TWO IRANIAN MOTHERS' LIFE EXPERIENCES IN CANADA:

A CRITICAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY

A dissertation

presented to the Faculty of Education at Nipissing University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education

By

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June 2024

Certificate of Examination

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The _____ Dissertation _____ by

Leila Kharazmi

entitled

TWO IRANIAN MOTHERS' LIFE EXPERIENCES IN CANADA:
A CRITICAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
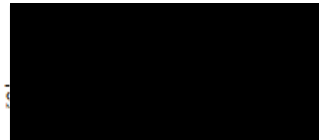
Doctor of Philosophy

Nov 25, 2024

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Abstract

TWO IRANIAN MOTHERS' LIFE EXPERIENCES IN CANADA:

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This dissertation explores the multifaceted experiences of two immigrant mothers in Canada, focusing on the intersection of motherhood, cultural preservation, and integration into Canadian society. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) as theoretical frameworks, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the systemic challenges and resilient strategies employed by these mothers.

The study highlights how immigrant mothers navigate the dual pressures of maintaining their cultural heritage while adapting to the dominant Canadian culture. The research underscores the significance of linguistic capital and social networks in fostering resilience and integration. The findings reveal that while bilingualism and multicultural friendships are theoretically valued, in practice, immigrant families often face linguicism and undervaluation of their cultural and professional assets.

Through qualitative interviews and a detailed literature review, this dissertation examines the personal narratives of two immigrant mothers, shedding light on their struggles and

successes. It addresses the lengthy and cumbersome accreditation processes that force many internationally trained professionals to seek alternative employment, often outside their field of expertise. The analysis also extends to the broader societal implications, such as the impact on Canada's healthcare system, where many internationally trained doctors are unable to practise despite significant shortages in family doctors and overwhelmed emergency departments.

The recommendations put forth in this dissertation emphasize the need for evaluating and enhancing existing policies to support immigrant integration more effectively. This includes advocating for more inclusive and streamlined accreditation processes and fostering environments that genuinely value and leverage the diverse cultural and linguistic skills of immigrant families. (275 words)

Dedication

To the immigrant mothers who inspire

resilience, courage, and love.

This work is for you,

your untold stories,

and the wisdom you carry,

May your voices echo in every corner

where understanding and empathy

grow. . .

Acknowledgments

My educational journey has been profoundly enriched by the Faculty of Education at Nipissing University. I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Carlo Ricci, whose wisdom, patience, and unwavering dedication have guided me throughout this endeavor.

To my committee members, Dr. Christine Cho, and Dr. Roger Bernardes, I am immensely thankful for your thoughtful insights. Your guidance has been a source of inspiration, shaping this work in meaningful ways.

To my external and internal reviewers, Dr. Karyn Cooper, and Dr. Prasad Ravi, I extend my heartfelt thanks for your thoughtful feedback and encouraging presence.

A special note of gratitude goes to the participant in this study, Violet (pseudonym). Thank you for your generosity in sharing your experiences.

This journey would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my family.

To my husband, thank you for your steadfast belief in me. Your encouragement has been my anchor in moments of doubt, and your love has been my constant source of strength.

To my children, the very rhythm of my heart and the light of my life—you have transformed my world in the most profound and wonderful ways, filling it with love, laughter, and purpose.

To my brothers, thank you for being steadfast pillars of support. Your belief in my abilities has driven me through moments of exhaustion.

To my mom, the strongest and most beautiful role model in my life, thank you for your unconditional love and for showing me the essence of motherhood. You have taught me, through your example, how to nurture, persevere, and love wholeheartedly.

To my dad, a compassionate pediatrician whose dedication to helping children inspired everyone around him: you were a beacon of kindness and strength. Your selflessness, even in the face of a global pandemic, exemplified your unwavering commitment to those who needed help the most. Though you passed away from COVID-19 while serving others, your legacy of love, courage, and generosity lives on. I miss you every single day and until we meet again, I will honor your memory with every step I take.

To everyone who has walked this path with me, I am profoundly and eternally grateful.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Canada has a significant number of immigrants. According to the official reports published by the government of Canada on January 3, 2023 (Government of Canada, 2023) in 2022, the government planned to welcome 431,645 new permanent residents in recognition of their valuable contributions to Canadian society. As the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, announced on the Government of Canada website, (Government of Canada, 2023) the country surpassed the target and broke the previous record of 2021, making it the largest number of newcomers ever welcomed in Canadian history since 1913.

While this news is significant for Canada's future, it is important to remain vigilant about how the immigrant population thrives in the country. Vinita Ambwani, the director of the Centre on Diversity and Inclusion within the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, highlighted the importance of including the voices of marginalized individuals in an interview published on the Government of Canada website (Government of Canada, 2021). She explained, "I'm a woman, a mother, an immigrant, and a visible minority. I carry multiple identities, so I see the world through that unique lens. Everyone experiences their life differently. It's not the same for all of us and that difference is lived experience." Ambwani further added, "Data and directives are good, but stories can go a long way in creating more empathy and understanding. Ultimately, it's about having an inclusive public service, and that means a better Canada" (Government of Canada, 2021). The impetus for my research stems from my position as an immigrant mother, and my conviction that to maintain a thriving future in Canada, it is essential that we incorporate and listen to these stories.

The objective of this research is to shed light on the experiences of two immigrant mothers living in Canada. While the sample size may be limited, their narratives offer valuable insights into the challenges and aspirations of immigrant mothers from minority backgrounds. By sharing these individual stories, I seek to provide a micro-level perspective that complements broader narratives. While it is acknowledged that the experiences of two individuals may not represent the entire immigrant mothers' population, these personal accounts serve as compelling examples that can help inform more inclusive and equitable policies and support systems for immigrant mothers. This research aims to highlight the unique struggles and strengths of these women and contribute to a better understanding of the diverse needs and contributions of immigrants in Canadian society. Sharing our motherhood experiences within the context of immigration has been an immensely rewarding experience for me. Writing this thesis has prompted me to deeply reflect on the significance of sharing the journeys of two immigrant mothers (including myself and another Iranian immigrant mother as participants) and the importance of our stories. Conducting this research amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the passing of my father and ongoing unrest in Iran, has made it particularly challenging at times. Nevertheless, I remained committed to this work. Through revisiting our experiences of motherhood in the context of immigration, I have gained new insights into my own motherhood journey.

While there are diverse forms of motherhood, this dissertation focuses specifically on exploring motherhood from a biological perspective, emphasizing the lived experiences of biological mothers within the context of immigration. It is important to acknowledge that other forms of experiencing motherhood, are equally valid and significant. These experiences, while not addressed in this study, deserve recognition and further exploration in their own right. By

defining the scope of this research, the dissertation aims to provide a focused and in-depth analysis of a specific aspect of motherhood, without diminishing the importance or complexity of other maternal experiences beyond its boundaries.

This introductory chapter outlines my motivation for pursuing this research, my goals, my choice of methodology, and the theoretical framework.

What Leads Me to Want to Do This Work?

"Every research project has to start somewhere" (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 14), mine started on a simple day in 2006, when I decided to study in the UK. From that moment on, the odyssey of leaving everything known and stepping into the unknown began for me. My interest in this topic has developed out of my ongoing personal experience of being an immigrant mother. As an immigrant mother, I have had various experiences and feelings related to my immigration experiences. Some of these experiences are uplifting and encouraging and some are not. All along the way, I have had a big question to carry throughout these years: How can I share my life experience as an immigrant woman? The reason behind this question is that throughout these years, there were many occasions where I felt lonely, in doubt, feeling judged by stereotypical standards, disqualified, and struggled because I did not belong to the white majority. I was disconnected from my support network of family and friends in Iran. In my pursuit to validate and potentially find common ground with other immigrants, I embarked on a quest to explore the narratives of fellow immigrants. I intended to gain insight into the various ways in which they navigated the intricate terrain of their immigration experiences. While I encountered a collection of detailed and inspirational accounts of immigration, I could not help but notice that extensive quantitative research endeavours dominated the landscape. These large-scale quantitative studies

were often designed to categorize immigrants into predefined groups, serving specific research objectives on a grand scale.

I realized that there is room for contribution and my unique vantage point, as an immigrant, could offer a nuanced perspective that could enrich the broader discourse on immigration. Mass migration and globalization seemed to lean the body of research towards political, social, and economic purposes rather than focusing on personal experiences that might offer unique and detailed perspectives. In line with this perspective, Curry-Rodriguez (2014) contends that:

> When immigration is examined as primarily a product of social forces without consideration of the people involved in the movement it produces a context in which all immigrants are gender-neutral or sometimes only masculine economic players and not members of families with unique familial roles. (p. 215)

Similarly, King et al. (2003), in their interesting book, *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration,* emphasize that the large-scale political, economic, and social impacts of migration "has effectively obscured the nature of the migratory experience itself, the emotions and practicalities of departure, travel, arrival and the attempt to rebuild a home" (p. i).

Most of the quantitative research on immigration that I had access to was like a clear-cut banana bread recipe that you find on big baking websites and if you follow it step by step it will give you pre-determined results. I did not want that! I wanted to hear real stories of people who actually tried to make banana bread with homemade recipes, and if they liked it, or if it burned, crumbled, was raw inside, if they substituted ingredients, or if it was okay to not like banana bread at all! Sharing my experience with my participant and hearing her life experience was

similar to the banana bread recipe metaphor. I believe that while individual experiences may not have the generalizability power (individual banana bread recipes that will not make it to the big websites), they are very important windows into the reality of the lives of immigrants. While searching for stories from immigrant mothers, I came across an article by Huma Qureshi (2019), who is both a journalist and an immigrant mother. She shared her own experience of feeling isolated and insecure because she could not find accounts from other immigrant mothers that reflected her own. She explained,

> I have longed to read a modern motherhood memoir by a writer who, like me, is of South Asian heritage. I have longed to read of how she might have written about choosing names for her sons that connect them to their origins without making them an unpronounceable laughing stock at school or teased for sounding like terrorists, or how she deliberates over which parts of her inherited culture she might choose to ignore. It's not always easy to talk about these things in parenting groups because first, where do you begin, and second, in my experience at least, even those can feel isolating. I once gatecrashed a National Childbirth Trust group before realising that it wasn't for me, that being the only woman of South Asian origin there made me feel more and not less alone. (Qureshi, 2019)

Qureshi (2019) goes on to explain that her isolating mothering experience as an immigrant mother was accompanied by insecurities and it became more overwhelming because she was caught halfway "juggling layers of cultures and religions and obligations and judgments in a way which perhaps the white narrative of mainstream motherhood doesn't always have to" (Qureshi, 2019). Her experience resonated with me and my individual life experience that did not fit into a clear-cut recipe. The number of years of living in different contexts exposed me to examples of

social injustice and stereotypical representations of immigrants in different ways. Also, as a foreign student and a mother, dealing with homesickness and the loss of my father to COVID-19, I felt the need to delve into our life stories to explore, navigate, and redefine meanings in life in the context of immigration.

My lived experiences have led me to puzzle about the experiences of other immigrant mothers. In a perfect scenario, I would have cherished the opportunity to connect with numerous immigrant mothers, exchanging a multitude of unique stories and experiences. It would have been a great opportunity to have several face-to-face conversations in a café, sharing our experiences. However, like many researchers of that time, my plans were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited my access to a diverse range of options for data collection due to the imposed lockdowns and travel bans. I was unable to explain and discuss my research face-to-face, and the added pressures and uncertainties of the pandemic discouraged many people from committing to participate. In addition to the pandemic, I faced further challenges in engaging potential participants. From my experience, the Iranian immigrant mother community is divided by cultural differences, political and religious views, varying levels of assimilation, and different socio-economic statuses. These divisions created barriers to building trust and encouraging participation. It can be difficult to address the often-unspoken issues related to immigration within this community, given their absent presence. During informal conversations with potential participants, I encountered concerns such as: "What if people recognize me? In the Iranian community, everyone is interconnected." "I know that sharing my story would mean discussing the painful parts too, and I've moved past that phase—revisiting it would bring back sad memories." and "I am grateful for being here and don't want to appear critical, even if it might help improve things." Given these constraints, I ultimately decided to focus on a single

case that promised to provide rich and valuable data. I discussed my initial research interest with an immigrant mother residing in Canada, and to my delight, she expressed eagerness to share her story, so that together we can contribute to the body of individual mothering experiences and minority groups in Canada.

What was important for me was to provide counter-stories to challenge the majoritarian stories and master narratives (Montecinos ,1995) that have an impact on the ongoing narratives about immigrants. In this regard, Montecinos (1995) explains that "A monovocal account will engender not only stereotyping but also curricular choices that result in representations in which fellow members of a group represented cannot recognize themselves" (p. 293). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) support this idea and define counter-stories as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32). Counter-stories provide a platform for voices that are often overlooked or silenced, offering an alternative perspective that challenges prevailing norms and perceptions. By amplifying the voices of those on the margins, counter-stories contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of social dynamics and power structures. They serve as a vital tool for fostering critical dialogue, promoting social justice, and advocating for change.

Significance of the Study

In this study, I recognize the impact of marginalization on the quality of life of immigrant women and that an effective and sustainable immigration policy should include the voices of immigrant women. One of the most challenging immigration experiences belongs to women and particularly mothers (Lee et al., 2020; Liamputtong, 2001; Pangas, et al., 2019). For immigrant mothers "gender and migration can intersect to produce negative outcomes" (Astles, 2020), and

they may have difficulty navigating the new system (Khanlou et al., 2017). More studies on women's immigration experience will be helpful in bringing their experience to the centre as "immigrant women's/ mothers' experiences have long been ignored" (Zhu, 2016, p. 143).

When I searched for research on immigration experience as seen through the eyes of women, I realized that most of the research is on the majoritarian stories, focused on male experiences. In that regard Saurez- Orozco et al. (2011) argue that,

> Gendered migratory experiences are another domain of significant neglect within the immigration research community. Scholars all too often fail to consider whether or not women are motivated by the same forces as men as well as how their experience within the new context may or may not be different than that of their male counterparts. (p. 15)

According to Curry-Rodriguez (2014), it is important to do research on immigrant mothers as "their immigration experiences are affected by their gender roles, and it is important to examine the impact of immigration on their roles as mothers" (p. 207). However, Curry-Rodriguez further states that there are problems trying to find data on immigrant mothers, "because many official agencies do not disaggregate data by sex and gender, much less in terms of motherhood. Second, every nation defines their data gathering in terms of their particular needs and customs" (p. 209).

The absence of sufficient female perspectives on the immigration experience can be the result of what Criado-Perez (2019) in her book *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, discusses as the gender data gap. She argues that since the beginning of history there has been silence about women's presence and experience. She goes on to explain that,

> our entire culture is riddled with them. Films, news, literature, science, city planning, economics. The stories we tell ourselves about our past, present, and future. They are all

marked—disfigured—by a female-shaped 'absent presence.' This is the gender data gap.

(p. 11)

Curry-Rodriguez (2014) similarly argues that only since 1980s scholars began to see women as active agents in migration, "women had been part of immigration throughout history but had been neglected because of the tendency to consider only males as immigrants" (p. 207). This oversight contributed to a significant data gap. In the context of Canada, Yax-Frase (2019) explains there has been a gap and a lack of focus on the mothering experiences of immigrant women, despite their significant contributions to the economic, demographic, and social growth of Canadian society. Examining the maternal work of migrant women is crucial as it offers valuable insights into how their values, culture, and child-rearing methods impact their children's identity and integration into Canadian society. Yosso (2005) posed an important question: Whose culture has capital? She highlighted how the normalized majoritarian White culture dominates discourse and that "racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared 'normative' values and 'neutral' social scientific principles and practices" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). Yosso emphasized the importance of acknowledging and learning from the often unrecognized cultural wealth of communities of colour and to recognize the overlooked epistemologies of People of Color. According to Yosso, culture encompasses "behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people" and is neither static nor fixed (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). In immigration discourse, the void regarding the experiences of immigrant women exists because their culture did not make it to the main narrative. Further research can provide counternarratives about the immigration experience of mothers. This is required to include their voices in the discourse on immigration, to call for equitable opportunities, and consequently contribute to the social aspects of the sustainability framework.

An important way to reduce the data gap is to share women's life stories. Hopper (2020) believes that by listening, reflecting, writing, and reimagining motherhood stories, our perspective of life will change and empathy grows, "and slowly, one story at a time, the world will be changed, too" (p. 9). Sharing life stories fosters understanding and empathy and is a sustainable way to transfer experience and knowledge. In the words of Manney (2008) "You and I may not be alike, but now I understand you. And I think you'd understand me, too, if I told you my story" (p. 59). In thinking with Manney I recognize that an important way to create an understanding environment among different groups and include perspectives from different voices is through sharing stories.

My dissertation contributes to the literature by unpacking the multifaceted experiences of two immigrant mothers through critical narrative inquiry. It enriches the field by combining Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) to explore the intersectionality of race, gender, and cultural identity in motherhood within the context of immigration. This work not only highlights overlooked perspectives but also critiques existing policies and practices, advocating for more inclusive and equitable frameworks in immigration and integration research. Additionally, it underscores the value and significance of small-scale research, challenging the prevailing emphasis on large-scale studies in most research narratives.

Research Questions

In this critical research design, I intend to explore the overarching research question in which I consider: What is it like for us to be immigrants in Canada? Saldaña and Omasta (2018) emphasize that "all questions should stem from the overarching research question" (p. 108). The overarching question in this research deals with our immigration experience in Canada and

contributes to four leading questions that revolve around the theme of motherhood in the immigration context:

1. What is it like for us to live in Canada as immigrant mothers?

2. What are our thoughts as immigrant mothers on the themes of homesickness and loneliness?

3. What is it like for us as mothers to live in Canada navigating cultural differences?

4. What is it like for us as mothers to experience sending our children to schools in Canada?

My mothering experience is prevalent in these questions. According to Martin and Parr (2020), it is important to focus on the mothering experience "and the multitude of social and emotional intersections women experience through mothering" (p. 5). One of the big intersections of mothering for me has been the immigration experience, so my research questions focus on the intersections of mothering and immigration.

To gather the data, I met the participant during four online interview sessions. During these sessions, we shared our experiences. I used the semi-structured interview method "to have participant(s) share as much information as possible with minimal direction from the interviewer" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 108). In semi-structured interviews, questions are open-ended which allows the participants to interpret and share their ideas (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). In each session, we focused on one of the questions, and at the end of each session we dedicated some time to any further thoughts or comments.

To frame my research, I employed the ideas of the transformative paradigm to focus on the experience of marginalized people and connect the dimensions of my inquiry. To do that, I

used narrative inquiry through the theoretical lenses of Critical Race Theory and Women's Ways of Knowing to contribute to the questions. When these two theoretical lenses are applied to immigration studies, they have the potential to highlight the experiences of marginalized people and challenge the stereotypical representations of this group.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the intersectional challenges faced by immigrant mothers and delves into the intricate issues and challenges that arise with immigration. It begins by exploring the research paradigm, grounded in the transformative paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of including marginalized voices and experiences to foster social justice. The theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) are employed to provide a comprehensive lens through which to view the unique challenges faced by immigrant mothers. These frameworks help to uncover the ways in which race, gender, and cultural identity intersect to shape the experiences of these women.

The literature review proceeds to discuss the personal motivations behind the research, rooted in my own experiences as an immigrant mother. It acknowledges the emotional and practical challenges of immigration, such as isolation, cultural displacement, and the struggle to balance cultural heritage with the new societal norms in Canada. This personal narrative is complemented by scholarly references, reinforcing the significance of understanding motherhood as a central aspect of women's lives.

Research Paradigm

Qualitative researchers are guided by a combination of their beliefs in three main areas. Ontology refers to questions about being and reality, epistemology addresses the questions about knowledge, and methodology is about the methods of obtaining knowledge (Kim, 2016). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) use the term "paradigm" or "interpretive framework" (p.13), to refer to these beliefs. Glesne (2016) further explains that a paradigm is "a framework or philosophy of science

that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to go about doing so" (p. 5). Paradigm "connect(s) all dimensions of inquiry" (Farias et al., 2017, p. 2). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) emphasize that,

> All research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. . . Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions that are asked and the interpretations that are brought to them. (p. 13)

I chose the transformative paradigm, as it helps me understand that versions of reality need to be critically questioned to determine "if they support the enhancement of social justice or sustain an oppressive status quo" (Flick, 2014, p. 516). The transformative paradigm emphasizes the role of people in the research "for personal and social transformation" (Mertens, 2009, p. 2). This particularly applies to my goal of including the voices of immigrant mothers which can be empowering and transformational.

Ontologically, this research is grounded in the belief that reality is largely socially constructed and shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts. This aligns with Critical Race Theory (CRT), which posits that race and racism are central, pervasive elements of social structures that influence individual and collective experiences. Similarly, Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) suggests that reality is interpreted through gendered lenses, where women's experiences and perspectives are uniquely shaped by societal norms and power dynamics.

Epistemologically, this study acknowledges that knowledge is subjective and constructed through social interactions and lived experiences. CRT emphasizes the importance of counter-narratives and the experiential knowledge of marginalized groups as legitimate sources of

understanding (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). WWK complements this by focusing on the epistemological perspectives and cognitive development of women, highlighting the importance of voice, self-expression, and the validation of women's knowledge and experiences.

Based on my epistemological stance and inspired by the ideas of the transformative paradigm that focuses on the experiences of marginalized communities (Jackson et al., 2018), my primary theoretical framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT). In addition, I draw on Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) to complement and enrich the critical perspective provided by CRT.

CRT serves as a foundational framework for this research, emphasizing the significance of race and racism in shaping social structures and experiences. CRT challenges dominant ideologies that perpetuate racial inequalities and advocates for social justice and equity. Key tenets of CRT include the centrality of race and racism, the challenge to dominant ideologies, the commitment to social justice, the importance of experiential knowledge, and the use of interdisciplinary approaches. WWK enhances CRT by providing insights into the ways women come to know and understand their experiences. This framework emphasizes the relational, contextual, and experiential aspects of women's knowledge, advocating for the inclusion of women's voices and perspectives in understanding their realities.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) complement each other by addressing intersecting dimensions of race, gender, and epistemology, creating a holistic framework for understanding marginalized experiences. While CRT often adopts a critical and rigorous lens to expose systemic racism and structural inequalities, WWK introduces a relational and gentle dimension, balancing CRT's focus on power dynamics and structural barriers. WWK emphasizes the value of personal narratives, relational knowing, and transformative experiences, which enrich the understanding of how marginalized women, particularly immigrant mothers,

navigate and construct knowledge within intersecting systems of oppression. Together, these frameworks challenge dominant narratives while providing a nuanced and compassionate perspective.

Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks offer us a way to "frame and interpret society" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 2). During my search for appropriate frameworks for my dissertation, I encountered Anzaldúa's assertion: "If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and liberated by theories" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi). The frameworks I selected resonated with this idea, as they made me feel empowered. These frameworks exemplify the liberation of marginalized individuals, providing a voice to those who are often unheard and are thus particularly suited to addressing the immigration experience. I also use narrative inquiry as my methodology to understand the human experience through stories and connect these stories with my theoretical frameworks. Narrative inquiry is a fluid way of understanding life and experience, it challenges the dominant story by providing different possibilities, "the structures, seen and unseen, that do constrain our lives when noticed can always be imagined to be otherwise, to be more open, to have alternative possibilities" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89). Hewett (2020) emphasizes the importance of documenting these life stories and memoirs. She believes that life stories have the power and the potential to record "cultural knowledge otherwise performed, embodied, or passed down orally in mothers' stories. Through remembering, these texts can resist dominant cultures" (p.195). Similarly, Delgado & Stefancic (2017) assert that stories are "opening a window onto ignored or alternative realities" (p. 46). The co-founders of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly, along with Delgado and Stefancic,

prominent scholars in CRT, share the view that stories can present alternative realities to those of the dominant group.

Narrative inquiry as my methodology can be in harmony with CRT as my theoretical framework by using storytelling to examine the experiences of individuals impacted by systemic racism and challenging dominant narratives that perpetuate racial inequalities. Narrative inquiry can also be connected to WWK by using storytelling to explore women's experiences and perspectives, as well as how their knowledge is shaped by social relationships and contexts. This approach can be particularly valuable in challenging dominant knowledge structures and amplifying marginalized voices. I believe that my choice of theoretical frameworks and methodology is aligned with the purpose of this research, which is to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The narratives of marginalized communities hold the potential to foster ideals such as equity, sustainability, unity, and solidarity, and to demonstrate our shared humanity despite our differences. Equity refers to fair treatment, opportunities, and advancement for all people, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.). Sustainability involves practices that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, n.d.). Unity denotes the state of being united or joined as a whole, especially among individuals or groups with common interests or goals. Solidarity is the sense of mutual support and shared purpose among individuals within a group, particularly in the context of standing together to address common challenges.

By conducting in-depth qualitative research on immigration, we open windows to the world of immigration and gain a more nuanced understanding of this topic, one that dispels stereotypes and sheds light on issues that have been misrepresented or overlooked. When more of these windows open, they activate the heart and foster caring. However, in our current capitalist society, caring for marginalized communities can be challenging, as it requires us to challenge the dominant ideologies that prioritize the interests of some groups over others. It is therefore crucial to amplify the voices of immigrants, even if the study features only two participants, to shed light on their unique experiences and perspectives. While this research may not encompass a broad range of diversity, it contributes to the broader goal of working towards a more inclusive and supportive world for marginalized communities.

A theoretical framework that advocates for including the voices of minorities is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT can be used "to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses." (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). CRT originated in the 1970s as a response to the call for new theories and strategies that could challenge the emerging and subtle forms of racism and combat "racial orthodoxy" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p. 2). It builds on ideas from radical feminism and critical legal studies. To uncover layers of racial inequality, CRT uses a critical lens to interrogate and question "the ideologies, narratives, institutions, and structures of society" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p.11). According to Mari Matsuda (1991), a prominent scholar in Critical Race Theory (CRT), CRT is "the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331). Scholars of CRT posit that racism is a persistent issue, one that may change in form and target

but remains present in some form or another. It can be challenging to identify instances of racism since they can be concealed within seemingly innocuous ideas, making it difficult for those who do not directly suffer from it to recognize. Critical race theory is deeply rooted in the intricacies of social realities, drawing from our individual experiences. In their seminal work on CRT, Words that Wound (1993), Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, explain that,

> Critical race theory is grounded in the particulars of a social reality that is defined by our experiences and the collective historical experience of our communities of origin. Critical race theorists embrace subjectivity of perspective and are avowedly political. Our work is both pragmatic and utopian, as we seek to respond to the immediate needs of the subordinated and oppressed even as we imagine a different world and offer different values. It is work that involves both action and reflection. It is informed by active struggle and in turn informs that struggle. (p.3)

Matsuda et al., (1993) explain the foundational principles of critical race theory, emphasizing its grounding in lived experiences and collective histories. They highlight the inherently political nature of critical race theory and its commitment to addressing both immediate injustices and envisioning a more equitable future. The quote also underscores the importance of action and reflection, as well as the reciprocal relationship between theory and activism in the ongoing struggle for social justice.

CRT is applied across various research fields, including education. In educational research, scholars utilize CRT to analyze classroom observations, interactions, and community dynamics, as well as to closely examine journals, letters, and official documents. This approach brings attention to overlooked and unheard voices, providing alternative explanations. They ask "How does being an immigrant affect an individual's ability to participate in public life? What

narratives do we construct to include and exclude—to construct social cohesion or sow seeds of discord?" (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018, p. 371). The CRT lens is not intended to twist or distort reality. Instead, it aims to offer an alternative perspective on racialized issues, amplifying the voices of those on the social margins.

Discrimination, Prejudice, Racism

To identify instances of racism, it is essential to differentiate between discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Discrimination is the unequal or unjust treatment of individuals based on perceived categorical differences. As Fish and Syed (2020) note, "Discrimination can be positive or negative—that is, people can be treated better or worse based on their group membership; however, research tends to focus on the latter" (p. 3). Discrimination can be complex and often stems from stereotypical representations of particular groups, which can have a detrimental impact on the quality of life of group members and limit their opportunities. Prejudice involves an individual's emotional response towards members of a different group, which "informs an individual's attitude directed toward people based on their group membership" (Fish & Syed, 2020, p. 3). It is important to note that discrimination and prejudice can affect anyone, including people of colour who may also discriminate and hold prejudiced beliefs. However, racism is distinct from discrimination and prejudice, as it pertains to the systemic and structural power that usually favours white individuals in Western societies and actively works against people of colour. Fish and Syed (2020) define racism as a system of power that "produces and maintains an ethnic and racial hierarchy" (p. 1). In their view, racism operates as a one-way street, with discrimination and prejudice serving as traffic lights and signs that reinforce and maintain the flow of racial hierarchy in society. Thus, discrimination and prejudice together serve to reinforce and uphold racism. Critical race theory seeks to identify, critique, and dismantle these traffic

signs and obstacles that obstruct the progress and flourishing of marginalized groups while reinforcing the unfair power dynamics of another.

The Main Tenets of CRT

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) in their seminal work *Critical Race Theory*, explain the main tenets of CRT that are widely accepted among CRT scholars. These tenets criticize the way society works to challenge marginalized groups.

- CRT criticizes racism and argues that racism is ordinary, which means "racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (p. 21).

- CRT is concerned with interest convergence. According to this principle, because racism provides advantages to white people, there is little incentive for them to work towards ending it. In other words, white people are only likely to support anti-racist efforts when doing so also aligns with their own self-interest. This principle recognizes that there is a power dynamic at play, where the dominant group is reluctant to give up their privileged position, and it emphasizes the necessity to challenge and disrupt this dynamic to achieve greater equity and justice.

- CRT argues that social constructions are not inherent or fixed. Races are "categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (p. 21).

- CRT focuses on differential racialization which is "the ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times" (p. 21). It recognizes that racial categories are not fixed or universal but rather are socially constructed and dynamic, changing according to shifting social and historical context.

- CRT places a significant emphasis on the importance of including the voices and perspectives of people of colour "because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know" (p. 22). This recognition of the importance of diverse perspectives is crucial for understanding and addressing the ways in which racism operates in society.

- CRT acknowledges the impact of intersectionality on individuals. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017) "No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity" (p. 22). Intersectionality argues that individuals might face overlapping discriminations based on their gender, race, physical ability, sexual identity, etc. In that regard, Solórzano & Yosso (2002) emphasize the layers of subordination that are based on "race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality" (p. 25). These layers of subordination can intersect with each other and have further impacts on marginalized people.

CRT and Colorblindness

Kimberlé Crenshaw (2019), one of the key figures of CRT, warns against the colourblindness approach in racial debates in modern societies. Crenshaw et al. (2019) argue the following:

Colorblindness at the most basic level mobilizes a metaphor of visual impairment to embrace a simplistic and misleading affirmation of racial egalitarianism. Its emphasis on color, imagines racism to be an individualistic aversion to another person's pigment rather than a systemic skewing of opportunities, resources, and life chances along racial lines. (p. 31)

In a society where racial inequality is covered by colourblindness, it is very hard to argue against the systematic racism that works to the advantage of white people. In that regard, CRT argues that "traditional notions of merit are presented as aracial, culturally neutral, and impartial, but in fact, the norms of certain cultural orientations are valued more than others" (Graham et al., 2011, p. 5). The traditional claims serve to cover the power system and privilege-based dominant groups in society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

This supposedly neutral social system conceals the ongoing racial issues of people of colour on one hand, and at the same time, on the other hand, deprives the white population of the information they need to realize the daily challenges and struggles of people of colour. Derrick Bell, the father figure of the CRT movement, argues that many white people respond to the race-based disadvantages with "either a sympathetic headshake or victim-blaming rationalizations . . . to the conclusion that contemporary complaints of racial discrimination are simply excuses put forward by people who are unable or unwilling to compete on an equal basis in a competitive society" (Bell, 1992, p. 15). This response, in Bell's view, reveals a failure to acknowledge the systemic and structural ways in which racism operates in society, and a tendency to prioritize the preservation of the status quo over the pursuit of social justice and equity. The focus on individual responsibility and meritocracy, which are central to many mainstream discourses around race and inequality, serves to obfuscate the ways in which historical and ongoing patterns of discrimination continue to shape opportunities and outcomes for people of colour.

Critical race theory argues that marginalized individuals do not have an equal chance of success due to systemic barriers and discrimination, and therefore, it challenges the notion of individual responsibility for one's life outcomes. It criticizes the systematic factors that affect individuals and emphasizes that marginalized people's life experience is important as their

experiential knowledge is critical to "understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

The CRT framework poses an important question: "How does race function as a barrier between the powerful and the marginalized?" (Mertens, 2009, p. 285). Viewed through the CRT lens, this question challenges the dominant ideology which claims that institutions are objective, colourblind, race-neutral, and provide equal opportunity. By challenging the dominant ideologies, CRT focuses on three main goals which are affirmed by Parker and Lynn (2002):

> (a) to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and in society; (b) to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct, and (c) to draw important relationships between race and other axes of domination. (p. 10)

Practicing these goals has not been easy for CRT researchers. CRT reminds us "how difficult it is to 'get past race' when it remains constitutive of what it means to be American" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. xii). Critiquing and questioning the entrenched white privilege-based beliefs and values is a difficult task that has been and still is met with opposition and disapproval.

CRT Today

Richard Delgado, who has written several of the key books on CRT, in the year 2000 argued:

> We reject new thought until, eventually, its hard edges soften, its suggestions seem tame and manageable, and its proponents are "elder states-persons," to be feared no longer. By then, of course, the new thought has lost its radically transformative character. We reject the medicine that could save us until, essentially, it is too late. (p. 485)

One might assume that in the two intervening decades since Delgado argued this, things have changed for the better in 2022. However, currently, there are debates on CRT and its ban on the school curriculum in the US. What started with a father accusing the school board of trying to "indoctrinate his children by teaching critical race theory" (Kingkade et al., 2021, para. 4) has now turned into a heated conflict that drew national attention by building a toxic image of CRT with claims that it will teach white children that they are racist. In the wake of the current debates on the banning of CRT at schools, Kimberlé Crenshaw one of the co-founders of CRT, in an interview in July 2021 with MSNBC, explains that "CRT is a way of looking at race, it's a way of looking at why after so many decades since the emancipation we have patterns of inequality that are enduring and stubborn." In the same interview, she addresses the current debates and calls it a backlash to reverse the racial reckoning. She warns that this debate will turn CRT which is anti-racism inherently, into racism against white people, or "reverse discrimination against white people" (MSNBC, 2021). Crenshaw encourages people to share their counter-stories. These stories offer a stage for voices frequently disregarded or muted, presenting an alternative viewpoint that contests dominant norms and perceptions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and get involved with CRT to challenge the majoritarian stories that might slow down the CRT movement.

The promotion of awareness concerning the realities of racism and the amplification of the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals are effective approaches for advancing endavours aimed at addressing and eradicating racism within society. This underscores the importance of actively listening to and engaging with the counternarratives of marginalized individuals. By doing so, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of racism and work collectively to foster a more equitable and inclusive society.

CRT and Counternarratives

Delgado and Stefancic in 2017 wrote that "society constructs the social world through a series of tacit agreements mediated by images, pictures, tales, tweets, blog postings, social media, and other scripts" (p. 44). What happens when these constructed images that circulate in the majoritarian stories convey ideas against marginalized people?

The majoritarian social narratives normalize oppression by sharing the stories "from the perspective of the dominant social group in order to sustain their racial and class privilege" (Gildersleeve et al., 2011, p. 97). Solórzano & Yosso use the term 'counter-stories' to address these stories while more contemporary scholars are using the term 'counternarratives.' In this research, I also use the term counternarratives.

Counternarratives, aim to share the real-life stories of marginalized people. They become bridges to understanding others. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argue that "narratives provide a language to bridge the gaps in imagination and conception that give rise to the different. They reduce alienation for members of the excluded groups, while offering opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway" (p. 52). Counternarratives are valuable tools to challenge the majoritarian stories and provide alternative perspectives into the lives of marginalized people. These stories echo the experiences of people who are socially and racially marginalized to "raise critical consciousness about social and racial injustice" (Yosso, 2006, p. 10). In this regard, Delgado & Stefancic (2013) assert that we construct our world with our stories and silence. When we remain silent, the majoritarian stories will depict us the way they wish, which may or may not be true.

Tuyisenge and Goldenberg (2021) encourage the use of counternarratives and argue that "all interventions and decision-making must be informed by the lived experience and voices of affected communities" (p. 651). Life stories and lived experiences are considered an important way to understand the reality of being a member of a marginalized community, but in Western societies the use of mono vocal, master narratives or majoritarian stories that are heavily relied on stereotypes is common. The majoritarian story is "one that privileges whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28) and makes them normative points of reference. If we do not make room for counternarratives of the true experience of marginalized groups that challenge the norms, the standard stories will "dominate the discourse" (Ikemoto,1997, p. 136).

Tapping into storytelling and personal narratives through reflection and interpretation is empowering, which is one of the aims of CRT. It challenges the "embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It helps the participants to be "in the position to decide which stories will be told and retold, and which will not" (Combs & Freedman, 2012, p. 1034). The narratives in my research will potentially offer solidarity and comfort; they will amplify the emancipatory power of stories and challenge stereotypes. These stories help members to find and define their place in the new context of their lives in Canada. In this process caring for each other strengthens and "we shall be reminded of our fundamental relatedness, of our dependence upon each other" (Noddings, 2013, p. 84). This will connect us to ourselves, others, and the world around us in a holistic way.

The reason I chose CRT as my main theoretical framework is that, through this lens, research about the lives of minority groups of immigrants can expose some of the biases they experience in their new environments. In the context of Canada, CRT can be relevant. Fleras

(2017) argues that in Canada, there is so much room for improvement in terms of practicing

multicultural ideologies because the issues of inequities are still a big problem for marginalized

people. He explains that "the fact that Canada's proposed principles do not always match

people's lived experience is the catalyst that divides the dynamics of race, ethnic, and aboriginal

relations" (Fleras, 2017, p.viii). Fleras further states that:

> No amount of multicultural gloss can mask the obvious: Racialized women and men
>
> continue to experience inequities in power, income, and privilege. That a growing legion
>
> of foreign-trained professionals are driving taxis or delivering pizzas points to Canada's
>
> mishandling of its immigration 'advantage' by transforming a potential 'brain gain' to
>
> 'brain drain' (p. viii).

Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli (2009) similarly examine the plight of internationally trained teachers

in Canada, highlighting that those who successfully navigate the provincial licensing

requirements often face a "disastrous" job search experience, while they could provide so much

experience and benefit to Canada if they had been given more chance (p. 603). While my

research is based on the narratives of two immigrant individuals, it is essential to recognize that

these stories offer insights into the detailed challenges and opportunities that Fleras (2017) and

Ryan et al. (2009) discussed at a broader scale. By delving into the personal experiences of the

two participants, I aim to provide real-world context and tangible examples of how the principles

and policies mentioned by these researchers may reflect in immigrants' lived realities. This

micro-level perspective can serve as a valuable complement to the larger discourse on

immigration and its impacts, shedding light on specific cases within the broader dynamics of

race, ethnicity, and immigration in Canada.

Similar to Fleras's discussion, Yuan (2013) adds that in contemporary Canada, racism often manifests in subtle ways, as it contradicts the principles of a democratic society where many Canadians uphold liberal democratic values such as justice, equality, and fairness. However, it is important to note that despite race being a social construct, the existence of racism has not disappeared in present-day Canada. Li (2001) argues that in Canada, racism has adopted a subtle form that can be hard to identify. He adds that:

> the significance of race in a democratic society can be articulated in codified language that sanctifies what otherwise would be unholy racial messages and transforms them into noble concerns of citizens that become acceptable and even appealing to majority
>
> members. In other words, racist discourse assumes a gentle appearance in order to claim its legitimacy in a democratic society (p. 78).

Herny and Tator (2007) further explain and criticize the subtle form of racism in Canada. In their book *The Color of Democracy,* they explore the way in which racism is hiding in a subtle form but still exists in Canada. They argue that racialized beliefs and practices persist in Canadian society, yet they often go unnoticed by those who are not directly affected by them. White Canadians frequently dismiss evidence of their own racial prejudices and differential treatment of minority groups. The testimonies of victims remain unheard, and their experiences are disregarded. Despite extensive consultations by public-sector agencies, there is often a failure to translate this knowledge into meaningful actions. Task forces and commissions of inquiry on racism are established by government bodies to showcase their concern, but their findings and recommendations are often overlooked. Henry and Tator (2007) believe that the subtle form of racism in Canada allows politicians and the power elite rationalize the existence of racial barriers that hinder the full participation of racialized communities, including Blacks, South Asians,

Muslims, and First Nations peoples, in various spheres such as politics, education, employment, media, justice, human services, and the arts.

With this background knowledge in mind, when researching immigrants who are from minority groups, it is important to focus on the political and social factors that shape their lived experiences in Canada. CRT explores the complex intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in the world of minority populations and examines how these factors negatively affect their lives. CRT values the experiential knowledge of minorities and scrutinizes the ways in which race and racism impact the lives of the minority population, and how race and racism affect social structures and discourses explicitly and implicitly (Yosso, 2006). According to Sawyer (2013), CRT allows marginalized people "to have their lived experiences and stories validated. CRT is not the means used to validate—these stories and experiences are already valid—but is used as a mechanism for moving the experiences from the margin to center" (p. 19). In the subsequent section, I will further explore how Women's Ways of Knowing complements and enriches the critical perspective offered by CRT, shedding light on the nuanced experiences of immigrant women and the multifaceted ways in which they navigate and respond to issues of race, gender, and knowledge acquisition.

Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK)

Our narratives within this research transpire at the crossroads of multiple intersecting identities, encompassing aspects of gender, motherhood, immigration, and Middle Eastern heritage, thereby directly engaging with the concept of intersectionality. In tandem with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the concept of intersectionality, Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) is another theoretical framework I have incorporated, which further enriches my analysis. WWK delves into the experiences of women as a distinct intersection that significantly influences our

epistemological perspectives and worldview. This theoretical framework supplements my analytical approach by providing additional layers of insight into the processes of knowledge acquisition and the epistemological viewpoints of immigrant women, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences.

This theory was introduced by a group of four female scholars, (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 1986;1997) who described five epistemological perspectives through which women understand their position in the world and their view on knowledge. They examined these perspectives that women used to understand truth, knowledge, and authority. WWK theory emphasizes women's epistemological assumptions and how it is central to their understanding of themselves and their worlds.

Belenkey et al. (1997) assert that the way we see the world is shaped by "our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge" (p. 3). In my view, knowledge is holistically constructed through connected knowing. I view women's experiences informed by their gender and perceived social and domestic roles: "all women grow up having to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood" (Belenkey et al., 1997, p. 4). Women's ways of knowing encourages women to "jump outside the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame" (Belenkey et al., 1997, p. 134). In this context, scholars of Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) encourage women to navigate beyond the limitations imposed by established frameworks and institutional structures, thereby enabling them to develop their own intellectual perspectives. This perspective is pertinent to my research as it equips me with the means to articulate my perception of the world. Stepping outside established norms requires us to exchange personal

experiences and narratives to offer alternative perspectives, enabling us to interact with the world in a manner that aligns with our comprehension of reality and truth.

In their influential study about women's ways of knowing, Belenkey et al. (1997) emphasized that for many of the women included in their study "the valued lessons learned did not necessarily grow out of their academic work but in relationships with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvements" (p. 4). I resonate deeply with this perspective, as my surroundings, life experiences, interaction with people, and social situations taught me more than formal education. As a result, I see life stories as strong pedagogical tools. I maintain that reality is socially constructed and is intertwined with life experiences. I think the answers to questions differ based on the context and "women become aware that questions and answers vary throughout history, across cultures, from discipline to discipline, and from individual to individual" (Belenkey et al., 1997, p. 138). As a narrative researcher with the view that experience is socially constructed, I focus on our "personal, social, cultural and political worlds, and how these worlds come together and interact within the narrative process" (Esin et al., 2014, p. 205). This process is interesting as it unfolds the multifaceted layers of individual experience that collectively contribute to one's comprehension of the world.

The biological process of motherhood has further contributed to my understanding of Women's Ways of Knowing by highlighting the embodied, relational, and transformative dimensions of knowledge creation. For me, pregnancy and childbirth were deeply embodied experiences that shaped my understanding of my physical self and my relationship with the world. These embodied experiences, while not synonymous with motherhood, provided a unique epistemological lens through which I constructed my maternal identity. Through these processes, I developed a heightened sense of bodily awareness, intuition, and emotional insight which are

core components of connected knowing emphasized in WWK. This lived, physical experience provided a unique lens through which I engage with knowledge that integrates both cognitive and visceral dimensions. Also, the biological process of motherhood fostered a deep relational connection between me and my child, even before birth. This connection is reflective of the relational knowing central to WWK, where knowledge is developed in connection with others.

The nurturing and interdependence involved in pregnancy and birth reinforced my epistemological framework, which is grounded in care, empathy, and mutual understanding. This life-altering experience also prompted me to re-evaluate my priorities, and ways of understanding the world, aligning with WWK's emphasis on the dynamic nature of knowledge and the transformative potential of lived experiences. The transition to motherhood compelled me to question my previously held assumptions and to construct new ways of knowing based on my evolving mothering role and responsibilities. WWK emphasizes the legitimacy of lived experiences as sources of knowledge, and biological motherhood exemplified this principle by empowering me to articulate and trust my voice while affirming the validity of my knowledge.

Building on this foundation, the voices of immigrant mothers carry profound significance, as they offer poignant insights into their unique worlds, shedding light on how social interactions, perceptions of motherhood, and notions of belonging are deeply shaped by emotional experiences and "emotions of guilt, shame, remorse, pride, happiness, anger, relief, satisfaction, stress, and anxiety," are tightly interwoven through place and time (Herrero-Arias, in press, p. 2). Immigrant mothers' narratives offer profound reflections on the complexities of their lived experiences, revealing the multifaceted dynamics of identity formation, cultural adaptation, and emotional resilience within the contexts they navigate.

In my quest to comprehend the intricate dynamics of motherhood within the immigrant experience, aligned with the transformative paradigm, I deploy Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) as a critical theoretical framework. WWK facilitates a reciprocal connection between my knowledge and experiential insights, enabling a mutual exchange with my research participant. This dynamic interaction serves to enrich the ongoing narrative surrounding immigration, encapsulating the manifold dimensions of women's experiences in this context and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their multifaceted lives.

Implications of CRT and WWK on my Research

Critical race theory (CRT) and Women's ways of knowing (WWK) can both provide valuable insights into my research on the experience of two immigrant mothers in Canada. CRT can help to illuminate the ways in which race and racism operate in Canadian society, particularly as they impact the experiences of immigrant mothers. This framework can guide me in examining how societal structures and institutions, such as the educational system, and healthcare, impact immigrant mothers differently based on their race, ethnicity, and immigration status.

WWK can complement CRT by providing me with a lens through which to view the unique experiences of immigrant mothers. This perspective emphasizes the importance of women's narratives and personal experiences and encourages women to create their own frameworks for understanding the world. Through this lens, I can explore the ways in which immigrant mothers' experiences of migration, motherhood, and identity shape their interactions with Canadian society, and how they navigate the challenges they face.

By combining these two frameworks, I can gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of immigrant mothers in Canada, particularly as they relate to race, gender, and identity. This can help to highlight the diversity of experiences within this population, and to identify the ways in which policy and societal structures can be improved to better support immigrant mothers.

Review of Related Literature

This literature review delves into the issues and challenges that arise with immigration, specifically highlighting the challenges faced by immigrant mothers.

The central focus of my research pertains to the topic of motherhood within the context of immigration. I have selected these two themes because my personal experience with immigration, which began in 2006 when I moved to the UK for study and work, has had a significant impact on my life. Later, when I became a mother and relocated to Canada, my perspective on immigration was further shaped in relation to the experience of motherhood and the new sense of self that I acquired. O'Reilly (2020) explains that motherhood is a significant aspect of a woman's life and should be taken into consideration:

> Mothering matters, and it is central to the lives of women who are mothers. In saying this, I am not suggesting that mothering is all that matters or that it matters the most; I am suggesting that any understanding of mothers' lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming and being a mother shape a woman's sense of self and how she sees and lives in the world. (p. 51)

Personally, as an immigrant mother, I found that motherhood took on a different dimension. The difficulties associated with immigration became more complex than before I had

a child, and I came to the realization that I felt less capable and faced more obstacles as an immigrant mother. Being separated from my family and friends, who had previously been my support system, was a significant factor, and I also had to juggle additional responsibilities such as studying, working, and caring for my child. Upon commencing my exploration of motherhood, I was directed toward literature from the Demeter Press, a pioneering publication centred around the study of mothering, which was established by Andrea O'Reilly. As I delved into the works of mothers from diverse backgrounds addressing other areas and experiences of motherhood, I found myself feeling emboldened and acknowledged that my own emotions and lived experience, "the gritty parts, the beautiful parts, and everything in between" (Hopper, 2020, p. 7) were valid and I felt motivated to include my experience of motherhood in relation to immigration. O'Reilly (2016) emphasizes that "any understanding of mothers' lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming and being a mother shape a woman's sense of self and how she sees the world" (p. 1). According to O'Reilly, feminist ideologies that solely focus on women are insufficient in addressing the obstacles that mothers encounter. O'Reilly (2016) discusses that:

> The category of mother is distinct from the category of woman and that many of the problems mothers face—social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and so forth—are specific to women's role and identity as mothers. Indeed, mothers are oppressed under patriarchy as women and as mothers. (p. 2)

She goes on to argue that "mothers—arguably more so than women in general—remain disempowered despite forty years of feminism" (O'Reilly, 2016, p. 2). Based on her view, mothers face oppression from patriarchy as both women and mothers, leading to dual pressures. Like O'Reilly, Takševa (2018) advocates for the systematic addition of the study of motherhood

as a significant aspect of women's experience into women's, gender, and feminist studies. It is now clear that contemporary feminist perspectives diverge from earlier ideologies that viewed motherhood as a barrier to women's advancement. Instead, present-day feminist writers argue that motherhood should be placed at the forefront of women's studies, recognizing it as an integral aspect of womanhood. In that regard, Kawash (2011) argues that "feminism cannot possibly hope to remain relevant without acknowledging motherhood in all its contradictions and complexities" (p. 997). Feminism's relevance hinges upon its acknowledgment and embrace of the different realities of motherhood, encompassing its contradictions and complexities. As a fundamental aspect of women's lived experiences, motherhood intersects with various dimensions of identity, social roles, and power dynamics. To overlook the significance of motherhood within feminist discourse would be to disregard the diverse array of challenges, joys, and struggles faced by women in their roles as mothers. Martin & Parr (2020) think that motherhood studies create a space for resonance "to grow empathy and community, and to grow in ourselves and others the freedom to re-imagine and re-story our lives" (p. 9). Hopper (2020) echoes their idea and asserts that when an understanding community is created, the seeds of real change are planted. These insights highlight the profound impact of motherhood studies not only on academic discourse but also on broader societal dynamics, pointing towards the possibilities for empowerment, connection, and social progress that arise when we engage deeply with the experiences of mothers.

Exploring Motherhood Studies Within the Context of Immigration

In her award-winning novel *The Namesake,* Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) beautifully portrays the feelings an immigrant person can experience:

Being a foreigner…is a sort of lifelong pregnancy, a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. (p. 51)

When someone inquires about my experience as an immigrant, I typically cite this quote. The feelings of ambivalence and doubt as to whether immigration is/was a good choice can be present in many immigrants' lives and sometimes it does not even matter if you are a successful immigrant or faced with failure in the new environment. Lahiri's analogy reminds me that the journey of immigration is a never-ending process. It does not simply stop when you reach the destination, as the destination would unfold more challenges. It would be more so being a woman and a mother (Government of Canada, 2021; Liamputtong, 2001). After outlining general challenges experienced by immigrants in their new surroundings, the literature review will specifically examine the difficulties faced by immigrant women.

Challenges of Immigration

Immigration is a transformative process with significant ramifications on the families as well as potentially long-lasting impacts on the socio-emotional development of their children. It is "one of the most stressful events a family can undergo, removing family members from predictable contexts—community supports and ties, jobs, and customs—and stripping them of significant social ties—extended family members, best friends, and neighbors" (Suárez-Orozco, Strom, & Larios, 2018, p. 4). Immigration can be a disruptive experience that uproots individuals from familiar environments and thrusts them into unfamiliar environments. The migration process can be emotionally traumatic for families.

Immigrants may go through numerous challenges in their journey of settlement while facing the "unfamiliarity in their new environment" (Forchuk, et al. 2021, p. 2). The difficulties that immigrant families face is not limited to the migration process. Settling in a new country also poses a range of challenges, including finding suitable housing (Heaven, 2023; Inam, 2023;Wildes, 2022), accessing healthcare (Higginbottom et al., 2015), education services (Cardoza, 2018), securing employment (Sivakumar, 2023), difficulty obtaining Canadian work experience (Government of Canada, 2022; Dunn, 2016; Karim, 2022) and non-recognition of foreign credentials (Ahmadzai 2015; Guo, 2009). Other challenges include, but are not limited to, language barriers (Matthew, 2023; Ro, 2021), culture shock (CanadaCIS, 2021; Anwar-Travas, 2018), racism (Matthew, 2023; Cotter, 2022), Homesickness and loneliness (Stick, Hou, & Kaida, 2021; Johnson et al., 2019), stress (Yoon et al.,2012), loss of support system (Gia-Lam, Collins, & Wong, 2020), and mental health issues (Hasbun, 2023). Fleras (2015) discusses the issue of unfamiliarity in the context of Canada which is well-known for its diversity. He argues that exposure to the diversity of the Canadian society can be both comforting and perplexing because "Newcomers must learn to navigate the social patterns and diverse cultural norms of Canadian society. They must also learn to embrace the fragments of various ethnic communities, with the result that there is no monoculture or single body with which to affiliate" (Fleras, 2015, p. 273). Fleras indicates that for newcomers there is an urgency to understand and adapt to the various cultural and social practices of Canadian society. They may find it hard to adapt to the multicultural community as they need to learn how to embrace and navigate Canadian diversity through the disorientation and reorientation process.

As immigrants navigate the new environment the challenges of "disorientation and reorientation" (Noble, 2013, p. 344), become central in their resettlement experience. In the

words of Rakoff (2003) "every act of immigration is like suffering a brain stroke: One has to learn to walk again, to talk again, to move around the world again, and, probably most difficult of all, one has to learn how to re-establish a sense of community" (Vivian Rakoff, as cited in Fulford, 2003, para. 2). The urge to make connections to the new environment can persuade immigrants to acculturate and some eventually assimilate to the host culture. But how free are they in choosing how to integrate is another challenge. Hofstra et al., (2005) argue that the immigrant population is not free in terms of choosing their adaptation strategy, "the use of certain adaptation strategies by immigrants partly depends on the attitude of the majority members. Majority members usually prefer immigrants who resemble them" (p. 604) and this puts pressure on immigrants to assimilate. Cho (2014) explains the case of Canada and argues that at the policy level, there appears to be a transition from assimilative approaches to those emphasizing diversity and the acknowledgment of differences. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that this shift may not have been as significant as initially perceived. While Canada is frequently lauded for its progressive and forward-thinking multicultural policy of 1971 and the subsequent Multiculturalism Act of 1988, it has also faced criticism for inadvertently promoting assimilation despite the purported intention of discouraging it through these policies and acts.

While establishing connections to the host country often requires a level of acculturation and assimilation, in immigrant families, challenges occur when the speed of acculturation differs between members of the family. This is because younger members usually assimilate into the host culture quicker causing "intergenerational stresses" (Tardif & Geva, 2006, p. 191). Immigrant children are usually "caught between parents representing the influence of the country of origin, and school and peers representing the ways of a new host society" (Montazer, 2012, p.

8) and immigrant parents feel threatened that their values are not practiced by their children. Similarly, Stroink & Lalonde (2009) argue that second-generation Canadians often experience enculturation within two different cultural frameworks simultaneously which can be difficult for them to adapt to. They are exposed to Western values and ideals through peers, teachers, and media while also being taught values and ideals of the heritage culture through parents and other members of the immigrant community. These two sets of cultural values and ideals can be very different and even contradictory. In her research, Chi (2020), explains the challenges of immigrant parents when their children are exposed to a different culture contradicting with their values. Her focus is on a group of Chinese parents in Canada and how their children's schooling and education have become their focal point of life in Canada. These families are urged to familiarize themselves with what values and ideas their children are exposed to in schools which may contradict traditional Chinese practices and educational values.

Losing Language, Losing Connection to Home

An important challenge faced by immigrant families is that during the process of acculturation, their children may become at risk of losing their first language. In an interview with Jaffer Sheyholislami (2022), a linguistics and language studies professor at Carleton University, he argued that the majority of children from newcomer families in Canada usually speak English or French as their primary language at home, especially for the second generation. He goes on to say that by the third generation, the ancestral language typically fades away. Sheyholislami (2022) states that the absence of strong language policies that support multilingualism and multiculturalism is a significant reason for language loss and shift in Canada. He believes that immigrant families are concerned that their children will not only lose their first language but also their connections with their culture, identity, families back home,

and homeland. Connecting the first language to the concept of home, Sheyholislami (2022) explain:

> A diasporic person, especially those of the first generation, always dream of returning "home" one day but not without their children. If that happens, it must be in the language of "home," otherwise there will not be enough connections to have a happy return. (para. 4)

This quote emphasizes the importance of maintaining one's first language. If parents are not able to speak their first language with their children, they feel that they may lose a part of their culture and identity. The quote also highlights the importance of language and cultural heritage in the lives of immigrants and their desire to maintain these connections across generations. However, false constructs of assimilation and enculturation can make this impossible.

In another interview, Evangelia Daskalaki (2019), an assistant linguistics professor at the University of Alberta talks about the importance of cultural identity and the adverse effects of losing one's heritage language. She argues that because of limited opportunities to practise their heritage language, immigrant families lose their language gradually. According to Daskalaki (2019), immigrant children tend to use the dominant language more frequently and in more varied contexts than their heritage language, which is typically only used at home with a limited number of speakers and for daily routines. Daskalaki argues that this can have negative consequences not only for family relationships, but also for the children's overall well-being. Daskalaki suggests that important aspects such as storytelling, play, arguments, and emotional expression within the family can be lost when children are unable to speak their mother tongue. This can cause the feelings of in-betweenness for children and make it hard for them to feel connected to any language or culture.

Finding Jobs: Lack of Canadian Work Experience and Non-Recognition of Foreign Credentials

One of the biggest problems that affects many immigrants to Canada is the non-recognition of their foreign credentials and lack of Canadian work experience which hinders their ability to secure employment that aligns with their expertise. In her 2023 doctoral dissertation on immigrant employment integration in a mid-sized city in Canada, Crea-Arsenio argues that while international migration increases and the global north faces a pressing demand for labour, immigration policies are placing greater emphasis on the economic assimilation of immigrants. According to Crea-Arsenio (2023), even with this heightened focus, the employment realities of immigrants during their initial years in the destination country often surpass national policies. Guo (2009) reports that for immigrants to Canada, lack of Canadian experience and transferability of foreign credentials are the biggest hurdles to employment. Guo (2009) further explains, "non-recognition of foreign credentials prevents them [immigrants] from accessing professional jobs in Canada and acquiring Canadian work experience, which subsequently makes it difficult for them to be qualified for professional jobs" (Guo, 2009, p. 42). Fleras (2017) explains that while immigrants may be selected for their set of skills, work experience, and credentials, in reality "Canadian employers don't want to use these or don't know how to" (p. 272). This issue may not be known to immigrants before they move to Canada, so many immigrate to Canada with high hopes only to find big hurdles along the way of employment. Guo (2009) considers this issue a political act and asserts:

> It is only after arriving in Canada that many highly educated immigrant professionals learn of the typical deskilling or decredentializing of their previous learning and work experience. While certain forms of knowledge are legitimized as valid, the learning and

work experience of foreign-trained professionals are often treated with suspicion and as

inferior. (p. 38)

This quote sheds light on the challenges faced by immigrant professionals in having their

qualifications and experiences recognized and valued in Canada, highlighting the need for

greater awareness, support, and inclusivity in professional environments. In line with this

perspective, Cho (2014) focused her research on immigrant teacher candidates (ITC) and the

difficulties they face in having their degrees recognized and finding teaching jobs in Canada.

Cho explains that some of the internationally trained teachers find it so hard to provide all the

necessary documents from their home countries that "sometimes graduates hide their foreign

credentials by completing a domestic degree so they do not have to produce transcripts from

another country. ITCs are implicitly required to present domestic degrees so they can begin to fit

into the Ontario or Canadian system" (p. 265). This quote reveals a troubling reality wherein

some ITCs feel compelled to conceal their foreign qualifications by pursuing domestic degrees,

simply to navigate the bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the Canadian system. This highlights the

role of gatekeepers, who often erect barriers that hinder immigrants' access to the workforce. By

implicitly requiring ITCs to possess domestic degrees, these gatekeepers perpetuate a system that

marginalizes and excludes qualified individuals based on their foreign backgrounds. In this

regard, Frank (2013) explains,

> The assertion that the dominant group in a society acts to maintain its power through
>
> limiting the resources of others may help to explain the difficulties experienced by
>
> immigrants when attempting to obtain a job in their field, particularly if it is a
>
> professional occupation. (p. 81)

This quote highlights the tendency of dominant groups to preserve their power by controlling access to resources. When applied to the experiences of immigrants seeking employment in their respective fields, especially within professional occupations, this perspective sheds light on the systemic barriers they often encounter. Cho (2016) further delves into this issue in her research and highlights the problem of the mal-employment of immigrants with a focus on internationally trained teachers. She emphasizes the desperate need for a paradigm shift by normalizing "instructions from bodies who have been historically Othered and who speak with a variety of dialects" (p. 55). Cho advocates for a diverse workforce to occupy positions of authority, challenging the traditional dominance of the White majority. One of the most frequently recited jokes on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Threads is that the best place to have a heart attack in Canada is in the back of a cab because your driver is likely a doctor. While this may sound amusing at first, it highlights a troubling reality faced by many internationally trained professionals in Canada. A quick Google review search reveals the struggles these professionals encounter when attempting to transfer their credentials. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) has a rating of only 1.7 stars out of 5 based on 230 reviews as of June 2024, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) has a rating of 1.5 stars out of 5 based on 165 reviews as of June 2024. A brief look at the reviews reveals recurring complaints such as "they are taking too long," "they should be disbanded," "beyond unacceptable wait times," and "the application process is long and poorly explained." One particular review noted that it takes more than three years for internationally trained teachers to become qualified to teach. The lengthy accreditation process forces many internationally trained teachers to seek alternative employment that is more accessible, often leading them to abandon their field of expertise. In the medical field, the situation is similarly challenging. A disheartening statement from the CPSO's website

may shed light on why many internationally trained doctors opt not to pursue their profession in

Canada:

> Significant financial and personal commitment is required to pursue licensure in Ontario
>
> and this experience is unique to each IMG (International Medical Graduates). Once the
>
> IMG begins the process, there is no guarantee of obtaining a licence to practise or an
>
> opportunity to engage in postgraduate training. The process leading up to licensure has
>
> many stages and often seems complex to those not familiar with the Canadian approach.
>
> (College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, n.d., p. 3)

This becomes even more distressing when considering that over 6 million Canadians lack access

to a family doctor, with overwhelmed emergency departments and extensive wait times for all

types of medical care (Rail, 2024). During a job fair event in 2023, I had the opportunity to

interact with a group of highly skilled immigrants who, despite their expertise, found themselves

working for Doordash, a food delivery company, where they struggled to earn even a minimum

wage after tirelessly driving around to deliver food. When the session moderator requested a

summary of our discussions, I took the microphone to address the issue of immigrants facing

difficulties when entering the Canadian job market with foreign credentials. After the session, I

had a conversation with Canadian job developers who attended the event, and they expressed

their surprise and lack of awareness regarding the challenges immigrants encounter, particularly

in securing jobs that align with their professional expertise. This encounter left me pondering the

portrayal of immigrant challenges to the Canadian public: How are these obstacles conveyed and

understood by the broader Canadian population? In an interview with Michael Valpy, a

renowned Canadian journalist and the recipient of Atkinson Fellowship for investigating social

cohesion in Canada, he argues how these issues that immigrants struggle with do not really make

it to the wide stream media (Dallas-Shelley, 2022). According to Valpy, there are noteworthy facts and statistics that are often overlooked by the media. For instance, he mentions that 65% of immigrants end up in jobs below their educational level, and a staggering 95% of immigrant doctors have never practised their profession.

Additionally, it has been observed through research that immigrants are seldom featured in accompanying photos in newspaper articles or invited as guests on TV shows. Valpy argues that the mass media has taken a rather laissez-faire approach toward multiculturalism and immigration, paying little attention to these issues. As a result, problems such as the rise of "racialized underclasses" and the prevalence of temporary foreign workers engaged in low-paying jobs have surfaced. These emerging trends have allegedly been ignored by the media (Kalaitzi, 2014). Alternatively, it has been contended that Canada has untapped potential in its pool of internationally trained professionals, which could be utilized more effectively in areas where additional support is needed. The healthcare sector, for instance, is experiencing a pressing demand for an increased number of physicians and support staff. The Ontario College of Family Physicians reports that within the province alone, 1.8 million residents currently lack a family doctor, a figure that could potentially rise to three million by 2025 if existing trends persist (Quenneville, 2020, para. 4). Dr. Peter Bell, an octogenarian medical practitioner residing in the small village of Sharbot, approximately 120 kilometers southwest of Ottawa, finds himself unable to retire due to the absence of a suitable replacement (Quenneville, 2020, para. 6). Similarly, Dr. Geneviève Dechêne, another physician based in Montreal, announced her retirement two years ago but has been disheartened by the failure of the healthcare system to provide new family doctors for her 800 patients. Dr. Dechêne has taken a vocal stance,

denouncing the current state of affairs as unacceptable (Van Vlaardingen & Lofaro, 2023, para. 5).

The challenges mentioned above partly stem from the complex and often cumbersome processes that internationally trained individuals must navigate to practise their professions in Canada. The existing loops and barriers in place create obstacles for qualified professionals seeking to contribute their skills and expertise to the Canadian workforce. Streamlining and simplifying these procedures could help alleviate shortages and ensure that internationally trained individuals can more efficiently integrate into the Canadian labour market, addressing the pressing needs in sectors such as healthcare.

I personally experienced difficulties finding employment and have seen many immigrants that have difficulties succeeding in the job market because of a lack of Canadian work experience and the lengthy process of transferring international credits to Canada. Bauder (2003) argues that "the non-recognition of foreign credentials amounts to the systematic exclusion of immigrant workers from the upper segments of the labour market" (p. 699). Hou and Bonikowska (2016) regard this issue as a catch-22 situation as immigrants are "unable to obtain jobs commensurate with their skills and education because they lack Canadian work experience but are unable to obtain appropriate Canadian work experience because they cannot find a job or are underemployed" (Hou &Bonikowska, 2016, p. 695). Yamagata (2020) also addresses this concern and argue that "despite newcomers' high educational attainment, their foreign credentials and professional experiences are often devalued in the Canadian labour market" (p. 16). This issue contributes to the problem that many skilled workers have been unable to find success in their area of expertise due to the devaluation of their foreign credentials in Canada, forcing them to take up menial jobs for their income. Consequently, they may experience a

diminished sense of job satisfaction. Crea-Arsenio (2023) expresses a similar sentiment but also states that "eventually many adapt their expectations and accept any form of employment in order to enter the labour market" (p. 130). In a qualitative research, by Yamagata (2020), she interviewed 12 Japanese professionals in Vancouver, Canada. The study involved participants who had worked in various professional fields in Japan, including medicine, biochemistry research, sports training, professional photography, and municipal government administration. However, in Vancouver, they held low-paying jobs such as Shiatsu masseuse, truck driver, sales associate, and caregiver, mostly as part-time, insecure positions. Despite their professional qualifications, they faced challenges such as non-recognition of their foreign credentials and being forced to work in less-skilled jobs. During the interviews, many participants highlighted these issues as major obstacles they had to face. Although these challenges can impact both genders, they often have more severe repercussions for immigrant women. Guo (2009) explains that "after immigrating to Canada, many immigrant women professionals are unemployed or working part-time in jobs for which they are overqualified" (p. 44). The failure to recognize foreign credentials often leads to immigrant women being trapped in jobs that provide neither financial stability nor independence. In her research, Ahmadzai (2015) found a correlation between the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and diminished employment prospects for immigrant women, resulting in grave consequences for some individuals. Despite their qualifications, many of these women experience financial instability, which may lead them to remain in abusive relationships and become victims of domestic violence, as "it can make immigrant women more prone to economic instability, which can lead to barriers in seeking help with domestic violence" (Ahmadzai, 2015, p. 13).

Racism, Discrimination and Stereotypical Representation of Immigrants in Canada

Despite successfully marketing itself internationally as an attractive destination for studying, working, and establishing a life, Canada faces the issue of systematic marginalization of minority groups due to their differences (Dallas-Shelley, 2022). It is critical to acknowledge that instances of racism and stereotypical representation of immigrants still exist and require attention. In her article, Khan (2023) explains the issue of racism in Canadian society. She highlights the discrepancy between public opinion in Canada that appears to be supportive of immigration and yet some practices that suggest otherwise. She explains these practices as increased surveillance, scrutiny of financial resources, discrimination against migrant workers, and hate crimes against immigrant groups. Khan criticizes the government's approach to addressing racism and believes the government fails to see that racism is a broad societal issue and emphasizes the need for the government to address racism through comprehensive measures. Additionally, she highlights the impact of regressive laws and policies, such as Quebec's Bill 96, on immigrants, which poses significant challenges for them in their new country. As my participant resides in the province of Quebec, it was especially crucial to gather in-depth information on the specific challenges and concerns that directly impact her. According to Kramer (2022) Bill 96 aims to safeguard the status of French as the official language of the Quebec province. While Bill 101 previously focused on promoting the use of French in business, education, and commerce in Quebec, Bill 96 extends these regulations. It not only identifies additional areas that must adhere to language requirements but also imposes more severe penalties for non-compliance. While it seems like a good idea to protect the French language, the strict measures can potentially impact immigrants and create additional barriers for them to access healthcare, education, employment, and over all negatively impacts their integration into

the society. Edward-Wright (2022) remembers her experience as an English speaker raised in Quebec stating that "As a native English speaker born and raised in Quebec, I am used to being told that I am a second-class citizen because of the language that I speak" (para. 2). She further mentions that this bill may introduce further racist issues to the society, negatively promoting the 'otherness' of non-francophones. According to Edward-Wright (2022),

> The passing of Bill 96 disadvantages all non-francophones, but Indigenous people and immigrants are more affected than anglophones. The bill institutionalizes and legitimizes the racist ideal of assimilation of racialized and non-francophone groups in Quebec. It also makes emigration an enticing option for all those the Bill discriminates against, a consequence that falls in line with the Quebec government's desire to create an entirely francophone population. Ultimately, Bill 96 joins the ranks of Bill 101, Bill 178, and Bill 86 in the Quebec government's arsenal of laws that perpetuate systemic racism and discrimination against non-francophones throughout the province. (para. 4)

It is crucial to conduct a critical examination of the issues impacting marginalized individuals and consider incorporating their perspectives and benefits into the decision-making process.

In her research, Dallas-Shelley (2022) employs a critical race perspective to assert that racism and discrimination permeates Canadian higher education and the skilled worker immigration program. She contends that racism is embedded within the educational system, which prioritizes Canadian education and training, thus creating obstacles for internationally educated professionals to transfer their credits and qualifications. She goes on to explain that despite the structural legal protections in place to promote diversity and inclusion in Canada, " there is a pretentious air about Canada's multiculturalism with many subtle (and some not so much), discriminatory undertone" (Dallas-Shelley, 2022, p.6), Dallas-Shelley uses the term

"multicultural imaginary" first coined by professor Helen Forbes-Mewett, a leading sociologist in Australia, to shed light on some of the disparities that contrast with Canada's multicultural image, and experiences of visible minority groups within the country. In another research, Esses et al. (2021) reported that for visible minorities in Canada, experiences of discrimination produce feelings of discouragement, powerlessness, and exclusion.

In conjunction with racism and discrimination targeting immigrants and marginalized populations in Canada, there exists a parallel issue of stereotypical representations that influence public perceptions. Henry and Tator (2002) argue that the stereotypical representation of immigrants in Canada partly happens by the media, as "the media hold up a mirror in which society can see itself reflected… that mirror's reflections are sometimes severely distorted. The media do not objectively record and describe reality, nor do they neutrally report facts and stories" (p. 5). According to Anderson (2018), some of the prevalent misrepresentations include the belief that immigrants take jobs away from Canadians, are freeloaders who do not pay taxes, strain the Canadian economy, and pose security risks due to their alleged propensity for crime. These misrepresentations reflect the unfortunate reality that many immigrants face on a daily basis.

A powerful strategy for fighting stereotypical representations of immigrants is to incorporate their voices and lived experiences into the narrative. By providing platforms for immigrants to share their stories, perspectives, and achievements, a more nuanced and accurate portrayal can emerge. This allows for a deeper understanding of the diverse backgrounds, contributions, and challenges faced by them. It helps to humanize their experiences, expose stereotypes, and promote empathy and understanding among the broader public. By amplifying

immigrant voices, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society that appreciates the valuable perspectives and contributions of all its members.

Feeling of Ambivalence

The challenges that immigrants face can create a feeling of ambivalence for them. King, Connell, & White (2003) discuss the feeling of ambivalence in the context of immigration. All the insecurities in the new environment can bring some important questions forward for immigrants. King et al. (2003) give some examples:

> Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better "then" or "now." Ambivalence towards the future: whether to retain a "myth of return" or to design a new project without further expected movement built-in. Ambivalence towards the "host" society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. Ambivalence towards standards of behaviour: whether to cling to the old or to discard it, whether to compromise via symbolic events whilst adhering to the new on an everyday basis. (p. 4)

The feeling of ambivalence and uncertainty and the difference between the ideal world immigrants created in their dreams and the challenges of the real world they are facing can put pressure on their well-being. King et al. (2003) suggest that "migrants may live in a number of worlds, and move between them on a daily, annual, or seasonal rhythm" (p. 3). These worlds or environments can be challenging to navigate. A personal example of travelling between these worlds for me can be described as a usual day at work where I am required to switch to English. I believe I know enough English to be able to communicate effectively and have no difficulty navigating my responsibilities at work. My brain on the other hand thinks that entering an English-speaking environment is demanding as it needs to work extra hard to analyze an abundance of information in a different language. After a few hours of constant exposure to

another language, I come back home and have a moment of relief when I assume I can switch back to Farsi. But that is not the end of the story as my son who is now fluent in English wants to watch English movies on TV. He uses English words and feels more comfortable switching to English when we play. At bedtime, he asks me to read him an English book. Also, needless to mention that there is a laptop with an ocean of information in English and my research waiting for me when I am done with my mothering chores. My point is, I am never fully relaxed in a Farsi-speaking environment where I feel I safely understand everything because I am still exposed to English in one way or another. I switch between worlds which can be tiring. Unfortunately for many immigrant women switching between these worlds can be much more demanding, dangerous, and risky. Traveling between the worlds requires an ability to safely navigate the uncertainties. Muna Saleh (2019) explains that "while I acquired the ability to travel to, within, and among the worlds I inhabit, there have been worlds where I was constructed in ways that did not fit my construction of myself" (Saleh, 2019, p. 11). The feeling of ambivalence, the unfamiliarity in the new environment, the lack of a support system, and the diversity that immigrants are exposed to can contribute to another challenge: Homesickness.

Homesickness and the Lack of a Support System

One of the primary difficulties that immigrants face is homesickness, which can be caused by the novelty of the new surroundings and the range of different experiences they encounter. Homesickness can be yearning for home or everything that is familiar to the person. Homesickness is a persistent issue that spreads like a big grey cloud over the life of immigrants. The concept of homesickness is not new, it is a universally recognized emotion that individuals can experience when they are far from their homes, especially when they find it difficult to adjust to new norms and challenges. It is defined as "a depression-like reaction to leaving a

familiar environment, accompanied by ruminations about and a strong preoccupation with the former environment as well as a strong longing to return to the previous environment" (Verschuur et al., 2003, p. 758). The struggles related to homesickness have been documented for centuries. Matt (2011) in her book *Homesickness: An American History* delves deep into this concept and gives a thorough history behind it. She explains that the word "nostalgia" was made up by a Swiss doctor in 1688 which meant acute homesickness and was considered an actual physical condition. Homesick people could die from its consequences and there were newspaper articles and columns dedicated to documenting such incidents. Moving forward to the current time and with the changing concept of the home under the effects of globalization, focusing on individualization, and mass migrations, homesickness is regarded differently. One is supposed to accept the consequences of moving to a new place and they might receive less empathy and support which makes it even more challenging (Matt, 2011).

If immigrants in Canada had a portion of their support network from their home country with them, it could potentially reduce the impact of homesickness. For instance, many young immigrant families face challenges in managing various responsibilities such as childcare, education, and employment. Having some members of their support system, like their parents, present with them in Canada would greatly alleviate some of these difficulties. Unfortunately, sponsoring parents to come to Canada is a lengthy process with strict requirements, making it difficult for new immigrants to benefit from this option. According to data from the Government of Canada (2023), immigrants who wish to sponsor their parents must undergo an assessment of their income from the past three years, and their income should meet a minimum average as indicated in the figure below.

Figure 1

Income requirements for sponsorship program, 2023

Income required for the 3 tax years right before the day you apply (sponsors applying in 2023)

Total number of people you'll be responsible for	2022 [1]	2021 [1]	2020 [1]
2 people	$43,082	$32,898	$32,270
3 people	$52,965	$40,444	$39,672
4 people	$64,306	$49,106	$48,167
5 people	$72,935	$55,694	$54,630
6 people	$82,259	$62,814	$61,613
7 people	$91,582	$69,934	$68,598
If more than 7 people, for each additional person, add:	$9,324	$7,120	$6,985

Note. This figure includes the income requirements for immigrants to sponsor relatives to Canada. Government of Canada, 2023

(https://ircc.canada.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=1445&top=14)

The chart clearly demonstrates that immigrant families need to wait for a minimum of three years to establish a stable income before they can become eligible to sponsor. These initial years of immigration are crucial for families to receive the necessary support, but unfortunately, they are unable to access that support if they do not meet the stipulated requirements.

Challenges of Immigrant Women

With a transition in terms of "place, space, and culture" (Ahmed & Veronis, 2020, p. 290), immigrant women find themselves challenged in different ways. Oliveira (2020) explains that "in contrast to men, when women migrate, they undertake a journey that may clash with the gender ideology present in their country of origin. This journey may be transformative for

women, but it can also reproduce patriarchal structures of their home country" (p. 403). Oliveira (2020) goes on to give an example of the results of some studies on migrant women who left the Philippines or Sri Lanka facing difficulties when they tried to keep up with the expectations and mothering practices in their home countries. This can result in feelings of inadequacy and stress, as they navigate the demands of their new surroundings while also trying to maintain a sense of familiarity with their cultural identity. It is important to acknowledge and address these challenges faced by migrant women, to support their well-being and ensure their successful integration into their new communities.

Settling in a new country is not easy as many immigrant women are disconnected from their system of support (Urindwanayo, 2018). Tulli et al. (2020) suggest that this will impose emotional implications. They may become vulnerable to mental health issues because of being disconnected from their support network. Urindwanayo (2018) explains that in Canada "the literature shows a high number of depression among immigrant women, and mental health problems are higher among visible minorities than Caucasians" (Urindwanayo, 2018, p. 155). The unfamiliar environment and different social norms, while lacking the support of their social network makes immigrant women a target for mental health issues. They find themselves being disadvantaged in terms of social determinants of health such as "employment, violence, socioeconomic status, race, and gender" (Urindwanayo, 2018, p. 155).

The cultural backgrounds of immigrant women can influence the way they experience the new environment. According to the ideas of sociocultural psychology presented by Markus and Kitayama in 1998, people make sense of their on-going experience by the cultural context they participate in, and they "construct meaning, coherence, and structure to their ongoing experience and organize their actions" (Markus & Kitayama, 1998, p. 3). Sociocultural psychology also

assumes that personality is built through active participation in the social world. How can a personality that has already been shaped by a culture adapt to the differences and demands of a new culture? Will there be challenges for people who have bicultural experiences? There can be intersections of differences that become hard to navigate. In that regard Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) state that "… no one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her" (p. 308). In a study in 2016, Holtmann researched a group of 89 Christian and Muslim women in the Canadian Maritimes whose religion played an important part in their identity. The research was focused on their strengths and vulnerabilities when faced with domestic violence. Holtmann's used a feminist intersectional framework based on the assumption that "women's lives are best understood by considering the multiple structures, such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion, that impact their lives as well as the multiple identities, such as mother, immigrant woman, Muslim, Christian and professional, that women manage" (p. 399). Holtmann's study revealed that this group of women who had young children, employed full-time, and were sponsored to come to Canada by their husbands, "lack access to important social support network" (p. 397). These women's attitudes that were already developed in their countries, intersected with their Canadian social context. This intersection created vulnerabilities in domestic violence situations for them. Holtmann (2016) observes that "dominant and minority groups collude in practices that make immigrant women more vulnerable when domestic violence occurs" (p. 398). This can be due to the power imbalances that exist within relationships, as well as cultural and social differences that may make it difficult for immigrant women to seek help.

Urindwanayo (2018) also contends that distinct moral values in the host nation create hurdles for immigrant women as they endeavour to acclimate to their new surroundings. This can

compound the difficulties they encounter in seeking assistance and resources to address mental

health concerns and related issues. In her publication, Zaman (2006) employs the metaphor

"Breaking the Iron Wall" to shed light on the formidable challenges faced by immigrant women

in their quest for prosperity in Canada (p. x). In the course of this study, I identified occurrences

from our real-life experiences that bore a striking resemblance to the concept of "breaking the

iron wall."

Government of Canada's Stance on Helping Immigrant Women

According to the 2021 report by the Canadian government, the act of immigrating to

Canada can offer numerous opportunities for women, but it also involves specific and diverse

obstacles that they must overcome. These challenges may include adjusting to a new language,

adapting to different work environments, taking care of children, building new social networks,

and dealing with changes in family dynamics. To tackle these issues, the Settlement Program

provides targeted support to vulnerable groups such as women and refugees. As part of this

effort, the program offers various settlement services that are available to newcomer and refugee

women. These include a pilot initiative aimed at facilitating employment programming for

visible minority women, as well as mentoring, information sessions on Canadian rights and

responsibilities, women-only employment and language training, and gender-based violence

prevention assistance (Government of Canada, 2021). The effectiveness of the settlement

services provided needs to be evaluated to determine their actual impact on the ground.

Immigrant Mothers Disconnected From Their Support Network

For immigrant mothers, gender and mothering roles can intersect with their immigration

experience. Curry-Rodriguez (2014) explains that "whereas men could fulfill their parental roles

while being immigrants, women must conceptualize how they fulfill their mother

roles as both caretakers, fulfilling emotional and economic labor" (p. 212). Ongoing childcare

duties and the added pressure of outside job duties combined with lack of support from their

network make it hard for immigrant mothers to balance life. Lee, Ruppanner, and Perales (2020)

in their research focused on motherhood and immigrant mothers' job prospects. They argued that

"intersectional matrices of oppression structure" (p. 2) negatively affect the immigrant women's

job prospects more once they become mothers. Without their support network, immigrant

mothers must "withdraw from the labor force or limit themselves to part-time work to assume

the bulk of childcare duties" (p. 2). With the financial burdens of immigration, it can be too hard

to work outside in addition to doing all the house duties. However, it becomes more stressful

having to give up a job to stay home for childcare duties, which means reduced income. So, both

scenarios of working and taking care of children, or not working and taking care of children

prove to be difficult for immigrant mothers. These adjustment issues prove to be hard on

women's mental health.

Giving Birth in a New Country

Being and becoming parents in a new country comes with challenges. Browne et al.

(2017) suggested that immigrant parents show higher levels of mental health problems than non-

parents. One of the reasons was the caregiving stress with little support from others. Browne et

al. (2017) particularly focused on immigrant mothers' experience of having children in a new

environment. According to them, immigrant mothers face a greater risk of depression and mental

health issues caused by postnatal mood fluctuations, compared to both immigrant fathers and

non-immigrant mothers. This is because they are more likely to assume the responsibility of

childcare, leading to fewer chances for integration, exposure to new environments, and

employment opportunities. Moreover, they may face additional pressure from cultural expectations, such as prioritizing personal sacrifices and fulfilling familial duties over their personal well-being.

When a woman gives birth in a different country, she may encounter certain difficulties such as a language barrier, unfamiliar cultural norms surrounding motherhood, challenges in navigating the local healthcare system, maternal depression, and other related issues. These challenges can make the experience of motherhood both stressful and demanding. Malviya (2021) explains the issue of language barrier in accessing healthcare in Canada. Malviya goes on to explain how numerous individuals who are new to Canada encounter significant challenges with language, particularly in the healthcare sector. Mistaken interpretations in healthcare services can have grave outcomes. Moreover, the inability to communicate effectively in an unfamiliar environment can give rise to emotions such as frustration, shame, and seclusion.

Postpartum Depression

Urindwanayo (2018) who focused on postpartum depression in immigrant women, explains that for many immigrant women "traditional customs during postpartum period are geared toward providing support for a new mother. Lack of these cultural traditions in Canada, however, reduces the women's support system and as result, women become more vulnerable to postpartum depression" (Urindwanayo, 2018, p. 156). Chen et al. (2020) reports on the importance of focusing on maternal depression as it is a crucial factor in intergenerational risk prevention and adaptation strategies for immigrants. They argue that maternal depression negatively impacts immigrant mothers' caregiving abilities and their emotional interactions with their children.

Also, another factor that may negatively impact their health is struggling with their stereotypical representations. Immigrant mothers can be negatively impacted by stereotypes that portray them in a one-dimensional way: not-highly educated, doing basic jobs, wasting the tax-payers money, etc. According to Appel, Weber, and Kronberger (2015) and based on the stereotype threat theory, negative stereotypes will undermine the performance of marginalized groups as they are under more pressure to prove they are better than those stereotypical representations and worry so much not to fail. Immigrant mothers who feel pressured to disprove negative stereotypes may experience heightened anxiety and stress, leading to reduced performance and diminished well-being.

Different Mothering Ways

Yidan Zhu's (2017) Ph.D. study examines the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant mothers in Canada, highlighting how their experiences are shaped by unequal social relations that are hierarchically structured by differences in race, gender, and class. Zhu draws on her own experiences as a mother and the challenges she faced in reconciling her Chinese parenting practices with the dominant cultural norms of Canadian society. She notes that the expectations of "good mothering" in Canada often differ significantly from those of Chinese culture, further compounding the challenges faced by Chinese immigrant mothers as they navigate their new home. She explains,

> The "knowledge" of mothering for immigrant mothers to learn in their settlement practice is constructed as expert, modern, civilized, and Westernized "knowledge" in contrast to immigrant mothers' traditional, indigenous, and personal experience and knowledge of mothering. Immigrant mothers' knowledge production and mothering practice are constructed as uncivilized, problematic, different, and often ignored. (p. 2)

According to Zhu's research findings, the Chinese immigrant mothers in this study had to learn Canadian knowledge of motherhood to be "good Canadian" mothers. They had to reconstruct their identity and integrate into their local society. She emphasizes that "the knowledge that these immigrant mothers learn involves unequal power relations. The local practice of organizing immigrant mothers' learning involves a series of institutions, politics, and social relations" (Zhu, 2017, p. 3). Zhu's work sheds light on the complex interplay between cultural norms, social hierarchies, and mothering practices, providing a deeper understanding of the experiences of immigrant mothers in Canada. In that regard, Miller (2005) explains that "becoming a mother changes lives in all sorts of ways. It has major significance for individual biographies, yet expectations and experiences will be shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which women live their lives" (p. 36). Miller's explanation suggests that the expectations and experiences associated with motherhood are often influenced by the cultural and social environments in which women live their lives. In other words, the way women perceive, and experience motherhood is not only a personal matter but also shaped by the societal norms, values, and expectations surrounding motherhood in their communities.

Including and Promoting Immigrant Mother's Voices on the Motherhood Narrative

This literature review provided me with affirmation that motherhood's lived experiences matter, and my lived experience prompted me to think that motherhood stories of immigrant mothers matter too. These life stories matter because they help bring unique perspectives into the mainstream narrative. In that regard Qureshi (2019) explains that,

> while motherhood is so intense and so intimate it is also wildly universal; after all, even if we've not all given birth we have all been born. Motherhood is, in this very simple way, naturally inclusive, which is why it's all the more important to make sure that the books

on the subject are too. For the more perspectives we read, the more empathy we might

have towards mothers of all backgrounds, all colours. The more we might even come to

understand what this immense, magnificent thing called motherhood really is. (Qureshi,

2019, para. 5)

Real-life stories of immigrant mothers, particularly as members of minority groups, serve as a

powerful means to provide counternarratives. These narratives offer valuable insights into the

authentic lived experiences of marginalized individuals, illuminating the complexities and

challenges they face. Through these stories, counternarratives emerge, challenging prevailing

stereotypes and dominant perspectives. By doing so, they disrupt established norms and offer

alternative viewpoints, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced

understanding of the realities of marginalized communities. These stories aim to challenge the

status quo and help promote equity for minority members of society. They can encourage the

focus of the societal gaze on the positive aspects of immigrants as opposed to clichés that may

represent false or biased pictures of them. Wilson (2014) strongly believes that mothers who

share their stories can disrupt what has already been written about women and mothers and write

away their absence. She debates, "stories of motherhood are scant in the recorded history of

world literature, where men have historically been the protagonists, and women maintained

peripheral roles" (Wilson, 2014, p. 5). Hewett (2020) also argues that "the history of motherhood

memoirs is marked by exclusion and silence, scholars tend to define maternal autobiography

broadly" (p.192). In thinking with Wilson and Hewett, I wonder what it takes to include more of

women's voices in the dominant narrative so that there are a multitude of stories?

Life Stories Matter

In a famous TED talk that has more than 27 million views, the Black novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009) talks about her life experience with stories and the importance of sharing diverse life stories. She says that stories make us realize that there are other possibilities different from what we always get from the dominant narratives. They open our eyes and make us less judgemental of others. She mentions that "the single-story makes stereotypes, and the problem with the stereotypes is not that they are not true, but that they are incomplete. They make one story to become the only story" (Adichie, 2009). Muna Saleh, a Canadian Muslim scholar in 2019 employed Achidie's explanation in her own experience as an immigrant Muslim woman who wears a hijab in public. She explains that her decision to cover her hair caused different reactions (stories) from different people, some helpful and encouraging, some confusing and irritating, and some frightening. She goes on to explain that each beholder has a single story in their minds about how a Muslim woman should look and they judge according to that story. She argues that others' stories that proved conflicting cause her "over time, to construct a defensive wall of silence" (Saleh, Menon, Clandinin, 2014, p. 274).

Michael Valpy, a Canadian journalist, addresses the issue of the lack of representation of immigrants in the mass media, which results in many citizens not really getting the true knowledge about the reality of the experiences of immigrants in Canada, he explains "Media defines the narrative of how we see ourselves and how we think of ourselves. Only human centric stories can break down the barriers. We are doing a bad job. We should go out and tell peoples' stories. This is our work" (Kalaitzi, 2013, para. 6). I wonder how many dreams and opportunities were diminished by the conflicting stories of the majority affecting the lives of minorities, and how many opportunities could be created if we were able to see the world

through the perspectives of other people and gain insights into their realities? Maria Lugones (1987) talks about travelling between the "worlds" so that we understand each other's worlds. In her work *Playfulness, "World"—Travelling, and Loving Perception,* she explains her experience as a woman of colour living in dominantly white worlds. By referring to "worlds," she means more than physical space. It is a space inside people that creates all the differences. She suggests "we learn to love each other by learning to travel to each other's worlds" (Lugones, 1987, p. 4). According to Lugones (1987) "A 'world' need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people" (p. 10). When we travel between these worlds, more understanding will happen. But what happens when people stay in their own world and do not see what other worlds have to offer? In that regard, Lugones further states that being at ease with one's world and refusing to acknowledge other worlds is dangerous "because it tends to produce people who have no inclination to travel across 'worlds' or have no experience of world-traveling" (Lugones, 1987, p. 12). This is how some stories become dominant stories because world travelling has not happened effectively. Her words resonate with me and remind me of the power of life stories. Through stories, we can travel to other worlds and encourage change. In that regard, Hewett (2020) explains "the act of recording one's memories and sharing them with others can empower communities, who can use written remembrances to revise larger stories, such as national narratives" (p. 192).

With the growing challenges facing the world during and after the pandemic of COVID-19, and with war and unrest happening in many parts of the world, we are navigating through unchartered waters. During this uncertain time, more than ever we need to hear each others'

stories to be able to travel to each other's worlds, be kind to one another, embrace our differences, and support each other.

Although immigrant mothers' stories may include considerable challenges related to isolation, displacement, and adjustment, their experiences can be a source of inspiration and reflection. Despite the hardships they encounter, many immigrant mothers exhibit strength, resilience, and determination as they navigate a new country and culture, while also raising their children. Their ability to persevere and provide for their families in the face of adversity can serve as a source of inspiration for others. As Curry-Rodriguez (2014) highlights "In their adjustment to host communities they draw on skills that appear to be unique to immigrants as risk-takers. These are women who make decisions based on the promise of survival and perseverance" (p. 219). This quote sheds light on the transformative journey many immigrants undertake and the contributions they make to their adopted societies. In that regard, Yosso (2005), describes community cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). Yosso's discussion of multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth, highlights the importance of finding ways to utilize knowledge already abundant within Communities of Color.

Our stories are shaped by our cultural wealth. By sharing our stories, we make our stories visible to others. Motherhood stories need to be shared to be heard. In that regard, Wilson and Davison, (2014) explain the importance of sharing motherhood stories this way: "To write motherhood is to write ourselves into the center of the story" (p. 5). Our counternarratives help us bring our stories to the centre and offer our perspectives on the reality of the lives of marginalized people.

Summary

The literature review has reinforced my belief that the lived experiences of mothers are important, and my personal experience has led me to recognize the significance of the stories of immigrant mothers. It is crucial to acknowledge these life stories because they offer unique perspectives that can broaden the mainstream narrative. Immigrant mothers face additional challenges due to their cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and their stories can shed light on important issues such as cultural adaptation, discrimination, and social isolation. These stories can also highlight the strength, resilience, and creativity of immigrant mothers in navigating these obstacles. By listening to and valuing the stories of immigrant mothers, we can promote empathy, understanding, and positive social change. This can challenge stereotypes and dominant narratives and help create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach adopted to understand our lived realities through narrative inquiry. The chapter begins by explaining the qualitative paradigm that underpins this research, emphasizing the choice of narrative inquiry as the methodological framework. This approach is grounded in the belief that people shape their daily lives through stories, which serve as portals to understanding and interpreting their experiences. The chapter also delves into the research design, which includes seven stages, from literature review to the final analysis. The data collection involved four in-depth interview sessions, conducted in a semi-structured format to allow for open-ended responses and rich data collection. Ethical considerations are thoroughly addressed, with measures taken to ensure the participant's privacy, informed consent, and the voluntary nature of participation.

In the course of my dissertation, I undertook an in-depth examination of the profound experiences of two immigrant mothers, including myself and another Iranian participant. My research was grounded in a qualitative paradigm, aimed at acquiring a nuanced comprehension of their lived realities. To navigate this investigative journey, I embraced narrative inquiry as the methodological framework of choice. This approach facilitated the exploration of the multifaceted narratives that emanated from their experiences, offering a window into the intricate fabric of their lives, the daily challenges they encountered, and the lens through which they interpreted their pasts. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain that:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they
> interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal

through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the

world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p. 477)

Drawing inspiration from the insights of Connelly and Clandinin (2006), I found that these

stories serve as more than mere accounts of events; they are windows through which individuals

enter the complex world of immigration. These narratives are lenses through which immigrant

mothers not only view themselves but also understand the world around them. They are the

threads that weave their experiences into a coherent and personally meaningful narrative.

By sharing these stories within the context of my dissertation, I facilitated a connection and

provided a platform to articulate our unique journeys. Through this process, the two immigrant

mothers (myself and another participant) discovered that our stories not only reflected our

individual experiences but also, at times, resonated with a broader collective immigrant narrative

in Canada that we encountered through our interactions with other immigrant communities. This

revelation underscores the interconnectedness of immigrant experiences and highlights the

significance of sharing personal narratives to contribute to the larger discourse on immigration,

cultural integration, and the multifaceted dynamics of identity formation. The act of sharing

these stories did more than simply document our experiences; it validated our challenges,

triumphs, and resilience. It illuminated the common threads that bind two immigrant mothers

together, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the larger Canadian society. In this way,

narrative inquiry became a conduit through which the two immigrant mothers' experiences were

made not only personally meaningful but also collectively significant.

In essence, my dissertation's use of narrative inquiry turned into a bridge that connected

the participants to their past, their present, and the world they now call home. It enabled me and

the other participant to assert our agency in shaping our own narratives, while also contributing

to the broader narrative of immigration in Canada. In the end, it was a testament to the power of stories to transcend time and space, allowing the two immigrant mothers to find their voices and share the essence of their journey as they navigated the complexities of their new lives in Canada.

Qualitative Research

Webster and Mertova (2007) contend that there exists a profound interconnection between narrative and human experience. They assert that relying solely on empirical methods and statistical data to encapsulate a life's journey is "insufficient and restricting" (p. 3). I share this perspective, as I believe that to truly grasp the essence of a life experience, we must transcend the limitations of linear quantitative approaches that seek to distill it from point A to point B. Life, in all its intricacies, defies such simplistic reductionism. In my view, a qualitative methodology offers the adaptability needed to capture the multifaceted richness inherent in the tapestry of life experiences. Agosta (2015) explains the hermeneutic circle that keeps evolving and adding to the truth and argues that each description of a phenomenon adds more value to its understanding:

A different description—a re-description—yields a different intention. A different intention yields a different action. A different action is re-described in its own diverse and different way. The relationship is circular and looping. Wherever there is description, re-description is also possible. We must understand the whole context to grasp the meaning of the particular element. We must grasp the part to understand the total context. The value consists in the going back and forth at richer and richer levels of detail, nuance, and significance. (p. 71)

I believe using qualitative methods can contribute to a deeper understanding of the immigration experience. Qualitative research allows for the re-description of the immigration experience from various perspectives, enabling researchers to delve into the nuances, emotions, and personal significance of each aspect of the journey. This aligns with the idea that a different description yields a different intention, which, in turn, leads to different actions. Through qualitative methods, researchers can uncover the diverse intentions and actions that immigrants take in response to their unique circumstances and motivations. Furthermore, qualitative research acknowledges the importance of context, echoing the notion that to truly understand an element, we must consider it within the broader context. The immigration experience is deeply influenced by the sociocultural, economic, and political contexts in which it occurs, and qualitative methods allow for a comprehensive exploration of these contextual factors. Regarding this matter, Coyle (2007) observes that qualitative research is not oriented toward uncovering meaning through numerical data but instead seeks to unearth significance within the themes that arise from narratives, reflecting shared human experiences (p. 205). The themes and patterns that emerge from my research will offer a valuable means of redefining or providing an alternative perspective on the immigration experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) make a similar comment about understanding an experience. They suggest constructing narratives of an experience helps us gain an understanding of that experience. They explain that,

> We try to gain experience of our experience through constructing narratives of that experience. It is here that we deal with questions of who we are in the field and who we are in the texts we write on our experience of the field experience. What becomes apparent here is that many of the ways we come in touch with our own experience, come to how what we know of our experience, is through stories. (p. 11)

By crafting narratives, we engage in a form of self-reflection and introspection. In doing so, we not only recount events but also ponder our role, identity, and perspective within those experiences. This reflective process is essential for personal growth and self-awareness. The added knowledge gained through qualitative research offers me the opportunity to explore my immigration experience. It goes beyond numbers and statistics and gives soul to the data. Herman (2009) beautifully explains the difference between various approaches to a phenomenon this way:

> Science explains the atmospheric processes that (all other things being equal) account for when precipitation will take the form of snow rather than rain; but it takes a story to convey what it was like to walk along a park trail in fresh-fallen snow as afternoon turned to evening in the late autumn of 2007. (p. 2)

For me, qualitative research is like describing an early morning walk on the fresh snow. It allowed me to express my feelings which is crucial when offering life stories. It also provides me with tools to address a "wide and diverse audience" (Richardson, 2000, p. 924) that may reach beyond the academic audience. Qualitative research can be impactful. Delamont (2012) argues that strong qualitative research challenges the status quo by sharing the standpoint of others and tries "to understand how the setting is perceived by and experienced by people who come to it, and live in it, from standpoints other than their own" (p. 14). Delamont (2012) goes on to say that powerful qualitative research should provide "education outside education," which refers to many settings in life that are situated outside formal education, and although they are important ways of gathering knowledge, they rarely make it to mainstream research. Life experience can be a site of learning and immigrants' life stories can be educational. Qualitative research

gives a platform for these less common knowledge sites and allows the impact of the experience on the genuine portrayal of marginalized people.

Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method

Narrative inquiry was deliberately chosen as the methodological approach for this research due to its unique suitability in capturing the intricacies of lived experiences, particularly within the context of immigration. As articulated by Webster and Metrova (2007) "quantitative research is typically looking for outcomes and frequently overlooks the impact of experience, while narrative inquiry allows researchers to get an understanding of that experience" (p. 5). Narrative inquiry offers an invaluable perspective that complements traditional quantitative research approaches. While quantitative research often prioritizes the quantification of outcomes and can inadvertently overlook the profound impact of individual experiences, narrative inquiry is ideally poised to delve into the depths of these experiences. Understanding the complexities surrounding issues such as immigration cannot be exhaustively achieved through statistics and quantitative surveys alone. Human lives and experiences cannot be confined to mere numbers and charts. They necessitate the exploration of detailed, context-rich personal stories that provide a multifaceted perspective.

Immigrants' experiences are unique, and their stories can provide us with a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and their contributions to society. It is crucial to acknowledge that real people with unique stories lie behind every statistic. By taking the time to listen to personal stories, we can gain a more complete picture of the impact of immigration on people's lives. As Lieblich et al. (1998) discuss "we know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (p. 7). Our stories provide us with the means to share our worldviews and perspectives.

Narrative inquiry is pioneered by Connelly and Clandinin based on John Dewey's notion that experience can be a site of education because it is interactive and continues (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). John Dewey (1929) argued that, for the scientific realm, "objects must be distinct; their traits must be explicit; the vague and unrevealed is a limitation" (p. 21). He goes on to say that in life there are experiences that cannot be only explained by scientific measures, and there is no boundary to limit experience:

> The dark and twilight abound. For in any object of primary experience, there are always potentialities which are not explicit; any object that is overt is charged with possible consequences that are hidden; the most overt act has factors which are not explicit. (p. 21)

Based on Dewey's explanation, every object we experience contains implicit potentialities that are not immediately evident. Even the most obvious action or object carries hidden ramifications that are waiting to unfold. Narrative inquiry as a method can capture some of the complexities and hidden parts of the phenomenon of life experience because it recognizes the interconnectedness of stories and regards "any situation as nested within an almost endless array of other situations and, rather than sort them out, seeks to understand and explore the layers of complexity involved in living a life" (Downey& Clandinin, 2010, p. 388).

Stories are Relational

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) mention that "the study of experience as a story then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about the experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon" (p. 477). For narrative inquirers, stories are relational and should be distinguished "from inquirers who see stories as data or consider inquiry as textual

analysis" (Blix, Caine, Clandinin,& Berendonk, 2021, p. 4). Therefore, approaching experience as a story is fundamentally a way of conceptualizing it. Narrative inquiry, as a methodology, adopts a particular perspective on the phenomenon. According to these researchers, for narrative inquirers stories are relational and should be differentiated from those who treat stories as mere data or approach inquiry as a form of textual analysis. I believe in the relational nature of stories, and in my research, I experienced the relationality of stories we shared. For example, during an interview session focused on homesickness, I shared with the participant the devastating experience of losing my father to COVID-19 while I was in Canada. The participant, who had not yet encountered the death of a loved one while living in Canada, expressed her inability to fully comprehend the pain I was describing. However, in a subsequent session, the dynamic of our conversations shifted as she had unfortunately lost her own beloved grandmother. In light of this experience, she expressed a newfound understanding of my feelings of helplessness and contributed additional thoughts to our previous discussions. So, the relational nature of stories suggests that they are not just individual expressions, but rather they are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. The impact of a story can be influenced by factors such as the time of its occurrence, the cultural background of the storyteller and audience, and the social relationships between the individuals involved. This means that stories are not fixed or static, but rather they are dynamic and subject to interpretation and reinterpretation in different contexts and over time. In this way, stories are not just individual expressions but are also a means of connecting people and creating a shared understanding of the world. The relational nature of stories highlights the importance of considering the social and cultural contexts in which they are produced and interpreted.

How Narrative Inquiry Helped Me With My Research

As a narrative inquirer, I lived in the stories, and the stories became meaningful for me through my experience. Stories enabled me to "create coherence through time, between the personal and social, and across situations" (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 387). In that regard, Webster and Metrova (2007) explain that "narrative inquiry is set in human stories. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories" (p. 3). Herman (2009) also adds that narrative is a human strategy to come to terms with "time, process, and change—a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, scientific modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws" (Herman, 2009, p. 2). While scientific explanations aim for objectivity and universal applicability, narratives are more subjective and context-dependent. Based on Herman (2009), this does not make narratives inferior to scientific explanations. Rather, narratives provide a way of understanding the complexities of human experience that cannot be fully captured by general laws or formulas. In other words, narratives offer a unique and complementary perspective on the world that can enrich our understanding of phenomena in ways that scientific explanations may not be able to achieve. Atkinson (1995) explains the power of stories this way:

> A story carries a power that can pull blinders off our eyes. It can teach us something important about life that we had probably forgotten we knew. The act of imposing a narrative framework on the raw material of our lives brings new order and clarity to something somehow familiar to us…It is through stories that symbolic images and universal, timeless themes find their expression. (p. 5)

The act of creating a narrative structure from our experiences can bring a sense of clarity and order to the chaos of everyday life. They play a profound role in shaping our perceptions of the world and enriching our understanding of what it means to be human.

Narrative inquiry gives a framework to the raw stories of life. As a research method, it was suitable for my purpose because its central tenet is that human beings "develop an identity through a process of creating a narrative or a story about their life" (Rosenberg, et al., 2020, p. 281). Narrative brings life stories in the form of research and allows the researcher to share a holistic view of the data in the form of stories. Life experience is not a linear process, it moves forward and back. The narrative method has the flexibility to capture the complexity of life and allow those complexities to be expressed. However, there is a difference between conversations and narratives. Mathieson and Stam (1995) differentiate between conversations and narratives this way,

> The narratives originate in discourse which is spoken into a context and conversation. But conversations are not always narratives, they are frequently the product of the momentary, practical realities of daily life. They become narratives, we argue, when they are part of the quest for personal identity. Of the many stories we tell it is those which are *ours,* not only about us but by us, that have the most meaning to who we are, where we have been and where we intend to go. (p. 23)

While conversations may not always be narratives, they can become narratives when they contribute to the quest for personal identity. The stories that we tell about ourselves, are the ones that hold the most meaning for us in terms of our identity, life experiences, and future goals. Therefore, narratives are not simply isolated events, but rather they are deeply intertwined with our sense of self and how we understand our place in the world.

Narrative Inquiry in Relation to Critical Race Theory and Women's Ways of Knowing

Narrative inquiry is in harmony with my theoretical frameworks. Narrative inquiry aims to understand and interpret individuals' experiences through the use of storytelling. On the other hand, critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines how race and racism intersect with social, political, and economic structures to produce and maintain systemic inequalities. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRT can use storytelling as a tool to explore the experiences of individuals who have been impacted by systemic racism.

Researchers can use narrative inquiry to end the silence that is present in the dominant narratives by collecting stories from individuals who have experienced racial discrimination in different contexts, such as education, employment, and healthcare. These stories can be analyzed through the lens of CRT to understand how race and racism operate in different institutional settings.

Moreover, narrative inquiry can be used to challenge dominant narratives and expose hidden biases and assumptions that perpetuate racial inequalities. Narratives help us impact our social world because the social world is constructed "with words, stories, and silence" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p. 3). By collecting stories from individuals who have been marginalized, oppressed, and silenced, researchers can amplify their voices and bring attention to the systemic injustices they face. In this way, narrative inquiry can be a powerful tool for social justice and advocacy.

Women's Ways of Knowing seeks to understand how women come to know themselves and their world through different perspectives and experiences. This framework emphasizes the importance of context, relationships, and emotions in women's learning and knowledge

production. Narrative inquiry can be connected to the theoretical framework of women's ways of knowing by using storytelling as a means of exploring women's experiences and perspectives. Researchers can collect narratives from women about their experiences with education, work, family, and relationships to understand how their identities and knowledge are shaped by these contexts. By focusing on women's experiences and perspectives, researchers can challenge the dominant male-centred knowledge structures that often marginalize women's voices and experiences. Also, narrative inquiry can be used to explore how women's ways of knowing are shaped by their relationships with others. Women's knowledge is often produced through collective experiences and shared stories, which are shaped by social relationships and networks. Narrative inquiry can be used to examine how these relationships shape women's knowledge production.

Research Design

Given the nature of my inquiry, a critical design is necessary. This design facilitates the inclusion of marginalized voices in the research. Van Maanen (2011) discussed critical tales as a method that would show "concern for representing social structure as seen through the eyes of disadvantaged groups in advanced (and not-so-advanced) capitalist countries" (p. 128). The critical design in narrative inquiry "illuminates individual experiences as well as larger social, political, symbolic, or economic issues" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017, p. 162). For this reason, I used the critical design presented by Edmonds and Kennedy.
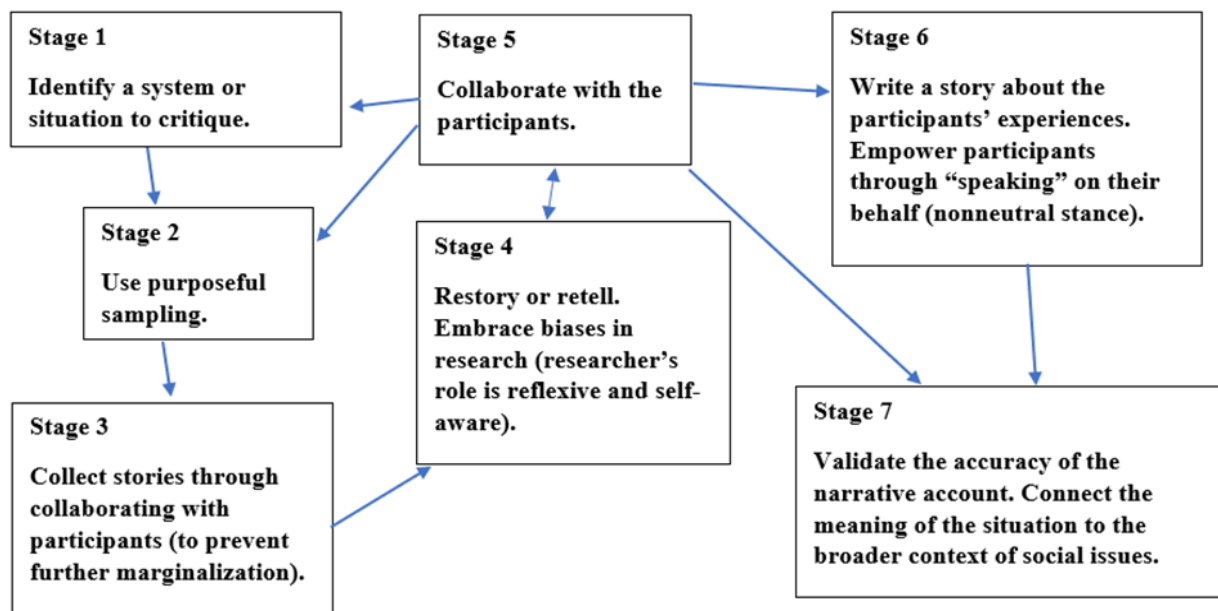
Figure 1 *Critical research design*

My research design consisted of seven stages. During Stage 1, I reviewed the available literature and identified a need for more immigrant mothers' stories in the immigration discourse. For Stage 2, I used purposeful sampling to select a participant who I believed could contribute to my research questions. In Stage 3, we conducted interview sessions to collect our stories of motherhood in Canada. Throughout the process, including in Stage 4, I reminded myself and the participant of our biases as immigrant mothers.

Our collaboration continued in Stage 5, as I gathered our stories and organized them based on the research questions' themes. In Stage 6, I wrote a detailed narrative based on our stories, which allowed me to capture parts of our journey. By presenting my participant's experience, I aimed to empower her, by highlighting her experience while taking a nonneutral stance inspired by the ideas of Critical Race Theory. In the context of my research, adopting a nonneutral stance means not just documenting the experiences of this immigrant mother but also advocating on her behalf. It involves using her story to highlight the systemic issues she faces

and pushing for solutions that can improve her situation. This approach goes beyond mere observation and analysis; it seeks to make a positive impact on the participant's life and others in similar circumstances. Finally, in Stage 7, I utilized the theoretical lenses of Critical Race Theory and Women's Ways of Knowing to analyze and contextualize the stories by connecting them to broader social contexts.

I also used the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to gain a holistic understanding of our immigration experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) introduced the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space or commonplaces of narrative inquiry as they referred to it later (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This space means that the stories happen "in a place or places over time, and in a relationship, which may be within oneself or with others" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15). The participants experience travelling "inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 50). In the context of this research, it means that the two Iranian women had a chance to explore their inner and outer world in different dimensions, and holistically through their stories. By inward reflections, the "feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) were explored. The outward refers to the environment, and backward and forward refer to the temporality of past, present time, and future. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry research as "*to experience an experience*—that is, to do research into an experience—is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way" (emphasis in original, p. 50). By using narrative inquiry, we framed our immigration experience by looking back at the context of our home country, and the present context of the host country, and we shared our ideas of what changes we hope to see in the future.

Data Integration

Analyzing life stories involved searching for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across personal experience" (Clandinin & Connelly,1994, p. 423). Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 63) suggest a five-stage holistic-content-perspective to read a life story. I used these stages to find emerging themes. The five stages are listening and reading empathically for a pattern or a focus of the story, followed by an initial impression of the story to decide which themes to follow. Then I colour-coded the themes and kept track of the results by following the themes throughout the stories. These stages organized the data into coherent themes while acknowledging that "the reading is more than the disassembling of text; analysis should always take place in the context of a personal, emotional, and aesthetic experience" (Gamble & Yates, 2002, p. 28). Once the data was generated, data immersion occurred in which the researcher "feels the pulse of the data" (Leavy, 2017, p. 150), to develop the initial thoughts.

Coding

According to Saldaña (2016) there are 33 coding methods available for researchers to use. He gives a simple definition of coding as coding being "the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (p. 5). So, coding is the process of going over the raw data to identify relevant concepts. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explain coding as "the condensation of a datum into a richer, more compact form of meaning" (p.181). Saldaña (2016) explains that qualitative codes capture the essence and important elements of the research story and "when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (i.e., a pattern), actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (p. 9)

There are four main coding processes "In Vivo Coding, Process Coding, Values Coding, and Emotion Coding," (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p.181) that can be used independently or merged in different stages of coding. In the coding process, I used In-vivo coding and values-coding (Leavy, 2017). These two coding styles are closely related as In-vivo coding uses the participant's exact words to generate codes, and values-coding unpacks and further explains those codes. I generated the following example (Table 1) inspired by Leavy's (2017) and Saldaña and Omasta (2018) analytic coding strategies.

Table 1

Coding Sample

Interview Transcript	In-vivo coding	Values coding
I feel homesick and can't wait to go back home for a visit. It has been a tough year.	Homesick	Suffers homesickness
		Needs a change
	Tough year	In tough situation

After this stage, the cyclic stage of categorizing, and theming occurs. In this stage, I used memo writing which involves "thinking and systematically writing about data you have coded and categorized" (Leavy, 2017). Memos are considered a link between coding and interpretation.

The important part of data analysis is the personal interpretations that help make sense of the data and spot emerging patterns. In qualitative research personal interpretations are valid and important as "multiple realities exist because we each perceive and interpret social life from different points of view" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 8). Josselson (2011) elaborates on the aim of personal interpretation this way:

> The primary goal of interpretation is not the passive repetition of what the speaker told
> us. When we listen to another's story our intention is to bring our own interpretation to
> his or her material. We take interpretive authority and we need to make this explicit.
> Even if we ask our participants to corroborate our interpretation, it is still our interpretive
> framework that structures understanding. (p. 39)

This also emphasizes the personal biases that researchers have that can affect their interpretation of data, which requires reflexivity. Reflexivity is a conscious awareness of oneself as both the inquirer and respondent, the teacher and learner, and understanding oneself through the research process. It compels us to address not only our selection of the research problem and our interactions with research participants but also to confront our own identities and the various facets that form the fluid self within the research setting (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). In the interpretation phase, there is a triangulation strategy in which the researcher uses different sources of data to address a question (Leavy, 2017). Qualitative frameworks allow for the exploration of different interpretations and the presentation of multiple understandings without deciding on one 'correct' interpretation. In this research, I incorporated multiple sources, such as government documents, social policy, lived experiences, and also theoretical triangulation. Theoretical triangulation involves "looking at the data through more than one theoretical lens in order to allow different interpretations to emerge" (Leavy, 2017, p. 153). I employed theoretical triangulation by using both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK). This approach enabled me to analyze the data through the lens of systemic racism and social justice (CRT) as well as through the lens of women's epistemological perspectives (WWK). By applying these two theoretical perspectives, I was able to generate a richer and more nuanced understanding of the experiences of immigrant mothers.

Participants

In narrative inquiry, the researcher and the participants are the co-participants of the stories, and they share, ponder, and gain insight into the research question. Saleh (2019) argues that we live in relation to the "personal, social, intergenerational, cultural, temporal, historical, political, linguistic, familial, and institutional narratives" (p. 52), so as researchers we are not detached from the participants. Similarly, Lindsay and Schwind (2016) explain that "we co-construct the emerging knowledge, which is at once particular and localized, and yet transferable to other persons and contexts by means of reflective self-inquiry of the audience" (p. 15). Wells (2009) also asserts that participants from similar cultures share their way of interpreting their experience and so "each confirming, modifying and elaborating on the story of the other" (Wells, 2009, p. 215). This sharing and connection is powerful as it is the synergy of ideas. I believe in this small-scale research choosing the participant was very important as sharing personal life stories and research requires a great deal of mutual trust. In that regard, Leavy (2017) suggests, "qualitative research typically relies on purposeful sampling" (p. 148). Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explain purposive sampling as one in which "participants are deliberately selected because they are most likely to provide insight into the phenomenon being investigated due to their position, experience, and/or identity markers" (p. 96). Saldaña and Omasta (2018) go on to discuss that "a number of insightful, well-regarded qualitative studies involve only a single participant" (p. 96), in their view, a single participant could generate "rich data" (p. 98).

In my case, I chose an Iranian immigrant mother as the other participant in this research from a similar background. My participant is a creative writer and after reading some of her stories about her immigration experience that I came across online, I contacted her and explained my research interest. She showed interest in sharing her life story for my research purpose and

was comfortable with online interview sessions. She used a pseudonym of her preference (Violet), and she was not identified by her real name. We were both comfortable with using the online platform as it allowed us to share our stories without having to arrange travel for interview purposes. Leavy (2017) regards this way of identifying participants as convenience sampling. It involves "identifying participants based on their accessibility to you" (Leavy, 2017, p. 149). Patton (2015) suggests inviting a single significant case as an exemplar. This implies identifying a participant that may provide the researcher with rich data. Also, in my theoretical thinking related to WWK, connected knowing is a way of understanding the world. It requires relationship-building over time, "connected knowing works best when members of the group meet over a long period of time and get to know each other well" (Belenky, et al., 1986, p.119). In my case, a similar background and nationality helped us understand each other better while sharing our stories as "each of us contributes to the overall story with a particular voice" (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p.147).

By centering on two participants, my dissertation underscores the significance of small-scale, qualitative research in revealing the complexities of human experiences that are often overshadowed in larger studies. It demonstrates respect for and validation of the significance of our unique stories. It highlights that every narrative, no matter how singular, holds the potential to inform and challenge existing frameworks, offering invaluable contributions to knowledge production. This approach validates the importance of individual narratives, not just as anecdotal data, but as profound and essential contributions to understanding broader systemic phenomena and driving meaningful change. Through this lens, the dissertation emphasizes that small-scale research has the capacity to amplify marginalized voices, providing nuanced insights that can reshape broader discourses on immigration, motherhood, and identity.

Researcher Background and Positionality

I start this section by explaining how I learned to care for stories and how they have become an integral part of teaching me about the world. After that, I will explain my research positionality and how I understand motherhood based on my lived experience.

My late grandfather was the manager of a national publishing company in Iran. The head office was in Tehran. I remember my best memories of childhood were during summer breaks when we would all travel to Tehran to stay with my grandparents. Many mornings I used to accompany my grandpa to his office. The office was located in an old stone house in the heart of the capital where all major publication buildings are located. There was a big storage room with millions of books, or at least it seemed that many to me. I could spend hours and hours in the world of stories getting papercuts from brand new books or smelling the scent of old books that were either in the pile of keepsakes for future generations or the ones that were doomed to go back to the factory and be recycled into a paste to become a different book. Outside the building, you could hear street booksellers shouting out the name of banned books to entice young customers who wanted to learn about the world through a hidden lens. There were also trollies of street food passing by with their delicious smell cutting through the lazy summer days. There were cinemas, old-fashioned diners, and old bazaars where you could find cheap children's toys that would sell triple the price in other cities. In those days technology was scarce, each neighbourhood had one house with TV or telephone line, where neighbours could gather to watch movies or hear the news about the ongoing eight-year war with Iraq. I can vaguely remember that some nights that we were all gathered around the oil lamp to hear my grandfather's stories of his youth and adventures, the deafening sound of sirens would force us to run to the underground shelter and hope no bombs would fall on our roof. Nobody was allowed

to make a noise or turn on the lights, to stay invisible for a few minutes that stretched like hours for us. To console the panicked children, adults would tell stories, so everybody could calm down.

All those years, through uncertainty and fear, stories saved us from falling apart. And stories stayed as an integral part of me long after my grandpa and his mystical book-filled building were gone or there was no need to hide in shelters. My "passion to tell stories and the thirst to receive stories" (Quintero, 2018, p. 3) goes back to that time encouraging me to continue my studies and get two degrees in literature later. I grew up in a family with a high socio-economic status that valued education, continuous learning, and the pursuit of new life experiences. This environment instilled in me a deep appreciation for knowledge and personal growth. Additionally, I married my husband in my early twenties, and we both share a passion for exploring new opportunities and experiences. Being a highly educated mother with an upbringing in a loving household, coupled with my life experiences and background in the heart of the Middle East, where challenges like war, drought, political instability, and immigration persist, has shaped my perspective. Furthermore, living and studying in Scotland for five years alongside my husband, and subsequently relocating to Canada in 2018 with my family, has enriched my worldview about immigration, and its challenges, and contributed to my evolving positionality. I came to Canada with 15 years of experience as an English teacher, IELTS instructor, university lecturer, language college supervisor, and teacher trainer. To my surprise, I found that I could not easily use my expertise due to my foreign credentials and work experience. On paper, I had all the qualifications that were advertised as required in Canada, but in reality, I had to start from scratch because I needed Canadian work experience to be appealing to many recruiters. So, I started as a volunteer in a language school, which was my first point of

contact with other immigrants, mostly mothers. Although I enjoyed interacting with other

immigrants, I had to give up that volunteering opportunity because my son could not speak

English when we first moved to Canada, and there were no Farsi translators in our small city to

support him in class. After a few mishaps due to the language barrier, I realized I had to take

action. I ended up working at his school as an educational assistant to be close to him in case he

needed help. I continued working with the school board long after my son's English surpassed

mine, gaining invaluable experience and understanding of the Canadian educational system.

Later on, my passion for teaching English to immigrants led me to earn a TESL diploma and

become a certified LINC instructor. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is

an English language training program funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

(IRCC) for adult immigrants and refugees. Through this job, I identified several issues that

needed to be addressed. For example, the classes are only for adults aged 18 and older who are

permanent residents, protected persons, or convention refugees in Canada. Once students obtain

their Canadian passport, they can no longer attend the classes, even if they still need to improve

their English. Additionally, immigrants on work visas are ineligible, forcing them to take entry-

level jobs. This prevents many immigrants from improving their English and showcasing their

full expertise and potential. Furthermore, LINC classes typically run for five hours per day,

making it difficult for immigrant mothers who need to care for their children to enroll. If students

are absent for too many sessions, they are replaced by new students from the waiting list.

    My life experience in Canada has been eye-opening. With a decade spent in different

parts of the world, I consider myself an insider to the immigration experience. I have integrated

my lived experiences into this research, embracing them as the primary factors shaping my

ontological and epistemological assumptions. Hewett (2020) explains that "placing oneself as the

narrator and/or subject of one's story can contest one's assigned position as ancillary or unimportant; it is a move that insists upon one's subjectivity and place in history" (p. 192). As both a researcher and one of the two participants in this study, I have a personal connection to the narratives shared, which presents a challenge in maintaining objectivity. However, it is important to note that the objective of my research is not to produce widely applicable findings, so I do not intend to disregard my inherent subjectivity.

In research where there is social interaction between a migrant researcher and a migrant participant who belong to the same imagined community, it is crucial to have an insider perspective. Insider interviews of this nature produce a unique social dynamic that highlights the contrasts between the researcher and participant due to their shared cultural understanding (Ganga & Scott, 2006). This is what Ganga and Scott (2006) regard as "diversity in proximity," which they describe this way: "as insiders, we are better able to recognize both the ties that bind us and the social fissures that divide us" (p. 2). This research required me to reflect on my life experience and choices which has not been easy for me as we "risk our comfortable norms and truth claims each time we seek understanding" (Gallagher, 2008, p. 2). However, I believe it is a worthwhile project to invite diversity and possibilities to the dominant narrative of society on immigration.

The interpretation of data is multi-dimensional: "what people know about themselves and others is a function of their backgrounds, motivational frames, and unique/biased perspectives" (Henriques, 2015, n.p.). While being aware of my positionality and the impact of my own experience on my interpretation and subjectivity in this research (Goodley et al., 2004), I am honest about where I stand (Taylor et al., 2015). Also, I acknowledge that narrative research does not show "the exact 'truth,' but rather aims for 'verisimilitude'—that the results have the

appearance of truth or reality" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4). I emphasize that this research cannot be, and should not be, generalized to every immigration experience, as it will defeat the main purpose of avoiding stereotyping the immigration experience, rather, it will encourage other people to share their stories and add valuable information to the immigration discourse.

Ethical Considerations

Holtmann (2016) highlights the risks of researching minority groups and asserts: "Drawing attention to social problems within minority groups is risky because it can be used to reinforce stereotypes held by members of dominant groups" (p. 398). Research on immigrant women can be classified as socially sensitive research. There are different definitions for a socially sensitive research topic. I refer to Sieber and Stanley (1988), according to them it is "studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in research or for the class of individuals represented by the research" (p. 49). To do research that does not hurt the participants or the researcher, it is very important to adhere to ethical considerations.

Ethics in research refers to "the moral deliberation, choice, and accountability on the part of researchers" (Mauthner et al., 2005, p. 14) throughout the research process. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) emphasize the need to respect ethics in narrative inquiry. They say that "in narrative inquiry, inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to undertake a life study and to live in relation in an ethical way" (p. 483). I adhered to the ethical framework provided by Nipissing University and through TCPS2, and I filled out the required forms obtained through the ROMEO portal to make sure my research complies with Nipissing University Research Ethics Board (NUREB's) protocols.

I received permission to conduct the study from the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board in September 2022 before I started to recruit the participant. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explain that one of the main elements of interview protocols is informed consent. I obtained the consent process verbally and through email "based on mutual understanding of the project goals and objectives" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018, p. 138). She signed the Participant Information Letter (PIL). In the first interview session, I began by reviewing the informed consent, and addressed any questions she had. I affirmed "important points such as the voluntary nature" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 104) of her participation, so she knew she could withdraw at any time without any penalties.

According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences, and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2018), "Privacy is respected if an individual has an opportunity to exercise control over personal information by consenting to, or withholding consent for, the collection, use and/or disclosure of information" (p. 57). I highly respected the participant's trust in me with her life stories and I respect her privacy. In my research, I did not share her personal information and I only portrayed her life experience as she shared them. I only used the portion of her stories that she allowed to be shared. Her stories that are available online were not used for this research purpose because she could be identified from those publicly available stories.

In the PIL, I explained the time commitment for the interview session and that the sessions would be recorded using Windows Microsoft built-in recording device. I explained that I would send her the transcription of the recordings and then she had the chance to add or retract any information from the interviews. I also explained that it may take up to 45 minutes to an hour to review her transcript and make edits depending on the length of the interview and the

transcript size. She received the transcripts within 3 days following the interviews. I followed up with her in an email to make sure she had received the material, and if she had any further questions. She had two weeks to make any desired changes. We agreed that if she did not return the edited transcript within 3-4 weeks, it would mean that she is satisfied with the content she provided. I also explained that she will have access to the dissertation and any publications (i.e., presentations, research papers, book chapters, and social media platforms) that will be related to this study in the future.

I also gave her the option to use journaling between the sessions. The reason is that sometimes we get inspiration from daily activities that might be helpful in answering the research questions. These inspirational moments can happen at any time and anywhere: while watching a movie, cooking, commuting to work, or simply when missing family and friends back home. The amount of time spent on journaling was totally up to the participant and was voluntary. The journals in the form of writing that according to the participant expressed her thoughts and feelings related to the research question were used as data with her consent. The writings were kept in a password-protected file with the rest of the data from the interviews on my computer. She understood that the data would be stored for 10 years to allow for the presentation and publication and that the raw data is accessible to only my academic supervisor and me.

Throughout the research, I sought ongoing consent and minimized the power imbalance. In doing research, power imbalance exists as the researcher who writes the account has more power over it (Olesen, 2005, p. 253). While I was aware of this issue, I tried to minimize the power imbalance as much as possible by explaining the potential benefits and harm to the

participant and reassuring her that she can stop sharing without penalty and leave the research at any time if she no longer wants to participate.

According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. (2018) "Because research is a step into the unknown, its undertaking can involve harms to participants and to others. Harm is anything that has a negative effect on the welfare of participants" (p. 21). Sharing life stories might become harmful, traumatic, and "poses a risk of re-traumatizing participants" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018, p. 127). I adhered to protocols for the participant's access to counselling to minimize any potential harm while retelling lived experiences. At the beginning of the interviews, I provided her with contact information for the available resources in the community that she could access. Also, I provided the same counselling resources in the Participation Information Letter.

Hammersley and Traianou (2012) warn against the "large grey area" in qualitative research (p. 60). Because of the frequent communication of the researcher and the participants, there is a blurred line "between what is and is not part of the research" (p. 60). In this case, I made sure that our communication regarding the research topic was limited to those sessions that we have both agreed upon. I practised confidentiality and let her ask any questions about the nature of my research; I explained the procedure in detail. In our conversations, we had a "non-hierarchical" relationship (Leavy, 2017, p. 158). Throughout the narrative process, I was open to new themes that appeared during our conversations, and I made sure that retelling my participant's story resonated with her experience. I used member checking (Birt et al., 2018) by sharing what I was doing with her stories and gave her the opportunity to review and comment. In that regard, Saleh (2019) suggests some questions that can be asked to let the participant have power over what they share:

Are you comfortable with this? Do you recognize yourself in this? Do you feel that it

honours the stories we shared, lived, and inquired into alongside one another? Is anything

missing? Does anything seem out of place, or did I seem to misunderstand or misinterpret

anything? (p. 62)

I asked similar questions throughout the interview sessions and after that, I sent her the interview

transcripts to make sure she is happy with the way the research questions and answers unfold and

the way her life experience is presented.

In my view, one of the best ethical pieces of advice for honouring the stories that come to

you is from a fictional character, the badger in Barry Lopez's book *Crow and Weasel* (1990):

Remember on this one thing, said Badger. The stories people tell have a way of taking

care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where

they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is

why we put these stories in each other's memories. This is how people care for

themselves. (p. 25)

Data Collection Procedure: The Interview Method

In total, four interviews were completed with the participant. The interviews were

scheduled for 60 minutes and ranged from 60 minutes to 1.5 hours with the consent of the

participant. All interviews were conducted by me through the Zoom online platform. All

interviews were audio-recorded, translated, and transcribed. The participant is fluent in English,

but she preferred to answer the questions in Farsi, which is our first language. I translated the

transcripts into English, and she reviewed the transcripts in two versions of Farsi and English for

the accuracy of the portrayal of her experience, and to make sure her words were not lost in

translation. After each interview, I compiled notes to help me recall the session during the data analysis. I included my own reactions to record the moments that may have influenced my understanding. Notes that were written on paper were stored in binders in a locked drawer and then I typed them into a password-protected file on my laptop and shredded the paper notes.

Why I Chose the Interview Method?

My personal interpretation of the importance of words and communications in qualitative research works was inspired by Maykut and Morehouse's (2002) explanation of the way words work:

Words are the way that most people come to understand their situations. We create our world with words. We explain ourselves with words. We defend and hide ourselves with words. The task of the qualitative researcher is to find patterns within those words (and actions) and to present those patterns for others. (p. 18)

I have been fascinated by the idea of exploring and making sense of the patterns created by conversations with the participant. For that reason, I chose the interview method and used its platform to explore the questions I had for my research and to find patterns and meanings that emerged from the interviews. In his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Irving Seidman, a professor emeritus in qualitative research at the Massachusetts University, and a pioneer in developing interviews in qualitative research explains that "it is a privilege to gather the stories of people through interviewing and to come to understand their experience through their stories." (Seidman, 2006, p.5). Also, it has been a great privilege and a unique experience to explore motherhood through the lens of an immigrant mother—one who not only shared her stories with me but also listened to mine about motherhood and immigration. For me focusing on

motherhood is important because motherhood is a critical aspect of many women's lives and experiences, particularly for immigrant mothers who navigate multiple cultural expectations. My understanding of motherhood goes beyond the traditional notions of caregiving and nurturing. Motherhood, in the context of immigrant mothers, involves the transmission of cultural values, practices, and identities to the next generation while simultaneously adapting to and navigating the dominant culture of the host country. This dual role of preserving heritage and fostering integration is often overlooked in mainstream feminist discourses, which may focus more broadly on issues of gender equality and women's rights without delving deeply into the nuanced experiences of mothers, particularly those from marginalized communities. Through our conversations we acknowledged the essential role that motherhood plays in shaping our identities and experiences. Our conversations have been eye-opening, emotional, and liberating. I call it liberating because during the interviews I and the participant both felt that by sharing our stories, the shadow of being immigrant mothers that lured above our heads with so many questions and doubts, was lifted from our shoulders and the experiences have become something that we were both proud to share. Our conversations created light within our hearts that helped us make more sense of our experiences. During the interviews, I reminded the participant and myself that based on the elements of temporality, sociality, and place in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) it was important for us to reflect on the dimensions of our experiences. Temporality refers to the transitional nature of our being. We have a past, present, and future. We understand our experiences based on our past, and present, and we connect our experiences to our future. Sociality directed us to our personal feelings and the social conditions in which our experiences are being shaped. Finally, place refers to where our experiences happened.

The Interview Guide

      I used the semi-structured interview method "to have participant(s) share as much information as possible with minimal direction from the interviewer" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 108). In semi-structured interviews, questions are open-ended which allows the participants to interpret and share their ideas (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). At the first session, I explained to her why her participation is important because her valuable contribution to this research will support and advocate for including more data on women's perspectives on the immigration experience. I highlighted that my hope is that the findings of this research will encourage better opportunities for immigrant mothers and that the narratives in my research will potentially offer solidarity and comfort. Also, they will amplify the emancipatory power of stories and challenge stereotypes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Real-life stories of minority groups have the potential to raise awareness of the reality of marginalized people and offer counternarratives, which can challenge the status quo and promote equity for minority members of society. This study seeks to address the need to add more women's voices to the immigration narrative, which often overlooks the people involved in the movement, making all immigrants appear gender-neutral (Curry-Rodriguez, 2014). Additionally, the study aims to shed light on the nature of the migratory experience, including the emotions and practicalities of departure, travel, arrival, and the attempt to rebuild a home, which is often overshadowed in research on the large-scale political, economic, and social impacts of migration (King et al., 2003, p. i). In this study, I adopted a qualitative approach and employed narrative inquiry as my research method. I conducted four in-depth interviews with another Iranian mother, during which we both shared our perspectives related to the research questions. In this chapter, I present the findings of my research. I begin by stating the research questions, followed by an explanation of the data analysis procedures, and conclude with the presentation of the findings.

Research Questions

In this study, I aimed to explore the overarching research question in which I consider: What is it like for the participants/two immigrant mothers to be immigrants in Canada? This overarching question addresses our immigration experience in Canada by channeling into four leading questions that revolve around the theme of motherhood in the immigration context:

1. What is it like for us to live in Canada as immigrant mothers?

2. What are our thoughts as immigrant mothers on the themes of homesickness and

loneliness?

3. What is it like for us as mothers to live in Canada navigating cultural differences?

4. What is it like for us as mothers to experience sending our children to schools in

Canada?

During the interview sessions, different themes emerged, and we addressed the ones that were

mostly related to the focus of this research. I adhered to the idea of Saldaña (2011) about

ensuring that any questions asked during an interview, although not necessarily part of the

primary research questions, should still be grounded in the research objectives to maintain a

robust foundation for the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Upon completing the transcription and translation of each interview, I took the initiative

to share them with the participant, ensuring her satisfaction with the translation of our

conversations into English. This step was essential to preserve the integrity of her ideas and

ensure they were accurately conveyed. Following her confirmation that the English translation

aligned with our original Farsi discussions across all four interviews to her satisfaction, I

initiated the pre-coding process. During the pre-coding phase, I printed out the transcripts and

employed coloured highlighter pens to emphasize emerging themes. Additionally, I made initial

notes of codes in the margins of the pages. Employing a line-by-line coding approach (as

outlined by Glesne in 2016, p. 196), I began developing the first draft, which encompassed five

principal themes and 20 sub-themes for the initial interview session, four primary themes and 14

sub-themes for the subsequent interview, two major themes with seven sub-themes for the third

interview, and likewise, two major themes with seven sub-themes for the final session. In my

quest to identify recurring themes, I drew upon Ryan and Bernard's notion that "repetition is one of the easiest ways to identify themes" (2003, p. 89). Consequently, I meticulously sought out themes that were consistently present across all interviews, facilitating the amalgamation of some interconnected themes. Moreover, I remained mindful that "coding is a cyclical act, and rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly executed" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8) as I navigated the coding process.

The process of merging themes demanded multiple passes through the data, culminating in the integration of certain themes for the subsequent discussion section. Consequently, I derived six major themes to be included in the dissertation's discussion chapter which are: Immigrant Women/ Immigrant Mothers; Mothering: The Iranian Style; Lack of Knowledge About the Services Provided for New Mothers in Canada; The Lonely Journey of Motherhood: Navigating Emotional and Physical Isolation; Challenges of Practising the Iranian Culture; and, Differences in Educational Systems.

Results

In this section, I embark upon a comprehensive exploration of the findings derived from our research endavour. To provide a comprehensive overview, I start with a demographic overview of the participants. Following that, I delve into the rich tapestry of interview data that has been carefully collected and curated. To ensure clarity and coherence, the presentation of these findings is organized into four distinct major sections, each designed to address one of the primary research questions. Within these major sections, a nuanced exploration ensues, with detailed sub-sections further dissecting the data to unravel its intricacies and significance. My research journey unfolds through these organized segments, allowing me to not only address the overarching research questions but also to discern the subtle nuances and patterns that emerge

from the data. This approach not only adds depth to my analysis but also provides a structured

framework for readers to engage with the findings on multiple levels. To offer a concise yet

illuminating conclusion to this chapter, I provide a comprehensive summary that encapsulates

the key findings, themes, and implications uncovered during this chapter.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Name	Country of Origin	Province of Residence	Age Group	Number of Children
Leila (researcher's real name)	Iran	Ontario	35-40	1
Violet (Pseudonym)	Iran	Quebec	35-40	1

Data Collection

Typically, our discussions commenced with a broad exploration of the overarching topic

for that particular session. However, I remained receptive to the related points raised by the

participant, allowing the conversation to organically evolve as needed. By affording participants

the latitude to shape the dialogue according to their experiences, I sought to capture a more

authentic and holistic representation of our viewpoints. The semi-structured interview method

provided me with a balance between structure and flexibility in data collection.

In preparation for this chapter's presentation, I attempted to categorize the themes and assign them to the appropriate questions after transcribing the interviews. However, I tried to avoid the practice described by Seidman (2006) as imposing categories onto the transcriptions. In this regard, he explains,

> The process of working with excerpts from participants' interviews, seeking connections among them, explaining those connections, and building interpretative categories is demanding and involves risks. The danger is that the researcher will try to force the excerpts into categories, and the categories into themes that he or she already has in mind, rather than let them develop from the experience of the participants as represented in the interviews. (p. 128)

It is important to mention that our perspectives are based solely on our understanding of the lived experience of women with skilled worker visas. We have limited insight or personal experiences with women who hold other types of visas, which could impact their life experiences in Canada differently. In this research, I am one of the respondents to the research questions, and I refer to myself as (I, Me, Myself, Leila). The other participant is referred to by the pseudonym she selected and her preferred pronoun (She, Her, Violet).

Question 1. What is it Like for us to Live in Canada as Immigrant Mothers?

In the initial interview session, before sharing our opinions on the topic, I briefly outlined how I developed this research interest, this way,

> I became interested in research when I faced numerous challenges as an immigrant mother adapting to a new environment. Issues like homesickness, loneliness, and slow progress made me wonder if other immigrant women, particularly mothers, experience

the same struggles. Through speaking with other immigrant individuals, I noticed that immigrant mothers, in particular, face additional difficulties compared to others. While this may not apply to all immigrant mothers, it sparked my desire to hear more stories. I chose to conduct my own research to shed light on these experiences and provide guidance for future immigrant mothers. My research focuses on the questions that interest me the most, but there are many other questions related to the immigration process that are worth exploring.

After sharing my background related to the research, we both expressed excitement about beginning a series of conversations that encompass our personal experiences. I am grateful that we were able to establish a strong connection and mutual understanding during the interview process. I agree with Brinkmann's (2018) statement about an interview where he explains: "An interview is not an interaction between disembodied intellects but a joint accomplishment of vulnerable, embodied persons with all sorts of hopes, fears, and interests" (p. 998). The quote suggests that interviews involve intricate exchanges that transcend mere information-sharing. They constitute profound human engagements where both participants contribute their distinct viewpoints, feelings, and drives, impacting the interview's course and results. Being aware of and comprehending these factors can result in fostering a deeper connection between the involved parties as humans rather than mere fountains of information.

Emerging Themes

Immigrant Women/ Immigrant Mothers

I allowed Violet to bring up any queries or uncertainties she had about the interviews. Then I asked her if she had already become a mother before relocating to Canada. She

responded, "No, my husband and I arrived in Canada on a skilled-worker program visa, and then I had my baby after settling here." I was eager to find out if her status as a mother had any influence on her immigration experience, so I asked, "How would you compare your immigration experience before and after becoming a mother?" Violet answered the question with enthusiasm,

> Leila, I was hoping you bring up this question early on in our conversations because I think women's immigration experience is as important and valid as the mothering experience. I think our motherhood experience is greatly shaped by our experience as women! Before discussing my experiences as an immigrant mother, I wanted to touch upon my experiences as an immigrant woman. I considered myself an accomplished woman in my early 30s when we moved to Canada. I was a teacher in Iran for several years and worked my way up the social ladder. I had a well-paying teaching job, and I had established a strong network of friends and colleagues where I felt valued, loved, and secure. Then after going through a marathon of applying for Canadian Permanent Residency (PR), my husband and I were accepted through the Québec province's immigration program. So, we packed all we could and left everything we could not fit in our suitcases in Iran, including both belongings and emotional connections. Before immigrating to Canada, I asked a few immigrants how it felt to move to Canada and was told that it was a good opportunity, but they warned me to be prepared to start from scratch. One of them told me that I should be ready to go back to square one of the snakes and ladders board game!

Violet's statement revealed the analogy of "going back to square one." I have heard it from other immigrants, and I had a similar feeling, so I asked her to clarify, she explained it this way,

Going back to square one means you cannot transfer all of your knowledge, skills, work experience, and self-confidence to a new country right away. Many things that worked in your home country do not work in the new environment. Imagine in a video game you successfully completed 20 levels, but then your game console upgrades and resets your game to level one, and ignores and erases all your progress! Or in a snake and ladder board game, when you think you are almost finished, you end up going back to the first square, where you must start the game all over again! It can be frustrating to know you've passed all those levels but have to start from the beginning. That's what my experience was like when moving to Canada. In Iran, I was able to teach English with my degree in English literature, but in Canada, I couldn't do the same job! I was even more frustrated when I realized that my certificate from the internationally recognized WES organization that assesses and provides credential evaluations obtained from different countries, was not really getting me anywhere in Canada's job market. I had to attend the Teachers' College and spend more years to be able to teach which I was already skilled at in Iran. I wasn't willing to invest that much time and money in going back to college, so I lost my teaching talent in the Canadian context. Aside from the financial aspect, I believe that prior to having my child, I had more opportunities to focus on my studies and apply for job prospects that would support my education. However, since becoming a parent, I've taken on more responsibilities and have encountered certain limitations. I feel that my experience with immigration has become more difficult since becoming a mother.

Violet's remark is similar to the experience of some internationally trained teachers in Cho (2014) research where they felt compelled to conceal their foreign qualifications by pursuing domestic degrees, so they could navigate the bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the Canadian

system. It also highlights that navigating the initial stages of adjusting to a new environment can be more challenging when you have the added responsibilities of parenthood. Violet also indicated that this sentiment was not unique to her own experience, but was supported by the experiences of others,

> I am aware of female immigrants who were medical doctors and dentists in their home countries but faced difficulties in obtaining the necessary certification to practice in Canada. One of them had to work as a taxi driver for an extended period before being able to study for the medical exams, but then became pregnant and was on bed rest for the duration of the pregnancy. As a result, all the income she earned as a taxi driver went towards covering her living expenses. Another who was a dentist in Iran became a hygienist instead because there were so many exams that she had to take before being able to practice as a dentist in Canada. She lived in a small town several hours away from Toronto where these exams and their preparatory classes were held. She was unable to attend the preparatory classes for the exams as all the classes were held mostly during the winter months and it was so hard for her to commute, leading to having to give up her status as a skilled dentist in Iran. She then became a mother and all the added responsibilities of motherhood made it even harder for her to pursue her dream. She told me that this "going back to square one" HURTS! To be honest with you, some of these lived experiences were hard for me to listen to, but they encouraged me to tell my own story and share my experience.

Violet's remark shows an awareness that some immigrants are unable to find jobs in their area of expertise, often forced to take entry-level positions that cover rent and help with financial restraints, rather than going through the lengthy process of having their degree recognized in

Canada. According to our discussion, the main difference between the experiences of immigrant women and immigrant mothers is the added burden of childcare responsibilities, which can impede their integration into the host country. Getting a skilled worker visa involves passing several screenings, indicating that as a woman, one has already achieved a certain level of success. However, some of those skills may not be transferable in Canada and require additional work to be recognized. Immigrant women may have an easier time navigating this process, whereas immigrant mothers must balance multiple responsibilities related to childcare. Although motherhood is considered a fulfilling experience, it can make it harder for immigrant mothers to reach their aspirations.

After our first interview session, I was reminded of a beautiful sentence I read by Denzin and Lincoln (2018): "Wounded storytellers can empower others to tell their stories" (p. 898). After what Violet mentioned about hearing other stories and based on my personal experiences of communicating with other immigrant mothers, we both acknowledged that our own experiences have been influenced by the stories we hear from others. These stories can be either inspiring or saddening and serve as a reminder to be mindful of our own experiences.

Mothering: The Iranian Style

In this discussion, we explored the concept of ideal mothering that has been passed down from our mothers and is prevalent in Iranian culture. We acknowledged that some of these ideals are inconsistent with the parenting norms in Canada, which can make it challenging for us to implement our preferred parenting approach. In Iran, motherhood is usually synonymous with selflessness for the sake of children. Mothers are expected to prioritize their children's success above all else and are considered the caretakers of the household. However, this often results in giving up their own aspirations, such as education, career, and social life. The support network,

consisting of other mothers and female family members, reinforces this traditional view that mothers should always put their children first. Recently, the notion of mothers sacrificing their social lives for their children has been challenged by feminist and modernist women in Iran. However, the traditional values still persist. Violet recalled a time in her life when she was exhausted and overwhelmed as a new mother. Her main goal was to concentrate solely on her baby, let him have contact naps, and pick up the baby as soon as she could hear him cry. After waiting for months to be paired with an English-speaking support worker, she recounted the uncomfortable conversations she had with the worker. Violet was trying to express her parenting principles based on her cultural beliefs, while the support worker was encouraging her to prioritize her mental health, arguing that a happy mother was crucial in raising a happy child. Violet recalls her support worker suggested she should leave the baby to cry it out! However, Violet felt guilty about the suggestion to focus on herself, as she feared it would be perceived as neglecting her baby. She mentioned,

> Deep down, I knew my support worker was worried about my well-being. But I was hoping she would meet me halfway with my cultural beliefs, instead of immediately dismissing them. I felt like I was ignoring my heritage culture and I wanted our conversations to reflect that.

This disconnect highlights the broader challenges faced by immigrant mothers in balancing their cultural heritage with the norms of the host country. According to Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, recognizing and valuing the cultural knowledge and practices that marginalized communities bring with them is essential. In the context of Violet's experience, the lack of cultural sensitivity from her support worker reflects a broader societal issue where dominant cultural values marginalize non-dominant cultural practices, as discussed in Critical

Race Theory (CRT). CRT emphasizes the need to understand how systemic racism and power imbalances shape the experiences of marginalized groups. By failing to acknowledge and incorporate Violet's cultural beliefs, her support worker perpetuated a form of cultural dominance that sidelined Violet's identity and heritage.

Integrating this perspective into the literature review, it is crucial to examine how the intersections of culture, motherhood, and immigration affect immigrant mothers' ability to practise native mothering standards. For instance, Brown et al. (2017) argue that the added responsibilities of childcare combined with the pressure of adhering to one's cultural expectations can cause emotional issues for immigrant mothers. Similarly, Oliveira (2020) illustrates the feelings of inadequacy among immigrant women who struggle to align with the mothering customs of their countries of origin when faced with new societal norms.

Cultural Expectations

I initially spoke about the values I inherited from my mother and grandmother in regards to parenting. In my ideal mothering approach, which is informed by the socio-economic class in which I was raised, it is strongly encouraged that I prepare homemade meals for my child daily, avoiding junk food even when I am occupied with work or study. I am also supposed to discover my child's talents and interests by enrolling him in various classes. We have tried various musical instruments and sports, and I experience feelings of guilt if I cannot attend a sports practice due to my studies. As a mother, I have often felt the pressure to try harder, as if I was not enough for my child. This feeling was particularly pronounced when my child began school and came home expressing feelings of loneliness due to a lack of siblings or cousins to play with. It was difficult for me to see my child feeling isolated and I felt a heavy sense of responsibility to try and fill that void. I understand that every mother has different experiences and motivations

related to motherhood, but for me, these feelings of inadequacy and the weight of responsibility have been a significant part of my journey.

Violet shared similar worries and discussed the expectation of devotion that Iranian mothers are supposed to embody. The notion that an ideal Iranian mother should devote her life to her children is prevalent. We both concurred that when we are unable to fully adhere to the ideal Iranian mothering standards, we feel guilty and inadequate!

Violet described how some of the cultural beliefs and norms within her family impacted her journey to motherhood. She mentioned how the cultural expectations were a driving force behind her desire to become a mother, which sometimes led her to lose sight of her own goals and priorities. Despite this, she remained determined to become a mother and navigate the challenges that came with it. Violet's experiences highlight the ways in which cultural values can shape one's personal journey, including the journey to motherhood:

> The pressure from my family and culture to become a mother was intense, and at the age of 34, I finally gave in to that pressure. This was considered a relatively late age for motherhood in my family's eyes. My parents were concerned that they might not have the opportunity to become grandparents if I continued to delay motherhood as I worked towards fulfilling the requirements to move to Canada. The cultural expectations and pressures led me to desire motherhood so strongly that I lost sight of myself. I used to think that becoming a mother was like accomplishing a major goal in a new environment, but in doing so, I had to sacrifice my success as a woman. As a result, I was far from where I wanted to be when I finally became a mother. For me, the process of immigration was like trying to grow roots as a young tree in a different climate. Despite the challenges, I was determined to become a mother, even if it meant being like a young tree

with shallow roots and trying to care for a tiny sapling while adjusting to the new and

unpredictable environment.

Violet compared her experience to the metaphor of a young tree trying to grow roots in an

unfamiliar environment, while also taking care of a delicate sapling. This comparison

emphasizes the difficulties and challenges she faced as she navigated motherhood and the

process of immigration while trying to maintain her own growth and stability. The metaphor

highlights the complexities of balancing personal growth with the responsibilities of motherhood

in a new and foreign setting. Violet and I both acknowledged that women have diverse

motivations and aspirations related to motherhood, and that it can be challenging for everything

to fall into place at the right time. Violet expressed her personal struggle in balancing her desire

to be stable as an immigrant woman before becoming a mother with the fear of missing out on

the opportunity to become a mother at all. She acknowledged that her perspective may differ

from other immigrant mothers and emphasized the importance of recognizing and respecting

individual experiences and choices related to motherhood.

Childbirth Experience

Violet bravely shared her thoughts on her hospital stay and the beginning of motherhood,

which she described as a frightening process. In Iranian culture, mothers are expected to

consume nutritious food and warm drinks after giving birth. Additionally, traditional Iranian

medicine suggests that mothers should remain in bed and be attended to by experienced elderly

women who will prepare healthy meals and help them recover. Many volunteers come forward

to cook for new parents and give the mother special care for the first ten days as it is believed

that a weak mother may develop postpartum depression and should focus solely on the care of

the newborn. In Canada, Violet did not have the same support system as she would have had in

Iran. The visa process for her mother or mother-in-law took longer than anticipated, leaving her and her husband on their own during her recovery from a C-section. She longed for homemade meals and nourishing food to help her body heal but instead was given unappetizing hospital food for a few days before being discharged to fend for herself. Although her mother-in-law eventually arrived a couple of months later to assist her, the early stages of motherhood with a challenging baby and a weakened body had already taken a toll on her mental health. Violet stated that she felt ready to give up at times.

Support Network After Childbirth. In contrast to Violet's experience, I had my son in Iran where I was surrounded by a supportive network of family and friends. My mother and two cousins stayed with me on the first night of my hospital stay, taking care of the baby and making sure I was comfortable as I recovered from the C-section surgery. I felt incredibly grateful for their motherly attention and care. Over the next few days, many of the female relatives organized a strong network of support, taking turns cooking homemade meals for us and caring for the baby so that I could rest. I have fond memories of hearing the doorbell every day at lunchtime, knowing that a relative had arrived with a pot of nourishing food. The scent of those life-giving meals and the kindness of my support network still brings a smile to my face. As we shared our differing experiences, we both agreed that it would be wonderful to have a support network for new immigrant mothers. Being separated from loved ones and navigating the uncharted waters of motherhood can be a source of stress and fear.

Only Child, Lonely Child. The difficult and lonely experience following the birth of her son, coupled with a miscarriage, left Violet lacking the motivation to try for another baby, despite her yearning for a larger family to fill the void of loneliness from being away from her support network. Her choice not to undergo the birthing experience in Canada again led to her

having only one child. Violet expressed concern that her son will grow up feeling lonely without siblings. She explained why she did not have her child in Iran before moving to Canada saying,

> The process of visa application is long. When you start the process, it takes a couple of years at least to obtain the visa. I personally wanted to have my child in Canada, because I was worried that with the uncertain visa processing times, I might be heavily pregnant or have a newborn by the time we were required to move to Canada. I could not deal with that added stress to my immigration journey. So, in the visa waiting game, I aged too! After moving to Canada and suffering one miscarriage, being on the bedrest for my second pregnancy resulted in me losing my job in Canada. I was in my mid-thirties when I had my child. I had to go through a C-section and spend some days in the hospital. Then when I was discharged from the hospital, I was still in so much pain after the surgery and I had a newborn baby who was a difficult baby.

Violet highlighted the importance of support for a new mother, especially for immigrant women who often lack a strong network of friends and family. She emphasized that immigrant mothers are often isolated both emotionally and physically from their support network located in their home countries. Violet mentioned that her husband had to work hard to support the family since they only had one income, and this limited his ability to spend time with her as a new mother. He also had concerns about his job security, which made him reluctant to take time off.

While contemplating on her pregnancy experience, she sighed and said: "We survive those challenging days, but we only have one child. My worry is that he does not have his aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins here. He is the only child and a lonely child!" Violet expressed her concerns about her experience with pregnancy and the difficulties they faced, including job loss, lack of support, and financial stress. Despite overcoming these challenges, she worried

about the fact that their child was an only child and did not have a large extended family nearby, potentially leading to feelings of loneliness. We both concurred that providing a robust network of assistance for immigrant mothers would tackle some of the challenges they face and would encourage them to have more children if that is what they desire. By doing so, these mothers will also make a significant contribution to the future population growth of Canada. A comprehensive support system that addresses the needs of immigrant mothers, from access to healthcare to finding employment and educational opportunities, would also empower them to make informed decisions about starting and growing their families. This would benefit not just the mothers themselves, but also their families and the wider community. By providing immigrant mothers with the resources and support they need, their overall well-being and economic self-sufficiency would improve. This, in turn, would contribute to healthier family dynamics and more stable home environments, fostering the healthy development of children. Moreover, as these families become more stable and self-reliant, they are more likely to actively participate in and contribute to their communities. This increased social and economic engagement promotes overall community stability and cohesion, creating a more inclusive and prosperous society.

So, I Bet You are Happy Now: Caught Between the Two Worlds. Violet recounted out her experiences regarding comments from her friends and relatives in Iran. She explained that she chose to immigrate to a new country on a skilled worker visa in search of better life opportunities, which was not seen as a valid reason for leaving by some of her loved ones. They would question why she could not have stayed in Iran and continue her life there. Despite these comments, Violet has big aspirations and a different perspective on life than those close to her, who sometimes sarcastically ask her about her university degree or high-paying job in Canada. She mentioned that she could not even share her childbirth story with some of her friends in Iran,

as one already commented, "If you had your child here, we would have taken care of you, you chose to move away from us!" She mentioned that: "while I usually brush off their comments, they can still get to me when I'm feeling low. I find myself questioning if I made the right choice by leaving everything behind." Violet mentioned that some comments made by her friends back in Iran made her feel estranged from them. According to her, some of her friends believed that her new life in Canada came with more privileges and opportunities for growth, leading them to view her as no longer belonging to their community. This perceived change in her circumstances and status can lead to feelings of alienation and exclusion. At the same time, Violet also mentioned that she was unable to find a sense of belonging and community in Canada. She described feeling caught between two worlds, like she was in a state of "purgatory." This can be a common experience for immigrants and individuals who have relocated to a new country, as they navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture, language, and environment while maintaining their ties with their home country. While Violet, and many individuals in similar situations, may face challenges in finding a sense of belonging in their new country, it is also important for them to maintain a connection to their home country and culture. This can provide a sense of comfort, security, and connection to their roots, helping to mitigate feelings of displacement and alienation.

Lack of Knowledge About the Services Provided for New Mothers in Canada

Violet stated that she was uninformed about the support and resources accessible to new mothers in Canada during a challenging time in her life. This lack of awareness exacerbated her stress and feelings of isolation. My experience was similar to Violet's. Upon moving here, we were faced with a wealth of information that was confusing and overwhelming. I found that there were various supports for families, but one had to actively search for them and inquire. The

information was not centralized, and the official websites had multiple sections with details, but it was difficult to navigate and access the help we needed. I gained knowledge about the options from colleagues and friends, but for Violet, who had to communicate in French, it was even more challenging as she struggled to find the information she needed and described it as being "scattered in an ocean that you had to dive deep and find it." Violet spoke of her dire need for assistance after giving birth in the following manner:

> After having my child, my husband had to return to work and my mother-in-law, who came for a visit, had to go back to Iran because it was too expensive for her to stay on a visitor visa without being able to work or earn money and the health insurance prices were too high for seniors on a visitor visa. I was left alone with a child who was later diagnosed with Autism and wouldn't sleep. Some days, I couldn't even find time to shower or cook a meal, relying on store-bought food. Before my mother-in-law left, she filled our freezer with homemade meals, but those ran out quickly. I was in desperate need of help and had a social worker who eventually suggested that I could have someone come to my house for 20 hours a month to help care for my child. Although it wasn't enough, those hours were a blessing. A kind nanny came to my home and took care of my son like a grandmother, and also showed me how to take care of myself. She would take my son to the park so I could take a nap, shower, or just have a cup of coffee in peace. From that experience, I learned that I needed to actively search for resources and help, even if it meant facing closed doors and frustration. However, I eventually found many helpful resources.

After talking with Violet on this topic, we concluded that the government should make a greater effort to provide new immigrant mothers with the information and resources needed. Currently,

the information is out there, but it can be difficult to find and takes a lot of effort to track down. Having all this information in one centralized location would be a huge help to immigrant mothers. It is crucial for the government to acknowledge the cultural diversity of immigrant populations and provide culturally sensitive resources to meet their specific needs. This not only respects the multicultural values of Canada, but also helps to ensure that immigrant communities receive adequate support as they integrate into their new country. By considering the unique cultural backgrounds of each immigrant group, the government can provide more effective and inclusive services that address their specific needs and challenges. This can greatly contribute to their overall well-being and successful integration into Canadian society.

Question 2. What are our Thoughts on the Themes of Homesickness and Loneliness?

The second research question served as the focus of our next interview session, where we explored the idea that the themes that I drew from the data throughout this chapter may have originated from any of the questions being asked. These themes are not limited to a specific question, but rather can be better understood when viewed through the lens of a particular question. By approaching the themes in this way, we were able to gain deeper insights and have a more comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand. For instance, feeling homesick can be caused by both loneliness and homesickness, as well as the added responsibilities of motherhood. Violet stated that "When the demands of motherhood become overwhelming, I feel even more nostalgic for home, as I associate home with support and understanding of my needs." Additionally, I shared that whenever I face difficulties here in Canada, I often think of home as a safe haven, a place where I can return to and start over. This realization highlights the fact that although these themes may be classified under different research questions, they can also be interconnected. It emphasizes the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to

understanding the experiences of immigrant mothers, taking into account all relevant themes. These interrelated themes greatly influence and form the daily reality of immigrant mothers.

Emerging Themes

The Lonely Journey of Motherhood: Navigating Emotional and Physical Isolation

The responsibilities of caring for children can create emotional and physical distance between mothers and their partners, society, and friends, leading to feelings of loneliness. Prior to having children, women may have had more opportunities to socialize with friends, but now they may struggle to do so. Being a lonely mother, especially one who is an immigrant, can amplify feelings of homesickness as they are far from their own families. This can also put extra pressure on the mother as they are tasked with fulfilling multiple roles—that of a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, and the entire support network that they would normally have back home.

Violet provided her own definition of homesickness, stating that it does not necessarily mean missing your home country. Even when she lived in her home country with her family and attended university, she experienced homesickness as a feeling of being mentally distant from those around her. She said we can use the word home-seek, seeking that safe space of understanding instead. She believes that sometimes, even your own family may not understand you, which can also contribute to feeling homesick. She admits that she may have an idealized vision of the world, and the reality can make her feel homesick for that utopia. I assured her that the ideal Home to be sick for is not the unreachable Utopia but a safe place where you are understood by people. It is not limited to geographical spaces but to places where you feel appreciated and understood. I found it fascinating that Violet's definition of homesickness

differed from the traditional meaning of the word. We discussed the possibility of there being many people with similar experiences who could share their stories and redefine the definition of homesickness. In today's society, the term is often associated with being away from your birth country, but it can have a much broader and nuanced definition. Homesickness can extend to longing for locations where memories were created, communities where one belonged, and meaningful bonds with individuals who are now distant. Since moving to Canada, Violet has experienced homesickness even more acutely due to cultural differences. She has noticed that the Canadian people whom she interacted with do not express their emotions as openly, and their concerns may not always align with hers. As a mother, she has found that her worries and conversations about her child's school experience are different from those of Canadian mothers that she met. She has struggled to explain her cultural background to others without feeling judged. She feels frustrated that some aspects of her culture may not be understandable to those who have not experienced the same traumas and challenges that she has faced being brought up as a woman in the Middle East region. We both wondered what it would be like if there were organizations or platforms dedicated to hearing the stories and thoughts of immigrant women, allowing for a more diverse and inclusive understanding of homesickness. We believe that sharing experiences and creating a community of understanding could help individuals like Violet feel less isolated and more supported in their new environments.

Lingering Traumas

Despite being far from her home country, Violet believes that certain traumas and experiences can remain with the person for a long time. We talked about how individuals coming from regions that experience ongoing wars, political unrest, sanctions, and an uncertain future may carry lingering traumas. We both recognized that there are numerous visible and invisible

stressors in the environment where we grew up that have directly and indirectly affected us. These stressors may surface unexpectedly and add to the difficulties of adapting to a new country. I recalled going to the Canada Day airshow, with a group of immigrant mothers from the Middle East. The guide was a culture-conscious woman who explained to everyone that they were about to hear loud noises from the flying jets and assured them that this was a celebratory show, and everyone was safe. However, when the loud jets flew over our heads with a couple of them flying too close to break the sound barrier, I could see in the eyes of some of those women the lingering trauma of the similar sounds that took away the life of their relatives and loved ones. In response to my comment Violet said,

> I understand where you're coming from. Growing up during the end of the Iran-Iraq war, I remember the fear of having to run to the basement and hope that a shell wouldn't land on our roof. I was only three or four years old at the time, but the shrieking sound of the shells still lingers in my memory. Just the other day, I was at a friend's house and her coffee pot made a similar sound, causing my heart to race and my face to turn pale. My friend asked if I was okay, but it's hard to share such childhood experiences with someone who has only seen them on the news. I didn't want to disturb the positive energy of our conversation by bringing up a distant memory that I can't even fully articulate. How can you explain that, after so many years, the sound of a coffee pot hissing still alarms you because it reminds you of falling missiles?

We both concurred that concealed traumas could exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation, as one might believe that their personal experiences vastly differ from those around them in Canada.

Loneliness and Homesickness due to Language Barrier

Violet shared her experience of slow progress in Canada and identified French language acquisition as a significant hurdle that impacted her job opportunities, studies, and social integration. She said,

My husband was the primary visa applicant, which necessitated that he had extensive knowledge of the French language. However, upon immigrating to our new home, we quickly realized that the level of French proficiency required here far exceeds what was assessed on the test. To secure a position with a reputable company, it was necessary to be multilingual, specifically fluent in both French and English. As the accompanying visa applicant, I encountered significant challenges since my French was not as proficient as my husband's. Consequently, I was unable to apply for numerous opportunities, which led to my feelings of isolation and loneliness.

After hearing her comments, I became curious about the availability of opportunities for her to improve her French language skills and integrate more effectively into the French-dominant society. In response, she stated that the government offered various options for learning French, some of which she had tried. However, when she moved to Montreal a decade ago, most of the classes were only available in-person, and they were full-time, intensive classes, and due to pregnancy, it became difficult for her to commute to these classes. Her responsibilities as a mother had a negative impact on her desire to learn French to fulfill the language requirements of different jobs. Despite her efforts, mastering the French language remained a significant challenge for her over the years. While discussing the negative effects of language barriers on homesickness with Violet, I mentioned that I have not personally experienced any hindrances to my success, nor have I felt that my lack of French proficiency has contributed to any feelings of

loneliness or homesickness. Living in Ontario, I see knowing French as a valuable asset, but I have not encountered any major difficulties as a result of not being fully fluent in the language.

During our conversation, Violet and I agreed that even in our small-scale research with two participants from similar backgrounds, there is a noticeable difference in how the French language has affected us. Violet shared that "based on our IELTS scores, which is an internationally recognized English test, we both have a similar level of proficiency in English, as well as similar job experiences in Iran." However, she added that French had significantly impacted her career and studies, while I did not face the same obstacles due to my lack of French proficiency. Violet argued that the government should take serious consideration and implement plans to assist those who immigrate through the Quebec program, as many are suffering because they do not know enough French to realistically live in the province of Quebec, beyond just meeting the visa requirements.

Homesickness and Loneliness Because of Slow Accomplishments

During our conversation, we discussed a theme that came up repeatedly—the feeling of homesickness and loneliness that many people experience when they move to a new country, including our own experiences as professional women who had relocated to Canada. It was a slow and challenging process to integrate into the Canadian culture and workforce, and we found ourselves struggling to adjust to a new way of life. As highly educated and skilled women in our home country, it was a shock to realize that we had to make many adjustments to find employment in Canada. The jobs that were available to us were often very basic compared to the positions we had held in Iran, and we had to start from scratch in building our careers. This was a humbling experience, and it made us appreciate the value of hard work and perseverance in a new and unfamiliar environment. However, the experience of integrating into a new culture and

workforce was marked by a sense of isolation and contributed to our feelings of homesickness. When faced with challenging situations, we often found ourselves yearning for the familiarity of home and the achievements we had attained there. Looking towards the future, we were sometimes overwhelmed by the uncertainty that lay ahead and struggled to find clarity on the path forward. Violet specifically conveyed a sense of being inundated with options but lacking the necessary support and information to decide, which left her feeling overwhelmed and paralyzed. Her uncertainty around how to proceed meant that she missed some deadlines, as she struggled to determine where to begin, she mentioned,

> While working at a daycare on a minimum wage, I was sometimes exposed to incredible opportunities such as free education to become a certified early childhood educator. However, despite my interest in pursuing these opportunities, I found it difficult to obtain sufficient information on how to get started and how to apply. It seemed as though others assumed that this information was common knowledge and that I should have known where to begin, which made me feel inadequate and as though I was not putting in enough effort. One particular day, I recall a couple of my colleagues were applying for an intensive course that would allow them to become certified early childhood educators, and in turn, increase their wages and improve their job prospects. When I inquired with the manager to learn more about how and when to apply, she responded dismissively and gave me the impression that I was expecting too much by wanting to move up quickly as a newcomer to Canada. Her response felt as though she was gatekeeping, hindering my progress rather than offering guidance and support. That evening after work, I felt a combination of sadness and determination to learn more about the intensive course and apply independently. However, I soon discovered that I could not apply on my own and

that I needed a referral from my superior at work, who happened to be the same manager who had previously dismissed my inquiries.

During the conversation, I also expressed my perspective on the matter. When I inquired about how to obtain an early childhood educator certificate, I was informed that I needed to have a full-time job at a school. However, I was also told that I could not secure a full-time job at a school because I did not hold that certificate. This created a frustrating and self-perpetuating cycle, leaving me feeling as though there were no viable options for advancement. Violet had been feeling isolated in her experience before she shared it with me. When she realized that I could relate to what she was going through, she felt a sense of validation and understanding that she had not experienced before. This validation helped both of us to feel more comfortable and accepted.

In our discussions, Violet brought up the topic of ambiguity and the overwhelming number of questions that can arise when faced with a major decision such as immigration. Violet mentioned that the process of immigration can be a life-altering experience that can be filled with feelings of loneliness and isolation. She expressed that these feelings were beautifully captured in Robert Frost's narrative poem (1915), "The Road Not Taken." The poem describes the feelings of a person who has made a choice between two ways of life and is left wondering if he made the right decision. The poem can be interpreted in many ways, highlighting the emotional impact of making significant life choices, the uncertainty and doubt that come with these decisions, and the ultimate understanding that the chosen path, despite its challenges, can lead to a fulfilling and rewarding life. Additionally, the notion that we may never discover what lies down the path not taken, even if it seemed the most heavily travelled path, can evoke feelings of nostalgia, longing, or even melancholy.

The poem's themes of significant life choices, uncertainty, and the bittersweet nature of chosen paths resonate with the experiences of immigrant mothers. For many, the decision to move to a new country may not have been their own, and despite the improved lives of their children and possibly themselves, there remains a profound longing for their homeland. This sense of nostalgia and melancholy for the life and paths left behind is a poignant reflection of the emotional complexities involved in such a transformative journey. This connection underscores the relevance of my qualitative research methodology, which values the nuanced and diverse perspectives of personal experiences

I share this poem here as I believe it beautifully portrays the emotions that many immigrants may experience as they navigate the challenges of starting a new life in a new country.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

The challenges of adapting to a new culture, learning a new language, and establishing a sense of belonging in a foreign country can be incredibly difficult for immigrants. These difficulties can be further compounded by the persistent question of whether or not they made the right decision to leave their home country. Immigrants often have to make difficult choices and sacrifices in order to pursue a better life for themselves and their families. It is natural to experience doubt and uncertainty when faced with major life changes, and the decision to immigrate is no exception. The fear of the unknown and the possibility of failure can weigh heavily on one's mind. Despite these challenges, many immigrants find that the rewards of their new life are worth the struggles they faced along the way. With time, perseverance, and support,

immigrants can establish a sense of belonging and find fulfillment in their new homes. It is important to recognize and celebrate the courage and resilience of immigrants who have made the decision to start a new life in a foreign country.

Yosso's (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth provides a valuable perspective on how immigrants draw upon various forms of capital to navigate these challenges. Yosso identifies six forms of capital that marginalized communities utilize: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. These forms of capital enable immigrants to leverage their cultural assets in overcoming obstacles and establishing a sense of belonging in their new environment. For example, linguistic capital, which encompasses the skills and social interactions of multilingual individuals, helps immigrants adapt to new languages and cultural contexts. Familial and social capital provide emotional support and a sense of community, which are essential for building resilience and a sense of belonging.

By recognizing and valuing these diverse forms of capital, we can better understand the strategies immigrants use to thrive despite the challenges they face. This approach not only highlights the strengths and contributions of immigrant communities but also underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments that support their integration and well-being.

Homesickness and Loneliness Because of Losing a Loved One

My experience with homesickness and loneliness intensified in July 2020, just a week before my father passed away from COVID-19. Before then, I had only experienced minor bouts of homesickness, such as missing my loved ones, craving Iranian food, or feeling left out of important family events back in Iran. However, losing a loved one to death is a completely different experience altogether. It transcends the trivialities of missing out on events or

traditions, and the pain sits on a much deeper level. My father was a selfless pediatrician who put his own life on the line to help save the lives of children. Despite the lack of treatment and absence of vaccinations for COVID-19 at that time, he remained dedicated and actively treated infected children. I recall urging him to stay home during a phone call, but he insisted that his presence at the hospital was necessary to help alleviate fear among younger physicians. He showed up to work every day to lead by example and provide support to his fellow doctors at the children's hospital. He worked full-time up until the day he was diagnosed with COVID-19. After fighting COVID-19 for two weeks, he eventually succumbed to the disease.

Losing my father felt like being thrown into a survival video game set in a zombie apocalypse. Every time I woke up from the recurring nightmare, I realized it was my new reality. My inability to properly mourn left me with a lump in my throat and an overwhelming sense of loneliness. Due to travel restrictions and the risk of contracting the disease, I had no choice but to stay in Canada. As a result, I had to watch my father's funeral online, which was not the ideal way for me to say goodbye to him, and I also felt guilty for not being there for my mother. In 2020, the fear of COVID-19 was at its highest, and I was faced with a difficult decision - to fly home for the funeral and risk my health or to stay put and stay healthy and alive for my child's sake. In the end, my maternal instinct won, and I chose to stay, but the pain of not being able to say goodbye to my father will always be with me. The sudden ending of our father-daughter relationship left me with a sense of homesickness that is layered with indescribable emotions. However, I am grateful for my friends who did not leave me alone on those sad days. When my father passed away, my colleagues and friends came to my door to offer their support in various ways, such as bringing flowers, meals, and providing a comforting presence for me to lean on. Despite cultural differences and different ways of mourning, I am grateful to have such

compassionate and thoughtful friends in Canada. During those difficult days, my Canadian friends did their best to provide some comfort for my broken heart. They would text me and check on me every day, letting me know that they were available if I needed them.

Violet, like myself, went through the distressing ordeal of losing a loved one. She lost her grandmother and uncle during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, she was unable to travel back to Iran and had to endure the grieving process alone in Canada. We both acknowledged that grieving is a continuous process and can feel suffocating if not properly dealt with. Violet felt that she did not receive as much support and understanding, which she believes was partly due to her limited proficiency in French, preventing her from fully integrating into the local community to establish a friendship network. We both concluded that there is a pressing need for organizations or centres dedicated to hearing the voices and addressing the concerns of immigrant women. Although we both tried utilizing the multicultural centres available in our respective cities, we did not find them to be effective in addressing the daily needs of immigrant women. Violet attributed her difficulties in establishing a support network to her lack of French language proficiency. However, I reminded her that she should not feel guilty about her limited French skills. Instead, she should have an environment that accepts her for who she is and allows her to flourish in that environment rather than struggling to be perfect in French and building her network from there, which can be a time-consuming process.

Question 3. What is it like for us as mothers to Live in Canada Navigating Cultural Differences?

During the third interview session, the topic of navigating cultural differences emerged as a central theme. As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that while adopting Canadian culture is a beautiful thing, it is equally important to preserve our heritage culture. However,

doing so presents a significant challenge, particularly given the prevalence of Canadian culture in public spaces. The omnipresence of Canadian cultural celebrations, such as Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Easter, makes it difficult for us to fully engage in and pass down our own cultural traditions to our children. While we practise the Canadian culture, we must work hard to preserve our heritage culture so that our children can fully understand their roots and feel a sense of belonging in both cultures.

Emerging Themes

Challenges of Practising the Iranian Culture

One of the primary themes that emerged during this session, was the difficulty of preserving our heritage culture while simultaneously embracing the Canadian culture. Violet conveyed her perspective, stating that the experience can be simultaneously enriching and disheartening. She elaborated that it can be enriching as it allows individuals to learn about various cultures and ways of life in a country of diverse cultural backgrounds. However, it can be disheartening as the commercialized Western celebrations tend to overshadow other cultural celebrations. As a mother, she tries her best to incorporate Canadian celebrations into her family traditions so that her child can feel a part of the community and not be left out. She said,

> You know, it's funny how having kids changes things. I never used to worry about things like Easter egg hunts or Elf on the Shelf. I didn't even notice the big theme changes in stores like Dollarama that carry the symbolic items of celebrations. But once you have a little one, you start to realize how important it is for them to feel included in these big celebrations like Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter. They exchange cards and gifts at school, and you don't want your child to feel left out. One year, I didn't

put up our Christmas tree right away, and my son came home and asked why it wasn't up yet. He wanted to decorate it and was even asking me why we didn't have any Halloween decorations in our front yard for the last Halloween. It's tough trying to answer all these questions and make sure your child doesn't feel different from his peers.

I agreed with her point and added,

At the same time, it's also a struggle to keep up with our Iranian culture. Here in Canada, they don't celebrate the same holidays as we do in Iran, and even when we try to celebrate at home, it just doesn't compare to the grandeur of the Christmas lights and decorations that are everywhere. Plus, our Iranian Winter Solstice celebration collide with Christmas, making it even harder to keep our culture alive. It's tough trying to balance both cultures and make sure our children feel connected to both.

Violet also expressed her concern that many immigrant parents face—how to ensure that their children feel connected to both their original culture and the culture of their new home. She explained that despite the challenges of maintaining Iranian traditions in Canada, she continues to make efforts to celebrate her culture with her son. For example, during the Iranian Winter Solstice, she took her son shopping for traditional symbols, such as pomegranates and purchased a red cake to coordinate with the colours and symbols of the Yalda Night celebration. However, upon returning home, the celebration was limited to just the three of them, which felt quite solitary. Although Violet believes her son enjoyed the experience, he was still dazzled by the abundance of Christmas decorations in the mall the next day and was asking why he could not be a part of big family gatherings. I expressed my thoughts on the extent to which we should advocate for our heritage culture. I also explained that, through the lens of Critical Race Theory, I often feel that the dominant culture's values marginalize non-dominant cultural practices. As a

young Iranian parent living in Canada, I have grappled with the challenge of preserving my culture while also encouraging my child to embrace Canadian culture. Embracing and promoting our cultural heritage not only counters the marginalization imposed by the dominant culture but also empowers us to reshape the narrative surrounding our identities.

I agree that it is not a good idea to force Iranian culture on my child, as it could create resistance and misunderstanding. Instead, I have found that it is important to introduce him to our culture in a gentle and organic way and let him explore it at his own pace. For example, during holidays like Winter Solstice or Nowruz, I try to involve my child in the celebrations by explaining the significance and importance of these events in our culture. I also make traditional foods and decorate our home with Iranian elements. However, I do not expect my child to fully embrace these traditions, especially when they are competing with the commercialized and widely celebrated holidays like Christmas. This approach aligns with Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the cultural knowledge and practices that marginalized communities bring with them. Yosso argues that communities of colour possess various forms of capital, such as familial and social capital, that are often unacknowledged in mainstream discourses. By gently introducing my child to Iranian culture and allowing him to navigate both Iranian and Canadian cultural contexts, I am fostering a form of navigational capital. This navigational capital enables him to maneuver through different cultural environments, thereby enhancing his ability to integrate and thrive in a multicultural society.

Violet agreed and added that this organic exposure to the Iranian culture can be supported by the presence of grandparents. Having grandparents around can provide a natural and authentic way for the children to be exposed to Iranian culture. The grandparents can share stories, cook

traditional meals, and teach children about their heritage in a way that is not forced or imposed. This way, the children can develop a genuine appreciation for their culture and identity without feeling like it is being forced upon them.

The presence of family members in Canada can make a significant difference in the lives of young immigrant families. It can provide a sense of support, belonging, and understanding. Not having that support can be a big challenge at times. Violet shared a heart-wrenching moment when her son came home from school in tears. He asked why his grandparents could not be with them like his friends' grandparents, and why they lived so far away that he could not have a sleepover at their house or see them when he missed them. My son has also made similar comments, especially at school gatherings where many families bring grandparents, uncles, and aunts, and my son did not have that circle of support to cheer on him.

Violet agreed with my comment and shared that,

It's tough to see our children feeling left out and longing for that connection to their extended family. It's not just about missing out on the fun sleepovers or having someone to spoil them with treats, but it's also about the cultural connection and the opportunity to learn and grow from their grandparents' experiences and wisdom. It's a challenge for us as parents to try to fill that void and provide our children with as much exposure to our culture as possible, but it's never quite the same as having that direct connection with their grandparents.

Grandparents as Cultural Ambassadors

The presence of grandparents can play a vital role in maintaining a family's heritage culture. They are often the primary sources of knowledge and traditions, and their presence can

provide a sense of connection to the family's cultural roots. Grandparents can pass down stories, recipes, and customs that may be lost otherwise. They can teach language, folktales, and songs that are meaningful to their culture. I remember that the presence of my parents gave me a sense of security, knowing that my child was in good hands and could benefit from their wisdom and teachings while they were in Canada for a visit. Nevertheless, most immigrants lack the support of their family members who could assist them greatly in raising their children and allowing the parents to pursue their careers or education.

Mountains to Climb Before one can Sponsor Grandparents

Violet identified two significant obstacles that may prevent many grandparents from visiting their children in Canada. Firstly, if the grandparents come on a visitor visa, they would have to bear the expenses themselves, including the high cost of private health insurance due to their age group. Alternatively, if their children sponsor them, the children must meet numerous requirements. For instance, when Violet wanted to sponsor her mother to care for her child while she pursued a full-time job, she realized that she needed to have had a well-paying job for the past three years to submit an application. Unfortunately, she was caught in a frustrating cycle of being unable to work full-time because she lacked a family member to care for her child, and unable to invite a family member because she did not have a full-time job to meet the criteria. Upon realizing that she could not have her mother's support during the crucial years when she needed it the most, Violet decided to try and preserve her heritage language and culture by staying connected with her family through video calls. This allowed her son to communicate with his grandparents in Farsi, which excited him and encouraged him to use Farsi at home. However, this only addressed a portion of Violet's concerns as she still had to sacrifice pursuing full-time employment or education to care for her child. Violet explained,

As an immigrant living in Canada, I often find myself wishing that there were more realistic approaches to allow grandparents to visit their children and grandchildren. When you're young and in desperate need of support, especially when trying to balance jobs and studies, you end up dedicating most of your time and energy to childcare. This can take a significant toll on your emotional and physical well-being, leaving you feeling burnt out and exhausted. Furthermore, by the time you're eligible to sponsor your parents, your child may already be grown and not need the same level of support from their grandparents as they did before. Additionally, the distance and lack of physical interaction can cause a fading of the heritage culture that grandparents can instill in their grandchildren. This can make it challenging for children to connect with their grandparents and maintain a strong connection to their heritage. As a result, families miss out on the benefits of intergenerational relationships and cultural exchange. It's crucial to find a way to balance the requirements of immigration with the need for family support and connection.

We both agreed that it is important to recognize that supporting young immigrant families in the early stages of immigration is crucial for their integration into Canadian society. By providing them with the necessary support and resources, they can start contributing to their new communities much faster. This can have significant benefits for both the families and the larger society. When families are left to struggle to survive the first few years of relocation without adequate support, they may face difficulties in adapting to their new environment, and their resiliency can become depleted. This can hinder their ability to thrive and contribute to society, resulting in missed opportunities for both the families and the broader community. Therefore, it is essential for the government to consider the benefits of supporting young immigrant families

in their early years and to create more accessible and realistic approaches to family reunification. This can help families maintain their cultural heritage, strengthen intergenerational relationships, and contribute to the growth and development of Canadian society.

Question 4: What is it Like for us as Mothers to Experience Sending our Children to Schools in Canada?

The decision to send our children to schools in Canada was a pivotal moment for our families. It provided us with a much-needed respite from the weight of childcare responsibilities, allowing us to enjoy a newfound sense of freedom to pursue our own individual goals, such as finding jobs or continuing our education. Although the Canadian education system differs significantly from what we were used to in Iran, particularly in terms of curriculum design and the underlying pedagogical principles, we were elated by its capacity to afford our children the prospect of acquiring proficiency in the English language and nurturing their linguistic aptitude. This was especially important to us as we recognized the value of being bilingual or trilingual in a globalized world. Yosso's (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth highlights linguistic capital as a significant asset that immigrant families bring with them. Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and style. By fostering bilingualism or trilingualism, we are not only preserving our heritage languages but also equipping our children with valuable skills that enhance their ability to navigate and succeed in a multicultural and interconnected world.

Additionally, the Canadian school system allowed our children to build their own social networks and make friends from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This experience was invaluable in broadening their perspectives and helping them to become more open-minded and accepting of diversity.

Differences in Educational Systems

Throughout the journey of sending our children to schools in Canada, we encountered a myriad of differences that proved to be eye-opening experiences for us. One of the most prominent differences we experienced was due to the vast contrast between the educational systems of Canada and Iran. Adjusting to a completely different set of rules and regulations was no easy feat, for us as parents, and it took us some time to acclimate to the expectations and norms of Canadian schools. As parents, we were exposed to an entirely new perspective on thinking and learning, one that was vastly different from what we were accustomed to in Iran. The transition to a new system was not without its challenges, but we were open-minded and eager to learn about new approaches to education.

In Iran, the education system is centralized and highly regulated by the government. The curriculum is standardized across the country, and all students follow the same curriculum, with little room for customization. In contrast, the Canadian education system is decentralized (except for Indigenous students living on reserve, which falls under Federal jurisdiction) and more flexible. Each province or territory is responsible for its own education system, and schools and teachers have more autonomy in designing their curricula.

From our experiences, the teaching methods and styles also differ between the two systems. In Iran, teaching is typically lecture-based, with a focus on memorization and rote learning even from the very young ages of primary school. In Canada, there is a greater emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and hands-on learning. The range of subjects offered is different between the two systems. The Iranian education system places a greater emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects, while Canadian schools offer a broader range of subjects, including arts, music, and physical education.

The Iranian education system places a great deal of emphasis on testing and examinations, with a particularly strong focus on the national university entrance exam, known as the Konkur. This exam is a crucial determinant of students' eligibility for higher education, and its highly competitive nature means that the results have a significant impact on students' future prospects. In fact, many students begin preparing for the Konkur as early as primary school, often with the encouragement and support of their parents and teachers. The prevailing belief in the Iranian education system is that if students become diligent and hardworking from a young age, they will have a better chance of gaining acceptance into prestigious universities. As a result, there is a great deal of competition and stress placed on students from a very early age, which can be both challenging and daunting. In Canada, while there are exams and assessments, they are not the sole criteria for admission to higher education, and there is less emphasis on standardized testing.

With our personal experiences of going through the requirements of the Konkur exam to enter university, we were accustomed to expecting our children to have a heavy workload and two hours' worth of homework every night. In Iran, parents are expected to be highly involved in their children's studies through homework, which can be challenging but provides insight into what is being taught at school and how their children are learning. However, when we moved to Canada, we did not experience the same level of involvement in our children's education, and although we recognized that our children were learning in a different way, the freedom of not having to dedicate most of our evenings to monitoring and guiding our children's homework was a newfound experience that was initially challenging for us to accept. Violet shared,

> Growing up, I was taught to believe that the best way to learn was through memorization, homework, and strict parental monitoring of my progress. Because of this upbringing, it

was difficult for me to trust that there were other, more relaxed ways of learning that could lead to success. I recall a particular experience from my time as a kindergarten teacher in Iran, where we were expected to teach young children how to give lectures and seminars. All the students were required to take a turn, and during a little boy's turn, he delivered an excellent lecture about cloud formations, where he spoke in detail about the nuances of clouds and precipitation, for a duration of 10 minutes. However, I soon discovered that he had spent a grueling week preparing for it, with the goal of eventually participating in the Konkur exam when he turned 18. Shockingly, this rigourous preparation began when he was only five years old. His mother believed that the earlier she started training him for the exam, the better his chances would be of gaining acceptance into a renowned university.

This level of pressure and focus on exam preparation is not uncommon in the Iranian education system, where competition is intense and academic success is highly valued. While some students thrive under this system, others may feel overwhelmed and experience negative consequences, such as stress and burnout. Violet then compared her Iranian experience with the one in Canada, she continued this way,

> In contrast, years later when I became an early childhood educator in Canada, I was impressed by the gentler approach taken to prepare children to learn new things. Instead of intense memorization and lectures, the teacher simply asked the children to bring their favourite toy and talk about it. Although I believe that the Canadian education system is more gentle and child-friendly than the Iranian system, I can relate to the challenge of letting go of the idea that intense preparation and strict learning methods are necessary for success. This is likely because we were raised in an environment where these

approaches were heavily emphasized and ingrained in us from a young age. As a result, it can be difficult to shake off these deeply entrenched beliefs and to trust that success can be achieved through more relaxed and flexible methods.

I agreed with Violet's perspective on the difficulty of learning, unlearning, and relearning new ideas. However, during my Ph.D. studies in education, I was introduced to many liberating learning methods that were beyond what I had experienced in the Canadian and Iranian education systems. At times, I felt uncertain and regressed back to old ways of thinking that were deeply ingrained in me. However, I eventually realized that learning can transcend any particular educational system. My Ph.D. journey has been transformative, allowing me to explore and adopt innovative educational practices that challenge traditional paradigms. Through this process, I have developed a deeper understanding of how to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. Post-Ph.D., I plan to use this experience to advocate for educational practices that embrace diverse perspectives and methodologies. By sharing my journey and the insights gained from it, I aim to contribute to the development of more flexible and responsive educational systems that better serve the needs of all learners, especially marginalized communities like immigrant mothers.

Cultural Differences

Going to school in Canada, presented several challenges for our children, and one of the biggest ones was the cultural disconnect they sometimes experienced. While we were happy to see them making new friends and learning about Canadian culture, it was clear that they struggled to understand some of the customs and traditions that were so different from what they were used to at home. This was especially difficult for my son, who had prior schooling experience in Iran and had spent his early years there, making it easier for him to identify the

differences between the Iranian and Canadian cultures. It could be frustrating and disorienting

for him at times, and we had to provide him with extra support and guidance to help him

navigate these differences.

On the other hand, for Violet, the challenge was different. Her son was born and raised in

Canada, and while he had visited Iran briefly, he did not have a strong memory of living there.

Violet was concerned that if she did not work hard to maintain the Iranian culture in their home,

her son might drift away from it completely. This was a tough balancing act for her, as she

wanted her son to embrace Canadian culture while also being aware of and appreciating his

Iranian heritage. She had to be intentional about incorporating aspects of Iranian culture into

their daily lives, such as cooking traditional dishes and celebrating Iranian holidays, while also

being open to learning about Canadian culture alongside her son.

Overall, it can be incredibly challenging for immigrant families to navigate cultural

differences and maintain a connection to their heritage while also embracing a new culture,

especially when their children are school-aged and exposed to a different culture on a daily basis.

The experience of adapting to a new culture can be overwhelming and disorienting, as families

navigate new customs, norms, and expectations.

For many immigrant families, there can be a sense of loss or displacement as they try to

find a sense of belonging in a new country. Children may struggle with identity formation as

they grapple with their dual identities and try to reconcile their family's cultural traditions with

the values and norms of their new environment. This can lead to feelings of confusion,

frustration, and isolation, as children may feel like they do not fully belong to either culture. As

they grow older this feeling of identity crisis might be increased.

By the end of the last interview session, both of us concurred that the Canadian government can also have a significant impact in aiding immigrant families to cope with cultural differences and preserving their cultural heritage. One approach that the government can adopt is by allocating funds towards initiatives and resources that provide cultural assistance and support to new arrivals. For instance, the Federal government can financially back cultural centres and associations that offer language lessons, cultural learning, and other provisions to immigrant families. These centres can function as a central point for the community, offering opportunities for families to engage with other people from comparable backgrounds and to discover their cultural customs. This helps children to develop confidence in their distinctiveness and feel less alienated in their schools when they attend such communities.

Furthermore, the government can also offer financial support and assistance to schools to provide cultural education and language lessons that reflect the diverse student population. This can guarantee that children have access to the resources necessary to learn about and value different cultures, thus encouraging increased comprehension among the students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative study that explored the lived experiences of two Iranian mothers in Canada. The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of their unique perspectives and the challenges they face as immigrant mothers. To achieve this, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing the participant to share her stories in her own words. The interviews were meticulously transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. This process involved coding the responses to identify patterns and emerging themes. The initial coding was followed by a more detailed analysis to refine these themes and understand the nuances of the participants' experiences. The chapter begins by outlining the data integration

process used to analyze the interview responses. By discussing these themes in detail, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by these Iranian mothers living in Canada. It highlights their resilience and resourcefulness, as well as the systemic barriers they encounter. This analysis not only sheds light on their individual journeys but also contributes to a broader understanding of the immigrant experience, particularly for mothers navigating new cultural landscape.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

In the preceding chapter, I presented the findings. In this chapter, I provide a more comprehensive understanding of the results. This chapter is divided into four sections to address the findings from the four research questions. To begin, I offer an overview of my findings organized by interview sessions and then I present the recurring themes from all interviews. Subsequently, I establish the connection between my findings and the theoretical frameworks. Lastly, I examine and analyze my findings in relation to other research studies.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to address the existing gap in understanding the immigration experiences of women, specifically immigrant mothers. In pursuit of this objective, I undertook a comprehensive qualitative narrative study featuring two Iranian mothers. This study generated alternative narratives concerning the immigration experiences of mothers, with the aim of integrating their voices into the broader conversation on immigration. The overarching aim of this research is to champion the cause of equitable opportunities and make a meaningful contribution to the social dimensions of the sustainability framework. Through the sharing of these personal accounts, I intended to enhance comprehension of the challenges faced by immigrant mothers and offer an alternative viewpoint to some commonly held beliefs. These narratives aspire to question the current state of affairs and advocate for fairness for minority group members in society, with the potential to shift the focus towards the genuine requirements of immigrants, enabling them to make more meaningful contributions to society.

The study sought to answer 4 primary research questions: (1) what is it like for us to live in Canada as immigrant mothers? (2) what are our thoughts as immigrant mothers on the themes of homesickness and loneliness? (3) what is it like for us as mothers to live in Canada navigating cultural differences? And (4) what is it like for us as mothers to experience sending our children to schools in Canada?

Summary of Findings

My participant and I focused on the first research question in the first interview: What is it like for the participants/two Iranian mothers to live in Canada as immigrant mothers? Five major themes and 20 sub-themes emerged during this session.

Themes from the first interview session

1	Start from scratch	*Accomplished back home, but not the same in Canada *Entry-level jobs to cover rent *Medical doctors in Iran, taxi drivers in Canada, hard to find jobs in the area of expertise *Job dissatisfaction * Hard to transfer skills to Canada *Slow progress
2	Lack of support network	*Motherhood responsibilities enforced limitations such as job loss and financial strains

		*Mothers isolated emotionally and physically from the support network
		*Trying to fill the void, lack of relative support, the pressure is on me, the mother, to keep my child busy and happy
		*Only child, lonely child
		*Hard birthing experience, lonely and terrified, challenging mental health after birth.
		*Isolated emotionally and physically from the support network
		*Long visa process for families to come over and help
3	Mothering norms shaped by cultural values	*Devoted mothers, giving up dreams
		*Different parenting norms in Canada
		*Feeling guilty when ignoring traditional mothering values
		*Urged and pressurized to try harder at being an ideal mother based on cultural values
4	Growing distances, caught between two worlds, not fitting in either	*Not belonging to either community feelings of alienation, or exclusion
		*Challenged sense of belonging
5	Lack of information about available	*Uninformed about the support and

	support	resources accessible to immigrant mothers
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Themes From the Second Interview Session

During the second interview, we specifically addressed the second research question, which explored our perspectives on the themes of homesickness and loneliness. From this session, four main themes and a total of 14 sub-themes were identified.

1	Homesickness	*Missing the support network * Hard to navigate cultural differences *Not feeling understood in Canada
2	Isolation and loneliness	*Added responsibilities of motherhood *Less opportunities to socialize *Past trauma makes it hard to connect to people *Language barrier: Makes one isolated/ results in fewer job opportunities/ makes it hard to build a support network in Canada
3	Cultural differences	*Hard to navigate the differences * Feeling judged and isolated
4	Slow rate of accomplishments	*Start from scratch in building a new life and career *Hard to transfer international credits to

		Canada
		*Gatekeepers
		*Not knowing where to begin/ find resources
		*Feeling guilty and incompetent when not meeting goals

Themes From the Third Interview Session

The third interview session delved into the research question concerning the experiences of us as immigrant mothers living in Canada and how we navigate cultural differences. We explored what it is like for us to adapt to a new cultural environment and the challenges we face in doing so. Two major themes and seven sub-themes emerged from this interview session.

1	Omnipresence of the Canadian culture	*Makes it hard to pass down our cultural traditions to our children
		*We are challenged to maintain our children's sense of belonging to the heritage culture while making sure our children do not feel left out of the mainstream culture.
		* Commercialized Western culture make it hard to stay relevant with our minority culture
2	Grandparents' presence and support	*Good way for our children to be exposed

		to Iranian culture
		*Grandparents support and presence crucial in early stages of immigration and settlement.
		*Young immigrants can worry less about childcare and focus more on finding full-time jobs.
		*Young immigrants challenged to have their parents' support: 1- No OHIP coverages and expensive health insurance for grandparents 2- If you want to sponsor your parents you are stuck in the vicious circle of having to work full-time to show you can support them, and at the same time not being able to work full-time because you have nobody to take care of your child while you are gone to work. So, you are unable to sponsor your parents because you do not have a full-time job.

Themes From the Fourth Interview Session

In the last interview session, we focused on the last question: what is it like for us as mothers to experience sending our children to schools in Canada? This session also resulted in two major themes and seven sub-themes.

1	Parents' involvement in children's education	*In Iran parents are usually highly involved, which can be problematic but keeps them informed of their child's progress/ Daily Homework/ possible need to support *In Canada parents are not much involved
2	Cultural identity formation for children	*Leila's child was born in Iran, knows Iranian culture and lifestyle and sometimes feels culturally disconnected from his friends in Canada *Violet's child was born and raised in Canada: Violet feels challenged to teach him Iranian language and culture *Either way children struggle with identity formation/maintenance. Sometimes feeling lost or displaced, trying to find a sense of belonging. *Children feeling confused, frustrated, and isolated, they do not belong to either culture

Theoretical Frameworks in Connection with the Findings

In this research, the narratives we shared encompass the intersections of being women, mothers, immigrants, and belonging to the Middle Eastern culture, which directly relates to the concept of intersectionality and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Another theoretical perspective I have incorporated, known as Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK), complements Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality by recognizing women's experiences as one of the intersecting factors that influence our epistemological understanding and worldview. Below, I provide a concise overview of how I perceive the link between the theoretical frameworks utilized in this research and the gathered data.

The critical nature of critical race theory arises from its inherent critique of discourses that purport to be impartial or objective (Carbado & Roithmayr, 2014). As discussed in the literature review, in present-day Canada, racism frequently takes on subtle forms, which go against the ideals of a democratic society where numerous Canadians uphold principles of justice, equality, and fairness. According to Li (2001), racism in Canada has assumed a nuanced shape that can be challenging to recognize. Henry and Tator (2002) argue that the stereotypical representation of immigrants in Canada contributes to the subtle racism, and it partly happens by the media, as "the media hold up a mirror in which society can see itself reflected… that mirror's reflections are sometimes severely distorted. The media do not objectively record and describe reality, nor do they neutrally report facts and stories" (p. 5). A powerful strategy for fighting stereotypical representations of immigrants is to incorporate their voices and lived experiences into the narrative.

When examining the experiences of two immigrant mothers through the lens of critical race theory, various challenges come to light. For instance, Violet's experience highlights the

"multicultural imagery" (Dallas-Shelley, 2022, p. 6) and the difficulty of transferring international credits to secure a job in line with her expertise. She perceives the presence of gatekeepers who impede immigrant mothers from finding employment commensurate with their qualifications. Also, the question arises as to why many internationally trained professionals such as doctors are compelled to work in entry-level positions, despite the shortage of workers in essential fields like healthcare (Kalaitzi, 2014).

Additionally, WWK investigates the various perspectives through which women conceptualize truth, knowledge, and authority, highlighting the significance of women's epistemological assumptions in shaping their self-perception and understanding of their surroundings. I perceive knowledge as a holistic construction achieved through connected knowing. I acknowledge that women's experiences are shaped by their gender and the societal expectations associated with their roles, both in social and domestic contexts. As Belenkey et al. (1997) state, "All women grow up having to confront historically and culturally ingrained definitions of femininity and womanhood" (p. 4). Being a narrative researcher who embraces the notion that experience is shaped by social construction, my attention was directed towards the interplay of our personal, social, cultural, and political realms within the narrative process (Esin et al., 2014). WWK complements this view and encourages women to transcend the frameworks and systems imposed by authorities and construct their own unique perspectives (Belenkey et al., 1997). This perspective helped me articulate my own understanding of the world. In our conversations, Violet emphasized that she was inspired to think beyond the norms, and she expressed a sense of empowerment in sharing her personal experience, which entailed challenging societal norms.

What we particularly liked about our conversation was that, since we are both Iranian and were brought up in the same educational, societal, and political system, we became more aware of our epistemological assumptions. In Iran, educational knowledge is often shaped by traditional and religious values, albeit changing in recent years. In contrast, the Canadian educational system supposedly tends to value critical thinking, inclusivity, and diverse perspectives. This divergence reflects the broader epistemological assumptions of each society. In Iran, knowledge is often seen as something to be transmitted from authority figures, aligning with a more positivist epistemology. In Canada, however, knowledge is often constructed through interaction and dialogue, aligning with constructivist and interpretivist epistemologies.

At times, it was challenging for us to determine which part of our knowledge and lived experience was worthwhile to share. Based on our lived experiences, worthwhile knowledge is often defined by those in positions of power and influence, and we were neither! But WWK inspired us to share our knowledge with confidence.

After living and studying in Canada, we both agreed that our thoughts are no longer in line with positivist epistemology. At one point, Violet mentioned that she felt good that she could be herself and just talk about her true feelings. By encouraging such dialogue, Violet felt supported in her quest to challenge the status quo and contribute her unique perspective to the conversation.

The process of challenging established norms necessitates the exchange of personal experiences and narratives, which enables the emergence of alternative viewpoints. Through this process, individuals are empowered to engage with the world in a way that aligns with their own understanding of reality and truth. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), narratives possess the potential to act as a bridge between different individuals and groups, reducing

alienation for marginalized communities and encouraging members of the majority group to embrace inclusivity. Inclusivity refers to the practice of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, are given equal opportunities and are welcomed to participate fully in society. However, inclusion into the dominant view of society can be complex.

For immigrant mothers, their diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds must be recognized and valued within the mainstream understanding of inclusion. This means that rather than expecting these mothers to conform to a singular, perhaps Western-centric view of Canadian culture, there should be an effort to create a more multicultural and flexible framework of inclusion that respects and incorporates their unique perspectives and needs.

There are potential risks in the process of 'inclusion' of immigrant mothers within Canadian culture. One risk is that their unique cultural identities may be overshadowed or diluted to fit into a dominant cultural narrative. Also, the pressure to conform to mainstream norms can lead to a loss of cultural heritage and identity, which is detrimental to both the individuals and the broader community that benefits from cultural diversity.

By leveraging the power of storytelling, we can strive towards a more understanding, empathetic, and equitable society that truly values the diversity of its members. This approach helps ensure that the voices of immigrant mothers are not only heard but also respected and integrated into the larger societal narrative without forcing them to abandon their cultural identities.

Discussions Related to the Literature Review

In this part, I discuss the main themes that emerged from the interviews in relation to the literature review.

1. Starting from Scratch and the Slow Rate of Accomplishments

When we discussed the theme of starting from scratch, I was reminded of a memorable quote from Rakoff (2003) who compared immigration to a brain stroke, in which the person needs to re-learn everything again and basically start from scratch. It becomes more challenging when, as Fleras (2017) argues, racialized women and men still face inequalities in power, income, and privilege. In our conversations, Violet mentioned the analogy of "going back to square one" and explained:

> When you think you are almost finished, you end of going back to the first square, where you must start the game all over again! It can be frustrating to know you've passed all those levels but have to start from the beginning. That's what my experience was like when moving to Canada. In Iran, I was able to teach English with my degree in English literature, but in Canada, I couldn't do the same job.

We also talked about the WES organization that evaluates credentials from other countries and were wondering why even with their internationally recognized certificate, we cannot do what we were good at in our own countries, here in Canada. The rising presence of foreign-trained professionals working as taxi drivers or pizza deliverers indicates Canada's mishandling of its immigration advantage, turning a potential brain gain into a brain drain. Based on the literature review, this issue results from the non-recognition of foreign credentials (Ahmadzai 2015; Guo, 2009, Fleras, 2015). Guo (2009) discusses how immigrants coming to Canada face significant challenges when it comes to finding employment due to the absence of Canadian experience and the difficulty of transferring their foreign credentials. Guo (2009) elaborates on this point by stating that the lack of recognition for foreign qualifications prevents immigrants from securing professional positions and obtaining Canadian work experience, resulting in their exclusion from

qualified job opportunities (Guo, 2009, p. 42). Fleras (2017) adds that even though immigrants are selected based on their skills, work history, and credentials, Canadian employers often either disregard or lack the knowledge of how to utilize these qualifications (p. 272). This predicament might not be apparent to immigrants prior to their arrival in Canada, leading many to have high expectations only to encounter significant obstacles in their employment journey. Guo (2009) frames this issue as a political decision and contends that upon reaching Canada, many highly educated immigrant professionals are confronted with the unfortunate devaluation and disregard for their previous education and work experience. Despite certain forms of knowledge being endorsed, the expertise gained by foreign-trained professionals is frequently met with skepticism and deemed inferior (p. 38). Additional scholars have underscored that the lack of acknowledgment for international qualifications results in a systematic barrier that prevents immigrants from accessing higher-tier employment opportunities. This issue has created a dilemma akin to a catch-22 scenario, wherein many immigrants are hindered from securing positions matching their skills due to the absence of Canadian work experience. Simultaneously, they face difficulty gaining Canadian work experience because their prior foreign background is typically not perceived as valuable (Bauder, 2003; Hou & Bonikowska, 2018; Yamagata 2020; Crea-Arsenio, 2023).

Henry and Tator (2007) explain that the existence of subtle forms of racism in Canada hinders the full participation of racialized communities in different spheres. Dallas-Shelly (2022) echoes this idea and argues that racism and discrimination is embedded within the educational system that prioritizes Canadian education and training which creates frustrating obstacles for internationally trained professionals. Stutter and Esses (2021) add that the discriminatory

treatment of visible minorities in Canada creates feelings of exclusion, powerlessness, and frustration.

Moreover, it is crucial to address the concept of linguicism, the discrimination based on language. While the ability to speak multiple languages is often valued on paper, in practice, linguistic diversity is not always equally appreciated. Yosso (2005) identifies linguistic capital as an important asset that immigrant families possess. However, the societal and institutional appreciation of this capital often falls short. For example, while bilingualism or multilingualism can be seen as beneficial and even celebrated in theory, immigrant individuals frequently encounter barriers when their native languages are not recognized or valued in professional and social settings. This disconnect can lead to further marginalization and exclusion of immigrant communities. Despite the advantages of being multilingual, immigrants may find that their linguistic skills are undervalued, and they may be pressured to conform to the dominant language to gain acceptance and opportunities. This can undermine their linguistic capital and contribute to a sense of cultural loss and identity erosion.

2. Lack of Support Network and Giving Birth in a New Country

During our discussions, we talked about the significance of receiving support in Canada and how challenging it was for us to be distant from our reliable support system back in Iran. Violet said her husband had to work a lot to support the family with just one income. This made it hard for him to spend time with her as a new mother. He was also worried about keeping his job, so he did not want to take time off. The lack of sufficient support and the responsibilities of being a new mother have had an impact on Violet's emotional state and well-being.

Literature findings not only corroborate but also provide valuable insights that complement the data gathered from our conversations on this topic. Immigrant mothers frequently confront a significant loss of support systems upon settling in a new country, resonating with the experiences discussed in our interactions. This disconnection from familiar networks, as highlighted by Gia-Lam, Collins, and Wong (2020), presents emotional challenges and potential mental health vulnerabilities (Tulli et al., 2020). The absence of a supportive social environment, combined with the stress of adapting to unfamiliar surroundings and different cultural norms, leaves immigrant women susceptible to mental health issues. Urindwanayo (2018) points out that depression rates tend to be higher among immigrant women, particularly among visible minorities, compared to Caucasians. The convergence of gender and mothering roles with the immigrant experience further complicates matters. Curry-Rodriguez (2014) notes that while men may fulfill their parental roles relatively smoothly, women must navigate the intricate balance between caregiving, emotional labour, and economic responsibilities. For immigrant mothers, the dual demands of childcare and external job obligations, coupled with the lack of a reliable support network, create formidable challenges in achieving work-life equilibrium. Lee, Ruppanner, and Perales (2020) emphasize that the intersections of oppression play a detrimental role in immigrant mothers' job prospects, often compelling them to withdraw from the labour force or limit their employment to part-time positions to accommodate childcare responsibilities.

Giving birth in a new environment was also a topic that we explored which was closely related to the lack of support network. In this regard, Violet mentioned that because she had to go through C-section, it took her longer to heal, and on the other hand, while she was hoping her mother-in-law would arrive any day to help her, the visa process took much longer than they had

anticipated, leaving her tired, drained and ready to give up. The birthing trauma had already taken a toll on her well-being, and she could not see herself going back to work anytime soon. She also mentioned that her husband was also stressed and frustrated, and often felt guilty that he could not be there for her when she needed him the most, but he was also pressured to keep working and secure his job and income for the family. This is reflected in the literature review by Brown et al. (2017) who focused their study on birthing in a new country and concluded that immigrant parents show higher levels of mental health issues than non-parents, because of the lack of support and the high stress levels they endure during the initial stages of having children. Two studies that were focused on postpartum mental health issues (Brown et al, 2017; Urindwanayo, 2018) indicated that immigrant mothers are exposed to postpartum depression as they are left with added responsibilities of childcare, while they are away from their support network available in their home countries. Based on the literature, this absence of support networks not only impacts immigrant mothers' emotional well-being but also influences key determinants of their health, such as employment, socioeconomic status, and overall life balance (Urindwanayo, 2018).

3. Mothering Norms Shaped by Cultural Values and Challenged by Cultural Differences

In our conversations, we discussed how some of our cultural practices have impacted our motherhood ideals. We both agreed that when because of our different situation in Canada, we were not able to fully practise the ideal Iranian mothering standards, we felt guilty and inadequate. We realized that it is important to consider how the intersections of culture, motherhood, and immigration affect immigrant mothers' ability to practise native mothering standards. For Iranian immigrant mothers, cultural expectations from their homeland may clash with those in the new country. The traditional Iranian values of family-centric and collectivist

practices may not align with the more individualistic and diverse parenting norms in the new environment. This tension can constrain their mothering practices and pressure them to conform to the host country's parenting norms which can create significant stress and challenge their ability to adhere to their mothering standards that have shaped their understanding of the world.

In that regard O'Reilly (2020) explains that "Mothering matters, and it is central to the lives of women who are mothers. . .I am suggesting that any understanding of mothers' lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming and being a mother shape a woman's sense of self and how she sees and lives in the world" (p. 51). Our sense of self was greatly and at times negatively influenced by the clash between what we expected from ourselves as good mothers, and the limitations we had as immigrant mothers with reduced support. The literature review supported our feelings of inadequacy when we could not fulfill our ideal mothering norms. Oliveira (2020) illustrates the feelings of inadequacy with an example of the outcomes observed in a study involving immigrant women who left the Philippines for Sri Lanka. These women encountered challenges when attempting to align with the expectations and mothering customs of their countries of origin. Brown et al. (2017) argues that added responsibilities of childcare combined with the added pressure of adhering to one's cultural expectations which can prioritize personal sacrifices over personal well-being, have caused emotional issues for immigrant mothers. Violet's experience in this regard was eye-opening for me, as I had my child in Iran where I could practise my cultural values while being supported by my relatives and friends. On the contrary, she shared her conversations with her support worker, who could not understand Violet's cultural values and would not meet her halfway, causing her to feel guilty and inadequate. Violet's feeling of inadequacy was resonated in Urindwanayo's (2018) research on postpartum depression amongst immigrant women in Canada. He emphasized that lack of

cultural traditions in Canada combined with their reduced support system makes immigrant mothers vulnerable to postpartum depression. This was also echoed by Zhu's (2017) research where she shared her own mothering experience in Canada and the challenges she faced in practicing her Chinese parenting practices. She emphasized that good mothering in Canada was different from the ideals of good mothering in China and at times she was confused and felt that her mothering practices were deemed different, uncivilized, and ignored in Canada. Hofstra et al. (2015) supports this idea and argues that the majority members in a society prefer immigrants who resemble their culture, and that cultural differences can be hard to tolerate or accept.

These struggles can lead to emotions of insufficiency and stress, as mothers navigate the demands of their new environment while striving to preserve a connection with their cultural heritage. Recognizing and addressing these difficulties experienced by immigrant mothers is crucial to fostering their well-being and facilitating their effective integration into their new communities.

4. Growing Distances, Caught Between the two Worlds, and not Fitting in Either

During our discussions, Violet conveyed her sense of being caught between two distinct worlds, namely, Iran and Canada, and that she often experiences a sense of not truly belonging to either of them. This sentiment is echoed in the writings of Suárez-Orozco (2018), who posits that immigration constitutes one of the most emotionally taxing experiences individuals can undergo, as it severs immigrants from their social connections, friends, and support systems. Violet specifically recounted instances where her friends and family in Iran questioned the rationale behind her immigration, sometimes employing harsh language to critique her choice to relocate to Canada. At times, Violet perceives that they intentionally withhold their support, perhaps in an attempt to prove that her decision to move to Canada was unwise. Violet shared that certain

remarks from her friends in Iran made her feel distant from them. She explained that some of her friends believed her relocation to Canada had granted her more privileges and chances for personal development, causing them to perceive her as no longer part of their community. This perceived shift in her situation and status can result in sentiments of alienation and exclusion. Simultaneously, Violet also expressed her struggle to discover a sense of belonging and community in Canada. She described her experience as being stuck between two worlds, akin to being in a state of "limbo." Violet described that she tries hard to stay focused on her new life in Canada, but when she encounters difficulties in Canada, certain critical remarks can deeply affect her, causing her to occasionally daydream about returning to Iran. However, she acknowledges that after investing substantial effort in building a new life in Canada, abandoning it to return to Iran may not be a sensible choice. The hardships encountered by immigrants give rise to a sense of ambivalence within them, a topic explored by King et al. (2003) in the context of immigration. The feeling of ambivalence and uncertainty, along with the contrast between the ideal world immigrants envisioned in their dreams and the challenges of the real world they confront can exert pressure on their well-being. According to King et al. (2003), one of the main questions that immigrants may ask themselves is "whether things were better then or now" (p. 4).

5. Homesickness, Isolation, and Lack of Information About the Available Support System

Closely intertwined with the sentiments of ambivalence were feelings of homesickness and isolation, often stemming from a lack of awareness about the available support systems. The concept of homesickness has been delved into by researchers like Stick, Hou, & Kaida (2021) and Johnson et al. (2019). They posit that the newness and challenges of the unfamiliar environment led immigrants to dwell on thoughts of home and their familiarity with everything there. We also discussed this topic during our conversations. What was particularly interesting in

our discussions was that we did not define homesickness as a simple longing to return to one's country of birth. Instead, we considered "home" to be a place where we feel truly understood, a space of empathy and appreciation. Any challenges we face in our lives could evoke a yearning for that space of understanding and recognition. Sometimes not being able to relate any physical spaces to that ideal space of understanding made us feel homesick or home-seek! Seeking for that concept and not being able to find it. We were confident that regardless of the specific definition of homesickness, we were more likely to discover elements of that place of understanding within our own communities in Iran, as opposed to Canada, where it can be challenging to connect with a community that shares similar values and cultural perspectives. As Verschuur et al. (2003) suggest, homesickness can manifest as a "depression-like reaction to leaving a familiar environment" (p. 758). We both agreed that we have experienced this feeling at different points of our immigration story. We were sometimes tired of being too strong after "breaking the iron wall" (Zaman, 2006, p. x) which according to Zaman (2006) means the struggles that immigrant women face to make it in Canada.

Violet expressed strong concerns about her situation in Montreal, especially regarding the passage of Bill 96, which emphasizes French as the official language of the province (Kramer, 2022). She believed that this legislation would further isolate her due to the language barrier and make it even more challenging for her to connect with any social groups and actively participate in the community. Similar concerns were echoed in the literature by Malviya (2021) and Edward-Wright (2022). Malviya (2021) specifically noted that the difficulty of effective communication in an unfamiliar environment can lead to emotions like frustration, shame, and isolation.

Violet expressed her concerns about the dearth of information regarding available support for immigrant women in Canada. She advocated that the government should give significant attention to and put into action plans to aid those who immigrate through the Quebec program. Many individuals are facing difficulties because they lack sufficient proficiency in French to genuinely thrive in the Quebec province, beyond merely meeting the visa requirements. Furthermore, even if resources are available to assist them, the language barrier serves as a significant obstacle preventing them from accessing those resources which are mostly available in French. Despite the various settlement services offered by the Canadian government (Government of Canada, 2021), there is a need for an evaluation of the accessibility of these services for immigrant women.

6. Cultural Identity Formation for Children

In our conversations, we also explored the intricate challenges faced by immigrant families, particularly in relation to the interplay between acculturation and the preservation of their heritage culture. As established by previous research, acculturation and assimilation are significant components of establishing connections in the host country (Tardif & Geva, 2006). However, within immigrant families, an evident hurdle arises when the pace of acculturation varies among family members, notably the younger generation, who tend to assimilate more swiftly, leading to what scholars have termed "intergenerational stresses." This phenomenon places immigrant children in a delicate balancing act, as they find themselves straddling two worlds, echoing the observations made by Montazer (2012). On the one hand, they are influenced by their parents, who represent the values and traditions of their country of origin. On the other hand, they are exposed to the host culture through school, peers, and media, as argued by Stroink & Lalonde (2009). This dual exposure to divergent cultural values can create tensions

and contradictions, posing a unique challenge to immigrant families. Drawing from my interviews with Violet, the theme of navigating cultural differences emerged prominently. Violet expressed the importance of both embracing Canadian culture and preserving her heritage culture. However, she noted the challenges posed by the omnipresence of Canadian cultural celebrations, such as Christmas, Halloween, and Easter, in public spaces. She acknowledged the value of exposure to diverse cultures in Canada but lamented the overshadowing of her own heritage celebrations. As a mother, she felt the pressure to incorporate Canadian celebrations into her family traditions to avoid her child feeling left out from the celebrations he is exposed to at schools, or in public places. Also, the data from this study concur with findings in other studies that as covered in the literature, one of the central challenges immigrant families confront during the acculturation process is the risk of losing their native language, as highlighted by Jaffer Sheyholislami (2022). The shift towards English or French as the primary language at home, particularly in the second generation, has significant implications. This linguistic transformation can lead to the erosion of connections not only with the mother tongue but also with the culture, identity, and families back home, as Sheyholislami emphasizes. The preservation of the native language is often intertwined with the concept of "home" for immigrants, underscoring the cultural and emotional significance attached to language.

Similarly, Evangelia Daskalaki (2019) sheds light on the adverse effects of language loss on cultural identity within immigrant families. Limited opportunities to practise the heritage language led to its gradual decline, with immigrant children favouring the dominant language in various contexts. This shift not only affects family dynamics but also has broader implications for the children's overall well-being. Important aspects of family life, such as storytelling, play, and emotional expression, may be compromised when children are unable to communicate in

their mother tongue. This issue was echoed in our conversations, as Violet was concerned that because her son was not born in Iran, and did not get those initial years of exposure to Farsi, he may lose his mother tongue more easily, as opposed to my son, who was born and raised in Iran for 5 years, where he could learn Farsi fluently. We both agreed that the best way to preserve our cultural heritage and language is to gently introduce and practise our Iranian culture and allowing our children to explore it at their own pace, rather than imposing our own ideas.

Violet and I agreed that the presence of grandparents could provide a natural and authentic way for children to connect with their heritage culture, sharing stories and traditions without coercion. However, we also acknowledged the challenges of not having extended family members nearby. Both Violet and I recounted instances where our children expressed longing for connections with their grandparents, not only for the fun experiences but also for the cultural richness and wisdom they offer. This void left us as parents striving to provide our children with exposure to our culture but recognizing that it can never fully replace the direct connection with grandparents or relatives.

In summary, immigrant families may face complex challenges in navigating the intersection of acculturation, preservation of heritage culture, and the importance of language in their children's lives. While the richness of multiculturalism in Canada is appreciated, these families grapple with the delicate task of preserving their unique identities in the face of dominant cultural influences. The presence of extended family members can play a pivotal role in bridging this gap, but for those without that support, the journey can be both enriching and disheartening as they strive to create a sense of belonging and cultural understanding for their children.

Limitations

While my Ph.D. dissertation on the lived experiences of two immigrant mothers in Canada provided valuable insights into their unique challenges and perspectives, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in this research. First, the small sample size of two participants limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader immigrant population in Canada. Our lived experiences, while rich and insightful, cannot fully represent the diversity of immigrant experiences in a vast and multicultural country like Canada. Additionally, the study's qualitative nature and reliance on in-depth interviews may introduce subjectivity and potential bias, as our narratives were interpreted through the lens of my own understanding and perspective. Furthermore, the research was conducted within a specific time frame and geographic location, and the experiences of immigrant mothers can vary significantly based on factors such as time of arrival, cultural background, and regional differences. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and considering their applicability to a wider context. Future research should aim to include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings, as well as employ a variety of research methods to triangulate results and minimize potential bias.

Recommendations

In considering the recommendations presented in this section, it is important to acknowledge that some initiatives and policies may already exist within the framework of supporting immigrant families. However, the mere presence of these policies does not guarantee their effectiveness. Therefore, it is imperative to critically evaluate and enhance the existing ones to ensure they are meeting their intended goals and making a tangible impact on the lives of those they are designed to support.

1. Helping Immigrant Mothers Remove the Language Barrier: Language proficiency is often a significant hurdle for immigrant mothers when it comes to integration and accessing opportunities. To address this, initiatives could be established to provide affordable language classes tailored to the specific needs of immigrant mothers. These classes could focus on practical language skills needed for everyday life, such as communication with healthcare providers, school personnel, and community members. Additionally, online resources and language-learning apps could be made available in multiple languages to further assist mothers in improving their language skills.

2. Creating Alternative Ways to Process Internationally Recognized Degrees in Canada: Immigrant mothers often possess valuable qualifications and experience from their home countries that are underutilized in Canada due to credential recognition challenges. To overcome this, Canada can establish streamlined processes for evaluating and recognizing foreign credentials, ensuring that these qualifications are put to use in Canadian workplaces. This could involve partnerships between government agencies, educational institutions, and professional associations to facilitate a smoother transition for immigrant mothers into their respective fields.

3. Facilitating the Ways in Which Immigrant Mothers Could Benefit from Their Support Network: Building and strengthening support networks for immigrant mothers is crucial. Community organizations and government agencies can play a role in connecting immigrant mothers with resources, such as mentorship programs, support groups, and cultural organizations that can provide guidance and assistance. Moreover, creating online platforms or apps that allow immigrant mothers to easily connect with each other and access relevant resources can enhance their support network.

4. Assigning Mentors to Immigrant Families: Assigning mentors to immigrant families can be immensely beneficial. These mentors could be individuals who have successfully integrated into Canadian society and are familiar with the challenges faced by immigrant mothers. They can provide guidance on navigating the education system, healthcare, and various social services. Such mentorship programs should be well-structured and include training for mentors to ensure they can effectively support immigrant families.

5. Introducing Practical Workshops for Stakeholders at Different Organizations: To promote cultural competence among stakeholders interacting with newcomers, practical workshops and training programs can be introduced. These programs should be customized for specific sectors like education, healthcare, and government services. Workshops can cover topics such as cultural sensitivity, communication strategies, and an understanding of the unique challenges faced by immigrant mothers. Continuous education and awareness-building can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for newcomers in these sectors.

By implementing these recommendations, Canada can take significant steps toward improving the experiences and opportunities available to immigrant mothers, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive society for all.

Concluding Thoughts

*"*When people reflect on their domination, they begin a first step in changing their relationship to the world" Paulo Friere (2000, p. 62).

My research journey commenced with the intention of sharing the often overlooked narratives of immigrant mothers from minority groups, as I firmly believed that untold stories often go unnoticed. Throughout this odyssey of learning, I encountered life-altering experiences

that permanently shaped my perspectives. I heard the life stories of immigrant mothers, and many of them stayed with me, occasionally keeping me awake at night, and at times, leaving me feeling powerless to effect significant change. What has become evident to me is that the learning journey that began in 2006 when I first left my home country for the UK transformed me into a different person. Initially, I harboured the illusion that I could change the world, and I could come to a full circle in my research journey, only to discover the limitations of my impact. I realized that this journey of learning is never meant to be complete as every day is another chance for me to hear, learn, and embrace different stories.

By using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK), I provided a nuanced perspective on the experiences of immigrant mothers. CRT helped me understand the systemic challenges and racial dynamics that affect immigrant mothers, while WWK highlighted the unique epistemological perspectives influenced by our gendered experiences. The insights gained from this research emphasize that motherhood among immigrant women involves a complex interplay of cultural preservation and adaptation. It shows that immigrant mothers often have to navigate a delicate balance between their cultural identity while engaging with the cultural norms of their new environment. This balancing act is not just a personal struggle but is also shaped by broader social and institutional forces that either support or hinder their efforts.

Moreover, this thesis contributed to the field of WWK by illustrating how immigrant mothers use their knowledge and experiences to create new frameworks for understanding their world. This approach validates their voices and experiences, providing a counter-narrative to dominant discourses that often marginalize or overlook the contributions of immigrant women. The process of challenging established norms necessitated the exchange of personal experiences

and narratives, enabling the emergence of alternative viewpoints. Through this process, we were empowered to engage with the world in a way that aligns with our understanding of reality and truth.

I hope this research offers an alternative viewpoint to individuals intrigued by this subject matter. The most significant insight gained from this journey was the development of empathy in me. Empathy allowed me to see beyond my own experiences and biases, fostering a genuine connection with the participant of my study. It made me aware of the profound impact that immigration and adaptation have on individuals and their families. Listening to the stories of perseverance and adaptation in the face of systemic challenges underscored the resilience and strength inherent in my participant's daily life. This emotional and intellectual engagement enriched my research, allowing me to approach my analysis with a deeper understanding and respect for the participant's lived experiences.

Furthermore, this journey has highlighted the importance of creating spaces where immigrant mothers can share their narratives without fear of judgment or dismissal. It underscored the value of storytelling as a powerful tool for bridging gaps in understanding and fostering a more inclusive society. The empathy developed through this process is not just a personal transformation; it is a call to action for broader societal change. It encourages the creation of policies and support systems that are responsive to the needs of immigrant mothers, recognizing their contributions and addressing the unique challenges they face.

Within the scope of my professional endeavours and social connections, I had the honour of engaging with a multitude of immigrants from various backgrounds, each with their unique life narratives. Each of these encounters underscored the pivotal role of listening to these narratives as a vital means of grasping diverse perspectives. I view my research as a single

bloom in an expansive field, and I aspire to witness numerous other blossoms flourishing in that very same field in the future.

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