

Coping differences between generations of Italo-Canadians during a Crisis of Meaning

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Abstract

Immigrants from all over have made the choice of leaving behind familiar and perhaps difficult circumstances in their country of origin for promises of change, economic opportunity, and long-term stability in new and foreign places. However, immigration does not come without its changes to both the immigrant and their greater environment. In the case of Italian immigrants to Canada, immigrants were shaped by the Canadian cultural landscape and the Canadian context then went on to be shaped by these very same immigrants. Over time as Italian immigrants settled down and began to build their own families, subsequent generations found themselves navigating a dual culture. This qualitative study conducted interviews with 11 Italian-Canadian immigrants from three different generations to explore how they cope with a crisis of meaning and takes into account themes surrounding culture, coping and time. Culture was present in how participants cope and made meaning of their crises and religious coping was present for first generation and older individuals.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the Italian community in Ottawa, thank you for sharing your stories with me, it was an honour, and for your kind words of encouragement.

To my Nonno and late Nonna for teaching me what strength looks like and that as long as I have my meals planned out, everything else will be ok.

Lastly, to the Italians out there struggling. Firstly, I hope you can be inspired from the strength of our people. Secondly, for those that need to hear this, you are Italian enough.

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1 Culture

1.1 Italian Culture and Culture in general

According to Triandis (1995), culture is a shared system of beliefs, values, roles, attitudes, and norms for people who speak a certain language, are tied to a similar time period, and live in a similar region. Furthermore, Triandis (1995) argues that culture occurs from interactions between people and throughout kin, passed down from one generation to another. In this sense, culture is both static and dynamic; static because it encompasses a shared system of implicit and explicit 'rules' and dynamic because it is constantly changing through interactions, and across time.

Certain aspects of culture tend to organize themselves according to a main theme otherwise known as a cultural syndrome (Triandis, 1995). The most well-known cultural syndromes include the idea that autonomous individuals are the foundation of a culture, otherwise known as individualism, and the idea that groups are the foundation of a culture, otherwise known as collectivism. Well-known individualistic countries included places like the United States and Canada and collectivistic countries include places like Japan and Argentina. Numerous studies have looked at the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, including differences in trust radius (Van Hoorn, 2015), emotional expression (Vishkin et al., 2023), gratitude and emotional well-being (Shin et al., 2020), love and intimacy (Dion & Dion, 1993) and coping styles (Chun et al., 2006).

However, some authors have argued that a cultural dichotomy does little to explain shared values in both groups, ignores values that go beyond the in-group (e.g. social justice, human rights) and places too much on categorizing values in polar opposite dimensions (Oyserman et al., 2002; S. H. Schwartz, 1990). In any case, individualism and collectivism can serve as a useful perspective when examining different cultures, especially when it comes to cultural differences regarding immigration. In fact, due to mass migration or even individual personality differences, some people may feel, act and behave in collectivistic ways regardless of the collective societal culture and vice versa. These are known as allocentric and idiocentric individuals, respectively (Triandis,

1995). For example in an observational study conducted by Caldwell-Harris and Aycicegi (2006), researchers provided a variety of clinical and personality tests to a total of 227 university students and found that students in an individualistic city (Boston) with higher collectivistic responses and students in a collectivistic city (Isatanbul) with higher individualistic responses had worse mental health outcomes and was associated with psychiatric outcomes. Other studies have examined different patterns of adaptation related to collectivism and individualism, including associations with psychiatric disorders (Bhugra, 2005), lower adaptation rates even among individuals reporting low levels of perceived discrimination (Du et al., 2015), and findings that first-generation immigrants from collective to individual societies are less likely to experience lifelong major depression compared to second-generation immigrants (Tan, 2014). The literature suggests that migrating from one type of society to another may be associated with negative psychological and social adjustment and may become worse over time. Therefore, in the case of Italian migrants, challenges in adjustment may have arose in the migration and creation of diasporas around the world.

The word 'Italian' can often conjure a range of associations from Michelangelo in the Renaissance period (or the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, depending on the generation) to stereotypical images of loud and passionate women and men who are strict followers of authority and would do quite literally anything for their family. Like all stereotypes, there are some elements of truth, and much, much more complexity. This paper provides a rather brief overview of Italian culture, which may risk leaning towards generalizations. With that, it is safe to note that not everyone who carries an Italian culture acts in the same way and believes the same thing, and that there are definite exceptions to the overview provided.

In order to understand the complex modern-day version of Italian culture, it is important to note the distinction between the northern and southern regions of Italy. While Italy as a whole is considered an individualistic country with a score of 76 on the Hofstede (2023) scale, the southern part of Italy is characterized by a history of economic difficulty and therefore, more traditional and collectivistic family-oriented values (Caprara, 2011; Hofstede, 2023) as well as a deep care for food. This distinction is noteworthy because the majority of immigration from Italy arose from

its southern, poor regions, with smaller waves from central and northern regions to the rest of the world and these immigrants took their culture and values with them (Tomasi, 1972). Therefore, the paper will focus mainly on general characteristics and values from this region.

1.2 Italian culture in immigration diaspora

What becomes of culture when it has been uprooted and moved across continents? Do immigrants maintain the same cultural ties to their country of origin, or does culture adapt? For diaspora communities, culture can represent a snapshot of time, much like a photo, taken from the motherland at the time of departure, preserved and carried forward through nostalgia and memories. Diasporas can share, among many aspects, a collective memory of the homeland and a strong and enduring sense of ethnic identity, characterized by a shared cultural and religious heritage and a belief in shared destiny (McLoughlin, 2009). In this regard, there can be a strong oscillation between what was familiar and what is new. Hall (1992) describes this contrast as tradition and translation, where tradition reflects an effort to preserve a sense of continuity with an idealized past, translation implies a more deliberate acceptance of the uncertainties and opportunities that arise from cultural blending. For immigrants who migrated before the technological age, there may be an even greater connection to the past as means to carry forth the culture and oscillation between tradition and translation, as in the case for Italian migrants in the new world.

Returning to Triandis (1995)'s definition of culture, Italians living in Italy shared within their regions a language, a cultural context that held similar values and a strong belief in Catholicism, which they passed down along generations. However, once Italians migrated to other countries, they carried with them a connection to the motherland that would be stopped in time and shared through collective memories. A new historical origin would be created, along with a constant choice between keeping tradition and translating their experiences to the new world. Over time, a newly formed hyphenated culture arose that would encompass Italian and 'other' cultural elements. The 'other' elements, for example, would include American, Australian and Canadian attributes (Giordano et al., 2005; Marino, 2019; Sansalone, 2009).

Italians migrated in large numbers all over the world, with elements of 'Italianess' changing and adapting to the unique culture of the host country and other elements remaining rather familiar. In the United States, a country that saw the largest amount of Italian migrants overall, but especially before the First World War, absorbed migrants with a 'melting pot' mentality. Italians brought their cultural system and values such as strong family loyalty, adaptability and resilience (Giordano et al., 2005).

Some research points very generally to Italians assimilating to American culture in both identity and language (Alba, 1985; Levine, 2005). Due to the historical role of the family in Italian society as a source of refuge and a primary coping mechanism during difficult times, assimilation into a more individualistic culture led to challenges, including a clash between values of individualism and traditional family loyalty (Giordano et al., 2005). Among other struggles, Italian Americans would also face discrimination, particularly during and after the Second World War (Luconi, 2011). The issue of discrimination was also present in other countries such as Australia and Canada. In Australia, a country that received its largest influx of immigrations post Second World War and contained more of a 'multicultural' rather than melting pot model, Italian immigrants faced harsh discrimination (Collins, 1992; Marino, 2019). Despite this, Italians travelled in large numbers to urban cities and worked in unskilled or semiskilled sectors (Collins, 1992), paving the way forward to a better life. Such is a similar case in Canada.

1.3 Italian culture in Canada

Although Italian immigration to Canada started as early as the 19th century, there were two major waves where Canada experienced a large influx of Italian immigrants. The first wave was between 1900-1914 and the second, biggest wave from 1950-1970 (Sanzone, 2012). When Italians settled in neighbourhoods such as Corso Italia in Toronto and NDG in Montreal, they brought what they knew: their beliefs, values, and language.

For the first time, Italians from all over the Southern parts of Italy were having to share similar spaces. Sharing communities meant that Italians had to adapt to each other's distinct dialects,

something that they had never done in Italy. Following the second world war, many immigrants would have arrived to Canada speaking their own dialect and been introduced to English and or French, which would have resulted in some form of *Italiесе*. *Italiесе* is a mix of English or French and Italian dialect with elements of standard Italian (Iuele-Colilli, 2018). For example, the English word 'shower' as in to take a shower, in Italian is 'doccia' and in *Italiесе* is 'sciáuro'. Some have argued that *Italiесе* served a means of survival for Italians to understand both each other and Canadians (Iuele-Colilli, 2018), others have argued that Italian migration to Canada was much more complex, often involving other languages such as Spanish and Portuguese and that Italians were able to communicate without it (Vizmuller-Zocco, 2002). In both cases, *Italiесе* served as a symbol for how culture can adapt given the context.

Italians also brought their values which proved to have a reciprocal relationship of change. For example the value of hard work adapted and was adapted by many social and economic factors in Canada. Italians developed a distinct skill set in Italy that led them to take on physically demanding manual labor roles, including work in construction and factories (Sanzone, 2012) and aided in building modern-day Canadian infrastructure. Particularly in the early 1900s, a large amount of Italians labourers spent time working at the Canadian Pacific Railway site in Montreal, helping to build a part of what is now the main railway system in Canada (Ramirez, 1986). The nature of the job was short-lived due in part to very difficult conditions and fluctuations in labor market demands.

During the postwar migration boom of the 1950s and 1960s, Italian immigrants significantly influenced Toronto's labor and economic landscape. As Agnoletto (2014) describes in *The Italians Who Built Toronto*, Italian men were very much involved in the construction sector, establishing a distinct economic niche that, in turn, greatly contributed to the city's physical development. The transition from a country where food and employment were difficult to access to a land where there were many opportunities instilled a strong work ethic in the Italian community. As another example, in her article examining adaptation and identity among Italian-Canadians, Sansalone (2009) highlights the viewpoint of prominent professional Sonia Del Missier regarding the Italian

work ethic. Sansalone references Del Missier's article, which outlines a ten-point list detailing the lessons her Italian cultural background taught her about work ethic:

Be prompt for work.

Work hard and don't dilly-dally.

Have a sense of dedication for your job.

Family and commitment to family values are important.

Have fun.

Take time to have lunch.

Respect authority.

Do a good job ("una buona giobba") and take pride in your work no matter what you do and regardless of how unimportant you might think it is.

Get an education and be ambitious.

Hold on to your faith and religious beliefs.

As stated above, working hard and doing a good job are important aspects of Italian culture that further developed post migration.

Another important aspect of Italian life is family and women played an important role in keeping family together. Italians carried traditional patriarchal family values that relied on men as the breadwinners and representative in the greater community, and women as the weaker sex. Like in many cultures around the world, Italian women, both in Italy and Canada, were regarded with a watchful eye by their husbands to ensure that they maintained proper 'morals' (Iacovetta, 1987).

Italian women often joined their husbands who had secured jobs in Canada, and therefore had to become legal and social dependents. Women compensated for their situation and worked hard to care for their families and took on low-paying, low-skilled jobs to help make ends meet. However, Italian women were still closely tied to familial duties and household chores in Canada. In fact in an older study, Danziger (1974), Italian immigrant girls are given less autonomy than non-immigrant girls and Italian immigrant boys. They also experience an increase in demands for responsibility in household duties after living in Canada for more than 4 years. The author hypothesizes that

there is more pressure placed on girls to maintain the stability and dependability of the family, in a time of very high stress and instability, therefore the unmarried Italian girl became a symbol to be preserved and guarded in her new country (Danziger, 1974).

A Roman Catholic religion was brought over from Italy and served as a means of identity and as a sense of belonging in Canada. In terms of identity, it is difficult to untangle Italian cultural identity from its religious counterpart. Italian churches and Mass appeared in neighbourhoods all over Canada. For example, St Antony's Parish in Ottawa's Little Italy serves as a marker of 'Italianess' and as a neighbourhood center-point. Religion and church service, became a way for Italians to hang on to their roots and feel connected to their homeland (Sansalone, 2009). In terms of a sense of belonging, going to Church was an important way to socialize and meet members of the same community on a weekly basis in Canada.

As discussed above, culture is a dynamic and complex system, one that becomes even more intricate when transplanted into a new context. Italian immigrants brought with them a snapshot of Italian culture as it existed at the time of their departure, which inevitably evolved and adapted within the Canadian environment. Elements such as language, identity, and core values, particularly those related to family, work, and religion, were compelled to change. Moreover, Italian migrants contributed significantly to Canada's development, particularly through their labor in infrastructure. It is only natural that this cultural intermixture transformed further across generations. The following section presents a review of the literature on immigration and generational change.

2 Generations

2.1 Generations and immigration

The act of immigrating is a massive transition for both individuals and their families for generations onward. Family life cycles such as growing old, illness, and death that were lived in the country of origin, surrounded by extended family, can no longer be shared in the same way (McGoldrick et al., 2016). Furthermore, immigration is experienced differently for individuals who are in different

stages of the life cycle. For example, a teenager, keen on exploration and individuation, might experience immigration as more exciting than an older adult who is more secure in their way of life (McGoldrick et al., 2016). This means that once in the host country, migrants are no longer tied to their ancestral ways of being and now need to re-negotiate life cycle milestones in their own way. Subsequently, each generation afterwards faces new challenges, unique to their time and place and often involves issues of identity and acculturation. For example, there is a phenomenon known as the immigrant paradox that describes how first-generation immigrants have lower rates of mental health issues, substance use and better academic achievement than second-generation immigrants (Coll & Marks, 2012; Motti-Stefanidi & Coll, 2018). This raises important questions about how immigration continues to shape the experiences and well-being of later generations. Due to the intensive transition that immigration brings to families and their offspring, many differences may arise between the next generations, especially when it comes to cultural identity and coping.

The phenomenon of cultural change where members of a group are continuously adapting and adopting to the host culture is known as acculturation (Berry et al., 2006). Furthermore, biculturalism is when an individual has successfully integrated two different cultures within their identity (Berry et al., 2006). Many studies have looked at the effects of acculturation and biculturalism on subsequent generations (Buriel, 1993; S. J. Schwartz & Unger, 2010; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). Specifically, a study done by Buriel (1993) looking at three generations of school children of both Mexican and Euro American cultural descent found that connection to Mexican culture weakens from one generation to the next, where first generation children have the strongest cultural ties and third-generation Mexican American children show similar levels of identification with Mexican culture as Euro American children. However, the study also found that even though second generation Mexican American children experienced a decline in cultural identity, they still experienced stronger cultural ties than Euro Americans. Each generation therefore, faces its own challenges in terms of cultural identity when adapting to the effects of immigration.

As part of culture, some studies in North America, particularly in the United States, have looked at how immigrants maintain and adapt to language differences over time. A change in language

use may not be a choice for immigrants, but rather a necessary change to acquire opportunities in the host countries. As such, some research has shown an overall shift towards the English language in subsequent generations of immigrants (Alba et al., 2002; Rumbaut, 2004; Zhang, 2010). While there may be evidence that the linguistic preference is some form of biculturalism, maintaining a native language while acquiring English (Portes & Hao, 2002).

Other studies have explored differences in stress and coping between generations of immigrants. According to Wong et al. (2006)'s theoretical model, different generations may have different levels of acculturation and therefore, different preferred coping strategies and coping outcomes. This has been the outcome of a few studies that looked at coping strategies and acculturation levels of both first and second-generation immigrants (Kuo et al., 2006; Neill & Proeve, 2000; Zheng & Berry, 1991). In a three-generation study of over 1000 Canadian adolescent students, Tardif-Grenier et al. (2022) looked at coping strategies and psychological adjustment. Tardif-Grenier et al. (2022) found that adolescents across different immigration generations used a variety of coping strategies, and that the association between the strategies and psychological adjustment varied by generational status. In other words, coping strategies and their effectiveness varied according to generation. The authors also found that first and second-generation teenagers, when compared to third-generation, were more likely to use prayer and find comfort in their religious and spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, first-generation adolescents were the most likely to find positive meaning, find comfort in spiritual practices and practice acceptance. Therefore, generations not only differ in their ways of coping but also in the outcome of those strategies.

2.2 Generations in Italian culture

The literature on generations in Italian culture has reflected a nuanced view with promising and less promising implications. Various research has explored language use, particularly in the United States, and has shown a rapid decline in Italian and Italian dialects and a trend toward a shift to English as the dominant language (Carnevale, 2009). This decline has been shown to start from the second generation onward (Hall, 1992; Pagliai, 1995). Similar patterns have been reported

in Australia, albeit at a more intermediate rate (Clyne, 2005; Slaughter & Hajek, 2015). While a steep decline in the Italian language use can be seen as a consequence of assimilation and as a loss of identity, other authors have argued that future generations are maintaining a strong sense of culture in a society that no longer views 'Italianess' as shameful. For example, an Australian anthropological study conducted by Marino (2019) examined identity and sense of belonging in three generations of Italian immigrants. The study found that first and second-generation immigrants experienced a 'double absence' of identity where they felt neither Australian nor Italian. Whereas both generations experienced discrimination and shame in being Italian, the second generation immigrants experienced implicit and explicit messaging about not being 'Italian enough' from their parents' generation. On the contrary, third-generation Italians described their Italian heritage as 'cool' and appeared to have more of a choice in negotiating their cultural identity.

In another Australian study examining language competence, self-reported language use and attitudes in second and third generation Italo-Australian, the author found that while the youth showed greater comfort in understanding versus speaking Italian, they also carried highly positive attitudes towards the Italian language (even greater than English). The Italian language represented a connection to culture, ancestry and family, even though it carried no value in work and everyday life (Rubino, 2021).

In studies carried out in the United States (Alba, 1985; Alessandria et al., 2016; De Fina, 2014), some authors have argued that while there is a linguistic decline in the Italian language, it may not be as bleak as it seems. For example, being and speaking Italian is no longer a source of shame, but rather a source of pride, and there may be more of a desire to re-learn and maintain the Italian language (De Fina, 2014). In another study comparing second and fourth generation American Italian immigrants' ethnic identity, researchers found that while fourth generation's identity may be less complex and carry less cultural knowledge, it may be just as important. They also found that cultural identity tended to vary in salience depending on certain life events (Alessandria et al., 2016). The findings lend support to a more complex notion of cultural identity, and the notion that identity becomes a choice in subsequent generations (Alba, 1985). Interestingly, the more recent

literature on generations in Italian culture (Alessandria et al., 2016; De Fina, 2014; Marino, 2019; Rubino, 2021) has lent support to the idea that while Italian language use is seeing a decline, Italian immigrants are freer to express their cultural identity.

2.3 Generations in Italian immigration in Canada

The research on Italian immigrants in Canada carries a nostalgic factor that is based on the late 1990s to early 2000s, with some research that has been presented in the last few years. Overall, studies have explored issues of identity, language, and, more recently, the effects of immigration on religion.

In earlier research, some studies pointed to a sharp change by the second generation, which included a loss of the *Italiense* language and the experience of a new and modern Italian identity through the changing global age (Sanzone, 2012). Italian identity is depicted as a complex juggling act between two different, sometimes opposing 'public' and 'private' worlds. For example, in an ethnographic study that interviewed 4 Italian Canadian youth over the course of more than a year, the author found that participants negotiated their identities through language to access, reproduce and challenge the many identities they hold. The author argued that cultural identities are fluid and dynamic and that Italian-Canadians balance both identities and languages in their many different contexts (Giampapa, 2001).

Italian identity is also seen as a juggling act even within family interactions. Del Torto (2010) examined language brokering in Italian Canadian families and found that language maintenance and use changes over generations, and the act of interpreting is a shared resource that allows family members to claim 'Italianness'. Furthermore, although everyone participated to some extent in translation, second generation family members were more likely to translate between first and third generation. The act of language brokering discouraged third generation family members from using Italian in family interactions. Some authors have argued that while second generation immigrant identity is less with their Italian background than their parents, the meaning of being "Italian" is shaped by how individuals see themselves in relation to different social groups

(Cameron & Lalonde, 1994). As such, cultural identities and languages can become a negotiation based on a variety of contexts.

There have been few to no studies that have looked at other facets of Italian identity outside of language and culture. Recently however, a study done by Le Donne (2024) has looked at the effects of immigration on religion in three generations of Italian Canadians. The author conducted interviews with 8 of her own family members and found that over generations, an Italian and Catholic identity became synonymous. More specifically, the author explains that the eldest generation brought their Catholic faith as part of a non-negotiable factor of their identity, which was enforced in their own upbringing. They also perceived passing down a more 'Canadianized' version of Catholicism; however, interestingly, their children perceived a strict transmission of faith. Furthermore, the second generation had mixed religious affiliations, some actively remaining religious while others actively resented and rebelled against it. In this study, the third generation engaged with Catholicism as a way to maintain a connection to their heritage. The author argues that religion is contextual and that over time, even those who do not identify with their faith stay connected to a Catholic identity, through their Italian identity (Le Donne, 2024). This study offers an interesting perspective on the question of how diasporic culture can evolve over time.

The literature highlights that multiple cultural elements, such as identity, language, and approaches to stress management, undergo transformation across generations. The next section will explore theoretical frameworks related to coping with particular attention to how these processes interact with cultural influences and generational change.

3 Coping and Crisis

3.1 The notion of Crisis and Coping

"In times of crisis and coping both the possible and the impossible become visible"
(p.9; Pargament, 1997).

The word 'crisis' comes from the Greek word *Krisis*, which means to 'divorce or separate', but also to 'choose'. Historically, crises were viewed as crucial decision-making points and were generally seen as unexpected and undesirable. However, in the most worthwhile moments in life, there can be a delicate balance between risk and opportunity. Therefore, crises are also a form of paradox where both suffering and subsequent growth can be found. In more recent research, there has been some push-back against the idea that crises are static turning points. Instead, crises are being viewed as dynamic processes that develop over time and are counter-transformational, eliciting action from both individuals and greater institutions (Qi, 2025). According to (Pargament, 1997), 'crises are pivotal periods. They destabilize 'tried and true' methods for dealing with problems and call for new solutions' (p. 5). Viewed through a combination of the above perspectives, crises can represent a disruption of established meaning, initiating a dynamic process of re-evaluation and decision-making. This raises the question of what choices individuals are making in these moments. Part of the decision-making process involves what steps to take next. Whether that's turning to a support system, pushing through, turning to God or seeking out the familiar and the comfortable, these are all types of coping. Individuals may choose a variety of different ways to cope with crises.

As part of the theories of coping, Pargament (1997) argues that the most important factor of coping is the interaction between an individual's orienting system and how they cope. Pargament (1997) defines the orienting system as a framework that includes knowledge of the self and of the world (e.g. beliefs, values and relationships) that 'orients' how an individual thinks about and deals with life situations. The orienting system is comprised of resources, attributes that are generally helpful in a variety of situations, and burdens, attributes that are generally unhelpful in a variety of situations. Burdens and resources come in a variety of shapes and forms that generally hinder or aid the search for significance, respectively. Secondly, Pargament (1997) defines coping as "a search for significance in times of stress" (p. 90), where significance is what gives life meaning, value, and purpose. Merged together, coping is defined as a search for what gives life meaning, value and purpose in times of stress. According to Pargament (1997), coping is a very active

process, where individuals are constantly making proactive decisions and bringing their conscious awareness to situations, even if that decision is to remain passive. Therefore, the orienting system potentially shapes, advances or limits the coping process. When an individual faces a stressful situation and does not know what to do next, the orienting system is translated into specific coping strategies. As an example, someone may have a religious or spiritual dimension to their orienting system, and when encountering stress, may translate this R/S dimension as a way of coping. On the contrary, an atheist may not do the same because their orienting system does not contain a religious or spiritual dimension. Pargament (1997) further suggests that when individuals face a crisis, they choose between two mechanisms in their orienting system, conservation, and transformation in both the destination and pathway to significance. Conservation is the act of trying to hold onto what is already known and meaningful. Many individuals try to hold onto or protect significance in the face of stress. An example of this is the act of denial or avoidance. Transformation is the act of changing and redefining one's beliefs, goals, understanding and the very idea of meaning itself. Sometimes, stressful moments create a drastic change, where only the act of transformation can be used. Transformation and conservation can be applied to both the means (the pathways to significance) and the ends (the goals or destinations of coping). When both the means and ends are conserved, Pargament (1997) refers to this as preservation, the act of holding on to what is already known and meaningful. When both are transformed, this is called re-creation, which involves constructing an entirely new way of living. Between these two extremes are the processes of re-evaluation, changing the end goal while keeping the same means, and reconstruction, modifying the means while maintaining the same destination.

Pargament (1997) summarizes his assumptions on coping as the following: (1) people seek significance; (2) events are constructed in terms of their significance to people; (3) people bring an orienting system to the coping process; (4) people translate the orientation system into specific methods of coping; (5) people seek significance in coping through the mechanisms of conservation and transformation; (6) people cope in ways that are compelling to them; (7) coping is embedded in culture; (8) the keys to good coping lie in the outcomes and the process. In the

assumption that people cope in ways that are compelling to them, Pargament (1997) adds a tertiary appraisal to the two appraisal theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). He notes that individuals select coping methods that will bring the most gains and the least amount of loss in significance with the use of the fewest resources and least amount of burdens (Pargament, 1997). Basically, individuals choose the path that costs the least overall.

In the assumption that coping is embedded in culture, Pargament (1997) argues that culture is the foundation for the search for significance because it is woven into nearly all elements of society. Comprised in the notion of culture is the aspect of time and place. Furthermore, he notes that culture affects coping, but the reverse is also true; the ways in which people cope can also affect culture. (Pargament, 1997) argues that, with immense adaptations and changes over the centuries, where religion once played the dominant role of shaping perspectives and providing a worldview, the task of coping has become an individual one, with the decrease of a religious presence. Coping is where individuals use strategies that are both available and attractive while simultaneously rooted in context, culture and time. According to this theory, in order to understand how people cope, it is important to understand what makes up their unique orienting system and system of significance. While Pargament (1997) theory serves as an important foundation in helping to distinguish what choices individuals make in coping with a crisis and how they make those choices, it does not fully incorporate the importance of culture in this choice.

Advancing the idea that culture is not merely a contextual backdrop but a central component at every stage of the coping process is the Cultural Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Chun et al. (2006). The authors argue that culture is the most influential piece of the person-environment coping interaction and that much of the choice that individuals make in coping actually stems from cultural factors. In particular, Chun et al. (2006) argues that culture affects all of the following aspects, including: the environment, the personal, and the appraisal process.

As part of the theory, Chun et al. (2006) uses collectivism and individualism as a framework to explain cultural differences and their effects on the coping process. Firstly, in individualistic societies, events increase stress if they lead to dependency (e.g. taking care of a relative) or get in

the way of autonomy (Chun et al., 2006).

Secondly, even the way individuals are said to have a higher degree of internal locus of control and tend to demonstrate more approach-focused and behavioural strategies (Kawanishi, 1995). They therefore tend to view stress as more of a challenge (McCarty et al., 1999).

Lastly, as a consequence, individualistic cultures also tend to have increased loneliness and isolation, and fewer social resources. This would mean that individuals in an individualistic society may view threats to their autonomy as highly stressful, cope through a belief that they are able to exert control on the situation and take steps to rectify the situation. On the contrary, in collectivistic societies, firstly, events are deemed as stressful if they lead to a change in relationships (e.g. marriage) or interpersonal conflict (Chun et al., 2006). Secondly, individuals are said to have a greater external locus, attribute stress to bad luck and use more avoidant strategies (Kawanishi, 1995). They tend to view stress as more of a threat, rather than a challenge (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Tafarodi & Smith, 2001). Lastly, collectivistic cultures also experience a higher demand to remain in connection with others with fewer individuating resources (Pang, 1991). This would mean that these individuals may view relationship difficulties as highly stressful, cope with the belief that outside factors carry higher influence over their situation, and potentially be more accepting of their circumstances. Overall, understanding an individual's cultural context is essential to understanding their coping process. According to this theory, culture influences every level of coping, from the types of stressors individuals face to the resources available to them, and the ways they respond.

It is impossible to review literature without listing one of the most influential theories on coping, which includes the transactional theory of coping and stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). While it remains one of the first theories on coping, it will be further developed in order to understand differences in coping across the lifespan, across generations and in order to explore gender differences.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s theory also contains the idea of individual choice through a two-step process, primary and secondary appraisal. In the primary appraisal, an individual assesses the

nature of the stressor and decides whether it's harmful, threatening or challenging. If an event has been deemed stressful, then in the secondary appraisal, the individual evaluates the availability and effectiveness of their resources and chooses how to act (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the person-environment interaction, the person and how they judge and perceive an event to be stressful are the most important aspects of the model. This means that coping is a highly personalized process that depends on personality traits, past experiences, beliefs, values, and so on. Out of Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s transactional model arose certain categories of coping strategies, for example, problem-focused, which consists of directly solving the problem, and emotion-focused, which consists of regulating emotions. Carver et al. (1989) went on to add and elaborate these categories, adding what some may call a subsection of emotion-focused, avoidant or maladaptive focused coping, which includes ignoring or escaping stress.

Many studies have explored differences in coping strategies across the lifespan (Compas et al., 2017; A. B. Neubauer et al., 2019; Schirda et al., 2016; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2016). For example, young adults tend to use coping strategies such as planning and anticipating consequences and inhibitory control; however, they also tend to use more maladaptive coping behaviours such as smoking, drinking and drug use (Johnston et al., 2016). Older adults tend to use fewer maladaptive coping strategies and greater use of acceptance compared to young adults. Furthermore, compared to young adults, older adults tend to use more proactive coping mechanisms and experience less stress overall (Schirda et al., 2016). When comparing generations coping with the same stressor, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic, Grelle et al. (2023) found that younger generations tended to have worse mental health outcomes and utilize greater maladaptive coping strategies such as substance use and sleep aids. However, the question remains as to whether younger people have greater difficulties coping or if this is a matter of time and place. Due to the highly individualized and context-specific manner of coping, it is hard to decipher. Some studies (Cheng et al., 2014; Vinodh & Vimala, 2025) point to an overall change in coping over time that is unique to the adaptations of the current cultural climate. For example, a study comparing generational differences in coping with stress, attitudes towards mental health and personal growth, Vinodh and

Vimala (2025) found that psychological behaviours generally evolve over time. Generation X showed more problem-solving and practical ways of coping and tended to show greater capacity in stress management. Generation Z tended to use more mindfulness, expressive coping, and social support and tended to have greater vulnerability to stress (Vinodh & Vimala, 2025). In terms of gender differences, the results are mixed. Some studies suggest that women tend to use more coping strategies overall compared to men and tend to prefer emotion-focused coping (Graves et al., 2021; Tamres et al., 2002). Whereas men tend to use more problem-focused coping (Ptacek et al., 1994). Other studies have shown no differences between genders (Cheng et al., 2014).

The process of coping more broadly is shaped by individual differences and the specific context in which stress occurs and leads to different choices of what is, firstly, stressful, and secondly, what to do about it. Bringing together Pargament (1997), Chun et al. (2006), and Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s theories of coping, when faced with stress and particularly crises, individuals must make choices about how they perceive the stress and what to do with it, which is partially shaped by their orienting system. Culture permeates every step of this process and can either create choices or remove choices for individuals coping in the face of stress. This study will utilize the amalgamation of these theories when discussing coping with particular attention to Pargament (1997) and Chun et al. (2006)'s theories.

3.2 Coping and Spirituality

Religious and spiritual (R/S) coping is a relatively newer field that takes into account both psychology and religion. Religion can be defined as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 32; Pargament, 1997). Whereas spirituality can be defined as “a search for the sacred” (p.12; Pargament, 1997). Religion and spirituality are defined as active processes that can be translated into coping strategies. In Pargament (1997) theory of coping, he noted that individuals whose orienting system comprises R/S beliefs will be more likely to utilize R/S coping strategies because it is both available and compelling. Furthermore, the more religion and spirituality become integrated into the orienting system, the larger the role they play in coping; the opposite is also true

(Pargament, 1997).

When it comes to coping, three R/S approaches have been described: self-directing, self-deferring and collaborative (Klaassen et al., 2006). Self-directing is described as solely relying on the self as opposed to on God. Self-deferring involves solely relying on God and refusing to take responsibility for the coping process. Lastly, collaborative is the act of involving God, while also taking responsibility in coping. Some studies have found that collaborative religious coping is generally linked to greater self-esteem or greater sense of control, self-directing has shown similar albeit mixed results (Fabricatore et al., 2004) and self-deferring has shown a negative relationship to those same variables (Pargament, 2002).

A question that has been posed in the literature is When does R/S coping tend to work best? Two hypotheses have generally emerged, firstly that R/S coping works best under high stress situations, and arises out of a pre-established R/S orienting system and secondly, that R/S coping works best no matter the stress level (Klaassen et al., 2006). Support has been provided for both models (Fabricatore et al., 2004; Pargament, 1997; Siegel et al., 2001). Variations in the way people use R/S coping have also been explored, particularly between immigrant generations. In a study done by Woo et al. (2014), looking at coping differences and well-being among older and younger Korean immigrants, found that, among other results, older-adult Korean immigrants tended to show higher levels of R/S coping resources than younger immigrants. The authors hypothesized that R/S coping served as a form of social support for older adults. In another study done by E.-K. O. Lee and Chan (2009) comparing R/S coping in older Chinese immigrants, it was found that religion and spirituality are embedded in cultural values and beliefs and provide effective coping strategies. These studies (E.-K. O. Lee & Chan, 2009; Woo et al., 2014) lend some support to the idea that older adults tend to utilize R/S coping as part of their system of values and beliefs.

In terms of crises, religion and spirituality, and coping have been argued to work together and share overlapping characteristics (Pargament, 1997). While many individuals turn to religion for meaning, comfort, self-actualization, intimacy and spiritual fulfillment, there is a liminal quality that religion and spirituality share with coping with crises. At the core, humans have limitations;

we can only do so much in the face of intense stress. Religion and spirituality are, in a way, an acknowledgment of these human limitations and a humble turn towards the divine, the supernatural as entities far more powerful than ourselves. Pargament (1997) calls these boundary situations, where individuals are confronted with the unexplainable and irresolvable limits of our world, and the choice of R/S coping becomes very compelling. If crises are moments of choice and represent a breakdown of significance, then religion and spirituality offer a compelling and meaningful framework for coping with suffering. For those who are already religious, there is an existing awareness of human limitations, which makes religious or spiritual coping especially salient and accessible.

A few studies have explored religious and spiritual coping in the face of crises and reflect the above. In the face of illness, religion and spirituality have served as helpful coping mechanisms, including in the face of mental health issues (Yangarber-Hicks, 2004) and physical health issues such as cancer, AIDS, and dementia (Agli et al., 2015; Bailly et al., 2014; Pargament et al., 2006). Another found that religion played a role in meaningfulness during the pandemic for those who are religious (Seryczyńska et al., 2021). While others found that nature and outdoor activities were more utilized than religious activities in dealing with pandemic-related stress (Ahmadi, Cetrez, et al., 2022). However, not everyone will cope with crises using religion. In a study by Ahmadi, Khodayarifard, et al. (2022), the authors looked particularly at secular existential meaning-making coping in a population of Iranians who suffer from cancer. The authors used semi-structured interviews to explore the connection between coping with crisis, meaning and culture. The results pointed to two main themes of denying/ignoring, which include sub themes such as 'ignoring the illness' and 'distraction' and 'empowering', which included sub themes such as 'altruism', 'encounter with others', 'unity with nature', etc. The authors also identified that some of the themes found were particularly linked to Iranian culture, such as ignoring and unity with nature, among others (Ahmadi, Khodayarifard, et al., 2022).

A variety of theories on coping emphasize different aspects of the process. Nevertheless, coping is widely understood as a dynamic and individualized experience, allowing for significant variation across individuals. Additionally, spiritual and religious coping are also often shaped by

context and personal meaning. The following section will examine the concept of meaning and its relationship to coping and religion.

4 Meaning

4.1 The Notion of Meaning

According to Schnell (2025), meaning is a multidimensional construct that includes a subjective evaluation of life as meaningful, with specific purposes, and a dynamic interaction between the qualities of meaning and the sources of purpose. Furthermore, Schnell (2025) defines meaningfulness as the trust that life is worth living, grounded in four dimensions: coherence, significance, orientation, and belonging. Coherence refers to the experience of life as consistent and comprehensible; significance is the sense that one's actions matter; orientation involves having a sense of direction or purpose; and belonging reflects feeling connected to others and perceiving oneself as part of a larger whole. However, while the recipe of meaning may seem straightforward, it seems as though in the present day, creating a life of meaning has become an individual burden. According to Schnell (2025), our fast-paced, multicultural and increasingly individualistic society (particularly in the West) makes cultivating a life that contains impactful actions, a feeling of belonging, guided by a clear sense of direction, and marked by general coherence an increasingly difficult and, for many, an elusive task. Frankl (1985), the creator of Logotherapy, described that life is filled with suffering and suffering without meaning results in despair and depression. He also noted a pervasive boredom in modern-day society that is the result of existential emptiness, where individuals no longer know how to fill their free time due to a lack of existential meaning (Frankl, 1985). Therefore, meaning plays an important role in overall quality of life and has been associated with general positive psychological well-being (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) as well as with certain facets of well-being like self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and positive relations (García-Alandete, 2015). Meaning has also been shown to be related to resiliency, which in turn is related to mental health and well-being (Wong, 2011).

The literature on meaning demonstrates certain trends related to lifecycle stage, gender and age. Firstly, meaningfulness is at its lowest point at the age of 18-29, and shows an overall increase as individuals get older (Schnell & Becker, 2007; Schnell & Danbolt, 2023; Steger et al., 2006). Women tend to find sources of meaning that group towards the theme of communion, whereas men tend to lean more towards the theme of agency. A notable finding is that transgender individuals may have lower overall meaning in life and existential isolation than cisgender individuals (Horner et al., 2023), which may be due to discrimination, bias, and isolation. Meaningfulness also tends to increase with education level Schnell and Becker (2007). The authors hypothesized that individuals with lower education have higher stigma in a world that favours education and a harder time finding employment. On the higher end of the spectrum, gifted individuals may have a lower sense of meaningfulness, which may be due to feeling under-challenged, under-valued and under-promoted in life (Vötter & Schnell, 2019). Furthermore, some research has pointed to meaningfulness being hereditary, with twin studies showing a variability of 30-50% (Bjørndal et al., 2023; Steger et al., 2011). Lastly, certain lifecycle stages such as being married (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2016) and having children (Baumeister et al., 2016; Schnell et al., 2016) showed greater meaningfulness in life (for most people).

The capacity to generate meaning is not innate, but rather partly constructed through cultural and social processes. The idea that meaningfulness can be practiced through culture is not a new idea (Hall, 1992; Takano & Wong, 2004). In fact, Hall (1992) argues that meaning does not exist by inheritance, but is created through representations (i.e., how events are spoken about, and processed), and cultural identity provides all the necessary tools (i.e., language, practices, etc.) for individuals to create meaning in their lives. In diasporas, Hall (1992) argues that cultural identity is an active stance that is negotiated in the present and is shaped by context. In relation to meaning, diasporas are faced with having to re-negotiate meaning in a new context. Cultural identity then becomes an active way of both 'being' and 'becoming'. Bringing together the notion of culture and the notion of meaning, it would make sense that the connection to culture is a form of practiced meaningfulness, or meaning in action, serving as an ongoing life narrative, a sense of belonging

and collective values. For example, in a factor analysis study, Schnell (2009, 2011) participants identified 26 sources of meaning. Although not all factors are directly related to culture, many can be argued to have a cultural and social foundation. Listed below are quotes taken from participants of the study (Schnell, 2025) describing the essence of the sources of meaning, particularly self-knowledge, freedom, tradition, care and communion.

Self-knowledge is the idea of putting in the work to better understand the self:

“Self-knowledge means that you question yourself again and again, or think about who you are, what you want or where you want to go, and in doing so you simply keep developing yourself.”

Freedom is described as the ability to make one’s own choices and think outside of societal norms:

“As long as you don’t have the feeling that freedom is important, you let yourself be restricted quickly. Then one simply lives according to prescribed norms and is too uncritical in one’s life.”

Tradition refers to knowledge passed down across generations:

“Tradition is what your parents pass on to you, most people pass that on to their children, and that is also important to the children. Every person needs the basics of tradition. You have to remember them, otherwise you have no roots.”

Individualism is the idea of choosing actions based on one’s own influence:

“Individualism for me means going your own way and not being influenced by others. It also means an evaluation from outside, from others. But also to do things in one’s own way.”

Care describes being present for those we love:

“For me, caring is a self-evident duty. I think it is part of life to be there for one’s family and for one’s people.”

Lastly, communion refers to connection with others:

“To feel like you’re connected to someone. It might even go on hiatus for a while, but you simply know that you can always depend on someone, that you actually live in community with others.”

The sources of meaning listed above can be viewed as connected to culture in ways related to the passing down of one’s roots, values rooted in collectivism and individualism and more particularly, Italian values such as care and communion.

Meaning in life plays a crucial role in overall well-being, in making sense of suffering, and in fostering a fulfilling existence. Research suggests that meaning tends to increase with age and life stage, and varies across gender identities and levels of education. Additionally, adopting a meaning-centred perspective can be a way of coping with life’s especially difficult circumstances.

4.2 Crisis of meaning

Since the definition of crisis already implies a loss of significance, a crisis of meaning may be especially difficult to endure. Schnell (2009) describes a crisis of meaning as a period of time where life is perceived as pointless, frustratingly empty and lacking meaning. Conceptually, a crisis of meaning has been found to be distinct from the mere absence of meaningfulness through confirmatory factor analysis (Schnell, 2009). In other words, a crisis of meaning predicts a lack of meaningfulness, but a lack of meaningfulness does not mean that a crisis of meaning is present. This study will utilize Schnell (2009)’s definition of a crisis while keeping in mind its acute nature and difficulty to verbalize.

In terms of related symptoms, crises of meaning are often accompanied by anxiety and depression, while also presenting with reduced life satisfaction, resilience and self-regulatory process. Furthermore, as it appears to be a very intense and emotional process, a crisis of meaning can be hard for individuals to put into words. In this sense, it would appear that a crisis of meaning would be accompanied by a significant amount of suffering. According to a study exploring the crisis

of meaning and suicidality, the authors found that even when controlling for factors such as low self-esteem and loneliness, crises of meaning were as related to suicidal tendencies as depression. The link was even more important for adolescent boys than for adolescent girls.

Similarly to meaning, there are certain prevalence factors for crises of meaning. According to Schnell (2025), crises of meaning are more prevalent in young people, with the peak being between 18 and 29, and tend to decrease with age. The cause of these crises in this age range tends to lean toward life transitions. For middle-aged individuals, the reason tends to be major life events such as breakups and separations, as well as professional conflicts. In older age, crises of meaning tend to be triggered by illness and family conflict. The authors also point out that older individuals in nursing homes tend to have crises of meaning that are related to death, loneliness and a lack of purpose. Lastly, personal crises of meaning may be triggered by global crises such as climate change, war and the COVID-19 pandemic (Schnell, 2025).

Many studies have looked at coping and religious coping in the face of COVID-19. A Finnish study that examined distress, sources of meaning and crises of meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic found that although religion did not play a direct role in managing distress, it did serve as a buffer against crises of meaning related to COVID-19 distress, even in Finland's secular society (Ojalammi et al., 2024). Interestingly, the authors also found that nature was among the sources of meaning negatively related to distress.

4.3 Meaning and coping

Much like coping, the act of meaning-making can also be a matter of choice. In the face of life's suffering, Frankl (1985) notes how individuals can cope through finding meaning, which he argues is a foundational part of being human. According to Frankl (1985), there are three avenues to meaning. Firstly, creative values refer to acts of creation, work, or contribution. Secondly, experiential values include experiencing something or someone, such as falling in love, being in nature or witnessing beauty. Lastly, and most importantly, are attitudinal values which refer to the choice that is made in the face of uncontrollable suffering. Frankl (1985) particularly notes

that while we cannot change a situation, we can choose how we respond and what meaning we bestow it. This is the foundation of meaning-focused coping, which describes that when situations are deemed particularly uncontrollable or unchangeable, it may be more helpful to try to create meaning from the situation, rather than attempt to reduce distress or problem solve. In fact, (Park & Folkman, 1997) has created a third category of coping, known as meaning-focused coping. They argue that, in general, meaning can be referred to in two categories, situational meaning and global meaning. Global meaning is referred to as the most generalized form of meaning, which includes an individual's basic goals, beliefs and expectations. Situational meaning is the appraised meaning of a particular event that is then compared to one's global meaning. When differences exist between an individual's situational and global meaning, a sense of loss of control, predictability and understanding of the world occurs, which in turn, creates intense distress (Park, 2008). The greater the discrepancy, the greater the feeling of distress. Meaning-focused coping attempts to reduce the discrepancy by modifying the meaning of an event to fit the global meaning, by modifying global meaning to fit the event, or both. Meaning-focused coping has been shown to be an important factor in the psychological adjustment to stress (V. Lee et al., 2006), in well-being (Folkman & Greer, 2000) and post-traumatic growth (Waters & Strauss, 2016). Furthermore, general meaning in life can serve as a buffer between a stressor and distress, where individuals are better able to keep in mind goals and meaningful outlooks and better able to cope with stress (Schnell, 2025).

In the case of culture and immigration, there are few to no studies that have particularly explored meaning-focused coping across generations of immigrants. However, in a few recent studies, researchers have looked at coping with stigma through meaning and culture and its potential importance for immigrant communities. For example, Seff et al. (2024) used a mixed qualitative study to explore Arab adolescents' meaning-focused coping when facing stigma and discrimination in the United States. The authors found that through coping, cultural resources underlie meaning-making, that coping strategies are deeply rooted in social connections such as friends and family, and meaning acquired through coping, along with coping outcomes, strongly influence

future coping decisions. In another study, Kadianaki (2014) explored how immigrants to Greece make meaning of the stigma and discrimination they faced. The author found that individuals use the very same social representations, such as ideas about race, immigration, or belonging, that contribute to their stigmatization to interpret their experiences and construct personal meaning (Kadianaki, 2014).

In difficult and uncontrollable situations, individuals can choose to cope by trying to make meaning of their experiences. Culture, in turn, provides a framework through which meaning is generated.

4.4 Meaning and spirituality

Every religious tradition encourages members, through interactions between divine and seeker of meaning, to find a live a meaningful life. In the past, religion has served the purpose of answering life's existential and meaning-filled questions like why does evil exist and where do we go after death. In essence, religion, and later on, spirituality, are a source of meaning that was extremely salient and bound people together in a common narrative (Pargament, 1997). Now, what once held religious significance, is seen as of in more of a matter of fact perspective, and an individual one at that. Meaning making, without a religious or spiritual lens, is a personal responsibility that needs to be created. Does this mean that those without religion or spirituality experience less meaning? In a study done by Schnell (2011), they found that the atheist were those that had the least amount of meaning in life compared to religious individuals. However, the authors continued to untangle the categories of atheist and found that those who were not actively seeking out other sources of meaning, in other words, those who had rejected a theism and not replaced it with another outlook, had the most meaninglessness and the highest percentage of crisis of meaning. In fact, when it comes to meaning and R/S, many authors (Jastrzebski, 2024; Pargament, 1997; Schnell, 2025) have indicated, albeit with nuance, that religion and spirituality provides a meaningful framework in life. Schnell (2025) has argued that through an R/S perspective, meaning does not need to be created, it just exists. Religion and spirituality provide a sense of community, the belief that actions

are tied to a greater purpose, an ethical and conceptual guideline, and the integration of meaningful suffering (Schnell, 2025). Therefore, meaning, religion and spirituality can be closely intertwined.

The importance of religion and meaning in the context of immigration has also been explored. For example, meaning making can be an important factor for well-being and adjustment (Luz & Thomas, 2023), and religion can be a way to stay connected to culture (Le Donne, 2024). In a study done by Batuwanthudawa and Udayanga (2025), researchers found that in a population of Sri Lankan immigrants that migrated to Italy, religion served as a cultural bridge between host and origin country and improved subjective and objective well-being. They also noted that religious and spiritual practices were less utilized upon arrival to host country, but saw a resurgence during uncertain periods. However, what occurs to religious and spiritual beliefs over time and over generations? In another study done by Kasselstrand and Mahmoudi (2020), authors found that immigrants in Scandinavia tended to see a decline in religious affiliation over time and that second generation immigrants tended to be more secular than their parents. Other studies (Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022) have found similar findings of a context-dependent decline in religiosity across generations of immigrants, excluding being apart of a minority religion or moving to a highly religious country.

Searching for and making meaning out of difficult situations is a fundamental aspect of the human condition. When individuals lack meaning, as in the case of a crisis of meaning, coping can become extremely difficult and painful, as it challenges the very essence of what it means to be human. Coping through meaning involves making choices about what is truly meaningful and how to respond in the face of suffering. While religion and spirituality have traditionally served as key sources of meaning, this task is increasingly becoming an individual endeavor. This study will primarily draw on Schnell (2025)'s theory of meaning, as well as the concept of meaning as a matter of personal choice in the face of adversity.

5 Italian Immigrants Coping with a Crisis of Meaning

Italian immigrants may cope with a crisis of meaning in varied and complex ways, shaped by individual, cultural, and generational factors. In terms of culture and generational change, Italian immigrants have experienced significant shifts in identity, language, and values over time. Second- and third-generation individuals, in particular, have experienced distinct changes in what it means to be Italian, with a more divided sense of identity while striving for a socially accepted cultural identity.

There has also been a decline in the use of the Italian language, as younger generations increasingly adopt English while still attempting to maintain ties with their heritage. First-generation immigrants, having been the initial point of entry to Canada, often faced the need to directly adapt to Canadian values as a means of survival. As a result, each generation embodies a distinct, though still connected, identity of Italian culture in Canada. Generationally, each group experiences the impacts of immigration in its own unique way. First-generation immigrants experienced the most significant uprooting and adaptation to Canadian values, but may also have had the greatest potential for overall success. In contrast, second- and third-generation individuals may be more focused on questions of identity and belonging.

When it comes to coping, the literature suggests that each generation of Italian immigrants may approach it differently. If coping is understood as context-dependent and an individual choice, then the varying degrees of Italian identity across generations, and the historical and cultural periods in which individuals were raised, will shape their particular orienting systems. For example, a first-generation immigrant who spent their formative years in Italy may have a very different orienting system than a third-generation individual raised in Canada with Italian heritage. Previous studies also suggest that religion may be less salient for second- and third-generation individuals compared to the first, and therefore may no longer serve as a core component of the orienting system for these later generations.

This pattern holds true for meaning and crisis as well. Meaning and experiences of crisis are closely tied to age and life stage. Older individuals tend to report a greater sense of meaning

and fewer crises of meaning, while the opposite has often been observed among younger individuals. Furthermore, culture and meaning may be closely intertwined, as immigrants often draw on cultural identity as a way to cope with the uncontrollable effects of migration. Italians across generations may find meaning through their cultural roots, especially when experiencing stressors beyond their control.

Despite this, no research to date has specifically examined how different generations of Italian immigrants cope, let alone how they cope with a crisis of meaning. As noted in the section on culture and generations, scholarly work on Italian culture in Canada has declined since the early 2000s. Given that immigration is a life-changing experience with long-lasting effects, not only on the immigrant but also on their children and future generations, further research into its impact is needed. As the Italian-Canadian community ages and younger generations assume responsibility for carrying forward Italian identity, it becomes increasingly important to understand where this cultural identity originated, how it has evolved, and where it may be heading. Such research is not only necessary for understanding the Italian community in Canada but may also provide a guide for newer immigrant communities who have not yet experienced the long-term, generational impacts of migration.

As a result, this study aims to address the research gap surrounding culture and coping across time by exploring the following overarching question: How do three different generations of Italian-Canadian immigrants cope with a crisis of meaning? Additionally, the following guiding questions will inform the study:

1. How do different generations of Italian immigrants create meaning in present-day life?
2. How do cultural identity and cultural belongingness affect coping with crisis?
3. How does religion and spirituality aid, hinder or not affect the coping process?

6 Methodology

6.1 Recruitment

Snowball and purposive sampling were used to reach members with specific criteria in the community to best address the research aims (Thorne, 2016). Participants in the study were recruited based on the following inclusion criteria: must be an Italian immigrant to Canada, the child or the grandchild of an Italian immigrant, have experienced a crisis of meaning where for a period of time life lacked meaning, felt frustratingly empty and pointless (Schnell, 2009) and be between the ages of 21-85. Many participants asked for further clarification on the definition of a crisis of meaning, which may have affected the reliability of the results. The exclusion criteria for the study included having a cognitive impairment that affects the ability to communicate or actively recall information.

Recruitment for the study was done via Italian community centers in both Ottawa and Montreal and via posters placed at Saint Paul University. Members of Italian community centers such as the *National Congress of Italian Canadians*, *Casa Abruzzo*, and *Italian Embassy Ottawa* in Ottawa were contacted via email. Organizations such as the *Italian cultural institute* and the *Leonardo Da Vinci Center* in Montreal were contacted (see Appendix B). The members of the above organizations were asked to share the study's poster (see Appendix A). Furthermore, posters were placed at Saint Paul University with proper authorization from the faculty of communications, and the study was advertised in the Saint Paul University monthly newsletter. The principal investigator (PI) also shared the study's poster with their own social network (i.e. colleagues, friends and distant family). The PI shared information about the study with individuals who had access to Italian community members outside of the PI's own social circle, with the intention of avoiding dual relationships. Due to the specificity of the recruitment criteria, three participants were recruited from the PI's social network; however, they were chosen due to their proximity to the researcher. Snowball sampling was then used as participants shared the study with other individuals whom they thought would be interested. Three participants referred someone they thought would be inter-

ested in participating. Overall, participants from the second generation were the most responsive to recruitment, followed by first and third generations.

6.2 Participants

A total of 11 participants were recruited from three different generations. Three participants were recruited from the first generation, 4 from the second and 4 from the third. A total of 45% were male and 55% were female. All identified as Italian immigrants or descendants of Italian immigrants; however, three participants described being Italian on one side of the family. 75% had a university degree or above, and 36% were married. A total of eight participants completed the online questionnaires; however, the remaining three participants provided sufficiently rich interview data to compensate for the missing questionnaire responses. One participant completed the questionnaires via phone with the help of the PI. All interviews were conducted in English and were approximately 30-60 minutes long, and were conducted over a 6-month period.

The sample size standard for descriptive studies is reported to be between five and 30 participants (Thorne, 2016). However, according to Seidman (2006), two criteria, sufficiency and saturation, are often used to determine whether or not a study has 'enough' participants. Sufficiency addresses whether the sample includes enough representation, specifically, whether the participants' experiences are broad enough for a variety of individuals outside the study to relate to them. Saturation is the idea that no new information is being collected. Seidman (2006) suggests choosing, based on the range of recruitment sites and people, the number of participants researchers would like to recruit while keeping in mind the two criteria of sufficiency and saturation. The number of 11 participants was chosen to ensure the depth of the interview and to attribute an approximately equal number of participants to each generation. Furthermore, as the data collection progressed, the PI participated in reflective thematic analysis to determine if participant interviews were fully understood and no new interpretations were present. After the 11th participant, the researcher determined that no new data was being collected and recruitment was terminated.

6.3 Procedure

The study utilized a phenomenological approach in order to capture participants' lived experiences. According to Seidman (2006), there are four key themes in phenomenological interviewing: focusing on the lived experiences of participants and the meanings they derive from them; striving to understand these experiences from the participants' subjective perspectives; attempting to represent what "was" as closely as possible to what "is" in the present; and uncovering meaning through participants' narrative recounting of their stories. Furthermore, Seidman (2006) argues that the best way to translate participant experiences into a meaningful narrative is through a 3-interview structure that comprises life history, details of lived experience and reflection on meaning. Seidman (2006) also suggests leaving at least one week in between interviews to allow for reflection. Due to the varied themes in the study and for the sake of time, the PI chose to incorporate elements of Seidman (2006)'s model into one interview, which may have affected participants' ability to deeply reflect on the questions posed. However, questions were created with this limitation in mind and were designed to elicit storytelling from participants (see Appendix D) with the aim of cultivating the lived experience of participants in a culturally sensitive way.

Once participants demonstrated interest in participating, the PI confirmed the eligibility criteria of the study and an interview time was set. Participants were approached with the perspective of reciprocity (Seidman, 2006) and were given the ability to choose flexibly a date and time as well as an interview setting that worked best for them. The participants had the choice of interviewing in person, over the phone or via a video conferencing platform. The majority (n=9) of participants chose to interview via Microsoft Teams. One participant expressed their preference for Zoom. Two participants preferred to do the interview via phone call, due to discomfort with video software technology. Lastly, one participant chose to do the interview in person at a cafe of their choosing.

Participants were given a consent form to sign before participating, as well as asked to complete two brief questionnaires via Google Survey of approximately 10 minutes total. The PI informed participants of their right to withdraw consent at any moment, as well as the confidential and anonymous nature of the study. The study interviews were conducted in an open-ended manner with the

focus on understanding participant experiences surrounding Italian culture, crisis of meaning and meaning. All participants requested a copy of the results for their own interest. After completion of the interviews, the audio and video files were transferred to password-protected computers to ensure confidentiality. Transcription of all interview data was done through Microsoft Teams transcription software and was checked by the PI for accuracy.

6.4 Reflexivity

I am a third-generation Italian-Canadian who was born and raised in Montreal. My grandparents are from different places across Italy, namely Naples, Bari and Abruzzo. I grew up speaking Italian as my first language and spent almost all of my free time outside of school with my grandparents. My motivation for the study was to understand how Italian culture changes and evolves over time and the impact of immigration on subsequent generations. I also wanted to understand how Italian immigrants deal with difficulty and explore how this has changed, if at all, over generations. As an insider to the culture, I approached this research with curiosity and the intention of letting members of the Italian-Canadian community share their stories. I am aware that my background shapes all stages of the study, including how and where I recruit participants, the kinds of questions I pose, as well as how I interpret participants' stories. As an example of bias, I initially assumed that Ottawa would reflect a similar Italian-Canadian population structure as Montreal, where first-generation immigrants tend to be of grandparent age, second generation in middle age, and third-generation younger adults. However, what I encountered instead was an older population of Italian immigrants, with less clear generational distinctions and a higher level of education than anticipated. Managing subjectivity in this context meant letting go of these expectations and allowing participants to guide the data collection process. It also required adapting the data analysis to attend to both age and generational status, recognizing that life stage played a significant role in shaping participants' experiences and identities. In general, I took time to reflect on how my Italian identity interacted with each stage of the study, both positively and negatively.

6.5 Measures

Participants were sent two measures to complete at a time of their choosing: the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) (see Appendix E). The CRS is used to measure the importance of religion in participants' lives. The 15-item scale utilizes Likert-style questions ranging between 5 and 8 points and is based on 5 dimensions: intellectual, ideological, public practice, private practice and religious experience. Some examples of items on the CRS include 'How often do you take part in religious services?' and 'In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists?' The scales range between short (5-item) and long form (10 and 15-item) and were originally developed for monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) (Huber et al., 2012). The measure was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the participant's religiosity beyond the cultural implications of religion in Italian culture. The CRS has a Cronbach's alpha between 0.84 and 0.93, with higher internal consistencies for the long-form version (Huber & Huber, 2012).

The MLQ consists of 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Absolutely Untrue) to 7 (Absolutely True). It consists of two subscales, presence and search. An example of the search subscale includes 'I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful', and an example for the presence subscale includes 'I have discovered a satisfying life purpose'. The measure has also been proven to be both valid and reliable in an Italian context (Negri et al., 2020). The purpose of the measure was chosen to help answer the question of whether participants feel they have meaning in their lives and provide context for the first guiding question. The MLQ has Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.86 and 0.87 for the presence and search subscales, respectively (Steger et al., 2006).

A semi-structured interview style was chosen in order to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and offer a flexible and free-flowing thought structure that is able to be adapted to fit the moment (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews may elicit greater sharing regarding sensitive topics (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The questionnaire guide contained a demographic section where questions about occupation, gender, age, and

so on were asked. Two pilot studies were done in order to test the internal validity of the questions and ensure that the guiding questions were being addressed. After the pilot study was conducted, the PI modified certain questions, which were approved by the Saint Paul University ethics board. The modifications to the questions included reformulating questions to elicit storytelling on the part of the participant. The PI used feedback from the pilot interviews as well as an emic perspective to reflect on how questions can be better posed. Questions were also screened for complicated jargon or confusing grammar in order to avoid confusing participants. The study questions consisted of three different sections: Italian identity, crisis of meaning and meaning in order to gently guide participants to greater depth and reflection (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Each section contained a general question followed by more specific follow-up questions. The questions were organized in such a way that more difficult topics were addressed in the middle section, whereas the last section was meant to leave participants with a sense of hope. This was done in order to ensure that participants did not leave on a negative note.

6.6 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) by finding themes and patterns within the data. RTA was chosen for a number of reasons, namely, it is flexible and can be modified to fit the scope of the research, it can be relatively easy to learn and apply, it can highlight similarities and differences across the data, and it can offer a social and psychological interpretation of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, a theoretical deductive orientation was taken with a latent and constructionist lens (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the analysis was sensitive to patterns emerging from the data, it was also theoretically informed by models of religious and cultural coping (e.g., Pargament, Wong, etc), guiding the focus on meaning-making processes within participants' narratives. The orientation chosen also aligns with the socially constructed framework of latent themes, as the study discusses elements such as culture, meaning and coping and allows for a deeper meaning to be cultivated from participant stories. Other orientations, such as interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology, were considered in the analysis of the study's data

and would have been equally as effective (B. E. Neubauer et al., 2019). However, RTA was chosen for its ability to elicit themes across participants (and generations) rather than specifically understand the lived individual participants (B. E. Neubauer et al., 2019). RTA encourages the researcher to partake in reflexivity, the act of continuously reflecting on how a researcher's perspective both enables and limits their interpretation of the data. As such, RTA acknowledges the qualitative researcher's bias as being an asset while also reminding the researcher to be critical of their own perspective. As a cultural insider within the Italian-Canadian community, the PI's understanding of the social, linguistic, and religious dimensions embedded in participants' narratives shaped the interpretation of themes. In keeping with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the PI approached her subjectivity not as a bias to be eliminated, but as a resource in guiding meaning-making. Throughout the data analysis, the PI participated in reflexivity, often reflecting on and writing about how her own experiences could affect the interpretation of the data.

The study followed RTA's six phases in data analysis: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase one consisted of immersion in the data through repeated readings of transcripts. Phase one also consisted of reviewing the transcripts and recordings to be certain that they were accurate. In phase 2, the PI systematically produced initial codes from the data set. In some cases, multiple codes were placed on a single section. Phase two also involves what is most meaningful in participant responses from implicit and explicit sayings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Phase three involves sorting through and combining different codes to create potential themes. Themes are formed from the combination of the research question, the researcher's knowledge of the topic and the interactions between the search and the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Phase four involves refining themes. The refinement occurs on two levels: assuring that all collated themes form a pattern and that the themes form a coherent and meaningful representation of the data. Phase five involves defining and redefining theme names to ensure that they tell a story. Lastly, phase 6 involves creating a narrative that tells the story of the data set.

Both measures, the MLQ and CRS, were reviewed and scored by the PI. The results were

further used to compare inter-generational differences and provide greater context when analyzing participants' stories.

7 Results and Discussion

This study aimed to understand how different generations of Italian immigrants coped with a crisis of meaning. The guiding questions of the study included: 1. how do different generations create meaning in present day life, 2. how do cultural identity and belongingness affect coping with the crisis and 3. how does religion and/or spirituality aid, hinder or not affect the coping process. As mentioned in the reflexivity section, participants tended to be older than expected and therefore themes were analyzed based on generational difference, but also according to differences in age and life stage. Participant demographics are described in Table 1 and results of the MLQ and CRS are presented in table 2. The reflexive thematic analysis revealed 5 themes with a total of 13 subthemes which are present in table 3.

Table 1 describes participant's demographic information including their generation.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Generation	Age	Gender	Educational Status	Employmentn status	Marital Status
Nico	1	65+	M	Master's degree	Employed	Married
Aldo	1	65+	M	College degree	Retired	Married
Stephano	1	65+	M	Master's degree	Retired	Single
Karina	2	65+	F	Bachelor's degree	Retired	Widow
Elena	2	55-64	F	College degree	Employed	Separated
Bianca	2	35-44	F	College degree	Employed	Separated
Giulia	2	25-34	F	Bachelor's	Student	Single
Laura	3	65+	F	Bachelor's	Retired	Married
Marco	3	55-64	M	Master's degree	Employed	Divorced
Antonio	3	25-34	M	Bachelor's degree	Employed	Married
Alessandra	3	25-34	F	Master's degree	Employed	Single

Regarding certain demographic information, approximately 55% of participants are female, and 46% of participants were 65 or older at the time of the study. Furthermore, 36% of participants hold a master's level education and were married at the time of the study.

Table 2 describes participant's generation as well as the results of both questionnaires provided.

Table 2: Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) and Centrality of Religious Scale (CRS) Results

Pseudonym	Generation	MLQ (Search and Purpose subscale)	CRS (Total and Mean)
Nico	1	N/A	N/A
Aldo	1	P: 20, S :10	T: 16, M: 1.07
Stephano	1	P: 25, S: 30	T: 62.14, M: 4.14
Karina	2	P: 15, S: 15	T: 34.89, M: 2.33
Elena	2	N/A	N/A
Bianca	2	N/A	N/A
Giulia	2	P: 23, S: 35	T: 30.21, M: 2.02
Laura	3	P: 29, S: 19	T: 57.77, M: 4.14
Marco	3	P: 25, S: 30	T: 63.29, M: 4.22
Antonio	3	P: 35, S: 13	T: 48.11, M: 3.2
Alessandra	3	P: 24, S: 34	T: 29.46, M: 1.96

Results of the questionnaires were presented as either subscales or according to total and mean scores. For the MLQ, the results were divided into the subscales of search and purpose, with purpose being how full of meaning one's life is and search being how engaged one is in finding or deepening the understanding of meaning in life. For the MLQ, clear age-related or generational patterns are hard to distinguish. For the CRS, results are divided into total and mean values with a higher value in both indicating a higher level of religiosity. With some exceptions, older participants tended to score higher on the CRS.

Table 3: Themes and Subthemes from Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Theme	Subthemes
Navigating Identities: From Immigration Struggles to Belonging	- Childhood immigration and Crisis of Identity - Juggling Multiple Identities - Canada as a Blank Slate
Keeping Culture Alive: Efforts to Maintain Italian Identity	- Back Then, things were different

Theme	Subthemes
Family First, Always: Being Italian Through Kin Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowing Where I Come From - What did the family before me do? - Italian women: Staying strong, marriage and children - Intergenerational Trauma and Internment
Connecting Through Others: The Role of Relationships in Coping, Meaning-making and Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connecting to People like me - Connecting to People Different than me
Translating religion into the orienting system: a generational divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious coping during times of crisis - Religion as Cultural Identity - Spirituality Beyond Tradition

8 Navigating Identities: From Immigration Struggles to Belonging

Approximately seven participants spoke about their experiences juggling two or more identities. All first generation immigrants spoke about what it was like to immigrate to a new country and the confusion that it created in their identities and lives. Second and third generation immigrants spoke about how they navigated growing up with dual or more identities. Regardless of generation, participants spoke about how Canada's cultural neutrality provided them the power to choose who they are. There are 3 subthemes present in this section: Childhood immigration and crisis of identity, Juggling Multiple Identities and Canada as a blank slate.

8.1 Childhood immigration and crisis of identity

All three first-generation participants spoke about what it was like immigrating and or adjusting to a Canadian context. Two participants experienced a crisis of identity as a result of immigration.

Nico explained feeling alienated when he first moved to Canada at the age of 10. Missing his life in Italy, and facing discrimination when he first arrived, Nico explains what it was like for him to move to Canada and how that resulted in a crisis of meaning.

I couldn't really relate. I mean, I didn't know what a French fry was ((laughs)) You know, and- and I missed that smell, that taste of my own food from back home, even though we were having it at home it wasn't quite the same as when you pull it out of that- that stone oven at home. Umm and then of course when at the same time when you're- I don't want to use the words that were used, but basically you know, I think you know what the word I hope no need to repeat it in your -in your story but 'You're without papers. You're a wop. You go back home'. En Francais 'c'est mondi wop, retourne chez toi'.

[...] you know, language issues and and really at a time when- when in Quebec there was a strength, strong sense of separation and not very kind to immigrants that didn't speak the language. Umm I felt a bit lost, but you know, how do you-how do you actually explain that now as we're- we're mature adults. And obviously I wasn't quite grasping it that way, but-were there times when I got home and crying? Of course I did. Because I was confused.

Nico faced a clear struggle between missing the comfort and familiarity of home and living in a place that rejected him as an immigrant. This would be difficult for anyone, but it was particularly challenging for a child who could not fully understand what was happening. He explained that this intense confusion caused him significant distress. As a way of coping, Nico kept close to the values of his parents and was advised not to be ashamed of where he comes from, transforming his identity into a source of strength.

Stephano, who immigrated at the age of approximately 6 years old, explains how being an immigrant affected him when he moved away from home to university. It was during this time that he experienced an identity crisis.

And when I entered university I I was, you know, pretty much disorientated, because I- I felt like I was entering into an alien environment. It wasn't not like home life, you know, a lot of the kids there already came from highly educated backgrounds and even their social life and their academic life was alien to me, so I wen-I felt lost and disorientated.

That were raised differently than than I was that had a different set of values. Umm or or even school and academia you're just walking into a different environment. And so it has been a constant challenge for me to hold on too core values for myself. And then you know, going to work or school and- and-and being challenged by different values and ways of growing up

Stephano describes feeling out of place and lost, both because of the way he was raised and where he came from. In another part of the interview, he explained that his mother grew up on a farm and his father was a handyman, "salt of the earth people" with a caring way of being. Raised with values not always reflected in the dominant Canadian culture, he found it difficult to maintain the part of his identity rooted in his upbringing, which contributed to a sense of alienation.

Another participant, Aldo, spoke about what it was like for him at the age of eight or nine years old to move to Canada.

I learned how to speak English by playing with kids that I met that make friends with but not-not so much at school because, like I said at school the first year, they basically just put me aside and said here just write down what's in the book. Copy. And I was writing down what was in the book copying it, but I had no idea what I was doing or what it was-what was written there.

While Aldo doesn't directly speak about the effects this might have had, he indirectly describes a sense of alienation and confusion that arose when he went to school for the first time in Canada. He had to move once again shortly after, when his aunt and uncle, with whom he was living, both passed away in a short period of time. He stated, "it was starting over again, moving to a new place, knowing nobody". As a result, Aldo had to learn to adapt to major changes at a young age.

Each participant expressed facing many difficulties related to immigration. While all three noted trying to hang on to what they knew in the face of change, in some cases, this proved more especially challenging in a new host country.

8.2 Juggling multiple identities

Participants explained how they manage dual and sometimes multiple identities in their everyday life. This subtheme is divided by generation.

First generation participants spoke about how they either came to terms with their hyphenated identity or struggled to do so.

Nico, described how he came to accept being Canadian and how that helped him cope.

And that's when I realized that while I remain truth- true and uh very emotionally connected to my roots, I was also realizing that I was becoming more and more Canadian, and I think that's how you avoid that alienation, that sense of crisis that many of us have experienced. And if you don't, if you continuously focus on that, you'll be in crisis for a long time.

Instead of focusing on what was lost, Nico chose to reconstruct his cultural identity to encompass the Canadian aspect. In other words, accept that he was becoming Canadian. It seems as though coping in this way was an important part of moving forward in the face of an uncontrollable and deeply rooted crisis of identity.

Stephano struggled to reconcile his Italian and Canadian identities. He further noted that 'trying to find a way how to integrate that with- in Canadian society and Canadian environment [...] it's

it's kind of an ongoing process" demonstrating that a crisis of identity can require lifelong coping.

But it's still sometimes a bit of a struggle because it's always- even saying my name out loud to someone at the other end of the counter, and you know it, it sounds foreign and it sounds ethnic

This quote demonstrates an ongoing sense of shame and alienation regarding his ethnic identity. Depending on how it's perceived, a name can be a clear marker of difference in a dominant culture. In Stephano's case, his name is a contrast between 'fitting in' and his cultural heritage.

In comparison, second and third generation participants spoke very differently about their culture. Elena explained that she grew up very proud of being Italian.

I think I'm more Italian than Canadian, to be honest with you. Canadian umm It was more of- see I didn't know we were Canadian until I went to school ((laughs)) Isn't that funny? Yeah, until we went to school because it was 2 languages in the house and broken English, right? [...] But I was Italian and so yeah, so I feel more even today- I've been to Italy three times

Although second-generation participants navigated hyphenated identities, they often spoke with greater certainty about their Italian identity. For example, Elena grew up deeply immersed in her culture and recalled that she was not even aware of being Canadian until she began attending school.

Lastly, Antonio, a third generation participant, explained how he switches between identities depending on the context.

Well, growing up, I would because I was so-such a sports kid like I loved hockey and I love soccer. I always felt that whenever I was playing or watching soccer, I was like my Italian hat on or whatever I was playing or watching hockey that was like my Canadian hat on. I always thought to myself, you know, either Italian in one sitting or Canadian in another setting. So it kind of depended the context of the situation uh because you can be surrounded by different people in those environments

For later generations, cultural identity appears to function more as a context-specific choice. In contrast, for first- and even second-generation immigrants, the choice often lay in how to navigate and cope with a dual identity. Antonio's experience illustrates that, over time, it becomes possible to choose which cultural "hat" to wear, depending on the situation.

8.3 Canada as a Blank Slate

Three participants described how Canada served as a cultural blank slate that allowed them to have more flexibility in choosing their identity. Antonio and Giulia both described how coming from a multicultural country allows them the privilege to choose who they are. However, they both connected differently to their Canadian identity. Antonio described the following:

in a way, I'm more Canadian than anything else, even though I have these traditions in this family and those backgrounds because of where I live and where I grew up and what my flag is

Whereas Giulia noted that "I don't think I strongly identify as a Canadian like culturally, but I know that I know that I am, but I -I- I enjoy the freedom, like to connect outside of that also".

Both participants grew up in Canada, so it is interesting to note the differences between generations. Giulia knows that she is Canadian, but doesn't identify with it culturally. Antonio, on the other hand, describes that his Canadian identity supersedes that of his Italian one because of the land he grew up in.

In regard to the power of choice, Bianca, who is also second generation, expressed the following: "so I think we live in a space that allows us to be who we are, but yet that hyphen kind of messes with you a bit". While having the freedom of choice can be a privilege, as shown above, Bianca notes that the very notion of choice can also lead to difficulties.

8.4 Analysis of Navigating Identities

This section connects directly and indirectly to the guiding question of how belonging influences coping with crisis.

In the subtheme of immigration and identity crises, first-generation participants experienced intense stress during the immigration and acculturation process. They had to negotiate the values and teachings passed down from their parents within a society that was markedly different, creating intense confusion around who they are. This supports Giampapa (2001) study, which found that Italian identity involves a complex juggling act between private life (e.g., upbringing) and public life, requiring ongoing negotiation. One possible explanation for the difficulty in this negotiation lies in the cultural differences between Italy's collectivistic culture and Canada's individualistic one.

Examining Nico's and Stephano's narratives illustrates two contrasting acculturation paths: Nico showed acceptance of both Italian identity and cultural change, while Stephano struggled to do so, leaning more toward preservation of his original identity. These different levels of acculturation were associated with different coping strategies and outcomes. While Wong et al. (2006) notes that such differences often occur across generations, this study suggests they may also emerge within the same generation.

Looking further at intergenerational and age differences, second-generation immigrants tended to identify less with a Canadian identity and expressed more certainty about their Italian one. However, because the age gaps between participants from different generations were relatively small, these differences appeared more subtle.

Finally, third-generation and younger participants described their Italian identity as more fluid, supporting Giampapa (2001)'s observation that cultural identities are dynamic and adaptable. This generation also expressed a greater sense of personal choice in defining who they were.

The idea that immigrant cultures change and adapt in response to their host society is also shown here. In the subtheme Canada as a Blank Slate, participants highlighted that Canada's acceptance of multiculturalism played a significant role, particularly for later generations, in creating

a sense of freedom of choice. While first-generation participants, and some second-generation participants, arrived or grew up in Canada with strong Italian values and identities, the Canadian context, over time, offered younger participants greater flexibility in how they engaged with their heritage. As one second-generation participant observed, however, this flexibility can have both positive and negative consequences: with greater choice comes the possibility of increased confusion and potentially greater effort to maintain.

9 Keeping Culture Alive: Efforts to Maintain Italian Identity

Every participant described how they maintain their Italian culture in some way or another. While this theme can be categorized into sections relating to food, language and returning to Italy, it can be argued that the true overarching narrative is how Italian immigrants put in the everyday effort to keep the culture alive. Subsequently, participants indirectly and directly described how their actions turned into a meaningful process. The subtheme, Back then, things were different, explains how past memories of Italian culture affect how immigrants feel belongingness and connection to their identity in the present. This theme is organized according to age.

Two younger participants, who include second and third generations, described actively trying to become closer to Italian culture through everyday efforts such as cooking and learning the language.

Alessandra describes the following about connecting to Italian culture and sharing it with her boyfriend.

We love coming to like Italian food places all the time. Now we go to get like paninis all the time and like just Italian food. Like last night we literally made pizza like with pizza dough and did the whole like thing ((general laughter)) So I I didn't feel like I've like taken it on and like tried to stay closer to it umm. More now and and yeah, so.

She described the act of eating and making Italian food as a form of connection. In general, food and eating can be an important part of culture because it carries a direct tie through certain

foods and memories of childhood upbringing. In this quote, there is also a clear distinction between then and now, as Alessandra put more time into reconnecting with her roots, which states that she is actively putting in effort to become closer to her Italian heritage. Alessandra further describes how being a part of her culture provides her with meaning in life.

And like whenever I was really involved in like Italian culture, I would feel like you know, like this is like almost like what was meant for me.

Alessandra described the power that can come from returning to her roots. In this case, becoming closer to her Italian family wasn't just something that she 'should have' done, but instead her everyday efforts carried enough meaning to lend itself to a cultural destiny.

Another example of connection through cooking and food comes from Giulia.

I feel very like protective of a lot of the, like ways that I've been taught to cook, like a lot from my mom, and then also just like, growing up eating my- my nonna's food and I think about my family like every time I cook in, just like the simplicity of Italian cooking and Italian food, and how it's often like I don't know kind of mired by a lot of like extra stuff here and just like kind of remembering where the food comes from, and that feels really special to me also. And so I would say like maybe most days

For Giulia, this everyday act becomes a meaningful way to remember, honour, and maintain cultural identity. In this sense, cooking is an act to be protected, but it also takes on an almost sacred quality. Giulia further described the beauty and simplicity of Italian cooking, which can be compared to the idea that sometimes meaning can be found in the simplest of things. For example, in its connection to the women in her life: her mom and nonna.

Giulia also describes her efforts in learning and practicing language, even taking classes in her bachelor's degree. She stated that being able to speak Italian, something she wasn't always able to do, is a large part of her feeling connected to her Italian identity.

Like I really rejected learning language when I was younger. Umm and then that was a number of years ago, like maybe 2018 and then almost two years ago now, I went

to Italy for- by myself, for the first time, and I was staying with my aunt. And I was just kind of like living everyday life with them which was really nice, but then I really felt my like connection to Italy into Rome, specifically when I met up with a friend of mine for a few days in Rome and I realized, like, how much better my Italian had gotten, and I had no idea and like suddenly I could like, hear conversations and umm yeah, it was so definitely like that was a moment of like, oh, this is like, a place that feels like home to me.

It can be seen that there is a continuous effort on Giulia's part to reclaim what she once rejected. She was able to notice how improving her Italian helped her to feel more at home in the city where her mother was born.

In some participants, keeping the culture alive also means being able to share it with their children. For example, Elena explains what it's like to pass along her culture to her son.

Yeah. So and yeah, it's it's my passion. I- I have a 13 year old son. And when he was little, my mom and I were teaching him Italian and he knew everything. He knew even well, we came up to [city in Canada] and we weren't living with my mom anymore, so he lost a lot, right? So it's pretty difficult. So I keep on talking about Italy and giving them some words. You know, and phrases to do. [...] But there's times that, oh, what's this? And I said, you know what? You're gonna love it. 'No I'm -Italians are too loud ((laughs)) They scare me.' Because we're it's just us here. So he wasn't raised in that environment, right?

Although Elena's upbringing was markedly different from that of her son, she continues to actively teach and expose him to Italian culture. This reflects an intentional and effortful process, one that appears to resist the natural shifts and changes that seem to occur with greater distance from family.

Lastly, it can be difficult when individuals are no longer able to try to keep the culture alive as much as they used to. In the case of an older second generation participant, Karina, explained how

she tries to be in the community even as times are changing.

Whenever they have a gathering, it's usually a meal of some kind, and my kids and I go um because they've been to [city in Italy]. So they they know-they know about the language. They don't speak it, but they know about it so. That's, that's about it now- I've I've I've lost the people that I know that are Italian now speak English. Let's put it that way, yeah. So I join the organizations as much to go and hear the language as anything else, and the [Italian community center] have filmed at the [library] once a month. And I tried to get to that the Italian Embassy puts it on in the library

Karina described losing the people who used to speak Italian, which seemed to make it harder for her to be able to speak and hear her cultural dialect. As a way of trying to cope with this, Karina tries to expose herself as much as she can through community organizations. She had mentioned in a different part of the interview that going out became much harder due to mobility issues, but continues to try and seek out Italian culture.

I am trying to keep that- keep in touch with with what is left. Umm I never-I guess there is a lot out there, but I- I don't see it as much now.

Karina's quote speaks of loss, of the Italian community and also of her connection to it. This suggests that culture can be delicate and that without the efforts and access to keep it alive, it can also be lost.

9.1 Back then, things were different

When speaking about their Italian identities, many participants described nostalgic memories from their childhood. Particularly, older participants, either first or second-generation explained how in the past, Italian communities and culture looked different. For example, Aldo, a first-generation immigrant, explained how he noticed the culture change for himself but also in his family.

“That’s a tougher one. I seem to be losing more and more of it. The connection and also kind of even forgetting sometimes Italian how to speak it or not so much Italian because I never really spoke Italian. I spoke to dialect from where we came and we all did or did anyways. And I kind of out of practice -practice I guess and... So I forget to speak it and sort of so it seems that I’m moving away more and more and I can also see it in my nieces and nephews and their families how they’re expanding, and they try to keep the culture but get together and you know, keep family always close but.. it’s. It’s not like it used to be when I was growing up and when I mean growing up, when I was a little kid, I guess or when we first came to Canada.”

As time goes on, Aldo seems to be experiencing more of a disconnect from his roots. Aldo’s description of visiting his family describes that of loss and a subtle form of cultural alienation, where he can look back and see that being Italian no longer looks like what it used to.

However, not all change is negative. Karina explains that there are both good and bad elements to the changes happening in the Italian community in Canada.

A lot of- a lot of the cultures are not here anymore and but Canada’s changing it as is supposed to happen anyway, with a different cultures that are coming in now that are enriching the country. You know, the first settlers were- were basically white people. Umm that came. And now we’ve got a good diverse um community, you know, and the richness that those cultures bring to [...] So I’m I’m sad we’re losing that Italian connection but. I’m happy that that we’re becoming more diverse to just like the world.

Now, many of the original immigrant groups have become older with little replacement. However, Canada is receiving new immigrant groups that are contributing to a greater cultural diversity. Therefore, the change in Canada’s immigration pattern also affects cultural identity and belongingness in the Italian community.

Lastly, ‘back then’, Italians faced more discrimination than they do now. Laura describes how she notices how the role of organizations has changed over the years.

But right now, the Italians don't need anybody to protect them. You know, they- they're in, they're in, you know, levels of various levels of uh politics. They're top surgeons, they're great business men. They're so they don't need- there's, you know- they don't need that support behind them. You know. 80 years ago, would there have been somebody like yourself studying, you know, for your, you know, for your educational qualifications, et cetera, et cetera, that wouldn't have happened.

She notes that Italians worked to be incorporated into various levels of society and no longer need protection from discrimination like they once did. She also notes that someone studying Italian immigration 80 years ago would not have existed, demonstrating the progress that Italians have made over the years.

9.2 Analysis of Keeping Culture Alive

The theme of keeping culture alive helps to answer how different generations create meaning through maintaining cultural practices, and how this affects their cultural identity and sense of belonging. Many participants described the various ways they tried to stay connected to Italian culture despite facing changes, challenges, and the effort required. Across narratives, participants either directly or indirectly expressed a sense of meaning in doing so, for example, in Alessandra's rediscovery of her roots or Elena's efforts to pass on traditions to her son.

Why does culture remain such an important element for Italian immigrants? It can be argued that culture carries more meaning for diasporas because it must be actively sought out and maintained; it is not a given. In Italy, Italians can simply step outside and experience their culture in everyday life. For Italian diasporas, however, culture is not something easily accessed. It requires active, intentional engagement through cooking, family gatherings, community ties, and daily habits. In other words, with increased distance from the homeland, both in time and space, there is a greater effort required to sustain cultural identity, but also greater meaning, precisely because it is so precious. This supports Hall (1992) argument that diasporas must take an active stance

in identity formation, continually renegotiating meaning in a new context. Italian immigrants have had to determine not only who they are, but also what is worth preserving in a changing world.

As time moves forward, some immigrants may prioritize the conservation of culture through tradition, while others may choose to transform it in the face of change. This was especially evident across generational differences. Although both age and generational groups made efforts to maintain Italian identity, their relationships to culture varied. Using Pargament (1997)'s theory of coping, first and older second-generation participants reflected on their childhoods, with Italian culture centred on preserving or recreating past traditions. In contrast, younger and third generation participants showed a more intentional process of reconstruction, seeking out elements of culture that may not have been strongly passed down. This reflects a shift from preservation to active engagement, where identity is shaped not only through inheritance but also through effortful action.

Cultural attachment may also reflect lifecycle and broader societal changes. For example, older participants' reflections on how "things were different back then" can be partially attributed to the very real societal changes that have taken place over the past 50 years, as well as the effects of aging, which often involve experiences of loss and disconnection. Notably, the two older participants who spoke about both cultural loss and losing loved ones also scored the lowest on measures of meaning in daily life.

In sum, the effort to keep culture alive is deeply tied to a sense of belonging within Italian culture, and from that, a sense of meaning in life.

10 Family first, always: being Italian through kin connection

It just feels like you're with family and you know that's the ital-way I see it, Italians. It's more family. The whole situation, it's always friendly and if you have something to say or disagree you disagree, there's always food and drink around

My parents had a lot of Italian friends that would come and visit or we would go in- in my time when I was small, we would go to visit them. So I guess I always felt

Italian. Because that's the way I was brought up. My aunt and uncle live next door to us. Umm my cousin. So I didn't live with an Italian community, but they weren't far away and my parents would visit often

In the above-mentioned quotes, participants express how spending time with and proximity to family are important parts of being Italian. Family was mentioned by every participant, regardless of generation, in all aspects of the interview, including in Italian identity, crisis, coping, and meaning. For participants, family represented the core of their identity and a central connection to who they are, what they care about and a guiding force during difficult moments. However, family also played a negative role in some participants' attempts at creating their own path. The great importance of family lends support to pre-existing research and knowledge of family as a source of refuge for Italians, and furthermore ties into the theories of coping and culture as well as meaning.

Four subthemes emerged from the theme of family, which include: Knowing Where I Come From, What did the people before me do?, The Weight of Family: Support and Constraint, Women's expectations in the family, and Back Then, things were different.

10.1 Knowing Where I Come From

This subtheme describes participants' experiences of using their origins as means of empowerment, connection and sometimes confusion. Furthermore, knowing one's origins is a direct connection to family, i.e. parents and grandparents, but it can also be a connection to a time and place and a particular way of being. First and older second-generation immigrants tended to express more pride and more certainty in knowing where they come from compared to younger participants, who tended to understand their roots as a connection to their family.

For 2 participants, knowing where they came from was a form of pride and empowerment.

Umm uh there were many times when I said "why should I be embarrassed that I come from a poor village? Why should I be embarrassed that I-I don't know the exact

properly targeted word and I only know the dialect or a four letter word that - that is not necessarily appropriate? You are who you are. So when I come to realize that from the earlier years to today still, I'm very comfortable in my shoes because I-I understand and I realize who I am as a human being. That is, I think, very powerful. And it - what it allows is it allows us to -to have those great moments.

Nico answered the above when asked about what gave his life meaning. Nico's crisis of meaning was related to immigrating to Canada and the effects this had on his identity. In this quote, he describes the process of feeling shame over his identity, potentially due to being in a new city, and reclaiming his identity through understanding where he comes from and who he is. He states, 'you are who you are,' which symbolizes a certainty and a matter-of-fact way of describing his identity.

I was always with my Nonna. I was always behind her, learning and touching and feeling and smelling. And my grandparents were farmers right. So they knew how to cultivate their garden right from scratch [...] So that was like the connection, the language, the passion, the loudness and the movement of the hands ((laughs)) you know what and I still have it today and I don't care. I love it. And I have some people say, well, you use your too-too much of your hands when you present. I thought, you think I'm going to change because it's too much for you. I'm an Italian, I'm not going to stop ((laughs)) just for you. So they were taken back when I said that. And I said I'm keeping my heritage I'm sorry if it makes you dizzy the door's right there ((laughs))

Elena, a second-generation immigrant, answered the above when describing an example of what makes her feel Italian. She connects her way of being (mannerisms, language and passion) to how she grew up and to her identity, claiming that she will not apologize for being who she is. This emphasizes that knowing where you come from is not just about knowing where your parents and grandparents come from, but also knowing what kind of people they are, and subsequently what kind of person you are as well.

For participants, knowing where they came from allowed them to move through the world with a stronger sense of self, not as something inherited passively, but as something shaped, chosen, and carried with intention.

For another participant, knowing where they come from served as a source of connection to their parents' generation, but also required greater effort.

And so also learning more about like my mom's side of the family. And just like being interested in our family has just like, brought me closer to my mom also. And, like, yeah, they're- it's- it's- it's about strengthening those relationships and also growing up like far away from my extended family it's also like a way to bridge that gap as well and understand where we all came from, even though like we all -like me and my cousins and I have had very different lives.

Giulia, a younger second-generation participant, described how knowing where her family came from was not something she simply inherited, but something she had to actively learn. This process allowed her to connect more deeply with her mother and extended family. Giulia also noticed that she started putting more effort into maintaining her Italian culture as she grew older. This shows how participants, in this case younger, may feel a distance between themselves and their families and cultural background, especially if there is physical distance as well.

Lastly, for Bianca, 2nd generation, knowing where you comes from made it difficult for her to choose her own career path.

You know, I think that we grow up with parents who pretty much come here to work, right? And they don't come here to fulfill all these interesting fantasies of life that Hollywood tells us like, like living your best life and dreams and all this bullshit sorry ((general laughter)) [...] Having a mom like her that always believed in dreams and travel and being independent and yada yada yada, but- wasn't successful because of her dysfunctional family. Then you're so torn of like, who the fuck am I? And what am I supposed to do? Like you know, I know I'm supposed to have a job, and I know

to pay the bills, and I know all that is important and dreams are always secondary, right?

Bianca replied to the above when asked about her experience with a crisis of meaning. As part of her crisis, she emphasized how, sometimes knowing where she came from, in this case from parents who valued hard work or who had not been able to follow their dreams, made it difficult for her to negotiate meaning in her professional life. For Bianca, having a strong understanding of who she was and where she came from sometimes felt like a constraint, as if she lacked choice in the face of stress.

Elements related to how Italian immigrants connect to their identity, find meaning and experience difficulties were found in participants' experiences of learning and knowing about where they came from.

10.2 What Did the Family Before Me Do?

What the family before me did is a subtheme that explains how participants turned to the family and ancestors as a way of figuring out what next steps to take. This subtheme was particularly salient in how participants coped with a crisis of meaning. Four participants expressed looking to their families as guides in some way.

In a way, I looked at all my family members too, like my cousins who are older than me and what they did and how they lived and who their partners were and their experiences. And I'm like, OK well, you know, they kind of come from the same boat as me, and they either did something similar or different and you know everything turned out fine and everything's fine with them and everything will be fine with me. So I'm not really worried about any of this.

Antonio, a third-generation immigrant, explained how he looked to his older family members as an example when moving out of his family home. Antonio looked laterally, meaning to family members on the same level, in order to comfort and validate himself in a moment of doubt and

uncertainty. In this case, culture added to his coping ability, and he was able to indirectly make meaning from his situation.

And then, like my father was dead 25 years this year. So I'm thinking you know 'what would he have done? Would he have continued to pursue this? Would he have-' Who knows? I- I- I don't know, but I guess I- I was the one that said to him 'well, you know you're no longer here. I'm going to continue what you started doing'

Laura, third generation, coped with her family crisis by continuing in her father's footsteps when he passed away. By asking herself what her father would have done, Laura is not only using her connection to family as a coping strategy but also as a way to garner a sense of direction and purpose in dealing with her family crisis. What her father would have done becomes a sense of guidance and purposeful action.

Asking what those before would do did not always end in a comforting note. For some participants, the question went against what they wanted to do in the moment.

Bianca stated the following when asked about how her Italian identity affected her ability to feel meaning in life.

'Cause, you're kind of groomed you know you're little you're you're told to do, and be and see and think this way [sound that describes continued listing] I wouldn't want it any other way to be honest. And so it- it in in moments of crisis or whatever it is, and meaning there's a way that it seems to, you know.. it almost feels like you can answer the questions you know or you know what directions take even if sometimes it's not in that moment what you want to do, or, but you're just like, OK. I should probably, you know, try and reconcile for example. Because you know, people in my family or people in my family would have done this, you know, or have done this or haven't done this.

In this quote, what family members have done before is more than a source of comfort but a pre-determined and guiding path. For Bianca, it seems to be helpful in coping with crises and also

in finding meaning in life; however, it also appears to sometimes go against her own desires. In other words, coping through culture can sometimes reduce one's choice of autonomy, which may be helpful in some situations.

Lastly, Alessandra, a third-generation Italian immigrant who described becoming closer to her Italian side of the family when she moved away from home to go to university, explained how knowing what her family would do contributed to pressures and expectations in her own life. Interestingly, she explained that she noticed these pressures once proximity to her Italian family increased. Alessandra's crisis of meaning involved not achieving her dreams but also what was expected of her and questioning the meaning of life. In the quote below, Alessandra is referring to the fact that she moved away from her parents and started living with her boyfriend before marriage.

Yeah, like, I felt like I was constantly judged in a way, even though this was like my family and my community. But it was like I wasn't following like the proper protocol. And so they were like, oh, like, that's not how you do things. Like you're not gonna like, live life the right way. And and so that was like difficult for me to sit with and like there were like in that regard, like I didn't really agree with it. So then it kind of made me question a lot of the traditions that I was like, is this really, how things should be. So yeah, that was like difficult. So that that was more on the like negative end of things of coming into the culture a bit more.

Alessandra is questioning whether the Italian 'protocol' coming from her family really fits with her own identity and ways of viewing the world. The tension that can exist between cultural belonging and individual autonomy is reflected here as well. However, it can be argued that, as a third-generation immigrant, Alessandra seems to have more space to be able to make her own choices. Compared to the narratives of second-generation women, where there seemed to be less room for individual decision making, it can be argued that Alessandra faces more social consequences for choosing to live outside of the culture and more freedom to do so. Without as

much of the rigid pressures, it can also be argued that Alessandra faces more overall confusion regarding who she is as an Italian because she does not necessarily have a clear-cut path.

Therefore, knowing how family members would act was a comforting and purposeful recollection; however, it also sometimes interfered with participants' own choices and autonomy.

10.3 Italian women: Staying strong, marriage and children

Four participants had spoken about having to remain strong for their family, getting married and having children. Some women described that these areas of life provided a deep meaning and a sense of direction, while others felt that they had to carve their own path. In this subtheme, mainly second-generation women with children spoke about the sometimes double standard that was present in relation to their careers, having autonomy and divorce.

As part of her crisis, Bianca explained that she had a difficult time choosing career paths in life, went back to school and then had a child out of wedlock. Bianca explained how she felt her role as an Italian woman influenced her decisions and how her children provide meaning for her today. Giving up her dreams to become more practical was a way in which Bianca coped with her situation.

Uhh had I left my child with my parents and had gone back to do my masters in Paris that I had planned and just, you know, checked in on my kid four years later, like no fucking way ((laughs)) No, like you know I'm a woman. I- I grew up with strong, you know, women who cared for their children. And who like-that is who they were. Italian women are women that bring the family together that raise their children that are strong for them in hard times like that is actually also who I am I'm not playing that role.

So I think it's- it's a- it's- it's a dual right where when I was living, you know in Florence studying fashion for that summer. I felt like on a high of like this is who I am. And then with the children, right, like. When I do stuff for them. Their birthdays,

their milestones, you know, things like that. That's where I'm like, oh, I love those so much. And like gaga googoo, stuff, you know. Oh yeah. But then when they talk back, I'm like, shut the fuck up. No. I don't say that to them. I don't say that to them ((general laughter)) But like my mind is like ready to explode.

Bianca describes how being a strong Italian woman gave her a sense of duty in giving up her dreams and raising her child. Furthermore, she seems to be embodying the strength of the women who came before her, and it is part of her identity. In this case, a close proximity to Italian culture seems to be helpful in giving Bianca a sense of what her next steps are when dealing with the crisis. However, in the next quote, Bianca describes a contrast between her role as mother and her role as a creative, independent woman, where both connection and autonomy can sometimes compete. While Bianca describes loving her children and gathering meaning from her role as a woman, she had to trade her alternative career in fashion in order to make it work. In direct contrast, while men in the study carried their own struggles, they did not speak about having to make decisions between their careers and their family life. For example, Nico described having a career in the Canadian Military and having to move away for a particular role in Italy. He stated that this helped him maintain a close connection to his roots, and stated that "I remained very connected. I'm very proud of that".

Elena spoke about how her family's over-protectiveness and double standards between her and her brother contributed to her own crisis of meaning.

So yeah, so it was, I was always protected. So I was diagnosed with epilepsy at young age. And so ever since they were very protective of me and umm you know, I rebell. I'm like, you know, well, why can't I do what [brother's name]'s doing? Well, you can't, you know. So it wasn't an encouragement of going playing soccer, you know, it was like, well, no, no, you know, stay home, be with Nonna. So there was a lot to me that I want to explore, so. It got to a point where I said, you know what, I'm tired of you telling me I can't do this oh you -you can't do that. And I opened my studio in the basement of the house because they didn't want me to get outside. So, you know

umm, yeah, so I just got lost in between family thing, my career because I wanted to expand and they didn't want to. You know made me feel insecure and worthless.

Elena describes directly how she had a hard time gaining her own autonomy and independence because of her identity as a woman, and especially as a woman who struggled with epilepsy. While her family's intention stemmed from a caring and well-meaning place, Elena was stuck between her family's love and care and her own desire to get out there and explore. Furthermore, she contrasted her own experiences with those of her brother, who seemed to have much more freedom than she did. Elena's struggles also impacted her self-esteem and self-worth. In reaction to her family's over-protectiveness, she decided to take a trip to visit her family in Italy, regardless of what her immediate family wanted.

Karina, a second-generation immigrant, described staying in an unhappy marriage in order to avoid her children bearing the consequences of divorce. She also noted that family and marriage were large sources of meaning.

Well, I guess uhh..I guess all right meeting my husband and going out with him and meeting his family and making a life with him, getting married and having -having children. Those were- that was the happy part of my life.

And I I would say the middle to last years of my marriage were- were not happy ones, and that's when I was going for therapy actually, I could never get my husband to- to come and I didn't have the courage to leave him. But anyway we- we sort of- we- we just worked it out. We just lived together sort of thing and and we would do the odd things together, but he basically lived his life and I lived my life so. So that -that was not uh uh uh my happiest time.

In these quotes, Karina demonstrates the dual nature of getting married and having children, both meaningful and sometimes the cause of unhappiness. She makes an important note on the stigma surrounding divorce in Italian culture, which can be argued is not gendered but more of a

religious and cultural aspect. However, Karina's concern about the consequences of divorce and putting her children's needs above her own demonstrates the role that Italian women take on in the family: that of strength and selflessness.

Interestingly, compared to third-generation women, second-generation women spoke more about how their identities were affected by their obligations and roles as Italian women. Furthermore, second-generation women also spoke about the meaning that family provided them. Whereas third-generation women with children mainly described how their marriage, children and grandchildren were sources of meaning and connection. For example, Laura described how having a grandchild was a way of being able to witness moments she missed in her own daughter's life due to work. She noted the following about taking care of her granddaughter and how her home carries a duplicate of children's toys and essential: "So she can come and my husband and I have a ball with her and she's funny and she's a delight. And so to me, that's most meaningful right now, you know?". This difference may be due to more of a shift in identity as a choice in later generations, where second-generation women had less flexibility in choosing who they are. With greater pressure to follow gendered expectations and family footsteps, second-generation women had more complex relationships with marriage, children and their identities as Italian women.

10.4 Intergenerational Trauma and Italian-Canadian Internment

One participant, Laura, explained how discovering that her grandfather had been a detainee in an internment camp was a shocking moment for her that further led to a crisis. The Italian-Canadian internment is an overlooked piece of Canadian history that occurred on 10 June 1940, when approximately 600 men were labelled as enemy aliens and brought to internment camps across the country. This was under the assumption that Italians living in Canada would be followers of Mussolini's fascist regime. Laura describes how this piece of history particularly affected her grandfather, but also subsequent generations in her family.

And- and I think he was one that never forgot what happened to his father 'cause he was- he answered the door to the RCMP and you can imagine a, a six year old, 7

year old these days answering the door in the RCMP come in, you know. So you know I- I tend to put that in in current circumstances. So I think that always, bothered him. I think the fact that there could have been a successful family business had my grandfather been able to hold on to that and this business was very successful. It was kept in the family of one of the Co owners that started it up with my grandfather. So there was a lot of umm -there were families that interconnected. And even though my father, I think was very umm I think very pleasant on the surface to some of the-the-like to this family. I think down deep it hurt him. And-and I guess I could see that and that's sort of our-a crisis in- I think it was a crisis that the family and- perhaps never has gotten over 'cause if I'm still talking about it, does it not bother me still? You know, I've had cousins say to me, 'oh, why don't you leave it alone? It was so long ago. Why are you working towards getting an apology? Why are you continuing?' This that and whatever. And I said 'cause, it's important to me.'

Her father, only six or seven years old at the time, unknowingly opened the door to RCMP officers, an event that triggered not only the loss of his own father but also the collapse of a once-successful family business. This moment had long-lasting and deeply rooted consequences. It illustrates how, alongside cultural values and traditions, traumatic experiences can also be transmitted across generations, becoming embedded in family narratives. In the context of Italian culture, where family is a central pillar of identity and meaning, the fragmentation of family due to external political forces can leave wounds that are particularly difficult to heal.

Well, that's basically to honour, you know, the the memory of my grandfather and and the memory of all those individuals that- that this, you know internment happened to as well. You know and and I have spoken to in the course of leading up to the apology in 2021 umm I have spoken to people all across the country uh you know, getting their particulars, you know, sending them official invitations for this, that and whatever.

As a way of coping, Laura explains that she chose to continue her father's efforts by sharing

their family's story. For her, honouring their memory becomes a form of re-authoring the family narrative, transforming inherited suffering into purposeful action. In doing so, Laura tries to make meaning out of pain, using her family memories not only as a personal act of healing, but also as a way to give voice to a history that might otherwise be forgotten.

10.5 Analysis of Family First

The theme of family first helped to partially answer two guiding questions: how cultural belonging and identity affect coping with crisis, and how Italian immigrants find meaning in present-day life.

Going back to Triandis (1995)'s definition of culture, it states that culture is a shared system of values, roles, attitudes, and norms passed along generations and created through interactions. In the case of diasporas, and particularly Italian diasporas, not only is family a value brought over by first-generation immigrants to Canada, but its importance remains high because it is a key area of being able to actually be Italian. Besides friends and community members, the most salient place for Italian's to be able to practice and share their culture is with their own family. Therefore, family has been and continues to be a place where Italians can turn to have the potential to be themselves and be understood, even if it is marked by complexity.

Family was found to be in every part of the coping process, including the crisis itself, coping and finding meaning. It was also an unsurprisingly large part of Italian identity. Lending support to Chun et al. (2006)'s theory of the Cultural Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, participants' coping was a cultural phenomenon. Italian immigrants not only used family or connection to family as a way of coping, but family issues were also apparent in what participants found stressful, what resources were available to them at that time and what values guided them during the coping process. For the most part, participants found that turning to family was helpful during times of distress, which means that culture also affected the outcomes of the coping process. The findings also lent support to Pargament (1997)'s theory of coping, as family seemed to be readily available in participants' orienting system and was further translated into coping strategies. Moreover, participants seemed to be searching for something meaningful, in this case, their relatives

and ancestors, as a way of making sense of and moving forward in times of stress.

In terms of meaning, connection to family emerged as a significant source through which participants derived a sense of meaning, both in everyday life and during periods of difficulty. During times of stress, many participants turned to their families and ancestral roots as a framework for understanding and interpreting their experiences. In doing so, they actively chose to make sense of their situation through the lens of familial connection and heritage. Returning to Schnell (2025), tradition, in other words, knowing and passing along one's roots, was similarly found to be a source of meaning along with communion and care. Moreover, the values that participants described, for example, being proud of where you come from or being strong, are carried across generations through their family system, in most cases via parents. As a result, values and knowing where one comes from can carry a large meaning for Italian immigrants, as demonstrated by participant narratives. However, other sources of meaning, such as individualism, freedom and self-knowledge, can conflict with the family values mentioned above (Schnell, 2025). The conflict of values illustrated in Bianca and Elena's narratives reflects how cultural expectations can at times restrict available coping choices. Despite this, both participants turned to family as a meaningful source of support, using these connections to make sense of their situations and navigate their distress. Therefore, family and family values, while embedded with meaning, can also be a source of tension and conflict regarding one's autonomy.

In terms of generational differences, first- and second-generation immigrants who had children of their own appeared to be more closely intertwined with cultural norms and expectations. This was particularly evident among second-generation Italian women. Second-generation participants also tended to identify more strongly with being Italian, sometimes even more so than Canadian. Among younger participants, experiences varied according to their proximity to Italian culture, with those most embedded in the culture describing greater exposure to its expectations and pressures. This may suggest that, while all generations draw on family as a coping resource, those who more strongly embody their Italian identity may experience both the protective and constraining aspects of cultural belonging more intensely.

11 Connecting Through Others: The Role of Relationships in Coping, Meaning-making and Identity

In four participants' narratives, they explained how connecting to others served as a way to cope, make meaning of their situation and helped them better understand who they were. Two subthemes emerged: connecting to people like me and connecting to people different than me.

11.1 Connecting to people like me

In Connecting to people like me, some participants explained a sense of belonging and understanding in connecting with people with the same or a similar background. Some participants also described that connecting to the Italian community had mixed effects.

Giulia explained that speaking with others who share similar experiences, namely those with immigrant backgrounds, provides a sense of meaning.

Yeah. And there's something also just like, very comforting about talking to people who understand where you're coming from and um what kinds of experiences you've had, or just to talk to other people who are also from like have- like immigrant parents. But yeah, I would say it only benefits it like it's never been something that's taken away from my sense of meaning

The act of belonging, in this case, goes hand in hand with Giulia's sense of meaning in life. She also noted that as a way of coping with her crisis, she returned to the comforts of her childhood and spent time with her friends. This highlights that in the case of something as destabilizing as a crisis, returning to comforts and a sense of belonging can be an important way of not only coping, but also as a way to make meaning.

Alessandra notes that as a way of coping with her crisis, she returned to those who understood her situation the most.

I do think that community was really important, like talking to people who had like been through this or had similar thoughts or feelings, um, and kind of feeling like I wasn't the only one who ever felt this way. Umm and especially people who had similar life experiences to me or umm even like within the same community umm that helps a lot because they can kind of relate and and they were able to like talk to me with like empathy and understanding.

Seeing her own experiences reflected in those around her helped her feel less alone. An important piece to Alessandra's quote is that she did not just turn to anyone, but she turned to those who understood her situation, her community. This highlights an important aspect of belonging: when coping with difficult moments, having the support of people who share similar cultural and life experiences can be especially valuable.

Representation in the media or elsewhere can also be an important aspect of belonging. Stephano explained how seeing Italians in the news helped him to be more accepting of his Italian identity.

But uhh this is gonna sound really awful I mean, in the US there was an incident where this young man killed the CEO of a big- and his name can't be more Italian than that, Luigi Mangione. And it's sort of, I guess..I guess, seeing others in the media or seeing others who have a similar sounding Italian name, that sort of makes me say, 'OK, well, you know, it's-it's OK to say your name' like sometimes I often go somewhere to apply for something and I'll say my name and then there's kind of a hesitation there 'like, sorry, what's your name again?' Or, you know, it's-I guess seeing similar sounding Italian names like my own is sort of instills a kind of a pride in being Italian

This quote demonstrates that media representation can serve as a source of cultural validation, even if that media coverage is negative. Stephano further notes that seeing people with Italian ethnic names allowed him to feel more comfortable in his Italian identity and sense of belonging.

Lastly, Bianca explains that sometimes connecting to people like herself can highlight the negative parts of being Italian.

I think it's the pros and cons. You know, I've seen people in the Italian community and I'm like, 'oh man, they got fucked up big time'. Like you know what I mean? Like they got messed up. Or they- there was something there that something happened, you know. And in other areas you see it's strong. They're strong.

Seeing members of the Italian community who 'have been messed up' can serve as a reminder that being a part of a cultural group can also have negative consequences. However, Bianca also notes that there is a duality present, with struggle comes strength, and in this case, Italians can be marked by both.

11.2 Connecting to people different than me

Narratives also expressed that connecting to people who are different served to solidify one's own identity and also served as a way of coping.

In trying to relate to others, Bianca describes how being Italian in her workplace increased her sense of belonging.

But anyhow, so when I'm with them or speak to them or engage with them about life, about work, experiences and all that. I then feel Italian and I'm like 'Oh, that's weird you guys are weird. You know I wouldn't do that.' So in my head I say that I don't say it to them. But I-I feel Italian. Oh, when I speak with my hands and no one else does, right? When I'm very expressive and animated and no one else is.

Speaking with her hands and being animated act as cultural markers that stand out in settings where they are less common. In this way, Bianca's sense of "feeling Italian" emerges in moments of difference, rather than solely in Italian contexts.

Stephano reflected on how the notion of "difference" influenced both the formation of friendships and the broader process of shaping his identity.

And there was a close friend who umm he was half Italian, half Spanish. Umm soo uhh it- it was just meeting this friend that sort of helped me kind of identify with my

own self as a person, but also myself as being Italian.. [...]it it it was just a meeting this person uhh who uhh seemed to share some of my own values

I- I think it's this constant back and forth between trying to meld these two different experiences, you know uh it's not only the Canadian environment, but also coming across other people's values, other uh people's perspectives that were different than my own growing up.

The idea of finding similarity within difference is expressed here. Stephano was able to connect with a friend who shared similar values, even if they did not fully share the same cultural background. This connection acted as a mirror, allowing Stephano to further explore and understand his own identity. Moreover, navigating the differences between his own values, whether rooted in his Italian heritage or influenced by Canadian or other cultures, has been an ongoing process in his identity development.

Lastly, Giulia reflects on the nostalgia she experienced after growing up and moving out.

And then I think leaving the familiarity and comfort of like a home, you realize that like and you're living, you know, with roommates or other people who obviously grew up differently than you. An I- I think there's just like a greater appreciation for like things that you took for granted or things that you thought were like normal or common sense and then you realize that other people aren't necessarily doing that and so it just becomes a little bit more precious.

She came to realize that not everyone lives in the same way she had, and this awareness brought a deeper sense of meaning and appreciation to her everyday life. This realization also served to further solidify her sense of identity.

11.3 Analysis of Connection through Others

The first two guiding questions were partially answered in this theme. Connection through others served as a form of coping and meaning-making in participant narratives. Regardless of generation,

every participant faced a lifecycle change, whether it was moving, changing careers, going back to school and so on. In the face of such destabilizing times, and in the face of a crisis of meaning, it can be part of the process to question one's identity and ask Who am I? Turning to connect with others can serve as a solid and helpful foundation in answering that question, and sometimes it only makes matters more confusing. Returning to Pargament (1997)'s theory of coping, the way participants coped could appear to be a form of conservation, in other words, hanging on to a sense of self in the face of change. However, it can be argued that it is actually a transformation as participants brought in other perspectives, whether the same or different, to very subtly modify their identity. Participants sought out what was familiar and what was different, but in the effort to integrate their environment into their identity. While there can be a longing to preserve or return to a form of belonging and identity from the past, perhaps diasporas have no choice but to transform, because the act of conserving identity as it once was doesn't exist. Across generations, but also across individual lifespans, culture is constantly interacting and changing.

Once again, in the context of diasporas, connection is an important piece of identity formation because immigrants are not able to see their cultural identity reflected in everyday life. Some participants expressed that actually being exposed to differences helped them know themselves better. However, when speaking about meaning, they described that connecting with other Italians fostered a sense of understanding and, ultimately, belonging. It can further be argued that connection to others is not solely a cultural phenomenon but can be applied to any form of identity, or even just to being human. In an Italian context, it serves as a mirror to show the aspects of being Italian that elicit pride and the aspects that elicit a sense of shame and aversion. Therefore, coping through connecting can be a complex system that takes into consideration the context of immigration, meaning and a sense of identity.

12 Translating religion into the orienting system: a generational divide

Almost all participants spoke about how religion related to their cultural identity, coping process or meaning-making. Due to the similarity in ages between generations, differences were not as distinct. Therefore, narratives will be compared in relation to age and generation. While participants described varied relationships with faith and religious coping, younger participants generally expressed lower levels of religious inclination compared to older participants. Three subthemes were identified: Faith coping and meaning, Religion as Cultural Identity and Spirituality Beyond Tradition.

12.1 Religious coping during times of crisis

The subtheme describes how participants engaged or did not engage in religious practices as a way to cope and is organized according to generation and age. A direct comparison is made between first and third-generation participants.

Alessandra's crisis of meaning involved not meeting her own and others' expectations about her career. She had not been accepted to the university program of her dreams, something she had worked for her whole life, and experienced a difficult time where she struggled with life's existential questions. When Alessandra was asked if religion or spirituality played a role in the coping process, she described the following.

So it felt like there was kind of like a disconnect because I was raised like God is good and he's watching after you. And it's like, well, if he's good, then why does he think these things? And then it's like he's watching after me, then why are these things happening to me. So then I started probably questioning a lot of it at that time because I was like, like if I pray now, like, will anything happen? Like I don't. I couldn't believe that it would because then I'm so used to like evidence and everything with my science background.

Interestingly, Alessandra considered turning to religion during her crisis of meaning, yet it remained inaccessible. Although religion had been part of her upbringing, her scientific background further complicated the idea of religious coping, as it is not based on observable outcomes. Therefore, there was a tension between doubt and faith, with the notion of faith carrying more questions and uncertainty than comfort during her coping process.

While Marco is a middle-aged third-generation immigrant, he comes from a mixed religious and cultural background. Originally from Latin America, he lived in several countries, including Italy, before eventually settling in Canada. His religious identity is equally diverse, as he was raised Catholic but is also Jewish. He expressed at length how religion is a very large part of his life, especially when it comes to meaning and coping with his crisis of meaning which was triggered by divorce.

Yeah. So there's a purpose there, right? Yeah. Automatic [...] Sometimes events happen in your life and you say, oh, God, that happened to me, but this this happened but it remind me that I'm prepared for this event because I- this other thing I experienced before. Like was so related. So is that on purpose? I think God made me do this experience in some event. Because he was preparing me for something else. That's what help you to cope with these challenges, like for example. Divorce. Maybe you can go to many relationships it doesn't necessarily mean that your soul mate is that one necessarily, but it can come later, right? And maybe the fact that you went through a divorce, you went through relationships is in a preparation to be better. Or better match to your future soul mate.

Suffering was reframed into meaningful and purposeful challenges. With a religious orientation, Marco coped with the difficulty of his divorce with a perspective that everything has a divine purpose. Marco held his religious identity with great importance and was able to translate this into active coping strategies.

First-generation participants' narratives revealed varied experiences when it came to coping through religion.

For example, Stephano stated that during his crisis of identity in University, he found support through a priest at his school's catholic center.

Umm it almost seemed like by accident that I met. this priest who was a spiritual director. So it-it there's always this element of chance when you're searching for something or someone and... Part of me wants to say that things don't always happen by accident [...], umm so maybe the thing that was instilled that it- it's OK to-to search to not have all the answers, but there is a a kind of reassurance nonetheless. That- that- that I could still search without always I guess feeling anxiety or or disorientation. So it's still a search and discovering who I am.

Once again, the idea of divine purpose or path presents itself in a participant narrative. Stephano's quote reflects the idea of searching for significance and further accepting that perhaps the search might be lifelong. Furthermore, his identity crisis involved confusion and ongoing self-discovery, which was supported and validated by religious and spiritual coping.

On the contrary, Aldo explained that while his parents where religious, he did not engage in religious practices or cope using religion. He stated that "religion basically I- don't believe in religion" and that "really didn't play a role in. I wasn't even thinking about it." This demonstrates that while there may be generational trends in religious coping, it also remains a deeply individual and personal decision.

Lastly, Nico stated that from a young age, religion had always been a part of his life, and continued to be even during times of crisis.

And because of family connection, my cousin was a priest and he-he actually was very influential in my own upbringing and and Aniello di Dio. The Lamb of God was the first book I've ever received as a- as a as a gift, as a prize in school. And I still have it today. So religion played an incredible role in my life in in dealing with the crisis and the and the overcoming of those crisis. But I also learned and still believe today that religion is a very personal thing. And I pray every morning and every night. But

I- I pray I don't-I don't profess to do it in front of someone or behind someone or in a group. It's my personal, my personal God.

Not only does Nico clearly express that religion played a significant role in his coping process, but he also highlights how it was passed down through family influence. This shows that religious beliefs can be culturally transmitted as well as directly instilled by family members. Already present in Nico's orienting system, religion became a resource he turned to during difficult times. However, he notes that his current beliefs have evolved to be more personal and less tied to religious institutions, illustrating how religion can shift not only across generations but also within an individual's lifetime.

Overall, participant narratives revealed mixed findings regarding religious coping. Older participants—whether first- or third-generation—generally spoke more about using religious coping than the youngest participants, though not universally. This suggests that while age and generational trends may exist, they are not always generalizable.

12.2 Religion as Cultural Identity

The subtheme of religion as a cultural identity emerged mainly from second and third-generation participants. Their narratives, taken from third-generation participants, are organized by age and speak of how Italian identity and Catholicism go hand in hand.

As a third-generation immigrant, Alessandra described what it's like to grow up in a culture that is so connected to religion, while she herself is not.

OK ummm it's hard because like I am not religious and like I don't always understand religion in and of itself, like especially cause like my parents are so religious and my family is so religious and my culture is so religious. I felt like, you know, I should be living by these ways ((laughs)) So that was like difficult for me to process, but I so I would say like -and I also don't always agree like again with the Bible and with Catholic like customs. So it's been hard for me because I'm like is if that religious

thing is like the meaning of life, I don't necessarily agree with it.

The cultural transmission of faith can leave less room for individual choice. As in the case of Alessandra, who feels as though she should have some sort of faith because her family and, by extension, community, all carry some sort of belief. She also notes not agreeing with those beliefs, which seems to create a sense of alienation from her own community. The notion that religious belonging may affect cultural belonging poses interesting questions for later generations of Italian immigrants.

Partaking in all the sacraments because those around him were doing it, Antonio explains that religion can be a part of identity, especially if it comes from culture.

Doing all the sacraments, and it was kind of again another thing that's not like, it's like almost unspoken but it's kind of just like do it and because everybody's doing and you accept it, you know, obviously different people like it or don't, like, growing up, but then you make that choice yourself when you're independent. when you're an adult, or even earlier to continue to accept or to reject completely. But again, in a way if it's based in your culture then it becomes a foundation of- of who you are and where you come from

Antonio presents the idea of religious beliefs and cultural identity as eventual choices. He notes that when growing up, religion is simply something that is expected because it is so closely tied to Italian identity. As one grows up, they can make their own choice about faith, just as they can decide which elements to keep from their Italian background. However, because it is part of the foundation of identity, it never truly disappears even if different choices are made. Antonio's case illustrates how religious identity can be transmitted through culture and passed down to subsequent generations.

While Laura, who is also third generation, spoke about having her own relationship to prayer and attending Church, she also spoke about how the Church served as a source of tradition for her own family and the Italian community. She noted the following about its importance:

No, I think in terms of the church I go to. And- and then maybe it's like it's a historical thing too. I mean, that's where my, you know, it's been in the family and you know my-my grandfather and grandmother were there and my father went and as I say, all the sacraments have been there and you know, when my when my granddaughter gets baptised, I hope it's there. You know, 'cause, it would continue on.

Not only can religious beliefs be passed through kin, but they can also have historical significance as churches serve as identity markers for a community. Looking at both her own past and how she will continue to pass along these traditions in the future, Laura remains active in trying to preserve the traditions she grew up with. In this case, the very idea that traditions can be changed or lost denotes the delicate balance that later generations of immigrants must face between preserving and transforming culture and religion.

12.3 Spirituality Beyond Tradition

Some participants noted that they carried a spiritual tradition that goes beyond the traditions of Catholicism. This subtheme emerged once again from second and third-generation participants.

Noting how religion was not a part of her life, Giulia explains that she understands how others have faith, as something to hold onto, during times of crisis.

Yep. Yeah, I-it's funny. Like I- I didn't -I was not like, like I said, was not raised religious and but it's in like these moments where I I understand the draw to religion and to spirituality because, you know, when things are hard, you need like something to hold on to. And like, sometimes it really feels like I have nothing to hold on to. Which is hard and [...] Yeah, I I love the idea of faith and I think it takes a lot of courage to have faith when things are really shitty but- and so I- I try to like reserve a little bit of that for these moments, but I find it really difficult.

Giulia's narrative illustrates how belief, whether religious or spiritual, can act as a potential anchor during times of crisis. Her desire to believe that things would improve, and with her difficulty

in fully accessing that belief, reflects a tension between hope and doubt. Two younger participants expressed this tension, suggesting that while sometimes spirituality can be a desired source of meaning-making, it's not always easily accessible. Moreover, the search for belief itself became part of the coping process, demonstrating that generational shifts in religiosity may shape both the accessibility and form of spiritual coping.

Antonio described God as a guiding force in his life. While he described aspects of Catholicism, he noted that he is not a strict follower of the faith but still believes in certain aspects. He described the following:

I still viewww or have kind of like oh, is God in the back of my head. It's like almost. God is the conscience in a way because everybody and it's obviously different with different religions, different people. But the way I see it is like in your- when you get like a gut feeling, or there's a coincidence or there's something in your life and it's like, you know what's right from wrong you know what you should do, or you really have to do even though you don't want to do it sometimes you know what the right path is in a way that's guide-God guiding you

Antonio's narrative shows a sense of spirituality that goes beyond traditional religious practices. While he did not engage in religious coping during his crisis, his faith is expressed through gut decisions that differentiate right from wrong. This moral compass, shaped by his Italian upbringing, was maintained culturally rather than through religious institutions. Faith, in this case, is more of an individualized and cultural practice, which shows how spirituality and religion can continue to be passed down across generations, even outside of the traditional religious norms.

Lastly, making a point that places can be a spiritual experience, Elena beautifully described how one's roots, meaning and spirituality can be tied together.

Every time I went to Italy, it was, a spiritual time for me. The connection was very spiritual, like it's almost like I was born there. I was part of the country at some time. I'm a very visual person and umm I have good energy so I can feel stuff. I don't know

if you can understand what I was saying. So not feel by touch, feel by energy. OK, so when I'm there I have a strong connection that comes naturally.

This quote illustrates how one's cultural homeland can serve as a source of spirituality and connection. Elena coped with her crisis not only by visiting Italy and spending time with family, but also by maintaining a spiritual connection to her place of origin. This experience allowed her to find greater meaning in her suffering. The awareness of one's roots and ancestry may be a powerful source of spirituality, particularly for those who are removed from their homeland.

12.4 Analysis of Religion and Spirituality

The subtheme of religion answered the guiding question of how religion and spirituality aid, hinder or do not affect the coping process.

Participant narratives described, in varying degrees, religion as a form of coping with a crisis of meaning and the connection between cultural and religious identities. Virtually all participants were exposed to Catholicism during their upbringing, which led to varying degrees of religious identity in adulthood. A clear distinction emerged between generations, in general, first-generation participants directly expressed using religion as a form of coping, whereas younger third-generation participants expressed religion as an extension of Italian culture. Second-generation participants' narratives occupied a middle ground: while they did not explicitly describe using religion as a coping strategy, they did express spiritual beliefs and viewed religion as a component of their cultural and historical identity. This lends support to Pargament (1997)'s theory of religious coping. As such, participants who actively maintained religious beliefs as part of their orienting system spoke more about translating those beliefs into coping strategies during their crises of meaning. Participants without R/S beliefs, although they thought about it, did not actively use this form of coping during their crisis. The act of thinking about religion or spirituality and not using it as a coping resource is an interesting phenomenon, which can further be explained by the notion of culture and Pargament (1997)'s theory. As noted, Pargament (1997) stated that culture and time play an important role in the orienting system. In this case, a potential mix of the current zeitgeist

as well as an active connection to Italian culture could have lent itself to R/S beliefs, both being present in younger participants' orienting system, but not remaining a legitimate option, despite in some cases wanting to. It remained instead a part of the Italian identity. This further lends support to Le Donne (2024)'s finding, which suggested that over generations, Italian and Catholic identities became synonymous, with first generation carrying religion as a non-negotiable, second generation having mixed religious affiliations and third generation engaged with Catholicism as a way to remain connected to their heritage. A somewhat similar pattern emerged in the current study.

There is also the question of what religious coping different generations partook in and their outcomes. It was hypothesized that older participants would firstly be more likely to have used R/S coping, and secondly, that it would have been in the spirit of conservation. In those that did utilize R/S coping, older participant narratives seemed to describe, in general, a conservation of means with a transformation of ends, or re-evaluation. They described turning to an already relatively active part of the orienting system as a way of coping, but as a necessary way to re-evaluate who they were and where they came from. While it can be argued that Nico, in particular, came to the conclusion of being proud, hanging on to his parents' teachings, and turning to religion, he had no choice but to re-evaluate and adapt those teachings in a Canadian context. In fact, both first-generation participants expressed that they struggled to make sense of their identity in the face of immigration, and had no choice but to adapt. Whereas, it can be argued that younger participants who described a lack of R/S coping, conserved both the means and the ends, otherwise known as preservation. This poses an interesting notion that in the face of something as destabilizing as childhood immigration, first-generation immigrants have no choice but to redefine their very idea of meaning itself or face even greater difficulties. Whereas, younger participants chose to cope in ways that felt familiar to them, and tried to hold onto what was already known and meaningful to them, their communities. Lastly, while it would be interesting to compare how these differences in R/S coping outcomes fared, it is difficult to do so in a qualitative study. Furthermore, because younger participants had recently or had actively experienced a crisis of meaning during

the interview, it can be difficult to know exactly how helpful coping strategies actually were. Some authors, such as Tardif-Grenier et al. (2022), found that religious coping was more utilized by first and second-generation adolescent immigrant and that generational differences also affected the outcome of coping. Further research is required to understand how generational differences in coping between Italian immigrants affected how helpful it was at overcoming a crisis of meaning.

13 Conclusion

Generations of Italo-Canadian immigrants coped in various ways with a crisis of meaning. Some patterns emerged, including the importance of family, maintaining Italian culture and varying degrees of religious identity in coping and meaning-making. Generational trends also emerged. Older and first-generation participants experienced greater difficulties in adaptation due to childhood immigration, which contributed to a crisis of identity, and in some cases, religious coping. Second-generation participants experienced pressure and expectations tied to their Italian identity, which in some cases contributed to their crisis meaning and a varied experience of religiosity and spirituality. However, they also experienced a greater sense of certainty when it came to coping and meaning-making, which mostly came from their family. Younger third-generation participants generally experienced greater choice in their cultural identity; however, this seemed to accompany efforts in keeping the culture alive, and a seemingly reduced sense of belonging compared to older generations. They are also closely tied to their cultural and religious identity. Overall, this study lent support to the idea of choice. As time moves forward, cultural identity becomes a choice for subsequent generations, which lends support to Alba (1985). Culture and cultural belonging also affect individual choices in the coping process, by either adding or removing choices, and this seemed to vary by generation, with the second having the least amount of coping choices, but a greater sense of certainty in those choices. This loosely lends support to the immigration paradox. Meaning also appeared to be a choice in making sense of difficult situations, where culture, such as the notion of tradition, and knowing where one comes from, as well as R/S beliefs and coping,

played an important role. Lending support to Hall (1992)'s theory that diaspora's sense of meaning needs to be re-negotiated in a host country, it seems that in this case, maintaining a sense of cultural belonging and connection is meaningful in itself because it is not a guarantee. Lastly, with some age-related exceptions, religious and spiritual coping arose mainly from first, second and older third generation participants, while younger participants maintained religious and spiritual beliefs in their orienting system, found it difficult to engage with. This lends support to Le Donne (2024)'s paper as well Pargament (1997)'s general theory of religious coping. Overall, the findings of this study reveal generational and age-related patterns in coping and religious/spiritual (R/S) coping, as well as a broader cultural significance in the process of meaning-making.

13.1 Implications

This study holds meaningful implications for both Italian Canadian communities and newer or future immigrant groups. In a time marked by globalization and heightened sensitivity to immigration worldwide, it remains essential to investigate the long-term effects of migration on individuals and families. Although Italian Canadians represent an older immigrant group, generational changes in coping strategies and meaning-making offer valuable insights that can inform understandings of newer immigrant experiences, particularly those in the early stages of migration in Canada. By examining how Italian Canadians navigate immigration-related challenges, this study provides comparative lessons that may benefit other cultural communities undergoing similar processes. Additionally, it contributes to the limited literature on Italian Canadian identity and mental health. More broadly, it highlights the significance of cultural identity, religiosity, and spirituality in making meaning and responding to existential challenges, with concepts like family and maintenance of culture at its core. It also denotes how Italians have and continue to show strength and resiliency, and how they can be incorporated in many aspects of the coping and meaning-making process.

13.2 Limitations and Future Research

A few limitations should be acknowledged in this study. Firstly, the concept of a “crisis of meaning” was not always easily understood or articulated by participants. Given the abstract and lesser-known nature of the term, participants’ interpretations of this concept were highly individual and varied slightly across narratives. Secondly, recruitment was conducted through a limited number of channels, which may have influenced the diversity and scope of the sample. For example, all first-generation participants were male, and all second-generation participants were female. A more varied gender distribution would have helped make cross-generational comparisons. Additionally, as previously noted, the participant pool was generally older than anticipated, which may have affected the strength of generational comparisons and the overall generalizability of the findings. Thirdly, three participants did not complete the questionnaires, which may have impacted the generational comparisons. Finally, the questionnaire, which in most cases was sent out prior to the interviews, may have influenced participants’ responses. Several participants referred to or reflected on the nature of the questionnaire items, particularly those related to religiosity, during their interviews.

This study was the first of its kind, and it opens several avenues for future research. Specifically within the context of Italian culture, further studies are needed to explore the long-term mental health impacts of immigration across first and subsequent generations. Research on culturally grounded mental health interventions tailored to Italian communities remains notably scarce. This connects to broader conversations about culturally sensitive care, not only in adapting existing models to cultural contexts, but also in recognizing culture itself as a source of healing and meaning-making. Future research should continue to examine how culture functions not only as a context, but as a dynamic process through which individuals in diasporic communities make meaning, cope, and heal.

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14 Appendices

A Recruitment Posters

 <p>CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS!</p>	UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-PAUL UNIVERSITY
<p>An interview-based study exploring coping with a crisis of meaning in 3 generations of Italian Immigrants</p>	
<p>Please contact us if you:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are an Italian immigrant to Canada, the child or the grandchild of an Italian immigrant• Have experienced a crisis of meaning where for a period of time life lacked meaning, felt frustratingly empty and pointless• Are currently between the ages of 21-85	
<p>If you meet the above criteria, you may be qualified to participate in our study!</p>	
<p>For more information please get in touch with master's student, Samantha at: scast061@uottawa.ca</p>	



INVITO A PARTECIPARE

Uno studio basato su interviste che esplora il coping con una crisi di significato in 3 generazioni di immigrati italiani

Vi invitiamo a contattarci se:

- Siete immigrati italiani in Canada, figli o nipoti di immigrati italiani
- Avete vissuto una crisi di senso in cui per un periodo di tempo la vita è stata priva di significato, si è sentita frustrantemente vuota e inutile
- Avete un'età compresa tra i 21 e gli 85 anni

Se rispondete ai criteri di cui sopra, potreste essere qualificati per partecipare al nostro studio!

Per ulteriori informazioni, contattare la studentessa del Master, Samantha, all'indirizzo:

B Recruitment Scripts

Hello,

My name is Samantha Castelli, and I am a master's student at Saint Paul University in the Faculty of Human Science with supervisor Dr. Andrzej Jastrzebski. I am conducting a study that aims to understand how three different generations of Italian Canadian immigrants cope with a crisis of meaning. If you are receiving this email, it is because you are ___ (i.e. Italian cultural organization, store/restaurant in little Italy, etc.) and I was wondering if it would be possible to post this information in your organization. By doing so, you will be helping to advance the research on Italian Canadian identity and mental health across generations.

I am looking for 12 participants who:

- Are an **Italian immigrant to Canada, the child or the grandchild of an Italian immigrant**
- Have experienced a **crisis of meaning** where, for a period of time life lacked meaning, felt frustratingly empty and pointless
- Are currently between the ages of **21-85**

Participation in this study involves interviews that will take approximately 60- 90 minutes depending on participants' stories and openness to share.

If you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,

Samantha Castelli

Thank you for showing interest in this study!

Before we get started, I wanted to take a moment to let you know what your participation would consist of:

- One interview which will take approximately 60- 90 minutes and that will explore topics such as Italian identity, a crisis of meaning and meaning-making
- Two questionnaires that will take a few moments to fill out about meaning in life and religiosity

Once again, in terms of eligibility criteria, it is important that you:

- Are an **Italian immigrant to Canada, the child or the grandchild of an Italian immigrant**
- Have experienced a **crisis of meaning** where, for a period of time life lacked meaning, felt frustratingly empty and pointless.
- Are currently between the ages of **21-85**

Before starting the interview, I will ask your permission to audio and/or video record the interview for data analysis purposes however, these recordings will be kept confidential, the recordings will be transcribed and all identifying information will be removed from the transcriptions

If you are still interested in participating, you can reply with three different dates and times in the following 7-day period (excluding weekends) when you are available for an interview. Interviews can take place via a videoconferencing platform or in person at St Paul University.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any more questions!

Thank you,
Samantha

C Consent Form

Title of the study: Coping Differences between Generations of Italo-Canadians during a Crisis of Meaning

Student Researcher: Samantha Castelli, M.A Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, Faculty of Human Sciences, Saint Paul University. Coordinates: scastelli061@uottawa.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Andrzej Jastrzebski, Faculty of Human Sciences, Saint Paul University. Coordinates: ajastrzebski@ustpaul.ca

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Samantha Castelli with supervisor Dr. Andrzej Jastrzebski. The research study has been approved by The Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University.

Purpose of the Study: The study aims to understand how three different generations of Italian Canadian immigrants cope with a crisis of meaning.

Participation: My participation will consist of attending a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete during which I will be asked a series of questions surrounding my experience with a crisis of meaning. I will also be asked to complete two questionnaires, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire and the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, as part of the study

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I will be asked questions surrounding meaning in life, religion/spirituality and culture and this may cause me to feel emotional distress. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by providing a confidential and compassionate environment. Furthermore, I can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help advance research regarding the importance of religiosity/ spirituality in responding to issues surrounding the meaning, purpose and making sense of the world. Furthermore, my participation will contribute to the research gap surrounding Italian Canadian identity and mental health across generations.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to others. All data collected from the study (i.e. interview recordings, transcriptions) will have identifying information removed and will be stored on password-protected computers to which only Samantha Castelli and Dr. Andrzej Jastrzebski will have access. Furthermore, researchers will take appropriate measures such as frequent data maintenance and storage procedures to ensure that the data is protected against modification or loss.

Conservation of data: The data will be stored for a period of five years after dissemination of the results and then destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any

negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, (_____), agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Samantha Castelli, of the Department of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, Faculty of Human Sciences, Saint Paul University.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4
Tel.: (613) 236-1393

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

D Interview questions

Demographics

0. Introduce yourself by stating your age, gender, current living location, level of education, marital status, employment

Italian Identity

1. Tell me a story about when you felt truly Italian
 - a. What were you doing, who was there, when was this?
2. How connected do you feel to this identity in your every day life?
 - a. Have you always felt this way or was there a time when things were different. What happened?

Coping with crisis

3. Tell me about the crisis of meaning. When was this, what happened?
4. What was most helpful in dealing with the crisis?
 - a. (Potential follow-ups: How did religion/spirituality affect how you dealt with it? (+/- or not at all) How did your Italian identity play a role in the way you dealt with it?)

Meaning

5. Tell me a time where you felt that life had a lot of meaning.
 - a. What were you doing? Who were you with?
6. How does Italian culture affect your ability to feel meaning in life
7. How does religion/spirituality affect your ability to feel meaning?

E Questionnaires

Meaning in Life Questionnaire

MLQ Please take a moment to think about what makes your life and existence feel important and significant to you. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and also please remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below:

Absolutely Untrue 1	Mostly Untrue 2	Somewhat Untrue 3	Can't Say True or False 4	Somewhat True 5	Mostly True 6	Absolutely True 7
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1. _____ I understand my life's meaning.
2. _____ I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful
3. _____ I am always looking to find my life's purpose.
4. _____ My life has a clear sense of purpose.
5. _____ I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
6. _____ I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
7. _____ I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
8. _____ I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
9. _____ My life has no clear purpose.
10. _____ I am searching for meaning in my life.

To Score:

Presence subscale score = subtract the rating for item #9 from 8, then add to the ratings for items 1, 4, 5, and 6. Scores range between 5 and 35.

Search subscale score = add together the ratings for items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10. Scores range between 5 and 35.

More information can be obtained from: <http://michaelfsteger.com>

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The Centrality of Religiosity Scale

Dimension	Items for both the basic and interreligious versions	Basic CRS versions			Additional Items for the interreligious versions only	Interreligious CRSi versions		
Intellect	01: How often do you think about religious issues?	CRS-5	CRS-10	CRS-15		CRSi-7	CRSi-14	CRSi-20
Ideology	02: To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?							
Public practice	03: How often do you take part in religious services?							
Private practice	04: How often do you pray?							
Experience	05: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life?							
Intellect	06: How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?							
Ideology	07: To what extent do you believe in an afterlife—e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?							
Public practice	08: How important is to take part in religious services?							
Private practice	09: How important is personal prayer for you?							
Experience	10: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?							
Intellect	11: How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?							
Ideology	12: In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists?							
Public practice	13: How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?							
Private practice	14: How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?							
Experience	15: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine is present?							
					04b: How often do you meditate?			
					05b: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are in one with all?			
					09b: How important is meditation for you?			
					10b: How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are touched by a divine power?			
					14b: How often do you try to connect to the divine spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?			

*Image taken from: Huber, S., & Huber, O. W. (2012). The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS). *Religions*, 3(3), 710–724. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3030710>