: the more important steps of capturing images, discussing and choosing best representations, and then sharing these images with powerholders are crucial to photovoice (Y. Poitras Pratt, personal communication, May 21, 2017). The photographs can be circulated through the internet, posted at national exhibitions, or sent to government agencies, to tell personal stories that address the inequality and injustices of marginalized populations (Prosser, 2011). An image is fitting for academic communication as it conveys numerous messages such as the posing of questions and the emphasizing of concrete and abstract thoughts (Weber, 2012). Although there are different ways of using photovoice in qualitative research, Wang and Burris's (1997) method resonated with me due to their work with marginalized Yunnan women and their experience with public health. I found their method to be empowering of the women once they were given cameras to capture their daily lives. Wang and Burris (1997) noted that photovoice was developed on a three-part theoretical basis: "education for critical consciousness; feminist theory, and documentary photography" (p. 372), which I elaborate on in the next section.

*Critical consciousness* was coined by Freire (1970), who voiced that vocation is "thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity" (p. 44). Freire believed it is important to view oppressed people as active subjects rather than objects to be acted upon. He presented a provocative look at the problem with education and described what he calls the "banking" (Freire, 1970, p. 25) model of education in which teachers merely make deposits of knowledge into students and later extract that

knowledge through standardized tests. As a solution, he offered the notion of a problem-posing model of education in which teachers and students share the roles of teacher and learner (Freire, 1970). This sharing through dialogue enables “people to think critically about their community, and to begin discussing the everyday social and political forces that influence their lives” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). This critical process is enhanced by using visual images, and photovoice pushes the boundaries further by having the people most impacted by injustice to take the photographs themselves (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Despite Freire’s (1970) stance against injustice, feminist scholars such as Maguire (1987) have critiqued his work. Feminist theory encompasses a wide area of research. Wang and Burris (1997) quoted Maguire in that participatory research can unintentionally silence women’s voices. Maguire noted that Freire’s use of drawings about “man in the world [to create dialogue] ignored men’s domination of women” (1987, p. 84). She challenged male monopolies in research, stating that the feminist perspective remains “peripheral [and] hidden” (Maguire, 1987, p. 4) in most participatory research projects and literature. Maguire argued that feminism involves a global movement of the redistribution of power. She indicated feminism is

- a) a belief that women all over the world face some form of oppression or exploitation; b)
- a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression; and c) a
- commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression, whether based on gender, class, race or culture. (Maguire, 1987, p. 5)

Maguire (1987) warranted that it is important to examine the patterns of injustice and dismantle those that are systemically oppressive. Thus, women’s and marginalized groups’ (such as immigrant and refugee youth) voices need to be heard and acknowledged, and action needs to

be taken to end oppression of these groups. Documentary photography is one means for addressing this need, which I turn to now.

Documentary photography is a method whereby researchers provide cameras to “people who might otherwise have no access to such a tool, so that they may record and catalyze change in their communities, rather than stand as passive subjects of other people’s intentions and images” (Wang & Burris, 1997, pp. 370–371). Since the 1930s, many projects have used documentary photography to raise social conscience and give voice to those who have been historically silenced (Wang & Burris, 1997). In recent years, numerous projects have used photovoice as a participatory methodology (Delgado, 2015; Dempsey, 2014; S. Greene, Burke, & McKenna, 2013; Mitchell, Steeves, & Perez, 2015). All these projects are community-based, and the participants’ familiarity with their environment gives them an advantage “over professionals in their ability to move through the community, portray its strengths and concerns, and use grassroots voices and images to advocate policy” (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p. 561).

According to Wang (1999), photovoice comprises five key concepts. First, images relay “how we [as individuals] see ourselves, how we define and relate to the world, and what we perceive as significant or different” (Wang, 1999, p. 186). Second, “pictures can influence policy” (Wang, 1999, p. 186), in that images can impact one’s worldview. Third, “community people ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape healthful public policy” (Wang, 1999, p. 186), in that people are encouraged to take pictures, describe the images, and give meaning to their interpretation of the images. Fourth, “the process requires that planners bring to the table from the outset policymakers and other influential people to serve as an audience for community people’s perspectives” (Wang, 1999, p. 187), and decision-makers

can be invited to have a dialogue with the community members. Fifth, “photovoice emphasizes individual and community action” (Wang, 1999, p. 187), so that community members can work together with policymakers to affect change.

In summary, photovoice is a methodology for working with marginalized and oppressed populations so that they can use cameras to capture their own images that speak to their own experiences. This form of empowerment can affect educational policy and social change when historically silenced voices are invited to share their stories and experiences with powerholders. Next, I discuss the rationale for using photovoice for my study.

### **Rationale for Photovoice**

Youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds often lack a strong voice in school when they are new to Canada (Asadi, 2014), as they can be overlooked in favour of students born in the host country and thus part of the dominant culture (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). For this project, I aimed to trouble the status quo by bringing forth the fundamental operations of power and control (Young, 1990, 2000) operating within schools and worked with youth so their voices will be properly heard. Madison (2012) acknowledged the significance of beginning to investigate other possibilities that will “challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities” (p. 5). As an educated Chinese Canadian woman, I intended to use photovoice to advance the knowledge and lives of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds so that together we would have a voice using a strengths-based perspective by looking at youths’ resources and agency.

Weber (2012) voiced that images can capture emotional responses that can be remembered and can result in the audience seeing topics and issues in a different and critical

way. Further, Wang and Burris (1997) shared that the rationale for using photovoice is many-fold. Here, I underscore the rationale by explaining several aspects that pertained to my study. First, photovoice confronts the problem of needs assessment where the opinions about what is needed have traditionally come from researchers or experts in the field. With photovoice, participatory needs assessment often “values the knowledge put forth by people as a vital source of expertise” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 372). Second, the visual image is powerful in that people can communicate their desired needs through photographs, which can be more impactful than the spoken word. Third, by giving cameras to vulnerable and marginalized populations, who may not have the ability to read and write (or do so succinctly), this method is accessible to anyone. Fourth, photovoice can be used in multiple settings instead of being confined to an interview room (for example). Fifth, using cameras can be a source of “community pride and ownership” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 372). Sixth, photovoice can be used to redefine and reaffirm goals of the community through the audience’s feedback. Seventh, photovoice invites other community members to tell their stories. Eighth, photovoice is strengths-based in that it tells stories of not only the problems, but also of abilities, resources, and celebrations. Last, photovoice can stimulate action as the images can “reach, inform, and organize community members, enabling them to prioritize their concerns and discuss problems and solutions” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 373); people become their own advocates for social change by communicating messages with powerholders.

The above reasons explained by Wang and Burris (1997) align with Young’s (2000) ideals of inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity. When youth are invited to take photographs to share their own worldview and story, they may feel empowered in that they are included in the democratic process as participants working for change. This, in turn, may

have them feel more empowered to question what is unjust. Further, they may develop skills pertaining to reasonableness in that they will cultivate a more open mind and the ability to listen and collaborate with others and agree on social action. With youth being involved in this way, they may feel that they are a part of a decision-making process by disseminating their photos and discussions with others.

There are also limitations to photovoice. Pertaining to my study, the participants who have taken the pictures may face “uncertain or unpredictable outcomes” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 374) due to their vulnerable position of sharing what is wrong with the system. For instance, they may share what they are not happy about at school and they may be afraid this critical stance could affect their school standing. Second, personal choice and selection of what photographs to take and which ones to bring up and discuss may have both participants and researchers leave out aspects of the findings; however, this is a common limitation in other methodologies as well (Wang & Burris, 1997). Third, participants may continue to be subjected to inequality, while the researchers and institutions may be the ones benefitting from the project (Wang & Burris, 1997). Other limitations include the high cost, such as the cost of the cameras and developing the photographs and the difficulty of analyzing the data (Wang & Burris, 1997).

In summary, the rationale for using photovoice was a personal as well as a participatory and community-based decision. I worked together with the teacher to cultivate a positive relationship and explained my social justice reasons for my work with youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in the Club. Photovoice fits well with the goal of community work with a youth population that has traditionally been oppressed (in their home country and/or in Canada) in the five ways (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and

violence) Young (1990) has described. Next, I share my journey of meeting and working with the youth participants.

### **Partner School Site**

For the past several years, I have had a working relationship with Ms. M., sponsor teacher of the Club. The student population in the Calgary high school, where she teaches, speaks over 30 languages and many are new to Canada. The working relationship began several years ago when I was invited to her school to talk about youth suicidal ideation. The invitation was due to my background as a counsellor and having worked with many young people who have thought about and have attempted suicide. Some of these youth engage in “cutting,” a form of self-harm as one way to attempt to numb internalized social pain. After my presentation, the teacher and I kept in contact. In the winter of 2018, Ms. M. formally invited me to meet the members in the Club.

I further collaborated with Ms. M. to learn more about the program and the youth who participate in this Club. I met with the principal and Ms. M. in January 2018 to present the research proposal, share the consent forms that students and families would be asked to sign, and explain the overall research study. At that time, the principal granted permission for me to conduct research at the school. Throughout the journey, I kept the principal informed of the project’s status. I participated in Club meetings; Ms. M. led the activities, and I had the opportunity to sit in. I attended meetings between February and May 2018. I believe my presence invited the students to get to know me, and we developed a trusting and open relationship through informal chats and sharing of lived experiences.

## **Photovoice Data Collection and Analysis**

In this section, I discuss data collection and analysis of photovoice group discussions. I used Wang and Burris' (1997) foundational work to detail the photovoice process. Here, I describe a seven-stage process of data collection and analysis following Wang and Burris'(1997) guidelines.

**Stage 1: Working with facilitators and school partnership.** I collaborated with the Club teacher, Ms. M., and introduced her to my research idea in 2017. With her support, I contacted the principal of the high school. We had a meeting on Thursday, January 25, 2018, and I explained the photovoice project idea to both Ms. M. and the principal. They welcomed me in the school and agreed that immigrant and refugee youths' voices are important and that this participatory action research project would help to have their voices heard. Ms. M. is an inside facilitator as she is accountable to the school community and committed to social change (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 376). As an outside facilitator (Wang & Burris, 1997), I worked with Ms. M. to familiarize myself with the school and the happenings of the Club. Ms. M was most knowledgeable and welcoming, and she invited me to meet the students involved in the Club.

**Stage 2: Finding the participants.** On Wednesday February 28, 2018, I went to the school to talk about the photovoice project. I shared my story of being a refugee child growing up in Canada and my lived experience as a teacher, counsellor, and researcher. I explained the aims of the project and the research questions and left Ms. M. with the consent forms. Students asked the following questions:

- Can we take pictures of people if we get their permission? (I replied no because this approach can get complicated if people want to withdraw their consent later).
- Can we take pictures of the community?

- Can we take a picture of a hand wearing a bracelet?
- How many pictures are needed?

I answered the rest of the above questions by letting the students know they could take metaphorical pictures as long as there were no faces, and that the number of pictures was up to their choosing. Then, the students who were interested self-selected to take the consent forms home to their families and explained the research to them. Thereafter, six participants returned with the consent forms signed by themselves and their parents/guardians.

**Stage 3: Orienting participants to taking and sharing the photographs.** Thereafter, eight club members came to another meeting. I explained the consent forms in detail (see Appendices A and B for the focus group and interview consent forms, respectively), outlined how consent is a continuous process, and clarified that they could withdraw participation by the end of June. We went around the circle, and each student introduced herself. Ms. M. and her colleague, who is an educational assistant, were present and also joined in. I welcomed more questions, and six students decided to participate. Thereafter, I asked the participants to think about what pictures to take for the photovoice and provided them with some questions; they also added some questions of their own (see Appendix C). Table 1 illustrates the participants’ demographics.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

| Pseudonym | Age | Background                                                                                           | Languages            |
|-----------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Nina      | 16  | Refugee (1.5 generation); came to Canada at age three. Born in Pakistan and family from Afghanistan. | Urdu, Farsi, English |

|       |    |                                                                                                                                                                 |                            |
|-------|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Tina  | 17 | Second generation immigrant; born in Canada. Father came to Canada from Pakistan when he was in Grade 7; mother came to Canada when they got married back home. | Urdu, Punjabi, English     |
| Zoya  | 17 | First generation immigrant; came to Canada at age 10 from Pakistan.                                                                                             | Urdu, English              |
| Nawaz | 17 | 1.5 generation immigrant; came to Canada at age two from Pakistan. Arrived in Montreal and moved to Calgary at age seven.                                       | Urdu, English, some French |
| Naomi | 17 | Second generation immigrant; born in Canada. Family is from Pakistan.                                                                                           | Urdu, English              |
| Ann   | 17 | Second generation immigrant; born in Canada. Family is from Pakistan.                                                                                           | Urdu, English              |

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**Stage 4: Taking the photographs.** I asked the participants to walk around the school to practice taking pictures that resonated with them and their involvement in the Club with their mobile phones. When they returned to the room, I asked them to send the pictures to my email address as attachments. I asked that they spend the next two weeks taking pictures as they wished and then send them to me when they could. Note that I decided not to use disposable cameras as all participants had access to a mobile phone, and the quality of the photographs were enhanced using phone cameras. I relayed the importance of the photographs to be shared within the group and that focus group conversations remain in the group.

**Stage 5: Conducting the participatory analysis.** I executed the participatory analysis using a three-stage process (Wang & Burris, 1997):

1. **Selecting:** The participants chose photographs that spoke to their experiences in the Club. I asked participants the reasons for choosing the selected photographs, and their responses jumpstarted the group discussion.
2. **Contextualizing:** This is also known as storytelling, whereby participants are involved in a group discussion. It can be remembered by the acronym VOICE: “voicing our individual and collective experience” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 381). At this stage,

participants shared the meaning behind their images, discussed within the group, listened to what others said, and shared collective stories about the photographs (Wang & Burris, 1997).

3. **Codifying:** In this last stage, participants were asked to “identify three types of dimensions that arise from the dialogue process: issues, themes, or theories” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 381). Participants then codified themes that had been gathered and analyzed them in a “collective discussion” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 381).

**Stage 6: Conducting the group discussion.** Wang (1999) created a way to facilitate group discussion using the acronym ShowEd:

1. What do you **See** here?
2. What is really **H**appening?
3. How does it relate to **O**ur lives?
4. **W**hy does this situation, concern, or strength **E**xist?
5. What can we **D**o about it? (p. 188)

In the group, I asked the above questions for participants to share what was happening in the photos and discuss the intended meaning behind the photos. It was important to be open to how some photos surprised the participants and myself. I transcribed the group discussion data and used participants’ codified themes as the starting place to write the findings.

**Stage 7: Having a finale celebration and disseminating the photographs.** On Wednesday, May 23, 2018, a finale celebration took place with Ms. M. and the participants to share participants’ creations. We invited everyone who was a part of the Club to contribute to the finale and showcase their work. Only the youth who wanted to and felt comfortable to participate did so. We as a group decided to invited powerholders (teachers, principal, and faculty members

at the University of Calgary) to attend and celebrate the participants' work. Five of the youth participants, Ms. M., three teachers, two faculty members from the university, and four other club members joined this celebration. We sat in a circle to cultivate open conversations.

We began with acknowledgement of the land. Then, Ms. M. introduced herself and the aims of the Club. I introduced myself and the project. Nawaz gladly volunteered to present her poem, *Shackles of Racism*. Nina, Zoya, and Naomi shared a photograph of their choosing. Tina shared her poem, *Society Is War*. After each sharing, the youth used the ShowEd process described above to talk about the photos and poems and invited everyone in the room to share their thoughts. Important insights and laughter ensued.

**Stage 8: Following up.** After one week, so that the participants had a chance to reflect on their experiences, I reached out through email to ask how they experienced the finale. This decision was made by the group as a final discussion group meeting was not possible due to the constraints of time; June was final exam month and the CBE would not allow research to be conducted at schools during that period. The five participants shared that they found the finale to be a wonderful experience that honoured everyone's voices. They expressed that they had been given a chance to talk about social justice issues that matter to them in a safe, meaningful, and fulfilled way.

## **Interviews**

Concurrent with the photovoice project, I conducted semi-structured interviews to augment the data in the group discussions. Interviews were done after the first two focus group discussions. Seidman (2013) shared that interviewing is a way of getting to know another's stories and stories are "a way of knowing" (p. 7). Drawing on van Manen's (1997) work, he indicated the root of in-depth interviewing is having a curiosity in understanding the lived

experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. The process of interviewing can generate a relationship that can change the researcher and participant in a short period (Seidman, 2013). Schutz (1967, as cited in Seidman, 2013) suggested a person's intersubjective understanding of another depends upon the "I-Thou" (p. 164) relationship. In this relationship, the "Thou [is another] alive and conscious human being" (Schutz, 1967, as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 164) and the shift is from seeing the participant as an object to seeing her as "thou-ness [or in a] we" relationship (Schutz, 1967, as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 164).

However, from Seidman's (2013) perspective, this "we" relationship is too intertwined. He thought there needed to be a balance: "Saying enough about myself to be alive and responsive but little enough to preserve the autonomy of the participant's words and to keep the focus of attention on his or her experience rather than mine" (Seidman, 2013, p. 98). For this study, I stayed closer to the "we" relationship by following Ellis's (2004) feminist tenets, which emphasize that it is substantial and noteworthy when feminist writers share their own experience. This approach may contribute to a greater balance of power given that the researcher and participant relationship may be plagued with imbalance due to the researcher being educated and being an expert (Ellis, 2004).

**Seidman's three-interview approach.** In Seidman's (2013) approach, interviewers use mostly open-ended questions, and their main undertaking is to explore and build upon the participants' responses to those questions. The objective is to have participants recreate their own experience within the specific topic. Sample interview questions are provided in Appendix D.

Seidman (2013) presented the three-interview series. The first of the three-interview series creates the background of the participants' experiences. The second interview asks participants to rebuild the details of their experience within the context in which they occurred.

The third interview invites participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. The social context of the interviews, such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender, affect the relationship (Seidman, 2013), and the interviewer needs to be aware of and address this context in the conversations. I went about this by being open about my own background and experience and was cognizant of power imbalance by noticing if the participants felt uncomfortable and checking in with them often. I believe my lived experience as a counsellor helped with working through the power imbalance as I am trained to listen with care, open heart, and curiosity.

***Interview 1: Focused life history.*** In the first part of the interview, the interviewer's mission is to put the participants' experiences in context by asking them to share as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic (Seidman, 2013). I asked the participants about their family, their experiences growing up in Canada, and their general experiences in the Club. Some interviews took place at the school and some took place at an adjacent public-school library.

***Interview 2: The details of the experience.*** The goal of the second part of the interview is to focus on the concrete details of the participant's present lived experience in the topic area of study (Seidman, 2013) and to uncover the details of this experience. I asked the participants about their specific experiences of being involved in the Club. For example, I focused on questions about the specific strengths and challenges of the Club as well as asked them to explain their different levels of involvement year to year.

***Interview 3: Reflection on the meaning.*** In the third part of the interview, participants are asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience in the Club (Seidman, 2013). Here, I delved into what it means for participants to be a part of this school initiative, what they think it says about them, how they think they have made a difference, and how the Club has connected

them to other volunteer opportunities. Making sense or making meaning involves the participants exploring how the influences in their lives interact to transport them to their present situation (Seidman, 2013). It also entails participants looking at their present situation in detail and within the context it occurs (Seidman, 2013).

I followed Seidman's (2013) spirit of interviewing but adapted it slightly. The photovoice group discussion meetings formed the basis of the first two aspects of the interviews described above, whereas the one-on-one interviews were akin to reflection on meaning. The group discussions took place on April 13th and April 27th; and the interview dates with each participant happened on May 3rd, May 16th, May 22nd, May 24th, and June 1st. I garnered this information in one interview due to the limited time students have in high school. However, I still incorporated the intent and aims of Seidman's techniques by incorporating the three-interview series with the explained format.

In summary, I followed an adaptation of the process of the three-interview series. Combining the first two interviews into the Club meetings and conducting only one face-to-face interview seemed a more respectful approach, as I was cognizant of the participants' limited time in completing their high school courses.

**Data analysis for interviews.** I had a transcriptionist transcribe the interview data, and I listened to the recorded data along with the written transcript to check for errors as well as input my own thoughts and reflections. Themes were uncovered by connecting participants' words from the interviews with the photovoice participant analysis' codified themes. My desire to represent the participants' voices justly and clearly was at the forefront, and I sent them the findings to ask them to check if the data represented them.

Seidman (2013) argued that separating the process of gathering and analyzing the data can be challenging. Madden (2013) voiced that field notes should be taken throughout the data gathering process, and these notes are also data. Hence, I began taking field notes at the beginning of the journey. In reading through the transcripts of the interviews, I also read these notes and incorporated them in the writing accordingly. Seidman advised that the process of analyzing data should be executed inductively rather than deductively. In other words, the researcher “must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (Seidman, 2013, p. 119). On the other hand, there is no such thing as a completely neutral or objective researcher. Seidman heeded the importance of reflexivity and for the researcher to know his or her own interests, biases, and prejudices and to articulate these views openly. In addition, Madden conveyed the importance of writing a subjectivity statement so that researchers can place themselves within the study and explain who they are and where they are coming from, as I positioned myself within the context of this study in Chapter 1.

Procedurally, Seidman (2013) advised to first reduce the text by reading it and marking with brackets the passages that are interesting. He noted that Marshall (1981, as cited in Seidman, 2013) conveyed she could bring forth what is important by reading the transcripts and feeling confident about being able to respond to meaningful chunks. On the other hand, Seidman shared how Marshall also talked about the dark side of the process as becoming less confident as more data emerge. I also had these concerns and checked with participants to invite them to tell me if they also believed in the themes of the findings (Seidman, 2013).

## **Ethical Considerations**

I adhered to the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) protocols as well as the CBE's (2017) research review guidelines. Specifically, I followed the protocols and ethical standards that are in place when working with participants. I continued to remain open and vulnerable by sharing parts of myself because conducting research with human participants is a "caring act" (van Manen, 1997, p. 5). Researcher self-reflexivity and positionality are important when working with any marginalized population, including immigrant and refugee youth. I was cognizant that my role as a doctoral researcher gave me power and as a result, I carefully considered how I worked with the youth so that they had a voice (Davila, 2014). Consequently, though I may have some shared experience with my participants, it is problematic if I label my own experiences the same as theirs. I was cognizant and reflexive of the dangers of this assumption throughout the study. Accordingly, I paid attention to the human relationship, where care, compassion, and active listening are present, rather than simply avoiding harm (Noddings, 2003).

Further, conducting research with youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds can be a "complex ethical enterprise" because they are a part of a vulnerable group (Davila, 2014, p. 22). In working with young people who are part of a vulnerable population, I needed to be mindful that my questions and conversations with them would do no harm; I was cognizant of the ethics of care (Noddings, 2003) as well as relational ethics. Thus, I have kept participants' identities (names) confidential by using pseudonyms. The school name and location also have not been disclosed in case the reader might recognize the participants. Not only did I acquire informed consent from the guardians and youth, but I also explained the objectives of my study and ensured they understood their role as participants before signing the consent form. At any

time, the participants knew they could withdraw from the study without fear of repercussion. In addition, I provided students with counselling services available at their school and/or outside agencies if they needed support with processing conversations related to trauma, pain, or other memories that may have generated deep emotions. As far as I know, none of the participants accessed these services.

It is important to conduct research that is morally sound, diminishes harm, and is based on an ethical research design (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Using photovoice with youth can be complicated despite the most well-intentioned and reflexive researcher (Delgado, 2015). Therefore, ethical considerations are crucial to ensure the youth are protected. Further to following the University of Calgary's CFREB protocols as well as the CBE's (2017) research review guidelines, in this section, I examine informed consent, the rights of participants, confidentiality, permission to publish, benefits of the research, degree of risk, data storage and ownership of data, rigour and trustworthiness, and care.

**Informed consent and permission to publish photos.** Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) outlined three types of consent when using photovoice. First, consent needs to be obtained from participants (and their guardians if they are under the age of 18) that outlines their responsibilities and rights. In doing so, I explained the context and objective of my study and invited participants and their guardians to sign consent forms. Second, the photographers need to obtain signatures from the subjects they are taking pictures of. They need to explain how the photograph will be used. For example, they could tell the person being photographed that the photograph is a part of this project and may end up on display as a poster to share with the public. Third, the photographers may give permission for the photographs to be published and used by the researcher to disseminate the findings (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). For my

study, I asked participants not to take pictures of people; therefore, the second form of consent was not needed. Hence, I obtained the first and third forms of consent outlined by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001). I continued to relay that participants could withdraw consent at any time with no adverse effect on them. Informed consent is a process whereby the participants are fully cognizant of what is “expected of them” (Delgado, 2015, p. 167). I asked for permission to use the photographs and group discussion data towards the goal of knowledge translation and mobilization at conferences and other venues.

**The rights of participants: Privacy, dignity, and confidentiality.** It is imperative to be aware of people’s right to privacy (Tinkler, 2014). This is especially crucial when working with a vulnerable population such as immigrant and refugee children, youth, and the elderly (Davila, 2014; Tinkler, 2014). I kept participants’ identities confidential by using pseudonyms. In group photovoice sharing, I ensured participants knew that confidentiality could not be guaranteed due to the nature of everyone in the group knowing everyone else (Tinkler, 2014). I spoke about the importance of participants respecting others’ privacy by encouraging them to keep what was said in the group within the group.

**Benefits of the research.** The benefits of this research are such that the immigrant and refugee youth were encouraged to voice the social justice issues that matter to them. By sharing their photographs with educational powerholders, they may be a part of social change. I as the researcher also benefitted from this project as it fulfilled a part of my doctoral degree. I will likely obtain recognition, conference presentations, and publications from this work. Educators, stakeholders, and individuals who attended the finale and/or read this dissertation may also benefit from hearing and reading the youth’s stories.

**Degree of risk.** The risk associated with this research pertains to youth sharing traumatic stories related to social justice. I provided participants with counselling service information in case this was required. If I had found the participants to be experiencing any form of abuse, I would have worked with the inside facilitators to notify the authorities, such as Calgary Region Child and Family Services. However, this was not the case. The risks to the school included students pointing out things they were not happy about, and school professionals may have felt responsible for their well-being. To my knowledge, these risks did not materialize.

**Data ownership and storage.** Ownership of data is a complex issue in photovoice; given that the youth took the photographs, they are the owners of the product (Delgado, 2015). Further, because the guardians signed consent for the youth to participate, they are also the owners (Delgado, 2015). Guillemin and Drew (2010) offered a solution to this conundrum by asking participants if it was acceptable to them if the photographs and findings were to be used in publications, conference presentations, reports, and so forth. I obtained assent from the youth and followed and worked collaboratively with the participants and their guardians to ensure they understand this process before giving or denying permission. The youth were asked to take only pictures that metaphorically spoke to their experience and not pictures of humans. The pictures were stored in a password-protected computer and possibly virtual storage devices on the participants' mobile phones. On my computer, the data will be kept for up to five years after the study and then destroyed thereafter.

**Rigour and trustworthiness.** At the onset of writing this thesis, I began to write notes to document my personal reflections, thoughts, and questions. This form of expression helped me with free-flow writing to reflect on new ideas, to question my own thinking, and to consolidate my ideas. In the field, I continued to document these notes; I think they added to the layers of my

thought processes and experiences. This reflexive process suggests that there is no insider–outsider perspective; rather, the notion “of reflexivity [is] to incorporate reflective work with research participants, not just about them” (Gildersleeve, 2010, p. 408). Moreover, I engaged in reflective thinking and discussions by using participant analysis as part of photovoice.

Rolfe (2004) noted that issues of validity in “qualitative studies should be linked not to ‘truth’ or ‘value,’ as they are for positivists, but rather to ‘trustworthiness,’ which becomes a matter of persuasion whereby the scientist is viewed as having made those practices visible, and therefore, auditable” (p. 305). Persuasion and visibility contribute to rigour; I believe Rolfe’s notion of visibility had to be articulated in the report of my findings, so it is auditable. Another word for trustworthiness is *authenticity*, and if informed people, such as the audience of this dissertation, come away convinced with my work, I, too, become trustworthy. Further, it is important to use care and a “process of acquiring information, organizing it as data, and then analyzing and interpreting those data with the help of refractive (conceptual, theoretical, perhaps political) lenses” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 584). In other words, rigour originates from having a process of inquiry. For this study, I have completed the required steps, including completing a research proposal, obtaining approval from the institution’s research and ethics board, gathering data in a respectful—and, in my case, participatory—way, and working with participants to collaborate on interpretation and action, all the while keeping a journal and field notes for layered reflection.

**Care.** The ethical core of the researcher is something that the researcher brings to the research, and the “moral compass is the core that helps the researcher on a clear and purposeful task” (Delgado, 2015, p. 147). Collaboration, authenticity, and transparency with the community are critical (Delgado, 2015). As part of these qualities, care is paramount. Noddings (2003) made

the distinction between one-caring and cared-for; she noted that one-caring is associated with the universal feminine “she [and cared-for with the masculine] he” (p. 4). Cared-for does not have the “promise to behave,” whereas one-caring does; caring is a reciprocal process, and one meets the other “morally” out of natural caring or inclination (Noddings, 2003, pp. 4–5). I believe I used care in a one-caring process when working with participants as I continuously communicated openly with the participants. Further, I have reached out several times after the final celebration of learning to invite participants’ feedback regarding the celebration and the writing of this dissertation. The participants have responded; of which I will share their words in chapter 5.

In summary, the ethical considerations in this study were multifaceted. I have been cognizant of all the protocols required by CFREB and the CBE’s (2017) ethical guidelines. Further, I continually used care and check-ins to ensure ongoing consent and that participants felt listened to, and that I have represented their voice in ways that they want to be represented.

## **Conclusion**

Photovoice provided a space for youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds to fully participate in the research process and project their own voices about social justice issues that matter to them (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice aligned with my work in the field of educational leadership to enlighten powerholders about the needs of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. The hope is for powerholders to focus on their strengths, resiliency, and their passion to create social change related to inclusion, political equality, reasonableness, and publicity (Young, 2000).

## Chapter 4: Findings

The experiences of youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a social justice leadership program using photovoice as methodology garnered four themes. In this chapter, I present these themes and subthemes derived from the photographs and stories shared in the photovoice and interviews. The girls spoke of how the Club has impacted them, their school, and the community. I have chosen to use the term *girls* to take back a word that has represented the gender divide with connotations of childishness, being too feminine, and insults to athletic (in)ability; I aim to give rise to the girls' gender and humanize their particular experiences. Further, the girls used the word *Brown* in our conversations to represent their ethnic cultural identity. I asked for their permission to borrow the term as it is an integral part of how they described themselves. They openly provided consent for me to do so. To preserve their voices, I have presented quoted material as close to verbatim as possible. The only changes made were ones to ensure the anonymity of the girls and hence the name of the Club.

The first theme that emerged pertains to identity and belonging. Within this broad theme, two subthemes were prevalent: friendships cultivated and the importance of teacher–student relationality. The second theme pertains to advocating for social justice. Within this theme, there are four subthemes: agents of change, creating awareness, embracing diversity, and overcoming adversity. The third theme speaks to the importance of mental health awareness. Embedded in this theme are the subthemes of destigmatizing mental health and supporting family and friends with their mental health concerns. The final theme is the girls' aspiration to dream at any age. Included in this theme are three subthemes: career-related aspirations; broadening and interrupting—breaking free from the mold of expectations, even just a little bit, without being

offensive; and using art as a medium to fulfill dreams. All these themes and subthemes are supported with photographs taken by the girls.

The girls have been involved in a club called Antyx and its objective is to bring the community together by creating awareness using art on issues pertaining to diversity, perseverance, dreams, and mental health. Hence, I also took photographs of the girls' finished massive art structures they made over an 8-month period with Antyx (<http://www.antiyx.org>). They all voiced that being a part of the Club led them to join Antyx at the beginning of the school year. Therefore, I believed it was important to include their Antyx creations.

### **Theme 1: Identity and Belonging: The Club Is a Part of Me**

The first theme is about identity and belonging as the girls conveyed that they initially joined the Club because some of their friends were joining. Also, the Club's social justice focus resonated with them. As the semesters progressed, they noticed they are making an impact and how they really do belong in the Club. Tina said:

Through this experience, when you actually see what you're doing is making a difference, I feel like that makes one feel good about yourself, because it makes you feel like you're doing something. And it also creates a positive impact in your environment. And I feel like with my friends' group, it's that much more beneficial, because I feel like we're all able to make that change and we're all able to make that connection.

In pressing further about the kind of impact she is making, Tina responded:

Impacting people's lives and also impacting myself. It causes my perspective sometimes to change on different things, where if we're having a discussion in class, and we're talking about, say, third world countries or in social, for me, again, because I was able to make that impact, make that change, I feel like I have more to contribute in those discussions. . . . Wherever you go, it becomes a part of you.

Here, Tina alluded to how she belongs in the Club and how her membership in the Club has changed her, particularly in how she sees she is making a difference. The experience has also changed the conversations she has in class and with her peers.

Zoya joined the Club because it provided opportunities to create a school community.

Her friends told her about the Club, and she agreed with the values of social justice. She realized it really fits for her:

When I came to this school, I was in Grade 11. . . . So, when I heard about the [Name of Club], it was—I think my friend was one of the first people who were in the Club. And I thought it was really cool. So, then we thought we should go check it out. And then since then I've really liked the Club. It was more like to build the school community and get involved. (Zoya)

The other girls agreed with Zoya about the importance of building a positive school community. They shared that they wanted to make the school a place where people felt they had a voice and were heard. Relating to conversations beyond the Club, Naomi said that being a part of the Club has made her want to volunteer more: “Once I started with [the Club], I knew that I'd enjoyed it, [and] I started volunteering outside more. So, I was already volunteering with the library here, but I joined Antyx as well.”

The confidence that Naomi felt as part of the Club transferred to other aspects of involvement as being a part of the school community. Naomi reflected on how the Club has helped her see that she has knowledge and skills to support students. Specifically, Naomi reflected on the volunteering she has done at the library to tutor children who need help with math:

There were math challenges that young kids could come up [with], and they'd choose the level that they're at, take a challenge, and they could take a volunteer with them and we'd help them complete the challenge. And then if they felt confident with that level, they could move up a level. (Naomi)

Naomi said that her practical math skills have allowed her to mentor young people in her community. She noted how it is rewarding to see children who struggle with math experience insight moments where they finally understand math. This success makes her continue to connect with these young minds.

Similarly, Nawaz shared that being a part of the Club has had her think about plans to join more clubs:

I'm hoping to continue to volunteer with Antyx. . . . I also want to join WISE, so Women in Science and Engineering at the University of Calgary. And then I'm thinking about joining other clubs; I just don't know of any yet. I've asked other people, but their answer has been like, "You have to wait until university starts, and then you can see the other opportunities that are available." But I have thought about it a lot. (Nawaz)

Nawaz voiced that she would reduce her work hours and continue to seek out opportunities to contribute to the profession of engineering as a young woman entering the program. She has already researched the types of clubs available at the university she will attend. This preparation shows her proactive striving to be involved in service beyond school.

Recently, Nina joined the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (n.d.) National Youth Action Council to have her voice heard to support people with mental health concerns. Nina shared that being a part of the Club has helped her get to know herself, and she has become more aware of social issues happening in the world.

I've become really a lot more empathetic to social issues. I've become more aware of different events going on in the world, either in the classroom or outside the classroom or anywhere, because usually, if I felt like if I hadn't joined these clubs, I'd be more of like an individualist who only really cared about themselves and what they were doing. But I feel like I look at the bigger picture as a collective. I've become more comfortable working in groups, showing my opinions in talks and everything, and I've also become aware that everyone has some sort of struggle going on with their life. (Nina)

Nina further shared that she has learned her peers have similar struggles, such as the pressure to be someone they are not, pursue a career that may not resonate with them, and fully immerse themselves in academic achievement even if it meant less time to do things they enjoy. The human connection has allowed her to become more aware of these similarities and to be open to her own and others' struggles.

The girls shared that being involved in the Club for the last few years has grown their sense of belonging and identity as part of the service to the broader school community. They

noted they will continue to volunteer in post-secondary studies and beyond. This desire is mostly internally motivated as no one has told them they must join certain clubs. Rather, they have done so to make a difference. Next, I turn to the subtheme of friendship.

**Subtheme 1: Friendships cultivated.** The girls shared that their friendships have become stronger due to their collective passion for social justice. They voiced that a few of them have been friends since elementary school and some met in secondary school. It appears that the synergy created in these previous friendships has propelled their efforts forward; together they have been able to connect and bond to create meaningful change. Their participation together has reinforced their alliance. Tina shared that even though she had already been friends with some of the girls in the Club, she would say their experiences together have strengthened their friendship:

Most of my friends are in the [Name of Club], so it wasn't too many new friendships. But there's a couple, like Nina and a couple of the other girls and another guy, I wasn't friends with them before, but I became friends with them through the Club. Once you find the same type of passion and the same social justice issues, you start talking, and those conversations happen and that's how you become friends, right? I feel like that's the way we built on our relationships.

When asked if Tina's core friendship group has grown stronger, she replied: "Yes, because again, we interact together all the time. With working on these issues, we're always there at the same events, we're always talking about the same things." Tina felt that she will be lifelong friends with other Club members given that they have a common goal of creating positive change. Most of them will attend the same university and expect that they will continue to keep in touch and perhaps join other clubs together.

To continue the conversation about friendships, Nina told me she received a mug (see Figure 1) during a gift exchange as part of the Club celebrations, and shared sentiments about the relationships cultivated:

So, this one was with [the Club], and this was our Secret Santa gifts. This one, I got a mug along with some chocolates and some cocoa to make chocolate milk with. This was

really important to me, because . . . I feel like out of all the clubs I joined, I've had the tightest bond with the people here, because it's just such a welcoming club, and I feel like the people are all very diverse yet very accepting. So, I just wanted to share this because of all the relationships that I've built through this club, which have helped me join other clubs and build other relationships. So, I guess it's just really a symbol of the relationships I have built and how I have grown into those relationships. (Nina)



*Figure 1.* The friendship mug Nina received.

Evidently, the Club has been a big part of Nina's high school experience. Nina expressed that being a part of the Club has helped to strengthen her friendships as well as relationships with teachers. She conveyed that the bond she has had with diverse individuals will continue to be a part of her life in Grade 12. Nina also talked about self-growth as she recognizes the Club has helped her cultivate her own self-confidence:

I guess it's self-growth, because these relationships really have allowed me to become more self-confident, even just approaching people I don't know and asking for help or helping them. It has really helped me build relationships with new people or has helped me approach people, and I guess it's just really helped me build my self-confidence as well. (Nina)

Hence, beyond relationship with others, Nina has discovered a strong connection and relationship with herself in that she has gained confidence and openness to reach out to others.

Naomi also shared that her friendships have been strengthened through the Club:

Well, I've gotten even closer with my friends because I've learned even more about them. And then I've made friends with lots of other people, too, like people in different grades or people from different backgrounds. It's allowed me to connect with more people. Because in class, you can do that, but it's not as much as you do with the Club because we're all so close, and we all talk about everything. (Naomi)

The Club has given Naomi space to expand her friendship circle and deepen those connections by talking about issues that matter. Nawaz voiced that her friends have encouraged her to continue to volunteer, and being a part of change has been a positive experience through the years:

My friends also do it [volunteering], so I want to be with them. I want to be a part of that. . . . Aside from that, all of my other volunteering experiences have been great. I always have something new to learn. And all of my volunteering experiences have been quite diverse. And so, every single time I do something, I'm always learning. (Nawaz)

Nawaz has appreciated the learning and growth that has come with being a part of the Club.

In relation to connection, Nina stated that talking and being open with peers who are going through similar struggles may have normalized the experiences:

Everyone has similar problems to me. . . . Grade 11 or Grade 12 is that sort of year where you feel a lot of pressure to be something you're really not or to do something you don't want to do. . . . I've learned that it's not just me who is struggling with this. It's everyone. So, I guess it has become a lot more easier to open up about it, because I know other people are going through the same issue, and it's a lot easier to speak to someone about it too. (Nina)

Nina has felt safe to allow herself to be vulnerable, and this vulnerability has resulted in stronger connections.

On top of the more serious topics and issues the girls have tackled, they also have fun.

Nawaz shared:

Like last week, we went for a group celebration to a laser tag, and that's the first time I've ever been there. I didn't think I would go, and it was really interesting; it was fun. And it's not just the fun activities. It's more like the opportunity to do something out of my comfort zone as well. (Nawaz)

Being a part of the Club is also about building community, getting to know friends in different ways, and having enjoyable moments together. Next, I turn to how Ms. M., the Club sponsor teacher, and other teachers at the school have made a difference in the girls' lives.

**Subtheme 2: The importance of teacher–student relationality.** The girls shared that Ms. M. supported them in many of their ideas to make school a more inclusive place for everyone. They voiced that Ms. M. has been a big part of their desire to continue to participate in the Club because she is passionate, understanding, and from a culture they can connect with. They shared that Ms. M. is Muslim and has had the lived experience to know what it is like to be a minoritized individual coming to Canada in her late teens.

The girls each talked about how Ms. M.'s encouraging, caring, and open nature have encouraged them to turn to her if they have ideas about an event or project. Here, Nina voiced that Ms. M.'s energy and passion have led students go to her for support of their ideas:

I had mentioned the teacher really impacts it, and I feel like Ms. M., she's just full of energy. . . . She has a lot of passion. . . . She's very committed to what she's doing. . . . It's also teacher relationship, because I mentioned Ms. M. is very passionate, it's very easy to talk to her. Sometimes, I feel like it's much more easy to come talk to her about my issues rather than a counsellor, because I feel like she's very open and understanding. And she's just very bubbly in a way. She's very approachable. (Nina)

Ms. M.'s way of living her life has resonated with Nina. Ms. M.'s welcoming qualities make her approachable. Nina voiced that Ms. M. has encouraged her and others to join different clubs in and out of school, and to be more involved.

Zoya also talked about Ms. M. stating that an empathetic and caring teacher who listens can make a big difference:

I think to support the students who are trying to create change and then to actually listen to them when they say that, "This is a serious issue going on in our school. This is what's affecting me, and I want to do something about it." Believing that this does happen and be like, "Okay, we can actually do something about it." Just that extra push, that little motivation to take that extra step further. There's also that passion to help the students

and then to also create change. And then there's caring about your students. And knowing that what they're going through is important. So, empathizing with them. (Zoya)

Zoya understood empathy as being able to step into someone's shoes and sitting with them when they need support. Zoya and the other girls agreed that teachers who are empathetic and kind are more relatable, and students tend to turn toward these teachers.

Further, Nina talked about her social studies teacher, Mr. B., and how she is moved by how much he brings forth social justice in every class, instead of following the curriculum in mundane and disconnected ways. She believed that schools should teach more critical thinking and topics that are relevant to students, rather than simply memorizing facts. Nina appreciated that Mr. B. has adopted a personal and relevant way of engaging with his students.

I feel like the problem is that in schools, they only focus about just school curriculum rather than focusing on the bigger picture, like, "This is happening in the world." My social studies teacher this semester has actually been doing that a lot lately, where we focus on less on the curriculum and we focus more on worldwide issues. But he somehow ties it into the curriculum, which I thought was really amazing, because it goes back to that idea of social justice and then when you're learning and becoming aware of what's happening around you. And what he said, it's usually, "It's important to build that sort of critical thinking in high school students." (Nina)

Nina shared that this teacher has taken diversity and women's studies classes, and this background knowledge shows in the way he teaches the class. He is open-minded and offers different perspectives, which has helped students challenge their own biases.

Nina further noted the importance of upbringing. She shared that teachers who have personal lived experiences or who are open to learning about diverse cultures are more effective as teachers because students may easily relate to them:

I guess he was kind of raised in the same way I am. . . . That [upbringing] also impacts how you treat other people, how you, I guess, push it [social justice] on to other people, because I've known other teachers who are very, I guess, traditional in their teaching style, and they were born . . . they were raised, not born, in a very different way than I am. (Nina)

Nina contended that when students see themselves in their teachers, they have a sense of belonging. For these girls, representation matters. They expressed that they have a particular connection and affinity for teachers who have had parallel journeys with their diverse backgrounds and cultures.

The girls appreciated a teacher who leads with experience and passion, and who listens to them wholeheartedly to support their initiatives. Teachers such as Ms. M. have made such an impact as students return each year to participate in the Club. There is an authentic teacher–student relationship as they would agree that trust, compassion, and a sense that teachers believe in students are essential. Hence, they shared the importance of being heard, recognized, and that what they say is taken seriously. Following, I discuss the theme of unity and how the girls voiced they are making a difference.

## **Theme 2: Advocating for Social Justice**

The girls shared the value of coming together to do good especially in today’s political partisanship where messages of divisiveness can be heard through the media daily and negativity can pervade our world. The girls voiced the importance of using a positive outlook and messages to combat this negativity. Throughout the school year, they would meet weekly to think of ideas to bring the school and community together.

To illustrate this approach, the girls spoke passionately of one event that held importance to their greater cause. They organized an Anti-Racism Day because they have seen racism in the media, in their own lives, and in the lives of others around them. They created a wall of sticky notes (see Figure 2) that spelled the word “unity,” with hearts on each side. Each note comprises a compliment and a positive message, such as “Thank you for being you,” “You are amazing,” and “You are an inspiration.” These positive messages were then passed out to students, or

students could go to the wall and choose one. They could decide to keep the note or give it to someone else. As I visited the school many times, I saw these messages everywhere—in the main office, in classrooms, and in the hallways. The girls noted that this simple, yet meaningful activity was a visual reminder to the school that there was a common love and unity in their humanity.



*Figure 2.* A photo of the unity wall of positivity.

The quotes on the wall show that the girls were active in uniting to create positive change in their school. Because they have been exposed to anti-bullying initiatives in the past, they took those experiences and integrated them into this concept of Anti-Racism Day. Naomi explained how the idea came about:

It was for Anti-Racism Day, and I just wanted to do something that brought people together. . . . And we'd seen before, for anti-bullying, people would write a bunch of compliments for sticky notes and put them around, so we thought, "Why don't we do that for Anti-Racism Day, just to make people's days better?" . . . So, unity fits really well with anti-racism and working together, which is why we decided to do that. (Naomi)

The past experiences of anti-bullying campaigns propelled the girls to do something similar, and they added their own spin and creativity by forming the word “unity” with hearts.

Nina shared that she gave one note to Mr. B. when they had a test that day. During the test, Mr. B. wrote one positive message for each of his students and gave it to them at the end of class.

Nina: It was just really sweet because during the test, just the thought of writing an individual something related to each student.

Gina: It is like he is paying it forward, like passing on the kindness.

Nina and all: That is the whole idea we had.

The initiative helped to address larger social issues that the girls had experienced. Moreover, the girls indicated this subtle way to promote kindness was more positive and less threatening and intrusive for broader members of the community. They conveyed the act of spreading kindness and paying it forward can be contagious and powerful as it is using kindness to combat hate. These sticky notes took weeks to prepare, and the girls shared that they experienced gratitude and a general sense of warmth when creating them as a team.

**Subtheme 1: Agents of change.** The girls aspire to be agents of change by being their own change agents and listening to their peers about what is important to them, no matter how big or small. The listening is only a part of the process; enacting change encompasses action and perseverance. These acts of creating change propel the girls forward in a pace that is possible within the time they have been involved in the Club.

Tina shared some reasons for having joined the Club:

So, I joined the [Club Name] in order to make a change that actually felt like I was actually doing something. . . . Through the [Club], it's always us contributing to what we're going to be doing, what we're going to be doing next, what issues we're going to be talking about. So again, it's our choice whatever's happening here, so that's one of the ways our voice is heard. And the other way that it's heard, as representatives of the student body, we talk to other kids. We see what they want to see happen, what changes they want to see, so that's how their voices are kind of heard through us as well. (Tina)

As evident, there is a reflective element in the girls' participation and activism in the Club. They become active listeners and executors of change. The process then becomes an iterative cycle of reflecting and creating change—an ebb and flow between listening and activism. And the actions are representative of their peer voices. Nina would say that no matter how big or small, any action towards social change can make a difference:

Social justice to me, to put it simply, I guess it just means change. . . . Every day small changes like helping somebody . . . or just stopping a bully or something like Tina had mentioned, or either something big-scale, such as helping children in a country have an education or some sort of thing. I guess really, just, it means to me change, whether it be small or big. (Nina)

To Nina, change is change regardless of apparent or immediate effects. As part of impactful change, as noted above, Nina has joined a youth group contributing to mental health initiatives (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, n.d.). She sought out this volunteer opportunity on her own and shared what it is about:

Through the Youth Champions, . . . we've been developing this website we want to build up for the resources for students at our school, to help them find resources with mental health issues related things. And I've also helped build some sort of other mental health related forms for them to access. (Nina)

It is evident that Nina wants to become a change agent by being involved in this much-needed mental health initiative. Nina shared that she has friends and family members struggling with mental health, and this situation has propelled her to proactively search for volunteering opportunities in this area so that she can contribute to making a difference to educate those who need the knowledge.

Nawaz volunteered for WE Day (WE Charity, n.d.-c) this year because she wanted to get involved, build connections, and expand her perspective. The motto of We day is “WE makes doing good, doable” (WE Charity, n.d.-b, para. 1). Nawaz became involved in WE day in

addition to her busy schedule of taking advanced placement courses, working, and ensuring she spends quality time with family and friends:

I was volunteering with WE Day. I didn't sign up to go from school, so there were some individuals that got the opportunity to go as a class with them. And so, it's also building connections with other individuals and discussing, just like broadening your perspective on life. I've always wanted to take part in a WE Day event and to help, not like a participant, I guess, but more of someone involved in it, in making the day wonderful for those who wanted to see it. And so, that's why I wanted to do it. . . . I do like the group; I do like the organization. I like what they do. (Nawaz)

It seems that the WE Day organization's message aligns with Nawaz's social justice views, and she wanted to ensure that people who participated would feel welcomed and comfortable at the event. This action speaks to Nawaz's giving and selfless nature.

Nina also talked about her involvement in the We to Me organization and how the Club sold Rafiki bracelets to support those in need (see Figure 3).

We send our Rafiki bracelets to that country, so she [the WE day facilitator] was talking about the impact we made and where the money really goes to. And she was talking about how people in Africa actually make the bracelets by hand, and how they ship it here and then we sell them, and then how the money goes back to help build schools or clean water systems and all these things. It was really cool to see, because I had never seen it before, so it's nice to see that okay, this is actually making a difference. (Nina)



Figure 3. A poster showing that *rafiki* = friend.

The selling of Rafiki bracelets can go a long way to provide certain areas with clean water, equip students with school supplies, help students obtain an education, support women to open their own business, and more (WE Charity, n.d.-a). Nina saw these objectives as important to take care of marginalized individuals across borders. Nina further explained that participating in this social action has connected her with people who live around the globe:

The catchphrase of the entire charity campaign is “Changing Me to We.” So, like I had mentioned before, instead of focusing on myself, it’s focusing on other people. So, these Rafiki bracelets were really a way to change what I was feeling to really what other people were doing. So, it’s a way, I guess, to connect everyone who are helping, not just the people here but the people there as well. (Nina)

The bracelets symbolize turning one’s attention outward by building connections with others in the global community. By being involved in this initiative, the girls’ support can make a difference in worldly ways, beyond their local community.

In a similar vein, Tina spoke about the impact of small changes. She mentioned the American rapper Kanye West and how his rants on social media have had people unfollow him:

Even celebrities unfollowed him because it's just ridiculous, but some people are like, "That is not what he is trying to say." What he is trying to say is, he is doing something right, and what is he doing right? [Laughs.] It's just ridiculous, but the masses are looking at that and saying, "No, this is wrong. I'm going to change something, even if it is an unfollow, it's still a change, there is still impact." (Tina)

Tina alluded to how anyone can be a part of change, even if it is a small act. Tina spoke to how each person has a voice and can use it in various ways, such as unfollowing someone. For her, that small decision may not have a large impact in the big picture but was representative of her principles and her values that are apparent in this Club.

Naomi shared that because they are in the graduating class of this high school, they are the leaders and mentors who can model and enact change:

So, we're almost like the role models. We're the oldest ones there. So, building an identity, I guess, for the school and helping everyone come together and realize that this school is actually a really good place. And in the case of educating them on things like the Me to We Campaign and helping out kids in places like Kenya. (Naomi)

Being one of the seasoned students at school, Naomi is passionate about making her school a positive and inclusive space that includes giving back to the global community. All the girls are involved in being agents of change inside and outside of school. These initiatives are self-driven, and their passion has had them create awareness, which points to the next subtheme.

**Subtheme 2: Creating awareness.** As part of being change agents, the girls agreed that they work to create awareness, whether it is for Anti-Racism Day, Wellness Day, or to speak out in general. Tina shared that social justice encompasses awareness:

Social justice to me . . . when we talk about making people aware of issues, that's kind of the key, because once you make people aware of issues, that's when that sense of humanity comes in. That's where you feel like, okay, now we need to make a difference. Something like that's kind of key to social justice. And then also social justice is more of like a culture than it really is . . . it's a kind of idea. It's not really something you kind of just do. It's like an idea that's like a movement. So, you have to have people become

aware of an issue. You have to have people working on the issue. And you have to have those impacts, or you have to see those impacts coming out of whatever you're doing. So, I think that's what social justice is. (Tina)

Tina alluded to how social justice is a part of humanity, whereby people need to take care of one another, so this world can be a better place for all. These ideas involve doing; hence, it can be a movement in which those who are impacted by injustice have a fair chance of being heard. Tina also voiced the importance of spreading social justice messages because she can see her peers pay attention:

I think that little by little, each idea that we have, that we contribute to the assemblies, and . . . basically every step that we take, that goes towards helping someone to create a change. . . . When you see other kids paying attention to the assembly or you see other kids actually attempting to be listening to what's going on and being aware and being interactive, that's where you see that change. That's where you see that difference. (Tina)

Tina spoke about the ripple effects of change when her voice has had her peers pay attention. Further, by stimulating opportunities for discussions among students, conversations can be initiated about difficult and important topics, such as racism in the anti-racism assembly initiative. Beyond creating awareness for others, Zoya voiced the importance of self-awareness and education:

If you don't know something about a topic, if you don't start talking about it, nothing will really change. So, the first step to change anything is actually to educate yourself on it, to actually become aware that this issue exists, that racism exists. It's a serious matter. And this is how people who have faced it deal with it. And this is like just educating yourself and learning about it, and then putting yourself in the shoes of other people can help you become aware of it. And then it can motivate you to do something about it. (Zoya)

Zoya was referring to empathy. When one can feel another's suffering, more room is opened to offer support. With awareness and empathy, Zoya believed, people can generate action.

To create awareness, Nawaz wrote a poem entitled *Shackles of Racism* (see pp. 1–2 of this dissertation). She performed this poem at the Anti-Racism Day assembly. She shared that the

poem is about unpacking light and dark skin colour and creating awareness about how someone's skin tone can advantage or disadvantage them. The poem is about how lightness and darkness can determine one's career trajectory, how one is perceived by others, and how successful one will become.

Different situations where we see racism; for example, like in job interviews and airport terminals, we see discrimination a lot there, especially for the Muslim population with increased security and all that kind of stuff. So, I started the poem with comparing different skin colours because I like makeup, and the first stanza started with different skins and with makeup and companies in general. We have words for different types of skin tones and with just nude, in general, it is more associated with lighter skin tones and nude tones in general are more desired. So that is where I started my poem off with, and I compared it with other skin tones like mahogany and mocha, which are great and everything, but when we use the connotations with them I guess they are more undesirable. So, it went on to how this toxic mentality with everyone with certain groups, not just with White people. We also have our own biases and prejudices, and they prevent us from living life to the fullest. I also talked about how in our world being White is considered the best, and even this is something I was recently introduced to: Apparently in Pakistan and Brown countries in general, there is this thing called "White region." (Nawaz)

Nawaz summarized the message of her poem and voiced the unjust ways people are treated due to their skin colour. She shared how she sees lightness and darkness play out in real life. In further conversations, she stated how unfair this perspective is because people are born with their skin tone, and there is only so much one can do to look lighter. The girls agreed, and we talked about why being light is perceived as being more desirable. We concluded that whiteness is a part of colonialism and that western power has spread throughout the world. This reality has made many desire to be whiter since whiteness equals power.

Further, Nawaz also noted how it is important to speak up against racism:

Also, another thing you can do about racism is by calling out people who are being racist. I guess sometimes we don't realize we are being racist because we . . . have these thoughts ingrained in us, so to actually realize we are doing something bad. If someone comes in and says, "No, this is wrong," then you are more aware of what you are doing. Then your attitudes change, so first you have to come in sometimes and say, maybe, "Do this another way." (Nawaz)

Nawaz referred to how people may have unconscious biases and not know it. By pointing this tendency out to people, they could become more aware. Tina shared that this persuasion can be done at the policy level, so people do not feel singled out:

I think [it is important] for this situation to happen in a positive way: instead of saying in a way where they feel blamed, put it in a way in a general type of setting instead. Like an example, okay, at work say one of your coworkers is not treating a child properly because of their race or gender, like that. Then instead of going straight to that person and say, “Hey, you shouldn’t be like that,” maybe go like if your boss is open to it, maybe talk to your boss about it. And then have an email sent to everyone rather than have it directed at that one person. When it is not as directed and there is no pointing fingers, it just makes it easier for that one person to realize, “Maybe I’m doing this, and I should self check myself.” (Tina)

Tina was working at a child care centre during the study and has encountered situations where a coworker has behaved in unacceptable ways toward minoritized children. She shared the importance of using her voice to go to her boss to solve the problem. Tina talked about being strategic, so the coworker may understand and accept her part in contributing to the problem and, it is hoped, resolve the issue as a collective. This approach replaces pointing fingers because people may then become defensive. In these situations, Tina can be empowered to continue to speak out against injustice.

Further, Tina shared that in Grade 9 she wrote a poem after she was heckled by some boys after a physical education (PE) class. She said that she worked hard in PE, and her efforts could be interpreted as aggression. She indicated that some boys did not like her competitiveness and called her names after class. This incident propelled her to write a poem entitled *Society Is War* (see Figure 4 and pp. 2–3 of this dissertation).



Figure 4. Tina's poem, *Society Is War*.

Tina's poem is about speaking up against those who criticize others. She voiced that in Canadian society, pressures to conform are constant. She shared that some boys would call her a tom boy because she is athletic, and a Brown girl should not be that way. The image of a tom boy does not fit into how society believes Muslim females *should* behave. Here is an excerpt about what happened after PE class that day:

There were four or five of them [boys], and they were really stupid, so I was like whatever, even if they say anything I won't really care. . . . I'm not trying to start anything right now and then they continued on, to be like, "Oh, you look like a boy," and it continued on from that. . . . So I said some things back, too. I was like, "You know what? You need to grow up." Then eventually the teacher heard whatever, and she was like, "If you want me to talk to them, I could talk to them." (Tina)

The teacher did talk to the boys, but it was near the end of the school year and nothing happened afterwards. This incident prompted Tina to write the poem to express her anger about injustice. A teacher noticed the powerfulness of the poem, sent it to a publishing company, and it got published. Tina also shared it in an assembly:

I read it at the ceremony at the assembly for the Anti-Racism Day last year. And then people really listened to it. And it had an impact on them. I had people come and say, "That was really inspiring." So, seeing that whatever I was saying was making a difference, it gives you this sense of leadership, but also responsibility that whatever I say or do is going to affect other people. (Tina)

When Tina understood that many students had heard her message, her confidence grew. She realized that her voice really does matter; she carries a responsibility to enact change. Tina further explained the importance of the collective and having people become aware that difficult issues such as bullying and racism affect everyone:

So first of all, getting everyone to see whatever the issues are, and then making them feel like it's not just something that's targeted to certain people. It's with everyone, and everyone equally feels that way sometimes. And then again, coming up with that conclusion that we need to stop these things. (Tina)

Tina referred to how hurtful acts can be a part of the human condition that people will suffer from at some point in life. She indicated the importance of having the courage to step in and stop these destructive acts. Tina's actions speak to her strength to bring everyone together to tackle serious societal problems.

When referring to minoritized groups, Nina noted that injustice and discrimination affect the Brown community:

There's a lot of discrimination against different races, especially in the Brown community, so we wanted to bring awareness to that. We also wanted to bring awareness to mental health because mental health is also really pushed away in those kinds of communities versus many counsellors today. They're—I don't want to say the word again, but they're White, so it's more normalized in other parts of the world than it is in those parts of the world. So, I just wanted to bring awareness to these issues, especially to the youth, . . . because there's a lot of problems with the youth from those communities nowadays, but they don't really know who to turn to when being faced with those problems, so we just wanted to raise awareness and raise hope for those individuals. (Nina)

Nina discussed how being Brown has had others discriminate against her and her people. Due to these experiences, she has a strong desire to support youth in her community, so they will have an outlet and feel more hopeful about the future. Even though she has not personally experienced explicit racism, she knows her people are vulnerable, especially after 9/11. Nina explained that being a part of the Club and joining other clubs gives her opportunities to create awareness and combat beliefs that Brown communities are dangerous:

I think definitely more awareness and just small changes there, and now, just trying to challenge viewpoints or those traditional things that everyone in this community has. So, it's kind of just creating even a small tiny bit of a change, for people to change their viewpoints on this sort of community. Because I was talking with my friend the other day, and she's like, "Oh, I heard there was a lot of stabbings at your school." And I was like, "What? I never heard of this. And she was like, "I heard of it." And I was like, "Okay, maybe I'm not aware of that piece." And she's . . . maybe [at] some different school or something, I guess stereotypes and everything, so it's really just trying to get rid of that. (Nina)

Nina was genuinely surprised by her friend's views of her school. Nina maintained that stereotypes are prominent as people get labelled due their background, skin colour, language, social status, and more. In a similar vein, Ann shared that it can be important to teach others about your own culture:

I think teach them stuff and get them the knowledge so that they know there isn't anything to be afraid of. So, like informing them of instead of them fearing things because they don't know anything about it. Teach them about it so they are more educated, and they know there is nothing to be afraid of. (Ann)

Here, Ann talked about fearing the Othered and mentioned that some groups, such as Muslims, have been painted in a dangerous light, especially after 9/11. Ann thought that sharing personal cultural knowledge with others may create space for understanding and a common humanity. Further, Naomi said she joined the Club to cultivate school spirit and to spread awareness:

We bring the school together through planning events or educating people on cultural things, such as like the Diwali we did; we sold *diyas* [candlelit pots]. And we had information and positive messages with those. So, we're educating them and bringing them together in a sense. (Naomi)

Naomi shared that *diyas* are candlelit pots, and the message is about celebrating light. Even though Naomi's family does not personally celebrate Diwali, she helped organize and execute this event to bring together different cultures. Naomi expanded on what awareness means to her:

In the sense of just creating awareness, bringing people together and going against stereotypes because a lot of people have stereotypes for people who are different than them. So, showing them how we can—we're all actually quite similar. And that there're so many things to other people's religions or to their cultures that we don't know about. And so, just bringing them together in that sense. And giving the school a place, . . . just to have a way to help people. (Naomi)

Naomi supported Ann's sentiments regarding the importance of educating people to counter stereotypes. Moreover, the girls saw the need to positively bridge the school and community. Hence, all the girls joined the group Antyx to create art structures located at a Calgary community centre. These structures took eight months to erect and will stay at the community centre indefinitely. This community centre has a library; gym and skating rink; round tables for coffee, conversations, and board games; public washrooms; and more. Nawaz shared the goals of Antyx Community Arts:

It's the program that a lot of us are involved in. It is a hybrid program between Antyx Arts and Aspen family, so a thousand voices. And essentially, what we do is we take issues in the community and we essentially transform them into art, and so everyone can view them and interpret them as whatever the way they would want to. And so, with the sculpture that we did, it was about mental health, discrimination, racism, multiculturalism. There was also like letting your dreams take flight and releasing that inner child within you, even as you become an adult and are forced to face with the hardships in the world. And then there was the last season, which was perseverance and not giving up. (Nawaz)

The girls brainstormed with the Antyx leader and others and created structures to spread messages of mental health, discrimination, racism, and multiculturalism (which I share in the following pages). The unique idea is for people to interpret what each structure means to them. The girls agreed that gaining knowledge and education is a part of creating awareness. They indicated that it would be difficult to do so without knowing who you are and what you are talking about. Therefore, they are keen to learn about their own and others' cultures, which leads to Subtheme 3.

**Subtheme 3: Embracing diversity.** The girls voiced that when people get to know others from different cultures, they may realize there is a common humanity and that people are not that different at all (see Figures 5 and 6).



*Figure 5.* Clock and twine balls sculpture.



*Figure 6. Fall into diversity poster.*

The words in Figure 6 read:

**FALL INTO DIVERSITY**  
**Clock and Twine Balls**

In Canada, many people of different colours and cultures live together as one community. The twine is various skin tone-like shades intertwined, representing that everyone, no matter where they come from or how they may look, is united and that racism should not divide us. Our clock is set at 11 o'clock to celebrate those who fought for our freedom and decorated with a world map to signify our beautifully diverse country. Autumn is the season of multiculturalism and diversity with its bright reds, yellows, oranges, and browns.

In this fall structure, the girls voiced that Canada is a place for everyone no matter what they look like, or what their religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or socioeconomic status. They used multiple coloured leaves to communicate this message. Further, they chose to honour fallen soldiers by showcasing a clock pointing to 11 o'clock. The piece of writing created by all the girls is about sharing oneself and being accepting of everyone's cultures. My conversation with Zoya highlighted the importance of open-mindedness and positivity:

Zoya: I think exposing yourself to different cultures [is key] . . . 'Cause when we don't know about another group, we tend to form biases and stereotypes of them, but when we actually interact with them we learn, oh, they are not what we thought they would be.

Gina: So be open about learning about other cultures.

Zoya: An aspect of being positive all the time.

This discussion derived from a conversation we had when I shared how I taught a diversity in learning course in my university's undergraduate programs in education. In one assignment, my students were to challenge themselves to attend an event to learn about a culture that was different from their own. For example, if they were Christian, they could attend a mosque; if they were heterosexual, they could attend an LGBTQ+ event. The purpose of this assignment was to challenge their assumptions and biases, because we all have them. The girls found this to be a fascinating project and remained curious about what it would be like to intentionally challenge our own biases.

In reflecting on the parallel principles that underpinned the university diversity assignment and those of the Club, Tina shared that such an assignment could have her school become more united. She talked about how the students in her school would frequently be segregated into different groups. Therefore, one Club initiative has been to bring people together through targeted or planned events:

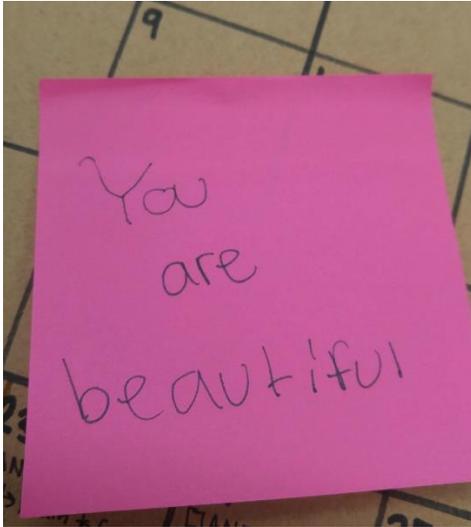
Some of my friends that aren't in the [Official Name of Club], one of their issues was even when you walk around the hallway, you see a lot of—what's the word? Like segregation among different groups of people, like popular kids and not popular kids. Again, one of the issues was being able to unite as a school and have that school spirit rather than have people marginalized and separated. That was one of our big issues. I feel like the way we did that, it wasn't just a one-event thing, trying to get everyone united. . . . We worked on that [continually], where every event that we did, we tried to make sure that we had some type of unity going on. So, I believe that's one of the major issues that we worked on. (Tina)

When prompted if she has observed that her peers are more united, Tina responded: "I haven't heard, but I've seen. Like just when walking around, you see the other kids would be hanging out with other kids, like change is up. You could see the impact."

Tina's sentiments point to how groups of people tend to stick together, but when they realize they have more commonalities than differences, they are more likely to connect with one another at a human level. To further this conversation, I shared that in my high school years, some students from certain ethnic groups would disagree and fight with other groups. The in-fighting could sometimes lead to violence and police involvement. However, there were also times when many got along and saw their similarities. Tina replied and shared: "Yes, it's because everyone has something different to bring to the table. It's not talking about the same things, talking about the same hobbies. You get to connect, and you get to find your interests."

Tina referred to how individual uniqueness makes it possible to form lasting connections as people learn from one another. On a similar note, Nawaz shared the importance of having more diversity in schools and workplaces, so everyone is represented. Likewise, Nawaz's poem about different skin tones, facial features, and body types is about embracing differences and celebrating diversity.

Correspondingly, Nina and I talked about beauty and how society has condoned stereotypical ways someone needs to look in order to be viewed as beautiful. These qualities are having a light skin tone, big eyes, a high nose bridge, and being slim. Nina shared how she wrote a note to her friend to tell her she is beautiful (see Figure 7):



*Figure 7.* Nina's "You are beautiful" note to her friend.

I was writing it and giving it to my friend, because my friend is very self-conscious about the way she looks. She doesn't really like it, because I guess it's just that perception of beauty that we have in our society nowadays, and it was actually part of our Wellness Day. So, I handed this sticky note to her as a way to just tell her that, "You are [beautiful], and you don't really need to look up to these expectations that society has to offer." (Nina)

When Nina gave this note to her friend, she smiled, but it seems she did not believe she is beautiful. This gesture is a small yet powerful message that could help disrupt the dominant discourses in society that create unreachable and unrealistic expectations. When I asked about the meaning of the photo, Nina responded to the importance of self-acceptance:

Even when it comes to clubs like [ours], it's just accepting yourself to the point where you would put yourself out to others and just be, "Okay, this is who I am. I don't really want to be this." It's just living up to your own expectations or standards rather than the standards or expectations of someone else. (Nina)

Nina's sentiments about self-acceptance are a part of resistance, whereby not everyone needs to look the same. Differences make us all beautiful.

In summary, the conversations about embracing diversity, noticing similarities, and uniting to create awareness can be powerful to combat stereotypes, racism, and hate. Next, I discuss how the girls have overcome adversity in their own lives.

**Subtheme 4: Overcoming adversity.** The girls shared that they and their families have encountered racism and other forms of discrimination in the past. Therefore, a message of optimism and support to overcome hardship and adversity would be important for the community. They created the winter structure (see Figures 8 and 9) to acknowledge the message of perseverance to overcome difficult times.



*Figure 8.* Clouds and snowflakes sculpture.



*Figure 9.* Winter wonderland poster.

The text in Figure 9 reads:

**WINTER WONDERLAND**  
Clouds and Snowflakes

It takes perseverance and community to support to overcome hardships. Snowflakes and clouds are symbols of this important characteristic that teaches us to continually work hard regardless of opposition or obstacles. In the coldest season of the year, we want to encourage people to stay strong and show support for other members of the community. Winter is the season of acknowledgement, respect, and come together to overcome adversity.

The girls used their own lived experiences of facing adversity to create this structure, with the message to keep going and not to give up in the face of challenges. They also recognized the importance of supporting those who are struggling in different areas of their lives.

Regarding adversity, the girls shared a painful topic of how someone made up “Punish a Muslim Day,” and how their family members were worried about them going to school. Some parents even asked their daughters to stay home in case they got hurt. Although Zoya has not

personally experienced violence, she talked about this particular day. I started by asking if anyone has personally experienced racism:

Zoya: Not personally, but nowadays there is so much racism going on, like with Muslims. Like that thing in the UK, Punish a Muslim Day.

Naomi: Punish a Muslim Day, I don't know if you heard about that?

Gina: I know, yes, and I saw it talked about in social media. Go ahead, yes.

Naomi: So, we are all Muslim here, so it kind of hit home personally. And we live here in Canada, but I was actually a little worried about going out and about my mom going out.

Tina: I had no clue the day before, but my dad was like, "Make sure you be safe."

Gina: So, Tina, your dad warned you to make sure you were safe?

Tina: Yeah, he was like, "Make sure you stay safe and that you reach your parents before . . ."

Nawaz: I know some students didn't go to school because they were worried.

Gina: So, did it happen here that some students didn't go to school?

Zoya: It was just some concern that what if it happens here, because it was also happening in the U.S.

Gina: So, Nawaz said some people did not come to school.

Together: Yeah.

The conversation above speaks to the fear of anticipatory violence. The girls concurred the fact that students stayed at home points to how they were afraid that violence would befall them. These made-up, hate-filled days affect the lifeblood of the school and community. When a made-up day such as this one results in families being afraid of sending their children to school, something they highly value, it shows the magnitude of the fear. The girls shared that those in the dominant group (White people) would not have to worry about violence in this way.

Nawaz talked about how on other occasions her neighbourhood was targeted and cars were vandalized:

A few years back in my neighborhood, which is predominant with Muslims, the car windows of every single Muslim individual were broken into because that area is located near a mosque. And so, that was like a hate crime almost, right? It's only the Muslim individuals; it was no one else. And so, it's an everyday thing you see, and it's in your workplace as well. People are more condescending and rude. (Nawaz)

When recalling this violent event, Nawaz's speech slowed, and she reiterated that only the cars near the mosque had been vandalized. Even though this incident happened in Nawaz's

neighbourhood years ago, the girls agreed that violence can often befall Muslim individuals today. Further, Nawaz shared her experience of being bullied and reasons for wearing a hijab, a type of veil that covers Muslim women's heads and hair. She got quite emotional and had some tears:

Nawaz: For me, the story as to why I started wearing it was actually in—I know my mom has always wanted me to wear it. And in Grade 5, I started near the end, after—sorry, I just need some time to think about it.

Gina: That's okay. Take your time.

Nawaz: So, in Grade 5, I was bullied, and so after that I wore it because it was—for me, at that point—like hiding, and after a while it became something I normally did. And—sorry . . .

Gina: It's hard for you?

Nawaz: No, it's just thinking about it.

Gina: Thank you for sharing that. It sounds like it's not easy to share. Especially experiences of being bullied.

Nawaz: So, it was a way of hiding, and then it fully became something I became comfortable with. And, I don't know, I just feel comfortable, like I'm protected. That's it.

Nawaz had to pause for a few minutes to find a tissue and was able to voice the last iteration above. One way she has coped with adversity has been to find a way to hide herself. After our meeting, she emailed me to apologize for shedding some tears. She stated that she has overcome that difficult time because of the support of her family, and especially her sister. I voiced that there was nothing to apologize for, that it took courage to share something that has caused heartache and pain in the past. Nawaz indicated she is in a good place now and being a part of the Club has helped her overcome the bullying experiences by having a voice and speaking out against injustice.

As for childhood experiences, Nina spoke about how when she first came to Canada and lived in southeast Calgary, she did not have a sense of belonging. This is because most of her schoolmates were “Canadian or Calgarian” (Nina). Nina alluded to how her school community consisted of mostly White families. Because she did not see herself represented at school, she felt isolated and alienated. Her older sister, who was 12 years old at the time, was being bullied.

In those years, she decided not to wear a hijab as she did not want to stick out and appear different:

So, I didn't wear a hijab back then, . . . because I remember my sister also telling me times about how she was bullied for it, too, and people would be like, "Oh." Because the 9/11 attacks had happened at the same time while my sister was going to middle school, so she got a lot of that at that moment. And then I remember my personal experience while I was growing up in the southeast. I felt very, I guess, out of place in there. (Nina)

Nina's decision to not wear the hijab when she was younger was in direct response to violence that includes bullying. She did not want to appear as an outsider, but rather aspired to conform to the Western way of dress in order to blend in. Eventually Nina's family moved to the northeast because her parents felt that it cost too much to live in the southeast. Henceforth, their lives improved as they met people from South Asia and Nina found a sense of belonging:

So, we all moved to the northeast and the northeast felt a little more, I guess, open, because I felt like there were more people like me. There were more people who shared my religion, my culture, and all that. (Nina)

When Nina found her people, she overcame the adversity of being marginalized due to her minoritized status. In fact, she began to thrive when she met a teacher who cared deeply about social justice and incorporated lessons in the classroom; it made the school a more inclusive and safe place. This had Nina begin to join clubs every year to contribute to giving back.

Naomi talked about volunteering to be a part of research to better the advancement of medical knowledge. She disclosed that she has mild cerebral palsy and has participated in research studies:

I've done a couple disability studies with the Alberta Children's Hospital because I do have this physical disability on my left side. So, just working with them, helping out, participating in their studies, volunteering for their studies so that they could further their research. (Naomi)

Even though Naomi has a disability and could position herself as a victim, on the contrary, she chooses to draw from her own resources and use them as a strength to contribute to research. Naomi does not allow her disability to define her, but rather she has accepted it as a part of who she is. She borrows from her lived experience to better inform the medical community so that people with cerebral palsy might live a more comfortable and fulfilled life.

On a further note, when I asked about challenges of being involved in the Club, Naomi stated that she notices some people do not seem to care about social justice or the messages the Club puts forth:

I guess one challenge would be people not caring enough. They'd see the posters and they'd be like, "Whatever," and they just walk past them. So, I guess challenges in that sense of getting people to actually listen to the information that we have and trying to actually spark something within them to help as well would be the biggest challenge. . . . Not necessarily negative comments, but the posters have been ripped off on the ground. (Naomi)

Even when people have not explicitly challenged her, Naomi has seen evidence that some students are apathetic about what the girls are trying to convey about social justice. However, it appears these negative experiences do not deter Naomi or the others to continue to fight for social change.

In summary, the act of uniting to combat negativity with positivity has helped the girls learn from their struggles to channel those experiences into kindness, compassion, and giving. The girls have come together and collaborate to best address problems at their school and community through social action. Hence, the word *unite* has many layers of meaning that continue to propel these girls forward. Next, I turn to conversations about mental health.

### **Theme 3: Mental Health Awareness is Crucial**

The girls voiced the importance of mental health awareness and talking about mental health in nonstigmatized ways. They have some friends and family members living with mental

health concerns or mental illness, and it has been difficult to have conversations about these issues due to embarrassment, shame, and the perceived need to keep problems within the family. They shared this tendency is particularly prevalent in the Muslim community, where negative stories are encouraged to be kept in the home for fear that others will judge them.

As an act of resistance, the girls planned a Wellness Symposium. Figure 10 is a poster that was offered to the teachers and students. Invited guests who were mental health practitioners presented on mental well-being to the entire school. The girls voiced that mental health is crucial for people to function well and thrive in what they do. This is because they think mental health issues are a common human condition.

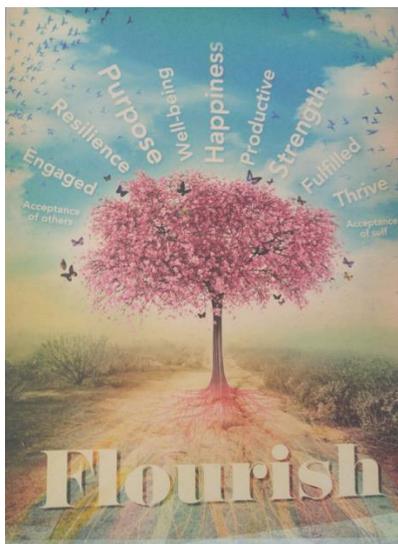


Figure 10. “Flourish,” a poster for a Wellness Symposium.

The poster shown in Figure 10 (creator unknown) has a tree in the middle that symbolizes life and growth. The words that surround the tree are acceptance of others, engaged, resilience, purpose, well-being, happiness, productive, strength, fulfilled, thrive, and acceptance of self. The girls noted that everyone needs these attributes in order to live a meaningful and purposeful life. The word *flourish* at the bottom reminds them that simply surviving is not enough; it is important to thrive and flourish in order to have a well-balanced life.

The girls shared their inner thoughts about mental health. Zoya indicated that mental health concerns are more common than people would choose to admit or face:

Mental health is something that everyone deals with at some point in their life. . . . When you are having any of those issues, how you deal with them [is important, as is understanding] . . . why mental health is just as important as physical health. (Zoya)

Zoya alluded to how when someone has a physical illness (e.g., cancer), it is talked about openly, accepted by family and friends, and others stay close to support the person affected. On the other hand, when people have mental health challenges, they are often hidden, especially in the Brown culture. This cultural norm has prompted the group to create awareness for mental health as a part of the Antyx project (see Figures 11 and 12):



*Figure 11.* Cherry blossoms and origami birds sculpture.



*Figure 12.* Spring blooming poster.

The words in Figure 12 read as follows:

**SPRING BLOOMING**

**Chery Blossoms and Origami Birds**

Mental health issues are often overlooked or looked down upon in our society. This topic can be delicate, as are cherry blossoms in their early stages of growth. We want to show our support for people struggling with mental health issues by providing a sense of hope, freedom, and alternate perspective represented by the origami birds among the cherry blossoms. Spring is about the beauty of rebirth and new life, like the growth of plants and flowers and the return of migratory birds.

The girls expressed that there is quite a bit of shame surrounding mental health in their community. They thought this barrier was unfair due to how mental health would likely affect someone they love. Hence, another perspective needs to be fostered and an alternative story needs to be told about mental health in order to cultivate hope. Nina mentioned that mental health concerns are more acceptable for those who are White. She stated that it is the youth in

her community who suffer, and it is vital to raise awareness so that mental health could be talked about more openly.

Tina said there is this silence around mental health issues. People do not talk about it either because they are not aware or because there is a feeling of shame and wanting to hide from the topic:

In the Club, again, we're part of that movement. It's bringing up issues and finding ways to fix them, right? So, one of the things we did was mental health awareness, and I feel like that's . . . again, it's not something that people like to talk about in this kind of community. It's kind of suppressed, that issue. So being able to raise awareness of that issue and telling people that there are ways to get help and there are outlets. I feel like that's one of the examples of the things that we've done as part of that movement towards social justice and towards helping people. (Tina)

The girls agreed with Tina that there needs to be open conversations, discussions, and better ways to support those with mental health struggles. The type of support should be dependent on what the person needs instead of assuming one knows the best support to offer. Hence, it is important to ask and listen. This idea leads to the subtheme of destigmatizing mental health.

**Subtheme 1: Growth: Destigmatize mental health.** There was consensus that it is time to destigmatize the idea of mental health. The girls disclosed that they have family and friends who are experiencing depression, and one family member has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. They voiced that mental health is not something to hide. In fact, there needs to be more support. Here is a conversation about this topic:

Zoya: When people don't want to talk about it, they are sort of ashamed of it, so it is so important to raise awareness and be like, "If you have a problem—anxiety or stress—if you have those kinds of issues, it's okay to come out and talk about it."

Gina: Mm hmm, kind of normalize it. It's not like you are crazy or not like you are totally different. It's okay to be open about it. Do you feel in society and now that you are in high school is moving toward that direction?

Nina: It's a lot better than it was years ago, so I think there is definitely progress.

All: Slow.

Nina: Slow, but there is still progress.

The girls felt any progress was better than no progress or regress. They wanted to be a part of the revolution to destigmatize the idea that mental health concerns or mental illness should be avoided in conversations. In fact, they thought it was more important than ever to talk about mental illness and normalize these experiences. To take action against the stigma, as noted above, Nina is volunteering for the National Youth Action Council (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, n.d.) to create more awareness about mental health and develop resources for those struggling with addictions:

It's like this council in Canada, and we've been working online, different resources and things for mental health-related awareness issues for Canada. . . . We haven't come up with much new upcoming opportunities yet, because we're still working on it, but some past things we worked on is holding a mental health art contest for students in BC [British Columbia], Alberta, and those areas. We've had Facebook group chats for those people. . . . Currently, we're building these guidelines that will be passed around for youth in Canada and at schools, and it's basically on addictions and the use of weed and marijuana and how to safely use it and approach that sort of issue or topic. And that was just interesting because I've gotten to meet people from other provinces and communities, to realize that this issue is actually not just an Alberta issue or Calgary issue. It's a worldwide issue. (Nina)

Nina's thirst for supporting others with mental health struggles is an example of knowing what is important now and finding ways to solve this collective world issue. She, along with the others, has been trying to navigate the complexity of mental health issues through multiple organizations, social media sites, and activities.

In summary, part of destigmatization is to take action to convey the message that mental health concerns exist, there is nothing to be ashamed of, and to do something to support those who need the support, so they can flourish. This leads to the next subtheme of flourishing and support.

**Subtheme 2: Flourish: Support friends and family with mental health concerns.** The girls disclosed how they know people close to them who are experiencing anxiety, depression, and/or schizophrenia. Some of them have been diagnosed whereas others have not because they

do not want people to know. Nina shared how her friend disclosed her struggles, and Nina wanted to be able to help:

A best friend of mine had mental health problems, and she was struggling with suicide, she was cutting, and I guess that really impacted me, because we were like 13, 14, at that time, and she was being bullied. And it was just very strange for me knowing that I was going through this in life while she was going through that in life. She started smoking, drinking, and all those things. . . . She was a dear friend to me, and I just didn't really want to lose her. And I understand that people with mental health, they also have friends who are struggling with that issue, and we don't want to lose them either, so I feel like it's much more impactful if we just help each other to overcome that. (Nina)

Nina alluded to how friends could struggle with dark thoughts of suicide and self-harm, how they might cope by using substances, and how important it is to stay by their side. Moreover, it is significant to listen with no judgement. Further, Nina disclosed that her dad had depression, and another friend of hers has struggled with mental health concerns. She shared that this friend has not wanted to reach out to her parents for fear of them thinking she is "crazy" or not being able to support her. Nina has been the one listening and providing a space for her friend to talk:

I guess it's that fear of judgment or fear of it getting worse. . . . I had that friend of mine, and the one reason she didn't want to tell was she was scared of what her family would do, because she also came from Iraq, and Iraqis are very traditional Islamists. So, she didn't really want to open to her parents about it, because they would just call her crazy, and she was fearing that maybe her parents would kick her out of the house. It was all those issues that were going on in her personal life that she didn't want to open up about it. (Nina)

The girls shared this fear of judgement regarding mental health may contribute to why youth may not seek support even when needed.

Zoya explained that if she was the one who needed support, she would turn to a trusted teacher, friend, or counsellor. These individuals would be the ones she felt safe to turn to:

If I do need help, and if I do need to talk to someone about it, I could go to my teachers, or I could go to one of the counsellors and someone will be there who understands what I am going through. And then it's also nice knowing that, if there's anyone else who's going through any issues, then they can always talk to someone about it in the school.

And then there's this community that's built, where if you need someone, if you have to talk to a teacher or even your friends, you can always do that, and it's safe to do that. (Zoya)

Zoya mentioned how feeling safe is important to her and that she is likely to trust someone with her fears, frustrations, and stressors, when that person has empathy. Similarly, Nina shared that support in various areas is important:

I feel like they might just need the social support or just awareness or connecting with people who are struggling with the same issue, or I guess some sort of research or information on how they can adjust their lives to those changes, or how do they overcome what they are struggling [with]? (Nina)

Nina stressed the importance of having connection with those who may be experiencing similar struggles, as they may be more understanding and knowledgeable. On a personal note, Tina remarked how her uncle has schizophrenia, but family members do not understand him, and some either avoid or make fun of him:

I have an uncle that—the crazy thing is like, when it affects one person, it starts to affect everyone in that family, right? I think at first, he got into drugs and then he used substances and later on he had schizophrenia, too, but like it came up more and he had to go through treatments and stuff. Like, I don't know if he goes to them anymore because of how his family . . . [have] kind of fallen apart, and they try to support him, but they can't at times. . . . So, he's become kind of a burden on their family, and they are falling apart because of it. And it is really heartbreaking to see that because it's crazy. Like again, in Brown culture, it seems a terrible thing to have those types of issues. And we see that in our own families where when everyone is over, our uncles—everyone—would be making fun of him . . . [but nobody was] talking about how to fix the issue. They all make fun of him. I get so sad because you shouldn't be doing that. (Tina)

Because of experiences like this one, Tina uttered the importance of not seeing people with mental health challenges as “crazy.” They need love and support, especially from their family members. The girls also discussed the idea that mental health issues can be tackled. Here, Tina used the word “fix,” meaning together people can do better. When asked about what she thought contributed to being able to talk about mental health, Tina responded:

Again, as the younger generations here, you learn . . . those things in school. You become more aware of them. You become aware that it's okay to talk about it. So, I think that

culture again, bringing in that culture that you can talk about it. That's what helps it.  
(Tina)

Tina's sentiment is that when people can talk about mental health in public spaces similar to the way they talk about physical health, then there is room to find solutions together. Hence, she placed importance on being open to discuss and tackle mental health in ways that can inform and support, rather than label people as "crazy." This change in mindset could go a long way in bringing people together to tackle such a crucial social problem such as mental health challenges.

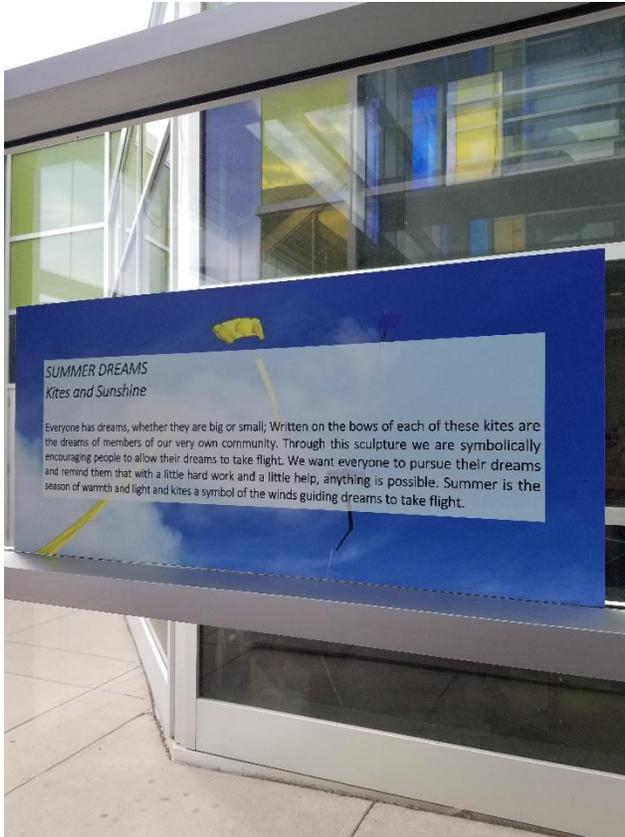
In summary, the theme of mental health awareness and thriving in this area was close to the girls' hearts as people close to them have struggled with mental illness. They hope that one day mental health will be just as important and honoured as physical health. Next, I discuss the girls' dreams for the present and future.

#### **Theme 4: Aspiration to Dream at Any Age**

The last theme has to do with being able to dream at any age. The girls conveyed that high school students face many pressures, such as making decisions as to which courses to take, determining what to do with their life, and committing to long-term goals while they are in their teens. The girls noted that as they are getting older, the expectation is for them to hyper focus on academics, careers, and landing a stable job. On this topic, they created a structure of kites and a message about dreams (see Figures 13 and 14).



*Figure 13.* Kites and sunshine sculpture.



*Figure 14.* Summer dreams poster.

The words in Figure 14 read as follows:

**SUMMER DREAMS**  
**Kites and Sunshine**

Everyone has dreams, whether they are big or small; written on the bows of each of these kites are the dreams of members of our very own community. Through this sculpture we are symbolically encouraging people to allow their dreams to take flight. We want everyone to pursue their dreams and remind them that with a little hard work and a little help, anything is possible. Summer is the season of warmth and light and kites a symbol of the winds guiding dreams to take flight.

The girls expressed that when one is able to dream, hope is cultivated, and goals can be accomplished. Goals can be big or small; with dedication and support, people can realize life dreams. The girls shared that they invited community members to write their dreams on the kites. Figure 15 is a photo of a community member holding a crayon and talking about how to get the wax shredded to create the colours on the kites. This kite-making initiative took days and weeks

and trial and error to make the most optimal kites. Thus, this creative process points to the girls' perseverance to impart important social justice messages.



*Figure 15.* Crayon collaboration.

The girls said that everyone can dream, no matter the age. They shared that when they were younger, their dreams were more open. Now that they have almost completed high school, their dreams are more restrictive to be career-focused. They did not necessarily like or agree with this reality. As part of the project, they had people of all ages write down their dreams. Children as young as six years old would dream big or small. They noticed that by or near adulthood, the messages became more real, such as wanting a certain career path. They shared with laughter some of the children's dreams:

Zoya: Some wanted to work at 7-11.

Naomi: Some wanted to be a prime minister, and some wanted to fly with a dragon.

Zoya: Some wanted to fly the kite.

The girls emulated that young children dared to envision these simple and yet complex dreams. The girls said that when children are young, they believe anything is possible, even becoming the prime minister. I asked them about their dreams, and many talked about their future, their dream job, and their career aspirations. They said that now that they are almost finished high school, their dreams are more realistic. They also noted it is sad that they can no

longer dream like young children. However, the act of community members writing their dreams on the bows brought the community together in hope-filled ways.

Figure 16 is a close-up picture of one of the kites with the words *hope* and *peace*. The girls shared that they chose these words because they represent a future people envision for themselves. They shared that no matter one's age, everyone wants to have both hope and peace.



*Figure 16.* Close-up photo of dream-filled kites.

Regarding the creative journey, Tina described the process of making the kites and having the entire community involved in the sculpture:

Throughout the process, we had two or three group sessions where we had people from the community come in and contribute to the ideas that we were bringing up. The first one was where we had the kites, and all the kites have ribbons that had dreams written on them. So, we had the community come and write down their dreams and make the kites. . . . Being able to make people contribute and then getting them to spread it kind of makes everyone more aware, so that helped us. And then the other thing we did was, over spring break, we brought our siblings in to come and help us out and check out what we're doing, just so that they can spread it around their schools as well. (Tina)

Not surprisingly, many community members participated, and they ranged in age from 6 to 80-plus years old. Overall, the girls said their family members were supportive of their

dreams. However, they concurred that their families want them to have stable and safe jobs that will earn them money and prestige, which brings the discussion to career-related aspirations.

**Subtheme 1: Career-related aspirations.** The girls, especially those who are in Grade 12 (Ann, Naomi, Nawaz, Tina, and Zoya), noted the importance of focusing on their careers.

They have felt pressure to do so since they started high school. Ann shared her career goal:

Okay, so my dream is kind of like everywhere because I want to work in medicine but then . . . I need to be realistic with my outlook. With engineering right now, people are not finding jobs in that area. So, I am checking everything. For example, I found biomedical engineering really, really fascinating, but engineering doesn't seem to be something very safe to go into. Because of that I am kind of letting go of that, so like those kinds of things remind me you have to look into something [but] you have to be interested in it as well. (Ann)

A part of Ann's dream emphasizes practicality. She articulated that she wants to pursue a safe and stable career. Therefore, medicine seems to be a more optimal choice than engineering as there will likely be jobs when she graduates.

Zoya has gravitated towards math and engineering and eventually would like to become a medical doctor, but she would want to make sure she takes small steps to achieve big career goals:

So, for me I really like math, but I also love bio. So right now I am going into engineering, and I want to major in biomedical engineering. And after I'm done my engineering degree, I want to go to med school and become a doctor, like it's really far away, and right now it's kinda overwhelming when I think about everything that I wanna do. But . . . taking things one step at a time sort of helps you get to your dreams 'cause you have to set up goals. So, do this first and then do that. (Zoya)

Looking at the big picture can sometimes be debilitating. Therefore, Zoya has managed the feeling of being overwhelmed by focusing on the mini steps she needs to take in order to achieve the goal of being a doctor.

Naomi wanted to combine her love of art and math and talked about the importance of having a good life:

I want to have a good, happy, successful life, [and] a successful career. So, I want to go into engineering because I've always loved art, but I know that art as a career in itself isn't that big. So, I love art, I love math, so why do I go through the engineering side? In sort of what type of engineering I'm not really sure, but biomedical seems really, really interesting, which actually kind of shocked me because I wasn't really a bio person. But yeah, I guess a successful engineer, and Dubai seems really interesting to me, too. (Naomi)

Naomi further explained how she loves art but knows it would not be an acceptable career path because it would not meet her family's expectations of her. Hence, she has chosen to become a biomedical engineer. Tina also wanted to become an engineer and travel to Dubai to work. Tina's dream involves seeing the world to augment her life experience. Nawaz wanted to be an inventor and help those who need prosthetics be able to afford it:

Well, my hope in the future, career-wise, is that I want to invent something. I want to be someone prominent in my field especially since the field that I want to go into is relatively new. I want to become a biomedical engineer. And so, with that it's still relatively new. And then with 3D printing organs, that's even—it's a completely a new topic, and there's not that much research into it. And so, I want to be in that because I'd be somewhat of a pioneer in that field, and that's what's attracting me towards it. So, I want to invent something. (Nawaz)

Nawaz further shared there is a social justice reason for her desire to become an inventor. Many people living at a lower socioeconomic status may not be able to sustain taking care of their health, whereas the rich are able to do so:

Something that makes it [biomedical engineering] affordable. Because 3D printing organs is possible, but the cost is so high that it's not justifiable for some people. If you're rich, then you can pay it, but for those that have a disease that targets those organs, it's not achievable. So, it takes away the fact that you don't have to wait 10 years for an organ donor, but the cost of dealing with that is just as [untenable]. (Nawaz)

Nawaz stated she would want to obtain a PhD in biomedical engineering and that her older sister also wants to earn a PhD. Nawaz conveyed how her older sister is a motivating factor for her. Nina, however, shared that her dream is less career-oriented and is more about living a fulfilled life:

To be honest, I actually don't have like a dream that really goes along the career line. 'Cause like for me, I don't think a career should define who you are. So for me, I think just living a fulfilled life would be what I love. But doing something realistic and of course earn money, but doing something I'm happy with. So, whether that be any career, it's not a big deal because that career does not make me who I am. I would say it's more what I want to be doing with my life. I am not 100% sure, but maybe it's travelling or putting art out, 'cause I also really like art. (Nina)

It seems Nina felt a career will not define her. Most of the girls had career at the forefront, except for Nina, who wanted to focus on having a meaningful life that included travel and art. She wanted a well-rounded and balanced life with meaning and happiness. This brings the discussion to the next subtheme of broadening and interrupting societal and family expectations.

**Subtheme 2: Broadening and interrupting—breaking free from the mold.** The girls disclosed that Muslim youth living in Canada often have the expectations from parents to be respectful and obedient of their wishes for them. They have felt this pressure in their own lives and overall have attempted to meet their parents' requirements of them. However, at times they have felt frustrated that they could not pursue their dreams in ways they desire.

Nina stated that her parents were supportive of her joining clubs in elementary school. She joined drama and art clubs, and those experiences have helped her cultivate self-confidence:

They did put me in out-of-school clubs, because they thought it would be nice to I guess build that confidence in me. So my parents encouraged me to join drama clubs and art clubs and all those things, which really helped boost my confidence a lot at such a young age, and now . . . it's much easier for me to speak out at assemblies or conferences or this kind of things. So that also really helped. I feel like parents are also vital in making sure that you do get exposed to those things. (Nina)

In furthering this conversation, it was interesting that even though Nina was encouraged to join art clubs, she knows that due to her parents' expectations of her, she cannot pursue art as a career for it is not a professional field. She, along with the other girls, spoke of how they are expected to be an engineer, doctor, accountant, or any profession that is stable and pays well.

Hence, even though Nina and the others love art, they cannot see themselves choosing it as a lifelong career. However, they intend to pursue it on the side to relieve stress and for creative fulfillment. Here Nina talked about pressures and expectations:

I guess doing careers you don't want to do, because like I mentioned, the arts or something is not something that's seen as a big thing. . . . I talked to my brother and my parents yesterday, and they were like, "Okay, you have five different categories. There's business, medical, law—" and they listed two others, and they were all science-related. And I was like, "Okay, what about this and this?" And they're like, "That's not really a real job." (Nina)

Nina shared what her family wants for her and how she has sometimes felt stuck because she is not able to follow her own dreams of pursuing art. For Nina, her family has planned her life for her, and it is difficult to break out of the pattern of expectations. Nina further spoke about being disappointed and hurt that her parents want her to be a professional in either engineering or medicine even though she has a passion for art. She hoped that they might shift their thinking given that Canada is different from South Asia:

I guess I feel kind of not really hurt, but I feel kind of down, I guess, because I thought they'd be a little more understanding. Because I grew up in a completely different environment than when my parents were growing up, and what my cousins or relatives have grown up with, because I feel the expectation would be a little more different. But I guess it's not, so it's a little disappointing in a way. But I feel like it should or would soon enough change, that they realize that Canada is a much different country than Afghanistan or Pakistan, or that what people can do here is a lot different than what people there can do, or what a woman can do here is very different from what a woman can do there. (Nina)

Nina hoped that her family would see that Canada is not the same as Afghanistan or Pakistan and that they could be more open-minded about what she wants to pursue. Yet, she explained how her family is traditional:

Well, my parents come from a very traditional family, so the definition of happiness is either have a good, stable job that earns money or something like that, get married and own a house or a car, and just their definition of happy is very more materialistic, while mine is more, I guess, emotion or feeling-based and being like what makes me happy while theirs is more just a stable life. (Nina)

Nina shared that materialism and success are connected because in Afghanistan or Pakistan, it is difficult to own things such as a house or a car, so owning material goods is important to her parents. In order to do so, one has to work hard to earn a good living, and they believe that pursuing art is not the way to do that. Likewise, Tina shared how she has broken free from the mold from time to time by writing poetry:

Poetry is one of my big things. Reading. Those types of things. . . . Once you get into high school and you are in Grade 11 [or] 12, and everyone would say, “Okay, choose a career now” and my parents saying, “You know, you should try to get into this type of field or that type of field,” your dreams become influenced by other people, where your dream isn’t really your dream anymore, it’s kind of like everyone’s dream. (Tina)

Tina referred to the importance of career first and hobbies and interests second. She indicated her parents would give advice about what career to invest in and how these expectations make it difficult for her dreams to be her own. However, these expectations from family members do not mean the girls have fully accepted these prospects. Next, I turn to the subtheme of using art as a channel to fulfillment.

**Subtheme 3: Using art as a medium to fulfill dreams.** The girls voiced that they turn to art for self-expression, to manage stress, and to connect with others. Nina created a piece of art to share her dreams (see Figure 17). This piece of artwork was donated to Manmeet Singh Bhullar School. Nina was saddened by the passing of Bhullar, a Calgarian and Canadian politician whose life ended when he helped a stranded motorist and was hit by another vehicle (Davis, 2015). Nina commented that Bhullar was selfless and spent much of his life giving back to the community:

So, there’s this school named after him and it’s opening next year, I think? And my teacher was like, “The principal from that school had wanted us to donate some art to the school,” so I thought I’d donate this piece to the school, because Manmeet Bhullar was really big on dreams, and he’s like, “If you dream big, start for the line, and eventually you’ll get there.” This also reminded me of him, and I really wanted to donate this piece because I guess it also ties in to [the Club], because it has really allowed me to be the

person I am today, and I have really self-developed through these clubs and activities that I'm taking part in. (Nina)



*Figure 17.* Nina's creation of dreams.

Nina shared that the artwork she created (see Figure 17) has a visual of a girl on the left flying kites with various animal figures. She chose these animals because she loves all animals. The boat on the upper left symbolizes her home country and her journey to Canada. She decided to keep the girl as a silhouette because she does not want her to be the centre of attention; rather, she wants to express how it is possible to dream as long as one continues to strive for knowledge, learning, and creativity.

Nina donated this piece to show that dreams can come true. It symbolizes how the Club has cultivated her self-growth. When I asked about the meaning of this artwork she shared: "Since I mentioned the part about Manmeet Bhullar, I guess it's just dreaming big and knowing that anything is possible as long as you put in the hard work into it, you can really just get anywhere . . . dreaming big ... work hard and the stars will align"

In fact, dreaming big was significant to all the girls. They all shared they could be tied down by the need to focus on school, grades, and work, and dreaming was a way to remember that there is life beyond these things. Nina mentioned that being involved in the drama club and creating visual art has given her more confidence. With these connections, she has felt closer to her community and part of her community. Making art has also lifted her out of the academic grind and provided her a space to create and interact with people who are like-minded:

My parents have put me into drama club and other things since I was younger, and I have been part of my drama school productions since Grade 3 to now, Grade 11. I guess it's really fun, and it's a great confidence booster. . . . We're just noticing how drama itself, like the community in it, we felt like it brought people together rather than pushed them aside. . . . The community feels very belonged in this group rather than, let's say, math class or science group, where it's all like, "Okay, let's just take notes." It's much more interactive. . . . You're going to meet new people, you get to experience new things, you get to build new skills. . . . I really do like visual art, because I feel like visual art is also really a big thing in our world today, either it be a political cartoon or any of that sort of thing. It could also bring awareness to different issues in the real world in a way that numbers or something cannot. (Nina)

Nina spoke of her love for drama in a powerful way. She noted that being involved in productions has taken her out of her shell, and she has experienced what it is like to perform. These experiences have cultivated her imagination and creativity. Nina further stated that art can connect people to social issues and that living in the northeast, where many people are from the Middle East or rural second world countries, it is even more important to create awareness about these issues.

As revealed, Nawaz authored the poem *Shackles of Racism*. She spoke about how poetry has brought her joy:

I've always loved poetry. I've only done it twice now, but I do like the notion of writing down your thoughts. And the format of it is so unstructured and I like that, so I wanted to do something like that. When we were discussing the anti-racism assembly, I wanted to take part in it. (Nawaz)

With poetry, Nawaz has room to use creativity to voice her social justice stance. The impressive part of Nawaz's decision to share her poem on Anti-Racism Day is that originally, two of her peers had volunteered to share their poems. However, one peer was absent that day, and Nawaz cultivated the courage to put her hand up to support Anti-Racism Day:

The role ended up being empty. And so, I offered to do it because I still wanted the assembly to go as planned, so that's why I did it like last minute in a way. So, I don't know. I guess the courage was that I still wanted everyone else to succeed, and so I stepped up in that moment. (Nawaz)

Nawaz indicated that even though she was nervous, she is proud of her decision and seemed empowered by that experience. It took courage to share, especially at the last minute. Her peers told her how her poem made them think about racism in more nuanced ways than they had before. Likewise, Tina said that poetry writing has offered her a space to express herself:

So, I used my poem writing skills to kind of . . . it wasn't only just to make other people aware of the issues. It's also kind of to recite my own feelings and get out whatever it was going on inside of me onto paper and get it out there. It helps you release something. It helps you inside. So that was my release, and it also made a change. I feel like that poem [*Society Is War*] instigated the feeling that what I do and what I say does make a difference. (Tina)

Performing poetry has allowed Tina to say things that are difficult. The process can also be therapeutic because it opens space where Tina can release her emotions. She explained the creative space behind writing poetry:

So many times, I had to analyze it, rewrite, revise, because when I write my poems, I can't just write. . . . So that's where the change aspect came in, where it's time for us to make a change now. I feel like it was a step-by-step process. It wasn't just one idea, and I was going to talk about it. It was kind of like a story. . . . I feel like with poetry, there's no format. You can do whatever. It's not like a story where it's right or wrong. When you write in class or you're writing for English, you're writing an essay, there's a right and wrong format, right? There's a right and wrong idea. I feel like with poetry, you can't have a wrong. You kind of just say what you want to say and get it out there. That's why I like poetry more than story writing. (Tina)

Tina noted how poetry has given her the freedom to express herself in a way that is not structured, rigid, or confined, such as writing an essay. This freedom seemed to be important to

her because at times she has found education restrictive. Tina also shared she enjoys going to shows. As part of the Club, she was introduced to a live production of *Charlotte's Web*. She appreciated the opportunity of being exposed to different cultures (see Figure 18).



Figure 18. Tickets to the production of *Charlotte's Web*.

It was really cool. I haven't really seen shows before, because it just hasn't been a part of my life type of thing, so it's cool to go see that. And I feel like in our culture, people don't go as much. When I went there, it was like all White people. It was different, and it was cool to go see that. . . . I feel like it helped me grow as a person because I got to see a different type of art, different type of outlet that people had, so that was cool. I write poetry and my cousin does art, so everyone has different outlets. (Tina)

It appears that being a part of the Club has enabled Tina to learn about events and cultures she would otherwise not have been exposed to. She seemed grateful for these opportunities to expand her cultural awareness.

In summary, the girls expressed that they wanted to live a good life, do good, and also have careers that both they and their families would agree to. All the girls voiced that they would continue to pursue art, poetry, or other creative outlets, even if it is "on the side" for now. This

concession suggests their acts of resistance when it comes to completely conforming to their parents' idea of success.

### **Conclusion of Findings**

The themes derived from participant analysis and conversations about the Club have contributed to the understanding that these six high-school aged girls are passionate about social justice and having a voice to make a difference and contribute to social change. They agreed that having been a part of the Club would continue to impact them as they progress through high school and post-secondary studies. The friendships cultivated, the acts of resistance of spreading knowledge, and creating art together likely will, for a long time, impact them and those around them. Next, I turn to Chapter 5, in which I discuss how these themes connect to the literature about minoritized youth in leadership.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The voices of the girls tell a powerful story of their lived experiences of participating in a social justice leadership club. Yet their experiences also touch upon larger political issues that parallel broader societal norms and discourses of society. As such, their words, stories, and pictures resonate with a sense of political activism and the mechanisms that they have drawn upon to create a sense of empowerment and within their school and community. Herein, I examine three themes from the findings. First, I present the concept of girl power. Within this theme, I discuss resiliency, self-efficacy, and empowerment. Second, I discuss how the Club has necessarily intersected with broader issues of troubling the injustice of Islamophobia. Within this theme, I present how Islamophobia is real and include the girls' moments of disruption. Third, I present how the girls have reshaped the narratives of their school and community. I talk about pressures; specifically, family expectations, societal expectations, and moments of reshaping these narratives.

In discussing these three themes, I consider how the girls have been able to rise above the difficult and contested terrain through their own empowerment and in their final celebration of learning. In pulling the themes together, what surfaces is a sense of voice, identity, and belonging in the girls' purpose for raising broader issues in society that has created a sense of community not only for those who have been a part of this Club, but to the wider school community.

### **Girl Power**

These girls are revolutionary. In this section, I discuss resiliency, self-efficacy, and empowerment. I start from the recognition that resiliency is overcoming and thriving in the face of adversity (Este & Ngo, 2011), self-efficacy is internal strengths (Akerman, 2018), and

empowerment is the act of empowering self and others (Page & Czuba, 1999). I address these concepts in interrelated ways as they are interconnected.

In a patriarchal society, there is widespread belief that women are weaker than men, women are expected to be humble and subservient, and women cannot be angry, otherwise they will be labelled as “bitches.” In my personal life as a Chinese Canadian woman, my aunt has told me to stop going to school and to quit my doctoral program because I am becoming smarter than my spouse. She believes that he will leave me if I surpass him in education and earnings. My aunt has good intentions because she wants my marriage to stay intact, but this example shows how minoritized females frequently hear oppressive messages from family members that reflect how women “should” live their lives (Giuliani, Olivari, & Alfieri, 2017; Zine, 2000). Further, although women have come a long way to fight for gender equality and many women have more education than men, they are less likely to be paid a salary, become entrepreneurs, and they continue to earn less than men in similar occupations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). Reaching gender parity is a continuous uphill battle (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017).

Adolescence is a time when girls are finding themselves, discovering who they are, and deciding who they want to become (Choate & Curry, 2009). This time can be particularly difficult for Muslim girls because they face discrimination based on stereotypes associated with Islam, such as in the way they look and how they dress (Zine, 2000). Further, discrimination has been found to be experienced more by Latin American and Asian youth; discrimination can lead to lower academic achievement, lower self-esteem, distress, physical issues, and depressive symptoms (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Nonetheless, Ayres and Leaper (2012) found that minoritized girls use avoidance as well as approach strategies to confront discrimination.

Examples of avoidance strategies entail avoiding someone who harasses them and shutting down privately to ruminate about the problems (Ayres & Leaper, 2012). Approach strategies entail seeking emotional support or problem-solving to find solutions (Ayres & Leaper, 2012).

Similarly, the girls have used reasonableness to problem solve when they have encountered bullying, racism, and sexism. For Young (2000), reasonableness is a set of dispositions whereby participants in a democratic society know that disagreements produce insight; they aim to reach agreement by listening to and trusting one another's voices, and therefore having an open mind is important. The girls indicated that there are ways to get people to listen without using name calling, degrading messages, or violence. In this way, the girls have embraced the notion of reasonableness to interrupt and change perceptions that would marginalize them as minoritized youth. For instance, Nawaz shared that everyone has biases, and people need to listen when someone calls them out. This listening can include reflecting on how they can acknowledge another's point of view to continue to engage with that person (Young, 2000). In this space, Bohman's idea of a "public deliberation" (as cited in Young, 2000, p. 25) is possible. This deliberation speaks to the respectful process of discussion; the girls have exemplified this respect through using art and poetry to communicate the problems in our society and to create awareness that these collective problems are a part of shared humanity.

In turning to supports that cultivate resiliency, there are social support from family, friends, and teachers that help minoritized girls become more resilient (Ayres & Leaper, 2012). The girls have reached out to older siblings and have supported younger siblings when problems arise. They have also leaned on each other for support, as well as supported those who need them. When peers share a similar culture and similar interests, friendships can often be cultivated and strengthened (Albrecht & Ko, 2017). Correspondingly, Nawaz spoke about meeting people

where they are at and connecting with them at their comfort level. Thus, self-efficacy and empowerment also involve listening to peers. An illustration of empowerment is when Zoya joined with her peers' voices within and outside of the Club to advocate for them and make some sort of change. This is an example of peer-to-peer learning, where youth listen to and learn with each other, and together decide to do something about societal issues (Traver, 2016). One such concept is youth organizing to collaborate and address serious problems in their school and community (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Traver, 2016). The girls have taken hold of peer-to-peer learning and youth organizing in ways that have empowered themselves, the school, and their community.

In addition, the girls' positive and collaborative relationships with Ms. M. and other supportive teachers have provided space for them to create awareness about challenging issues as well as spread positive messages of love and acceptance. The kind notes the girls created for the anti-racism assembly was a simple yet meaningful activity and was a visual reminder to the school and the constituents therein that there was a common love and unity in their humanity. Similarly, the youth in Youniss' (2006) study worked with adult mentors to change educational policy so that more minoritized youth would have opportunities to attend higher education. Subsequently, when youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds have a sense of self-efficacy, they are likely to feel empowered to contribute to social change (Este & Ngo, 2011; M. Greene, 1995; Lund & Nabavi, 2008).

Although youth from immigrant backgrounds can be painted in a negative light, many of these youth in Canada excel academically and in post-secondary education (Krahn & Taylor, 2005). Students with high academic achievement have higher confidence and self-efficacy; these students are also more likely to stay away from high-risk activities such as using drugs and

engaging in dangerous sexual behaviour (Ngo et al., 2013; Portes & Rivas, 2011). Minoritized youth who have positive relationships with teachers are likely to excel at school and are stronger in saying no to these risk-taking behaviours and focusing on academic success (Ngo et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). The girls' cultivation of positive relationships with their family members, teachers, and peers has made it possible for them to focus and thrive at school (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2010).

Beyond excelling at school, the girls have challenged prevailing societal messages that immigrant women should be quiet and meek. Their willingness to speak against racism, champion mental health, and celebrate diversity are apparent in their collaboration in the Club and with Antyx. Simmons (2014) shared that racism involves "relations to the 'Other.' . . . Historically racism concerned modes of production, exploitative social relations, capitalism, and global territorialisation" (p. 198). The girls are not compliant with being Othered in this way. They have used their voice and creativity to engage in social action whereby their peers at school and members in the wider community have listened to them problematizing serious issues. Beyond problematizing, they have made an impact by shifting people's minds about sensitive topics such as racism and mental health. This influence is evident when they hear their peers praise their poetry or when their peers tell them they had not thought about racism in certain ways. Further, Naomi has challenged the concept of ableism, as she has not let her diagnosis of cerebral palsy define or limit her (Lindsay, King, Klassen, Esses, & Stachel, 2012). In fact, her participation in research studies is one way she is giving back so that people living with disabilities will be able to reach political equality and have a say in what affects them (Young, 2000). Furthermore, the girls' participation together in the Club has allowed them to promote "free and equal opportunity to speak" (Young, 2000, p. 23). It was apparent that the girls have

capitalized on these opportunities through their activism activities.

Outside the walls of the school, many youth desire to be involved in their community to solve collective problems (Checkoway, 1998; Christens & Dolan, 2011). Often, these problems are of personal relevance to them, and to their social and political locations. Marginalized youth may particularly benefit from youth organizing programs to learn more about themselves and their culture (Yee, 2008). The girls seemed to concur as they have chosen to be involved with Antyx, a group in which many Brown students feel heard and empowered to speak out against injustice. The structures the girls have made symbolize a “shout out” and an awakening to serious problems youth face today. This initiative has united the community as many people spend hours of their day at the centre to connect, learn, and play. Further, Tina noted the importance of agency and movement and doing something when marginalized people need assistance and support. She indicated that creating awareness is a good first step, but it takes initiative and action to do something about the problem:

Movement is kind of making people aware of the issue and kind of not just making people aware, but also showing them what they can do to make a difference. So, say if we're talking about poverty, it's not just telling people that “Oh, there's poor people in some country.” If we find ways to contribute and ways to help like food banks and those type of things, that's the movement part of it. It's forming ideas that will help people.  
(Tina)

Tina used the word *movement* several times, and she referred to the “doing” part of social justice. The girls agreed with Tina that awareness is important, but awareness alone is not enough. Action must accompany the awareness. Hence, Tina voiced that offering food where it is needed is part of social change. The notion of “doing something differently” parallels acts of resistance, where minoritized youth are saying that things are not okay and are choosing to enact change in ways that speak to self-efficacy and empowerment (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Redmond & Dolan, 2016; Yee, 2008; Zine, 2000).

Moreover, in using publicity, the girls have held themselves and others accountable. When they speak to one another, they know they have to answer to the “plurality of others” (Young, 2000, p. 25) and are thoughtful about how to express themselves. Hence, Nawaz and Tina’s performances of poetry-writing and reading show that they are considerate of the plurality of the audience. In many facets, their poems have reached their teachers and peers in personal and political ways as they demonstrated their “particular background experiences, interests, or proposals in ways that others can understand” (Young, 2000, p. 25) and therefore have been able to connect with the public even if people may disagree with them. Their art structures have performed a similar role. The girls have received messages from their peers and community members indicating they appreciated the girls’ determination and perseverance to invest months to create the much-needed and relevant messages to connect the community. There was an opening day celebration during which community members came together to celebrate the creations. This day symbolized the use of publicity to express their artistic creations to showcase their art and sentiments about topics that are relevant in today’s world. Regarding the community responses which were positive, Young (2000) noted that reasonable people are willing to change preferences or opinions when others persuade them that their initial stance may be “incorrect or inappropriate” (p. 25). Young (2000) would say this is a part of publicity, where “people hold one another accountable” (p. 25). It was apparent that the girls used publicity and reasonableness to share their perspectives in hopes of the ripple effects of small steps to create big change.

The girls have empowered themselves and others due to their many civic, volunteering, and activist endeavours. They have heard their peers tell them they are doing good. As noted in Chapter 4, Nawaz said about her poem, “People really listened to it. And it had an impact on them. I had people come and say, ‘That was really inspiring.’” Even though Nawaz did not see

herself as a strong public speaker, she has pushed beyond her shyness to risk negative reception of her work. Nawaz's growth in confidence underscores Phinney and colleagues' (1998) finding that when minoritized youth feel they have something to contribute and have a sense of mastery, they are apt to thrive in many aspects of their lives.

The girls noted that being involved in the Club and other initiatives has grown their confidence as they feel a strong sense of belonging. Likewise, Stevens (2005), in working with poor African American female youth, found that when they had strong social attachments and were involved in programs that recognized their identity, they could flourish and learn leadership skills. When minoritized youth know they have a voice and that their voice matters, their collective voice becomes even stronger (Christens & Dolan, 2011). As a case in point, turning to the finale celebration, the girls were excited to be offered a space to talk about their photographs, poetry, art structures, and more. Nawaz read her poem, and each participant shared a photograph of her choosing. I was impressed with how engaged and courageous the participants were, given that two faculty members from the university (one of which is my supervisor and associate dean of undergraduate programs in education), their teachers, and other peers were present. Each girl spoke up to share their passions, concerns, and thoughts about social justice with everyone listening and offering their thoughts in open and respectful ways. We sat in a circle and had meaningful conversations about the themes of the photographs. Zoya voiced how she appreciated the space to share:

I liked talking about issues that we don't normally have this detailed discussion about. It was nice knowing that you can talk about it and knowing and listening to other people's opinion about these issues that are so common, but we rarely had any detailed discussions on them. (Zoya)

The other girls voiced similar sentiments. Nina noted she liked the opportunity to share her own experiences as well as hear the group's experiences relating to social justice. Hence,

when minoritized youth are interconnected in their school and community, their sense of voice, kinship, and confidence will have them flourish beyond what society expects of them (M. Greene, 1995).

In summary the girls' resiliency, self-efficacy, and empowerment have unmasked their power to speak out and create meaningful social change. Their bond and social justice passions have had a synergistic effect in the school and community, whereby their peers look up to them for guidance. The girls know their voices are important. This knowledge will likely propel them forward to continue to promote social change and be involved in volunteerism and activism for years to come.

### **Troubling the Injustice of Islamophobia**

In this section, I explore Islamophobia and the girls' moments of troubling this phenomenon. The definition of Islamophobia is "fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination" (Zine, 2006, p. 239). The girls voiced that years after 9/11, they have continued to hear hateful messages in the media about Muslims and the Islam faith. Examples of Islamophobia in the United States and Canada are notable policy bans that have targeted Muslims (Beeby, 2015; Krieg, 2017; Nasser, 2018; Sanghani, 2017; "Trump travel ban," 2018), targeted attacks against Muslim students and their communities (Fantz, Almasry, & Stapleton, 2015; Montpetit, 2018), and general fear and anxiety against all Muslims (Krieg, 2017; Nasser, 2018). Islamophobia is not an abstract construct but rather is felt and lived by these girls.

Muslim youth often have to navigate their cultural identity amid Islamophobia (Zine, 2000, 2001). Muslim youth can be labelled by teachers as minorities and be seen as different because they wear clothing that speaks to their beliefs, they do not eat pork, and they convene

together (Fahlman, 1985). Presently, youth from immigrant backgrounds, particularly Muslim youth, have been experiencing negative treatment at school due to anti-Muslim rhetoric (Blake & Nayan, 2014). The girls shared that due to their intersecting cultural identities as young, female, and Muslim, they have experienced forms of bullying (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006) and racism (Zine, 2000, 2001), and have heard many negative and dangerous messages about Muslims (Fantz et al., 2015; Krieg, 2017; Montpetit, 2018). A safe space at school is needed so that Muslim and minoritized youth can be who they are without these repercussions (Blake & Nayan, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

The girls voiced their perception that since 9/11, Muslims have had to continuously live on the margins due to the stereotyped belief that all Muslim are terrorists. This viewpoint relates to Young's (1990) discussion about cultural imperialism, where marginalized groups are "Othered," and the dominant groups see themselves as the norm. Zine (2001) noted that Muslim youth in Canadian schools face racism, Islamophobia, and peer pressure to conform. She also voiced that Muslim youth need to negotiate within three conflicting cultural frameworks: "the dominant culture, their ethnic culture, and Islam" (Zine, 2001, p. 404). The youth in this study have found ways to navigate this reality by fully committing to living the Islam way, as Islam teaches the "straight path" (Zine, 2001, p. 399). The path is about following the teachings of Islam despite the pull to stray towards a Western way of behaving, such as dating and having premarital sex. Tina shared that the definition of Islam is "peace," and in order to disrupt Islamophobia, one needs to learn about Islam. Tina spoke to how it is important to know what Islam teaches and the meaning of being a Muslim. This knowledge gives her the power to debunk the negative and dangerous messages around her and in the media. The girls further agreed that acquiring knowledge and knowing how to back up their beliefs and values would

give them a chance to trouble the discourses of Islamophobia. Reasonableness is empowering for the girls because they voiced that hate does not solve any problems (Young, 2000). They have demonstrated reasonableness through the collective ways they have problem solved in their involvements in the Club and at school.

The marginalization the girls face due to their Islamic faith is reflective of the broader discourses of Islamophobia. Young (1990) indicated that marginalization affects those who are “racially marked” (p. 53) and those who are socially invisible (e.g., the elderly, the unemployed, single mothers, and people who are mentally and physically disabled). Young (1990) shared that marginalization is the most dangerous form of oppression because “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (p. 53). The girls concurred that in certain situations they have felt marginalized, such as on public transit or when they tried to communicate their social justice messages to a group of rowdy boys. They said they either have felt invisible or targeted and shamed. However, these experiences have only made them more empowered to create change.

Barriers of racism and discrimination do not stop at the gates of the school, but rather permeate in the interactions among and between students in the hallways, classrooms, and curricula (Zine, 2001). For instance, Zoya stated that it is not uncommon that “people got their scarves torn off their heads or people get called insults or slurs just because they’re Muslims, or they got labelled as terrorists because they’re Muslims.” These examples speak to how oppressed and marginalized groups often experience violence (Young, 1990). Zoya emphasized how she cannot and would not accept the marker that she is a terrorist, because she is far from the label. She, along with the other girls, shared that when someone who is Muslim commits a crime, that

person is automatically labelled a terrorist, whereas when a White person does so, journalists would interview family members and find out about the person's life to cultivate a greater understanding of why they committed the violent act. Hence, Zoya wanted people to see a different side of Muslims. The different side is about presenting an alternative story, where a single story about other people or cultures does not define them (Adichie, 2009). For instance, there is the danger of a single story generalizing that all people who live in Africa are poor, need help, listen to certain music, or behave in particular ways (Adichie, 2009). These generalizations can be dishonouring and dangerous when an entire country or cultural group gets labelled in stereotypical ways. Generalizations such as these are particularly significant when people view all Muslims are terrorists.

Zoya's sentiments speak to cultural imperialism in a perilous way, where it means "to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (Young, 1990, pp. 58–59). I argue that cultural imperialism dehumanizes Muslim individuals. When the larger society does not see Muslims as humans, assigning them dangerous labels such as "terrorists" and "killers," these labels define all Muslims. This tendency is what the girls alluded to in our conversations about Islam. Young (1990) gave some other examples, such as "gay people are promiscuous" and "women are good with children," whereas "White males are often seen as individuals" (p. 56). The girls talked about how unfair these beliefs are, and they continue to work towards troubling this expression of cultural imperialism.

Zine (2000) noted that Muslim students in public schools, when following the Five Pillars of Islam, can feel that they are a "foreign cultural import" (p. 295) and that they do not belong in mainstream Canadian society. Likewise, the girls mentioned that they have learned certain tactics

at school, such as conformity and blending in so they do not stand out and get judged, because being different is seen as not acceptable. This phenomenon was coined the “split personality syndrome” (Al-Jabri, 1995, as cited in Zine, 2000, p. 293): Muslim individuals have to assume certain identities in order to integrate into mainstream society, while at the same time maintain their own ethnic cultural identity. Zoya could relate to this phenomenon as she came to Canada in Grade 5 and felt like an outcast when she entered school. Zoya’s sentiments mirror the difficult journeys minoritized students travel where they are thrown into the Canadian education system that privileges dominant Anglo-Saxon students’ experiences (Fahlman, 1985; Nanji, 2015). Further, Zoya had to adapt quickly to the different way school is taught. In Pakistan, the method of teaching and learning, relying on rote memory, is not central to the pedagogy in Canada. Zoya wanted to fit in with the dominant culture and learn English but being in a predominantly White school had her needing to work hard to navigate her ethnic culture and the dominant culture. Consequently, it is important for educators to see that minoritized students have strengths and their own funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2006; Hlatshwayo & Vally, 2014), rather than seeing them as a foreign cultural import (Zine, 2000) who are deficient.

Moreover, in schools, multiculturalism is often superficially acknowledged by celebrating holidays, dress, and food. However, Nabavi and Lund (2012) discussed the importance of troubling surface multicultural celebrations. Although these celebrations can appear positive, they can mask systemic injustice. Likewise, the girls voiced that even though they celebrate diversity at school with food and traditional acknowledgements, it can be an uphill climb when they attempt to disrupt structural injustice.

As such, the girls spoke about their individual decisions to don the hijab. The performance of veiling has Muslim women experience dual oppressions (Zine, 2006). From the

bigger society, they can face Islamophobia and racism; within their communities, they can be subjected to patriarchal oppression and sexism (Zine, 2006). Female Muslim youth have the added pressure to dress in the Western way that is less modest and not to wear the hijab (Alvi, 2014; Zine, 2000). In Arabic, the hijab means to “cover” or to “screen” (Alvi, 2014, p. 215). Of note, Tina shared that she has worn the hijab to “hide her beauty.” Alvi (2014) talked about how clothing can be performative (Butler, 1999) in that what people choose to wear is socially constructed rather than them having been born to dress certain ways. Alvi further defined the hijab to mean “the same thing as the veil . . . any covering that visibly identifies a woman as Muslim” (2014, p. 215). She shared that after 9/11, the veil has been seen as a sign of oppression, whereby men enforce women to wear it, and has come to symbolize inequality.

I was given the privilege to delve deeper into why the girls have chosen to wear this symbolic veil. The four girls who wear the hijab shared that it was their choice to do so. Ann wanted to focus on school, and wearing the hijab is a reminder to be serious about her studies. Nawaz wore it after she was bullied in order to hide herself; she has a favourite one that Pakistani children wear, and she loves the beautiful stones on it. Nina noted that it is not the hijab that makes a person; rather, it is the person who makes the hijab. For Naomi and Zoya, who do not wear the hijab, Zoya said being in high school, she does not want to draw attention to herself if she begins to wear it. She has continued to ponder whether it fits for her. All six girls conveyed that they are not pressured by their families in any way to wear the hijab. These findings contradict how wearing the hijab is a sign of oppression and that women are often pressured by men to wear it. In fact, Muslim women are “choosing to veil as a way of asserting their identities as Muslims, and to exercise their political rights to veil in any manner they choose” (Alvi, 2014, p. 216). Voguing the veil, whereby “women who fashion their veils in new and untraditional

ways” speaks to how Muslim women choose to wear the hijab to express their stylishness (Alvi, 2014, p. 216). Likewise, the girls mentioned they take time to choose their hijab to match their clothing. They are thoughtful about the performance of veiling because they want to honour the hijab.

In summary, the girls have thrived in the face of Islamophobia. They have used their lived experience to educate, speak out against, and counter the global belief that all Muslims are terrorists. Some have chosen the hijab and others have had the hijab choose them, whereas some have chosen to not veil at this time. All the girls spoke about the powerful symbol of veiling in their own ways.

### **Reshaping the Narrative**

In this section, I present how the girls have shaped the narratives of their own lives, the school culture, and the wider local community. Female Muslim youth face pressures to conform by meeting parents’ expectations (Zine, 2001). Muslim adolescents living in Western countries often have the expectations from parents to be respectful and obedient of their wishes for them (Giuliani et al., 2017). For boys, this expectation entails academic success and earning money to support their family; for girls, they are expected to stay at home and maintain their cultural heritage (Giuliani et al., 2017). Contrary to Giuliani and colleagues’ (2017) findings, the girls mainly voiced that their families want them to do well in school, find a stable and high-paying job, and have a career before marriage.

Further, Giuliani and colleagues (2017) found that Muslim boys are encouraged to speak out and become the breadwinners when they grow up, whereas Muslim girls are told to be quieter and listen, so they can be seen as modest and humble. Consequently, female Muslim youth are expected to be more subservient and less assertive than male Muslim youth (Giuliani et

al., 2017). In this study, the girls talked more about the pressures to do well in school and less about their families wanting them to be subservient. They have heard their parents tell them how they sacrificed to come to Canada, and how they gave up professional jobs in order to provide them with a better life and education. They have not heard so much about marrying well, as Giuliani et al. (2017) found when he worked with Muslim girls and they hear messages about finding a suitable husband and settling down to start a family with the focus on raising children.

Nevertheless, for the girls, pressures to do well in school has caused some anxiety. Some of the girls take advanced placement courses to meet their parents' expectations that they pursue engineering or another stable career that are believed to reap financial rewards and prestige. To channel the pressures, the girls have reshaped the narratives of the school culture as well as the culture of the community by opening up conversations about difficult topics such as parental expectations, mental health, racism, and diversity. The girls' social justice initiatives correspond with Zine's (2000) message of creating cultures of resistance; she borrowed Solomon's (1992) quote: "Cultures of resistance' [are created when] student subcultures . . . use oppositional behaviours to dismantle the social and institutional structures of schools and replace them with ones that are more compatible with their own needs and desires" (p. 12). One way of dismantling these structures is using visual arts to communicate the desired messages, this was contrary to the parental idea of art as a non-viable endeavour. Visual arts have numerous uses, such as demonstrating creative skills, tapping into the intellect to engage with the wider world, and using the imagination to transform personal lives and communities (De, Hunter, & Woodcock, 2008). Even though art is not a medium that is encouraged in the Muslim community, art creates a space for young people to appreciate diversity (De et al., 2008). Following, I note moments when the girls have troubled conformity.

One example of disrupting the narratives of the school and community is the girls' collaboration with Antyx and using creative spaces to respond to what the girls have experienced in their own lives, as well as what their peers have shared is important. The messages about mental health (spring), dreams (summer), perseverance (winter), and diversity (fall) invite conversations to promote civility and acceptance. Therefore, the girls have used their own experiences as Muslim youth to dismantle the dominant discourse that everyone needs to conform to the majority. By doing so, they disseminate these fierce messages to support those with mental health challenges, to be able to dream at any age, to persevere despite hardships, and to embrace the diversity of Canada.

Another moment of disruption is when the girls chose to use poetry to speak their truths. Tina's act of composing a poem after she experienced heckling from boys had her realize she could do something about injustice without resorting to aggression or violence. She used her artistic influence and creative voice to interrupt the discourse of silence in a nonthreatening way. Tina's creativity and courage have allowed her to do something that is often needed in schools to send the message that bullying is not okay. A teacher noticed this passionate message and encouraged Tina to have the poem published. The published poem now holds a space of rising above hurtful experiences, despite how Muslim girls are expected to stay quiet (Giuliani et al., 2017).

Additionally, Nawaz's poetry-writing and reading speaks to Young's (2000) notion of inclusive political communication that allows for narrative and situated knowledge. Young (2000) explained how narratives embrace storytelling to challenge hegemonic perspectives. I contend that Nawaz's poem *Shackles of Racism* is a testimony of her personal experiences and knowledge of racism. This testimony involves "one person's story standing or speaking for that

of a whole group to a wider [public]” (Young, 2000, p. 71). Nawaz performed her poem in front of the entire school. Further, within the poem, she shared stories of how people with mocha or mahogany skin tones often experience racism in the workforce and at airport terminals. These small stories within the poem speak to Young’s (2000) explanation about meaningful political discussion and debate:

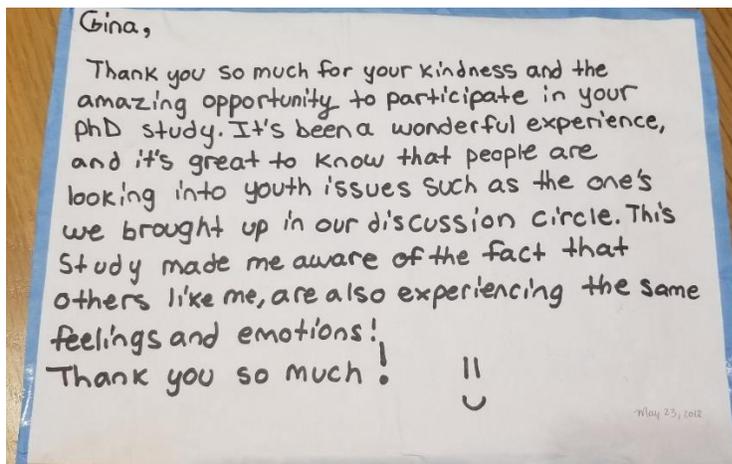
We must share a description of the problem, share an idiom in which to express alternative proposals, share rules of evidence and prediction, and share some normative principles which can serve as premises in our arguments about what ought to be done. (p. 72)

Likewise, Nawaz’s description of the problem is that discrimination and racism exist. The shared idiom is the comparison of the different skin tones. Further, shared rules of evidence are that minoritized groups are discriminated against based on their ethnic names, as job-seeking candidates may be ruled out even before selection to participate in job interviews (Gerdeman, 2017). Other evidence includes the girls’ telling of how women with light skin tone are often perceived as more beautiful, attractive, and complimented by many, whereas those with darker skin tones can often be labelled unattractive, unwanted, and undesirable. As such, Nawaz’s poem generates awareness through a creative means to educate her teachers and peers that stereotypes about skin tones and racism are not acceptable.

A third moment of disruption is the participation in this photovoice project, whereby the girls expressed their appreciation for this journey. This participation had them think of what pictures to take and what the pictures represented, as well as offered the opportunity to have in-depth discussions about them at the finale celebration. The finale celebration began with Nawaz and Tina reading their poems, and Nina, Naomi, and Zoya disseminated a photograph of their

choosing. The girls were engaged and embraced their vulnerability—it takes courage to speak out in front of university faculty members, teachers, and peers. The sharing circle invited each participant in a reasonable and public way (Young, 2000) to speak her mind about personally important social justice issues.

After the celebration, one girl, who wished to remain anonymous, brought me chocolate and wrote a note on wrapping paper. She simply put the box by my backpack in an unassuming way. When I asked who it was from, no one owned up to the kindness. Figure 19 is a photograph of the message:



*Figure 19.* Anonymous note of gratitude.

This kind note and thoughtful gesture summarize poignantly how these girls express their gratitude in humble and subtle ways. The note states an appreciation for a safe space to talk about difficult issues that affect the girls' lives; in this study they were able to share their “feelings and emotions.” They seemed to appreciate that they are not alone and that many were present to listen to their concerns during the photovoice journey and the finale celebration.

Additionally, At the time of this writing I sent these chapters to the girls. Nina, Nawaz, and Zoya shared their thoughts after reading them:

Wow, this must have taken you forever to write! It is incredibly detailed and covers all of what we had mentioned during our discussions! I really like how you detailed every club, activity, and our passions, especially our work with Antyx and Nawaz and Tina's poems. As well as the focus on all our career goals and the obstacles we face. It was nice to read about the others' stories since all of us weren't there for the one-on-one interviews. Much of what we mentioned was really similar which is great! My favourite thing about reading these chapters was the focus not on just the issues we face/are dealing with but the ways we are dealing with them and our solutions to them as well! I love how the photos went along with our stories. This is awesome Gina!!! Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this! (Nina)

I have read the document and I feel as though you have accurately described the discussions and the sentiments of the group as a whole. I particularly enjoyed the section of the document which outlined disrupting the narrative and how our experiences enabled us to dismantle the predominant discourse that everyone needs to conform to the social norm. (Nawaz)

I was very pleased with the way you represented our stories and perspectives. The passage about Islamophobia was very relevant to the discussions that took place in the group, and I believe our fears and concerns regarding the issue were adequately highlighted! Furthermore, I am glad you chose to include it in your paper as this is an issue that seems to be on the rise currently and raising awareness for it is very important. Lastly, I really enjoyed reading the passage about girl power, and I found the use of the word "girl" very empowering, as the connotation of the phrase was changed, and it represented our experiences and contributions in a positive manner. Thank you so much for providing us with the chance to participate in your study. (Zoya)

The feedback above shows that the girls have some ways been transformed by this experience and in turn are likely to continue to transform the ways people see Muslim youth and the challenges they have faced, as well as have found ways to navigate the difficult terrains of racism and Islamophobia. Through the high school years, these girls have joined together to enact inclusion and political equality, and they have accomplished representation in their school and community (Young, 2000). They have used narratives to create change. The girls have achieved inclusion by inserting their voices to let the public know they are affected by how the dominant people at school and how society see them. They have helped create a school culture of safety and respect, while also knowing they can be themselves by choosing to veil—or not.

When the school is an inclusive place, it allows students' voices to be heard. Being a part of change, the girls have shown that their creative expressions are relevant to combat racism, bullying, mental health stigma, and more.

The girls are letting people know that they want to be held as equals in a democratic society; therefore, they aspire to achieve political equality (Young, 2000). They have come together to organize events in a peer-to-peer learning way (Traver, 2016) to collaborate to best address serious problems at school and in their communities through social action (Christens & Dolan, 2011). They have subtly, yet strongly, fought for their voices at the table by asking important questions about the issues that are affecting youths' lives today, as well as responding to criticism when it seems their gender, age, faith, or other intersecting parts of their identity make it that others are less likely to listen. They do so by backing up their claims with knowledge, using art to connect the school and community, spreading positive messages, and creating a safe space for difficult conversations. In turn, they invite diverse voices to speak and be heard, rather than using threats or coercion to make others accept their points of view. They aspire for greater inclusion and in turn have reshaped the narrative of the school and community into a more open and united place to be.

In my life, I have heard messages that women should be in the background, make food for men, and be sacrificial mothers by always putting their children first. Looking back as a young girl reflecting on these messages, I knew that I could be outspoken, yet respectful; I could cook, but men can do so as well; I could be a mother and also have a career. Yet it has taken me years to explicitly speak out to family members. On the other hand, at such a young age, the girls in the leadership club studied have consistently disrupted and resisted how the dominant society wants to label and define them. By doing so, they have changed the narrative of what Muslim

girls are supposed to be like, they have altered the narrative of the school to be more open to listening, and shifted the narrative of the community to be more accepting of differences.

In summary, the girls have risen above to dismantle, trouble, disrupt, and resist the dominant discourses to shut out women's voices. By being reasonably disruptive, the girls have invited listening, understanding, and open conversations in public spaces about difficult topics humanity is facing in the 21st century.

### **Conclusion**

I began this chapter with the idea of girl power because these two words summarize how the girls in this study are resilient, have self-efficacy, and have empowered themselves and others in many facets of their lives. The girls have experienced Islamophobia in various ways and nevertheless have remained strong to combat hateful messages. In the process, the girls have disrupted the narratives of their school and community by using their creativity, intelligence, strong will, and reasonable voices. Next, I turn to the last chapter, in which I conclude this project, discuss future directions, and provide recommendations moving forward.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Canada is a country comprising the First Peoples and individuals from all over the world and is becoming increasingly diverse. New immigrants and refugees settle in this nation for hopes of a better life and future; students in schools reflect this reality. Despite being a largely immigrant nation, historical challenges of racism and discrimination against newcomers to Canada are noteworthy (Ninette & Trebilcock, 1998; Troper & Lambert, 2015). And so too is the case that students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds face oppression as part of their daily lived experience in schools and in their community.

To interrupt the cyclical discourse of racism and discrimination, the girls of this photovoice project have invested their own time, resources, and passion in helping to create a welcoming space at school and in the community. In the girls' words, they want to "unite everyone." They voiced that "we all have much in common: we all want love, want belonging, and want to feel safe." The girls have been a part of the Club for several years, in part because they want everyone included in the democratic process (Young, 2000). Their desire and willingness to hear their peers' concerns and bring important issues back to the Club to create awareness and change have been pivotal to the school culture of acceptance. Their self-efficacy for empowerment was evident in that they have risen above the negativity that can permeate school walls. They have gradually broken out of their mold and have become increasingly confident, knowing that they have a voice and that their voices matter.

The girls in this group, all of whom were Muslim youth, noted their own struggles fielding Islamophobic realities in the hallways and classrooms of their high school, their local community, and the media. As a mechanism to shift this discourse, their use of public showcases to create awareness is a powerful and reasonable way to break down such barriers. Using

positive messages, writing and performing poetry, and tapping the creative arts, such as building massive sculptures, are indicative of fashioning an ethos and culture that exposes and challenges stereotypes, particularly those targeting Muslim students.

Moreover, they voiced that bonding together and uniting to spread love is more meaningful and powerful than spreading hate. Their efforts have had their peers tell them they are making a difference in many ways. Moving forward to Grade 12 and post-secondary school, it is likely that these girls will continue to join clubs to contribute to the field of engineering, address areas of mental health, and participate in research to better the knowledge about being differently abled. The girls have already sought out information and have committed to a lifelong journey of social justice. It will be exciting to see where their lives lead them.

### **Future Directions and Recommendations**

Although the context of this study locates the girls in a particular time and space, the lessons learned provide emergent ways to consider how to empower students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in their local schools. The opening for creating space and conversations may generate a necessary first step in how such clubs might not only empower the students in the clubs, but create more awareness, understanding, and empathy in the broader school community. Of note, it is not up to minorized students to change the system of structural oppression, but rather schools apt to be a place where educational powerholders need to work to disrupt structural injustice, so youth are positioned in ways to be included in a democratic society. Further, it should not be up to a single teacher to do so, but rather a systemic change to oppressive practices is necessary. As such, I have three recommendations for consideration: embracing student creations, using public showcases, and cultivating safe spaces.

**Embracing student creations.** First, I recommend schools offer more opportunities in clubs to provide an outlet for students to create a sense of belonging, identity, and agency. As voiced by the girls, they value the teacher–student relationship and positive teacher role models who listen to them and support them in their social justice initiatives. They voiced that when they feel heard and empowered, they strive to be more involved in other clubs within and outside school. These involvements had a collaborative and synergistic effect in that not only did the girls cultivate belonging and agency, but also their peers felt safer and more heard at school. Further, interested and invested teachers have been propelled and motivated to support the students in ideas they are passionate about. With these collaborations, both students and teachers thrive in making schools and communities more open and vibrant.

I recommend teachers to be intentional in paying attention to youths’ voices. Rather than simply defining what each club does, teachers could ask students to participate in discussions about what is important to them and support their voices. Moreover, knowing students who are fervent and compassionate about making change, teachers could encourage them to initiate their own ideas for clubs and step in to sponsor their ideas and passion. This “stepping in” could entail more time; however, my findings show that when students have a strong sense of justice and a springboard for action, they can take up the lead for many initiatives important to them and their peers. Hence, active noticing and listening from teachers can make a life-changing difference for student empowerment.

**Using public showcases.** Second, the use of public showcases may be an effective way to generate awareness and understanding in the broader school community without adopting a threatening or adversarial approach. Schools could consider encouraging and displaying diverse student voices in the hallways, gymnasiums, classrooms, learning commons, and other areas to

honour these voices. Moreover, teachers could support celebrations of learning whereby students showcase their creativity and individual or collective voices. These celebrations could take many forms, such as assemblies, pep rallies, parent–teacher conferences, or social justice–oriented letters or petitions to community leaders or powerholders to enact change.

The girls voiced that their structures as part of Antyx, use of showcases to share problems through positive messages, and art to counter hate are examples of how schools can cultivate a culture of awareness and unity. Schools could be more intentional in working with community partnerships to cultivate students’ talents and interests so there is learning and sharing beyond the school walls. I argue that pushing beyond the school will help students relay their passion in relevant and authentic ways as formal and informal learning are both paramount to character development. These forms of learning can help prepare students for life no matter the path they choose after high school graduation. Therefore, public showcases can serve many purposes that can have long-lasting effects for individual students, teams of students, schools, and the wider community.

**Cultivating safe spaces of dialogue.** Third, the cultivation of safe spaces at school may parallel the internal elements of the Club to break down “taboo” topics that may be difficult for students to talk about with their families and communities. The girls have directly or indirectly faced sexism, racism, and Islamophobia. There could be more effort to bring coalitions of students and teachers together to give voice and space for students to note their concerns and have teachers support their struggles and come up with solutions. These coalitions of safe spaces can create a school culture of acceptance, kindness, and love. When these conditions are present, schools will increasingly become safer for all students to voice their concerns and act upon what is fair and just. For educational policy, there could be changes or additions to the new Alberta

Learning Program of Studies (Alberta Education, 2018) to further include diverse perspectives, specifically minoritized voices, in its principles and learner expectations.

Further, mental health and wellness could be infused in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary ways, such as extracurricular activities and family involvement. The girls argued that a one-day wellness symposium, although a good start, is not sufficient to destigmatize mental health and support those who struggle with mental health concerns. Therefore, a taboo topic such as mental health could be considered less taboo and more normalized if it were infused in the curriculum and at school in comprehensive and safe ways. In order to do so, administrators and teachers need to join in, through dialogue, to champion this important cause, with enthusiasm. In the girls' words, "mental health is just as important as physical health," but many in society still think people with mental health concerns are "crazy." Given that mental health issues are on the forefront of wellbeing, there is no better time than now to pay attention to the girls' voices regarding mental health.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This project was a deeply personal and social endeavour for myself and for the girls. As a practitioner and researcher, even though Young's (1990) notions of exploitation and powerlessness did not explicitly speak to the girls' experiences, I hope to see more studies including minoritized youths' voices in relation to gender, socioeconomic class, ability, and sexual orientation. These studies would further inform minoritized students' intersectionality experiences in high school. In turn, findings could have educational powerholders further appreciate students' funds of knowledge, so they could thrive at school and in life (Gonzalez et al., 2006). This research contributes to improving the quality of life of minoritized youth in negotiating the lived spaces of schools. It offers a glimpse into creating a sense of place and hope

for these students, who see the possibility in reflecting on themselves as empowering girls, and also in the possibility for the future of society.

Creating a space for minoritized youth in schools to voice their concerns and creativity may offer both youth and educational powerholders a vision for positive social change in order to trouble injustice and inequality. In this 21st century, where divisive politics and dangerous rhetoric further marginalize immigrant and refugee populations, bringing voice to the perspectives of these youth provides a powerful message of support not only to them, but to the larger community. Having an empowered voice can bring youth out of the shadows of the classroom walls and hallways so that they can be vibrant contributing members to the school community and society for generations to come.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Consent Form



**Focus Group Consent**

Dissertation Title:

**The Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Youth in a Leadership Program: A Photovoice**

Research Question:

*“How does participation in a [Official Club Name] impact immigrant and refugee youth?”*

*“How does participation in a [Official Club Name] impact the school and community?”*

| <b>Researcher</b>                          | <b>Doctoral Supervisor</b>                                        |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gina Ko                                    | Dr. Dianne Gereluk                                                |
| Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership | Professor, Associate Dean, Undergraduate<br>Programs in Education |
| Werklund School of Education               | Werklund School of Education                                      |
| University of Calgary                      | University of Calgary                                             |
| Phone: [telephone number]                  | Phone: [telephone number]                                         |
| Email: [email address]                     | Email: [email address]                                            |

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand your experience in the [Official Club Name] so that together we will share your stories using photovoice. Your participation will include being a

part of a photovoice project where you will use a mobile phone or other electronic device to take pictures of your experience in the Club. You will be given an opportunity to share your photographs with your peers who have also consented to participate. Near the end of the project, you will be invited to share your creations with educational powerholders (educational leaders, teachers, school counsellors, decision-makers, stakeholders, and policy-makers) so that they may keep your stories in mind when creating educational policies and/or practice.

The information you share will be used at conference presentations and for publication purposes, along with the existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the University of Calgary Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room. The final research paper will be publicly available.

A pseudonym will be used with all identifying information altered to ensure anonymity. Group discussions will be transcribed, the audio version erased, and stored in a password protected computer. This information then will be viewed by my doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee only.

**As a participant, you will take part in the following ways:**

- 1) To meet with the researcher to ensure you have an electronic device to take photographs and discuss the nature of the photographs.
- 2) You will be given two weeks to take the photographs.
- 3) A group discussion to last for 1.5 hours where you will share your creations with other group members.
- 4) The researcher will work with you to have the photographs displayed in a poster. You will be invited to present your poster in a finale event where powerholders are invited to hear of your stories.

- 5) A final focus group to debrief your experience in the finale.

**In participating in this study and providing consent, this means you:**

- 1) Are to provide consent on a voluntary basis and you will be provided adequate time to read over the information and pose any questions you may have.
- 2) May at any time during the research project, ask any questions or cease to answer specific questions during the group sharing process.
- 3) May discontinue with the study and withdraw your photos before June 30th, 2018, but due to the group nature of the focus groups, you will not be able to withdraw your focus group data after the sessions have begun.
- 4) Will be entitled to information that may be relevant in your decision to withdraw, this information will be provided in a timely manner.
- 5) Consent to the information collected, after the removal of identifying information, to be viewed by my doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee.

There are few identifiable risks associated with participating in this study. Personal stories about the migration experience or conversations about social justice may create some emotional or other adverse effects; therefore, a list of counselling resources will be provided if you need to talk to a professional counsellor. Below are a few examples of such services:

- Eastside Family Centre – walk-in counselling at no cost
- Calgary Counselling Centre
- Psychologists of Alberta Website will offer you other counselling services outside of the above ones. [http://psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/site/doctor\\_search\\_form](http://psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/site/doctor_search_form)

Although there is no financial compensation for your participation, your involvement in this study will help powerholders understand your experience in the [Official Club Name].

Another benefit is that you will be provided with the opportunity to learn more about yourself and your peers.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read this consent form and understand all the information outlined and I agree to participate in this study.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

*Ms. Gina Ko*

*Werklund School of Education, Educational Leadership*

*[telephone number]*

*[email address]*

*Supervisor: Dr. Dianne Gereluk*

*Werklund School of Education, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Programs in Education*

*[email address]*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form



**Interview Consent: Youth**

Dissertation Title:

**The Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Youth in a Leadership Program: A Photovoice**

Research Questions:

*“How does participation in a [Official Club Name] impact immigrant and refugee youth?”*

*“How does participation in a [Official Club Name] impact the school and community?”*

| <b>Researcher</b>                          | <b>Doctoral Supervisor</b>                                        |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gina Ko                                    | Dr. Dianne Gereluk                                                |
| Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership | Professor, Associate Dean, Undergraduate<br>Programs in Education |
| Werklund School of Education               | Werklund School of Education                                      |
| University of Calgary                      | University of Calgary                                             |
| Phone: [telephone number]                  | Phone: [telephone number]                                         |
| Email: [email address]                     | Email: [email address]                                            |

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand your experience in the [Official Club Name] so that together we will share your stories. Your participation will include taking part in an

interview that will last 45-60 minutes. The information you share will be used at conference presentations and for publication purposes, along with the existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the University of Calgary Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room. The final research paper will be publicly available.

A pseudonym will be used with all identifying information altered to ensure anonymity. This information then will be viewed by my doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee only.

**As a participant, you will take part in the following ways:**

- 1) To meet with the researcher for 45-60 minutes to participate in an interview.
- 2) Here are some sample interview questions:
  - a) What motivated you to be a part of the [Official Club Name]?
  - b) What are you learning about yourself and others from this experience?
  - c) What are you contributing to the school and community?
  - d) What does social justice issue mean to you?
  - e) What do you do in the club?
  - f) What are the activities/projects you sponsor?
  - g) How has this club connected you to other clubs?
  - h) How have the relationships you developed in this club impacted you?
  - i) How do you think you are making a difference?
  - j) What are the challenges you have faced?

**In participating in this study and providing consent, this means you:**

- 3) Are to provide consent on a voluntary basis and you will be provided adequate time to read over the information and pose any questions you may have. Your consent will be

provided without undue influence from peers, parents/guardians, or anyone else in a position to influence your decision including researchers.

- 4) May at any time during the research project, ask any questions or cease to answer specific questions.
- 5) Agree to be audio-recorded.
- 6) May discontinue with the study and withdraw your interview data by June 30th, 2018.
- 7) Will be entitled to information that may be relevant in your decision to withdraw (such as changes in study protocol); this information will be provided immediately through face-to-face interactions.
- 8) Consent to the information collected, after the removal of identifying information, to be viewed by my doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee.
- 9) Consent to the findings of the interview to be published (i.e., in journals, books) and presented at conferences.

There are few identifiable risks associated with participating in this study. Personal stories about the migration experience or conversations about social justice may create some emotional or other adverse effects; therefore, a list of counselling resources will be provided if you need to talk to a professional counsellor. Below are a few examples of such services:

- Eastside Family Centre – walk-in counselling at no cost
- Calgary Counselling Centre
- Psychologists of Alberta Website will offer you other counselling services outside of the above ones. [http://psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/site/doctor\\_search\\_form](http://psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/site/doctor_search_form)

Although there is no financial compensation for your participation, your involvement in this study will help powerholders understand your experience in the [Official Club Name].

Another benefit is that you will be provided with the opportunity to learn more about yourself and your peers.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read this consent form and understand all the information outlined and I agree to participate in this study.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions/Concerns**

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact: *Ms. Gina Ko*

*Werklund School of Education, Educational Leadership*

*[telephone number]*

*[email address]*

*Supervisor: Dr. Dianne Gereluk*

*Werklund School of Education, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Programs in Education*

*[email address]*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix C: Sample Focus Questions for Photographs

1. What motivated you to be a part of the [Official Club Name]?
2. What kept you in the program?
3. What are you learning about yourself and others from this experience?
4. What do you wish could be different about the club?
5. What does social justice issue mean to you?
6. What are the activities/projects you sponsor? \*
7. How has this club connected you to other clubs? \*
8. How have the relationships you developed in this club impacted you? \*
9. How do you think you are making a difference? \*
10. What are the challenges you have faced? \*

\* Participants added questions 6–10.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What do you **S**ee here?
2. What is really **H**appening?
3. How does it relate to **O**ur lives?
4. Why does this situation, concern, or strength **E**xist?
5. What can we **D**o about it?

#### Appendix D: Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

1. What motivated you to be a part of the [Official Club Name]?
2. What are you learning about yourself and others from this experience?
3. What are you contributing to the school and community?
4. What does social justice issue mean to you?
5. What do you do in the club?
6. What are the activities/projects you sponsor?
7. How has this club connected you to other clubs?
8. How have the relationships you developed in this club impacted you?
9. How do you think you are making a difference?
10. What are the challenges you have faced?

Note: I used the same questions as the photograph prompts to garner more in-depth stories.