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Challenging Neo-Colonialism and Essentialism: Incorporating Hybridity into New Conceptualizations of Settlement Service Delivery with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Immigrant Young People

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Abstract

The settlement services sector in Toronto, Canada has faced difficulties in responding to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) immigrant youth in ways that respect their specific experiences. One way agencies have taken up this challenge in Toronto has been to develop LGBTQ-specific settlement services. Housed within a diverse range of organisations, these services are intended to engage and support LGBTQ immigrant youth. In this article, we report on evaluation research conducted with LGBTQ immigrant young people from Griffin Centre's reachOUT Newcomer Network where we asked about their experiences accessing settlement services in Toronto. Our findings suggest that LGBTQ immigrant youth are deeply influenced by intersecting identities linked to racialization, sexuality, gender identity, education, employment, and immigration status. Participants expressed overwhelming interest in accessing support, but remain disconnected from settlement services. A reconceptualization of LGBTQ settlement services within a framework of hybridity that challenges essentialism and neo-colonialism would improve service delivery. This shift would allow for more integrated settlement services that acknowledge LGBTQ newcomer youth and their experiences of (un)belonging.

Keywords: Immigrant youth; service access; hybridity; intersectionality; LGBTQ

According to George (2002), services for newcomers can be based on either theoretical models or practice-based models. Theoretical models focus on the stages of adaptation that newcomers' experience, while practice-based models reflect what is structurally available in the service delivery system. Currently, two types of service providers exist: ethno-specific agencies and mainstream agencies. Ethno-specific agencies typically reflect the communities they are serving, while mainstream agencies share the dominant culture value system and may struggle to engage culturally diverse communities.

To resolve this issue, a third type of practice-based model known as the bridging or collaborative model (George, 2002) has emerged. In such instances, mainstream agencies learn from ethno-specific agencies as to how to provide culturally sensitive services to communities that were previously invisible, or formerly non-existent, but who now live in their catchment areas. In turn, ethno-specific agencies benefit from the resources of larger and more established mainstream agencies. Each of these models has limitations and often fail to acknowledge the inherent tensions, struggles, and contradictions of operating within the neo-colonialist and racist discourse of (un)belonging (Garvey, 2011) inherent in Canadian systems and institutions.

Upon arrival in Canada, newcomers encounter support systems that, at a systemic level, reflect the disparate power imbalances between those who are seen as "Canadian", deserving of and belonging to the nation-state, and those deemed "others", who are not included as a part of the Canadian nationalist discourse. Newcomers are often marked as "others" and continually struggle to garner legitimacy and entitlement from a standpoint of their own identity-making and subjective realities. In contradictory ways, the multiculturalism policy of Canada simultaneously creates belonging and (un)belonging by controlling and determining the terms, conditions, and possibilities for newcomers (Sakamoto, 2007). For example, Kraft (2012, p. 157) writes about how Muslim women in Canada represent this tension by "expos[ing] the Canadian state and its multicultural policy as promising belonging at the same time as being directly implicated in the impossibility of actually achieving it."

As a white settler society (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001), the historical imprint of Canada carries the legacy of domination and control of the unknowable "other". Because queer bodies of colour are understood by their cultural differences and are identified as having specific needs based on those attributes, the naming of race, class, gender, and sexual oppressions are often based on essentialist stereotypes. For instance, when agencies ask questions about categorical areas of differences as part of the intake and assessment process (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual identity) it is easy to make assumptions about these categories in stable, fixed, and homogenizing ways. These assumptions may unintentionally reproduce forms of heteronormativity and cisnormativity (Pyne, 2011) that do not accurately represent the lived experiences of the service user nor delve into the unique, systemic barriers that they encounter with institutional structures.

To examine the services provided to LGBTQ newcomers in Toronto is also to raise questions about the simultaneous practice of intersectionality and queer theory, which can only deepen our understanding of the shortcomings of the systemic practices and organization of settlement services. According to Fotopoulou (2012, p. 19), "intersectionality is the systemic study of the ways in which differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other

sociopolitical and cultural identities interrelate”, while “queer theory has sought to denaturalise categories of analysis and make normativity visible.” Fotopoulou further argues that scholars since the late 1970s have criticized the use of singular categories to identify race, gender, sexual, class, and/or ethnicity because of its ethnocentric and imperialistic assumptions.

A well-known example is Crenshaw’s (1989) comment that anti-racist policy discourse and feminist theory have failed to situate the specificity of Black women’s experiences in broader gender analysis. In fact, what has occurred is that Black women’s experiences tend to be constantly foregrounded, understood, and justified in relation to, and in the context of a white woman’s normative understanding of social relations. Crenshaw (1991) demands that Black women’s experiences be uniquely understood from a multidimensional model of intersectionality that does not erase the issue of “race” at the level of structural intersectionality, nor at the political and representational levels. In the former, Black women face unique structural barriers due to their race that are not experienced by white women. In the latter, Black women also experience unique political and situational responses that Crenshaw argues researchers cannot understand unless and until Black women are able to speak outside of the Canadian nationalist discourse.

Similarly, Habib (2008) argues that the lives of women of colour are often made to fit within the narratives of the multicultural state, which enforces particular policies and ideologies in regards to the communities to which people belong. For example, multiculturalism can be viewed as a form of universalism that unites and brings together various ethnicities into a Canadian nationalist discourse that simultaneously allows for specificity and universalism to operate together. However, the specificity of individual identities that require political and representational power can never be realized because of the hidden practices of re-colonization and assimilationist policies held at the level of structural intersectionality within the settlement services sector.

To address this critique we call for a new model of hybrid settlement services that will ultimately queer and trans the (un)belonging discourse of the Canadian nation state. By doing so, at a structural level, institutions and systems will begin to “accommodate multiple identities and [challenge] normative attitudes that rely on racism and other forms of violent categorization” (Garvey, 2011, p. 759). It is not enough simply to name race, class, gender, and sexual oppressions, because, unwittingly, service providers reproduce the dominant forms of oppression against newcomer youth who are viewed as “others” within mainstream institutions. As noted by Gandhi (as cited in Habib, 2012, p. 220),

... hybridity theory contests all claims to the stability of meaning and identity. It is characterized by ambivalent, transitory, culturally interconnected and borderline states of mind; reciprocal resentment and cooperation, rather than total opposition between the colonizer and colonized.

With newcomer LGBTQ youth, in particular, our desire is to find the non-performative and “positive potential of spaces of queer (un)belonging” (Garvey, 2011, p. 757). The complication, however, in searching for this diasporic space to create a new kind of identity-

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making formation is how do we ensure that the “spaces [that] undo belonging” do not lead also to the “destructive erasure of not-belonging” (Garvey, 2011, p. 757)?

Besides the issue of service providers’ unwittingly reproducing essentialized stereotypes about the “other” (Heller, 2009; Poon, 2011), one must also be careful to avoid re-creating dichotomous notions of belonging and community that oversimplify and reinforce a prescribed understanding and definition of what is deemed successful integration for LGBTQ newcomers in Toronto. This would reproduce the colonizing practices of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and homonormativity (El-Tayeb, 2012) within systems and institutional structures. As Garvey (2011) argues, “identity politics does not necessarily mean the reduction of multiple identities into a monolithic identity or narrow cultural nationalism” (p. 765), but rather identities “formed in relation, shared space, and overlapping paths not yet mapped” (p. 766).

In the next section, we shift from a discussion of the challenges of service provision to describe the context for this study, to “explore the complexities of multiple diasporas in a world city like Toronto and [examine] the possibilities for community among its inhabitants” (Garvey, 2011, p. 766). Interestingly, we find such possibilities in spaces created by AIDS service organizations and LGBTQ settlement services. We provide an overview of services for LGBTQ newcomers in Toronto and describe the ways that LGBTQ settlement services are structurally organised not as one particular type of agency, but rather a place of relationships that embodies both hybridity and intersectionality, offering the potential to create new forms of belonging for queer and trans newcomer youth.

Setting the Context: Services for LGBTQ Newcomers in Toronto

LGBTQ newcomers have limited access to LGBTQ-specific settlement services in Toronto. Most supports are located in the downtown core and are housed within LGBTQ and AIDS service organizations or offered as specialized programs within mid-sized to large mainstream settlement organizations. Historically underresourced, it is only recently that these organizations have received funding through provincial and federal governments, corporate donors, and foundations to provide targeted outreach and programming to LGBTQ newcomer communities. The term settlement services is used to describe a range of supports that are funded by provincial and federal governments including information and referral, orientation, initial needs assessment, solution-focused counselling, and bridging services.

Over the past decade, several projects for LGBTQ newcomers in Toronto have emerged. These include Express (a weekly drop-in group offered by Supporting Our Youth at Sherbourne Health Centre) and Among Friends (a partnership between The 519 Church Street Community Centre, Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre, and CultureLink, to train and support service providers to increase service access for LGBTQ newcomer communities). In addition, through innovative community-based research, the Youth Migration Project (e.g., O’Brien et al., 2004) and the Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment (e.g., Noh et al., 2012) have drawn attention to the links between HIV, immigration, and systemic oppression.

ReachOUT is a program for LGBTQ youth and adults located within Griffin Centre, a mainstream mental health agency located in north Toronto. In early 2007, based on

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conversations with reachOUT participants, the agency submitted a proposal to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to establish settlement services for LGBTQ newcomer youth. Successfully funded since January 2009, reachOUT Newcomer Network (RNN) supports LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13 and 24 who are government-assisted refugees or permanent residents.

During RNN's first year, the team included a mix of part-time and full-time staff, all of whom had lived experience as LGBTQ immigrants or refugees. Many of the staff were themselves young people. In addition to extensive outreach, RNN developed promotional materials that specifically targeted LGBTQ newcomer youth. These were translated into 10 different languages. It was hoped that this model of service would be a good fit for LGBTQ immigrant youth and would increase the appeal of the service.

Despite incorporating a combination of traditional and innovative approaches to outreach and service delivery, the program experienced initial failure to reach the target population. In order to address an imminent loss of funding, RNN consulted with partner agencies, community stakeholders, and academics concerning the best next steps. Given the dearth of existing literature on LGBTQ immigrant youth and their experiences accessing services, RNN developed an evaluation tool to seek direct feedback from LGBTQ newcomer youth in identifying optimal approaches to outreach and settlement service provision. The following section discusses the research design and profile of the participants who participated in the RNN evaluative study.

Method

In consultation with community stakeholders, the RNN research team developed a semi-structured interview guide. Demographic questions covered basic information related to immigration, employment, education, finances, and housing. Remaining questions addressed early settlement experiences, quality of life, formal and informal supports, and accessing and improving services for LGBTQ newcomers. The Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) of Memorial University approved the research study's protocols and consent forms.

Recruitment was conducted through conventional approaches including e-mail listservs, posters, announcements, and in-person recruitment at community agencies. In addition, the team successfully recruited LGBTQ youth participants through online communities and social media such as Craigslist and Facebook. Participants were given \$50 cash and transit tickets in compensation for their time. Interviews were conducted in accessible locations, with translation services made available.

Thirty-one interviews were conducted in person with LGBTQ immigrant youth. Twenty-seven participants met the eligibility criteria, and four participants were excluded either because they were over the age limit or because they were refugee claimants or Canadian citizens. Since we aimed to reach people who were eligible for CIC services, participation was limited to government-assisted refugees or permanent residents between the ages of 13 and 24. With consent, interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Themes were identified from the transcripts, and those, which reached saturation, were used for analysis.

Results

Participant Demographics

Evaluation participants ranged in age from 16 to 24, with an average age of 22. They typically immigrated to Canada through parental (59%) or spousal (13%) sponsorship from a range of geographic areas, particularly the Caribbean (37%), West Asia (19%), South Asia, and Southeast Asia (15%), and Central and South America (11%). Eighty-one percent were racialized, including young people who identified as Black Canadian, Black Caribbean, Indo Caribbean, Black African, South Asian, Latin American, or Middle Eastern. Participants had been in the country on average five years, from a minimum of one month to a maximum of fourteen years. Most participants spoke English as a first language (67%). Additional languages spoken were Spanish, Farsi, Croatian, Hindi, Konkani, Pashtu, Russian, Tagalog, and Urdu.

With respect to living arrangements, 33% lived with at least one parent or with extended family, 26% lived with friends or roommates, 19% lived alone, 11% lived with a partner, and 11% lived in shelters (see Table 1). Seventy-one percent of the young people interviewed were full-time students: of these, nine were attending university, five were in college, three were in high school, and two were learning English. Seven percent were working full-time, 22% were working part-time, 4% were self-employed, and 22% were looking for work. Financially, 48% supported themselves, 41% received support from their parents, 30% received support from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), 12% from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), or shelter support, and 7% received support from their partners. About half (48%) of the participants identified as men, and 41%, as women. Additional reported gender identities included two-spirit, transgender, and genderqueer. Regarding sexual identity, participants identified as gay (37%), bisexual (26%), lesbian (22%), queer (15%), pansexual (11%), and straight or heterosexual (4%), with 4% being “not sure yet”. Note that because participants could select more than one response, percentages do not total 100%. See Table 1 for a full list of these results.

Table 1
Demographic Information on Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Living Arrangements		
Lives with at least one parent or extended family	9	33
Lives with friend(s) or roommate(s)	7	26
Lives alone	5	19
Lives with partner	3	11
Lives in shelter	3	11
Work and Education		
LINC student	1	4
ESL student	1	4
High School student	3	11
College student	5	19
University student	9	33
Working part-time	6	22
Working full-time	2	7
Self-employed	1	4
Unemployed and looking for work	6	22
Sources of Income		
Myself	13	48
Parents	11	41
Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)	8	30
Ontario Works (public assistance/welfare)	4	15
Partner	2	7
Refugee Assistance Program (RAP)	1	4
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)	1	4
Shelter support	1	4
Gender Identity		
Man	13	48
Woman	11	41
Two-Spirit	3	11
Transgender	1	4
Genderqueer	1	4
Not sure yet	2	7
Sexual Identity		
Gay	10	37
Bisexual	7	26
Lesbian	6	22
Queer	4	15
Pansexual	3	11
Not sure yet	1	4
Straight or heterosexual	1	4

Note. Except for the data on living arrangements, frequency percentages do not add to 100% due to multiple responses

Key Findings

Four key themes were identified based on the analysis of interviews with 27 LGBTQ newcomer youth: 1) LGBTQ newcomer youth identified the need for additional support; 2) outreach and engagement strategies need improvement; 3) barriers to accessing service relate to complex identities as youth, newcomers, and sexual and gender minorities; and 4) changes to format, hours, location, and characteristics of service providers could improve settlement service delivery. Each theme is discussed below.

LGBTQ newcomer youth identified the need for additional support. In relation to basic needs, the youth we spoke with were interested in help with finding housing, accessing education, securing employment, and obtaining information about their legal rights. Almost all (96%) of the young people interviewed stated that they would like to receive services of some sort; this included supportive counselling (65%), drop-in groups (54%), workshops (50%), assistance applying for government programs, services and scholarships (50%), and referrals (46%).

In addition to these services, a number of young people we spoke with identified early experiences of feeling lonely and wanting to make new friends, as the following quotes indicate.

Respondent 1 (R1): ... I got kicked out when I was 17, so I was looking for friends, acceptance. I was struggling....

Interviewer (I): Were you looking for any particular sort of group of people...?

R1: I remember being lonely. Very lonely. But then eventually I, I guess I got used to it. [laughter]

I: How did the loneliness come about?

R1: ... Remember I told you that my parents were really strict and I wasn't allowed to go out, so then when they finally kicked me [out and I was] on the streets, I had no one to talk to. My family wanted nothing to do with me and I didn't have any friends.

Interviewer (I): When you had questions about adapting to life in Toronto, who did you ask?

Respondent 31 (R31): I guess the little group I was with. The internet. [laughter]

I: Okay. And any professors or guidance counsellors?

R31: No, I kind of just winged it. And yeah, it was kind of hard if I look back at it in retrospect.

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I: What was hard about it?

R31: It was isolating.

I: Yeah.

R31: Lonely.

While participants pursued several avenues to obtain support, many of the youth also identified a desire to navigate systems by themselves, and a feeling of isolation when first arriving in Toronto. It often took them a year or more to make friends. During this time, many LGBTQ youth were unaware of settlement services and often had no one to rely on but themselves to get their bearings.

Outreach and engagement strategies need improvement. Because Griffin Centre's approaches to reaching LGBTQ newcomer youth had been largely unsuccessful, we were curious to learn more about where and how our study participants sought support. When they had questions about adapting to life in Toronto, our respondents most often asked close friends (41%). Many (81%) also went online to look for information when needed, typically turning to Google (86%) and Facebook (23%). This tendency is reflected in the fact that 38% of the study participants were recruited through online strategies.

While the young people we spoke with were interested in accessing support, they reported difficulties connecting to services. The primary barrier was a lack of awareness of formal settlement services and not knowing where to find support. Part of this difficulty relates to the terminology used in outreach materials. For example, only half (52%) of our respondents had heard the term "settlement services". Of those who knew the term, 21% did not know what types of services were provided or equated settlement services with legal support.

The issue of terminology was also linked to language used to describe ethnicity, and sexual and gender identities. Some respondents were unfamiliar with terms such as "queer", "pansexual", or "people of colour". Others had not been exposed to broader conceptualizations of gender identity. A number of respondents challenged the labels themselves, explaining that they found the terms for ethnicity and sexuality limiting and that they did not like "boxes". For example, one participant explained that they typically used multiple terms to describe their sexuality, while another had difficulty choosing from a list of ethnicities where none seemed to be a good fit.

Barriers to accessing service relate to complex identities as youth, newcomers, and sexual and gender minorities. In addition to not knowing about relevant community supports, many youth also said they felt shy, scared, or embarrassed about accessing service and that they did not know where to turn. The quote below highlights this confusion about how to navigate the system and the ways that service access is tied up with poverty and economic factors.

Respondent 2: I found that there was no real support for you to fit into that community. So the school never told you, 'Okay, so there's a community centre where you live'. And I think that considering as a kid, that's where you spend most of your time.... On my own, I

ended up finding out about the community centre. In the beginning you don't even know that that stuff is free, right? You're thinking, everything [costs] money. So, I didn't even go in the beginning, and then once I started going, you don't even know if you're [allowed] to print [information for free] and there's money for that. So, slowly you learn on your own. There was a lot of gaps between services being available, but you know, awareness of the services wasn't that common.

Additional barriers to accessing supports include delays and waitlists, "feeling like a number", fears that the service would not be welcoming to youth, concerns about disclosing one's sexual identity, and difficulty finding a service provider with whom one could connect. Participants also mentioned specific challenges in accessing health care; several told us that they did not have a family doctor or that they were seeking a health care provider who was female or LGBTQ-positive. As noted below, these comments regarding health care providers echo some of the characteristics young people are seeking in service providers overall.

Changes to services offered could improve settlement services uptake. When asked how settlement services could be improved for LGBTQ young people, respondents identified changes in format, hours, location, and the characteristics of service providers. Participants highlighted the need for welcoming service environments, a central meeting spot or community centre for LGBTQ youth, and more services delivered in high schools and the shelter sector. Online services were strongly recommended. Less structured programming was also suggested, including drop-in formats rather than set appointment times. As explained in the quote below, a more centralized point of information would improve access and communication:

Interviewer: What would you say are the services that are missing for LGBTQ newcomer youth in Toronto?

Respondent 18: ... it's a little bit difficult, because there's not one particular centre that's just – that I know of – that's just for LGBT youth. But just finding out about these things is really difficult when you're coming from a space where you don't know very much. Because it all seems very scattered. And when you look at it and the five first things that you look at don't apply to you, it's very discouraging...

Participants were also asked to specifically identify the characteristics and qualities they seek in service providers. The top three factors were the ability to access service providers who were LGBTQ-identified (72%), service providers who were youth themselves (44%), and providers who spoke the same language (60%). Additional factors raised were that the worker be informative and helpful, accepting and non-judgemental, and female.

Interviewer: What kind of services do you feel are needed for LGBTQ newcomer youth?
 Respondent 29: I don't know if there's, like, counselling? Is there? I know there's group counselling, but I always want to find a counsellor who is, like, lesbian or bi, but I can never find any. You know what I mean? Or a psychiatrist? Even though they don't tell you that they are.

Discussion

Making the Connections between Research and Evaluation Findings

Existing literature suggests that LGBTQ newcomers experience particular barriers to accessing service including shame, a feeling of invisibility, fears about safety, and outright discrimination. For example, in their study with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) South Asians in Southern California, Choudhury et al. (2009, p. 247) found that, “even when LGBTIQ South Asian individuals have access to various health services, cultural norms that marginalize LGBTIQ identities deter many of them from using these services”. LGBTIQ South Asian youth perceived “more discrimination based on sexual orientation or ethnicity, nationality, or immigration status” compared with adult participants (Choudhury et al., 2009, p. 258).

Related findings from Chávez (2011), and O’Neill and Sproule (2011) highlight service gaps and the need for peer support. In a study of LGBTQ immigrants and refugees in Southern Arizona, Chávez (2011, p. 198) found that more than half of the respondents reported a lack of culturally competent health care, and “a desire for a larger culture of awareness, access, and welcome in all areas of service provision (e.g., health care, legal, housing, education, employment)”. Similarly, O’Neill and Sproule found that “LGB newcomers expressed the desire to be connected with peers for social support as well as practical information” (2011, p. 72).

The experience of feeling lonely or isolated from ethnoracial communities and/or LGBTQ communities is commonly reported in research with LGBTQ immigrants in both Canadian and American settings (e.g., Chávez, 2011; Choudhury et al., 2009; Planned Parenthood Toronto, 2005). Based on research with LGB newcomers in Canada, O’Neill (2010, p. 30) notes, “social workers need to be aware of the powerful combined effects of oppressions related to race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality”. Little data exists on what works for immigrant LGB youth (O’Neill, 2010). More importantly, the assumptions made about LGB youth often reinforce essentialist stereotypes that serve to retrench colonialist practices on their bodies. For example, immigrant LGBTQ young people may be unable to provide input into changing the way services are delivered from their worldviews and understanding because they are still continuously framed within a white and heteronormative perspective both at the individual and systemic level.

Impacts of Essentialism and Neo-Colonial Practices on Settlement Service Delivery

Our interviews with LGBTQ newcomer youth suggest that settling in Canada can be an isolating experience and significant internal resources and strategies of resilience are required to navigate the service delivery system. Historical and structural practices of neo-colonialism and essentialism, which impose false binaries on the identities of LGBTQ people, intersect with immigration and integration experiences to contribute to a challenging situation for queer and trans immigrant youth. For instance, the very services intended to support newcomer youth often reinforce a model of neo-liberalism and individualism. Clients are separated into isolated units in order to create an “efficiency-based” model of accountability that emphasizes measurable

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change and value for money (Clarke, 2012). Service delivery is focussed on the individual success of a client, as opposed to encouraging clients to be involved in civic and collective engagement that would promote their needs and rights (Clarke, 2012; Dei, 2012; Douglas & Casipullai, 2012). The settlement services system is organized and controlled by the state and, more specifically, by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) which monitors agencies via evaluation and other “efficiency” measures to ensure objective accountability to the money being spent. Hence, service providers are focussed on numbers in order to ensure sustainability of funding. Examples of this occurring are reflected in the experiences of participants who explained that they were suspicious of settlement services after early negative experiences, which made them feel that they were “only a number”.

A Reconceptualized Model of Settlement Services

The experiences of LGBTQ immigrant youth are deeply influenced by their intersecting identities, and to some extent by fluidity or uncertainty in terms of gender and sexuality. By incorporating a critique of essentialism (Poon, 2011) within an ecosystems model of settlement work (George, 2002), social workers may better understand the ways in which these young people are more than stereotypes of “queer”, “immigrant”, or “youth”, and help agencies to design and deliver services that better respond to LGBTQ immigrant young people in their communities. For example, the participants in this evaluation were very different from those we had anticipated reaching. In planning RNN, we had looked to existing literature and anecdotal information, which suggested that the most common home countries would be Afghanistan, China, Iran, Mexico, and the Philippines. Perhaps because early services tended to work with refugee claimants, people without status, or LGBTQ people who had immigrated to Canada with a same-sex partner, we now realize this was an incomplete picture of LGBTQ immigrant youth in Toronto. Contrary to the image of the immigrant who comes to Canada to escape homophobic or transphobic persecution elsewhere, many of the youth we spoke with became aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity only *after* arriving in Canada. Essentialist practices operate through settlement services by making the diverse experiences of LGBTQ newcomer youth unseen and unknown and, in particular, draw attention to the ways in which heteronormativity, whiteness, and professionalism coalesce to reproduce and reinforce current stereotypes about LGBTQ immigrants and the services developed to support them.

Services for LGBTQ immigrants tend to be offered within the LGBTQ services sector and the settlement sector, and these services typically operate within neo-colonial frameworks that embrace new managerialism. The emphasis of new managerialism is to focus on the numbers of participants that agencies can draw into their services in order to meet the outcome measures required from funders (Aronson & Smith, 2011). LGBTQ newcomer youth are more likely to be connected to services in the LGBTQ sector than the settlement sector. In order to truly respect the needs of LGBTQ newcomer youth, LGBTQ settlement services need to reconceptualize themselves as a hybrid of both LGBTQ services and settlement services, and to appreciate the potential to become whatever the LGBTQ newcomer youth want them to be.

Much learning can be derived from queer and trans diaspora communities. For example, rather than culturalize the differences between LGBTQ settlement services and those of mainstream agencies (Poon, 2011), service providers need to recognize the multiplicity of

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expressions that challenge “Anglo-American gay ontologies” (Tan, 2011, p. 867). For instance, Tan (2011) argues that the metaphor of the “closet” and the process of coming out publicly and being known by family and friends as “gay” suggests a “hetero-homo divide”. He argues that “this binary aligns heterosexuality with the public sphere, the masculine, the honorable, and a socially connected and fulfilling life, while relegating homosexuality to the diametric opposites: the private, the feminine, the shameful, and an isolated and miserable existence” (Tan 2011, p. 867). This binary divide inaccurately portrays the possibilities of the sexually non-conforming and advocates for “in-between spaces” as opposed to “in” and “out” dichotomies (Acosta, 2011, p. 885).

LGBTQ ethnocultural communities have drawn attention to the need to choose between being a part of LGBTQ communities *or* ethno-specific communities because of exclusionary practices and failure to embrace the specific needs of queer and trans diasporas within each of their own spaces. Coalition building that allows for commonality to build on the intersectionality of queer and trans identities may address the tensions found within mainstream (white) communities and ethnocultural communities. This is why advocacy campaigns, such as those under the banner of “No One is Illegal” (NOII is an international network of antiracist groups that protest the restriction of rights and access to services for undocumented immigrants or refugees at risk of deportation) focus on resisting “racist immigration and border policies” (see NOII, 2013) alongside critiques of international economic policies and settler colonialism. The NOII-Toronto website and activities create spaces for new ideas that are framed around social justice.

In addition, the concept of hybridity makes space for difference and contradiction. Establishing settlement supports within queer and trans diasporas opens up the potential to reorganize traditional ways of providing immigrant services. Whether offered within larger mainstream organizations, or in smaller ethno-specific agencies, programs could be developed and coordinated by people with lived experiences as queer and trans immigrants themselves. Such programs would create room for new dialogues of what it means to be LGBTQ-identified, how or whether to connect with mainstream LGBTQ communities, and what new spaces might look like that recognize systemic racism, neo-colonialism, and the day-to-day experiences of being an LGBTQ newcomer young person in Toronto. Furthermore, demanding more transparent program delivery service models acknowledges that state funding mechanisms have the potential to engage and transform the way programs (and people within them) operate.

In sum, the service delivery model of organizations needs to shift. One approach that would better reflect the lived experience of LGBTQ newcomer youth would be to emphasize both practical supports and community development. The service sector must move away from a neo-colonial model that emphasizes individual needs and success to an increased emphasis on community – and a space for (un)belonging (Garvey, 2011). This model of community differs from “the community of the neo-liberal project” (Burkett & McDonald, 2005).

LGBTQ newcomer youth in this study identified key strategies to improve settlement services. They would like additional supports to be put in place including supportive counselling, drop-in groups, workshops, assistance applying for government programs, services and scholarships, and referrals. LGBTQ newcomer youth would also appreciate improved outreach

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and engagement strategies that incorporate clear language and an awareness that terms such as “settlement services” may not be familiar or widely understood. The young people we spoke with described multiple barriers to accessing services, which must be addressed if we are to do a better job of reducing isolation and creating more opportunities for people to feel connected. Service providers could also improve settlement service delivery by considering changes in the ways services are offered including attention to different programming formats, service hours, locations, and team composition.

Addressing the needs of LGBTQ newcomer youth is about more than culture, it is about recognizing the unique experiences, knowledge and worldviews of queer and trans diasporas (Eng, 2003; Fotopoulou, 2012; Garvey, 2011). Furthermore, helping people to make friends and build community are not necessarily on the agenda of mainstream social service agencies, but are clearly important to newcomers. Agencies offering settlement supports that incorporate community development approaches may be able to more effectively respond to LGBTQ newcomer youth and to support the ways they are navigating their queer and trans diasporas as immigrant young people.

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