

**Iranian Immigrant Educated Women and Their Challenges in
Canadian Society and Higher Education**

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by Giti Eghbal

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Giti Eghbal

Abstract

This research analyses Iranian immigrant educated women's (IIEW) narratives and experiences, demonstrating how they face multiple challenges in Canadian society and in Higher Education (HE). The purpose of this dissertation is to highlight what these challenges are, and how the Canadian higher education system can respond and help IIEW in overcoming them. This research offers some suggestions for improvements to Canada's social and educational environments. This thesis, consequently, aims to provide a clear understanding of highly-educated Iranian women's situation in Canadian society. Supported by feminist theories and deploying a feminist epistemology using a women-focussed "gender lens" (Bolden, 2014; Brewer, 2005; Sprague, 2005), this research aims to contribute to addressing the research gap since challenges among IIEW in Canadian society have not been fully explored and analysed, while also providing suggestions regarding how Canadian HE can help in overcoming these obstacles. By combining a gender lens with an ethnographic approach, this research offers an understanding of gender and immigrant issues, challenges, and experiences in Canadian society. Data were gathered through a questionnaire submitted in person to research participants, followed by in-depth interviews that collected participants' views, which were then discussed. The data were analysed using a systematic thematic analysis approach whereby themes and sub-themes were identified. This helped in creating an overall classification of the challenges encountered by IIEW in Canadian society, thereby allowing for a discussion of potential interventions the HE system could implement in order to support these women. Additional comments were made in relation to how these women reacted to and attempted to overcome their challenges. The research concludes by suggesting practical ways to improve the situation of IIEW.

Keywords: Iranian immigrant educated women; higher education, Canada; challenges; women's stories.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT.....	American College Testing
BCIT.....	British Columbia Institute of Technology
VCC.....	Vancouver Community College
CEA.....	Canadian Education Association
CIC.....	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
IELTS.....	International English Language Testing Services
IIEW.....	Iranian immigrant educated women
IMF.....	International Monetary Fund
IRPA.....	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
LPI.....	Language proficiency index
MD.....	Medical Doctor
OECD.....	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIS.....	Participant Information Sheet
RCMP.....	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SAT.....	Scholastic Aptitude Test
TA.....	Teaching Assistant
TOFLE.....	English as a Foreign Language (TOFLE)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As immigration to Canada increases, so does its impact on Canadian higher education (HE) systems and organisations (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008; CIC, 2012). This research investigates the challenges Iranian immigrant educated women (IIEW) face in Canadian society. As indicators suggest (CIC, 2012), a significant number of Canadian immigrants are highly educated and skilled. This research provides an account based on IIEW's experiences and narratives concerning the challenges they face while living and studying in Canada. This study also makes connections with the HE sector in order to determine how it might help immigrant women to face their challenges.

This opening chapter introduces a narrative on my personal migration story as an IIEW, it then discusses IIEW's migration issues, together with the Canadian context to immigration and some of the main factors which motivate this group to migrate to Canada. The research questions are followed by the purpose statements alongside a short description of my position as a researcher. Moving forward, I explain how this study is supported by a feminist perspective. The chapter also sketches the methodology and instruments used as well as the theoretical viewpoint and approach. Finally, a short account about each chapter's contents is provided.

1.1 Narrative of my Personal Migration Story

My personal migration story alongside my educational background has motivated me to conduct my doctoral research among IIEW in Canada. Once I was honored to graduate in the field of Clinical Psychology in Iran, I chose to work among depressed women. While I researched and practiced as a clinical psychologist in mental health clinics and hospitals in my homeland, I became

aware that many women in the wider population suffered from depression which went unnoticed and untreated. Due to political restrictions, I made a confidential list of reasons why Iranian women (in many cases) were ignored. I continued my research further at clinical level. Some of the patients and/or clients spoke about the political and economic situation in Iran since 1979 (Post-Revolutionary), how they lived in the changed cultural politics of gender and sexuality problems, how they dealt with economic necessities, material desires, and how they experienced patriarchal familial relations. Similar to many of my clients and women in general in Iran, I also struggled with the gender limitation not only in my traditional family environment, but also within the fundamentalist Iranian society. Many women in Iran experience sexism and gender inequality at different levels. In my own professional context for instance, we (as clinical psychologists) had to follow certain restriction and policy criteria written by fundamentalist government: a psychologist was obliged to warn, lead, and support a female client/patient to listen to and follow their guardian's directions (these include her husband, father or father in law, brother, brothers in law, sons, etc.) even for a basic decisions and personal need such as marital challenges, educational opportunities, or working outside the home.

Personally, I was challenged for my post-secondary education when I was a young girl. When I look back at my own narratives, I always find myself extremely lucky since my husband was a liberal educated person who believed in gender equality and as such, he supported me to continue my post-secondary education in Iran. On the other side, my father considered education for women as unimportant (or maybe irrelevant).

In the face of all these limitations as an Iranian female (social, political, educational, etc.), the challenges of post-revolutionary Iran were also felt by men (economic, lack of opportunity,

freedom of thought, etc.) along with many other educated Iranians. That said, even though myself and my husband had suitable jobs, we were looking for a better social and private lifestyle where we could experience freedom not just for ourselves but also for our children. Therefore, like many other educated individuals in that generation, we decided to migrate to Canada.

It is noteworthy to mention that based on The Islamic Civil Code in Iran, women's freedom is quite restricted in terms of their travelling or migration plan, such as applying for a passport or leaving the country on their own (this issue will be further discussed in next chapter). Therefore, even though that my husband and I decided to plan for our migration to Canada, to accelerate the process, my husband was the main applicant for gaining permission to migrate. Working opportunities, liberal lifestyle, easier access to receiving a visa, were some of the significant factors that led us to choose Canada over many other countries such as Australia. That said also, Canada was always considered as a very ideal country to live in, particularly among young Iranian educated generation at that period of time (e.g. being a multi-cultural society, respecting immigrants and refugees, promoting freedom of choice in outfits, religions, etc.).

Finally, my husband and I hired an Iranian immigration lawyer who betrayed our trust with many empty and unrealistic promises such as opportunities for continuing post-secondary education without having to go through the admission process, high possibilities to find a job in Canada upon arrival. Our experience of the immigration lawyer was, it emerged, far from unusual. I will discuss these issues more in the section of my findings as I believe, Iranian immigration lawyers have a significant impact when providing information on the level of the challenges Iranian (both men and women) encounter in Canada, information that require to be accurate.

While we were waiting for the Canadian migration correspondents for our migration application, my husband received a great job opportunity in the Netherlands where he used to take many educational/professional courses in the Medical field. We (with my two little children) moved and lived in the Netherlands for about three years when we received our approval from Canadian migration. Upon arriving in Canada in 2001, we realized there was no free university admission and no pre-approval guaranteed as our immigration lawyer promised. Indeed, like many of the Iranian educated individuals who immigrated to Canada, we (as a family of four) have faced many unpredictable challenges. My husband was not able to find a suitable job for many months. After couple months, due to some financial challenges, we decided that my husband will have gone back to the Netherlands to support the family expenses from there while the rest of us (my two children and I) would stay in Canada.

It was then that I could feel the level of burden and responsibilities of migration on my shoulders. I started searching for a paid job based on my educational background. Soon after, I was informed by many IIEW that I may not find a relevant paid job unless I have Canadian volunteering experience. I started looking for any relevant volunteering positions that I could in order to collect Canadian work experience, practice my accumulated knowledge in Canadian workplace, and develop my skills while getting familiar with Canadian culture and practicing my English simultaneously. I start working as a volunteer within a number of non-profit organizations (including immigration organization), had/have the honor of working as educational counsellor/clinical psychologist with Canadian community, Royal Canadian Mountain Police in Vancouver (RCMP), Immigrant Services to Society (ISS), and some other organizations. Although finding a relevant volunteer occupation was quite difficult, frustrating, and time consuming

(particularly in terms of economic side of it since they were unpaid jobs), I always found myself lucky enough to challenge the situation with a great outcome. Many of the volunteering jobs became a great reference for my paid job either within the same organization or similar societies in the end. Also, while seeking for a paid job, although challenging, I never came across the issue of my degree's international recognition, unlike many IIEW in this study or many Iranian fellow that I was/am working with. While I was acting as a volunteer, I start working as a settlement counsellor in a women's shelter with minimum wage salary. Even though that job had its own struggles considering my personal case (e.g. I had to work from 12 midnight to 8:00 am on an unsecure part of the town and I had to pay for baby sitter for my children), I was extremely delighted that I could finally have a paid job after two years searching and I could consider this as a key milestone in order to accomplish my goals and dreams in Canada.

The nature of the night shift job also inspired me to prepare a postgraduate statement and a very competent essay for two well-known universities in the same city where I lived. I sent my educational applications to those universities and surprisingly, I received my admissions from both Canadian universities. In terms of the financial expenses, I received some provincial student loan. Furthermore, I was thoroughly ambitious for continuing my post- secondary education in my new home land to learn more and to serve my community better. Soon after, I have received many educational Canadian awards (public and private) alongside my Teaching Assistant (TA) position at universities which was a great support toward my post- secondary educational expenses.

I have to confess the fact that there were many moments of dramas, ups and downs, disappointments, family separations, acting and look after my children as a lone mother (even though I did not officially carried single mother status), and a sense of regret after we came Canada.

That said however, we all kept our hopes up and promised one another to negotiate and overcome the challenges for a brighter future for ourselves and for our children altogether.

After all of these, I became passionate to learn more about Iranian immigrant women in Canadian society. In my educational journey, I started to conduct some research on the history of Iranian immigrant lone mothers in Vancouver, when I was completing my master degree, as a significant subject that could easily be the focus of further research. I also conducted my research on examining possible financial challenges being faced by Iranian immigrant lone mothers in Canada. Ultimately, I realized the group of Iranian immigrant lone mothers I studies in Vancouver, represents just one view among many of this issue, but offers the potential for further dialogue and enquiry. Therefore, I had a chance to conduct in-depth interviews with five immigrant women from Iran who provided detailed narratives about their labor market experience and its challenges. Surprisingly, many of their issues were quite similar to my own challenges when I arrived in Canada. The findings of the Master research indicated that Iranian immigrant women who stayed in Canada are not able to find satisfying jobs because of language problems, a lack of Canadian job experience, or devaluation of their previous education, etc. (Eghbal, 2009).

It is noteworthy that, despite the generally liberal attitudes of these Iranian women, as Mahdi (2001) confirms in his study of Iranian immigrants in the US, Iranian women immigrants neither abandoned all their cultural values upon residence in Canada nor accepted all elements of the new dominant value system that governs gender relations. Iranian immigrant women in my study (Eghbal, 2009) expressed similar concerns to those noted by Mahdi (2001) about their roles in the family, in society as a whole, and as women in Western society, but were cautious and selective. The idea motivated me to further investigate IIEW's challenges in Canadian society.

Considering all those struggles and challenges throughout living, working, and studying in Canada, I always appreciate the sense of freedom in this beautiful land where I could have the opportunity to investigate further my fellow IIEW's situation, challenges, successes, and struggles in Canada. Hence undertaking this study will also help me understanding what the real needs of immigrant women are, particularly of Iranian's in Canada and how to better support them during their daily life and job (e.g. acting as a mother, breadwinner, family provider, student, employer, etc.).

1.2 Review on the Migration of IIEW in Canada

Researchers' reviews on Iranian migration (Chaichian, 2008; Dinshaw, 2007a, b; Ershad & Hemaatkhohe-Jahromi, 2007; Stecklow & Fassihi, 2009) show the rising number of IIEW continuing in higher education or seeking a different life (or both) in many developed countries. The same studies suggest that post-1990 Iran has had the highest brain drain rate of all Asian countries (Panahi, 2012).

One of the outcomes of this change in Iran's history was a huge out-flow among highly educated/skilled individuals and professional people as the third wave movement (Rafsanjani, 2007) or "brain drain" (Chaichian, 2008; UN, 2008) of people seeking a better life. In addition, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (as cited in Chaichian, 2008), the number of highly educated and skilled Iranians migrating to developed countries stood at an average of 150,000-180,000 people per year. This has placed Iran in the first ranked position of 91 developing and under-developed countries in terms of educated migration (Ershad & Hemaatkhohe-Jahromi, 2007; Fallahi & Monavaryan, 2008; Panahi, 2012).

Despite the fact that there is no definitive number for Iranian overseas migrants, many international researchers and statisticians believe that the figure is in the range of three to five

million individuals (Ershad & Hemaatkhohe-Jahromi, 2007). Iranian immigrants have looked at the issue of migration from different perspectives since the advent of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution and the post-revolutionary era (Keddie, 2006, 2007; Ebadi, 2006; Mahdi, 2001; Paulson, 2011). The Iranian revolution is defined by the overthrow of Iran's monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic which led many Iranians to migrate (Milani, 1998). Migration, therefore, may have different connotations for different immigrant groups based on a variety of factors such as race, gender, class, education level, social and marital status, financial wealth (Chaichian, 2008), or if they hold different beliefs or subscribe to other religious faiths (Bailey, 2008).

Some of the above indices are among the motivations for Iranian emigration to Canada. For example, seeking study or continuing education HE opportunities or even securing a new job are relevant factors (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2006). As will be discussed in chapter 2, the main focus of the Immigration Act in Canada (1976) (Thobani, 1999) as formulated by the Canadian government was to allow access to suitably skilled individuals. This policy allotted points to applicants who possessed certain abilities, education qualifications and skills that would enable an applicant to contribute to Canadian society in a variety of ways, focused in particular on their potential economic contribution. In terms of the many criteria used, accessing Canada may be allowed, for example, based on one's age, educational background and level, vocational experience and so on (Thobani, 1999).

According to Chaichian (2008), given this context, some IIEW look at migration as an opportunity to improve their post-secondary knowledge, thereby developing their skills. While some of them intend to return to Iran in order to utilise their knowledge to serve their nation,

many other educated immigrants, particularly in the post-revolutionary era, choose to live abroad permanently, especially in Canada, in order to improve their life situation. If we pose a more specific question such as “Why Canada?” we can find some attractive aspects which indicate as some welcoming component in Canada. Healthier working opportunities, more liberal lifestyle, stress-free admission in Canadian universities, easier access to receiving visa, established Iranian immigrant population ranks Canada to be considered a very ideal and distinguished destination among many developed countries. This was also highlighted by several Iranian immigration lawyers and research participants I spoke with. Although this was in several respondents a will of anticipated ‘freedoms’, it lead to the key fact that women were unable to use their professional qualifications in the Canadian labour market.

1.3 Canadian Context to Immigration

Studies on the legislative changes to Canadian migration law (in the latter half of the 20th century) verifies that the criteria for allowing immigration assessment has a direct influence on the number of Iranian individuals who were able to move to Canada (Baily, 2009; CIC, 2012). Based on the most current Canadian immigration legislation criteria (point system implication centered in the 1967 Canadian Immigration Act), the government of Canada standardized criteria for selecting and also admitting immigrants (including Iranian individuals) to Canada (cf. Hawkins (1972), Canadian and immigration, p. 374). This system allotted points to certain applicant(s) who possessed certain abilities, education and skills which would enable an applicant to contribute to Canadian society in a variety of ways, but more specifically, to the economy. Based on Canadian Immigration Act legislation and its criteria, virtually every single immigrant (first applicant) had at least an undergraduate degree (Oreopoulos, 2009). Within the context of “knowledge-based economy”, as Feng (2009) articulates, applicants (mainly highly

educated candidates) look into Canada for opportunities to gainfully employ their skills, education and abilities.

Consequently, the Canadian system made migration more accessible to Iranian individuals who are mainly from the younger generations, are skilled workers and carry HE degrees.

Since 2002, however, the number of Iranians migrating to Canada was also affected by both Iranian political condition deterioration (social, economic, educational, etc.) as Chaichian describes (2008), and by the Canadian immigration program (Oreopoulos, 2009; Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 2008).

Since 2002 Canada's immigration program has been based on the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and its regulations (Government of Canada, Justice Laws Website, 2014). Established by the previous Immigration Act in Canada (1976), the primary focus was on allowing appropriate individuals to access Canada (permitted classes against prohibited classes) which in a discriminatory way gave the option and extra power to Canadian provinces for setting broader terms to define who was eligible to access the country according to many criteria (such as age, and preference, for example homosexuality, disability, etc.).

IRPA replaced the Immigration Act of 1976 by defining just three basic categories for its permanent residence: reuniting families, contributing to economic development and protecting refugees.

The skilled workers component, which most Iranians come through, according to IRPA (2002), includes individual applicants who can demonstrate their ability to enter the Canadian labour market and successfully establish themselves in Canada. This group is assessed based on their education, language proficiency (English and/or French) and accumulated work experience in the area of their studies.

While many Iranian educated individuals benefited from the Canadian Immigration Act of 1976 and those who applied based on IRPA (2002 and after) to achieve high economic and life standard of living in Canada, the issue of discrimination amongst applicants is still noteworthy (Thobani, 1999).

Iranian women have faced various forms of oppression/challenges not only in their homeland, but also in the new country. In other words, entering and living in Canada has its challenges, one of which could be educational one. Studies of Iranian immigrant elite women in Canada are still emerging, especially with regards to the possible local social/academic challenges they face. In the next chapter, I provide some more information about the HE system in Canada and the challenges Iranian immigrant educated women face based on the literature review and how the HE system helps women to overcome their challenges.

1.4 The Research Rationale

Women in Canada have progressed significantly in different social aspects (Turcotte, 2011). One of the main indicators of the progress women have made is their level of engagement in the field of education and HE. Education indicators demonstrate that although the total number of educated women in the last twenty years is lower than that of educated men with only 25% of women aged 25-54 have HE level education there are an increasing number of educated women closing the post-secondary education gap between men and women today (Turcotte, 2011).

Alongside this positive metric, many Canadian studies (Lum & Grabke, 2012; Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Nusche, 2009) demonstrate, however, that many of the existing Canadian educational organisations do not properly meet the needs and challenges of HE students.

Research confirms that the issue is worse among vulnerable groups such as low income individuals, immigrants and newcomers, and women (Fong & Cao, 2009; Lum & Grabke 2012;

Sadeghi, 2008). Meanwhile the existing literature reflects that a significant volume of academic and non-academic research has documented the realities of male immigrants, including their challenges, education levels, labour market participation and performance (Chiswick, 1978; Dobrowolsky, 2012; Chiswick & Miller, 2002, 2010), however, only a few recent studies have focused on immigrant women and their related issues (Adsera & Chiswick, 2007; Ferrer & Ridell, 2008).

Studies of immigrant success in the job market in general support the assertion that female immigrants with at least one university degree fare the worst in the job market in comparison with equally well-educated Canadian candidates (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008). This group experiences both a lower earning potential and a higher unemployment rate compared to their Canadian counterparts (both male and female) and immigrant men (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Oreopoulos, 2011; Sadeghi, 2008).

A lack of sufficient information about IIEW in Canada on the one hand, and an absence of any related information about this group and their possible challenges on the other, is the main motivation to conduct this study. In order to explore the challenges IIEW experience (including educational concerns) in their new homeland of Canada, and to ascertain how HE might help IIEW to face their trials, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. From a female perspective, and considering their educational background, what are the general challenges facing educated female Iranian immigrants in Canada who may (or may not) be seeking work in their professional area of expertise?
2. How, in the view of IIEW can (or do) HE organisations assist women to overcome these challenges?

Answering the second question helps me to design a more focused sub-question considering how the quality of the HE services provided to immigrant women assist in overcoming these challenges. The outcomes of my previous study regarding economic security amongst Iranian immigrant single mothers in Canada (Eghbal, 2009), show that the main concern of many Iranian immigrant single mothers was to gain employment. That study collected data via individual questionnaires/in-depth interviews following focus group interviews. Therefore, exploring work and employment issues among IIEW in this study reflects a continuity of focus derived from my previous research outcomes. Additionally, my position as an EdD student alongside my professional involvement in the Canadian community as a clinical psychologist and TA (both in the educational environment as well in mental healthcare) can assist in my role as a professional practitioner while underlining the importance of conducting this study. It is noteworthy that I have engaged with many Canadian newcomers (including IIEW) within a number of non-profit organisations (including immigration bodies), while I also work as an educational counsellor/clinical psychologist in the Canadian community with different bodies, as well as a TA at Canadian universities, and as an educational counsellor at language schools etc.

In addition, an elucidation of my academic position alongside my professional job involvement in Canadian community (both educational environment as well mental healthcare centre) may help the readers to introduce my role as professional practitioner and the importance of the reasons why conducting this study was/is important for me. It is noteworthy to mention that I have been working with many Canadian newcomers (including IIEW), within a number of non-profit organizations (including immigration organization), had/have the honor of working as educational counsellor/clinical psychologist with Canadian community and especially with different renown

universities such as RCMP, ISS, public shelters, Salvation Army organizations, Teacher Assistant at Canadian universities, language schools as educational counsellor, etc. Indeed these experiences provided me opportunities to create linkages with HE Institutions as a practitioner who able to directly deal with HE students and put my knowledge into practice version as a trainer, university teacher assistant, educational researcher, and educational counsellor in universities as well as the language schools I am working with. I am finding extremely important for my professional practice undertaking this study with the strengths and limits that will be highlighted in this thesis on the way. Hence undertaking this study will also help me understanding what the real needs of immigrant women are, particularly of Iranian one in Canada and how to better support them during my daily job. Indeed, these experiences have provided me with opportunities to establish links with HE institutions as a practitioner able to deal directly with HE students while putting my knowledge into practice. Hence undertaking this study will also help me to understand the real needs of immigrant women, particularly those of Iranian women in Canada, and determine how to better support them in my professional roles.

1.5 Knowledge Production Using a Feminist Lens

Since this research work focuses on IIEW's challenges in Canadian society, the research benefits from the feminist standpoint theories, which argue that feminist social science should consider the perspectives of women research participants (Hartsock, 1983). As theorised by Hartsock, a feminist standpoint should be built on an understanding of "women's experiences" and points of view based on their positionality, namely as non-dominant forms of political/personal knowledge (Hartsock, 1983; Sprague, 2005). Therefore, a feminist perspective has influenced this research's approach and questions in terms of relying on a feminist approach for its ability to produce "useful

knowledge”. The latter, according to a feminist epistemological approach, is knowledge that develops awareness while raising women’s voices in both the private and public spheres (Darvidshpoor, 2003; Derayeh, 2006; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006; Sprague, 2005), which is also the aim of this study.

This research is inspired by a similar perspective as that used by feminist researchers. This study is supported by a feminist perspective while using a study context whereby the researcher and participants cooperate in joint intellectual efforts (Morris, 1982). This study has attempted to share power with women as the study’s subjects without barriers that might have stopped them sharing their experiences. In other words, research subjects’ insights were taken into consideration when leading the research work (Luff, 1999; Sprague, 2005). In a concrete example, research participants supported the idea of choosing individual interviews over focus groups due to personal or privacy issues.

This feminist approach also differs from other qualitative research methods since it expressly identifies gender and gender-related issues, challenges, experiences and unheard voices as important dimensions, while giving voice to them and underlining the significance of exploring interactions, collaborations, and feedback involving women (Bolden, 2014; Brewer, 2005; Sprague, 2005). Supported by a feminist viewpoint, in this research particular attention was paid to each Iranian educated migrant woman’s knowledge, experience, voice, suggestions, complaints and/or critiques, while also providing each participant with the opportunity to offer a contribution to the very same society in which she has faced challenges. According to all of the women participating in this study, they had never had the opportunity to attend a discourse-based research interview using their own words, sharing their personal challenges, while generating

suggestions for improvements. Using a feminist lens also has an advantage over other social research approaches as it defines and analyses the “social fact” through the perspective of women and their experiences, thereby making sociologists aware of issues that were previously ignored (Sprague, 2005).

Feminist researchers take pride in recognising women’s diversity within an interdisciplinary framework. That is to say, in both private and social spheres women are alike in some ways and dissimilar in others. While the researcher in this study acknowledges that any multiple minority groups have more distinct and severe problems/challenges from other groups (e.g. lesbian, disabled and abused women respectively, in comparison with men), as such their problems/challenges may be different from the IIEW. Therefore, the special interests of IIEW also need to be considered, articulated, defended, and correspondingly addressed to develop new strengths as a result of their unique situation.

1.6 Methods and Methodology

This study utilises qualitative methods in its research design. This research principally emphasises face-to-face interactions to generate direct descriptions of the phenomena (Sandelwoski, 2000). In order to derive adequate and accurate information from the research data, this study includes a questionnaire (close-ended alongside open-ended questions) and in-depth interviews with the same participants to ensure the interviews enabled me to acquire more in-depth data from the questionnaire distributed among IIEW.

The research participants were provided with a set of questions that were straightforwardly understandable, short, and simple in terms of word choices while open enough to be answered and designed in a specific order covering diverse themes (Kirby et al., 2006). This is the reason

why the research included some direct questions to obtain accurate and focused answers (questionnaire closed and open-ended questions), whilst also asking some broader questions in order to receive more personal and introspective feedback (interviews open-ended questions). To build up appropriate trust with the participants, I followed the ethical guidelines (for the proscriptions required by the University of Liverpool's ethics approval processes, see Section 4.5) and rules provided by the University of Liverpool step by step and applied the "reflexivity principle" in my approach (Nencel, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Since the main aim of this research is the creation of original and useful knowledge, this study endeavours to be open to any unexpected outcome by using ethnographically-informed and discovery-oriented approaches (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), thus allowing "women's voices" to be heard (Sprague, 2005) throughout the study. Equally, using an ethnographic methodology provides the opportunity to systematically collect data in a specific cultural context and for the researcher to be more immersed in that environment in order to understand the participants' situations (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Coffey, 1999; Whitehead, 2004). Ethnographic approaches have also enabled the study to look at cultural phenomena in a context that reflected the participants' viewpoints.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis Chapters

This section will provide a short summary of each chapter presented in the thesis.

1.7.1 Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on the Iranian immigrant movement in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. As the basis for the discussion of IIEW, the literature review explores the reasons behind the migration of highly-educated Iranian women and links this with the Canadian

immigration system and policymakers' demand for educated individuals. Thereby, this chapter begins by illustrating the social, cultural, educational, and political dimensions of the Iranian post-revolutionary era. The chapter offers some further information regarding studies on general and educational challenges educated immigrant women face in Canada. The chapter further elucidates how HE institutions might be aware of the challenges they are facing and how HE bodies can support women to overcome their challenges. Some information is also provided under the heading "Conclusion".

1.7.2 Chapter 3: Theories on Epistemology and Ontology

Due to this study's connection to IIEW in Canada and their issues, this research relies primarily on feminist perspectives. The chapter also defines feminist theories and perspectives while discussing feminist epistemologies and ontologies. Therefore, the chapter outlines how the research approach emphasises social epistemology's perception of gender, concerns about the meaning of knowledge, and examines its enquiry and justification practices (Kirby et al., 2006). As such, the chapter introduces the other supportive frameworks used throughout the study such as the ethnographic approach, as well as anti-sexist and anti-racist theory. Hence, the chapter provides some insights concerning my position as an insider researcher. The chapter also deliberates on the research aims and questions.

1.7.3 Chapter 4: Study Design and Description of Methodology and Data Analysis Process

This chapter discusses the theories connected with the development of the research design. A precise description of the methodology utilising qualitative instruments, as well as a thematic approach is examined to explain how the study addresses the research questions. The project's methodology is described and presented in detail and introduces the method used to recruit

participants, collect and code the data, ethical considerations and their relationship to the data analysis process. The chapter provides step-by-step information about how the results have been themed and sub-themed. The chapter will end with a short description of the findings' validation based on a triangulation strategy before the conclusion section.

1.7.4 Chapter 5: Research Findings and Discussion

This chapter outlines data reflecting the experiences shared by the women. Therefore, a short account of the findings as well as a description of the researcher's vantage point is used to examine and interpret the study findings, which are articulated in detail in each section. IIEW's challenges, educational battles, accomplishments, and the like form part of the data developed in this section. This chapter answers the research questions. Discussion of the research findings also begins with an overview of Canadian HE challenges under each theme. This chapter outlines the study findings in order to analyse the data set, answering the research questions in conjunction with the literature review.

1.7.5 Chapter 6: Overview, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter discusses the findings while providing recommendations based on the HE context, IIEW's need to pursue their own initiatives, and the support provided to them by Canadian society. The chapter also identifies the impact of the study's outcomes as well as outlining this researcher's perspective. The chapter also underlines the impact of the study's findings and how these might potentially and/or practically affect positive changes in Canadian HE as well as wider society. The chapter concludes by summarising the findings and discussing some of the study's limitations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The first part of the chapter discusses the general dimensions of women's position in contemporary Iran and some of the reasons behind why they want to leave their country (Dossa, 2009; Ebadi, 2006; Moghdam, 1988). Information and migration reports help to develop an improved understanding of the very substantial levels of migration from Iran. Additionally, in the second part of this chapter I discuss the issue of IIEW who have moved to developed countries, as well as their connection to Canadian immigration policy during the latter half of the 20th century. The term developed country is very subjective, and it may vary from one classification to another. In this research, developed country has been defined based on similar definition in Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The main criterion used for defining a developed country status relate to the economic success, the geographical location, educational standards, safety and life style, etc. (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2001; Carrington & Detragiache, 1998; Rizvi, 2005). In other words, a country that has a developed economy and advanced technological infrastructure relative to other less industrialized nations may be called the developed country.

In the absence of literature that can support and address IIEW's context in Canadian society, reference is made both to some of the findings from my previous study (Eghbal, 2009) and from United States-based sources in order to create a broader understanding of Iranian migration. Studies by Chaichian (2008), Ershad & Hemaatkhohe-Jahromi (2007), Huang & Lu (2013) alongside some of the most recently available statistics will be discussed. HE in Canada and some of the challenges faced by Canadian HE students also forms part of the literature review

featured in this chapter. Finally, this chapter provides a short literature review of Canadian social services to Canadian immigrants in general, before closing the chapter with conclusion section.

2.2 Review of the Aftermath of Iran's Revolution

It has been more than thirty-five years since Iran's 1979 revolution (Ebadi, 2006; Hojati, 2012; Moghdam, 1988). The revolution's social and religious foundations (Ebadi, 2006; Keddie, 2006, 2007) included the overthrow of Iran's monarchy and the formation of an Islamic Republic which led many Iranians to migrate (Milani, 1998). Like many other political revolutions, profound changes in the country's social, economic, educational and ideological fabric followed the 1979 revolution. This study asserts that revealing these critical factors helps to develop a deeper understanding of the migration of the Iranian educated elite in general and IIEW in particular to Canada in the following years.

2.3 General Changes after the Islamic Revolution

The Iranian revolution brought about numerous changes generally and more especially for Iranian women (Ebadi, 2006; Keddie, 2006, 2007). During the course of the revolution, the idea of reform and its nature changed, with distinctly gendered implications. Therefore, over the course of the post-revolutionary period, Iranian men and women were affected in significantly different ways. In the context of this study, the implications for women are of particular interest, both in the private and public sphere and these repercussions will be discussed briefly below.

2.4 The Revolution's Influence on Iranian Women

During and after the Iran revolution in 1979, Iranian women have been affected by frequent social developments (e.g. impacts on their human rights), radical changes (wearing the hijab and

veil), economic conditions (decreased job opportunities), educational limitations (limited choices in post-secondary education), moral demands (raising children, motherhood), and marital status (men as guardians). These changes in contemporary Iranian society are just a few of the challenges faced by many Iranian women (Dinshaw, 2007a, b; Keddie, 2006, 2007; Moghissi, 1999; Schirazi, 1997). For example, while the overall trend globally is toward the improved recognition of human rights, Iran, as stated by a United Nations Development Programme (2015) report, has evidenced a hostile response to essential freedoms in terms of women's expression, health, HE access and income levels. In terms of the academic environment and HE the opportunities and access women enjoy has also deteriorated drastically (UNISEF, 2011).

2.5 HE and Female Students

In this study, HE organisations include universities or similar degree-level educational institutions such as community colleges, institutes of technology, etc. Similarly, information about the HE system in Iran and the situation of Iranian female students offers the opportunity to elucidate why the number of IIEW in Canada is growing. Iran has extensive networks of private and public universities which offer different levels of HE degrees, all of which come under the direct supervision of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology for non-medical universities and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education for medical universities. Limited access to social media, inadequate available resources for further study, restricted access to the internet and research interactions, and the limited university majors available to women are just some examples that underline the current stressful situation for Iranian female students in HE, which stem from ideological fundamentalism and gender discrimination (Dinshaw, 2007a, b; Dyck & McLaren, 2002; Salehi-Isfahani, 2008). Despite the fact that Iranian women have

experienced a variety of educational limitations they have simultaneously made outstanding educational progress in areas they were/are allowed to select their preferences. Iranian women comprise approximately 60 percent of all university students in Iran since 1979 (Esfandiari, 2003; Khajehpour, 2014). Esfandiari (2003) underlines the remarkable educational progress of Iranian females in the last decades as a visible social phenomenon. In fact, this desire for progress became a substantial motivation for educated women to continue their education to a more advanced level in HE (Khajehpour, 2014). Therefore, it is widely believed that Iranian women in Iran have made significant movement in the field of HE in comparison with men after the 1979 revolution down to the present day (Ershad & Hemaatkhohe-Jahromi, 2007; Khajehpour, 2014) despite all social limitations. Such progress by women, I believe, has brought about positive and varied change, including demand for equal labour market access, including calls for the improvement of women's status (in both the private and public spheres) and social relations (Dobrowolsky, 2012; Esfandiari, 2003; Khajehpour, 2014), which in turn has meant that women can achieve "qualified immigrant" status allowing them to enter many developed countries such as Canada.

2.6 Overeducated Iranian Women and the Iranian Islamic Ideology

Salehi-Isfahani (2008) analyses the reasons why the Iranian government believes that Iranian women are overeducated and why the Iranian government attempts to control women while intentionally installing obstacles in order to hinder their success. One of the issues he discusses is the patriarchal establishment operating in both the private and public dimensions of Iranian women's lives. Salehi-Isfahani (2008) considers how the fundamentalist male-dominated hierarchy in Iranian society is shaped by the Iranian government's Islamic perspective on women's lives. Based on this gender discrimination and the fundamental idea that rules Iran –

including in its HE systems and organisations – women must stay at home in order to maintain the importance of motherhood (Ebadi, 2006; Moghdam, 1988). According to Islamic legislation promulgated by Islamic political and clerical leaders (Paulson, 2011), gender identities imposed on men and women have been modelled on notions of tradition emphasising the importance of women's perceived domestic and maternal duties (Bailey, 2008; Ebadi, 2006; Keddie, 2007; Chaichian, 2008), alongside the imposition of a gender discrimination public policy. My own experience, for example, is that of an Iranian-educated woman who has also experienced compulsory veiling (hijab) in the public sphere, such as at Iranian universities. In addition, one of the most significant regulations for women in post-revolutionary Iran has been the obligation to wear the chador (Afary, 2009). In some universities, such as the one I attended for some HE courses, wearing a full black covering in addition to a veil was compulsory. Women were obliged to wear a chador while studying at such universities.

2.7 Islamic Legislation and Outcomes to the Present Day

The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic (1980-2013) controlled Iranian women in many aspects. The Islamic Civil Code in Iran, for example, restricted women in terms of their migration planning, such as applying for a passport or leaving the country without permission from their husband, father or male guardian. The burden of such legal restrictions and hindrances still tends to hamper the capacity of Iranian women to emigrate. More positively, some studies such as Kouhi Esfahani (2014) have established that the limitations seem to be empowering Iranian women in different fields. For instance, whilst many women faced a loss of freedom in the public sphere, there are studies that demonstrate how some (mainly highly educated) women have worked around such limitations by using Iranian HE to access higher status opportunities in

countries such as Canada (Afary, 2009; Ebadi, 2006; Shahidian, 2002). Due to women's educational attainments in recent years, these have resulted in, for instance, changes in family structures, the proliferation of a lively feminist press, growing female university enrolment, a dramatic decline in fertility, and a large number of non-governmental organisations staffed by women, just a few examples that can be cited in support of Iranian women's empowerment (Kouhi Esfahani, 2014).

2.8 Iranian Migration to Canada

In this section I will briefly explain Iranian migration tendencies, particularly in relation to Canada while discussing the latter's migration policy and HE sector.

2.8.1 Migration Tendencies among Iranians

The issue of international migration from one country to another is not a new historical phenomenon. What is more significant in this case is the size of migration involved. In fact, movement plays a significant role as it shapes international realities for both lands, country of origin as well as host country (Chaichian, 2008). The United Nations (UN, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2001) points to migration as a significant aspect of twenty-first century reality. This phenomenon has brought many challenges and opportunities, both for the host countries (in this research Canada) and for its immigrants, especially amongst educated people (in this study IIEW). World Bank (2011) estimates that over 215 million people are living outside their country of origin (while more than ten million people have migrated from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran (Beine, Docquier, & Özden, 2009).

Hakimzade (2006) notes that the number of Iranian migrants moving to developed western nations drastically increased in the years after 1979 from 10,291 (in the years before the Iranian

Revolution) to 46,152 (in the first post-revolutionary years). The years from 1971 to 1980 are considered as constituting the first wave of migration. Before 1979, Iranians moved to Canada mainly to experience better economic conditions, to enhance their investment opportunities, or for educational reasons, while after the 1979 revolution, the majority of relocations had different motivations such as flight from cultural, social, humanitarian, and educational persecution (Chaichian, 2008).

While some educated immigrants look at migration as a way to improve their knowledge and skills, after which they wish to return to Iran to utilise the knowledge they acquired in order to serve their nation, many other educated immigrated groups – particularly in the post-revolutionary era – have chosen to live abroad. Mahdi (2001) discusses migration to Canada and its connotations for different genders. For many immigrant men, immigration means access to more satisfactory living conditions (Dyke & James, 2009). However, for many immigrant women from Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, the experience often means escaping from extreme difficulties – political, financial or cultural – to seek out an ordinary life (Keddie, 2007; Ebadi, 2006; Mahdi, 2001; Paulson, 2011). In the contemporary era, as Hakimzade (2006) articulates, many of the Iranian educated elite have travelled and lived abroad in order to continue their education.

2.8.2 Educated Iranian Women and Migration to Canada

In the context of a lack of appropriate and knowledge-based educational opportunities (e.g. limited access to the internet, shortages in academic sources, particularly in the field of the arts) (Ebadi, 2006; Hojati, 2012), and with restricted access to open and group discussions at university level, continuing education has, therefore become one of the main motivations for Iranian individuals to move overseas.

Continuing education, entering the labour market, experiencing social freedom and committing to and leading political activities, make up some of Iranian educated women's motivations for moving overseas (Eghbal, 2009; Demographics of Iran, n.d.), however such decisions are not easy for many women. In turn, Tohidi (1993) has found that migration to new lands has involved a breakdown of traditional norms for Iranian women. As such, female immigrants from Third World countries (including Iran) often experience major difficulties integrating into new societies such as Canada, both culturally and economically. More positively, Naficy (1993) points out that while "female Iranian immigrants are moving away from traditional understandings of gender roles and sexuality, they are developing their own unique synthesis of attributes and values representing the cultural realities of both their past and present lives" (as cited in Mahdi, 2001, p. 210). While I agree with the notion that many female Iranian immigrants adjust successfully to new political, financial, educational or cultural challenges, conversely many others find it hard to cope with and overcome these difficulties (Eghbal, 2009). This is another element which will be investigated in more detail at the HE level (Nusche, 2009; OECD, 2014).

2.8.3 Canadian Migration Policy and Highly-educated Immigrants

A brief comparative analysis of the migration context in Canada, Australia, and the USA is provided here. The literature on immigration history demonstrates that Canada and Australia – after the USA – have been chosen by asylum seekers most frequently. The history of immigration policy shows that Canada and Australia have both sought skilled and educated individual migrants (Richardson & Lester, 2004; Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, & Sweet, 2013). In addition, these two countries – the main target countries for many asylum seekers – have offered a comprehensive set of civil rights immediately upon arrival for those applying to become

permanent residents (Ruhs, 2009). Such an opportunity could be listed as another pulling factor alongside other elements listed earlier. Statistics Canada (2001, 2006) reports that after Australia (24%), Canada has the highest percentage of immigrants (18%). The same report agrees on the uprising of “knowledge-based immigrant” (Fong & Cao, 2009; Oreopoulos, 2011; Ruhs, 2009). The same data also underlines that Canada, after the USA, receives the most educated immigrants. In turn, King (2012) demonstrates that with Canada’s shift from traditional to knowledge-intensive industries, Canadian immigration policy is targeted aggressively towards well-educated individuals such as Iranian educated immigrants.

As the basis of investment shifts to knowledge production in many countries, accessing and achieving HE becomes a necessity for many individuals, societies and governments. The most current Canadian immigration legislation criteria for selecting and then admitting skilled, educated and professional individuals from many countries (including Iranian educated individuals) to Canada (Hawkins, 1972). Point system implication centered in the 1967 Canadian Immigration Act and after 2002 with IRPA Immigration policy are: age, history of job qualification, educational background, alongside some other periodic societies need (e.g. demand for certain skills/job). Therefore, an enormous number of Iranian immigrants are primarily educated women, although the number is not accurately presented.

While Canada as a host country is looking for skilled and educated individuals from overseas countries to grow its own economy (Fong & Cao, 2009), many educated applicants (including Iranian immigrant trained women) seek opportunities to employ their knowledge gainfully in a respected society (Eghbal, 2009). Fong and Cao argued that, unsurprisingly, immigrants look to use their HE levels to achieve high economic standards of living (Fong & Cao, 2009). Many

immigrant women do not find what they hoped for in Canada, particularly in terms of relevant employment. For example, even in terms of finding a part - time job, immigrant women in general as a group (26.6%) were somewhat less likely than Canadian-born women (30%) to have worked part-time; however, in a positive aspect, women who had recently immigrated were slightly more likely (31.1%) to have done so (Statistics Canada, 2011). It is clear that immigrant women are less likely to be employed full time than non-immigrant women. They are also slightly less likely to have a part time job, although this has increased recently for new immigrants. The available data is not sufficient to offer explanations, however, in my own experience as a member of the community, and from my own research I would argue that most IEIW want to use their qualifications and work full time. In addition, studies of IEIW in Canada are still emerging, especially regarding the potential local social and academic challenges women can face. In the next section, I discuss women's challenges in general and analyse the HE system in Canada in terms of how the latter has helped women to overcome their challenges.

2.9 Gap in the Literature on the Challenges IEIW Face

The classic and early literature argued that a significant proportion of academic and non-academic research documented the experiences of male immigrants including their challenges, education levels, labour market access and economic performance (Chiswick, 1978; Dobrowolsky, 2012; Chiswick & Miller, 2002, 2010). However, a number of recent studies have focused on immigrant women and their related issues, demonstrating a different assimilation profile based on gender (Adsera & Chiswick, 2007; Ferrer & Ridell, 2008).

This study, however, will further investigate IEIW in Canada, since the literature (Adsera & Ferrer, 2014; Fong & Cao, 2009) supports the notion that immigrant women are more likely to

work in lower status jobs, earning lower wages, and working less hours in comparison with both immigrant men and native Canadian-born women despite their HE achievements. Relatively speaking, while aspects of the literature (Afary, 2009; Chaichian, 2008; Fong & Cao, 2009) agree on many significant causes for large scale immigration (e.g. the search for political, ideological, social, educational and economic opportunities), there is no significant literature on the possible challenges educated Iranian immigrant women face in their new receiving country. To date, and according to my knowledge at this time, there are just a few case studies that analyse the common challenges immigrant female students face (e.g. Hojati, 2012).

I believe that due to the current gap in the literature, and in the absence of accurate academic research among Iranian immigrant women in Canada, there is inadequate information about this group and the challenges they encounter. Hojati (2012) argues that IIEW experience a double/multiple negative effect, in HE and in the workplace, even though the women willingly engage with Canadian society. The term “double/multiple negative effect” is a frequently deployed concept in the literature (Guo, 2010, 2015; Hojati, 2012). The term is a combination of negative effects (single and multiple) derived from gender, marital context (married/divorced), and foreign country of origin. The following section will further explore some of the educational challenges that women face in Canada as highlighted by the literature.

2.10 The Level of Women’s Access to HE

A gender-based statistical analysis reveals an increase in the proportion of female master degree graduates in Canada (Turcotte, 2011). This demonstrates that women made up 50% of the master’s degrees awarded, whereas in PhD programmes across Canadian universities, they climbed from 32% of the total in 1992 to 44% in 2008. These statistics include immigrant and

international female students. Similarly, as Statistics Canada (2014) reports, the majority of immigrants were concentrated in fields of study such as architecture, engineering and related technologies (mostly male immigrants), and health and its related fields (mostly female immigrants).

A review of the literature (Lum & Grabke, 2012; Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Nusche, 2009) demonstrates that many of the existing educational systems in Canada do not properly meet the needs and challenges that HE students encounter. The issue is more apparent among vulnerable groups such as low-income individuals, immigrants and newcomers, and women (Fong & Cao, 2009; Lum & Grabke, 2012). Despite the fact that Canada's HE enrolment rates are among the highest in the world, the literature on the challenges that HE students in general encounter, underlines that there is a gap in providing facilities to groups in need, including immigrants (Educational Policy Institute, 2008). For example, international students in particular pay higher enrolment fees and taxes, and receive less access to social services according to the same study.

It is noteworthy that the Canadian government provides an opportunity to international students to stay in Canada permanently (Marcucci & Usher, 2012). Based on Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, 2014), many international students can apply for their immigration process and Canadian residency during their studies and, in many cases, they do indeed stay in Canada permanently. For many highly educated individuals entering a Canadian university as an international student is considered a means to leave Iran (see chapters 5 and 6). Having said that, this research explores whether such possibilities are truly practical among Iranian international female students. In turn and according to many western governments, including Canada, post-

secondary education is an essential element to ensure improved social status as well as resulting in economic and cultural development (Educational Policy Institute, 2008).

2.11 Challenges in Canadian HE

The national initiative of the Canadian Education Association (CEA) in 2012 emphasised the contribution of HE students' level of engagement to enriching their learning experience and achieving certain academic outcomes. In turn, Lum and Grabke's (2012) study details how recent immigrant adult students are moderately involved in university life in general. The same study articulates that academic engagement has different meanings for native and immigrant students. That said, achieving a balance in terms of acquiring appropriate information relating to existing university services, acquaintance with a HE learning model, alongside workload and work demands (in academic and non-academic environments) may provoke other challenges among Iranian immigrant students (Guo, 2010, 2015; Lum & Grabke, 2012). Although student engagement is important, it is, however, experienced to a different degree by natives and immigrants. Furthermore, immigrant students are required to overcome many other challenges that may also add distress that could impact on their level of engagement (Guo, 2010, 2015).

Engagement can be shown in a variety of ways such as involvement in group discussions, joining institutional clubs and taking part in communication opportunities. While the concept of engagement in HE has been shown as significant in relation to students' success (Wilms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009), some researchers have demonstrated that many immigrant women, including IIEW, experience feelings of isolation (Dyck & McLaren, 2002; Eghbal, 2009; Lum & Grabke, 2012). Similarly, Harvey and Green (1993) discuss additional problems that immigrant students confront such as acculturative stress and a lack of familiarity with the North American HE

system. My previous study (Eghbal, 2009) also demonstrates that Iranian immigrant single mothers face diverse stressors, one of which is undertaking university level education while taking care of other responsibilities.

For many governments, such as Canada's, post-secondary education is a crucial factor behind improved social status, economic growth and cultural development (Educational Policy Institute, 2008), however, many studies (e.g. Fong & Cao, 2009) depict educated immigrant women's situation in an undesirable way. Studies of the Canadian HE system's challenges, for example, show that despite high university enrolment rates among women (Finnie et al., 2004; Lum & Grabke, 2012), post-secondary education remains inaccessible to some disadvantaged groups such as immigrant women. Additionally, the same study illustrates a growing anxiety among female immigrant students around issues such as financial support, quality of education and female graduate unemployment (Fong & Cao, 2009). Due to the increasing challenges this underprivileged female educated group face in Canada (e.g. IIEW), the level of their anxiety also increases (Dean & Wilson, 2009). Immigrant women in general experience many challenges simultaneously (e.g. lack of appropriate financial support, unemployment, etc.) but some other women, despite the general common experiences, may successfully take their own steps towards more successful lives in Canada. For example, Afshin Jam (Miss Canada 2003), is a renowned IIEW in Canada who has successfully demonstrated her ability to take advantage of Canadian political opportunities to establish and/or practise gender equality, freedom, and human rights while playing a role as a fashion icon and model in Canada. In addition, Shirin Ebadi (2006) is another great example of a successful IIEW, although she does not live in Canada. She is an Iranian lawyer, a former judge and human rights activist and founder of Defenders of Human Rights

Center in Iran, who has managed to practise human rights advocacy leading to her receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003.

On a positive note, the literature review underlines the support and services that can be found in Canadian society (CEA, 2012; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Moore, 2008; Lum & Grabke, 2012). Lum and Grabke (2012), however, categorise university services into three clusters:

- 1) Those that most immigrant students are aware of and are well known, such as library and computing, tutoring, counselling and athletics provision;
- 2) Those that are known to 50% of immigrant students, such as English Language Studies, career services, child care provision and mentoring programs;
- 3) Those services that are known to relatively few immigrant students, such as language skills assessment, student success programs and first-generation access.

I argue in this dissertation that educating women in general and immigrant women in particular about available supports/services may result in more positive experiences for these women and potentially for international students, both male and female, who confront similar challenges. A study by Gates-Gasse (2012) contends that international students studying in Canadian HE institutions or who have graduated from Canadian universities experience different requirements in different provinces in terms of qualifying for certain jobs. Gates-Gasse lists undergraduate or graduate international student conditions that need to meet as a requirement for their settlement, which depends on the particular Canadian province a given student is studying at or has graduated from. Some of these requirements are based on work experience in Canada, in-province education for sponsorship, and ineligibility for federally-funded social assistance until

they are granted permanent residency. The process, as Gates-Gasse (2012) details, may take up to 10 years after entering Canada to study.

University fees for international students are twice those of Canadian applicants according to many reports including Kapusta and Roadevin (2011). For example, relying on the same reports, Ph.D. students in Canada had to pay \$5,807 in 2011-12 for university fall term costs while Canadian students paid \$2,836. Those international students who cannot pay the full tuition fee, not only have to leave the country immediately as they do not have sufficient proof of their immigration intention, while they would also not receive a degree at any level of their PhD programme (Kapusta & Roadevin, 2011). While I agree that many students in Canadian HE have to face similar circumstances, however many international and/or immigrant students also seem to be able to enjoy financial support such as access to funds (e.g. loans, grants, public awards, scholarships, etc.) as many leading Canadian websites underline (Finnie, Usher, & Vossensteyn, 2004; Turcotte, 2011).

In a positive aspect as many research working groups report each year (e.g. Metropolis Health Canada Working Group (HCWG), Metropolis Centres of Excellence), Canada provides its support in the area of immigration. The supports encompass a variety of areas such as health care, mental health, child tax benefit, English language programmes, settlement, etc. For example, on the official website of Government of Canada, a newcomer can find the type of services they might require in terms of their area of interest or need. Looking for a job, getting a language assessment, registering for language classes, finding a place to live and the like are some of the options available on this website and which are offered by different social service agencies. Although some enhancements are needed (CEA, 2012; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Moore,

2008; Lum & Grabke, 2012), one may also note the availability of supports run by federal and provincial governments for newcomers and refugees.

2.12 Challenges for Immigrants and International Students Accessing HE

Gates-Gasse (2012) argues that the role of Canadian universities and other HE institutions is significant in delivering information to assist students in achieving their settlement goals by reducing their challenges. Formal university and HE institutions, along with community social networks, links with other professions, and informal advice must lead and orient students to seek academic support, settlement orientation and employment (Gates-Gasse, 2012; Moore, 2008). In addition, Roach (2011) indicates that CIC attempts to help students to meet their social and related educational challenges (e.g. employment, settlement, integration) by providing workshops and bridging services to connect immigrant students with the community. In this study I will emphasise the dynamic role of university advisers in the provision of educational information to immigrants concerning relationship, housing and immigration issues (see chapters 5 and 6).

Some researchers such as Pace (1980), Chickering & Gamson (1987) argue for the theory of “quality of effort” which partially defines the success of immigrant students according to the individual student’s effort. This theory also suggests that while HE organisations provide the sources and opportunities required for learning, the issue of academic success still depends on the students’ level of engagement. Lum and Grabke’s (2012) assessment of academic engagement of the immigrant students in HE reveals that recent immigrant adult students were moderately involved in available educational components, learning models and strategy, and university facilities during their study. Seeing through all these lenses, my study attempts to

clarify whether any other reasons are involved to encourage IIEW students to become more involved in the HE environment.

When the participants discussed social and university services, they underlined those who were in need of both social and university support. Therefore, in this study the level of IIEW's awareness of university services is investigated as an important factor for women attempting to overcome their challenges. This will also be discussed further in the data analysis and conclusion chapters.

Many researchers believe that HE has a social responsibility to educate, develop and deliver highly-skilled individuals everybody can benefit from (Dietz, Esses, Joshi, & Bennett-AbuAyyash, 2009; Nusche, 2009; OECD, 2013). However, as my study argues, HE organisations may not have put in place sufficient procedures to support educated immigrant women and likewise the immigrant student women may participate more to solve their challenges. Thus, while Canada attempts to attract the most skilled and professional immigrants in order to benefit as a host country (Skills Research Initiative, 2006), this study simultaneously attempts to highlight IIEW's need to receive adequate attention.

2.13 Canadian Academic Engagement

Although this findings demonstrate how IIEW's strength-based attitudes could help them to manage/overcome their challenges, postcolonial feminists such as Stewart (1989) and Stewart et al. (2008) emphasise how essential it is for immigrants to access and experience social support, connection/networking in order to cope with a new society. The latter can maintain and support emotional health and IIEW's adjustments to their new homeland in terms of coping with Canadian cultural networking traditions. In turn, the results from a study assessing immigrant

students' academic engagement by Lum and Grabke (2012) discusses how recent immigrant adult students were moderately involved in academic components, learning models and university facilities. The same study articulates that academic engagement has different meanings for native and immigrant students respectively. That said, establishing a balance between providing appropriate information for existing university services, acquaintance with higher educational learning models, alongside the workload and demands (in academic and non-academic environments) may cause distress for Iranian immigrant students (Lum & Grabke, 2012). As one may note, IIEW, as newcomers, are expected to overcome many other challenges. This situation may also cause them distress that might also impact on their level of engagement (Guo, 2010, 2015).

2.14 Conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated that practical problems such as finding a job, meeting family responsibilities, networking, combatting feelings of isolation, accessing the necessary resources to receive support alongside associated social and educational challenges are some of immigrant educated women's common experiences as a disadvantaged group (Gates-Gasse, 2012; Lacireno-Paguet, 2004; Moree, 2008). Given the growing number of educated immigrants in Canadian society, the role of HE organisations alongside with social service agencies, and unions/employers would seem to be crucial to meeting immigrants' needs in a more targeted and supportive manner (Nusche, 2009).

Although the literature demonstrates Iranian females' experience of restrictions in the post-revolutionary era in relation to their age, economic status, religion, education, ethnicity or social class, ironically these same restrictions and limitations have resulted in empowerment

opportunities for Iranian women (Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Ebadi, 2006; Paulson, 2011). While my research cannot claim to speak for all women, it does offer new insights, namely in terms of addressing IIEW's challenges in Canadian society and in the HE system. Depicting existing problems by referencing the relevant literature and other geographic contexts (e.g. the US and Australia), has helped my study to explain the need for additional research.

This literature review on educated immigrants in Canada illustrates that the Canadian economy has become progressively more globalised due to both immigration and its education sector (King, 2012) and, as such, the issue of immigrants' challenges cannot be neglected. This study offers some suggestions for positive changes in Canada's social and educational environment while attempting to fill the gap by suggesting how HE contexts can play an active role in helping women who encounter strains and challenges. This research, therefore, underlines their need for further support from education policy-makers.

CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL THEORIES

3.1 Introduction

It has been more than thirty years since feminist scholars and sociologists identified gender and gender issues as an important dimension requiring further exploration (Bolden, 2014; Brewer, 2005; Sprague, 2005). Subjects such as politics, work, everyday life interactions, motherhoods, family dynamics, law, education, economic recession/development, race and ethnicity, class and many similar issues reveal gender as shaping particular social arrangements (Cohen & Pulkingham, 2009; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Roschelle, Toro-Morn, & Fascio, 2010; Warnke, 2008). Over the course of women's life histories, most have been excluded from official roles in discovering, uncovering or producing new knowledge (Bolden, 2014). Due to the nature of this study and its relation to IIEW in Canada and their issues, this explanatory research relies primarily on feminist perspectives. According to Reinharz (1992), "A feminist perspective means being able to see and analyse gender politics and gender conflict" (p. 250).

Relying on a basic feminist approach, I will use a feminist epistemology and a "gender lens" in this study. Using a feminist lens has an advantage over any other social research methods as it defines and analyses the "social fact" through the perspective of women and their experiences, which is quite different from a "constructed social fact" (Sprague, 2005). According to Sprague and many other feminists (Bodwitch, 2014; Moghadam, 1988; Roschelle et al., 2010), social scientific knowledge is generally shaped and influenced by many factors such as assumed definitions of gender roles and hierarchy, social power, religion, cultural standards, economic security, race and ethnicity in a male-dominated society, and all of these factors can shape a constructed social fact. Therefore, Sprague (2005) believes that using a feminist epistemology

with a gender lens improves knowledge leading to social progress since a given fact is described in terms of its social nature by women themselves. Thus, research through a gender lens provides a better understanding of gender issues, conflicts and challenges in today's society.

Conversely, some scholars (e.g. Hammersley, 1992) have critiqued the validity of feminist theory and its research methods since it is based exclusively on a feminist perspective and women's beliefs, experiences and concerns. Although the experiences of women are distinctive in their private and social aspects, and therefore unavailable to men as Creese, McLaren and Pulkingham (2009) argue, it is believed that using a feminist perspective in this study will help the research to share knowledge derived from women's unique perspective which Creese et al. term a "thought provoking situation" (p.602). Considering women's experience using a feminist lens in some ways adds value to this research, although it is simultaneously a one sided view. That said, the researcher aims to produce accurate and productive knowledge in order to allow gender issues and women's voices to be heard in a social context (Bolden, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Park, 1993; Thobani, 2007).

The chapter concludes ethnography approaches followed by a description of utilizing feminist theory in this study. Moving forward, standpoint theory and feminist social epistemology will be debated. In this chapter in particular, and in the study more generally, I will also discuss a combination of anti-sexist and anti-racist principles alongside feminist theory approaches (Darvidshpoor, 2003; Derayeh, 2006; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Creese et al., 2009) and how they interact with one another, all in conjunction with the use of a feminist approach to analysing experiences in context. This is also a standard approach in relation to feminist epistemology, termed the "theory of knowing" (Band-Winterstein, Doron, & Naim, 2014; Sprague, 2005; Le

Compte & Schensul, 1999). Research aims and questions will be outlined in the last section of this chapter prior to the concluding section.

3.2 Utilising Feminist Theory in this Research

In this section I will introduce feminism, its perspective and discuss the basis of feminist epistemology and ontology (Lawson, 2003). Moving forward, I will outline how a feminist perspective has influenced this research approach in terms of producing useful knowledge. Positive epistemology and the idea of systematic knowledge of the social world in a constructed society will also be examined (Bodwitch, 2014; Bolden, 2014; Moghadam, 1988; Sprague, 2005). I will scrutinise how feminist social epistemology, standpoint feminism and knowledge production has aided me during this study. Anti-sexist and anti-racist (Carpenter, Ritchie and Mojab, 2013; Dossa, 2009; Lawson, 2003; Oreopoulos, 2011; Sprague, 2005; Thobani, 2007; Wotherspoon, 2009) will also be considered.

Prior to defining the meaning of feminism and its perspective, I would like to emphasise that feminism has accumulated a rich, complex and vast literature (Creese et al., 2009; Bodwitch, 2014; Moghadam, 1988; Nencel, 2014). Considering Sprague's discussion of the feminist perspective and this study's word limit constraints, this research relies on a general version of feminism and does not adopt a specific position relative to feminism's historical waves and movements (e.g. suffrage in early twentieth century, activism in the anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1990s, post-colonial/post-modern thinking, issues around body, gender and sexuality identity, heteronormativity). Therefore, this study does not follow any particular feminist tendency such as feminism of women of colour (e.g. Mann, 2008; Smith, 2005), lesbian feminism (e.g. Garber, 2001) and postmodern and transnational feminisms (e.g. Mohanty, 2003);

nonetheless it meshes with and benefits from the concept of feminism. This study, therefore, stresses commonalities among different theorisations, namely: 1) gender issues and promotion of consciousness; and 2) enhancement of social knowledge in accordance with social feminists' viewpoints (Creese et al., 2009; Enns, 2010; Bodwitch, 2014; Kar, 1999; Keddle, 2007; Kirby et al., 2006; Moghadam, 1988; Nencel, 2014; Sprague, 2005; Thobani, 2007; Warnke, 2008).

3.3 Feminist Epistemology and Ontology

Before defining feminist epistemology and its ontology, a general scholarly definition of epistemology and ontology may be helpful to the potential readers. In brief, epistemology is the theory of knowledge to answer how do we know and understand things (e.g. the world) while ontology is talking about the nature of its reality, and the nature of its being (e.g. the world).

Also, "Feminism" is a term that has been applied to convey the diversity within feminist theoretical ideas and political views. A feminist perspective not only describes the situation of women but also provides a better understanding of women's issues and oppression (Creese et al., 2009; Bodwitch, 2014; Moghadam, 1988). Many researchers believe in the idea that knowledge is power (Derayeh, 2006; Sprague, 2005) and, accordingly, feminist epistemology involves the theory of knowing how to produce knowledge that brings about awareness and empowerment while raising women's voices in both the private and public spheres (Bolden, 2014; Cohen & Pulkington, 2009). Sprague (2005) and Smith (1990), in discussing the theory of epistemology, describe the "knower", the "known" and the "process of identifying" as involving specific assumptions, an insight other scholars have also engaged with (Ristock & Pannell, 1996). What makes a feminist approach distinct from the many other systematic and constructed social science research methods is that feminist epistemology tends to focus on how these three elements (i.e. the "knower", the

“known” and the “process of identifying”) are connected (Smith, 1990). Feminist epistemology as the theory of knowing seeks to construct a distinctively feminist epistemology to yield accurate knowledge and representation of women’s real lives (Bodwitch, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Feminists debate the nature of the interconnections among these elements in the process of knowledge, but they agree that feminist epistemology describes a method for developing knowledge from the insights of women’s experience.

Sprague (2005) questions if facts speak for themselves (positivism and positive epistemology) and questions the idea of systematic knowledge of the social world, which she reports is impossible. In feminist view, as she also describes, knowledge is socially constructed and provisional while, at the same time, knowledge is attainable. This viewpoint leads my research to interconnect the “knower” (researcher, subject), the “known” (IIEW and available social constructed knowledge) and the “process of identifying” (from thought to action, the women sharing experiences), while focussing on their links and connections to collect voices/knowledge in order to foster social changes that will improve the lives of IIEW.

Therefore, feminists emphasise the essential nature of the interconnections between real life, women and society alongside asserting that, while they agree that feminist epistemology describes a method for developing knowledge derived from insights regarding women’s experience, the nature of these interconnections involve issues such as race and ethnicity, class, marital status and education in the process of producing knowledge (Bodwitch, 2014; Hartsock, 1983; Hawkesworth, 2010; Lawson, 2003). Hence the epistemology deployed in this study is not conceived as a constructed social fact but rather it is reality that is impacted by additional elements such as those listed above. Indeed, this is feminist epistemology’s main difference

compared to traditional constructivist theorisations (Bodwitch, 2014; Sprague, 2005; Warnke, 2008). In a similar way, this research relies on the foundation of being and is framed on the basis of reality (the latter being at the core of feminist ontology), while also focusing on the interests, experiences and understanding of any knowledge produced (Whitbeck, 1984).

Feminist ontology theorises the symbiotic relationship between the body, the mind, human emotions and women's feelings (McWeen, 2014; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Related to this, the body is conceptualised as a form of becoming yet its meaning is never fixed, narrowed or formulated to just the womanistic body (i.e. the woman's bodily surface and look), while the mind and emotions are interconnected. Meanwhile, some researchers (e.g. Childers, 2013) indicate that feminist theories/ontology are not typically recognised or explicitly articulated as a feminist approach, since they are considered as constructed outside of mainstream feminist research. However, in this research I also benefit from Stanley and Wise's (1993) view that debates on feminist ontology do not seek to reify "experience," rather they critically emphasise the need to engage with the aforementioned elements (i.e. the body, the mind, and emotions). I am aware of the assertion that every epistemological approach and/or ontology may have pros and cons, while I certainly do not suggest any specific or idealistic viewpoint outside the bounds of this study.

In this study, I considered both views since feminist epistemology and feminist ontology are fundamentally rooted in one another as they both concern on that social knowledge can be produced and generated based on human experience (and in this study women's experiences), and not on a given social or professional role, title, group, household, bodily image or social status as a mother or wife. The idea of social knowledge can be seen as embodying aspects of culture, politics, marital status, race and ethnicity (not just the womanistic body) whereas

women's personal experiences are unique and different (Bodwitch, 2014; McWeen, 2014; Roschelle et al., 2010; Warnke, 2008).

Stanley and Wise (1993) outline that: "the relationship between feminist epistemology and feminist ontology is one which positions ontology as the foundation: being and thus of theory and knowledge" (p.192), based on individual experience. Ontology is the set of experience, receiving an experience, feeling an experience, interpreting an experience, and dealing with an experience in a real life. This ontological conception has positively affected my research choices in terms of achieving deeper insights into IIEW's real life experiences while considering the differentiation their unique experiences imply (without social and political interpretation), thereby helping to produce more accurate and new knowledge. In other words, respecting and recognising individual's narratives, suggestions, complains, emotions, pleasant and unpleasant experience, helped me to pay particular attention to a) each woman's experience, feelings, and feedback in each and all research steps (from recruiting the participants, data collection throughout the last step for data interpretation and finding; and b) be open and to respect different views with no pre- assumptions but based on the reality of and clarification of women's thought.

3.4 The Ethnographic Approach

The principal methodology adopted in this study was an ethnographic approach. By deploying an ethnographic methodology, I have the opportunity to better investigate the group under discussion in their particular context, thereby gaining more direct insights from their narratives, experiences, limitations, successes and choices, which are then systematically analysed from the collected data in their particular cultural context in order to better understand their situation and

context (Bolden, 2014; Coffey, 1999; Cohen et al., 2007; Nencel, 2014; Whitehead, 2004). Since the primary aim of this research is the creation of new knowledge, I endeavoured to be as open as possible to any and all unexpected data harvested from discovery-oriented and ethnographically-influenced approaches (Bolden, 2014; Nencel, 2014).

Moreover, undertaking research as an insider researcher in participants' life contexts helped me to collect particular and specific information. An ethnographic approach helped the study to examine the cultural phenomenon in a context that presented the participants' viewpoints. Acting as an insider researcher, although offering countless benefits, has its own drawbacks as explained above. That said, I was aware of this difficulty and was cautious about the potential biases, assumptions, and/or judgmental interpretations I could come across during collecting data or data analysis (Asselin, 2003; Cresswell, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). As I will explain more in details in section 4.9 of this study, to ensure my study's validity, I relied on reflexivity, a tool often used in feminist approaches, in order to reduce possible bias while questioning myself and checking with my participants if I was collecting truthful data, and evaluating my aims and conceptions honestly (Shaw, 2010). Re-checking the data with the participant for example, helped me to collect the most accurate data from the women. That said, after having taken notes for collecting data, I doubled checked and rechecked my notes with the women either verbally or by showing my note to the participant, right after to be sure that the data collected, presented the content and messages the woman aimed to deliver. Also, I attempted to be straight forward in data collection and the process of analysing research data. By this, I tried to ask my question(s) as clear as possible and to clarify them to participants too. Also, to avoid any confusions, I tried not to make any pre- assumption either from researcher's side or the women's. Therefore, I acted and presented myself as an outsider researcher who knows nothing about the women's potential

experiences and situation. In addition the data analysis, reviewed by my both supervisors challenged myself with questions and new comments helping me to avoid taking things or assumptions for granted and to explore the data under different perspectives and angles.

Meanwhile, ethnography defines the word “culture” and looks at the subject as a pattern of behaviour of a group of people (Nencel, 2014) which I felt is close to my experience as part of this cultural context. Supported by this approach, this research looks at the issue of culture as a series of different components such as forms, histories, beliefs, principles and educational opportunities, as well as many gender issues (Coffey, 1999) such as marital status, cultural changes, family responsibilities and other topics that directly related to participants. Using an ethnographic methodology helped me to better understand the purpose and nature of the experiences of the group under discussion, and assisted me in placing their comments in their/ my own cultural context as a common area between the participants and researcher (Whitehead, 2004). According to many social scientists (Cohen & Pulkingham, 2009; Roschelle, Roschelle et al., 2010; Warnke, 2008), cultures are distinguished by patterns that repeat themselves in different contexts. This approach allowed me to generate an understanding of IIEW’s standpoints while developing the research interpretations and analysis. The drawbacks in using an ethnographic approach and playing the role of an insider researcher relate to the bias created when the researcher is overly immersed in the data and in the women’s experiences. Indeed, this is a shortcoming I had to take into consideration during my study and I have discussed this issue above when outlining my positionality.

3.5 Producing Useful Knowledge

This study's research approach and questions have relied on a feminist approach to produce "useful knowledge". The latter is considered as one of the most influential aspects of feminist epistemology. Useful knowledge, according to a feminist epistemological approach, is knowledge that brings about awareness while raising women's voices in the private and public spheres (Darvidshpoor, 2003; Kirby et al., 2006; Sprague, 2005). In many contemporary Western societies such as Canada, researchers retain a privileged position. A privileged researcher position can be based on one's race and ethnicity, gender, class and social power. As Mies (1983) argues, research has tended to be dominated and legitimised by society's powerful elite. McWeen (2014) further articulates that, as a result of such unshared power, the findings, collected data, discoveries and information will usually be delivered in the way the hierarchical society wishes and expects to receive them (Bodwitch, 2014; Lawson, 2003; Roschelle et al., 2010). A similar perspective inspires this research by analysing facts in relation to IIEW's actual experiences.

3.6 Standpoint Theory and Feminist Social Epistemology

A significant task throughout this research was to recognise who is producing knowledge. Maguire (1987, 2001) believes in participatory research while explaining that the latter entails the provision of validated knowledge (Bodwitch, 2014; Roschelle et al., 2010). Additionally, Maguire emphasises the idea that the "political is personal" while arguing that women have been largely excluded from producing dominant forms of political/personal knowledge (Bodwitch, 2014; Park, 1993; Roschelle et al., 2010). The silence around gender and women's issues in participatory research in some social research endeavours continues down to the present day. On the other hand, many feminist researchers (Bolden, 2014; Hall, 1992; Park, 1993; Thobani, 2007)

indicate that without paying attention to acknowledging and recognising the concept of male biases at different levels, participatory research cannot be genuinely emancipatory for all people and, as such, the knowledge that is produced may be inaccurate as it ignores the voices of half the population. Having considered this notion throughout this research, the study benefited from feminist standpoint theory. The latter argues that knowledge can be built on an understanding of “women’s experience” with their points of view framed on their position (e.g. multiple positions at the intersections of social, cultural, economic and political power relations). Thereby feminist epistemology admits to the positionality of all research as expressed in standpoint theory (Sprague, 2005).

As Sprague (2005) has underlined, social epistemology argues that knowledge is “grounded, in particular, social and historical contexts” (p. 67). Benefitting from and directed by social epistemology, this research aims to bring the individual’s needs to the surface and to place these in their proper context in order to advance possible future collective actions, social reforms or changes (Reinharz, 1992). In other words, a feminist epistemology has the potential to empower IIEW (Kirby et al., 2006) while collective empowerment, as articulated by Israel, Checkoway, Schultz and Zimmerman (1994), is the process whereby individuals, organisations and communities are enabled to take social control and power over their lives and environment.

3.7 Feminist Theory and its Relation to Anti-sexist and Anti-racist Theory in the Context of Migration

A literature review with a feminist slant (Bodwitch, 2014; McWeen, 2014; Snyder, 2008) demonstrates that there are a variety of classifications and definitions that characterise feminism, adopt feminist politics from different angles, discuss feminist theories, debate what kind of

methodology a feminist practice requires, and who can be considered a feminist researcher. As Agger (1988) notes, while there are many definitions, political opinions and approaches to answering the above questions, the primary theory within the feminist approach is that of gender oppression.

Using a feminist lens, therefore, this study attempts to provide a practical academic forum for IIEW to use and practice their power/position as a way to be a voice for themselves and on behalf of other IIEW who have not had a chance to be included in such a research.

3.7.1 The Anti-sexist/Anti-racist Approach

Another component of feminist theory is ending the oppression of women in our society and creating gender equity (Jaggar, 1988; Thobani, 2007), which is also known and defined as anti-sexist theory (Agger, 1998; Carpenter et al., 2013). In the context of this study, the value of using anti-sexist theory lies in centring IIEW's experiences in those social and educational contexts where they have been ignored or their voices have not been heard. Therefore, feminism connects with anti-racist theory (e.g. Black Nationalism) and also involves and necessitates political consciousness (Agnew, 2007; Jiwoni, 2005; McWeen, 2014; Thobani, 2007).

Anti-racist feminist theory defines discrimination in relation to various forms of resilience, agency and organisation (Frye, 1992; Thobani, 2007). That said, there is a need for further work on feminist, anti-racist theories (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Creese et al., 2009; Hawkesworth, 2010; Warnke, 2008). With few available studies, one may not expect a proper contribution to race and racialised women in Canadian society. Therefore, feminist anti-racist theories play a significant role in this study, since they have assisted this researcher in looking at the problems and challenges IIEW face by examining these issues through the eyes of Iranian immigrant

women such as my respondents. This approach is not free from shortcomings since it may stress the importance of only one particular way of seeing the world and reality. Indeed, the aspect of my role and positionality as a researcher will be discussed at greater length in this chapter.

Meanwhile, Canadian society is extremely stratified in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, class, marital status and other components (Hawkesworth, 2010; Oreopoulos, 2011; Warnke, 2008; Wotherspoon, 2009). Similar studies document differences based on racial group inequalities in the fields of employment, wage levels and education. For example, foreign-born immigrants (such as IIEW) experience greater educational and occupational discrimination compared to their Canadian-born counterparts (Oreopoulos, 2011). In this research, racial distinctions are not defined as historically White and non-White as is usual in Western societies shaped by the colonial and postcolonial eras. Ethnic minorities continue to experience social distinctions given the exclusion of some groups from power while others enjoy substantial control. In this study, the position of IIEW as immigrants experiencing differences in language and culture place them outside of the White, mainstream and dominant society (Jiwani, 2006; Ebadi, 2006; Thobani, 1999, 2007).

Supported by anti-racist theory in this study's data collection and analysis processes, the research endeavoured to depict racist situations experienced by the women arising in relation to employment equity, academic job opportunities, educational atmosphere etc., thereby revealing if the women faced any greater barriers in both public and HE organisations in their new homeland compared to their fellow Canadians. This study, therefore, benefited from utilising anti-sexist theory (Carpenter et al., 2013; Thobani, 2007) while promoting anti-racist theory to

uncover those racial and/or gender inequality experiences the research subjects may have faced in multicultural Canadian society and/or in its educational environment.

3.8 Personal Experience as an Insider Researcher

My position as an EdD student alongside my professional involvement in the Canadian community as a clinical psychologist and TA (both in the educational environment as well in mental healthcare) describe my role as a professional practitioner while underlining the importance of conducting this study. It is noteworthy that I have engaged with many Canadian newcomers (including IIEW) within a number of non-profit organisations (including immigration bodies), while I also work as an educational counsellor/clinical psychologist in the Canadian community with different bodies, as well as a TA at Canadian universities, and as an educational counsellor at language schools etc.

As an Iranian immigrant and insider researcher who experienced different social and educational challenges, I was also aware of some of the problems that could develop when participants presumed that the insider researcher appears to know more than the participants concerning the topic under discussion. That said, I was aware of this difficulty, and was cautious about the potential for participants to make such assumptions (Asselin, 2003; Cresswell, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the researcher's role as an insider has been challenged (Khawaja & Morck, 2009). Feminists such as Angrosino (2005) have called for the researcher and the research process's "greater consciousness of situational identities and to the perception of relative power" (p.734). In a similar vein, Rose (1985) concludes that "There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're

leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing" (p.77). Therefore, to ensure the study's verisimilitude (Houghton et al., 2013; Finlay, 2011; Yardley, 2008), I also had to consider any potential biases or preconceptions that I might have during the research process due to my experience as Iranian educated immigrant woman in Canada (Berger, 2013; Darawsheh, 2014; Finlay, 2002; Finlay & Ballinger, 2006; Reinhartz, 1992).

I relied on reflexivity, a tool often used in feminist approaches to share power between the researcher and participants, in order to reduce possible bias by processing insights through the dynamics that arose during the research. Reflexivity or engaging in a reflective process (Sprague, 2005) requires the honesty, openness, and transparency of both research parties, most of all on the part of the researcher. Given this, I was able to question myself in a deeper way, to challenge my insights more profoundly, and to evaluate my aims and conceptions honestly (Shaw, 2010). Additionally, in relation to the process of data collection and interpretation, reflexivity helped me to be as authentic and trustworthy as possible (Houghton et al., 2013). Therefore, I made myself aware by acknowledging factors such as the role I had in this study, the limits of my knowledge, alongside recognising and identifying the source of my values and biases (e.g. personal interest and/or experience) (Bolton, 2010; Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Pillow, 2003; Trainor & Graue, 2013). Reflexivity in feminist approach invites other voices be openly heard while challenging researcher's knowledge claims. In addition, I kept questioning myself and re-checking with my participants about what I had collected through data collection to make sure they feel represent freely what they said and/or what have collected is a truthful record. I also applied rechecking to validate if I understood and interpreted their thoughts correctly and evaluating my aims and conceptions honestly. Given this, I prepared and kept a procedural note for the research code and discipline. In that note, I consistently recapped myself to be aware who am I and why do I

choose this particular topic for my research, what are the intentions, how do I collect the information, is there any confusion, how do I interpret the data, is there any clarification needed, etc. (Shaw, 2010). Reflexivity also helped me to become aware of my limitations as researcher being an Iranian immigrant well educated woman myself and how this would have impacted the interpretation of my findings. Reflexivity helped me to collect accurate data which also assisted me in interpreting the findings, while paying careful attention to my bias and pre-conceptions (Houghton et al., 2013).

Despite the advantages and disadvantages related to both the insider and outsider research position, I attempted to offer a “researcher continuum” which explores the degree to which I might be called a native or stranger (Eghbal, 2009; Sprague, 2005). With this awareness, I hope to have used the best possible aspects of both roles (outside and insider researcher) to inform and enhance this research experience and its findings. Holding such a unique position in this research gave me the opportunity to understand and appreciate what the women had to say.

In addition, the approach used in this research is supported by many feminist researchers such as Asselin (2003), Acker (2000), and Cresswell (2013). Acker, for example, concludes that the insider/outsider question may not be fully resolved, however a researcher should be creative enough to attempt to find a way to marry both positions by managing the implied tension.

Reflecting on my understanding of participants’ thoughts during the data collection and analysis, Houghton et al. (2013) assisted me in minimising any misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their ideas. For example, the interview notes were either provided to participants for further validation and data triangulation, or were shared verbally with the women during the data interpretation.

3.9 Research Aims and Questions

Feminists believe that questions that address a social problem tend to outline what concerns the individual who experiences the problem, rather than looking at the issue of the social policy that is the likely cause of the problem. In this study, the questions give emphasis to members of disadvantaged groups, their experiences, challenges and/or their possible solutions promoting social policy/strategic reforms. The research questions are:

- 1) From a female perspective, and considering their educational background, what are the general challenges facing educated female Iranian immigrants in Canada who might also be seeking work in their professional area of expertise?
- 2) How, in the view of IIEW can (or do) HE organisations assist women to overcome these challenges?

The first research question investigates the potential challenges experienced by highly educated Iranian women in their new country, Canada (e.g. social challenges, educational encounters, occupational issues). However, in terms of the general challenges and as the literature review demonstrates, it seems there is a clear connection between educated immigrant women and work-related challenges which have emerged in previous studies and field research (Graham, Atkey, Reeves, & Goldberg, 2009; Hojati, 2012; King, 2012; Kustec, 2012; Naghdi, 2010; Oreopoulos, 2011). The second question refers to HE organisations. The latter, in this research, refers to any post-secondary educational and teaching/learning environment in the higher education system which awards degrees. Consequently, the second question in this study examines the way HE organisations can provide additional support to immigrant women facing certain challenges. The research questions aim to raise awareness by focusing principally on describing reality from the perspective of those who have traditionally been excluded, not only

as knowledge producers, but including those who might benefit from the research (Cresswell, 2013).

3.10 Conclusion

This research focuses on IIEW's challenges in Canadian society and its HE system. In this research I benefited from the feminist standpoint theories which argue that feminist social science should consider the perspective of female research participants (Hartsock, 1983). As theorised by Hartsock, feminist theory argues that a feminist perspective should be built on an understanding of "women's experience" and points of view based on their positionality. Indeed, and as explained earlier, feminist ontology theorises the symbiosis of the body, mind and emotions (Lawson, 2003; McWeen, 2014; Stanley & Wise, 1993). McWeen argues that, unlike some other approaches, feminist ontology defines connections, interconnections, and coalitions that go beyond women's bodies while underlining the importance of the cultural/political context (Mikkola, 2011; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Sveinsdóttir, 2011; Whitbeck, 1984). Based on this vision supporting this study's point of view, I used anti-racist and anti-sexist principles (Carpenter et al., 2013; Dossa, 2009; Oreopoulos, 2011; Thobani, 2007).

As mentioned in earlier sections, using a feminist lens has an advantage over any other social research approach as it defines and analyses the "social fact" from the perspective of women and their experiences, which is quite different from the "constructed social fact" (Sprague, 2005). Many feminists believe that social science knowledge is generally shaped and influenced by factors such as presumed gender roles, social power, cultural standards, race and ethnicity in a male-dominated society (Bolden, 2014; Bodwitch, 2014; Moghadam, 1988). Using a feminist epistemology via a gender lens helps in furthering social change (Sprague, 2005; Cree et al., 2009) while uncovering IIEW's experiences and narratives in this study assists in understanding

women's challenges and consequently helps to solve their issues in Canadian society as well as identifying problems emerging from the Canadian HE system. Indeed, job-related and educational challenges appear to be connected as some of the literature discusses (Graham et al., 2009; King, 2012; Kustec, 2012; Naghdi, 2010; Oreopoulos, 2011).

In anti-racist and anti-sexist theory using a feminist view has helped this research to look at the given phenomena from different angles. Supported by these instruments, the study research intends to provide accurate findings and interpretations whilst giving a public voice to immigrant women in order to reveal the challenges this group faces. What is evident in the aforementioned theories is the idea that immigration and immigrants' rights are most definitely a feminist issue (Wayland, 2006). Supported by feminist theory, this study aims to generate awareness while also giving women a voice in the public sphere as well as in their private lives.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY DESIGN, METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND DATA

ANALYSIS PROCESS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design from a theoretical perspective, while this chapter considers the qualitative methodology used to address the research questions. The chapter then progresses through the following sections: methodology, research design and its method, data collection methods (questionnaires followed by in-depth interviews), and the reasons for choosing this method. Moving forward, ethical issues and its procedure, and the issue of confidentiality as parts of this chapter will be introduced. Data analysis using a thematic approach is then outlined. The subject of using triangulation strategy in this study will also be delineated as the last section before closing the chapter with the conclusion piece.

4.2 Methodology, Research Design and the Research Method

4.2.1 Qualitative Method

Deploying a theoretical feminist view in this study, I have used qualitative methods in the overall research design. While a quantitative method has its advantages, such as allowing direct data comparison or conducting large scale research, feminist research critiques quantitative methodology for its use of standardised measures (Bolden, 2014; Creese et al., 2009; Trainor & Graue, 2013). The process and the results of a quantitative study, according to feminist research, threaten the reliability and validity of the data generated. In this interpretation, repeated use of recorded data from previous studies and/or the outcome based on a quantitative research method does not provide adequate and accurate deep analysis as does qualitative research (Kesler & McKenna, 1978) given that there is no entirely reliable way to collect and analyse data in any

given research process (Berger, 2013; Trainor & Graue, 2013). In this study, I rely principally on a qualitative research method due to its emphasis on face-to-face interactions and intensive relationships, while data analysis is used to describe the phenomena in a direct way (Darawsheh, 2014; Sandelwoski, 2000; Yardley, 2008). Guided by Kirby's (2006) methodology using a social feminist approach, this study examines the issues associated with this researcher's involvement with the research participants and the importance of "women's voices" (Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013; Trainor & Graue, 2013; Darawsheh, 2014).

Using a feminist lens alongside ethnography as the study methodology has meant choosing over many other qualitative approaches such as Grounded Theory (GT), namely an inductive and comparative method for the purpose of constructing theory (Strauss, & Corbin, 2008). The phenomenographic approach, on the other hand for example, centred on variations of experience while not exploring information based on individualised variations (Fallahi & Monavaryan, 2008; Bowden, 2005). That said, phenomenography focuses on how people observe, experience, and understand the same phenomena (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, & Pang, 2008), while in feminist view, additional attention is given to women who may experience different phenomena with similar and/or different experience more widely (e.g. social and educational challenges).

One may note that there are many similarities between the above mentioned qualitative approaches and ethnography approach. For example, both of the above allow for social expression, are considered as forms of explanatory research, avoid making assumptions, encourage creativity, gather rich data, systematically generate theory and result in unrestrained assumptions (Myers, 2009).

However, they have some dissimilarities in relation to the feminist view with ethnography approaches. For instance, Allan (2003) critiques GT as he claims the approach suggests that researchers use only one data source, usually an interview method. He continues that GT asks researchers to write and complete the literature review after collecting and/or finishing the study findings (Allen, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). That said, and as opposed to GT, the feminist view appreciates the researcher's freedom to choose diverse techniques, creativities, and methods in conducting research. Indeed, one of the advantages of adopting ethnography approach, as McWeen (2014) argues, is that researchers are free to choose or combine suitable methodologies in his/her study (e.g. I opted for a questionnaire method followed by interviews due to the nature of my study). In a similar vein, considering the researcher's cultural background and work-related experiences, the researcher benefited from both positions an insider and outsider, simultaneously.

Another significant characteristic is the political approach, which suggests that choosing women study participants not only means the researcher is actively engaged but also helps to develop participant-based narratives and solutions (similar to GT and phenomenography), thereby assisting the given researcher to change both their own and other women's lives. In short, GT is designed to build theories from the ground up, while the feminist together with ethnography approach is additionally and more profoundly interested in understanding IIEW's experiences. In comparison with phenomenography, this study is not concerned with exploring how women build their meanings and understandings regarding a given fact, issue or topic, but rather wants to understand their experience using a gender-focussed lens (Bolden, 2014; Creese et al., 2009; Mcween, 2014; Moghadam, 1988).

4.3 Collecting Data

4.3.1 Why is a Questionnaire Followed by an In-depth Interview?

To gain meaningful information for the data and to capture all relevant information, I did not depend on a single method to collect the data. In order to gather accurate data, I included a questionnaire and then conducted in-depth interviews to ensure that the data were able to show, or bring to the surface, significant issues among IIEW.

It is worth noting that I have also chosen the methods cited above in order to allow adequate space for my research participants to express themselves and to raise their voices on two different but complementary occasions. Therefore, 1) I first set up a session for each participant to answer both the closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire. I provided the study participants with a set of open questions and conceived these in a particular order and based on diverse themes (Clarke, 2006; Houghton et al., 2013; Roschelle et al., 2010; Trainor & Graue, 2013). This is the reason why this research included some direct questions, namely to reach an accurate and focused answer (close-ended questions) while I provided a set of indirect questions to generate more personal and introspective feedback (open-ended questions). While I acknowledge some limitations regarding using questionnaires (e.g. the possibility of low responses rates, misunderstood questions, various meanings behind given responses, etc.), I also believe the benefits (e.g. possibility of a large number of respondents, time saving, simple to code, etc.) outweigh the limitations as each research method has its own pros and cons. In order to obtain the most data from participants' thoughts and perspectives, I also chose to use in-depth interviews.

Following the data collection, one-to-one face-to-face follow-up interviews were made up of open-ended questions, which also assisted me in collecting research data that was unintentionally missed in the research questionnaire. Therefore, the purpose of using this method was twofold. Firstly, it gave my participants the possibility to express any thoughts they had not previously shared (for any reason), and secondly, it provided an opportunity for me to individually debrief each participant, verify my data with the participants, and collect missing data. In addition, I organized some notes immediately after I collected my data. I believe a qualitative research method was more appropriate for this form of analysis as it has a deeper approach to information; it is also more flexible, subjective and less strict or fixed in orientation compared to a quantitative approach (Kirby et al., 2006; Patton, 2015).

4.3.2 Sampling Data Collection Procedure/Participants and Recruitment Process

I attempted to expand the data collection by including items related to at least 10 participants (both for the questionnaire and the interview). As suggested by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), I believe this can be considered a sufficient number to collect data saturation from participants whilst also being able to manage the data over a limited time period.

The participants in this study were all females, ranged in age from 25 to 55, they have diverse marital status, hold HE degrees from Canada or Iran, and are fluent in English. They had enrolled at a Canadian college or university as a means of entering the labour market, while some of them are still enrolled at university in order to update, upgrade or to continue their HE (7 in total) and others (3) decided to take up different jobs. Since the participants entered Canada at different periods (2005 to 2011), some of them have received their citizenship as permanent

resident immigrants, while others are still waiting to reach that point. They are all legal permanent immigrants in Canada.

At the time of conducting the research, most of the participants had resided in Canada for approximately four years, at the most eight years. These elements enabled me to generate an adequate range of data, both in terms of quantity and quality. This study recruited participants using a sampling procedure by advertising the research project in English in public places.

It is noteworthy that prior to placing the research advertisement at SUCCESS (Services to the Community), the Vancouver Multicultural Society, Persian stores and in public libraries in areas where the Persian community principally resides such as North Vancouver, West Vancouver and Coquitlam, I contacted the head of these organizations to receive their consent. To ensure confidentiality and to collect accurate data, I decided to avoid interviewing people that I knew directly or who had any kind of personal or professional relationship with me. As I mentioned earlier, the intention of this study was to select 10 IIEW in order to explore their life challenges in Canadian society.

Table n. 1: Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Age	Year of Migration	Educational /Professional Background	Marital Status	Canadian HE	Current Occupation
#1	27	2005	Electronic Eng.	Single mother	Yes	Babysitter
#2	43	2006	Family doctor	No info.	Yes	Volunteer at Senior Care Services
#3	42	2011	Family doctor	Married	Yes	Unemployed
#4	35	2007	Pharmacist	Married	Yes	Student / McDonalds Services
#5	35	2008	Dentist	Married	Yes	Dentist Business Owner
#6	48	2007	Dermatologist	Married	Yes	Hair Removal Centre
#7	29	2010	Physiotherapist	No info.	Yes	Food Store Cashier
#8	39	2010	Electronic Eng.	No info.	Yes	Carpet Industry Designer
#9	50	2011	Family doctor	No info.	Yes	Volunteer at Senior Care Services
#10	36	2011	Civil Eng.	Single mother	Yes	Real Estate

It is necessary to explain that I received very positive feedback after placing the first advertisement in the initial location. Although Silverman (2005) argues that making contact with participants is not as easy as it looks, it was quite the opposite in this study since I received many phone calls right after placing the very first advertisement in a Persian grocery store in North Vancouver (three IIEW on the same day). In less than a week, I had been contacted by up to 12 individuals who were qualified based on the research design's inclusion criteria (e.g. all women, aged 25-50, with at least one post- secondary degree from Iran). I made a note of their information and organised some time slots to meet with them in person. On the other hand, in order to have additional research participants in case of withdrawals, I made further arrangements with three other women over the phone. I never met with the women on this alternative contact list, however, after collecting the study data I called them to express my sincere appreciation and thanks. The positive feedback the research participants provided highlighted for me the need to conduct such research.

4.3.3 Data Collection Process

For data collection I prepared a focused questionnaire (closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire) one on one followed by separate interview questions based on each participant's location and availability in an individual session, in order to meet in convenient libraries or coffee shops and based on participant's time availability. Therefore, in some cases all the data collection accrued on the same day while some other participants preferred different days. I consider the women's desire to not be tape recorded as rooted in Iranian women's past experience (e.g. fear of being threaten, being investigated and as practiced by the Iranian government). Throughout the historical social and private privations experienced by Iranian women in Iran (e.g. limited access to social media, inadequate available sources for conducting

and participating freely in academic research), women have not had the chance to elaborate their thoughts and experiences and, as such, this was a significant factor for the women's reluctance to be recorded. Also, they may have had some fears that the information might be leaked to political interests in Iran, although in the ethical form I clarified that this would not be the case. Therefore, the women's lack of experience of situations similar to those of this study and due to the earlier limitations experienced during the Iranian Islamic revolution (Ebadi, 2006) (such as the lack of freedom to express their own thoughts and share narratives), may have influenced their decision on this matter.

That said, I was flexible enough to manage the sessions by taking notes and assessing their feedback and emotions. To be fast and accurate enough, I organised the handwriting and collected notes – including any notes that I took and/or any symbols that I used – and pulled them together and decoded them quickly after each session. As mentioned earlier, all the women were fluent in English and as such the research process took place in English both during the interviews and even in my note taking. It is noteworthy to state that all the women in this study had required to have their intermediate/upper intermediate English degree prior to entering Canada as part of their migration policy. The term “fluent” in English is described here according with the level of these certificates between intermediate and upper intermediate.

Speaking and writing in English was required from the very first contact, thereby all the women participating were aware of this requirement when I first reached out to them, and this continued to be the case throughout all the research work. In fact, they all willingly spoke and wrote in English and none of them used Farsi in their contact with me. Using the official research language (English) from the beginning helped me to avoid possible confusion or extra work such

as ensuring accurate translations. Collecting interview data using notes helped me to describe the participants' words or reflections while interpreting them simultaneously.

In the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study such as this one, Bogdan and Bilken (1998) stress that “analyzing involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p.157). The course of data collection was an ongoing procedure, one that was processed throughout the entire study which started with the use of a coding system. Consequently, and as many researchers have recommended (Cohen et al., 2007), I initiated the data analysis process soon after collecting the data. Therefore, I attempted to review all the ideas, strategies, experiences, body language and expressions, hunches, repeated thoughts and patterns, feedback and reflections that emerged during my interactions with participants during the data collection process (Kirby et al., 2006).

This method of ethnographic helped me to play my researcher role in a professional way; not only as an external observer but also as an insider researcher who was very much embedded into the stories of participants because linked with my own personal life and story. Consequently, using questionnaire and then interviews afterwards helped me to double check participants' views and to observe this process as an outsider and insider simultaneously.

Since the data in this qualitative study was gathered from a questionnaire and interview instruments, I have utilised codes (e.g. simple words, short phrases, symbols and even numbers) to summarise and capture the most salient aspects of the data derived from interviews and discussions (Gribich, 2007). I created a face code to categorise the findings for a pleasant experience (☺), challenging situation (: /) and for unpleasant experiences (☹). Following

Bogdan and Bilken (2003) and Gribich (2007), I started by coding my notes from the questionnaires and interviews. This process began by breaking the information down from the start of the primary analysis. In the very fundamental analysis stage, for example, when I was checking back with each individual separately to ensure the participants knew they retained the right to modify my interpretations of what I understood from their narratives, I then developed a list of interpretive themes and sub themes based on checking my understanding of the information the participants shared with me. This technique helped me to break down and detail accurate interpretations when developing the study findings. The coding process helped me to develop and expand the data interpretation whilst categorising similar themes together (Cohen et al., 2007). Another advantage of conducting this process was the fact that the process prevented me from misunderstanding and/or misinterpreting the women's voices.

All of the participants (10 women) reviewed their thoughts, and many of them (six individuals) edited their notes or revised and/or clarified my interpretations of their thoughts. As explained earlier, the women had given their consent to the researcher for making a note. For instance, one of the participants (no. 9) changed the note from being "feeling lonely" to "feeling isolated" when I described her relative enthusiasm about working with Canadian seniors. In some cases, I had to edit some of the women's language, thus identifying more appropriate word choices or just indicating how angry or upset they were, in relation to the Canadian HE system. In these cases, the attempt was made to retain the definition and conception of the women's voices with particular attention paid to their emotional expressions such as frustration, anger, happiness or feelings of upset etc. It should note that – and while following the feminist research approach – I did my best to ensure that the research participants were as comfortable as possible, while providing them with a space where they were able to express their views and feelings. A feeling

of liberation in terms of sharing their unshared stories and experiences willingly was one of the examples of common positive feedback shared by the women in this study. Without the women's openness and cooperation, this study would not be able to offer such rich and complex data.

4.4 Ethical Issues/Procedures

This study has followed the ethical proscriptions required by the University of Liverpool's ethics approval processes. As underlined by Kirby's (2006) model and method, many other researchers in the field respect and follow ethical frameworks (Houghton et al., 2013; Roschelle et al., 2014; Trainor & Graue, 2013), and as required by the University of Liverpool, I ensured that the study and data collection procedures received ethical approval from the University of Liverpool before any data gathering began. In this study, therefore, I followed step by step the ethical proscriptions required by the University of Liverpool's ethics approval processes. I believed the various shapes and templates provided useful insight into research at this academic level. For instance, I sought and obtained approval through the University of Liverpool ethics approval letter, and forwarded the consent forms to research participants (which they were required to sign) well in advance. Meanwhile, I explained the research goals to all potential participants. I also let the research participants know that their contribution to this research was valuable and entirely voluntary. As researchers believe, ethical codes and actions must span the entire research process and, as such, must also include their involvement in this research steps such as recruitment, interviewing, collecting data, analysing data, interpreting findings, comparing the results and/or sharing data (Kirby et al., 2006). Use of a feminist approach to working with the research participants helped me also when, one of the women during one of the individual interview sessions, felt uncomfortable and cried. Considering ethical procedures, following the feminist approach and relying on my professional background as a clinical psychologist, I could

coach the situation to help and support another fellow woman to overcome her emotional circumstances. The idea of such an approach brought positive weight into my study and it well connect with the Feminist perspective of supporting women and empowering them.

4.5 Anonymity and Confidentiality

In this research, the procedures and analysis/write-up plan includes many measures to ensure that participants' identities are not directly or indirectly disclosed. The shared information and research results were kept confidential and anonymous. In other words, the data is, was and will be stored securely with adequate provisions observed to maintain confidentiality. The consent form and any related information, therefore, were and will be documented and saved on a personal computer with a secure password. The data will also be stored on a password-protected computer/laptop. The written documentation and files are stored in a locked cabinet. The information will be stored for five years, and it may be published while retaining participant anonymity. That said, numbers were immediately attached to real participants' names and data were collected and analysed using this new classification system in order to make participants' names immediately unrecognisable and confidential. The participants' names and contact information were destroyed after the data collection process ended.

4.6 Thematic Strategy as an Analytic Tool

The data analysis in this research is based on "thematic analysis" (Kirby et al., 2006). Thematic strategy is an analytic instrument which allows a researcher to be systematically precise while undertaking qualitative analysis. Since the main focus of this study is to reveal individuals' beliefs, experiences, narratives and perceptions, the data collection was based on questionnaires and interviews. Applying thematic analysis (Coffey, 1999; Kirby et al., 2006; Whitehead, 2004)

during this research helped me to summarise and categorise the themes encountered in the data collection. The study's thematic approach assisted in organising the data collected on different levels by unearthing the salient themes (Cresswell 1994, 2013) in the women's shared experiences. In a thematic approach, researchers read and re-read the data, identify themes, code those themes, and subsequently interpret the organised data's contents (e.g. Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

This model of analysis alongside Whitehead's (2004) helped me to undertake data reduction in a more strategic way, since qualitative data was segmented, recognised, categorised, summarised and constructed in a way that captured the significant concepts of a data set. To do so, I underlined the words, concepts or ideas from both the questionnaire and each participant's interview, and selected the key information in order to categorise the data individually while subsequently interlinking it with other data.

4.7 The Data Coding Process

Since this research follows a qualitative design, the study pays sustained attention to how participants interpret their personal experience and/or social reality and how they interweave certain aspects (e.g. race and ethnicity, gender, class), therefore there are no right or wrong answers (Kirby et al., 2006, p.221). The first step of data analysis, as Kirby et al. (2006) suggest, is reviewing and referring to the data continuously, which is also known as a "back and forth" process whereby researchers make sense of the collected information (p.219). Securing the data as explained above was the next significant rung in this process. Keeping, filing and protecting the accumulated data, places both the study participants and the researcher in a secure position. The next step of the process, in order to analyse the accumulated research data, was the coding

stage which involved arranging the information in a systematic order and classifying/ categorising it accordingly; a thematic method described by Gribich (2007). She states that this strategy of data coding and recoding allows the accumulated data to be “segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanations” (p.21).

Following Gribich’s (2007) approach to coding the study data, I assigned a particular word or very short phrase to any salient or essential information during the data collection process. These categories included versions such as the language used (during the interview), emotional attribution or body language (while sharing their experience), and/or word stresses in their notes (questionnaire transcripts). Therefore, I applied this form of “descriptive code” (Gribich, 2007). For example, I was looking for the emphasis a participant used when sharing a personal experience such as a racist incident (in terms of verbal dialogue), looking for a particular word or words in the participant’s notes, such as using the word “they” to refer to Canadian individuals, as well as the level of emotion expressed, such as crying during this research’s data collection.

Categorising the study data was the next step in analysing the findings. The research list of words for classifying the findings was based on the repetition of certain ideas as well as the concepts used. I also included the signs and/or symbols a given participant had used during the interviews in order to be as accurate as possible. I have used an individual symbol to record receipt of positive feedback about a particular question from each of the women and have also used a different symbol if she evidenced any additional interest regarding a certain subject. As one may note, the coding process occurred both during and after data collection, the latter for the purpose of data analysis.

To ensure accuracy, I checked my notes repeatedly (Gribich, 2007; Kirby et al., 2006), and itemised the information collected based on thematic exploration, sorting it into different parts and categories to ensure that each type made sense and was relevant to the wider research project. Subsequently, I considered the related information which shared the same or similar aims, ordering them based on commonalities and differences, thereby establishing a relationship by linking them via a sub-theme. Sub-themes, therefore, were detailed, named and developed based on the information related to each other, and under a similar theme (see chapter 5).

4.8 Themes and Sub-themes in Data Analysis

Bernard and Ryan (2010) suggest that analysing the research findings involves identifying “patterns in data” and to identify ideas that help explain why (or why not) those same patterns are there in the first place (similarities and differences). Therefore, the research organised the modified data, although already manageable, into themes to ensure that each theme made sense and has a relation to and was aligned with the overall research (Kirby et al., 2006), hence the themes emerged from the entire data set. At this stage, I attempted to be selective in terms of choosing important information that would help to answer the research questions. Accordingly, the data was simplified, abstracted and transferred from the women’s interview notes, questionnaire answers, as well as from my notes and observations during the data collection process. The process helped me to organise the study findings and thereby construct themes. The intention was to identify a central concept/theme, then to add the issues that participants considered as important while raising new and emerging themes and sub-themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

In the practical version I applied, I first repeatedly reviewed and re-read the study notes, questionnaires and a reduced version of the study notes. Building themes, I indicated and linked the data information based on the similarities and differences of participants' chosen words/vocabularies (in both instruments) and gathered them into a phrase or paragraph that could help me to identify significant themes.

4.9 Triangulation Strategy

The process and results of this qualitative study were undertaken in line with the feminist research approach and its construction of validity (Darawsheh, 2014; Kirby et al., 2006; Robson, 2002; Trainor & Graue, 2013). Validity refers to the “truth” before, during and after conducting any academic studies. Robson (2002) understands validity as “what is observed or measured is the same as what was purported to be observed or measured” (p.533). In addition, Robson (2002, 2011) suggests that validity may be designed differently based on the nature of the study, therefore the researcher might use different instruments during the course of a qualitative research study, such as considering a triangulation strategy in order to ensure validity.

Triangulation, as Cresswell and Miller delineate it, is “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (2000, p.126). As such, and in order to enhance the quality and the credibility of data analysis (Patton, 2015; Houghton et al., 2013), I utilised two instruments to develop knowledge and sustain the validity of my research outcomes (namely a semi-structured questionnaire which included closed and open-ended questions, and a series of in-depth interview questions), adding the literature as a third resource. Employing a triangulation technique, as Houghton et al. (2013) suggest, is a key way to promote credibility, assure the validation of the

study findings, while helping to elaborate on them. Patton suggests using multiple triangulation methods and sources of data while “comparing and cross-checking” through follow-up (2015, p. 665). Although the number of participants may appear a limitation, it helped me to increase the findings’ in-depthness. Additionally, to ensure the collection of sufficient data, I carefully, listened and interpreted participants’ thoughts while analysing and sorting the findings more prudently. For example, reviewing my understanding of the participants’ shared thoughts in the data analysis helped to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpreting their ideas. Therefore, the interview notes were either provided to participants for further validation and data triangulation, or were shared verbally with the women during the data interpretation. For that reason, the main intention was to involve the women’s voices at every step of the research while further validating the findings.

In a similar vein, and according to Ellis and Bochner (2000), validity means that the work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own (p.751).

While the traditional definition of reliability delineates the term as a way to determine trustworthiness in qualitative research, Robson (2011) cautions that reliability may be an inappropriate concept as the results of any qualitative research are variable for the same research. Indeed, other researchers in similar studies may come to the same or different results while conducting such a research project with a different group but within the same subject area.

The analysis of the existing literature also helped in order to additionally triangulate the data. Considering such cautions endorsed by many researchers (Robson, 2011; Kirby et al., 2006) this process has assisted me in identifying a link between this study’s findings and the existing

literature. Therefore, it is noteworthy that reviewing the literature was not limited to the beginning of this study, since I also examined the literature related to the study's subject, themes or sub-themes at later stages. Indeed, this process helped me in the conclusion to compare and contrast the study findings with the existing research. However, this will be discussed extensively in the concluding chapter.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained how I chose to collect the research data based on questionnaires and in-depth interviews while using a qualitative ethnographic approach. Since the methodological framework in this research focuses on the creation of new knowledge, I endeavoured to be open to any and all unexpected data that arose from the research. One of the primary concerns of the work was to consider the ethical issues that might arise during the study. Understanding the accumulated data is the next part of the research journey after its collection, recording and storage and organisation. The study benefited from a thematic strategy (Coffey, 1999; Whitehead, 2004), an analytic instrument that permitted me to be accurate and organised throughout this qualitative analysis. I utilised thematic analysis due to its suitability for this research, and given its accuracy to identify themes and sub-themes. I also provided information about how I coded and identified the research findings step by step. In this chapter, I have also elucidated how I chose different themes and sub-themes to categorise the information in order to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The section addresses the research questions by pinpointing some of the main challenges IIEW face in Canadian society or their educational environment. These questions are:

- 1) From a female perspective, and considering their educational background, what are the general challenges facing educated female Iranian immigrants in Canada who may (or may not) be seeking work in their professional area of expertise?
- 2) How, in the view of IIEW can (or do) HE organisations assist women to overcome these challenges?

Answering the second question helps me to design a more focused sub-question considering how the quality of the HE services provided to immigrant women assist in overcoming these challenges

I outline these challenges by categorising them under “Women’s Challenges in Canada”. The subthemes include “Economic Security/Seeking Work and Employment”, “English Language Barriers (Self-Reported English Language Abilities) and HE Support Services”, “Academic Credits”, “Recognition: Challenge of Continuing Education and the Issue of Job Finding”, “Educational Counsellors/Advisors in Canadian HE”, “Academic Orientation Sessions”, and “Feeling out of Place”. Furthermore, the data analysis is not limited to the research’s planned questions. In some cases, unexpected observations, questions or information became the object of analysis. In many cases, I tried to include different quotations from the women in order to offer readers the means to forge a direct understanding of the women’s situation. By sharing the women’s discourses, the reader of this dissertation has an opportunity to independently judge, critique and evaluate the analysis of the findings (Reinharz, 1992; Nencel, 2014).

By using this approach, I mean to convey a wide spectrum of those challenges embedded in the social and educational aspects of women's lives in Canada. Some of these challenges are related principally to trials they encounter in the HE environment, such as difficulties in academic contexts and/or any issues connected with educational concerns. From this main theme, I also collected data and perspectives on how HE organisations might assist educated women in overcoming these obstacles, which in turn addresses the second research question. Identifying the women's challenges demonstrates that both the social and educational encounters related in this study are interlinked, regardless of time and/or location.

This chapter also provides some overview reintroducing the challenges that participants commonly encountered and shared on their journeys while engaging with the literature in order to discuss the contribution made by this dissertation. This chapter also provides a critical discussion of IIEW's challenges in Canada in general and regarding HE in particular. Challenges and HE actions are connected with both the literature as well as the study's theoretical perspectives.

5.2 Women's Challenges in Canada

5.2.1 Economic Security/Seeking Work and Employment

This sub-theme discusses the findings relating to female professionals being disappointed in terms of being able or unable to find employment especially in the academic environment. A dominant theme in the scholarship and university websites is the need for a strong portfolio on the part of potential applicants, such as academic references, a high Grade Point Average (GPA), related work and educational experience, and other prerequisites for meeting certain job requirements or gaining admission to continuing education (Hojati, 2012; Oreopoulos, 2011). The data indicate that the

women provided details that they held the necessary qualifications for given employment positions, and they exhibited disappointment in different ways when they failed to secure these positions. Some of them simply gave up, thereby avoiding facing more challenges in their new lives in Canada, while others tried to initiate new paths (e.g. undertaking volunteer work as an alternative).

Consequently, and as the findings in this study demonstrate, socioeconomic conditions appear to be an important issue for all participants. Many of the women not only have to find a job to survive, they also have to study a different subject area in order to secure an unrelated job role. One of the participants (no. 8, questionnaire) states that “after many years of studying and working experience, I still have to take different courses to keep my current job [software designer at a carpet company] secured”. She added, “While I have a deep passion to learn new things, I really don’t know till when I should keep studying unrelated subjects to keep my current job”.

Alongside such challenges, gaining access to the employment system poses its own difficulties for IIEW. Childcare expenses, family commitments, and their particular family dynamic in Canada (i.e. parental or marital status), results in different experiences which may pose even more personal challenges. One of the single mothers (Participant 1, interview) stated: “I can barely find an Iranian woman who finds her exact suitable job in Canada [...] no, can’t recall anybody that I know of”.

Participant 9 (interview) articulated her challenges, remarking that:

I am always thinking whether I made the right decision moving here [Canada] or not. When I look at my educational and vocational history in Iran and compare it with now, not sure how long can I endure this way.

It seems, having to find a suitable job related to their educational background is a substantial challenge for these Iranian women. One of the women who looks after her own child while taking many additional courses said:

I ended up with babysitting other “White” [emphasis on native individuals] employees’ kids [Canadian] with \$15,000 debt to B.C. government [...] it does ring a bell to me as many other Iranian women have the same job like me. Why I have to take care of “White” kids you can guess they are all Canadian employees, right? Isn’t it interesting to have a highly educated women babysitter for your kid? (Participant 1, interview).

As we may note, finding a suitable job related to an IIEW’s educational background is not an easy task for many of the women in this study. As stated in this interview excerpt, the woman has to stay home and provide childcare to the Canadian (White) families she describes. Even though almost all the women in this study complained about their individual challenges in different situations, on an optimistic note, one participant (no. 5), who was studying dentistry and worked in her own office, seemed to be pleased about her job position and social status.

As the findings in this study demonstrate, economic security and finding suitable work is a significant challenge many IIEW struggled with, which somehow deprived them of other important desires in their personal lives such as continuing their careers in HE.

According to the findings, socio-economic conditions are a recurring issue and were raised by the majority of the participants (9/10). Childcare expenses, family commitments, educational expenses, transportation issues and the level of family dependency Iranian women experience (i.e. parental status, marital status, etc.) result in challenges that mark their new economic life in Canada. Additionally, the findings reveal that many of the women not only have to find a job to survive, but also have to study a different subject area in order to secure an unrelated job by

undertaking additional training and education, which involves time management, expense and energy.

Alongside such challenges, the findings illustrate that access to the employment system has its own difficulties for IIEW since there is no guarantee that these women will even get an unrelated job (i.e. a job unrelated to the woman's educational background or vocational experience) and thereby recoup their financial expenditure.

Research by Hojati (2012) shows that visible minorities such as immigrant women earn lower incomes compared to non-immigrant women. The women in this study experienced similar dynamics and as a result of such experiences, some of them have struggled with unemployment, and have occupied themselves by volunteering (3/10) or are engaged in occupations unrelated to their educational backgrounds (6/10).

Additionally, due to lacking a recognised degree, Iranian women's educational backgrounds are not fully acknowledged in Canada and for this reason it is more difficult for them to find jobs based on their existing educational qualifications. Therefore, the transferability of international credentials among immigrants "who received their training in regions other than Europe, Australia and North America" is rather marked, hence they "generally had lower education-job match rates" (Chui, 2011, p.21). As a consequence, and according to many Canadian employers, the education-job match rate of internationally trained immigrants – and not only among native and immigrant women – was lower, but it is also less than their male counterparts (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008).

These experiences are reflected in recent research that echo the participants' comments (Bell, 2010; Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 2008; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Hojati, 2012), showing that although

the women are educated individuals, finding work related to their educational background was very difficult. Also, they had been offered work largely unrelated to their background and experience. In turn, the outcome of this study is supported by feminist views regarding economic-related gender roles. The discipline of economics testifies to women's oppression in terms of their economic life in general (Bolden, 2014) and highlights immigrant women's financial shortfalls in particular (Guo, 2010, 2015). In other words, entering and living in Canada has its own challenges, some of which are due to English language barriers and a lack of recognition of IIEW's educational background, which as a consequence results in income-related issues.

5.2.2 English Language Barriers (Self-Reported English Language Abilities) and HE Support Services

One factor which appears to be central to the research findings, concerns English language skills. Many IIEW considered their English language abilities as a requirement in order to access Canada. All participants have passed a number of English language tests and some have taken additional comprehensive English language assessments, either voluntarily or based on personal and professional needs (e.g. continuing education). In addition, for the purposes of both the migration process to Canada and face-to-face English language conversation assessments, they have also been interviewed by a Canadian immigration officer in an exclusively English language context. Nevertheless, and as many of the women in this study shared, when it is time to use their English language skills in university classroom environments, most of them hesitated. One of the respondents, who is an electronic engineer and works in the carpet industry as a digital designer, stated:

One of the main challenges during my study at Canadian university [*] was about my English conversation [...]. It may be my Persian accent [...]. I am really good at writing, believe me [smiling proudly] I am not bragging about it but when is a time for something near an English native speaker at the classroom, I stuttered in classroom, don't have that confidence that I have in my mother tongue speaking (Participant 8, interview).

As one may note, many of the participants in this study were pleased about their English language ability, including reading and writing, although many of them (6/10) mentioned that their reading and comprehension skills were better than their speaking abilities. Almost all of them have learnt English in their homeland – Iran – and they took different English language examinations prior to entering Canada (such as English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), American College Testing (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), International English Language Testing Services (IELTS), mainly because of their academic goals, their desire to engage with the community, and in order to find a job.

That said, they also stated that their accent when speaking English seems to be one of the main reasons depriving them of social engagement and education networking opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. In another case, one of the respondents shared her experience in LPI (Language Proficiency Index) classes during her studies at a Canadian university. Participant 10 (interview) articulated:

In [the] LPI course, our mentor was using slang language to explain the subject under discussion. I did not understand him fully because he was using too much slang words and as a result, I kept asking for further explanations. I overheard one of the native students loudly said go and learn our language first and then sit here [...] I never forget that embarrassing moment [*mentioned with sadness*] but I was strong enough academically, to pass the final exam successfully, I got 92/100.

Although the woman's remarks indicated upset feelings when recalling this experience, it might suggest how many IIEW might be unaware of the language resources and services available in

their universities. While many of the women in this study seem to be uninformed regarding learning support centres and their services in their universities, those students who used the services were very pleased about receiving such support in their HE environment. One of the women stated:

When my professor in one of my minor classes placed a green label on my essay paper and asked me to visit the Learning Centre at Canadian university [*], I thought I have to redo a part of my work and was so discouraging [...] it turns out to be so encouraging as I found the facility there that I was not aware of (Participant 6, interview).

Free of charge student services that were recommended by their professor(s) were part of the learning support centres' assistance, including grammar checking, writing and similar support sessions (up to three sessions according to three participants' experiences), and these appeared to be useful and encouraging. Such centres include a variety of language skills services such as language assessments, reading skills, student success programmes, writing skills, project peer reviewing, work edits, and open discussions.

What is surprising here is that, the issue of the lack of awareness of the available support services among IIEW which seems to be a common challenge to the women's everyday life in Canada. Meanwhile, this lack of awareness may be considered as negative impacting IIEW in terms of becoming familiar with academic environment and/or services. Even though IIEW have many unmet needs in HE environments, which may potentially decrease their academic and employment success rate in Canada (see the chapter of Literature Review), there are on the other hand many supportive services available for them to succeed professionally and academically that they should seek to learn more about it.

In a nutshell, while it is true that from IIEW's perspectives learning local slang language/words alongside adjusting a Persian accent when speaking English requires time, the findings of this study simultaneously show that many of the women were unaware of existing language services in university.

Studies of IIEW indicate that many newly arrived female immigrants enrol at Canadian universities (the women in this study arrived from 2005 onwards). Many of these women attended Canadian HE institutions such as colleges or universities to retake, update or upgrade their educational qualifications or to study a new field. A factor which appears to be a key insight in the findings concerns English language skills. Almost all of the participants learned English in their homeland – Iran – and have passed different English exams prior to entering Canada, mainly in order to achieve their academic goals, engage with the community and to find jobs. As mentioned earlier, many of the IIEW participants highlighted their English language ability prior to entering Canada. The findings show that all of the women have passed English language tests, such as TOFLE, ACT and other similar comprehensive English language assessments, either voluntarily or based on their personal and professional needs (e.g. continuing education overseas).

Although many of them (6/10) cited their reading and comprehension skills as better than their speaking capacity, when it was time to practice their English language abilities in an academic environment, most of them hesitated, which contradicts their evaluation of their full spectrum language skill abilities. Indeed, the study's findings identify that, despite the competence of the educated Iranian women in relation to their academic English language qualifications and abilities, they have low levels of self-confidence in using English for the purpose of communication.

Guided by post-colonial feminist scholars (Dobrowski, 2012; Stewart, 1989; Stewart et al., 2008) and regarding the issue of low self-confidence during communicative events, women could experience significant inequalities related to gender, ethical and race differentiation, cultural distinction, and/or the challenge of migration to a new country. All of these issues can negatively impact women's self-confidence (Dobrowski, 2012) as the study data shows in a similar way, which can be considered a recognised outcome among immigrant women (Zaman, 2008).

It is noteworthy that, having reviewed the findings, the conclusions led me to introduce some reflections drawn from the psychological aspects of theories related to belongingness and integration as well as self-esteem in relation to immigrants in general. I further benefited from engaging with these theories in terms of sustaining my findings, mainly in relation to IIEW's English language skills, issues of race and/or ethnicity, and the theme of feeling out of place. In this study, and as many psychologists and researchers have defined (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1938), a sense of belonging refers to a need for social bonds and connections with other people in their respective community (e.g. in wider society, an educational environment, the workplace, etc.). Also, Sieler (1998) defines self-confidence as a feeling of the trust in one's own qualities, judgment, expectations, and self-construction, which enables/motivates a person to have a positive or realistic sense of himself/herself in potential situations that have experienced or are likely to experience. Additionally, Bandura (1986, 1997) refers to self-efficacy as encompassing beliefs about an individual's capability to learn and perform at a predictable level (e.g. a student in HE). On the same dynamic, other researchers (Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1995) believe that self-efficacy affects a student's academic motivation, learning, and achievement. Therefore, "self-efficacy is also sometimes used to refer to situations concerning specific self-confidence. Thus, academic self-confidence can be viewed as connected

to self-efficacy” (Alias & Hafir, 2009, p.1). However, as Neill (2005) articulates, “self-esteem defines as a general feeling of self-worth or self- value [...]” (p.1). In addition, Neill defines self-esteem and self-efficacy as a notion with combination of self-confidence, thereby “academic self-confidence can be viewed as self-efficacy” (main page). In similar vein, and based on Bandura (1986), self-efficacy theory is defined as a specific situation or precise condition whereby one has the self-confidence to handle a certain task.

As many studies report (Raoofi, Tan, & Chan, 2012; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010), it is important to examine immigrant women’s self-efficacy beliefs in relation to English language skills. In the present study, self-efficacy is considered in relation to English language skills as a factor impacting academic approaches, goals and progress, particularly concerning speaking and communication with other classmates and/or professors in a HE context. For example, an efficacious student (e.g. Participant 10 in this study) might believe that she has the capacity to speak and communicate in English fluently, as she mentioned. This is also probably the case as her self-efficacy and self-confidence were strong. On the other hand, she might also believe that, despite her self-perceived capability, she was unable to receive a good grade/mark in class discussions because her classmates or professor seems to be racist or may she may believe that she was unfairly treated since they simply did not like her.

Although ethnic minorities continue to experience unpleasant social distinctions among different cultural groups (Adsera & Ferrer, 2014; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Jiwani, 2006; Oreopoulos, 2011; Thobani, 1999, 2007), considering the issue of self-efficacy in this study suggests that IIEW’s experiences can be interpreted differently by a person who has low self-esteem (e.g. being

excluded from power by others with full power in terms of ethnicity, education, job opportunities, low-level salaries, and many other social components). That said, as immigrants IIEW experience differences and challenges in their new homeland (e.g. language barriers, cultural differentiations, finding jobs), and such experiences may not necessarily reflect racism but might be impacted by issues related to their own self-esteem and self-confidence as foreigners in a new land.

As one may note, self-efficacy is generally concerned with judgments about capabilities, including those feelings of self-worth that accompany belief in one's own competence (Pajares & Valiante, 2001) which, as this study's findings also reveal, is a significant issue among IIEW since they may experience low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence compared to others (in this case native Canadians) given that they are in a new country with quite a different culture, language, learning methods, and education system. While self-efficacy is related to an individual's capabilities, self-conception, on the other hand, includes the feelings of self-worth that accompany competence beliefs in a given environment, such as HE (Pajares & Valiante, 2001).

As discussed above, the present findings indicate the possible impact of the cultural distance between IIEW and Canadian natives as a significant component affecting the former's self-conception and confidence in terms of practising their English language skills (mainly orally) in an academic environment. Self-conception also refers to one's separate belief or understanding of something, such as an observation, an experience, or even a subject (Neill, 2005). Therefore, despite the fact that many IIEW discussed various unmet needs in HE environments, there were many support services available to them that were intended to help them succeed professionally and academically.

The present study suggests that there also appears to be a lack of adequate communication between immigrant students and HE, particularly since the former are not fully aware of the educational support available to them while HE do not fully communicate this to women. Similarly, many researchers (Dyck & McLaren, 2002; Eghbal, 2009; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Lum & Grabke, 2012; OECD, 2014; Suto, 2013) have identified that insufficient levels of communication – and at some points engagement – might result in this group's discouragement, thereby limiting their achievement, motivation and efforts. Additionally, a sense of belonging plays a substantial role in adult HE success. This group's potential feeling of belonging to the HE community would, in a sense, promote the level of engagement with their own community. It is true that there are a variety of educational services available to students in Canadian universities such as writing support, peer review, banking, and library services. It is also the case that immigrant students – particularly immigrant female students – are in potential need of utilising the available services and, as appears in the participants' comments, many of them are unaware of these support services. However, participants did recognise these services as helpful. Throughout the discussions I held with IIEW, what was perceived as most helpful was advanced library and IT services. Indeed, there are a variety of HE services available to all students, including immigrants, such as writing and peer review support, banking, free workshops, reading clubs, open discussions, debates, and peer study sessions. However, it is also true that immigrant students – particularly females – are in need of these services but are not fully aware of their availability as mentioned above. The issue clearly illustrates an overall lack of awareness on the part of IIEW that there are many additional HE support services available to them. For example, free of charge services for students recommended by their professors included English grammar

checking and essay writing support (up to three sessions according to three participants' experiences), which appeared to be useful and encouraging to those who attended.

In short, the research's findings show how IIEW are not aware of the services provided by HE organisations while it also reveals how many HE services exist, albeit they are inadequate.

Therefore, knowing more about the importance of the social, institutional, academic and intellectual engagement of students in Canadian society helps both IIEW and HE to achieve their mutual goals (CIC, 2012; Dunleavy & Cooke, 2010; OECD, 2014; Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2011).

5.2.3 Academic Credits Recognition: Challenge of Continuing Education and the Issue of Job Finding

In this study, foreign credentials refer to the highest degree at any post-secondary level attained by the participants outside Canada and/or their homeland. One of the principal commonalities that emerged in the questionnaire – particularly in the study's in-depth interviews – was the lack of recognition of IIEW's academic experience, as such offering little opportunity for this group to find university-level academic positions. One of the participants (no. 6, interview) observed despondently that:

I really don't understand why they [Canadian medical institutions such as hospitals and clinics] don't accept my medical profession experiences. I have devoted studying for many years and worked hard to receive where I am standing now. What are they expecting from me is somewhat redoing my study [in general] and re-accumulating my academic position experiences which I am proud of. For how long should I study? For what reason? It is just because I am a foreigner and I know that.

One of the research's findings indicates that the majority of the participants were either unable to enrol full-time at university, or were not yet able to finish their studies at Canadian universities.

The majority went to a Canadian college or university for a variety of reasons, such as to upgrade

their skills, qualifications or education, or to repeat a similar or identical programme that they had taken in Iran (7/10).

Many of them believed that the HE system in general tends to look after the financial interests of the institution rather taking care of HE needs. One respondent who has finished her studies at a renowned Canadian university with an unpaid provincial loan, stated:

My education in Canada at [*] has nothing to do with upgrading my knowledge [...] I strongly believe that the [Canadian] government is making money out of my redoing courses which I mandated to pay anyways, namely a debt to the B.C. government. (Participant 1, interview)

The same participant critiques Canadian policy makers and academia, suggesting that they ought to put immigrants' knowledge and proficiency to use in academia and provide informative classes.

In a similar vein, one of the participants, a physiotherapist who works as a cashier in a Canadian superstore, focused on the issue of access to Canadian universities. She reported: "After living about four years here in Canada, I am still confused what is the requirement of Canadian universities here in Vancouver [sighs]. Nothing is clear to me up until now [...]"

When I asked her why she was not admitted to the universities she had applied to, or what was the main hindrance to her admission process, she pointed out the dissimilarities between information on the university website and what she heard from university advisors. She continued:

Put yourself in my situation. Do you trust the universities' website or another student who is going through the same path? We rely on each other [IIEW] rather universities' websites [information]. Many of us [are] spending time and money at Canadian universities for no reason (Participant 7, interview).

Almost all the participants in this study complained that their accumulated work and educational experiences from Iran are insufficient for Canadian universities and/or for employers and, as such,

are not accepted and fully recognised. One of the participants, who is a family physician and came to Canada in 2011 (Participant 3, interview), remarked:

I have tonnes of colleagues and educated relatives who already applied or [are] applying for coming to Canada with the hope of better opportunities [...] when I advise them not to be that much positive, they suspiciously asking me why am I staying in Canada dealing with these number of challenges then!

Another woman (Participant 1, interview) mentioned: “You know how hard it would be to redo your courses once you had received a good mark for them [...]. I was preparing to continue my education, not redoing it”. When I asked her if she was informed about retaking her courses in Iran, she sarcastically continued: “All I recall is the fact that they [Canadian HE] were throwing a red carpet for me [they will be happy to have me]”. Such anticipation in women’s mind indicates that the women were not well-informed or were uninformed about the status of their academic credentials while applying for migration to Canada.

Even though a similar lack of acknowledgement of the women’s academic credentials from Iran seems to affect their job opportunities, the study considers that such challenges should not be blamed on the HE system per se. Participant 9 (interview) discussed how having an appropriate network in Canadian society matching one’s educational background would give an individual greater access to job opportunities. She stated: “if I was a Canadian, I easily could have had my right job without redoing any courses [related to my educational background] they don’t buy our foreign profession here [Canada]”.

My findings show that of those who were able to attend a university or renowned college in Canada (7/10) or renowned institutions (3/10), just one participant (1/10) was able to find a job matching her educational background and proficiency after receiving a Canadian degree. On a

positive note, one of the woman (Participant 5) received her doctoral degree in dentistry in Iran and, after redoing some courses at a Canadian university, graduated successfully with the equivalent degree.

As one may remark, many participants (if not all) seemed to have a different expectation about their credential acceptance and recognition upon arriving Canada.

As one may note, many women shared their negative experiences regarding recognition of their Iranian academic credentials. I also compared my most recent findings with CIC official website, a Canadian government department tasked with providing immigration services. Almost all the participants in this study complained that their accumulated Iranian work and educational experiences were insufficient for Canadian employers and, as such, their experiences and qualifications are not accepted and recognised, also at a HE level. Similar negative experiences in many Canadian universities were also shared regarding the women's academic credentials gained in their country of origin (Dietz et al., 2009). This study's findings indicate that individual educated immigrant women need to negotiate a variety of barriers, including the failure to have their educational credentials recognised in order to access better job opportunities or even HE.

The issues shared by the women in this study are rooted in two different aspects:

- a) Iranian degrees are poorly rated on the international measures used in Canada, therefore – and unfortunately for the women in this study – Canadian universities have a legitimate case for not recognising them as IIEW had expected;
- b) Iranian degrees are highly rated in Iran so the women's sense of injustice is legitimate.

In either case, one may note that Iranian university rankings, according to most recent online assessments, are not highly ranked. For example, the highest ranking university in Iran (i.e. Tehran

University of Medical Science) is ranked number 433 in the world (Ranking Web of Universities, 2016). That said, even though IIEW felt a sense of injustice, Canadian universities require recognised degrees with equivalent credits to ensure graduated students' highest qualifications and reputation. The assessment of the credentials of a foreign degree are processed via registered organisations based on the requirements of certain provinces and universities (Dietz et al., 2009). This study's findings show that this issue is more challenging since the assessment, surprisingly, can differ from one province to another.

The women's experiences in this study reveal that many highly trained and educated migrant Iranian women suffer from inequality in Canadian HE organizations, particularly given their educational atmosphere. Foster (2008) acknowledges this, particularly with respect to immigrant physicians and the medical professions where they are "treated like labour market commodities and not like citizens with equal rights" (p.19). Foster (2008) further argues that despite Canada's medical physician shortage, immigrant physicians who were trained and educated in their homeland not only face a regulatory and assessment problem, they also experience a "double standard". Foster (2008) suggests Canadian society and organisations require a "paradigm shift" to abolish this dual standard in order to create balanced opportunities without unreasonable discrimination against all educated citizens.

Although the findings in this study cover a range of the social and educational aspects that IIEW experience in their Canadian lives, in this section, I investigate factors which I believe play a fundamental role in Canadian HE organizations. Recognising interruptive and/or destructive conditions, may also diminish the number of challenges IIEW encounter. Therefore, and to add to what Foster (2008) argues, I look at this issue by questioning my findings regarding why the

women felt their educational backgrounds had not been recognised or appreciated by Canadian HE. With this question in mind, I also enquire how a newcomer with pre-arranged employment receives their credentials while having their experience recognised.

Throughout the women's narratives, I heard repeatedly that when applying to migrate to Canada, IIEW had not expected substantial challenges in terms of finding suitable employment and/or having their educational experience recognised. As the findings show, almost all the women in this study assumed that they were/are qualified both in terms of entering Canadian HE and slotting into their professional employment field. The participants expected an easier transition experience since they all met Canadian migration qualifications, requirements and standards as educated applicants. As I discussed briefly in chapter 5, the gap between HE and the women's expectations may be rooted in several factors. That said, either Iranian degrees have been rated as poor in Canada or they have been highly valued in Iran; in either case the women's sense of injustice is understandable.

My position as an insider in this research led me to further deliberate on how certain factors constrain HE in terms of supporting foreign students and why IIEW face such challenges in HE organizations. Furthermore, my research shows that the CIC official website, for example provides clear, adequate and well-organised information across a wide range of regulated and non-regulated occupations and professional bodies in order to measure foreign credentials and credits. The list of qualifications and credential assessments may differ based on Canadian policy regulations, which are subject to changes, however, according to the most recent list on the CIC website, some of the designated organizations for occupations are: World Education Services (WES), International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS), and International Qualifications

Assessment (IQA). Similarly, CIC provides a link to information for professional bodies to authenticate and assess foreign educational credentials, thereby determining how they compare with and meet Canadian standards. The links are for both practising and/or licensing processes. Some of the designated professional bodies include the Medical Council of Canada (MCC) and the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada (PEBC). My very first challenge started at this point. I spent sufficient time on the CIC website in relation to the abovementioned organizations. Surprisingly, not all the links were working and in some cases (e.g. the MCC and PEBC), CIC posted messages such as “the proposal service was closed on March 13th, 2015”.

Like many potential visitors/applicants in similar circumstances, I relied on a CIC immigration lawyer to receive accurate information. Some of the documents one must gather together to submit an application included official translations of transcripts and the most recent HE degree, approval of English/French official tests, and work experience. All these requirements, although linked to one’s educational background and status, are a prerequisite for an applicant who intends to immigrate to Canada (based on Canada’s migration point system) and, as such, have nothing to do with HE policy and university admissions. Similar to what I have experienced in my migration processing to Canada (I explained it at the beginning of this study), many of the participants in this study were misled with inadequate or inaccurate information via Iranian immigration lawyer in Iran. In addition, further investigation indicates that the likelihood of an immigrant’s educational background being recognised depends on:

- 1) The location of study or work and the original country where the degree was received (USA and UK qualifications generally receive higher levels of credential acceptance compared to European or Asian countries);
- 2) Certain province’s assessment standards (e.g. British Columbia vs. Ontario);

3) The organization that assesses foreign credentials (e.g. university vs. a work-related organization or an employer).

According to Houle and Lahouaria (2010), modelling credentials and experience helps to determine whether “foreign credentials could be fully accepted (i.e., the employer/institution recognizes a credential as being legitimate within determined standards), partially accepted (i.e., the employer/institution partially recognizes a credential as being legitimate within determined standards), or not accepted (credential not recognized as being legitimate within determined standards)” (p.20).

At this stage confusion may arise for uninformed applicants (including the participants in this study), since they have not been fully briefed about the distinction between entering Canada as a PR (Permanent Resident) applicant and/or being a student eligible access continuing education in Canadian HE. In other words, one may meet the requirement to enter Canada and receive one’s Permanent Resident Card (PR card), however the same individual might not be eligible to obtain university admission. As the insider researcher in this study, and as opposed to what has been expressed in the participants’ narratives, the issue is not that much of a challenge for international students since they need to receive a letter of acceptance from a university prior to their student visa being issued.

While CIC accurately informs its candidates about their migration requirements and policies, in contrast, Canadian HE does not follow any systematic method of credential assessment. The level of confusion is more noticeable since many Canadian universities (in general) rely on their own unsystematic credential assessment, based on original transcript from the given country or origin (such as Iran). Consequently, as the findings in this study also show, grading systems may be inaccurate and vary from one province to another (Ontario and British Columbia), from one

university to another university, or even based on personal tastes in one department compared to another (such as an academic supervisor's personal choice).

HE organisations may not have put in place sufficient procedures to support educated immigrant women. Thus, while Canada attempts to attract the most skilled and professional immigrants in order to benefit as a host country (Skills Research Initiative, 2006), it simultaneously needs to explain the requirements for immigrant women to access HE. The next chapter will shed more light on this subject by suggesting practical solutions.

Although “newcomers to Canada often face challenges in getting their credentials recognized so that they can find work” as CIC (2017, main page) states, in order to solve the problem, the Government of Canada intends to undertake an ambitious attempt to recognise immigrants' foreign credentials (newcomers), thereby supporting immigrants with well-paying jobs.

5.2.4 Educational Counsellors/Advisors in Canadian HE

One of the issues many of the women talked about concerned their receiving poor information from advisors/counsellors at the very first step. The research findings indicate that the majority of the participants were either unable to enrol full-time at university, or were not yet able to finish their studies at Canadian universities as a result of misleading information provided by university advisors. The findings also show that the majority went to a Canadian college or university for a variety of reasons, such as to upgrade their skills, qualifications or education, or to repeat a similar or identical programme that they had taken in Iran (7/10). One of the participants, is a

physiotherapist who works as a cashier in a Canadian superstore, focused on the issue of access to Canadian universities, relating that:

After living about four years here in Canada, I am still confused what is the requirement of Canadian universities here in Vancouver [sighs]. Nothing is clear to me up until now [...]. I have spoken to at least three or four educational counsellors in both universities [*]. Each person gave me different direction for continuing my education (Participant 7, interview).

When I asked her about the main hindrance she experienced during her admission process, she pointed out the dissimilarities between information on the university website and what she heard from university advisors. She continued:

Do you want to hear something funny? One of them [an educational counsellor] told me that I have to redo my grade 11 and 12 in Canada [smiled sadly]. It is so ridiculous to hear these misleading things from the counsellors as a newcomer student in Canada. We [immigrant students] are lost with different wrong and right information. (Participant 7, interview).

Listening to the women's voices in this study reveals how each participant experienced different struggles in terms of receiving information concerning their admission to Canadian universities. What is also noticeable throughout these conversations is the absence of proper support on the part of university counsellors. This issue seems to be significant as it arose in many participants' comments.

Participant 6 specified in emotional terms that: “Honestly speaking, my daughter who is a current student at [*] in her third year of study knows much more about the facilities than me as alumni from the same university”. This observation, on the other hand, indicates that young immigrant students are more informed and processed university information better than older immigrants, while factors such as high school experiences, levels of academic engagement and social integration, or because of their personal characteristics, self-esteem levels and personalities might have had an impact. In a similar vein, Participant 2 (interview) stated:

You know the pressure of the study in medical field is so high, how on the earth could I go and make myself familiar to the amenities and counselling services at university. Is that my job or the university's? [...] sometimes making an appointment with an advisor takes for ever too.

Even though the above quote shows the participant may face challenges in terms of insufficient time, study workload and perhaps family responsibilities, the tone of the woman's expectations may be rooted in the use of a less proactive approach and a more passive strategy concerning how to access university information. Participant 1 (interview), who had attended a well-known university in Iran, shared her experience in this regard. She had graduated from university and explained how gaining admission to a (high ranking) Canadian university was a tiresome task that not only required hard work and high-quality research but also money to meet the admission requirements and tuition fees. The level of the distress this electronic engineer experienced may clarify the challenges she experienced when studying on a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree programme:

I am holding my BSc and I was graduated from [*], you know how high rank is this university, don't you? After many years trying to get into BSc programme, thanks to the fault information I have received from counsellors [educational advisors] I have taken many extra courses here and I have finally given up studying in my field [...].

During the interviews, I noticed many of the IIEW had graduated from top universities in Iran.

One of the women (Participant 3, interview) talked about her own challenges in this regard, stating:

The Canadian government and university policy makers set a long list of requirements for immigrants to enter Canada, but why this should be one way. Don't they have any responsibility to provide proper educational counselling services for such a highly educated people like me here? I personally did not stick to the adviser's information rather I updated my information from other Iranian students.

The study findings show that numerous IIEW have concerns that money and (occasionally) networking are the main prerequisites for gaining entry to Canadian universities. However, some other factors such as a young student's proactive approach regarding how to access university information, the level of IIEW's self-integration in the HE system, taking active steps to get to know Canadian culture, and one's personal characteristics such as self-esteem have had varying impacts on the overall perception of counselling services available to IIEW in HE and their subsequent access to information.

The findings lead us to the idea that some of the challenges foreign students encounter might be largely the result of educational/cultural differences, misinformation, and their passive attitudes and approaches to exploring their universities.

The study's findings demonstrate that IIEW are not well informed about the HE services available to them, also through the counselling services provided. The participants' responses to the questions regarding Canadian support resources and services, both in the questionnaire and interviews, somewhat contradicted my expectations/experiences as an insider researcher. In related research (CEA, 2012; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Moore, 2008; Lum & Grabke, 2012), as well as in my work experience in a number of non-profit organizations, I expected educated female immigrants

to at least be aware and pleased regarding the support services and resources available in the Canadian community and/or at their universities (e.g. Public Police, Immigrant Services to Society (ISS), volunteering opportunities, and free job-finding resources for immigrants). Indeed, these services provide substantial opportunities to create linkages with HE institutions. I also expected the study participants to emphasise the positive impact these or similar services and organizations have had on their HE experiences, however, they reported mainly negative and challenging experiences. The findings related to this topic somewhat opposed my own experience as an insider who had also studied in the post-secondary education sector in Iran.

In relation to HE institutions, educational counsellors' up-to-date knowledge and how educational advisors delivered information to the women was significant as some IIEW had negative encounters and were unsatisfied by the support offered. That said, the study's findings reveal that one reason for such experiences may derive from being unfamiliar and uninformed about the variety of services available in Canadian communities and universities. For example, many women were unaware of social services and/or referral workshops that they could attend for free or for a limited charge at many university recreation centres during the evening (e.g. resume preparation, consulting services, and education portfolios). As I mentioned earlier, the women's attitude toward learning more about their educational services alongside education counselling services might be driven largely by different educational and cultural backgrounds as well as approaches.

Indeed, the IIEW's cultural backgrounds seem to play an important role in their educational success and their approach to HE in Canada. Although Iranian women have made outstanding educational progress and comprise approximately 60 percent of all university students in Iran since 1979 (Esfandiari, 2003; Khajepour, 2014), as Salehi-Isfahani (2008) has articulated, the

fundamentalist male-dominated hierarchy and gender limits still influence the Iranian cultural context. Consequently, their Iranian cultural background still impacts on women's behaviours, approaches, and options in both the public (HE) and private spheres (Ershad & Hemaiaikhoh Jahromi, 2007; Shahidian, 2002). Carrying with them a variety of cultural limitations given their experience of a traditionally gendered society with all its barriers (including gender limitations, compulsory wearing of the hijab, limited communication), may influence the women's way of approaching and accessing sources and/or gathering information they need in their new HE context.

Furthermore, based on the women's narratives and what they have learned from their cultural background, the IIEW generally relied on their friends and university classmates' experience drawn from a range of educational levels (e.g. graduate students, upper level students or former students) and, as such, they used the same approach in Canadian HE institutions (the women called it "networking"). A similar approach, although perhaps useful in some occasions in Iran's HE system, might prove problematic if used in a Canadian HE context. The findings also demonstrate that being uninformed about Canadian society's norms, alongside being unaccustomed to the HE study workload and its expectations, habits, culture and other factors, left participants feeling isolated on occasion and as a result they relied on their compatriots' experience rather than on official counsellors/advisors. Subsequently, IIEW may have to consider increasing their level of integration into the Canadian academy while playing a more active role. Some comments clarify these points. For instance, Participant 6 (interview) remarked:

I am so happy to see my daughter [the current student in a Canadian university at the time of interview] willingly seeks for improvement for herself [...]. She didn't make my mistakes. Maybe she learnt it in Canadian high school since she is involved in her school.

Indeed, students' integration plays a significant role in their educational success (OECD, 2013), particularly in terms of first generation immigrants. According to the study's findings, in a positive sense students' roles and involvement are crucial, not only in order to provide a faster and deeper understanding of Canadian culture and its HE system, but also in terms of helping immigrant female students to feel part of the education community. In addition, HE structural problems were evident at all levels, from applying to a university through to studying in Canadian post-secondary organizations, which appeared to challenge many of the IIEW who participated in this study. The issue might also reflect the idea of "quality of effort" as coined by Pace (1980), Chickering, and Gamson (1987). This theory is based on immigrant students' involvement in academic activities and engagement with the services available. Quality of effort further articulates that while HE organizations provide sources and opportunities for learning, the issue of academic success relies on the students' level of engagement. In other words, it is highly dependent on a student making the best use of the resources and services available at a given university. According to this theory, the delivery of services, although necessary, may not be adequate for learning. That said, while HE organizations are generally well known for providing services and learning opportunities (in the public's view and as some studies show), ultimately it is the individual student's responsibility to access these (Pace, 1980). As the study findings demonstrate, there are many educational services available to students (free workshops, volunteering job findings, writing peer reviews, essay correction, etc.) but the relative lack of proper transfer and communication of these services leaves certain students, including the participants who are often unaware of these opportunities, at a disadvantage.

In addition, lack of precision and of consistency regarding the information provided by counsellors in HE added to the lack of an active search for information on the part of IIEW, alongside their

low levels of engagement. This lead IIEW to express a degree of discouragement and limit their HE choices, goals, achievement, motivation and efforts. Indeed, the Canadian Education Association (CEA) in 2012 emphasised the contribution of HE students' engagement levels to enriching immigrants' learning experience and achieving certain academic outcomes. In turn, Lum and Grabke's (2012) study details how recent immigrant adult students are moderately involved in educational components, learning models and university facilities.

Although the relationship between the available resources and the effort required of immigrant students to utilize these services is significant and has had an impact on the challenges IIEW were facing, the women were expected to make an attempt to participate in their educational community and to play active roles as invigorated students in their educational environment. The study's findings underline that multiple perspectives and issues need to be considered. This is in line with feminist theories and approaches, which have the ability to produce knowledge while supporting a self-awareness process among women (Houghton et al., 2013). Experiencing freedom in Canadian HE society (as oppose to IIEW's cultural backgrounds) provides the latter with the opportunity to define and to discover their new social and educational environment where they might experience desirable opportunities. In other words, feminism has the potential to empower IIEW (Kirby et al., 2006) while collective empowerment, as articulated by Israel, Checkoway, Schultz and Zimmerman (1994), is the process whereby individuals, organizations and communities are enabled to take social control and exert power over their lives and environment.

In a positive way, this study's findings show that even though many of the women may not be sufficiently aware of many other available services in their HE environment besides the provision of educational counselling, they simultaneously appreciate the opportunity they have been given

to study at a Canadian university. Similarly, greater involvement and a more active role played by IIEW would have provided the women with the opportunity to weave themselves into their new cultural environment while helping them to face certain challenges and acknowledge the riches of their differences.

The study findings assert that a given student's engagement is important, however this is experienced to a different degree by native and immigrant students. In addition, immigrants are required to overcome many other challenge as newcomers, which may also cause them distress, thereby impacting on their level of engagement (Guo, 2010, 2015). In summary, a positive attitude is expected of them on a daily basis, irrespective of one's educational or social environment.

5.2.5 Academic Orientation Sessions

Another interesting theme emerging from my data relates to academic orientation sessions. They are organized in HE settings and provide opportunities to new students (mostly freshmen) to become familiar with their new educational setting. In such session, new students get to know more about their universities and the available services, such as general information about the credits they are required to take each semester, the location of different offices and departments, dorm availability and policies, financial aid, transportation, and other services. Academic orientation sessions may also range from physical sightseeing to accessing university libraries, identifying the locations of academic seminars/workshops, community centres, sport clubs, educational advices, and so on. The duration of the orientation sessions also vary from two hours to one or sometimes two full days. While attending academic orientation sessions is compulsory in many universities (e.g. American institutions), based on the women's experience in this study, attending such an orientation session was an optional for students in many Canada universities.

Four women in this study reported unpleasant experiences about the academic orientation sessions at their universities. One of the participants stated:

There is a tour session for new students right before the beginning of the semester each year run by one or two students that they were also new to the university, in my case, the leader several times mentioned that she does not know about all the services at university either since she was a first year student too (Participant 5, interview).

Similarly, Participant 6 (interview) commented that she missed the only tour session as her visa was issued later and, as a result, she never had a chance to take this tour again and the session was never repeated. She cried: “I think that was my basic right to know about my university where I am going to study, right?”

When I asked her if she made a request for another make up orientation tour [group or private] she continued “unlike many other universities [*], in my university, each student has just one time opportunity to be in the orientation session and when you miss it, you simply missed it”.

The woman’s answer was quite interesting as it seemed there was only one tour available. One of the women (Participant 4, interview) specified that “in many universities like [*] there [are] different university trip days for international students but in my university in Canada [*] there was a combined local and international students all in a really large group [...] in just one or maximum two hours”.

Another participant, who is a physiotherapist working as a cashier in a Canadian superstore, focused on the issue of access to the orientation session. She reported:

I have spoken to at least three or four advisors in both universities [*]. Each person gave me different direction for attending the sessions. Finally, I tried to find the date myself through the flyers on the university board (Participant 7, interview).

When I asked her what was the main reason for receiving misleading information, she pointed out the dissimilarities between information on the university website and what she heard from university advisors. She continued:

One of them [an educational advisor] told me that I have to register for the orientation date prior to the actual date [...] the funny part was about the fact that the university staffs were not aware of the orientation date themselves and even the link I could registered (Participant 7, interview).

When I asked her what she did eventually, she replied: “I clearly shared the challenge I had experienced during the orientation session but, unfortunately, all I had heard back was a nice apology sentence from the representative”. Apparently, the women in this study had expected more accurate and scheduled information regarding their orientation session, however, and in more positive terms, some women took further action.

As the finding demonstrates, not all the women were disappointed about the level of information they received. Indeed, some women took further action either by speaking up and raising particular requests or speaking with HE staff, in this case the actual orientation group session in their university. As has been noted in the participants’ comments, some of the women also sought further information by looking for another option, rather just relying on university staff.

While the study’s findings discuss many of the women who have had some unpleasant experience regarding their orientation session in Canadian university, one of the women (Participant 3, interview) talked about her positive experience in her orientation session. She cried: “The orientation session was one of the most eye-opening experiences I have ever had in Canada [...] God [out of happiness] I could not believe my eyes such a huge university with these much facilities [...] I enjoyed my two full-day tours”.

As the finding shows the women had diverse experiences of the sessions which may be categorised in three types:

- 1) Those who were not pleased about the quality of the orientation;
- 2) Those who had missed the orientation session (e.g. international students) and;
- 3) Those women who were pleased about the orientation session.

The findings in terms of the orientation sessions show a considerable gap between students' needs and the information services provided to immigrants in their faculty or department.

In accordance with this study's perspective, the experiences as shared by the women could be managed or ameliorated by supporting, educating, and informing faculty staff who are involved with counselling services for new students, as well as by facilitating linkages with services outside the faculty, which in turn might be implemented by promoting women's engagements such as professional trainings, volunteer jobs inside and outside university, involvement with research, etc.

While one might agree with the general conclusion of the finding that IIEW experience a variety of challenges in their academic orientation sessions, the reality is more complex than it might first appear. Gates-Gasse (2012) articulated that there is no doubt that the role of Canadian universities and other HE institutions is significant in delivering information to assist students in achieving their settlement goals by arranging academic orientation sessions. However, as the study findings also show, students' familiarization with their educational environment should not be expected to be built on the basis of an academic tour alone. That said, although HE academic orientation sessions may be considered as a corner stone of the student's orientation, a post-secondary student is equally expected to take further action by making him/herself familiar with their educational environment and the existing services.

The issue, therefore, can be scrutinised from two sides; namely HE as a sector is expected to deliver the most productive orientation session possible from the perspectives of students (both in terms of sessions' quality and quantity), and IIEW have responsibilities to educate themselves regarding the available options (availing of flyers, library facilities, book clubs, open discussion groups etc.) in order to engage more actively with their educational community. In addition, this study suggests that even though HE has consistently mentored international students to link up with other HE professionals and available services, some improvement regarding how these services are delivered may also be necessary. In addition, as Gates-Gasse (2012) remarks and this study's findings also show, additional follow-up processes and actions should be taken up by IIEW in this respect.

The above proposals are in line with the feminist approach (Sprague, 2005), underlining the need to pay particular attention to woman's understandings, voices, suggestions, complaints and/or critiques, while also allowing IIEW the opportunity to learn, act and empower themselves and one another. Feminist scholars suggest that listening to women will not only be sensitive to what these women share, it will also offer them the opportunity to empower themselves by offering the prospect of positive social change and action (Bolden, 2014; Brewer, 2005; Sprague, 2005). This suggestion can also refer to work involving joint intellectual efforts (Huntley & Logan, 2001; Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013) that can simultaneously promote flexibility in facing different tasks in new situations (e.g. increasing women's strengths when encountering HE challenges) while seeking possible resolutions with their universities. The latter, in line with the feminist approach, could be considered as a strong perspective in terms of empowering women, which might lessen IIEW's emotional distress, thereby increasing their sense of affinity with

Canadian HE and in turn providing positive impact resulting in positive social changes through small improvements.

As this study's findings reveal, some of the women were disappointed and/or unsure about how to obtain information concerning the opportunities available in their respective universities, while many students believed information distribution should be a transparent and pragmatic process throughout their study. That said, IIEW may be stimulated not only when they face a variety of challenges, but also when they perceive that they can successfully meet and surmount the challenges they are presented with. For example, and as many feminist researchers believe, building awareness and understanding of the new environment can be seen as embodying aspects of culture, race and ethnicity, policies, politics and gender (Bodwitch, 2014; McWeen, 2014; Roschelle et al., 2010; Warnke, 2008).

In this new learning experience, women's positive action has the potential to help them gain access to services, participate in HE communities, and further their personal development while completing their education. In addition, a lack of engagement might further discourage this group and limit their HE choices, goals, achievements, motivation and efforts. In addition, a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1938) plays a substantial role in adult HE success. As such – and as Dunleavy and Cook (2010) have argued – knowing more about the importance of social, institutional, academic and intellectual engagement has helped women to achieve their goals in Canada, not only in HE but also in their new lives overall (CIC, 2012; OECD, 2014; Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2011). This way of looking at the challenges not only emphasises the role of universities in providing adequate educational information to IIEW in orientation sessions, it also underlines the need for them to feel welcome in HE, an insight that

feminist theory supports. Responding to this insight might also lead IIEW to become more aware and motivated in terms of taking positive steps to update and upgrade the information they have.

In short, while it is true that immigrants need consistent support from HE institutions and Canadian universities, IIEW assuming more independent actions might also be expected.

Assistance related to educational settlement guidelines, educational services such as orientation sessions, and volunteer experience have the potential to expedite IIEW's integration into their new educational contexts.

5.2.6 Feeling out of Place

“Feeling out of place” in this study refers to experiencing a sense of isolation, being ignored, and experiencing loneliness in a given environment, either emotionally or physically. Experiencing such a feeling impacts on Iranian women in a variety of negative ways, some of which concerned communication with fellow classmates and handling difficult dialogues with classmates, missing suitable job opportunities, language difficulties with native speakers, neighbours and colleagues (both academically and vocationally), a lack of practical study and job plans, and other similar experiences. The findings in this study demonstrate that achieving friendship with Canadians appears to be significant since such bonds brings feelings of closeness to Canadian society, including Canadian HE. However, according to the women's experiences, in reality not all of them were successful in establishing such a bond. One participant commented that:

I used to live in an apartment and in my building there was a few Canadian neighbours [native] who also lived on the same floor as we. All I could receive was two words “hi” and “bye” but I would have seen they are into a chit chat with other white [native] neighbours but never saw them with immigrant people (Participant 1, interview).

She continued:

I did not have a chance to make a friendship with my classmates in university either. Well, I had always convinced myself that this was maybe because of the load of our school work [...] I knew that was not the reason [sadly smiled] (Participant 1, interview).

Another interviewee (Participant 7, interview) stated:

After being here for almost four years, I don't have any Canadian friends to hang out with. It is hard because how can I get to know the culture if I don't make any Canadian friend but many immigrant friends [...] sometimes I think I don't belong to their community!

A different participant mentioned in a similar vein: "Both of my kids [kindergarten age and grade 2] never have [been] invited to a play date in their Canadian classmate's places [...] I am worried about them more than myself" (Participant 10, interview).

A lack of feeling that they belong into the community they live in Canada, experiences of both isolation and being second class citizens were mentioned frequently by the participants.

Participant 6 (interview) who felt very emotional, cried on recalling the following incident:

In one of my dermatology classes at university in Canada, I was overheard that a white female student was talking to three other white Canadian students about a dermatologist specialist who seemed to be a cab driver here and was complaining about his job status. She antagonistically claimed that "Why is he here in the first place [...] they have to go back to their own country".

In addition, many Iranian immigrants in this study felt themselves to be outsiders and different from the Canadian community, and as such they believe they have to find a way to overcome their own challenges. Having no (or few) Canadian friends while learning and adapting to new tasks and experiences on a daily basis, consulting with other immigrants or Iranians instead of with Canadian individuals, and facing new and unfamiliar circumstances, are some of the challenges these women shared.

One participant, a medical doctor volunteering at Senior Place in West Vancouver, stated: “I know that I am a physician and it is so unfortunate that I am still challenging to find my right job but I am happy to be respected as a volunteer worker at this place [...] the least benefit it has is that I make new Canadian friends which I am not able to do it outside of here” (Participant 9, interview). This participant’s comment shows the positive aspect of taking action in terms of dealing with certain challenges.

Taking action, as many of the participants experienced in different ways (e.g. keeping up their networking, choosing volunteering work), inculcates feelings of intimacy within a united group. However, this has its own pros and cons. One of the women (Participant 4, interview) explained how she found it difficult even to work as a volunteer, stating:

I had to drive a long way [the northern to the southern side of Vancouver] to take care of a volunteer job [...] laughable right? [...] With the hope I can find some Canadian friends, establish my networking, while hopefully find my right job as a pharmacist and you know that there are tonnes [of] drugstores in North [Vancouver]. But who gives us a hand, nobody but another immigrant who faces our challenges.

Another example concerns Participant 1 (interview), who shared how being left alone made her lose self-confidence and resulted in low self-esteem. She elucidated emotionally: “look at me [...] I supposed to be an electronic engineer not a babysitter but sadly I am locked [in] as a home babysitter”. In addition, Participant 10 (interview) shared her experience by saying “I never forget the day my mentor asked us to make group of five for doing a group project [...] I was left behind and at the end, the instructor fitted me into a group [...] the feeling still hurts”.

In summary, the participants in this research interpret their experience of feeling out of place as based largely on (or in conjunction with) racial and national stereotypes rather than

acknowledging their individual attributes, proficiencies, or educational backgrounds (e.g. their frequent use of word choices such as “White Canadian”). However, such feelings may also be experienced as a result of individual or personal attributes, assimilation levels, proficiencies, or given participants’ educational backgrounds. In other words, the issue of feeling out of place may be experienced by women regardless of their respective environments and ethnicity.

Feeling out of place, which has been experienced in different situations by many women in this study, might be influenced by a variety of factors (i.e. feeling homesick, missing relatives, personal issues). The struggle is more heart-breaking than it first appears. IIEW’s experiences not only makes these women feel lonely, it also stops them somehow from becoming more actively involved in Canadian society, including sharing their ideas, expressing their feelings and demonstrating their abilities and knowledge.

The findings show that many of the challenges (if not all) do not occur in a university/academic setting exclusively, rather they are experienced daily, regardless of location or environment. These factors could potentially contribute to distress and emotionally downgrade IIEW in relation to both academia and wider Canadian society. The study’s findings also reveal that IIEW and their families (including their offspring) establish more supportive bonds with other Iranian immigrants rather than creating relationships with their native (i.e. Canadian) counterparts at university and elsewhere.

As the findings in this study as well as other studies demonstrate, a substantial number of the immigrants have felt the impact of their race, ethnicity and immigrant status at a HE level (Chaichian, 2008). The issue of race/racism is a significant and sensitive topic in a multicultural society such as Canada’s. Throughout the participant interviews, I heard different comments

about the way IIEW perceive and characterise racism in Canadian society, particularly in academia. In this study, and as described in chapters 3 and earlier in this chapter, the definition of race is not limited to one's skin colour, biological inheritance, anthropological perspective or demographic characteristics as many researchers have observed (Van den Oord & Rowwe, 2000). In fact, according to participants' narratives and experiences as shared with this researcher, the identification of race and ethnicity is considered as a real social phenomenon that experienced on a daily basis from making a friend, to receive a proper social and educational guidance, level of community integration, etc.

This study's findings suggest that the issue of discrimination (i.e. social distinction, having no or limited Canadian neighbours and friends to social with) and exclusion education and social prestige (unprofessional job opportunity rather receiving suitable job) can be considered as one of the main challenges IIEW experience. However, the literature shows differences based on racial inequalities in the fields of employment, wages and education in Canada (Adsera & Ferrer, 2014; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Fong & Cao, 2009; Wotherspoon, 2009). The findings in this research also demonstrate that racial minorities continue to experience social distinctions in terms of education and job opportunities alongside many similar social components. Devaluing IIEW's academic experience lessens the chance for this group to find university-level academic positions, and this became a real racial concern for many of the participants while is considered as an underlying racism issues to many others for many individuals in this study. Turcotte's (2011) study indicates that while women in Canada take up the majority of teaching positions at high schools, as well as in colleges, the situation is quite different at university level. For example, in obtaining an academic position (and probably any other employment), an applicant's name reflects one's racial or ethnic origin, which may profoundly influence the potential

applicant's eventual success (Adsera & Ferrer, 2014). Therefore, and as the study's findings show, the issue of race and ethnicity based on the participants' experiences seems to be more significant than their further education level, language skills, volunteer work experience or extracurricular accomplishments.

On the other hand, my research findings led me to pinpoint how self-efficacy psychological theory plays a significant role in immigrant's achievements in this study, since the issue of race and ethnicity also impacts people's self-esteem in a variety of ways. In addition, self-efficacy theory is a significant component of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) argues for the importance of reciprocal interactions of many environmental, behavioural, psychological, and personal factors in one's daily life. In turn, self-efficacy also relies on that individual's beliefs and their ability to affect and shape their environment rather than passively accepting or reacting to it (Schunk, 2003).

Further aligning with self-efficacy theory, while some participants developed composite comments based on their experiences of discrimination in academia and general social situations, they might perform better in academia if Canadian HE presented them with the same job opportunities as it does for Canadians. As this study's findings demonstrate, IIEW are seeking support and the opportunity to practice their knowledge in Canadian society. According to some case studies (Chui, 2011; Oreopoulos, 2011) Canadian society is extremely stratified in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, class, marital status and other factors. Similar studies document differences based on racial group inequalities in terms of education, employment and wage levels. For example, foreign-born immigrants experience greater educational and occupational

discrimination compared to their Canadian-born counterparts (Oreopoulos, 2011) as the IIEW in this study have encountered.

While a positive research finding by Jirojwong and Manderson (2001) indicates that highly educated immigrant women have a lower likelihood of reporting emotional health problems, in my study, women felt lonely due, for example, to being unwelcome in different social activities and clubs. The participants stated that leisure activities, social engagements, and the time required for self-care requires money and opportunities that many of them complain they lack and, as a result, this has directly or indirectly impacted on their mood, as Suto (2013) has also observed.

In turn, the IIEW felt out of place due mainly to their accent/language skills, injustices in the workplace, and their cultural differences (e.g. style of dress if they wore the hijab). Using a feminist lens when analysing the experiences of IIEW (Cohen & Pulkingham, 2009; Creese & Wiebe, 2012) alongside the theories of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1938) and self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010), reflect women's situation relating to everyday life interactions, motherhood, legal dilemmas, education, economic status, race and ethnicity, thereby exposing gender conflicts as evidenced in particular social arrangements.

Merging feminist approaches with the abovementioned theories led this study to examine how essential factors work together to interact and/or enforce the construction of inequality and social exclusion, as a result of which IIEW felt out of place in Canadian society. For example, Meares (2010) emphasises the impact of skilled women's post-migration reorientation from the public to the private sphere (such as the home). This shift can generate feelings of loneliness and isolation, of moving from being a professional to a housewife defined by motherhood, and a move from

being financially autonomous in their (Iranian) past to economic dependence in their new Canadian lives. The implication of reconceptualization for the “acculturation construct” (Schwartz et al., 2010) within new and probably different cultural values, beliefs, identifications, combined with experiencing deskilling, loss of professional identity, the double burden of working both in the home and the formal economy (if the latter opportunity arises) have particular implications for IIEW’s mental/emotional health and further shapes their feeling of being out of place.

Considering women’s experiences in terms of feeling of out of place in this study (e.g. experiencing being a devalued or low qualified employee compared with their Canadian counterparts or feeling that they are ignored in their Canadian neighbourhood) can also be supported by reference to feminist insights alongside anti-sexist and anti-racist principles, self-efficacy, and belongingness among immigrant women. For example, this feeling of out of place is detectable when IIEW compete with Canadians employees who have inferior HE qualifications and knowledge in the same field, thereby demonstrating the tensions that this study’s participants have encountered in Canada.

In addition, Aroian, Norris, Tran and Schappler-Morris (1998) propose that a key factor in successful integration involves being welcomed and accepted by a new society. In these cases immigrants (in general) and IIEW (in particular) have intended that Canada would be their home where they might resettle and build their future lives. My observation is supported by the feminist approach as well as many other studies in terms of encouraging positive attitudes in relation to becoming involved and connecting with HE communities (Bolden, 2014; Brewer, 2005; Gates-Gasse, 2012). Such a notion can also help other female students to positively

contribute towards their HE. This could be considered as a form of analysing the “social fact” through the perspective of women and their experiences (Sprague, 2005), thereby promoting positive changes in their HE environment. That said, HE needs to be concerned with defeating bias at any level by providing more opportunities for Iranian women’s integration into both their educational environment as well as wider Canadian society. Receiving such support would promote feelings of acceptance and help IIEW to move towards feeling more settled in their new environment. IIEW also need to take further action by promoting the level of their cultural adjustments. Thereby, what appears to be important for an immigrant, alongside formal settlement in a new homeland, is the promoting a sense of a new and promising context as well as similarities, rather than a deepening awareness of differentiations and distinctions.

In summary, even though the research findings demonstrate the female participants commonly experience feeling that they are inadequately informed by HE institutions, the study also shows how they need to play a more active role in their respective educational institutions and Canadian society overall in order to obtain the information they need, thereby helping them to integrate further into the new educational context. Cultural adaptation and community involvement alongside social engagement has been recognised as playing a central role in the well-being of individuals and the community to which they belong.

5.3 Summary of the Above Sections

In these above sections an attempt was made to analyse and address the challenges IIEW faced in general, in educational organisations, and/or while seeking work in their professional area of expertise given their respective educational backgrounds. In trying to allow for hearing women’s voices throughout this study, the findings were framed on women’s narratives and experiences in

Canadian society, which demonstrate that IIEW face multiple challenges. The data demonstrates that IIEW, at some level, remain economically and socially marginalised.

As discussed throughout this study, Canada receives many educated immigrants on a yearly basis, a lot of whom are Iranian women. The findings of this study show IIEW are deprived of the opportunity to access suitable jobs when it comes to applying for positions based on their educational backgrounds and proficiencies. A similar experience has been evident when it comes to their choice to continue their post-secondary education. IIEW have experienced and/or sensed different levels of inequality and felt out of place as a result of their racial or ethnic difference, as they elucidated.

The degree of social distance they experience educationally, in their personal lives, friendships and workplaces in relation to the dominant White mainstream (Canadian-born individuals) seems to pose significant challenges to many of the women in this study. Additionally, the findings derived from the women's narratives underline that almost all of them (9 out of 10) were either: busy volunteering in an area related or unrelated to their career or educational background; occupied in a field which needs lower skills or proficiencies; or involved in unrelated employment, which they therefore considered as a survival job. It is that, in this research, foreign credentials refer to the highest post-secondary education level attained outside Canada.

According to the females' shared experiences, their abilities and skills have not been fully recognised, completely accepted, or valued accordingly. Relating such experiences seemed to be upsetting for the women in this study however, facing such a challenge may be due to the women's misinformation prior to moving to Canada in terms of international academic recognition. The women's academic credentials, qualifications, vocational experiences, and

skills will be discussed in more detail in chapters 6 and 7. In turn, lack of financial support and economic security, difficulty accessing HE, taking care of family members, and dealing with study necessities whilst also being newcomers to the area, seemed to be overwhelming many women in this study. The situation is more severe for some women compared to others, such as Participant 1, who is also a single mother.

The findings illustrate that the challenge of overcoming certain barriers is not an easy task for the women involved in this study. As mentioned above, many of them felt overwhelmed and, as a result, wondered how long they might endure the burdens they have taken on while studying and living in Canada. The findings also indicate that IIEW in Canadian society in general, and in university environments in particular, were affected in different ways based on their individual situations (i.e. levels of family responsibilities, linguistic ability, job tasks, and study obligations). In addition, the level of challenges IIEW encounter (both inside universities and outside of them) are reflected in their frustrations.

The participants were all well-educated, holding at the very least an undergraduate degree. That said, not all of the women were successful in finding suitable opportunities based on their educational field, background or previous experience. Dealing with curricula, admission structures, governance issues, academic requirements and prerequisites alongside funding issues, were named as some of the struggles the participants experienced in Canadian society and academia. In many cases, conversely, such an occurrence could be due to a lack of active action undertaken by the participants themselves.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed outline of the analytical process used in this study. Deploying a triangulation strategy allowed me to check and recheck the data as well as referencing many other perspectives in the literature before, during and after the data's collection and analysis. Since the purpose of this chapter is to analyse the data concerning the women's shared experiences in depth, I further explained how I chose themes and subthemes based on their experiences. Also, I paid specific attention to how participants' discussed their personal experience and how these interlinked with different themes (e.g. race and ethnicity, gender, class) (Kirby et al., 2006, p.221). An example of applying this approach in practice is that the women looked at the phenomena from different perspectives based on their different backgrounds and individual experiences. Looking through the lens of women's narratives provided opportunities for IIEW to talk about their issues, without the anxiety of providing right or wrong answers. All the participants stated that they were pleased to have had the chance to express their Canadian experiences freely.

The participants' experiences indicate that IIEW felt pressurised and experienced many challenges, especially when trying to achieve a proper balance between educational tasks alongside the demands of both university and their everyday jobs. In addition, the personal and family expenditures associated with being an immigrant female student, in conjunction with trying to access university job opportunities, meet tuition fees, surpass language barriers etc., made these circumstances even more challenging.

The study benefited from insights derived from feminism, anti-sexist and anti-racist theories, the sense of belonging and the concept of self-efficacy. My findings led me to interpret that, even though many of the women in this study may not be aware of many available services in their

HE context, they appreciate the freedom of thought and opportunity to take positive action at university. In addition – and as will be discussed in the concluding chapter – students' integration plays a significant role in their educational success (OECD, 2013). The idea is, according to feminist epistemology, that this will allow the women to take positive action, no matter how small (Bolden, 2014; Creese et al., 2009; Sprague, 2005). Feminist epistemology indicates that improving knowledge leads to social progress while being part of it (in this study meaning IIEW's involvement in HE).

In the final chapter, I detail some of the initiatives IIEW might undertake in order to lessen their unpleasant experiences in their new educational context, measures that would be even more effective given the assistance of Canadian HE.

CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the challenges IIEW have faced in both their new homeland, Canada, and also in the specific context of HE. To answer the research questions, the recommendations are shaped both by the study's outcomes as well as the researcher's perspective. At the beginning of this chapter, I would like to briefly outline my viewpoint as a practitioner researcher while an attempt was made to gather adequate evidence and develop findings in order to address the gap between academic research and practice by developing constructive policy recommendations, thus leading to improved practice.

As it has been noted throughout out this study, my position is that of an EdD student and of an Iranian immigrant woman myself who was graduated from Iranian and Canadian universities. In addition, my professional involvement in the Canadian community as a clinical psychologist and as teaching assistant (TA) profoundly impacted my decision of conducting this study. Being engaged with many Canadian newcomers (including IIEW) within a number of non-profit organisations (including immigration bodies) and private clinics, clarifies my position as an educational counsellor with immigrants and refugees and as a clinical psychologist in the Canadian community. This will help the readers to have a better understanding of my role and positionality inside this study. As I discussed in the Chapter of Methodology, I found it extremely significant for my professional practice undertaking this study with the strengths and limits that will be highlighted in this study. All these experiences have provided me with opportunities to establish links with HE institutions as a practitioner able to deal directly with HE

students understanding the real needs of IIEW and identifying some ways to better support them while putting my knowledge into practice.

By following a practitioner approach throughout this study and presenting feminist standpoint theory as reflected in the study's epistemology, this research has developed findings which can contribute to promoting knowledge about IIEW's involvement in Canadian education and society based on the interaction between the women and the researcher in the interviews and through expressing the women's own words.

The chapter also identifies the impact of the study's findings and how these might potentially and practically affect positive change in Canadian HE and society (albeit on a small scale). The research aims to develop new knowledge and to encourage the women to become more visible while raising their voices. The chapter concludes by summarising the findings by discussing some of the limitations encountered while conducting the study. The next section presents the study's aims, purposes and research questions.

6.2 Aims, Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This study offers an account of some of the key challenges encountered by IIEW in Canadian society and HE. Therefore, this study encourages women to share their narratives, their success, their challenges, their hopes and expectation, and their potential knowledge and suggestions to change for a better society, and to be part of their Canadian community (socially and educationally) in an absolute non-judgmental research atmosphere. To do so, this research aimed to encourage the IIEW to be visible by raising their voices and raising awareness in a wider communities supported by feminist theories as well as outlining suggestions regarding how the

HE system can help this minority group to face its challenges. Consequently, by using the perspectives of IIEW, the study attempts to cast light on the following key issues:

- 1) From a female perspective, and considering their educational background, what are the general challenges facing educated female Iranian immigrants in Canada who may (or may not) be seeking work in their professional area of expertise?
- 2) How, in the view of IIEW can (or do) HE organisations assist women to overcome these challenges?

Findings from answering the second question in this study assisted me designing a more focused sub-question determining how the quality of HE services provided to immigrant women assist them in overcoming their challenges.

6.3 Themes and Sub-themes in This Study

IIEW face challenges across Canada's societal and educational spheres, and in many cases the two are interconnected, regardless of their specific environments/atmospheres and/or locations. Consequently, and in order to address my research questions, the study themes and sub-themes classified the type of answers provided by participants by referring to the challenges they met. I outline these challenges by categorising them under the heading "Women's Challenges in Canada" although many of the challenges are similar to what they have directly and/or indirectly experienced in HE. Therefore, I also collected data under these themes in order to determine how HE organizations might be able to assist educated women in overcoming these challenges.

6.4 Overview, Conclusion and Recommendations Regarding IIEW's Challenges

6.4.1 Economic Security/Seeking Work and Employment

One of the main challenges evidenced by this study was the financial barriers IIEW experience in many different contexts. According to the women's perspectives and experiences as they outlined, they expected post-secondary education to bring them economic gains and an improved lifestyle, higher incomes and life satisfaction. However, this did not happen. HE tuition fees, for instance, seem to be challenging, particularly when educated Iranian women believe they are redoing the same training. In a similar vein, a lack of financial support or obtaining loans at high interest rates brought about further stress. What is particularly noteworthy in this group is the number of other responsibilities IIEW undertake alongside their HE studies, particularly when they are looking for adequate employment related to their educational background. In addition, access to, or continuing education at, a HE level was one of the challenges this group encountered when trying to find suitable employment.

IIEW have struggled to find jobs related to their educational background and degree, particularly as an academic in universities. As discussed in the previous chapter, the findings revealed a variety of problems stemming from finding a proper job based on one's academic knowledge, university degrees awarded, and vocational experience respectively. Consequently, IIEW turned to the post-secondary system to update, upgrade or redo their degree as a means of gaining better access to job opportunities and the employment system. The participants also dwelled on the issue of settling in a new community (both socially and academically), and this came up many times as a significant element.

As the number of highly educated immigrants arriving in Canada increases, so does the responsibility of HE organisations and wider society. Therefore, HE organisations play a significant role in this context. The findings pinpoint universities' crucial role in meeting IIEW's needs in terms of identifying suitable employment. Assisting IIEW to find suitable jobs based on their fields of study and academic degrees, promoting economic assimilation and language skills to further academic engagement, involving IIEW in academic roles, providing settlement services at universities, housing, valuing immigrant women's previous academic experience and providing housing opportunities seem to be just some of the social and educational support services many Canadian organisations might pay more attention to.

In similar vein, employers play a significant role in Canadian society. Expecting individual employers to recognise foreign education qualifications without additional social support is probably unrealistic. However, devaluation of foreign education results in the under-utilization of labour capital and increases the likelihood of unemployment (Akbari, 2011). Therefore, following a regulated standard and establishing recognised systems capable of evaluating foreign qualifications and vocational skills (if that is readily feasible in Canada), would be more beneficial for immigrant students as well as Canadian society.

Encouraged by some feminist theory (Bodwitch, 2014; Kirby et al., 2006; Sprague, 2005), this study's theoretical framework calls for a co-operative approach from both sides – i.e. IIEW and HE – in order to resolve the matter. That said, IIEW should also be more involved in joint intellectual efforts (Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013), meaning an emphasis on participation, flexibility, the relationship with the subject, sharing and representation alongside empowering new voices (Huntley & Logan, 2001; Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013). The concept here involves

taking the initiative, involvement in society and academia, sharing practical ideas, and providing help to those are in need of proper information and services (in this case IIEW). This approach would bring mutual benefits to all parties (e.g. IIEW students, academics, as well as employers).

6.4.2 English Language Barriers (Self-Reported English Language Abilities)

The study's findings reflect that, despite the abilities that IIEW have demonstrated in relation to their academic English language level (e.g. TOFLE), their low level of self-confidence and SE in communicating in English still constitutes a barrier for them. The study outcomes illustrated the insecurity that this minority group experiences in an academic environment when using English. In addition, English language skills may be especially important since a lack of them can negatively influence perceptions of IIEW's educational achievements, thereby limiting their access to certain careers and job opportunities. Therefore, and as the women in this research also suggest (e.g. Participant 7), one of the factors that contributes to the academic success of immigrants – and particularly immigrant women – is the feeling of belonging (e.g. feeling that they belong to something or that they can interact with English speakers, either in the classroom or workplace). Indeed, valuing such a notion would increase the level of engagement of these women with both Canadian society and the university community. Similarly, being familiar with the English language resources available and becoming more aware of how they can access services would enhance the level of their engagement with their community.

While this current study agrees that HE is supposed to provide a responsive and supportive environment to its students, my research simultaneously encourages the women to take positive initiatives to explore their new learning environment. This study also suggests that HE and IIEW together may assist one another to establish a strong sense of SE in the educational environment.

Such a notion could be established and developed by IIEW's HE initiatives and positive experiences. Opportunities provided by HE (e.g. volunteer positions in academia, engaging with department activities) alongside IIEW initiating positive steps toward further engagement with the educational community (e.g. running academic or cultural workshops, providing constructive critiques and suggestions), would prove efficacious in terms of building bridges between HE and IIEW (Bandura, 1997).

A practical example of possible interaction is immigrant student networks making connections between colleagues and students within the HE environment. This would enhance the likelihood of positive influence among colleagues and students in the learning community (e.g. by supporting each other, patterning and/or copying one another's success, etc.). Networking among students also offers more opportunities for interactions as well as observations of others' interactions, thereby deepening access to activities and services (Dweck & Goetz, 1978). Over time, and as Berndt and Keefe (1992) suggest and this study's findings recommend, members become more similar to one another given their positive experiences. For example, open discussions between students can influence their choices of activities, while friends will often make similar HE choices. In a similar way, IIEW peer groups might promote motivational socialization which would result in IIEW's motivational engagement (Sprague, 2005).

To sum up, providing IIEW students with a strategy that helps them succeed can also raise their SE in conjunction with a sense of belonging to their HE community. As IIEW students work on certain tasks (peer groups, guiding orientation sessions, open discussion, student cafés), they learn which actions result in positive outcomes, and this information can guide positive actions both for them and for other women.

Practising the suggestions mentioned above supports a sense of efficacy while strengthening IIEW's personal traits and increasing their self-esteem levels. Personal efficacy influences the choices these women will potentially make in their lives in Canada, both socially and academically and, in a similar vein, such choices can also influence the effort they expend as well as the persistence and resilience they exert when obstacles arise. All of this may potentially pave the way for achievers to experience self-efficaciousness while feeling personally responsible for their academic-learning process.

6.4.3 Educational Counsellors/Advisors in HE

This section outlines some implications related to the issue of HE counselling services. Recognising the gaps and challenges that exist in HE counselling services can help to formulate guidelines that might assist Iranian graduates, assuring them of a proper service and ensuring that they will not be ignored. Such suggestions might help to inform both sides; firstly, HE could provide a focused path with adequate information to better assist and support immigrant professionals and, secondly, this can lead IIEW to take productive steps and actions in terms of receiving and processing the HE information they need. What was clear throughout the conversations with immigrant women was the absence of proper support provided by university counsellors to immigrant potential students. The issue is clearly significant as it was brought up by many of the participants. The level of assistance provided and university-level educational counsellors' knowledge of the available services also appears to be a concern for some other participants. Moreover, the Canadian admission processes may need to guide students in a more accurate and professional manner – particularly immigrant students – since the latter are unfamiliar with the Canadian academic system and, as such, the educational counsellors available to them

turn out to be the only source of advice while acting as an educational associate in a university environment.

Accessing knowledgeable and well-informed educational counsellors/advisors, although seemingly essential for providing the most up-to-date information to HE students (in this case IIEW), should not be the only strategy available to IIEW. Indeed, on the other hand, IIEW should take more active steps and actions while actively seeking to obtain the information they need similar to the younger generation. For example, one of the factors IIEW need to consider in their educational lives is the importance of their level of engagement with both Canadian society in general and the HE system in particular.

Integration is defined as a multidimensional process and as such needs to be considered from different angles in its specific context (e.g. age, gender, ethnic, and cultural concerns). Student engagement is defined as “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (Kuh, 2009, p.683). While academic integration is generally understood as including how HE students can engage on an academic level (e.g. participation in open class discussions), social integration can be defined as behaviours related to the social involvement IIEW need to engage in order for them to integrate into Canadian HE.

Taking positive steps towards information acquisition rather than staying away and waiting or expecting to have information delivered to them, although desirable, may not be a realistic option or solution. A concrete measure is for IIEW to try to understand more about Canadian culture, both socially and educationally. In addition, IIEW may educate themselves about how HE policy and its expectations works in Canada. Acknowledging the differences between the HE system in

Iran and in Canada could be a positive development that leads the women to make themselves familiar with the HE services offered to them.

Engagement could be shown in a variety of ways such as involvement in group discussions, sharing their ideas (thereby acquiring a voice), joining clubs, and taking part in communication sessions such as attending out-of-class academic activities. While women's engagement could support a stronger involvement in their educational environment, it would also allow them to explore the HE system, language learning, and cultural issues together with community involvement, as well as improving their networking opportunities.

This study, therefore, suggests that while the level of IIEW's awareness could be raised by conducting additional IIEW-related case studies, equally, the women's self-awareness is vital. By encouraging IIEW to develop a voice and to be able to speak out could let other immigrant women know that they are not alone in experiencing challenges, thereby fostering more support.

6.4.4 Academic Orientation Session

Once more, this study's findings discuss the role of university advisers in the provision of education information to immigrant women related to issues such as housing, credentials, financial and educational plans and so on. Such information is generally provided by HE institutions through orientation sessions. As explained in chapter 5, many IIEW were interested in attending such sessions whereas others missed them due to a variety of reasons (e.g. late visa issues) and some others were unhappy with the quality and frequency of these sessions.

The study findings show that having regular orientation programmes was a recurring suggestion and one which is of real benefit to IIEW. For example, providing exact dates, times, approaching and contacting students in various ways (such as sending automatic session reminders via email,

text, and phone prior to the event) may, for example, allow IIEW to manage their time and plan to attend the session in advance. Similarly, organising multiple university orientation programmes and sessions, rather than just holding one annual event, may also foster a more supportive academic environment in a stress-free context.

The study suggests that academic advisers, administrators, and faculty staff should provide accurate and detailed information about the university's resources and services on offer, where they can be found, how they can be accessed, and when they are available. As one may note, orientation sessions would be an ideal concrete opportunity for IIEW to familiarise themselves with their HE system, their new classmates, and the services available to them. While the women's narratives are relatable in terms of their expectations regarding receiving up-to-date information from academic advisers, administrators, and faculty staff about orientation sessions (date, location, time, comprehensive responses, organising multiple orientation programmes and sessions, rather than just one annual event), it should also be noted that detailed information about the university's academic orientation session could be actively sought by the women themselves by relying on other readily accessible resources such as websites, university libraries, departmental notice boards, book clubs, alumni cafés, as well as official and/or reliable social media including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Indeed, the way HE present its services to the new students (in this case IIEW) does vary.

Feminist epistemology (Bolden, 2014; Cohen & Pulkingham, 2009) suggests different modes to further women's engagement. Joining institutional sports clubs, attending university conferences and seminars, and participating in communication events are some other examples, particularly since HE engagement has been shown as significantly in terms of student success (Wilms,

Friesen, & Milton, 2009). As an example, IIEW could be used as exemplary counsellor students and they could also offer volunteer orientation sessions in a HE context. The benefit is two-fold:

- a) IIEW may pursue positive action by supervising and guiding orientation session(s) as experienced students. The concept would help IIEW as well as new classmates in terms of learning from IIEW's previous challenges and possible resolutions. Encountering potential and sometimes similar experiences may also inculcate a sense of positivity in new students (i.e. sense of empathy, promoting a sense of belongings). The notion will also comfort new students who will become aware that they are not alone in their new academic environment;
- b) IIEW operating orientation sessions would deepen their sense of responsibility terms of receiving the most up-to-date and accurate information while delivering this information to new students. Consequently, this would help IIEW to learn more about their educational environment, in particular guiding them through their academic orientation.

I believe such initiatives will prove advantageous to both sides, namely IIEW and HE. These practices will not only make the women more familiar with existing services while introducing them to new student groups, it would simultaneously help them to have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the available educational services. Indeed, volunteer action and/or exhibiting some initiative will also bring further HE-related engagement opportunities, consequently affecting their professional lives. Similarly, establishing an IIEW society inside the university will allow the women to network and thus become more comfortable with their educational challenges, giving them the chance to share their educational successes while

benefitting one another. Guiding each other in this educational context might build a bridge to HE through, thereby allowing both HE and IIEW to access potential opportunities.

In short, orientation sessions are an ideal opportunity for IIEW to know their HE system and to educate themselves while presenting/distributing information to their new classmates, all while familiarising themselves with their new cultural involvement (HE) and the services available to them. While it is true that the environment and the way HE presents orientation services to students are essential for students themselves, how IIEW participate in their educational context is equally significant. Meanwhile, identifying gender and gender-related issues, challenges, experiences and facilitating previously unheard voices is considered a substantial dimension in this study, while underlining the importance of exploring interactions, collaborations, and feedback involving women is equally important and worthy of exploration (Bolden, 2014; Brewer, 2005; Sprague, 2005).

6.4.5 Feeling out of Place

Overcoming feelings of isolation and/or feeling out of place – which is a common experience among the IIEW participating in this study – seems to be another significant challenge the women face in Canadian academia and wider society. The issue of segregation remains an unpleasant experience reflecting issues of gender and ethnicity among IIEW, regardless of the number of years they have been living and/or studying in Canadian society.

While the study findings reveal that many IIEW tried to keep in touch with immigrant groups and with other individuals who they believe encounter somewhat similar challenges in Canadian communities, on the contrary, it has also been shown that this may not be an appropriate resolution in terms of countering feelings of isolation among IIEW. This study suggests that

although relying on other immigrants' knowledge and experiences may be useful in certain contexts counting on this form of resolution as the only pattern, may leave the challenge inadvertent among this group. Therefore, this study underlines that a volunteer job, for example, may have auxiliary benefits in terms of overcoming feelings of isolation among IIEW while facilitating networking with Canadian natives. The study findings show that the participants attempted to make positive contributions via their volunteer work in Canada, and although this had relatively little impact on their involvement with the Canadian community, it may also facilitate potential commination and new networking opportunities with native individuals. In addition, the idea of volunteer work alongside HE participation may be felt to be unique and challenging for IIEW based on different personal experiences, although it offers opportunities to develop new knowledge, to understand differences, and offer solutions whereby IIEW can overcome potential challenges. Additionally, a sense of belonging to their new Canadian community can play a substantial role in adult HE success.

This study believes that differences (culture, ethnicity, language etc.) need to be acknowledged and valued by both IIEW and native Canadians. In order for this to happen, such dissimilarities and differentiations need to be understood in the first place. As mentioned previously, IIEW can help achieve this goal through their own positive initiations. Taking initiative by introducing Iranian culture and their educational background is significant in this regard. For example, IIEW initiating some cultural activities in universities could be a great starting point for presenting Iranian culture in a Canadian HE context. Introducing Iranian writers, athletes, scientists, and politicians in different educational seminars, cafés, and events can create opportunities to exchange knowledge while posing questions and facilitating answers. Such activities would be a

worthwhile communication opportunity and not only an occasion to share knowledge but also to promote the development of a feeling of belongingness among IIEW.

In a nutshell, and as the study findings indicate, exploring the challenges faced by this minority group in Canadian society has the potential to lead to and encourage positive attitudes towards supportive learning systems that can really help female students to develop their sense of belonging while increase the sense of being part of Canadian HE, thus making positive social changes while simultaneously empowering IIEW.

6.5 How Can HE Assist?

6.5.1. The Importance of Academic Credits Recognition/Women's Concrete Feedback

As immigration to Canada increases, so does its influence on Canadian educational systems and organisations. The literature indicates that a very large proportion of immigrant individuals are highly educated and skilled (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2012). As the outcomes of this research demonstrate, IIEW struggle with many challenges accessing HE/academia, while they also did not feel confident regarding accessing university-level academic jobs in Canada.

In this context, HE plays an essential role in today's society, by promoting economic integration alongside involve students and alumni in accessing suitable job opportunities where they can put their knowledge into practice (Akbari, 2011) in order to deepen their contribution to Canadian society. This dissertation's findings indicate that many IIEW who stayed in Canada are unable to find satisfying jobs based on their educational background. The issue appears to be due to many factors such as language barriers, lack of required job experience in Canada, or the failure to recognise their non-Canadian academic credentials. That said, one of the participants' queries

concerned how HE can support IIEW in finding better jobs, thereby helping them to overcome their challenges.

As discussed earlier, Canada is one of the leading destinations for Iranians with a HE degree (CIC, 2012; OECD, 2014; Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2011) and, positively, there are many social and educational support services to be found in Canadian society (CEA, 2012; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Moore, 2008; Lum & Grabke, 2012). IIEW's level of social and university-level academic engagement, being more familiar with the available support services, and having access to and utilising the resources available to enhance involvement could help to lessen the engagement gap. The research findings also suggest that new and high levels of transparency and accountability will attract top students, such as self-service administrative options, improved resources, technology, laboratories, sports facilities etc., and these should also be taken into consideration.

Turning to public policy support and its effectiveness in aiding IIEW in overcoming their challenges, the findings of the questionnaire and in-depth interviews suggest that a multifaceted approach is necessary to alleviate these women's frustrations with Canadian society. The new initiatives should target and reflect immigrant women's education, cultural differences, language barriers, and the recognition of foreign education by Canadian employers in a practical way. That being said, while immigration policy facilitates skilled/educated individuals' entry into Canada by screening their educational background, in a similar vein HE should cooperate with immigration to recognise and approve IIEW's educational background and practical experience. Therefore, and as this study suggests, any concrete initiatives intended to improve IIEW's situation, such as trusting their practical experience, providing them with the opportunity to use

their existing knowledge, giving them room to practice their educational knowledge in Canadian society and/or accessing an educational context that will appreciate them is vital.

Academic success can benefit from facilitating immigrants in general, namely by being fully engaged and integrating the latter while also considering immigrants' needs and access to resources and services. Although HE needs to pay appropriate attention to the issue of involving students in the wider educational community, IIEW also have to take advantage of the variety of social and educational services available to them in Canada. I argue that HE can assist immigrant students by catering to women's needs and by providing/directing a forum to build a bridge between universities and IIEW. This notion would not have to be applied if it was already set in place in professional arenas such as academia.

Although it might sound ambitious, this study suggests establishing a standard evaluation system for evaluating foreign qualifications and credentials. This study believes that this would offer a less stressful educational and working environment for immigrant women. The idea may be facilitated by connections between Canadian universities, Canadian migration institutions and employment regulations. This interconnection would also deepen the links between IIEW and where they live and work (Canadian society) as well as HE. As a very compact practical step, having a solid credential assessment programme like in many other well-known universities worldwide, may ease the path for foreign/immigrant students and lessen their challenges. Such a link would also further integration and cultivate a sense of belonging, thus helping IIEW to overcome their challenge of feeling out of place and/or avoid misinterpretations in terms of their definition and identification of discrimination.

The women in this study suggested that they should enjoy the same job opportunities as their Canadian peers in post-secondary education. In a practical way, the women advocated that their previously-earned degrees be acknowledged and recognised as legitimate foreign educational credentials and skills. Providing working opportunities for Iranian immigrant educated and elite women in a related field of education or academia might, according to the women's suggestions, start with HE teaching assistant positions.

On the positive side, Lum and Grabke (2012) describe how immigrant students in HE are more optimistic compared to their native counterparts. Lum and Grabke have coined the phrase “dual frame of references” to define the phenomena of these attitudes to success. Dual frame of references represents having a chance to compare issues, struggles or challenges with the conditions “back home”, whereas non-immigrant students generally speaking do not have the opportunity (or necessity) to evaluate in the same way and, as such, often lack a sense that challenging situations can be overcome (Lum & Grabke, 2012). In a similar vein, HE organisations might also play a significant role in practising dual frame of references in terms of furthering students' success. More positively, many women were pleased about the quality of their studies in Canadian universities (6/10). One of the most frequent answers regarding the decision to continue post-secondary education in Canada appeared to be based on the quality of education in Canadian universities and colleges. One of the women stated that: “I have learnt how I am allowed to critique an author's article in Canadian HE” (Participant 1, interview). Interestingly, the same issue was mentioned by two other study participants. Similarly, they appreciated the freedom of thought and the chance to critique literature concepts in the classroom. That said, the women used the notion to suggest positive changes. Throughout this study, one of the most noteworthy examples of their action in this sense was to make their voices

heard. What is more perceptible, however, is that IIEW have many unmet needs in HE environments which hinders their academic and employment success in Canada. Therefore, and as the women involved in this research also suggest, one of the reasons for immigrants' potential academic success is the feeling of belonging.

The main concern derived from the suggestions/feedback concerns how HE might act as an instrument to help the IIEW research group to overcome their challenges in Canadian society. This could be developed by building a bridge with HE, working together and sharing knowledge with certain stakeholders and institutions (i.e. provincial and federal government, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Statistics Canada, HE, training institutions, students, and educated individuals), thereby providing further opportunities and deepening the involvement of these women. Encouraging other female students to use the available services afforded by HE rather than relying on other immigrants who have faced similar issues, was another suggestion made by the participants.

6.5.2 Bringing IIEW and HE Organizations Together to Build Practitioner Research Capacity

A lack of adequate academic research sources/information about educated IIEW in this research led this study to ascertain that there is a need to tackle common risk factors among this minority group in Canadian HE. Therefore, it was important for me to take the opportunity to conduct this research in order to further high-level engagement between Canadian HE organisations and myself as a professional practitioner. The ideas and findings that emerged from the study have positively influenced me. The indication is that uncovering the issue under study has, to my knowledge and at the time of conducting this research, not been previously investigated.

Therefore, this motivated me to research the women's challenges. Simultaneously, the study's findings impact my professional practice, which is intended to establish a connection between what we know while advancing positive changes, namely as a clinical psychologist dealing with many immigrants including IIEW and as a seasonal TA engaging with this group.

I would like to take the opportunity to share my innovative work as a practitioner academic researcher, specifically as an educational counsellor working in private language institutions in Canada. I created some networking opportunities with a number of Iranian professionals via a non-profit organization called Iranian Professional Networking. The aim is to educate Iranian immigrant educators by running workshops in North Vancouver and Tri-City (the two main regions with large Iranian populations) dealing with a variety of topics such as access to HE in Canada, discussion of cultural differences/viewpoints, assisting Iranian immigrants to meet the requirements of the labour market, awareness of legal rights, domestic and public safety issues, social and educational activities including sport, and many other related issues.

Consequently, one of the main aims of my research is to communicate the findings at relevant academic conferences and seminars such as The Middle East and Islamic Consortium of British Columbia, university environments, alongside the aforementioned workshops. The intention is to create more awareness and to help women to take some positive action as part of the Iranian Professional Networking group. As described above, discussing the study's findings in an organization for women such as Iranian Professional Networking, will not only familiarise them with their Canadian communities, it would also inculcate more awareness, promoting more strategies for them to access accurate information by sharing some common challenges, and

successes alongside networking opportunities. Such practices, additionally, offer more support to the Iranian community while acknowledging that they are not alone.

As one may note, the study's findings are based on IIEW's experiences of Canadian HE and this research offers some meaningful and practical suggestions that might help to build a bridge between community-based practitioners such that IIEW and academic organisations might work together more effectively. As a practitioner, this research also attempts to develop capacity within community-based immigrant graduates and HE organisations. This study has impacted my practice as a practitioner in terms of broadening my awareness of the need to support IIEW. This research, therefore, contributes knowledge regarding raising awareness of educated immigrant women in the community while allowing their voices to be heard (Fox, 2003). Graduate research such as this doctoral study requires dissemination strategies which include knowledge brokers, lectures, the circulation and discussion of work in progress, conferences and publications, all of which can help to initiate positive change and thus shape future agendas.

6.6 General Research Impact

Even though there are many aspects of migratory movement that call for further attention and responses, looking at the migration of highly skilled/educated Iranian individuals not only helps to develop a deeper understanding of Iranian migration globally, it also provides the opportunity to reveal factors that facilitate migration among the Iranian educated elite in the first place. As a result of conducting such studies, our leaders, policy makers, university governors, professors and students will be able to recognise gaps in a variety of areas and, consequently, will be able to address relatively unexplored aspects of the education system for the benefit of immigrant students as well as that of wider society.

6.7 Impact of the Research on Practice and the Associated Knowledge Base

This study has numerous implications for the participants and knowledge creation, some of which are detailed below.

6.7.1 Raising Awareness in the Wider Community

Making IIEW's voices audible to the HE community and the wider public is another significant impact this study has attempted to deliver. The primary intention has been to raise awareness of these women's challenges and their attempts to overcome those, struggles which have been hidden or obscured in dominant discourses (Sprague, 2005). A number of the research findings which will help in designing interventions to encourage improvements in HE organisations' performance include valuing invisible labour, consciousness of students' sensitivity to the issue of discrimination at any level (in any environment or form), while recognising and evaluating IIEW's degrees and educational backgrounds form a few of the research's findings. In turn, this research will, I believe, help to design interventions, thereby encouraging healthier performances on the part of HE organisations. Raising awareness of Canadian society and HE organisations regarding IIEW's needs is another impact that this study contributes to. This same impact can be considered an appropriate instrument for disseminating new and existing experiences, identifying possible needs, and promoting knowledge of better and healthier procedures in an academic environment.

I believe, this study also has a positive intellectual impact as the existing literature was either too general and/or rather outdated as there has been relatively little scholarly research conducted on the subject under discussion here. For example, many studies were based on Canadian statistical research in 2006 with no later research. To help fill this gap, I have benefited from the literature

on similar issues in the United States to create a broader understanding of Iranian migration, including Chaichian (2008), Huang and Lu (2013), and Stecklow and Fassihi (2009).

6.7.2 Encouraging Impact on the Group under Study

This study has followed a feminist research paradigm which recognises and validates multiple, partial and subjective truths. Although a feminist researcher cannot claim to speak for all women, new knowledge can be derived from studies such as this that are grounded in the realities of Iranian immigrant experiences, thereby helping to enact structural changes in a multicultural community as exists in Canada. Considering that no single strategy fits all situations, Canadian educational policy-makers may benefit from the data generated by this research and thereby begin to design appropriate approaches to IIEW, meeting their needs, hearing their voices and considering their burdens. The research findings therefore aim to help HE bodies to first recognise certain gaps and then develop an appropriate strategy to meet immigrant women's needs. According to Sprague (2005), by establishing research partnerships that include girls and young women and being consistent with participatory action research, the research will be more likely to be relevant and meaningful for the group studied while also of interest to wider academia. Potential support on the part of HE policy makers may encourage a reconsideration of IIEW's foreign credentials and academic skills (Dietz et al., 2009) such as evaluation or screening throughout the application process as the study discussed in previous chapter. This valuable support might also inculcate more cultural acceptance among Canadian employees in terms of acknowledging foreign credentials and degrees. I believe a starting point could be for HE organisations to support and facilitate this process and I am optimistic that this study will have a profound and positive influence on IIEW in Canadian society. The study's findings

reinforce the critical importance of women's economic independence based on their academic background since most of the immigrant women here are either highly educated or skilled in their working areas (cf. Thobani, 2007; Tadaki, 2013). Nevertheless, the study of Iranian migrant women in Canada is still emerging, in particular regarding the local social and academic challenges they face. I also hope that this study's findings might be applied in the field of academia in terms of deepening interest in immigrant educated women across Canada.

6.7.3 Potential Positive Impact of the Research

Although this research may not have direct practical influence on education policies, it still recognises the gaps and challenges that exist and, as a result of generating relevant academic data, can help to formulate policies that could assist Iranian graduates, thereby assuring them that they have not been ignored. The findings might help inform a local Canadian university to provide focused courses to help professionals convert their qualifications into relevant criteria to deepen their social integration. Another example of the study's potential impact, is that distributing the findings and results in a similar field might contribute to helping a host country, such as Canada, to make the best use of its "brain gain", and to recognise and plan how Canadian policies might encourage the employment of Iranian academics.

I would like to take the opportunity to initiate further work as an academic researcher. As an educational counsellor involved with working in private institutions in Canada, the aim is to put the accumulated knowledge into practice in the educational organisation where I work. The research findings have also encouraged me to be more focused on teachers' practices, receiving feedback and constructive critiques, offering the research findings to the school's policy makers while implementing policy. Consequently, and as previously stated, one of the main aims is to

communicate the findings at pertinent academic conferences and seminars such as Middle East and Islamic Consortium of British Columbia, university environments, alongside public workshops. While it is unlikely that this study provides a sufficient number of cases (just 10 IIEW) to assess all the challenges these women experience and face in Canadian society and its HE organisations, the study's findings have the potential to have significant impact by generating further research and discussion.

As I have mentioned above, this research can be considered as laying the groundwork for future academic studies. I would definitely like to increase the sample size to a number greater than 10 and to establish some focus groups and conduct further in-depth interviews. Also, for the purposes of comparison, I would have interviewed a group of Iranian immigrant elite men, to explore their potential challenges. I would like to use several groups (as samples) with two or three separate discussion sessions for each group. The findings may also be useful in terms of aligning education policy with high-performance standards at a university level, an issue which undeniably calls for further exploration. There are excellent examples of collaborative projects offering some examples of best practice for academics and community-based practitioners working together – not just to conduct research, but also to build research capacity within community-based organisations (Fox, 2003), internal debates etc.

6.8 Overview of the Study's Limitations

This research believes that conducting any study has its own constraints and challenges. While the study did not face any problems finding qualified participants, one of the main challenges was the emotional barriers many of the participants experienced. Despite the women in this study being excited regarding sharing their experiences for the sake of research, recalling what they

had experienced was somewhat emotional. To manage this issue, I let the participants decide whether to continue or stop speaking about particular subjects.

Another limitation – and one that has been mentioned previously – was the lack of existing literature to work or compare this study with. As a result, one of the main challenges that I encountered conducting the research was a dearth of literature on the IIEW's educational experiences in Canada. This limitation, however, served as motivation for continuing this study. To help fill this gap, I considered some US-based literature reviews that helped to generate a broader understanding of Iranian migration. This limitation was more perceptible when starting the research (which, again, made me more eager to conduct this research), while this also made me proud to gather essential information that might help further academic enquiry.

The research also explored similar studies in the field, such as Bodgan and Bilken (1998). The latter state that “Whilst there is some debate whether a qualitative study should begin with the review of the literature or not, [...] believe that after you have been in the field for a while, going through substantive research in the area you are studying will enhance analysis” (pp. 163-165). The concepts found in past literature in related research fields also aided the study in determining the most significant issues and, as such, helped me to thematically structure the findings based on important and crucial concerns. Therefore, the research outcomes may be considered as a starting point for future and additional research.

The small number of participants, despite appearing as a limitation, also helped me to establish the study's authenticity. It is noteworthy that since the findings are based on a small number of participants (10 women), the data cannot be statistically generalised to all IIEW. This is the reason why the data was triangulated with other resources related to educated immigrant women

in general and IIEW in particular (i.e. the literature, the questionnaire and the interview) to provide further depth to the study's findings. In any future research, the research should aim for a larger number of participants in order to generate more profound findings.

Another limitation is related to the researcher's position. Many social and feminist researchers (Sprague, 2005; Reinharz, 1992; Kirby et al., 2006) argue that a key area for reflection is the researcher's status in the research arena. Being an "insider" better enables me to understand what women had to say in a way in which no "outsider" could. On the other hand, with insider research there is the risk of assumptions going unchallenged (Hockey, 1993, p.199) while the researcher who adopts an "epistemology of insiderness" sees life and work as intertwined.

Although I carefully explained my research position to myself and to the participants at the beginning of the research, the common and sometimes shared experiences and challenges the women shared, or the level of emotion they expressed during the interviews, was quite overwhelming and might have had an impact on my data interpretation.

To overcome such challenges, an attempt was made to perform and respect my position as a researcher, and to consider the problems of being an insider or outsider using a reflexive approach (Nencel, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013) as explained previously. Reviewing the researcher's understanding of the participants' thoughts during the data collection and analysis helped me to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpreting their ideas. For example, notes were either provided to participants for further validation and data triangulation, or were shared verbally with the women during the data interpretation process to ensure the interpretation developed here was accurate. Findings were also triangulated with the available literature. As I have mentioned elsewhere, this research can be considered as laying the groundwork for future

academic study. For example, future research based on a larger number of participants could be organised alongside additional focus groups and in-depth interviews. It is my intention to carry out such research in the future. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the interviews conducted here with interviews with a group of Iranian immigrant elite men, in order to explore the latter's particular challenges. I would have liked to use several groups (as samples) with two or three separate discussion sessions for each group. Another idea that would be interesting to utilize as an approach in my future study involves using a feminist collaborative approach and its associated methodology.

The word "collaborate" means to work together, which has also on occasion included researchers and participants' joint intellectual efforts (Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013). Collaboration in feminist research means emphasising participation, flexibility, the relationship with the subject, all while sharing, representing and empowering women's voices (Huntley & Logan, 2001; Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013). Therefore, collaboration in feminist research involves a deep partnership between the participant and the researcher.

In my future study, I would use collaborative approach as Shields and Dervin (1993) suggest. They have articulated that in collaborative research the distinction between the research and researcher may be somewhat blurred and eliminated and, as such, both the researcher and the researched's positions must be considered (Jasper, 2003; Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013). Considering this, in my future study I would attempt to pay more attention to individuals' involvement from the stage of pre-designing my study plan as the approach recommends.

I believe that future studies could allow me to explore female participants' issues further in terms of their everyday lives from different perspectives in order to generate practical suggestions for action.

6.9 Summary and Conclusion

The study's findings demonstrate that IIEW face multiple challenges in Canadian society. They can be summarised in: "Economic Security/Seeking Work and Employment", "English Language Barriers (Self-Reported English Language Abilities) and HE Support Services", "Academic Credits", "Recognition: Challenge of Continuing Education and the Issue of Job Finding", "Educational Counsellors/Advisors in Canadian HE", "Academic Orientation Sessions", and "Feeling out of Place" are equally significant to the participants. Said that however, as the data analysis shows that IIEW, at some level, remain economically and socially marginalised. The degree of social distance from the dominant White mainstream (Canadian-born) individuals educationally, in their personal lives, friendship situations and at their workplaces appears to be a significant challenge for many of the women participating in this study.

While the findings demonstrate the female participants commonly experience feeling that they are inadequately informed by HE institutions, the study also indicates how they need to play a more dynamic role in their Canadian society to obtain the information they need, thereby helping them to integrate further into the new educational context, and positive feeling of being welcomed. Cultural adaptation and community involvement alongside social commitments and positive integration/engagement has been recognised as playing a central role in the well-being of individuals and the community to which they belong.

Additionally, the findings deduced from the women's narratives elucidate that almost all of them (9/10) were either busy volunteering in an area related or unrelated to their educational background, or they were occupied in a field requiring lower skills or proficiencies and, as such, they considered these be survival jobs.

On a positive note, the participants, despite their frustrations, felt more satisfied living, working and even studying here (Canada) than in their original homeland (Iran). Therefore, while all the women made comments or suggestions regarding how HE can help Iranian immigrant students to overcome their challenges, they were also trying to help one another using their own techniques. Almost all of them felt that they were moving towards a goal and making a positive impact on their private and public lives, however small that might be considered from an outsider's perspective. In a similar vein, one of the participants stated eagerly that: "I will keep continue fighting to approach my goal, I have to find my right job that matches with my education and experience. I will not give up, regardless" (Participant 8, interview).

A closer look at the issue shows that they interpret and define any social, economic, personal and political barriers as temporary difficulties that might be overcome with the passing of time and their own hard work. The issue is more tangible when it is connected with HE. In addition, Lum and Grabke (2012) support these findings by suggesting that immigrant students tend to view educational participation as providing a means to social integration. They elaborate that immigrants "see the cultural/language differences as barriers to be overcome in order to achieve their long-range goals of employment, good wages and other benefits, rather than as markers of social identity to be maintained" (p.20).

In the interviews, the participants spent a significant amount of time discussing their satisfaction

(or lack of) with the conditions they experience, both socially and academically. Even though most participants report that they are largely satisfied with their choice to move to Canada to live, they did not show much approval of the services Canadian society and universities provide to immigrant students. At the same time, however, their comments also reveal that they feel in a state of limbo, suggesting that even though the women face a variety of challenges, they still believe that living and studying in Canada is worth fighting for.

Assessing IIEW's diverse experiences reveals that the number of Iranian educated women migrating is likely to rise as there are an increasing number of Iranians who are planning to come to Canada or who have already applied to do so. For instance, one of the participants stated: "I know I would have made the same choice as if it was 10 years ago, but dealing with challenges is so hard, particularly when you don't have anybody to talk to" (Participant 2, interview). Such expressions by educated elite Iranian women suggest that immigrant students in the Canadian academic environment possess a strong sense of positive achievement in terms of reaching their goals.

This study has several implications for the participants and knowledge creation, including producing new knowledge, raising awareness, and gathering data for future research. I believe this research generates new and rich knowledge which helps to fill a gap in the existing literature, thereby fulfilling the study's intention to positively impact on IIEW while helping to lay the groundwork for future research.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL



Dear Giti

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee: EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)

Review type: Expedited

PI:

School: Lifelong Learning

Title:

First Reviewer: Prof. Morag A. Gray

Second Reviewer: Dr. Ewan Dow

Other members of

the Committee Dr, Peter Kahn

Date of Approval: 03.02.14

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

		M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the
		VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD
1	Mandatory	Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at

<http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Morag Gray

Chair, EdD. VPREC

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

A) Personal Background Information

1. When did you leave Iran?
2. Did you come to Canada directly?
3. If no, in which country(s) did you live before entering Canada?
4. Are you a citizen or permanent immigrant to Canada? What kind of visa do you have?
5. How long have you been in Canada?
6. What is your field of study in Iran?
7. What is your field of study or occupation when abroad (excluding Canada)?
8. Which profession were you working before landing to Canada?
9. What is your field of work experience in Iran? Do you have any other working experiences?
10. What was your degree of study in Iran?
11. How long have you been working in your educational related job in Iran and/or abroad?

B) Canadian Experience

1. What is your field of study in Canada if any? Did you take any specific courses in Canada?
2. Is this field of study related to your background field of study in Iran? Why or why not?
3. Are you still student at any Canadian university now?
4. What is the current educational degree you obtained in Canada?
5. In order to access the Canadian University, have you obtained any certificate in:

- a) Canadian collages such as BCIT, VCC or any others as prerequisite necessary to be admitted to Canadian university?
- 6. If you have received any professional/skilled/educational degree in Canada, what was the main purpose of doing so?
- 7. In which profession are you working in now?
- 8. What is the level of satisfaction in your educational progress in Canada (score or define)?

C) Advantage and Disadvantage

- 1. Do you see any advantages living in Canada? If yes, name as many as you can. If no, why do you think so? Please describe.
- 2. Do/did you come across any challenges while living Canada (socially, educationally, etc.)? Please specify.
- 3. How did/do you overcome your challenges at the beginning of your settlement in Canada? How about now?
- 4. If you had the opportunity of discussing your challenges with any person or organizations, what would you say?

D) Higher Educational Viewpoints

- 1. How do you describe higher education in Canada?
- 2. What motivated you to start/continue education in Canadian higher education universities?
- 3. If this is the case
 - a) Do you recommend your fellows to study in Canadian society? Why?

b) Do/did you face any challenges or educational challenges while you were/are studying in Canadian higher education organization? What were some of the challenges you faced?

4. What is your main concern and/or challenge(s) in higher education?
5. Did you overcome the challenges you experienced? How?

E) Opportunities

1. Have you been offered for any attractive or satisfying professional job opportunities in Canada? If yes, what was it and if no why do you think was/is it so?
2. What does seem to be as more important/helpful in finding a related job based on your educational background? Why?
3. Do you find yourself a satisfied graduated student in Canadian society? Why or why not?
4. What do you think has contributed to your failure and/or success at university level?
5. Generally speaking, do you find yourself satisfied about your education in Canada? Why?
6. Has your experience of life in Canada met your expectations? Explain.
7. Did you achieve your professional goals by coming to Canada? Why?

F) Community Services

1. Did/do you experience any community support such as welfare system, income assistance, English class, and / or similar help in Canada?
2. If your answer to the above question is yes, do you think this kind of assistance have helped you in overcoming some challenges? If so what kind and why?

3. Are you willing to be referred to receive better support in job finding, English learning classes, child parenting, etc.? Why or why not?
4. How do you think Canadian social and educational services (including higher educational services) can assist and support immigrant students in Canada?
5. Do you think that higher education have helped or will help you in overcoming some of your challenges?
6. Do/did you face any challenges for finding your suitable job? If yes, how do you think HE can help or cannot help in overcoming some challenges of yours?

APPENDIX 3: UN-STRUCTURED ORAL INTERVIEW BROAD TOPICS

- 1) Canadian Experience
- 2) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 3) Higher Educational Viewpoints
- 4) Opportunities
- 5) Community Services
- 6) Suggestions
- 7) Critiques

Appendix 4: Table n. 1: Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Age	Year of Migration	Educational / Professional Background	Marital Status	Canadian HE	Current Occupation
#1	27	2005	Electronic Eng.	Single mother	Yes	Babysitter
#2	43	2006	Family doctor	No info.	Yes	Volunteer at Senior Care Services
#3	42	2011	Family doctor	Married	Yes	Unemployed
#4	35	2007	Pharmacist	Married	Yes	Student / McDonalds Services
#5	35	2008	Dentist	Married	Yes	Dentist Business Owner
#6	48	2007	Dermatologist	Married	Yes	Hair Removal Centre
#7	29	2010	Physiotherapist	No info.	Yes	Food Store Cashier
#8	39	2010	Electronic Eng.	No info.	Yes	Carpet Industry Designer
#9	50	2011	Family doctor	No info.	Yes	Volunteer at Senior Care Services
#10	36	2011	Civil Eng.	Single mother	Yes	Real Estate