Iranian Immigrants' Interactions within Iranian Communities:

An Exploration of Diversity and Belonging

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Abstract

Iranians were the third-largest group of admitted immigrants to Canada between 2011 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016). The current literature on Iranian immigrants in North America explores Iranians' integration into the host society and Iranian communities (Kafili, 2013; Mostofi, 2003). Studies that document a lack of cohesion within Iranian communities have mostly focused on the role of religious or political affiliations at the community level (Malek, 2015b). However, an in-depth account of interpersonal interactions and a sense of belonging to the community is missing in this literature. Moreover, research on Iranians living in North America has focused on single identities and has not considered immigrants' intersections of identities. Therefore, this qualitative study explored how Iranian immigrants in Québec, experienced their intersections of identities during interactions with other Iranians and the meanings immigrants made while living in or belonging to the Iranian community. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used as a research methodology and intersectionality as the epistemological framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 first-generation Iranians between the ages of 32 and 44 who had permanent residency status and who lived in Québec for at least three years. An interpretive phenomenological analysis of the results yielded several major themes: transitioning to Québec, challenges of bilingualism, career transitioning, experiences unique to women, community engagement, and interpersonal interactions. An analysis of intersectionality highlighted the intersections of classism, sexism, ageism, racism and political affiliation in shaping interpersonal interactions and a sense of belonging to the community. The implications for practice, policymaking, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Iranian immigrants, intersections, community belonging, interpersonal interactions

Résumé

Les Iraniens constituaient le troisième groupe en importance d'immigrants admis au Canada entre 2011 et 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016). La littérature actuelle sur les immigrants iraniens en Amérique du Nord explore l'intégration des Iraniens dans la société hôte et les communautés iraniennes (Kafili, 2013; Mostofi, 2003). Les études qui documentent un manque de cohésion au sein des communautés iraniennes ont principalement porté sur le rôle des affiliations religieuses ou politiques au niveau communautaire (Malek, 2015b). Cependant, un compte rendu détaillé des interactions interpersonnelles et d'un sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté, font défaut dans cette littérature. De plus, les recherches sur les Iraniens vivant en Amérique du Nord se sont concentrées sur les identités uniques et n'ont pas pris en compte les intersections des identités des immigrants. Par conséquent, cette étude qualitative a exploré la façon dont les immigrants iraniens au Québec ont vécu l'intersection de leurs identités lors d'interactions avec d'autres Iraniens et les significations créées par les immigrants lorsqu'ils vivaient ou appartenaient à la communauté iranienne. La phénoménologie herméneutique a été utilisée comme méthodologie de recherche et l'intersectionalité comme cadre épistémologique. Des entrevues semi-structurés ont été réalisés avec 12 Iraniens de première génération âgés de 32 à 44 ans, titulaires du statut de résident permanent et résidant au Québec depuis au moins trois ans. Une analyse phénoménologique interprétative des résultats a permis de dégager plusieurs grands thèmes : la transition au Québec, les défis du bilinguisme, la transition de carrière, expériences uniques aux femmes, l'engagement communautaire et les interactions interpersonnelles. Une analyse de l'intersectionnalité a mis en évidence les intersections du classisme, du sexisme, de l'âgisme, du racisme et de l'affiliation politique dans la formation

d'interactions interpersonnelles et d'un sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté. Les implications pour la pratique, l'élaboration des politiques et les recherches futures sont discutées.

Mots-clés : immigrants iraniens, intersections, appartenance à la communauté, interactions interpersonnelles

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Immigration has increasingly become a significant factor in global society since the beginning of the current century (United Nations, 2013). The developed countries (including Canada and the U.S.) absorbed 69% of the world's international migrants between 1990 and 2013. One considerably large group taking part in these global changes are Iranian migrants. The 2016 Canadian census showed that around 154,000 Iranian immigrants were living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Between 2011 and 2016, Iranians were the third-largest immigrant group in Canada who received permanent residency (Statistics Canada, 2016). Moreover, a 2007 estimate of the number of Iranians in the U.S. showed that about 413,000 Iranians live in the U.S. (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2010). Other estimates, however, show an even larger number of Iranians in the U.S. (Ardaghi, 2009).

This large Iranian immigrant population faces several challenges while forming communities and connecting with the host societies in North America (Mobasher, 2006). The negative image of Iran in North America and the recent political tensions between Iran and Western countries have resulted in feelings of discrimination among Iranians (Sahar Sadeghi, 2016). Recent anti-immigration events in the U.S., including the 2017 travel ban for citizens of Iran, contribute to the challenges faced by Iranians living In Canada and the United States.

Literature has documented that the oppression against ethnic and religious minorities, along with discrimination against women and political dissidents have resulted in the emigration of many Iranians (Chaichian, 2011). The Iranian population in Canada and the U.S. has been described as heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, gender and sexual orientation, and political affiliation (Mobasher, 2006). Current literature on the transitioning and

integration of Iranians into Canada and the United States covers various areas including mental health issues (Abdolsalehi-Najafi & Beckman, 2013; Ghaffarian, 1998) identity and belonging to the host society (Mazaheri, Sadeghi, Ganjavi, & Minakari, 2009), gender and sexual orientation issues (Hojati, 2012; Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011), and political and religious identity (Saghafi, Asamen, Rowe, & Tehrani, 2012; Shafafi, 2015).

While the recent socio-political history of Iran has resulted in a commonly shared dislike of the Iranian regime by many Iranians, this sentiment has not proven to be a strong unifying force within North American Iranian communities (Moghadam, 2007). Given the within-group heterogeneity, and diversity of immigration reasons among Iranians living in Canada and the U.S., several scholars have documented the challenges Iranians face in re-defining their individual and collective identities, constructing a sense of belonging and establishing memberships in groups (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003; Sahar Sadeghi, 2016). The general consensus among scholars researching Iranian communities in North America is that Iranians often do not perceive their communities as strong or cohesive (Malek, 2015a; Mostofi, 2003). Moreover, the current literature focuses mostly on religious and political affiliation as factors that have created sharp divisions within the Iranian community (Malek, 2011). The oppression of the Iranian regime in the name of religion has resulted in intense political divisiveness among groups of Iranians outside of Iran (Shafafi, 2015). For example, there are disagreements over the role of religion in society and attitudes towards the Iranian regime (Shafafi, 2015).

Research Rationale and Purpose

Iranian immigrants constitute a large ethnic group in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). The literature on the integration of Iranians to North America has documented how Iranians define and express their identity (Hojati, 2012; Mazaheri et al., 2009). However, most studies

have focused only on individual aspects of Iranians' identities and not their intersections (e.g., gender or political affiliation). In other words, while some scholars have agreed upon the role of within-group diversity and heterogeneity of the Iranian population in North America (Mobasher, 2006), very few have addressed the challenges of transitioning and living in the host societies using a complex intersection of social locations (Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006).

Extant literature has documented challenges of belonging within Iranian communities (Malek, 2015a; Mostofi, 2003). However, the current literature has mostly focused on political and religious affiliations as factors responsible for creating divisions within these communities. Research discusses community challenges mostly on the community level. That is an in-depth account of how individual community members interact and experience their sense of belonging to their community is missing. Moreover, since turning to other immigrants who speak the same language and are from the same home country is one of the first strategies for seeking support among new immigrants (Sinacore, Titus, & Hofman, 2013), it is imperative to understand how new Iranian immigrants experience their interpersonal interactions within the Iranian community. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze how new Iranian immigrants in Québec interact with other Iranians and experience their sense of belonging given their intersections of identities.

Research Questions

This study seeks answers to the following questions: (a) How do people from Iran living in Québec experience their multiple intersecting identities? (b) How do Iranians living in Québec experience their multiple intersecting identities when interacting with other individuals from Iran? And (c) How do people from Iran perceive collective identity and belonging to the Iranian community in Québec?

Epistemology and Methodology

Intersectionality was chosen as the proper epistemological framework for this study (Sprague, 2005). While the current literature addresses the challenges of Iranian immigrants living in North America, the literature has rarely addressed these challenges using an epistemological framework that takes into account the intersections of immigrants' identities. Moreover, adopting intersectionality as the epistemological framework enables the researcher to study the power structures and inequalities that impact interactions and a sense of belonging to the community (Lykke, 2010). Therefore, adopting an intersectionality epistemology was appropriate as it provided a framework for the study of Iranian immigrants' experiences given the intersection between socially constructed categories such as gender, race, class, age, and nationality that results in multiple types of inequalities (Lykke, 2010).

Given that this study aimed to analyze the lived experiences of Iranians within Iranian communities in Québec, a qualitative research design was deemed appropriate. As such, hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen to gather retrospective accounts of Iranians living in Québec. Intersectionality as the epistemological framework and hermeneutic phenomenology as the research method call for attention to lived experiences and a situated meaning within participants' social locations (Lykke, 2010; Polkinghorne, 2005; Van Manen, 1997). Therefore, adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological method in conjunction with an intersectionality epistemology provided a proper methodological framework for studying the lived experiences of Iranian immigrants in Canada.

Organization of the Dissertation

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter two will review the literature on Iranian immigrants in North America with a focus on various aspects of Iranian identities within the

socio-political context of immigration. Chapter three will discuss the epistemology and methodology of the study, as well as the selection of participants, materials and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. In chapter four, the findings of the study will be presented, and in chapter five, a discussion about the findings and their relationship to the literature will be presented, and then strengths and limitations of the study and implications for research and practice will be reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To better situate the current literature about Iranian immigrants in North America, first, a brief history of emigration from Iran and the public discourses about Iranians in North America will be reviewed. Then, the current literature based on the most-studied social locations such as national identity, sex, gender and sexual orientation, the political, and religious affiliation will be discussed. Finally, the role of the community and the strengths and limitations of the literature will be reviewed.

Context of Leaving: History and Waves of Emigration

Current research discusses the relationship between Iran's historical events and reasons for Iranian emigration at length (Chaichian, 2011; Lewin, 2001; Saedi, 2010; Shamtoub, 2014). Before the 1979 revolution (also known as Islamic Revolution), the "Shah" (king) governed Iran and his totalitarian regime oppressed some forms of freedom, such as political and religious freedom. However, the country enjoyed some levels of liberty, such as women's right to have a preferred type of hijab and relative freedom for some religious minorities (Torbat, 2002). During this period, the majority of Iranians who left Iran and arrived in North America were students, due to the appeal of the North American educational system and limited higher education opportunities in Iran (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2010).

The 1979 revolution was the start of another totalitarian regime guided by extreme religious fundamentalists who revoked the already limited rights Iranians had enjoyed (Torbat, 2002). After the 1979 revolution, the legal system was adjusted based on Islamic law and, therefore, women were forced to wear the hijab and were banned from numerous social spaces. Moreover, religious minorities, such as Jews and Bahá'ís, were persecuted and had limited access to higher education and the job market (Chaichian, 2011). During the first few years after

the revolution, many university lecturers and students, members of political groups, religious and ethnic minorities, artists and writers, had to leave the country as immigrants or refugees due to the threat of persecution (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2010; Chaichian, 2011). A few years after the revolution, the Iran–Iraq War (1980-1988) added to restrictions and the burden on people (Lewin, 2001). This war marked the start of another wave of emigration, as many Iranian youths left the country in fear of conscription.

Moreover, by the end of the 1980s, another surge of political oppression added to the number of political refugees (Torbat, 2002). The final wave of immigration resulted from the controversial June 2009 presidential election and its accompanying street violence. Chaichian (2011) posits that a large number of refugee and immigrant applicants following the 2009 presidential election were students who were disappointed by the socio-political system in Iran. In addition to these reasons for immigration, Chaichian argues that, in the past few decades, an increasing number of highly educated and skilled Iranians have been leaving Iran in search of better work and living conditions as a result of globalization and new market demands. Therefore, the emigration motives of these Iranians are not necessarily political or related to minority status.

Context of Receiving: Public Discourses about Iranians in North America

Before the 1979 revolution, Iran was represented by a positive and peaceful image in North America (Torbat, 2002). The first event that had an extremly negative effect on the mindset of people in the U.S. and Canada was the Iran hostage crisis in 1979 (Mobasher, 2006). As well, the 1979 revolution contributed to a general perception that all Iranians suppress the rights of women and minorities and hate Western countries (Mobasher, 2006). The general negative perception about Iranians continued as political tensions between Iran and the U.S.

remained unchanged throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, the attacks of September 11, 2001, exacerbated this attitude, and many Middle Easterners, including Iranians, were labelled as supporters of terrorism (Marvasti, 2005). Lastly, the continued hate speech by Iran's central political figures has sustained the negative image of Iranians in the West (Hojati, 2012).

In addition to negative historical events, the media in North America played a critical role in shaping the public's images of Iran and Iranians. For example, the role of Islam in Iran was greatly emphasized by the media, and it was implied that Islam caused the Iran hostage crisis (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013). Since Iranian rulers were both Muslim extremists and anti-Western, Islam itself was portrayed similarly. Moreover, the North American media portrayed Iranians as a homogenous group devoid of internal differences of political stance, social class, and ethnic identity (McAuliffe, 2007).

As a result of the aforementioned portrayal of Iran in the media, the scholars have identified several discourses that have dominated the North American mindset and affected Iranian immigrants. First, the progress of Iranians has been constructed and represented as unidirectional and Western-defined (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013). According to this discourse, Iranians who follow a North American way of life (e.g., use American products and fight the use of the hijab) are praised, while Iranians with traditional or alternative values are negatively portrayed (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013). Second, negative historical events (e.g., the Iran hostage crisis) and the media's coverage of these events have constructed an atmosphere of "otherness" that applies to all Iranians regardless of their diversity, which, in turn, results in discrimination (Hojati, 2012). Khanlou, Koh, and Mill (2008) similarly explain the experiences of discrimination as a result of media misrepresentation of Iranians and the perpetuation of

stereotypes (e.g., the portrayal of Iranians as terrorists). In these discourses, Iranians have been positioned as troublemakers, outsiders, or those needing rescue by Western forces.

Even though the discrimination experiences mentioned above are reported both in Canada (Hojati, 2012; Khanlou et al., 2008) and the U.S. (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003), there are differences between these two countries in terms of their receptivity towards Iranian immigrants and refugees. Chaichian (1997) argued that traditionally, the U.S.' dominant attitude towards immigration from any country had been described by the term "melting pot". The concept of the melting pot refers to the expectation of immigrants to adopt mainstream "Americanized" culture and values (which consist mainly of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values) and become assimilated to American culture (Mostofi, 2003). Nevertheless, Chaichian argued that, since a few decades ago, scholars have tried to challenge the concept of the melting pot and represent the U.S. as a pluralistic country.

Alternatively, researchers have repeatedly described Canada as a country with a history of multicultural values (Foltz, 2009; Nabavi, 2011; Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006). McAuliffe (2005) reviews the history of multiculturalism in Canada and posits that unlike most other developed countries, Canada holds multicultural values at the core of its identity (i.e., by valuing and respecting the cultural diversity and ethnic minorities within a cultural mosaic). Nevertheless, some scholars (Hojati, 2012; Nabavi, 2011) discuss the limitations of multiculturalism in Canada and posit that immigrants still need to define and situate themselves in relation to either British or French cultures. Therefore, there are mainstream nations as well as "other" nations (i.e., non-white, non-French or non-British), and this adds to immigrants' experiences of otherness. Nevertheless, research shows that Iranians in Canada appreciate

multicultural values in their everyday experiences and actively criticize and push for the same values in their communities (Khanlou et al., 2008; Nabavi, 2011).

National Identity: One Size Fits All?

National Identity as Collective Identity

Mazaheri et al. (2009) claimed that the highest form of collective identity is national identity. Phinney, Berry, Sam, and Vedder defined national identity as a sense of belonging to the larger society and positive attitudes towards it (Khanlou et al., 2008). In order to assess national identity, Mazaheri et al. used the concept of "national pride" as one of the main features of national identity and defined it as "both the pride and sense of esteem that a person has for one's nation" (p. 340). Using a survey, they compared the national pride levels of three groups of Iranians: (a) those who live in Iran, (b) those who applied for immigration to Canada (still living in Iran) and (c) Iranian immigrants residing in Canada. The results of their study showed significant differences between the three groups. Iranians living in Iran had the highest level of national pride, while immigration applicants and residents of Canada had lower levels of national pride. The two latter groups had similar results and, therefore, Mazaheri et al. concluded that a low level of national pride could be the main factor in emigration from Iran.

Nonetheless, Mazaheri et al. (2009)'s argument has its limitations, as other researchers have emphasized that the collective identification of Iranians, specifically in the diaspora, has been a complicated matter given the recent socio-political history of Iran (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003). Mobasher (2006) claims that extreme persecution in Iran and the revolutionary policies of the Iranian regime resulted not only in large emigration rates from Iran but also the alienation of many Iranians from the Iranian regime and its symbols (including Islam). Moreover, the media in the West has associated the image of Iran, and the name "Iranian", with

negative images of terrorism and oppression (Mobasher, 2006). Mobasher explains that, therefore, Iranians in North America have been dealing with identity crises in which they want to both express pride in their country of origin and dissociate from the Iranian regime (even though their host countries do not differentiate these two concepts).

In order to resolve this identity crisis, Iranians in North America not only separated their identity into public (Western) and private (Iranian) spaces, but also labelled their national identity with the word "Persian" instead of "Iranian" which refers to former name for the country of Iran (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003). Therefore, Mazaheri et al. (2009)'s argument that Iranian immigrants have low levels of national pride have overlooked other researchers' point that Iranian immigrants' national pride is associated with their culture and tradition rather than the Iranian regime (Gutierrez, 2013; Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003).

Non-national Modes of Belonging

Some researchers have questioned the importance of national identity altogether (McAuliffe, 2007; Nabavi, 2011). McAuliffe (2007) argues that the media and researchers have overlooked all non-national modes of belonging. The dominance of national identity in research misses the internal differences within each group. McAuliffe describes different types of belonging that can be geographical belonging, such as regional identities, or categorical belonging, such as class, religion, and ethnicity. More recently, Nabavi (2011) showed that a globalized identity for Iranian youth in Canada is reductionist and, in reality, participants' socio-economic status, history of immigration and ethnicity contributed to their constructed sense of identity and citizenship.

Transnational Belonging

Several researchers have documented the role of the Internet in redefining the home (Ghorashi & Boersma, 2009; Graham & Khosravi, 2002; McAuliffe, 2007). Ghorashi and Boersma (2009) studied humanitarian and social change charities using the Internet and other forms of media. They argued that because of both globalization and the advent of the Internet and satellite TVs, Iranians outside of Iran have become more aware of the realities of current Iranian society and can directly or indirectly take part in social action inside Iran. Therefore, this new possibility has shifted discourse such that Iranians' primary form of belonging outside of Iran did not have to be defined by political stances necessarily. Moreover, several researchers have argued that as a result of the transnational activities of charity, human rights' or women's rights activists, new transnational forms of belonging have been created (Ghorashi & Boersma, 2009; Sameh, 2014). Chaichian (2011) used the term "internationalist national identity" and explained that in the new era of globalization, many highly educated and skilled Iranians decide to leave Iran in search of better living conditions to meet the demands of the global market. Therefore, physical borders cannot bind the collective identity of these Iranians, as they feel they can contribute to the development of a country in which they do not reside (Chaichian, 2011).

Sex and Sexual Orientation

Gender norms in Iran are rooted in a patriarchal culture that dates back to the pre-Islamic era; however, Islamic principles embedded in Iranian law and policies perpetuate the patriarchal norms in contemporary Iran (Shirpak et al., 2011). The segregation between sexes exists in most public spheres, including all educational levels, with a goal to protect men from sexual temptation (Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2007). The traditional gender role expectations are sustained and taught within families, and the family's well-being and honour are

considered more important than the individual's needs. As such, everyone is expected to consult their families regarding important decisions. Moreover, men are considered the head of the family and breadwinners, while women's primary role is housekeeping. Girls are expected to be modest and obedient and learn to become good housewives, while boys are expected to be protective and financially independent (Shirpak et al., 2011).

Women

Scholars posit that the process of immigration results in both improvements and challenges in Iranian women's lives. That is, the ability to work outside of the home, financial independence, financial contribution to the family, increased interaction with the outside world, and increased support for egalitarian laws for women and children (e.g., child custody, the welfare system) each increase women's autonomy (Abdolsalehi-Najafi & Beckman, 2013; Moghissi, 1999).

Conversely, Moghissi (1999) talked about the double victimization of Iranian women as both being oppressed by patriarchal traditions of the family and marginalized by the host society. She argued that, as a result of racism in the host society, many Iranian immigrant women do not feel a sense of belonging to the host society and are pushed back into the traditional patriarchal family structures. Nevertheless, Hojati (2012) argued that despite the marginalization of women in different spheres of the host society, most Iranian women would still prefer to stay in Canada since women's rights are much more oppressed in Iran.

Men

A review of the literature on men's challenges after immigration reveals a host of difficulties (Moghissi, 1999; Shirpak et al., 2007, 2011). The first and foremost challenge for male immigrants is finding a job that is similar, both in payment and social status, to their former

career in Iran (Moghissi, 1999). Moghissi showed that men often could not find jobs in their original field due to the loss of educational equivalency and their network of contacts. Also, according to Moghissi, "men are reluctant to work in low-paid, part-time, dead-end jobs-typically, the domain of female workers" (p. 273). Shirpak et al. (2011) have also confirmed similar challenges experienced by male immigrants. They similarly claimed that financial problems and changes in family roles, such as increased independence, freedom and agency for women, are among the factors that challenge men's integration.

Sexual Orientation

The current Iranian regime, under the influence of Islamic law, upholds strict laws against any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Iran is one of the few countries in the world in which having same-sex intercourse can result in a death sentence (Van Gilder & Abdi, 2014).

Very few North American studies on sexual minorities (LGBTQ+) exists in the current literature on Iranian immigrants in North America. Mireshghi and Matsumoto (2008) studied the relationship between perceived cultural attitudes towards LGB individuals and mental health. The results of their study showed that LGB Iranians living in North America assess Iranian culture as more homophobic than LGB non-Iranians assess their own culture. Moreover, assessing Iranian culture as homophobic was associated with higher levels of stress. However, among LGB Iranians, those who were "out" to their parents and accepted by them had significantly lower levels of depression and higher levels of self-esteem than their American counterparts.

Because homosexuality is still widely considered a disease or a Western phenomenon among Iranians, non-heterosexual individuals often experience identity dissonance or perceived

invisibility (Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016). Van Gilder and Abdi (2014) showed that queer, second-generation Iranian-Americans from various states often experience shame anxiety resulting from a fear of others discovering their sexual orientation. As a result, non-heterosexual individuals often negotiate how and to whom they can reveal their sexual identities. Similarly, avoiding interactions with others within the Iranian community was reported as a common coping strategy among gay Iranian refugee men in Canada (Karimi, 2018). Moreover, Abdi and Van Gilder (2016) argued that non-heterosexual, second-generation Iranians often "describe feelings of identity conflict where their ethnic and sexual identities are directly at odds with one another" (p. 78). Nevertheless, Karimi (2018) showed that gay Iranian refugees could also feel rejected within local non-Iranian gay communities, based on their ethnic identity. Therefore, ethnic and sexual orientation identities could interact in ways in which members of sexual minorities feel rejected or limited in their interactions both within Iranian communities or larger society.

Political and Religious Identity

The majority of Iranian immigrants who emigrated from Iran after 1979's revolution share a common dislike towards the current Iranian regime (Bozorgmehr, 1998; Moghadam, 2007). Moghadam (2007) argued that this common dislike applies to political or religious refugees and those who have left Iran for educational purposes. Moreover, the Iranian regime persecuted and massacred thousands of its political opponents in the 1980s, resulting in the mass immigration of political groups to Western countries (Shafafi, 2015). As a result, there are sharp divisions within the Iranian diaspora in terms of political affiliation. Younger or second-generation Iranian immigrants have recently condemned the activities and approaches of these political groups outside of Iran as a source of disharmony within the Iranian community that harms the collective action (Shafafi, 2015). For example, after the controversial 2009 Iranian

election, many first or second-generation immigrants from various political groups participated in protests across North America in solidarity with those in Iran who claimed their votes were stolen (Malek, 2015a). However, Malek (2015a) describes that this unparalleled show of solidarity "quickly turned into flashpoints for old rivalries" where various political groups started fighting over the "waving of pre- and post-revolutionary flags, and disagreements flared over the desired outcomes of political action" (p. 29). Therefore, political affiliation remains a strong source of within-group diversity and identity formation among Iranians in North America.

The majority of Iranians living in Iran identify as Muslim; however, the religious tendencies experience a sharp decline after immigration (Moghadam, 2007). Nevertheless, religious affiliation remains as one of the main identifiers that Iranians use to create intra-group belonging (Bozorgmehr, 1998). Several factors impact the role of religious affiliation for Iranians immigrants in North America. One factor is the change in the religious minority or majority status as a result of emigration (Saghafi et al., 2012). For example, the Christian Armenians who are considered a minority in Iran will identify with Christian majority society in the U.S. while Muslims will have to adopt a minority status in the new host society. This status change impacts the integration of immigrants. For instance, being a Muslim in Iran gives the person certain automatic privileges, whereas research shows that the majority of Muslim Iranians in North America try to distance themselves from their religious affiliation due to negative perceptions (Chaichian, 1997). Moreover, the majority of Muslim Iranians either lost their religious practices or tried to hide their religious identity due to negative perceptions of Islam (Mobasher, 2006) and their sense of belonging to Islam decreased dramatically (Saghafi et al., 2012).

The experiences of other religious minorities, such as the Jews, Bahá'ís, and Zoroastrians, are quite different from those of Muslim Iranian immigrants (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2010; Malakuti, 2013; Saghafi et al., 2012). Most of the followers of these religious minorities left Iran due to discrimination, and upon arrival to North America, they are still considered part of minority groups- with the exception of Christians (Saghafi et al., 2012). Living and connecting to other Iranians within the Iranian community or even other members of the same religious group has its own challenges. For example, Talebi and Desjardins (2012) found that Bahá'í immigrants in Saskatchewan had challenges such as accepting a more casual moral code in Canadian society, difficulties finding jobs, and integrating into Canadian society. Most of the participants in their research had to restructure their faith to adapt to the Canadian context. Talebi and Desjardins found that in order to integrate Canadian and Bahá'í identities, some Bahá'ís maintained a reality that contained contradictory views and identities. For example, Bahá'ís would hold an appreciation of Canadian human rights, freedom of choice, and democratic values while distancing themselves from Canadian secular moral order (Talebi & Desjardins, 2012). Nevertheless, the religious affiliation for Iranian religious minority groups has proved to be a robust identity factor when it comes to entrepreneurship, job finding, networking and community formation (Sahar Sadeghi, 2016).

Collective Identity and the Role of Community

The current literature on the functioning of Iranian communities in North America is scarce, contradictory, and often not supported by research data. Some scholars have discussed both the way Iranians form and sustain communities in North America and the challenges associated with establishing solidarity within these communities. While the preservation of Iranian culture (Mostofi, 2003), support for women and children (Khanlou et al., 2008; Moghissi,

1999), and commonly high educational and socio-economic level (Bozorgmehr (1998) are deemed as unifying factors in community associations, religion and politics are suggested as divisive forces in Iranian immigrant communities (Fathi, 2015; Malek, 2011; Mostofi, 2003).

Mostofi (2003) discussed a sense of collective identity among Iranians in California based on nostalgic memories of Iran and experiences of the immigration process. According to Mostofi, a collective sense of loss for Iran, survival outside of Iran, and hope for return to the home country have each formed collective memories and feelings that could be defined as elements of the diasporic identity. Specifically, she found that the integration of Iranian "non-religious holidays, nonspecific cultural mannerisms, and ethnically neutral traditions into a collective Iranian diasporic identity has been created by affluent Muslims in Southern California" (p. 689).

However, Mostofi (2003) also argued that these elements alone do not necessarily create sufficient coherence needed to form a sense of community in every part of the U.S., and not all Iranians can relate to these Iranian cultural universals as well. For example, Mostofi noted that not all Iranians feel connected to community events if they are associated with Muslim traditions. Mostofi argued that "cohesiveness" based on "neutral traditions" (i.e., those which are not related to specific religious or political backgrounds) is needed among Iranians so that a community can be formed. Mostofi's work, while significant, is not without limitations. As Mostofi did not clearly outline her data collection and method of analysis, it is difficult to verify and support her claims. Moreover, her assumption that there are "neutral traditions" that represent an all-Iranian collective identity is arbitrary as other scholars, for example, Malek (2011) have claimed that those neutral traditions have roots in pre-Islamic religions.

While Mostofi (2003) argued that to reach cohesiveness, the diverse ethnic and religious Iranian groups should adopt a "majoritarian" cultural identity, Malek (2015b) pointed to possible marginalization resulting from such collectiveness. Malek argued that creating so-called "coherent" communities based on collective memories and actions, can result in the marginalization of other groups and minorities. In line with this notion, Mostofi (2003) found that because neutral cultural traditions are being propagated by "affluent Muslims" who represent the backbone of the Iranian community in Southern California, any non-affluent Muslim Iranians would find connecting to the community challenging.

Regardless of the reasons for lack of cohesiveness, the majority of scholars report significant divisions within Iranian communities in the diaspora (Malek, 2011, 2015a; Shafafi, 2015). Some scholars believe that challenges faced by Iranians in the diaspora stem from Iran's political and religious history (Shafafi, 2015). The violent suppression of political and religious groups by Iran's strict Islamic government in the1980s often forms a basis for current political divisiveness among survivors currently living in North America (Shafafi, 2015). In turn, these tensions have resulted in many Iranians blaming the lack of coherence in diasporic communities to the discord among Iranian political groups. In fact, scholars have documented the recent rejection of religion and politics among Iranians who wish for a more cohesive community (Malek, 2011). Nevertheless, scholars highlight the importance of considering teh effects of the trauma from the 1980s when studying Iranian immigrants' challenges in North America (Shafafi, 2015).

There is also a lack of trust among Iranians in North America that acts as a barrier against strong intra-community ties. Some Iranians suspect that agents of the current Iranian regime live amongst them who have ill wishes for the community (Mostofi, 2003; Shafafi, 2015). Similarly,

Saghafi et al. (2012) have noted that even non-Iranians may hold assumptions that Iranians of Southern California are supporters or agents of the current regime. Mostofi (2003) argued that these assumptions and suspicions by both groups had created a culture of skepticism among Iranians, which further prevents coherence in the Iranian immigrant communities.

Nevertheless, other scholars (Khanlou et al., 2008; Moghissi, 1999) have discussed the role of Iranian communities with a focus on Iranian women and youth. Moghissi (1999) argued that when Iranian women in Canada face racism or any gender-related discrimination, they have nowhere else to seek support aside from their family and community. More recently, Khanlou et al. (2008) studied the experience of discrimination and prejudice by Iranian and Afghan youth in Canada and showed that one way they coped with instances of discrimination in school and society was by having a sense of belonging to the community of heritage.

Strengths and Limitations of the Literature

Review of the literature on Iranian immigrants in North America results in the identification of several strengths and limitations. One of the strengths of the literature is the diversity of research methods. More specifically, about one-quarter of all the research reviewed for this literature review was conducted quantitatively and the remainder used qualitative methods including a variety of ethnography, narrative, phenomenology and thematic analyses (Alinejad, 2013; Jafari, Baharlou, & Mathias, 2010; Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006; Shirpak et al., 2011). Moreover, the literature on the integration of Iranians to Canada and the U.S. has used a diversity of models and orientations. For example, researchers have used alternative theoretical orientations such as social constructivism, interpretive approaches (Marvasti, 2005; Maticka-Tyndale, Shirpak, & Chinichian, 2007; Nabavi, 2011), and feminist and standpoint theories (Shiva Sadeghi, 2008; Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006) along with classic integration models.

However, several limitations of the literature should be explained here. Even though the research on Iranians in North America has a diversity of qualitative and quantitative methods, it should be noted that many of the studies that use qualitative methods fail to report their method of analysis (Chaichian, 1997; Ghorashi, 2003; Marvasti, 2005; Shahidian, 1999; Tehranian, 2006), theoretical orientation (McConatha, Stoller, & Oboudiat, 2001), or data collection (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013). Moreover, apart from doctoral dissertations, in most cases, the authors do not report any measures' trustworthiness, such as transferability or credibility (Ghorashi, 2003; Hojati, 2012; Jafari et al., 2010; Marvasti, 2005).

Another area that requires further research is community interactions and a sense of belonging to Iranian communities in North America. As previously mentioned, the motivation for emigration in recent years has changed and diversified as a function of educational, economic and political change in Iran (Chaichian, 2011; Mossayeb & Shirazi, 2006). Moreover, Ghorashi and Boersma (2009) argued that the Internet, mass media, and frequent trips back and forth between the host country and Iran (which have become more common) have created transnational relations and identities. Many Iranians have favoured these identities over having one political affiliation dominate as their sole identifier. Therefore, research is needed to explain how the changes in emigration motivation, socio-economic changes in Iran, and transnational relations, affect the ways Iranians negotiate their sense of belonging to Iranian communities in North America.

In addition to changes in emigration motivation and transnational relations, the current literature shows that membership in subgroups of Iranian immigrants (e.g., religious, political and sexual minorities) can impact community involvement among Iranians in North America (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003). However, most of the studies on Iranians' transitioning, and

their sense of belonging, focus on one or two identities. Very few researchers have addressed the intersection of social locations and used it as their framework of analysis (Hojati, 2012; McAuliffe, 2007; Nabavi, 2011; Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006). For example, the role of national identity has been studied, but without attention to the intersection of other aspects of Iranian immigrants' identities.

Moreover, the current literature discusses the challenges of community solidarity or collective identity without addressing interpersonal interactions. In other words, while the literature has documented the lack of cohesion on a meso-level (community), an in-depth and clear picture of what this lack of cohesion looks like on a micro-level (individual and interpersonal) is missing.

Previous research shows that immigrants at times turn to members of their communities for help, especially during the first months after their arrival in the host country (Sinacore, Khayutin, Nasrullah, & Titus, 2017; Sinacore et al., 2013). Given the above concerns about the sense of belonging to the Iranian community and lack of knowledge about ways Iranian immigrants interact with each other, investigation into both topics is warranted. Since an in-depth account of Iranian immigrants' interactions within the Iranian community and their sense of belonging to the community is missing from the literature, a qualitative research design that considers the intersection of immigrants' identities best fits this investigation.

Research Questions

The current study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. How do people from Iran living in Québec experience their multiple intersecting identities?

2. How do Iranians living in Québec, experience their multiple intersecting identities when interacting with other individuals from Iran?
3. How do people from Iran perceive collective identity and belonging to the Iranian community in Québec?

Researcher Assumptions

Before conducting research, it was vital to acknowledge my assumptions and views regarding the above questions, as assumptions could impact the way research questions were approached. I believed that Iranian immigrant communities had a large within-group diversity that impacted a variety of community interactions. Moreover, I thought that the diversity within Iranian immigrant communities had traditionally been interpreted as a source of weakness and discord. I had noticed numerous cases in which differences in political beliefs had resulted in sharp divisions within Iranian communities in Canada. Moreover, I believed there were other aspects of Iranians' identities, such as gender and ethnicity, that impacted the sense of belonging to the community or society at large. Moreover, I also thought that the transnational interactions of the Iranians living in North America, such as frequent trips between Canada and Iran, and use of the Internet, had significantly impacted how Iranians approach community matters in North America.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

The extant literature on Iranian immigrants documents both interactions within Iranian communities as well as Iranian immigrants' interactions with the larger society. However, research in this area is in its preliminary stages, and a detailed description of these topics is lacking, specifically within the North American context. The present study adopts a qualitative approach to expand the current knowledge of how Iranian immigrants in Canada negotiate the intersection of their identities within Canadian communities. Qualitative methods are ideal for researching a process rather than studying cause-and-effect relationships (Harper & Thompson, 2012). Moreover, qualitative methods can deepen our understanding of the individual's experience and meaning-making (Polkinghorne, 2005). Therefore, a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative method with an intersectional epistemological stance was used to explore the experiences of Iranian immigrants and their intra-community interactions.

Epistemology

Epistemology is a theory about knowledge and how it is acquired (Harding, 1987). Epistemology addresses questions such as who the knower is, what can be known, the way one knows information and how one tests knowledge. Therefore, epistemology acts as a framework or structure for the study of any phenomena. As such, a researcher's epistemology should be distinctly outlined along with the research methodology and method of analysis. The epistemology chosen for this study is intersectionality, which has its roots in feminist standpoint theory (Sprague, 2005). In this section, feminist standpoint theory will be reviewed. Then, intersectionality as an epistemology will be discussed, and its suitability to the current study will be explained.

Feminist standpoint theory critiques the positivist's understanding of an objective approach towards knowledge and contends that knowledge is constructed within the context of everyday life (Harding, 1992; Sprague, 2005). In fact, Harding (1992) argues that socially-situated subjective knowledge "require[s] and generate[s] stronger standards for objectivity" (p. 51); that is, to be objective should not limit us to "objectify". Instead, it can and should attend to the specific time, place, interests and conditions of what needs to be studied. Moreover, a standpoint acts as a "vantage point", a point of view that a combination of social locations can offer (Sprague, 2005). Standpoints act as unique windows to the understanding of any given phenomenon. Sprague (2005) argues that the standpoint, "is not the spontaneous thinking of a person or a category of people" about the phenomena, rather, it is an understanding that has been constructed by the living experiences of people within given sets of physical location, culture, and social context (p. 41).

Standpoint theory has evolved through the work of several feminist scholars such as Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, and Dorothy Smith (Harding, 1992; Sprague, 2005). Each of these scholars has contributed to standpoint theory by bringing to light the vantage point of marginalized groups, with a specific focus on the experiences of women. For example, Hartsock (1983) studied the labour market using Marxist theory. She argued that from the standpoint of the ruling capitalist class, power and labour are defined as things that can be taken or given. However, the standpoint of workers provides us with another understanding of power, which involves domination and control. When the social location of sex is added to the picture, a new understanding of power can be addressed. Hartsock argues that studying women's work from the standpoint of women can lead us to the unique understanding of power and work, as women have traditionally been responsible for domestic labour and men for labour outside the home.

From their standpoint, women have been responsible for taking care of and empowering people. The work of Hartsock shows the way labour relations can be studied using women's standpoints.

In addition to the category of sex, feminist scholars have discussed the ways in which the social construction of womanhood from the perspective of different race and class backgrounds results in specific standpoints (Lykke, 2010; Sprague, 2005). These categories or social locations (such as sex, gender, race, class, body, ability, etc.) may result in the construction of standpoints for the interpretation of social reality and knowledge. However, adding two or more categories of social locations cannot adequately explain the complex ways that oppressive forces work in the real world (Lykke, 2010; Winker & Degele, 2011). As a result, the term "intersectionality" was coined to address this paucity (Collins, 2015).

Intersectionality, an evolution of standpoint theory, refers to the intersection of socially constructed categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, nationality, mother tongue, and citizenship status that results in multiple types of inequalities (Lykke, 2010). The reason for considering the intersection between these categories, instead of the mere addition of them, is that these social locations can interact with each other in a multitude of ways. For example, older age might result in higher wages for men, whereas the same is often not true for women. Therefore, adopting the epistemological stance of intersectionality allows the researchers to study the way power differentials are enacted within the intersection of social locations. Moreover, Lykke (2010) argues that intersectionality, like other feminist theories, conceptualizes all social categories as "doing" instead of static identities or "being". Therefore, individuals are considered as active agents in the negotiation of "power-laden social relations and conditions in which they are embedded" (p. 51).

Intersectionality (Lykke, 2010; Winker & Degele, 2011) was deemed as an appropriate epistemological framework for this study for several reasons. The current literature on Iranian immigrants has documented the issues and challenges of Iranian immigrants in North America in the context of nationality, gender, or other types of identities. However, the literature rarely addresses the ways in which Iranian immigrants negotiate the intersection of these social locations and identities. Moreover, intersectionality allows for an analysis of the ways power differentials embedded in different social locations impact the choices and options available to Iranian immigrants. Lastly, intersectionality considers individuals as active agents in negotiating the intersection of their social locations in any given moment within different contexts. Adopting an intersectional epistemology enabled the researcher to study the ways in which Iranian immigrants negotiate their relationships with their local Iranian and non-Iranian communities.

Several researchers have suggested guidelines for conducting research using intersectionality as an epistemological framework (Collins, 2015; Lykke, 2010; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Shin et al., 2017). I used the suggestions and guidelines of Shin et al. (2017) and Moradi and Grzanka (2017) to ensure consistency and quality in the application of intersectionality. The guidelines suggested by Shin et al. and Moradi and Grzanka are particularly nuanced for the discipline of Counselling Psychology and therefore are appropriate for this study. Shin et al. suggested that it is the responsibility of the researchers to not only examine multiple intersecting identities but also discuss "how multiple forms of oppression interlock to create unique outcomes" (p. 464). Further, researchers are encouraged to go beyond the identification of systems of power in relation to their study questions and suggest

implications for social action and advocacy that address broader social structures (Shin et al., 2017).

Philosophical Underpinnings of the Methodology

Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology are research methods that have long been used in human sciences. Nevertheless, they are primarily philosophical schools of thought (Kakkori, 2010; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004), and a review of their philosophical principals is warranted. Phenomenology was mainly developed by Edmond Husserl in the late 1800s and the early 1900s to study the lived experience of the lifeworld (Van Manen, 1997). Husserl believed that life is composed of experiences that should be studied carefully so that meanings of these experiences may be exposed (Laverty, 2003). In Husserl's phenomenology, phenomena should be studied in the way they appear before consciousness, or in their "natural" form, and not through theorizing, generalizing, induction, or adapting categorization (Dowling, 2007). Therefore, the experiences should be studied "pre-reflectively" and in an "intentional" process where the mind is free of prejudice or theorization about the phenomenon (Dowling, 2007; Laverty, 2003). Instead, according to Husserl, the mind focuses on the phenomenon to describe the structure or essence of experience (Dowling, 2007; Laverty, 2003). In practice, the "pre-reflective" system of studying any phenomenon is done through a process called "bracketing", which was developed by Husserl himself (Kakkori, 2010; Laverty, 2003). In bracketing, researchers are called to free themselves from all presuppositions, beliefs or biases about the phenomenon in question and look at the phenomena in a "pure" way (Kakkori, 2010).

Martin Heidegger was a successor to Husserl and further developed the concept of phenomenology as the study of lived experience (Dowling, 2007). Whereas Husserl was focused on a pure description of the experience, Heidegger was interested in further understanding the

phenomena (Dowling, 2007; Kakkori, 2010). Therefore, even though Heidegger adopted principles of phenomenology, he departed from focusing purely on a "pre-reflective" description, and instead searched for "situated meaning" (Dowling, 2007; Laverty, 2003). To do this, meanings of experiences are constructed by the historical background or "situatedness" of the experiences in the world (Laverty, 2003). Thus, it is impossible to reach the meaning of a lived experience without engaging in an interpretation (specifically, a hermeneutic interpretation) based on its cultural and historical context (Dowling, 2007). As such, bracketing is no longer possible or even desired. This process of understanding is fundamentally interpretational and cyclical. The interpretive process alternates between parts of the experience, and the whole experience and repetition of this cycle can lead to a deeper level of understanding (Laverty, 2003).

The hermeneutic process of understanding was used and elaborated on by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who built upon the work of Heidegger and Husserl (Laverty, 2003). Gadamer mainly focused on the conditions needed for understanding to evolve. He viewed language as the inextricable component of understanding. For Gadamer, understanding happens during interpretation, and interpretation is defined as a fusion of "horizons." A horizon "is a range of vision that includes everything seen from a particular vantage point" (Laverty, 2003, p. 25). The repetitive nature of the hermeneutic cycle does not merely happen within the researcher's own mind. Instead, it involves a fusion of horizons, such as questioning one's stance and exchanging opinions and visions using dialogue. Therefore, doing research based on Gadamer's interpretation of the hermeneutic cycle involves dialogue, engagement in discussion, and receiving feedback from participants, which ultimately results in a fusion of horizons (Dowling, 2007).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Research

As described above, phenomenology and hermeneutics have distinct features. Phenomenology, in Husserl's point of view, is universalist and essentialist, while hermeneutics is about various interpretations of any given text or lived experience (Kakkori, 2010). Heidegger linked phenomenology and hermeneutics, while scholars such as Donald Polkinghorne and Max Van Manen elaborated on the implementation of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach in the field of human science research (Kakkori, 2010; Polkinghorne, 2005; Van Manen, 1997). The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to reach a deeper understanding of any lived experience through a contextualized, cyclical process of analysis. The researcher's stance and experiences are acknowledged and made explicit according to this phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001). The researcher's experiences are considered as their horizons, which through the systematic process of research, are "fused" with horizons of other research participants to yield a rich, detailed description of the experience (Hein & Austin, 2001).

Even though a specific step-by-step research process cannot be found for hermeneutic research, some general guidelines have been suggested (Hein & Austin, 2001). Van Manen (1997) suggested six intertwined research activities that can be implemented in hermeneutic research. First, the researcher should *turn to the phenomenon to be studied* full-heartedly. Phenomenological research is an embodied process, meaning that the project of inquiry belongs to a real person who is deeply engaged with the topic and reflects upon it, given the context of the individual. Second, the researcher is expected to *investigate experience as one lives it*. The goal is to re-learn and re-establish the very experience of the world and the project of inquiry. One is encouraged to actively engage in discovering the lived experience in its various facets. The third element of phenomenological research is *reflecting on essential themes*. In

phenomenological research, the researcher is asked to go beyond the surface of what the experience entails. The goal is to reflect deeply on the essence or element that "constitutes the nature of this lived experience" (p. 32). Fourth, the "*writing and rewriting*" is what defines the action of phenomenological research. In other words, to do the phenomenological research is to immediately engage in conversing and "bringing to speech" the lived experience in the inquiry. The fifth element is a call to *maintain a strong and oriented relation* to the question of the study. To maintain a strong and oriented relation is to refrain from retreating to categorization based on theoretical constructs and accept preconceived ideas about the phenomenon while attending deeply and humanly to the lived experience. Lastly, *the balance between part and whole* should always be considered. The researcher is encouraged to repeatedly step back and look at the whole picture while attending to writing about the specific themes of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1997).

The Relationship Between Epistemology and Methodology

It is evident that, given the context of the current study, the philosophical basis of hermeneutic phenomenology is aligned with intersectionality as the study's epistemology. Intersectionality (as rooted in feminist standpoint theory) rejects the positivist's understanding of the objective study of knowledge and maintains that all knowledge is contextualized within the conditions of social locations. Similarly, hermeneutic phenomenology searches for "situated meaning," or an understanding within the historical and social background of the phenomenon. Therefore, both intersectionality and hermeneutic phenomenology contend that the study of any given phenomenon should be done with attention to the context of the phenomenon in the society and its historical background. Moreover, the feminist standpoint and intersectionality epistemologies require that the researchers identify their biases and personal stances regarding

the question of the study. Hermeneutic phenomenology also encourages the researchers to reflect on their assumptions and understandings about the phenomena and engage with the research question. In addition, Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons attends to the ways new understanding can be achieved by the co-construction of the researcher's understanding and participants' perspectives. Thus, both intersectionality and hermeneutic phenomenology agree on the role of careful study of the researcher's biases and preconceived ideas about phenomena in the study. Lastly, a feminist standpoint and an intersectionality perspective encourage researchers to study the lived experiences of the participants with great attention to the details of their lives. Similarly, hermeneutic phenomenology calls for a great deal of attention to the taken-for-granted details of the lived experiences to reach the themes underlying them. Therefore, adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological method in conjunction with the intersectionality epistemology can significantly facilitate the conducting of research on the lived experiences of Iranian immigrants in North America.

The Researcher's Subjective Stance

The use of a hermeneutic phenomenology method requires researchers to study a phenomenon within the context of society (Hein & Austin, 2001). As well, the researcher's subjective stance is considered as part of the social context that contributes to the recreation of the phenomena in the study (Hein & Austin, 2001). Therefore, it is impossible to study the meaning of any experience without an interpretational interaction between the participants' experiences and the researcher's own experiences and biases. In other words, the researcher's experiences, assumptions and biases about the phenomena should be continuously studied and monitored as contributing factors to the interpretative process of hermeneutic phenomenology

(Laverty, 2003). In the next few paragraphs, I will explain my personal experiences, biases and beliefs about the current research.

I am a 38-year-old, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class, Iranian, Bahá'í male. I grew up in Iran and moved to Canada to pursue my graduate studies. I understand that I have been greatly impacted by my salient identities and characteristics. A critical aspect of my identity is being a Bahá'í, which has dramatically impacted my worldview and interaction with society. For example, given the extreme persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran, I have always been cognisant of the power imbalances between various groups in society. Moreover, since Bahá'ís are deprived of various rights in Iran (such as the right to higher education and official work), I have grown sensitive to the role of privilege in one's societal situation. The Bahá'í community is stigmatized in Iran. Therefore, I have always been careful about my interaction with non-Bahá'ís and members of other communities.

I came to Montréal, Canada, in 2007 to earn my Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology from McGill, a prestigious university. However, at the time of completing my degree, I viewed myself as an international student rather than an immigrant, since I did not intend to stay in Canada. Nevertheless, displacement had a major psychological and interpersonal effect on me, as I lost many friends and connections. I had to adapt to a new society with different cultural norms. After moving back to Iran, I realized I was not the same person who had left Iran two years before. Therefore, I developed an awareness about how displacement and immigration could impact an individuals' beliefs and values.

I practiced and taught Counselling Psychology for a few years in Iran before moving back to Canada in 2012 to pursue my PhD in the same field. The first time I left Iran, I was a single student. However, I am now married and intend to remain in Canada. Therefore, I have

come to appreciate the ways peoples' relationships, stages in life, and intentions shape their options and choices. Moreover, immigration has greatly changed my interaction with other Iranians and involvement in the various communities in Québec. For example, I am now free to practice the Bahá'í faith and I am much less apprehensive about my interactions with various religious and social groups within the Iranian community in Montréal.

Throughout my stay in Canada I have developed an awareness about how displacement impacts people's involvement in various communities. Consequently, I realize the critical role of my beliefs, social locations, values, and the intersection of identities in my experience of immigration and interaction with other groups and communities in society. I understand that these beliefs and experiences have formed my assumptions about the subject of this study. I continued monitoring my biases regarding immigration and interactions with other groups and communities throughout the analysis and writing of the results.

Participants

The selection of participants in a qualitative study is not intended to provide a representative sample of a population, but instead, it intends to provide a rich understanding of any given experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Therefore, a purposive selection of participants is often suggested for qualitative inquiries (Polkinghorne, 2005). In purposive sampling, individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question are selected (Polkinghorne, 2005). Since hermeneutic phenomenology calls for a rich description of the lived experiences, purposive sampling was a suitable sampling method for this study. Even though the literature does not suggest a specific number as an ideal sample size, different researchers have suggested 8 to 15 participants as sufficient for qualitative research purposes (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Polkinghorne, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, first-generation Iranian immigrants between the ages of 22 and 50 who had arrived in Canada with their Permanent Residency and had lived in Canada for a minimum of three years were targeted for recruitment. The lower age range of 22 ensured that only adults who had finished their secondary education and had lived in Canada for a minimum of 3 years would be recruited. Moreover, several studies have shown that those who immigrate to the U.S. or Canada in later adulthood undergo unique experiences in their processes of acculturation (McConatha et al., 2001; Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006). Therefore, the maximum age criterion for inclusion in the current study was chosen as 50.

Recruitment methods consisted of online advertisements on several Iranian websites, community printed newsletters, weekly magazines, online social media (Facebook), and word of mouth (see Appendix A). Participants were given a gift card valued at $10 in compensation for their time.

Recruitment resulted in 12 permanent residents (10 females and two males, all heterosexual) between the ages of 32 and 44, all having at least three years of experience living in Québec with a maximum residence time of seven years. Prior to arrival, all participants had obtained their permanent residency. Ten out of 12 participants had obtained their permanent residency through the Skilled Worker immigration program, while two participants were sponsored by their families (Family Sponsorship). Moreover, seven participants were married or had partners, while one participant was divorced, and four participants were single. In terms of the highest educational degree, one participant held a post-high school diploma, six participants had bachelor's degrees, four participants had master's degrees, and one participant held a doctorate. Ten out of 12 participants were from Fars ethnicity while two were from Baluch ethnic background. At the time of the interview, most participants were working full-time (eight

participants) while two worked part-time, one was on leave, and only one person was unemployed.

Participants were also asked about their religious affiliation in the demographic form. Eight participants noted their religious affiliation as Muslim, while four did not report as being affiliated with any religion. During the interviews, the majority of the Muslim participants identified as non-practicing Muslims. Female participants did not have any type of headscarf, veil or Hijab. These religious demographics are not surprising, as the literature has documented a decline in strong religious affiliation among the majority of Muslim Iranians living in the diaspora (Fathi, 2015; Moghadam, 2007).

Materials

This study included four forms of data collection. Primarily, the researcher requested participants' informed consent, contact information, and demographic information. As well, a semi-structured interview protocol guided the interview process. All materials used for data collection were created in collaboration with the researcher's doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee. Moreover, the research proposal and materials were assessed and approved by McGill University's Research Ethics Board, which follows the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

Informed Consent Document

The Informed Consent document (see Appendix B) was used to ensure that research goals, confidentiality, limitations of confidentiality, participation requirements, and the collection and data maintenance methods were clearly communicated to and understood by the participants. The informed consent document also explained the data collection procedures, the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the protection of confidentiality and privacy of

the participants. Moreover, any foreseeable risk that could be associated with participation in the project was explained in the Informed Consent document. The content of the document was also verbally explained by the researcher and participants were encouraged to pose any questions they had. After participants agreed with the conditions of the informed consent, they signed two copies, one for the researcher's records and one for themselves.

Contact Information Form

The contact information form (see Appendix C) was used to gather participants' contact information, such as their home address, phone number, and email address. The participants were informed about the option of contacting the researcher regarding further questions, explanations, or enquiries about the study's results.

Demographic Information Form

The demographic information form (see Appendix D) requested the participants' age, sexual orientation, family structure, ethnicity, religious affiliation, spoken languages, age of immigration to Canada, level of education, class of immigration (i.e., immigrant or refugee), and economic status. As all participants were fully bilingual, they were able to read and understand English forms. Therefore, the consent form, contact information form, and demographic information form were all in English.

Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview (see Appendix E), acted as an interview guide and contained inquiries formulated based on the main research questions. Semi-structured interviews contain a set of questions to be posed to the interviewee and allow for flexible answering in which the participants use their own language and line of thinking. Moreover, a semi-structured interview protocol allowed both the researcher and participants to address the questions that had

not been included in the interview. The interview protocol asked general questions about the participants' experiences and their interactions with various communities in Canada. After the interview protocol was prepared, it was translated to Persian. The translation was verified by a bilingual scholar who had expertise in the topic of this study. Then, the interview protocol was piloted with two participants, and the feedback received from them was incorporated to create a finalized interview protocol.

Procedure

Ethics

In order to obtain the ethics approval, the research proposal was submitted to the Research Ethics Board-II, which governs research involving human subjects conducted in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. After obtaining research ethics approval, the researcher started the advertising and recruitment process. Iranian immigrants who met the current study's participants' criteria were contacted by phone or email. A brief phone conversation was scheduled to make sure that the participants understand the general scope of the study and that they meet the recruitment criteria. Further, in-person interviews were conducted in the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab rooms.

Before the interview started, the researcher went over the Informed Consent document together with the interviewee in order to make sure that the interviewee fully understood the research goals, risks involved in participation, and their rights as a participant. After the interviews were finished, all audio-recorded files, paper forms (e.g., consent form and contact information form), and transcribed computer files were stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab. Further, computer files were encrypted and password protected for security purposes. Moreover, all identifying information was removed

from the demographic forms and transcribed interviews. These demographic forms and transcribed interviews were coded with numbers associated with the contact information forms.

Data Collection

After the informed consent process was finished, and the signatures were obtained, the contact information and demographic information forms were presented to the participant. Then the interview started using a semi-structured interview protocol. All participants preferred to speak in Persian throughout the interviews, although they had the choice of speaking in either English or Persian. I transcribed most of the audio-recorded interviews. However, a few interviews were transcribed by a hired professional transcriber. Participants were informed of the service of a professional transcriber on the Informed Consent document. The professional transcriber had signed a confidentiality agreement with me, as reflected in the ethics approval procedures. I verified each transcript, whether done by myself or by the professional transcriber, with the original audio file and then de-identified it.

Data Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the collected data (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological analysis since they both adopt a phenomenological approach to the interpretation of participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, IPA is well aligned with the intersectionality epistemological framework as IPA emphasizes giving voice and meaning-making based on the subjective experience of the participants (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Sprague, 2005). The goal of IPA is identifying "what matters to participants and then exploring what these things mean to participants" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p. 105).

Before describing the steps taken for the analysis of data using IPA, a note about language and translation from Persian to English is necessary. Language is an important factor in the process of qualitative analysis, as it delivers meaning through words, sentences, and subtle nuances and complexities (Polkinghorne, 2005). As Temple and Young (2004) suggested, researchers should contemplate that at what point in the analysis of data the translation should occur. Moreover, Temple and Young suggested that researchers should report the translation procedures used in their research. In this study, the process of data analysis was done using the original language of the participants. Following the suggestions of Wada (2016), only themes, subthemes and categories of themes were translated into English. The decision to analyze the data in the original language was taken in consultation with the researcher's supervisor, in order to preserve the nuances and complexities latent in the participants' original language and transfer them to subsequent themes, subthemes, and categories of themes. The translation of themes, subthemes, categories of themes and direct quotes from participants were verified by an independent translator. In the case of disagreement, I met with the translator and discussed the disagreement until reaching consensus.

Consistent with the suggestions of Wada (2016), I used the reaching consensus method instead of translation-backtranslation, to ensure that nuances and complexities of the original language are reflected in the translation. Wada argued that the translation-backtranslation method is in line with the positivistic approach towards translation and assumes that there is "only one right translation" possible (Wada, 2016, p. 59). However, in the reaching consensus method, the researcher and translator have to go back to the original data, study the meaning of the words within their original context, and discuss until they make sure the nuances and emotions are preserved (Wada, 2016). Both intersectionality and hermeneutic phenomenology

value the contextualized meanings and nuances. Therefore, the reaching consensus method was chosen for this study as it was more in line with the study's epistemology and methodology.

The steps explained below followed the suggestions of Larkin and Thompson (2012) and Smith et al. (2009) for IPA analysis. The first step in IPA analysis is to provide an accurate transcript of all the interviews. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that since the goal of IPA is to report on the content and interpretation of the meaning of the data, it is not necessary to record the length of pauses or other non-verbal clues. However, according to Smith et al., the significant pauses should be noted. The audio recorded files were transcribed according to the above suggestions.

Consistent with the suggestions of Larkin and Thompson (2012), I read each transcript several times to increase my sensitivity to the participants' accounts. While reading each transcript, I started writing comments on the margins of the interview. These comments (impressions) included emotional reactions, preliminary interpretations, ideas about what the participant was talking about and more. I used these comments to identify focus points (codes) and their corresponding transcript lines. At this point, for the purpose of member-checking, I created a summary of the participant's interview and sent it to the participant. I conducted member-checking to ensure that I understood the main themes within each interview and any further comment or feedback from participants. The summary was written in English. By writing the summary in English, I informed my supervisor of the content of each interview and major themes as she was not familiar with Persian. Moreover, as all participants had good to very good knowledge of English, they were able to verify my translation and understanding of the major points they had covered in their accounts. Nine out of 10 participants reviewed the

summary of their interview. Three participants did not reply to my request for a summary review.

Next, I reviewed the focus points (codes) by going back to the whole transcript. At this stage, some codes merged, and some new codes (or subthemes) were identified. Each time a change in codes happened, the whole transcript was re-read to identify lines that aligned with the new code. Then, the resulting themes and their corresponding lines were verified by another a judge who was familiar with the subject of the thesis and was also fully bilingual (English and Persian). Any disagreement between the judge and myself over the themes were discussed until consensus was reached. When the verification was completed, the themes were translated to English. The translation was verified by an independent bilingual judge to ensure the quality of the translations. The above process was repeated for each participant's transcript.

In the cross-transcript analysis, I studied patterns across transcripts. If necessary, I created a category of themes and merged or edited some themes. Then, I created subthemes and studied them across themes to make sure that there is no overlap between the subthemes of various themes. The category of themes and subthemes were judged and discussed with my supervisor. During the above process, whenever I made a new theme or subtheme, I re-read the whole transcript to identify the relevant lines related to the new theme or subtheme. Moreover, the above process was cyclical in that I went from levels of abstraction (i.e., themes, subthemes, categories) to the original text and then back to the abstraction levels. The iterative process, as explained above, resulted in a set of themes. At this point, I wrote an account of participants' experiences using the themes.

Quality and Trustworthiness

In the current study, several techniques were used to ensure quality. The standards of quality in qualitative research is often referred to as trustworthiness or rigour (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005). Scholars have proposed various criteria with which to ensure trustworthiness and quality in qualitative research (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Following the taxonomy of Spencer and Ritchie (2012), the trustworthiness criteria for the current study are described using three general categories: credibility, rigour, and contribution.

Credibility

Credibility refers to "the extent to which findings are believable and well-founded" (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012, p. 234). In other words, credibility taps into how much the research claims represent the views of research participants (Cope, 2014). Several techniques were used to ensure the credibility of analysis in the current study.

Careful documentation of the research process is one of the main ways to ensure credibility (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). The research process in the current study was fully documented by providing descriptive and interpretative accounts of the analysis and relevant excerpts of the participants' accounts. Any steps that were taken during the analysis of data have been described under the Data Analysis section. Moreover, I maintained a detailed journal of the actual steps taken for gathering and analyzing the data.

Another technique used to ensure credibility was the *validation of the research findings* (Morrow, 2005; Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). Morrow (2005) argues that the qualitative researcher should reflect upon whose reality is being represented by the research results. In order to make sure that the research represents the participants' accounts and lived experiences, the current study used member checking. To do this, I sent back an account of each participant's analyzed results to the participant to receive feedback and ensure the quality of the analysis. Since

interpretive phenomenological analysis requires several layers of interpretation, member checking can be done after analyzing each participants' interview (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

Rigour

Another method of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is establishing rigour. Rigour refers to the methodological validity of the research (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). Attending to rigour ensures thorough scrutiny of the research process, dependability of design and evidence, and proper conduct (Cope, 2014; Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). One technique used to establish rigour is to demonstrate the *dependability* of the data and process (Cope, 2014). Dependability is achieved when the process of conducting the research is audited and confirmed. For the current study, all the research steps and levels of analysis were monitored and checked by my primary Ph.D. supervisor. As well, the *defensibility of research design* was ensured by providing a clear rationale for the choice of epistemological framework, methodological approach, and analytical technique as described in this document (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012).

Finally, *reflexivity* was adopted as another measure of rigour. Through reflexivity, researchers try to explore the impact of their history, beliefs, values, and theoretical orientation on the research process (Darawsheh, 2014; Morrow, 2005; Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). More specifically, in the context of interpretative phenomenological analysis, reflexivity refers to the ways researchers' preconceptions and previous experiences interact with the participants' perspectives (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Therefore, the goal of keeping a reflexive journal in the interpretive phenomenological analysis is not to "bracket out" the subjective biases of the researchers, as encouraged in pure phenomenological research (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Instead, the reflexive journal helps clarify the role and impact of researchers' preconceptions on the analysis (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Keeping a reflexive journal helps the researchers to

clarify their values and develop consistency in their analysis (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). As such, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process to systematically reflect upon the above factors and ensure rigour.

Contribution

Lastly, the trustworthiness of qualitative research may be described with the level at which the research has contributed to the world (Morrow, 2005; Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). This contribution could be to the theory, policy, practice, and lives of actual research participants (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). This study added to our knowledge of how Iranian immigrants interact with each other, engage with the context of Canadian society, and participate in their communities of interest. This knowledge, in turn, can help therapists have a deeper understanding of the challenges of Iranians living in Canada. As well, the knowledge may allow policymakers to better understand the needs of immigrants and Iranian communities. Moreover, this study used *catalytic validity* as an additional measure of contribution. Morrow (2005) argues that catalytic validity "speaks to the extent to which action is stimulated" in the research participants as a direct result of engaging in the research activities such as interviews (p. 253). In the context of this study, interview questions helped participants reflect upon the creative ways in which they had negotiated their intersection of identities in order to interact with others in Canada. Therefore, the interviews provided an opportunity for participants to become aware of their agency in the process of transitioning to the new society and the impact of different aspects of their identity on their interactions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of this study as pertinent to the research questions: how Iranian immigrants experience their multiple intersecting identities in interaction with other Iranians and their sense of belonging to the Iranian community. Participants' accounts of their interactions with others and community belonging were rooted in their reasons for leaving Iran and the story of their immigration to Québec. Therefore, the transitioning experience of participants will be discussed first. Then, interactions within contexts of career development, interpersonal relationships, and community will be discussed. Two themes of the role of language and challenges and opportunities for women will be discussed separately.

The Transition from Iran to Québec

In this section, the transition from Iran to Québec is discussed in four major themes: reasons for emigration, establishing in Québec, challenges and opportunities, and resiliency and coping strategies.

Context and Reasons for Leaving

The experience of emigration was initiated and shaped by the context of the home society and personal and societal reasons for leaving. Eleven participants emigrated directly from Iran to Canada while one participant stayed in France for a few years post-emigration and then moved to Canada. Diverse reasons for emigration for both men and women included joining family members abroad, seeking independence, wanting freedom from political oppression, distancing oneself from family constraints and other social pressures. Women often recounted limitations imposed on them (e.g., veil, legal restrictions) as reasons for emigration. It is important to note that participants' socio-economic status (SES) in Iran greatly shaped their subsequent experiences with and expectations about integration. Therefore, to explore the underlying

reasons for emigration, participants' SES in Iran will be discussed first, followed by the two major themes describing the Iranian context: socio-political climate and limitations for women by society and family.

Socio-economic status (SES). Participants were all highly educated professionals in Iran who held at least one degree in higher education before leaving. All participants had established lives and careers in Iran, and most of them came from middle to higher economic classes. For example, one participant had her own medical clinic prior to emigration, and another owned a mid-size engineering corporation. One participant reported, "I did a B.A. in agriculture, then did my M.A. in cinema, went to U.K. to get a diploma … started jewelry making and earned so much to buy a house … I lived a royal life!." Regardless of the level of financial income, a few participants noted the impact of the deteriorating economic conditions in Iran on their lives. One participant explained, "… the prices multiplied over a short period of time. Like I thought that I would be able to buy a house in a few years … I realized that it is getting worse day after day." However, even those participants who were not coming from middle to higher economic classes were able to establish themselves in their professions and lived a rather financially stable life. One participant who was not financially affluent, stated, "When I was leaving Iran, I was at the top of my professional career as a critic." That is, even those participants who were not from middle to higher economic class reported having access to resources that made their lives stable. For example, a participant whose family was middle class and belonged to a Muslim religious minority, explained, "My sisters and brothers were all able to get good [job] positions since my father had good connections." Access to resources also allowed for the option of emigration and greatly smoothed the emigration process for the participants. For example, two participants had family members who sponsored their immigration to Canada. For others who were in the middle

or higher economic classes, their SES allowed them to approach immigration as an option or a reversible choice. For example, a participant explained, "My mother told me that 'Think of it as a trip! Go and see if you will like it'. I came here only with $10,000 to stay for three months and then go back… but then I liked it and stayed." For her, access to resources and familial support allowed for a flexible decision-making process, smoothing the path for emigration.

Participants' professional and educational credentials supported their emigration from Iran, but also greatly rewarded them within the context of Québec's immigration system. All but two participants had immigrated to Canada as professionals under the Québec Skilled Worker Program (QSWP). In the QSWP, participants received points based on categories such as age, level of French knowledge, educational degree, and type of profession. Working in fields such as civil engineering, nursing or computer science had advantages in the points-system of the QSWP application process at the time participants had applied for their immigration. Thus, working in these fields made QSWP a good option for participants and aided them in the process of immigration to Québec. One nurse explained, "at the time of my application, my profession was highly demanded [by Québec]" and another reported that, "At that time, many nurses were leaving Iran … one would see the terrible situation [of Iran], and one would be tempted [to leave] especially that it was easy [for nurses]." Québec's preference for immigrants who were highly credentialed served as a strong pulling force encouraging emigration from Iran.

In sum, most participants came from a middle to higher SES with access to resources that enabled them to emigrate. Even though two participants noted the deteriorating economic conditions of Iran, the reasons for immigration went beyond economic concerns. Participants' SES and access to resources helped them in their process of application and immigration to Québec. For participants, a host of reasons related to the intersection of their identities (such as

educational and professional credentials, SES and minority status) influenced their decision to leave Iran.

Socio-political climate. Many participants described violence, discrimination, political, legal, and structural oppression as primary reasons for leaving. For several participants, the violence and oppressive atmosphere that was reflected everywhere in society took away their hopes for a future in Iran, "Especially after events in 2009 [protests after the controversial election], I saw people being shot right in front of my eyes… right there, I told myself that I will leave Iran no matter how." Political oppression was further complicated if the participants were members of minorities:

> We are Sunnis. My husband used to work in an embassy … It was right after 2009 events … the pollution of air, my dissatisfaction with my job…. I never wanted to have kids in Iran … we were particularly more discriminated against just due to our religious beliefs.

In addition to political oppression and discrimination against minorities, participants complained about the socio-cultural stressors that negatively impacted their lives in Iran. One participant reported that after the 2009 election in Iran, she realized that, "…the morale in society suddenly dropped … Lying had become a norm in Iran … I was not sure how I was supposed to raise my child anymore." In the context of low morale and increasing socio-economic pressures of life, concerns for safety and peace of mind were elevated, as one participant stated,

> You might live in a very good house with great facilities, but still, your life is always stressed, there are always fights between people. … [want it or not,] you get involved in contentions and anger by the nature of living there.

Another participant stated, "Oh social conditions [were terrible]! You would not feel safe walking in the streets, even for me as a man! ... When I would see police, I would be fearful … I was always vigilant about people who were walking beside me…." Participants expressed how an absence of trust in police and government made them search "for peace of mind" or stability and safety outside of Iran. Women in particular discussed legal and cultural limitations as reasons for leaving Iran, which will be discussed in a separate section.

Participants noted the dire situation of Iran as a factor that made them leave their home country. One participant explained, "If our culture was right, none of us would have immigrated. I seriously believe that if we could have lived well, immigration would be an absolute mistake." She continued to explain that right after the Iranian revolution in 1979, her family intended to immigrate to North America. However, they cancelled their plan as her mom wanted to stay close to her parents. She remembered that she used to condemn her mom's decision,

> but when I came here, I realized that she had made the right decision. At that time, they did not have this [current] pressure [in Iran] … I mean I think our revolution [1979 revolution] was a change that [everyone] hoped to reach something good … in the beginning [of revolution], people were motivated … they had a purpose and endured those years easier. But in the last 20 years, one could have everything in Iran and nothing! That's why I think my mom's decision back then was right.

Loss of hope in the current condition of Iran was a recurrent theme across participants, "Maybe because of [1979] revolution, maybe since we endured all these hardships [in Iran], or that Iran is messed up so much, that I think even when we leave Iran one generation should pass [so that Iranians can behave better]."

Planning for Immigration

When asked about their story of immigration, almost all participants described the path and decisions they had to make prior to emigration. Participants explained the way planning for immigration impacted several aspects of their lives. For example, one participant stated, "…it was also because of our immigration plans that I and my wife decided not to live together [and rely on his wife's parents support]." As well, many participants mentioned the challenges of negotiating the Canadian immigration system. One participant gave an example of these challenges,

> I started studying English before 2009's election, both for a change in my life and also immigration- although I was not sure where [I would immigrate to] … first, I decided to apply through the federal immigration system. I got a grade of 6 in IELTS [English language exam] but when I gave my test results to my immigration lawyer, the lawyer said that conditions [of Canadian federal immigration] have changed and now it takes six years instead of two years to immigrate. I left the whole thing and did not continue with it. … Then a new colleague told me that you should go to Québec and it is very good there.

For participants, motivations for leaving were often discussed along with difficulties in negotiating the immigration system and weighing the benefits of moving to another country. One participant stated, "…I gave it up [being at the top of his career] to immigrate without any second thoughts or remorse. … this was a small price compared to like those who come as refugees … we just had to wait for three years in Iran [for our immigration documents to arrive]."

Arriving and Settling in Québec

The second major aspect of the transition from Iran to Québec was establishment in the host country. For participants, the first few months after arrival were especially stressful due to the following reasons: navigating the immigration system, leaving previous connections and loved ones, understanding the realities of the new society, and experiencing language and communication issues (which will be discussed in the next section). One participant explained, "it was incredibly hard in the beginning. The first three months, if I had a return ticket, I would have gone back! Being away from my family was very hard." Another participant reported, "the first six months were very difficult. I mean, when you get on the airplane, it is as if someone is cutting your roots. It is like you are losing your family and relatives, you'll be alone, and get-togethers – are all gone!" For these participants, the first few months were often filled with tasks related to adapting to the new environment and attending to the basic needs. A few participants (mostly those who were sponsored by their family members) had family members who helped them become established. However, the majority of participants had less help, "I had no one here. I only had two ex-colleagues who had rented me a place when I arrived here. And that was it. The rest, I learned on my own." Nevertheless, the majority of participants were quick to find resources and help from other Iranians, as will be discussed in the next sections.

To many participants, the arrival-adaptation stage was filled with uncertainty, doubts, and losing self-confidence, "You have to figure it out yourself - everything! As if you were 18 years old again or even younger. Finding your way, getting on buses, learning about metro and transportation… finding new friends…." Understanding differences and having difficulty connecting with the surroundings were confusing for some participants,

> I had landed in November, but I would go out of home every day early in the morning … I would look at the streets and places and would ask myself: 'Is this Canada?!' I had a hard time adjusting the image of Canada I had built in my mind with what I was seeing … I was lost somewhere between Iran and Canada.

Participants' hopes and expectations for the new society were among the factors that formed their experience. Since most participants were educated professionals, their aspirations were often high, as reflected in this example,

> I am an idealist. I was in shock the whole first week of being here. I cried, and I was scared because I knew that I have not come here to go sightseeing or to enjoy myself. No, I had come here to make a better life than what I already had in Iran.

Other participants who had a higher SES level in Iran and had previously visited other countries hoped that immigration would provide them with better choices of living. For example, for one participant, immigration was also a path for obtaining a Canadian passport, which in turn would give her the ability to travel between Iran and Canada or visit other countries without worrying about applying for a visa. She said,

> My original plan was not to stay here [in Québec]. My real plan was to get my passport and then decide if I want to stay here or not. I did not even intend to stay in Québec, as I wanted to go to Toronto. In the beginning, everything seemed gloomy … I don't know if it was because of the context of the city or just that it was a new environment. It very much looked like Russia to me. People seemed very cold, buildings old….

Arrival in Québec was stressful for many participants, and it was filled with uncertainty and doubts that were sometimes further exacerbated by hopes and expectations that clashed with reality.

Challenges and Opportunities for Growth

Challenges and opportunities for growth were the third major aspect of the participants' transition from Iran to Québec. Almost all participants noted the intense pressure of the first few months or years after their arrival in Québec in which they faced challenges such as burnout, high expectations from colleges and fear of criticism. One participant explained,

> It is very hard. Some weeks I work five days while doing an internship for three days in the week, and this is a lot. I go to work right after my internship and get home at 11 pm. And this has negatively affected my learning at my internship … I have a lot of stress and worry that I will end up burnt out soon.

Pressures in the first few months of settling in the new society resulted in physical or mental challenges. Another participant explained,

> When I could not find a work [as a nurse] and had to work with this agency that each day used to send me to different places,…I got very anxious…and then [later on] the hospital for me was turned to a place where I felt I was always being criticized, even if it was only my impression. Now I want to see a psychologist for my anxiety.

For married participants, the pressure would, at times, find its way to their relationships, as was the case of arguments between one of the participants and her husband. In this case, the challenges this participant faced affected her physical health as well,

> My husband didn't have a job … and our friends kept giving us negative energy, like constantly advising us to go back. And I had so many fights over this with my husband in the first and second month of coming here as he wanted us to go back, and I was against it … all these arguments and turmoil resulted in my miscarriage, and then I got

> this sickness…due to extreme stress, my immune system got hyperactive…and aggressively attacked my body tissues.

In the face of challenges present in establishing in the new society, some participants contemplated moving back to Iran as a possible solution. For instance, one participant reported, "If I had a return ticket, I would have gone back to Iran in the first month! Being away from my family was very, very hard and could not believe that I had been so much attached to them." Another participant and her husband, whom both used to have well-paying jobs in Iran, had intense arguments about staying versus going back. These arguments were further fueled by other Iranian friends' suggestions and meddling. Her husband compared his good job and overall living conditions back in Iran with his less-professional job in Québec and wanted to go back, while she preferred to focus on their options in Québec.

Participants expressed their feelings for what they had lost in immigration. The price of leaving Iran for each person was different, based on the personal positions and situation of each participant. One participant stated, "being away from my family was very, very difficult! I never imagined I was so attached to my parents … the only thing that after four years [of immigration] makes me question my decision [of immigration] is [leaving] my parents." For another participant gains and losses were based on her social position as a divorcee,

> I came here, and my ex-husband took away my child from me. The family's atmosphere and the society's gaze [at me as a divorcee] got to the point that I left my child and left such a good job that I had in Iran, just so that I can live right.

As all participants were highly educated, and many were coming from middle-to-higher and higher SES level in Iran, the theme of losing social status and previous positions were dominant. One participant who used to be a well-established artist in Iran said,

> I did not have any financial worries [in Iran]. I had my job, my hobbies, I could read books I liked …I had a royal life! Now I compare all that to this miserable situation [of living outside of Iran] that I have now, that I have to beg someone to lend me a book in Persian…. Now here I have worked as a […] sales agent, selling […] to people! ... I cannot say living in Canada [for someone like me] is good! I cannot say that!

Despite the challenges, all the participants, with the exception of one, expressed their satisfaction with their decision to immigrate. Some reflected on their overall personal learning: "I am satisfied with this experience [of immigration]. … I am not the same person who left Iran. I have changed a lot, I have become calmer and more reasonable – and much more resilient." Some participants who did not have a high income, or had unpleasant family situations in Iran, never doubted staying in Québec. For example, one participant who was coming from lower-middle SES level in Iran stated, "I came here with a strong resolve. I did not assume that I had to necessarily find a job at my field of interest…. I was even happy with mopping floors or any odd jobs." However, he found a semi-skilled job and believed that his gains as a result of immigration outweighed any challenges faced by leaving the home country. Others expressed peace and security, the rule of law, lack of political and societal pressures, freedom and more equal rights for women, lack of systematic discrimination against minorities, and being away from the oppressive and toxic atmosphere of Iran, as major gains made during the process. One participant explained, "When I went back to Iran, I was even more glad that I had immigrated to Canada! ... there was extreme air pollution … crazy traffic, lack of law and order…but my family is there, and I still like to go back."

Resiliency and Coping Strategies

In the face of hardships of the first months or years of immigration, participants developed resiliency by using resources and developing coping mechanisms. Participants realized that if they wanted to establish themselves in Canada, they had to focus their thoughts on staying, rather than contemplating the option of return. For instance, one participant who was considering moving to Iran or elsewhere noted: " … when I cancelled my flight [back to Iran], I felt that OK, now I have destroyed all ways of going back, and now I have to stay and build my life here." As discussed earlier, participants relied on various resources such as family support, and help from professionals such as mental health practitioners and Emploi-Quebéc.

In addition to resources, participants developed ways to cope with the new situation and its stressors. Even though talking to friends and family members was helpful, many participants would intentionally limit their interactions with friends and family as they feared judgments or prying of friends and family into their affairs, "I'm not like what I used to be in Iran anymore … here, I don't talk with others so much … I solve the problems myself." Some participants recalled their personal characteristics as their resources. One participant expressed, "something that helped me here … I feel having a smile on your face at all times is really helpful here … in finding work, in the first connections, it works miracles!" For another participant, "a factor that had really helped me was that I easily get adapted to anything … If I couldn't adapt, then I'd never be fully integrated … like I'd get adapted to winter." Several participants busy themselves with activities and particularly general jobs to polish their language skills and learn more about the host society's culture. One strategy that was used by many participants to cope with the intensity of the immigration was to go for short trips to Iran. One participant said, "After all these pressures, … I went back to Iran and visited my family. It was really really good." Others

would use trips to Iran for taking care of the affairs, "I hadn't gone there [to Iran] for fun really, … I had gone there to visit my dentist; I also had to sign a couple of documents and renew my passport." Even if participants did not use trips to Iran as a defusing experience, most of them still went back to Iran at least once or twice since their arrival in Canada. Those who did not prefer to frequently visit Iran expressed reasons such as not having so many friends or family members left in Iran, family issues, and staying away from the atmosphere of busy cities. One participant explained, "I have gone to Iran only three times [after my immigration] … because I don't really have anyone in Iran other than my family. I have no friends left there, no nothing."

Negotiating Bilingualism in Different Contexts

Knowledge of French or English proved to be one of the most important and common factors in participants' evaluation of their ability to interact with non-Iranians and integrate with the host society. As one participant stated, "language impacts everything. It impacts your fun time, it of course impacts [ability to attend] university; it impacts work…." Before emigration, at least half of the participants had intermediate or advanced levels of English or French language skills. For example, one participant held an M.A. in French translation and had been a French teacher in Iran. Another participant stated, "I studied French translation in Iran, then I went to France and studied French literature and got my M.A. in French literature." Other participants were able to study French before emigrating, specifically to prepare themselves for immigration as they were warned about the importance of language proficiency by Iranians previously immigrated to Québec. One participant said, "…Now Iranians have learned from each other – through Facebook groups, for example – that we should first work on our language [skills] and then come here."

Nevertheless, upon arrival, even those participants who assessed their language proficiency as intermediate or advanced, realized that their language skills needed improvement (for example, to improve their understanding of the French accent). One participant reported, "I boasted that my language was good. … I realized that … I was just like a deaf person: I could speak, but I could not understand others! … I was very disappointed and scared."

In this section, the necessity of knowing both English and French for living in particular parts of Québec and the impact of these languages on transitioning and community belonging will be discussed. Later, language-related experiences will be discussed within contexts of work and education and interpersonal interactions.

Québec Context

Many participants realized that they needed to be fluent both in French and English if they wanted to live, study, or work in some parts of Québec (e.g., parts of Montréal). Currently, most Iranians study English or Arabic as their second language in Iranian schools. Prior to emigration, several participants had to switch their second language from English to French to prepare themselves for Québec or to get higher points for the point-based immigration system of Québec. To some of the participants, learning the third language seemed to be an added layer of difficulty. One participant stated, "My colleague encouraged me [to] apply for immigration through Québec. I asked her what I should do? She said you should study French! I was like, 'don't even think about it! Studying yet another language?!'."

Once in Canada, participants often realized the reality that some parts of the Québec have a bilingual job market or community. Even though the government-funded French classes for immigrants helped participants with their French proficiency, some jobs or educational opportunities required English proficiency as well. For example, one participant explained, "My

husband studied French here for two years and then said, 'You forced me to study French, while I actually needed to study English!'." Another example was a participant who used to be a French teacher but had to improve her English language skills in order to finish a Bachelor of Education degree at an English-speaking university. Similarly, participants who graduated in English-speaking programs in Québec realized that they needed to improve their French in order to be successful. For example, one participant stated, "My husband didn't have a job - his English was perfect, but he didn't know French, and they [the job] wanted him to know French." Another participant noted, "In our field, they have divided [name of the city in Québec] into different sectors … and since I have finished my program in English, I am only allowed to work in two sectors [of all the sectors]."

Educational and Work Environments

Participants discussed their challenges with language proficiency, mostly within the context of educational or work environments. Participants who had higher levels of language proficiency before immigrating had significantly fewer problems in connecting with the larger society. For example, one participant who had a Masters in French literature before arriving in Québec expressed, "I don't have a particular problem for living in Québec because I can speak French, I have a job and can speak French with my colleagues easily. You know? I feel like I am a citizen here just like others." But, even for those who had advanced levels of language proficiency, studying in another language proved to be difficult. One participant reported, "The first year was very difficult- this is while I could speak both languages … the university was very hard … They expected from me what they expected from a native. They didn't care if you were an immigrant or not."

Even though most participants attended government-funded French classes in the first or second year of moving to Québec, they soon realized that taking classes did not guarantee a smooth interaction with others. "The first week of work, I wanted to sell [something] to the client, and kept [repeating]: Est-que vous pouvez répéter doucement? Est-que vous pouvez utiliser les mots faciles? Well, [asking people to repeat themselves] over and over will not work." Facing extreme challenges with language resulted in lowering mood and self-confidence. Losing hope and self-confidence were especially common amongst participants who had believed they had good knowledge of French or English. One participant explained,

> I used to be very self-confident [in Iran]. I mean at work [in Iran] everyone used to tell me that I had a great self-confidence … well, after six months of being here [in Québec], I felt like a child entering daycare! My self-confidence was very low, and I could not connect with anyone … I realized that my language level is nothing for here! More French classes? What's the point of taking more classes?!

Nevertheless, working in the context of the new society did help participants in honing their language skills. One participant explained, "I could speak in both languages [English and French] well, but the French I used to speak was very different than French here. My French has really adapted thanks to my job."

For some participants, the fear of not having the required French or English skills prevented them from applying to jobs. One participant who reported having a good level of French knowledge before arriving in Québec, expressed, "I met this person, and she encouraged me to apply for [a position at a pharmacy]. At first, I did not apply, thinking that my French and English are not good enough to communicate with people." By contrast, some participants did experience language as a real institutional or legal barrier. Many participants who needed to

work in fields regulated by institutions in Québec reported having to pass French language tests. One participant noted, "You have to pass a French exam … even after you get your diploma [of your profession] … the word 'temporary' is written on top of the diploma, and only if you pass that exam, your diploma will become 'permanent'."

Discrimination based on language. Some participants believed that their lack of proficiency in French or English made them targets for discrimination. At times, this discrimination took the form of being alienated from others. One participant said,

> In the work settings … sometimes you feel, or you see that they do not treat you well, maybe because they feel that you cannot communicate with them in French to the level they expect from you. They also don't know any English, so they prefer to ignore you altogether and don't even initiate a conversation

Participants also described situations where language abilities were used by those in positions of power to treat participants in condescending ways. In such cases, participants mostly felt they were targeted not because of their language difficulties, but because of being an immigrant or coming from Iran. For example, one participant explained,

> In our college, half of the class were Iranians. … Their perception of Iranians was very bad … the teachers and the program director would come to our class every now and then and would say that Iranians are this and that … [the program director] used to tell us … that your language [skills] are not good, [and therefore] your results are not good, and you won't pass the Ordre's bar exam….

Moreover, participants felt discriminated when they were disrespected or rejected because of their language abilities, instead of being assessed based on their professional knowledge. One participant explained that she had been accepted to Québec because of her

nursing skills and her French-language abilities. Nevertheless, she was rejected in interviews simply because she was deemed to be an immigrant with poor language skills. While waiting for a job interview, "a man … using a loudspeaker said: 'if you can't fully explain yourself in French, go back to your home!' This was indeed disrespectful … We were all professionals waiting there. You could at least talk to us for 5 minutes." This participant felt discriminated not only because of the possible lack of language skills but also because of being an immigrant (non-Francophone identity). She asked, "if you wanted perfect French, then you had to be satisfied with Québecois! Why did Québec ask for immigrants?!"

Interpersonal Interaction and Community Involvement

Participants also reflected on the role of language in interpersonal interactions and engaging with the community, each of which will be discussed below.

Interpersonal interactions. Participants discussed the way they exerted their language choice to form or describe their relationships. For example, one participant said that some things could only be discussed in the mother tongue, "…like eating something [Iranian] or cooking [in an Iranian style] … There are things that no matter how good your language skills are, you cannot express them in any language other than Persian." The preference for mother tongue was also evident in the case of one participant, who, due to multiple stressors (i.e., classes, language barriers, marital conflicts, and exams) wished to see a therapist, "I didn't want my psychologist to be English speaking, as this was really not where I wanted to challenge myself over language…." These examples show the role of language in the process of relating to or avoiding the host society.

The choice over language was also complicated by the space and context in which the language was used– and not just the language skills or comfort level. For example, one participant explained:

> Here [at her workplace], they expect you to smile and properly welcome the [client], like 'rooz bekheir! [good day in Persian]'. If I want to translate this into Persian, it will be too formal- feels like too artificial and strange to do with an Iranian! Now, if an Iranian comes to […] here, I don't know how I should interact with her…[this is while] if a non-Iranian is present, I feel like it is too bad to speak in Persian…

Some participants discussed how challenges that existed in their relationship with other Iranians – which will be discussed in the next section – were a price to pay for communication in one's fluent and comforting language. One participant explained, "Maybe the most important thing that has kept my relationship with Iranians is the Persian language. If my French was as good as my Persian, maybe my relationships with Iranians would be reduced to 10 percent." Later on, she gave an example of a friendship she had started with an Egyptian friend: "…that feeling that I could talk with someone in Persian for an hour and half, it was just not there. It was hard to keep talking [in English] after 10 minutes on phone."

In addition, some participants mentioned how language ability was used by some Iranian immigrants to ridicule and suppress other Iranian immigrants. For example, one participant reported the way a fellow Iranian used host-country's language in order to shame fellow classmates:

> There was this Iranian woman … whose language skills were much better than all other [Iranians]. I saw her backstabbing other Iranian students when talking to our teacher! I saw her making fun of one of the Iranian students who couldn't pronounce words well.

The following describes another example that relates to lowering the participant's self-confidence: "I have an Iranian friend whose French is better than me and has taught French in the past. She tells me: 'well … you have to work on [your French] pronunciations' … this lowers my self-confidence, and I don't like this."

Community engagement. Several participants made clear connections between language abilities and a choice between engaging with the Iranian community or wider society. One participant stated that over time, "You can react or fight for your rights [in English or French], and then you don't feel you're a stranger anymore. This language barrier results in fear and taking refuge in your own community." For other participants, integration meant keeping distance from Iranians or the Iranian community: "I have very few Iranian friends … I am fully integrated [in the Québec society] because, well, if you stay in your community, be it Iranian, Chinese or whatever, you don't get integrated into the society." Further, another participant noted, "My [Iranian] friend does not like going to any Canadian [i.e., non-Iranian] gathering. …she says 'no, what do I have to talk with them?' I tell her that someone will say something and then you can follow on that…."

For those who had advanced French language abilities, issues with language or negativity around the French language or the host society was less understandable. One participant who used to be a French teacher in Iran noted,

> Iranians are always nagging here and are not satisfied with anything. But I say well when you wanted to move here, you knew the condition here. After a year, you should have learned and accepted that 'well, I am in Québec, they speak French…, this is the weather [referring to the cold weather]'. So, you need to get used to that.

Career Transitioning

Career transitioning was a major context for participants' experiences of interaction and transitioning after arrival in Québec. Participants described several factors impacting their career transitioning. In this section, first, three factors affecting participants' experience of their career transitioning, namely previous job and family support, preference for professional jobs, and age, will be discussed. Later, career trajectories of participants and the role of work in transitioning to the new society will be explained.

Factors Influencing Career Transitioning

Support of family and previous job. Financial or familial support – either in Iran or in Québec – proved to be determining factors in the career transitioning of participants. One source of relief for some participants while dealing with career challenges was having the option to return home to an established career. For example, several participants who had stable jobs back in Iran (e.g., private practice, health care, or government-related), were able to keep their positions using unpaid leaves or other methods. One participant reported,

> My plan was to get the citizenship for myself and my son and then go back to Iran … I still have my office in Iran and I told myself that well, worse comes to the worse, if it gets too hard here, I still have my job back in Iran and … I can still get projects there and work in Iran.

For others, having supportive family members provided the option of going back: "My father repeatedly told me: 'if you felt like you can't do it, don't force yourself to stay there just because you have left Iran. Come back to us!'." Whether due to keeping their previous job while immigrating to Canada or having the full support of the family back home, these participants felt a strong sense of relief and support from their previous social positions. Further,

immigrating as a skilled worker, and not a refugee, helped participants to have the option of going back to Iran in case they needed. As one participant noted,

> I always thought that if I immigrated and then realized that I am not successful [in the new society] or I am getting depressed, I will go back, as I have always lived with my family. I left Iran [under] Skilled Worker [immigration program], not as a refugee! If I was a refugee, all the ways back to Iran would have been blocked.

However, some other participants did not have a supportive family, or the previous job in Iran to go back to in case career challenges in Québec seemed unresolvable. For these participants, right from the beginning, immigration was viewed as a final decision. Ways to deal with the pressures of immigration for the latter group of participants were different. For example, one participant was satisfied with a semi-skilled job that was paying enough for himself and his wife to manage their expenses, (a satisfaction which contrasted the other participants' lack of acceptance for general jobs).

Participants who were from higher SES or had the support of their families residing in Québec were able to focus on their studies or try different career trajectories without worrying about income. For example, one participant was an M.D. in Iran and had a certain level of financial stability. Moreover, her family had immigrated to Québec with her and was a source of support to her. Given her family's support and her financial situation, she was able to focus on her studies in Canada without any need to do part-time or general jobs. Alternatively, even though another participant came from an affluent family and higher SES in Iran, she didn't have the financial support of her family once in Canada, and had to work in general jobs in order to sustain herself: "In Iran, I had my own corporation with ten professional engineers working for

me, and used to go on vacation [outside of country] at least once per season. … But now, I have worked here as a simple cashier."

Preference for professional jobs. For almost all participants, a "real job" meant a professional or highly skilled job (e.g., engineer, accountant, or nurse). Many participants explicitly stated the importance of having this type of job in order to have status in the community. It was seen as something that could make them proud of in the eyes of other Iranians. One participant stated, "For Iranian community, it is extremely important what sort of job you have. If you don't have a good job, then they don't treat you with respect, either." This participant's husband was never able to find a job in his professional field, and that flared arguments between them to whether they should go back to Iran or stay in Canada. She continued, "Recent immigrants are all skilled workers, all educated, and most of them had good jobs and positions in Iran." Being able to work in a professional or highly skilled job is a major aspect of establishing oneself in the host country, and it is not always possible.

Participants explained that having a general job (i.e., a job that requires unskilled labour) was interpreted as low or shameful by other Iranians, and as something to hide. One participant explained this phenomenon: "Iranians hide many things from each other. For example, if they work in a general job. It seems that doing general work or odd jobs is a great shame." On the other hand, participants discussed how the type of job – or unemployment – could be an excuse for others' judgments. For example, one participant, being tired by her friends' judgments regarding why her boyfriend had not yet proposed, explained, "He has not found a job yet … [men] all have some pride related to having a job and feeling that [they] should be able to pay for [their] wife as well … and I can't put pressure on him …." Judgments around her boyfriend's unemployment put pressure on her romantic relationship. This participant further explained that

when she asked him to attend a party, "… he says: 'No! I won't come! Her husband is going to ask me about what I do [as a profession], and obviously, I don't have a job'."

Nevertheless, several participants had to work in general jobs at some point during the first years of their stay in Québec. These participants often appreciated the experience of working in a general job: "My friend gave me good advice…like she encouraged me to find a job…after five months, I found a job as a cashier, and that really helped me- with having an income and everything…." Although these participants admitted that Iranians look down upon general jobs, some explained that they did not let feelings of shame stop them from working. Another participant explained,

> My friend told me, 'When people ask you, you proudly say that you clear shelves in Pharmaprix. I will never dare to admit that I work at Winners!' … I told her that I am never ashamed of what I do for work.

For others, finding a simple job helped them in their process of decision making and staying: "I found this general job … I told myself that I would take this job for only 2-3 months … but finding that job and this friend, together with breaking up with my boyfriend, all made me stay in Québec." In all these cases, working in general jobs made participants realize the benefits of staying active, becoming independent, and learning about Canadian society.

Age. Participants often took age into account when they made decisions about work or education. For example, one participant, who was an artist in Iran and held several professional degrees related to art, explained his experience with a career counsellor: "In Emploi Québec, …she gave me a test … asking questions like, 'do you like to become a dentist?' Obviously, it would have been my dream to become a dentist!" He realized that many of the suggestions given to him by Emploi Québec were not relevant to his age or previous experiences. He

concluded that "It was obvious that immigration does not work for someone like me. It works for someone with a maximum age of 25 years old. I tell this to everyone, especially artist friends [who want to immigrate here]."

The choices around education and work were even more limited when, as in the case of a participant who was a single mother. This participant realized that she could get equivalency for a portion of her university courses and then attend an educational program and pass the licensing exam for her field of work in Québec. However, she said, "I decided to pull back. I realized that I am too old to dedicate another eight years and that I need to study something to start earning as soon as possible." She decided to get a diploma in a similar field that would allow her to enter the job market faster: "I got an admission from college … but because my son was with me and … and I could not leave him alone at home, I cancelled it … but then I found an online program…."

Career Trajectories

All participants were very active in searching for career opportunities and establishing their careers in the new society. One participant stated, "…I was worried about the cold weather and finding a job … but I was able to quickly find a job as a nurse-assistant and right away decided to study in a program while working." The beginning of career trajectories for most participants meant taking advantage of classes and financial supports funded by the government of Québec. One participant explained, "In the first year of arrival, everyone goes to Francization classes [French language classes]. Everyone goes to business classes. They all receive bursary and line of credit [for attending them]."

Almost half of the participants continued studying and finding jobs in fields directly related to their previous studies in Iran. After receiving an equivalency for the educational

degrees received in Iran, participants often had to complete courses, exams or programs to help their chances in the job market. For example, one participant explained, "I had eight years of accounting experience in Iran when I arrived here. Therefore, I started a short accounting program…." Participants who wanted to work in a field that was governed by a professional order in Québec had some additional exams or steps to take, as explained by one participant who used to be a nurse in Iran: "I have been running since I came here … First, I started Francization [French language] classes … then I did the nursing integration program [refreshing courses] ... and after all of these, I started studying for the Ordre [bar] exam." Nevertheless, some other participants were unable to obtain an equivalency for their degrees: "We have to re-do all of our program. It was a three-year program. Getting into it was very hard. It had an entrance exam and then an interview. … It was a lot of pressure."

Some of the participants did not re-start their previously-held careers in Québec, as they seized immigration as an opportunity for a new beginning: "When I came here I did not want to continue doing an office job … [I told myself that] Canada is the land of dreams! I will do whatever I really enjoy!" Others had to change their fields of work due to degree equivalency and licensing issues. One participant who used to be a medical doctor in Iran was a clear example of the former situation: "It took about three and a half years … for degree equivalency and passing three hard exams. Then I studied French… Then I applied for residency, but they did not accept me! So… I started studying in a relevant field." At the time of the interview, she had finished her master's and was starting her second Ph.D. For others, immigration provided them with enough distance from their family or previously disliked fields of work that they could change to a preferred career: "In Iran, I always liked to become a nurse, but my father did not let me. This had stayed with me somewhere deep down…."

Changing careers, attending certification exams, and dealing with degree equivalency issues constituted only a portion of challenges in career transitioning to Québec. After completing equivalencies and exams, participants often had to search for a job, and this task proved very difficult for many of them. Often, participants had little knowledge of the job market and job-search strategies. For one participant, who was a nurse, it took one year to find a relevant job in her field: "It was a very, very difficult time … I did not know how to sell my skills … did not know where to go, what is the process…." The post-studies stage was particularly difficult for those who did not have any previous experience in searching for a job. For example, participants who had previously benefited from familial or local connections to find jobs in Iran faced more difficulty in the job search than other participants. For some, internship opportunities subsidized by the government played an essential role in building a bridge between their refreshing courses and the job market. One participant explained, " … The place [internship] itself gives you the opportunity to create new relationships, and then you don't need to only rely on your Iranian contacts."

Role of Work in Transitioning

Participants described the way work positively impacted their experience and supported their career transitioning. For many, finding their first job, be it general, internship, voluntary, or professional, was a door to connecting with the host society, learning more about it, and above all, boosting their self-esteem. One participant reflected on her overall experience of working at her internship site: "I'm very satisfied by my progress. This – where I am – might not be anything special … but at least I'm proud of myself."

Financial compensation was another positive aspect of finding work for participants. Participants coming from middle to lower-middle class were particularly satisfied with their pay,

as they compared their income and other aspects of their current jobs with what they used to earn in Iran. For example, one participant reported that her income is much more than what she used to earn in Iran and that now she realizes that her pay in Iran was "discriminatory":

> Life is very different here. You don't have financial worries about the future. If you have a setback [e.g., lose your job, etc.], the government will help you. As a [her profession] … there is only a small difference between my income and that of [one level higher in her profession].

For another participant, other aspects of the job made it positive: "My supervisor [at my job] is very kind, my job environment is very good, even though the pay is not that high, it is a stable job … Now I have peace of mind – one of my reasons for immigration."

Interpersonal Interactions

Interpersonal relationships were another major context of interactions and experiences of Iranian immigrants. In the first few months or year after arrival, one general trend among participants' accounts of their interpersonal interactions was the abundance of contact with Iranians as opposed to non-Iranians – a trend that was often reversed after negative experiences in interactions with Iranians. It is important to note that it was often not known to whom participants were referring to when talking about "non-Iranians." In other words, "non-Iranians" in participants' narratives were often considered a homogenous entity that included anyone who was not Iranian and was previously settled in Canada. Participants used the terms "non-Iranian", "Canadians", or "*khareji haa"* [literally translated to "foreigners", which, as historically used in Iran, refers to those who were not Iranian]. It was also not known in which category participants considered indigenous Canadians or other minorities, as there was no mention of the indigenous

peoples of Canada in the accounts of participants. For the purpose of consistency, the term "non-Iranians" will be used for the rest of this section.

In this section, first, reasons for the abundance of interaction with Iranians right after arrival will be discussed. Then, three major themes of participants' experiences in their interpersonal interactions will be discussed. As participants frequently compared their interactions with Iranians to those with non-Iranians, each component will be discussed, including these comparisons. Finally, experiences of discrimination based on participants' immigrant status or national identity will be reviewed.

High Interactions with Iranians Right after Arrival: Reasons and Spaces

Reasons for preference of interaction with Iranians over interaction with non-Iranians in the first few months or year after arrival are discussed in this section.

Use of mother tongue. The ability to communicate in the mother tongue better was one of the important reasons for having more contact with Iranians. For instance, one participant explained, "At the beginning of my arrival … we used to go to [the events of] Iranian communities more often- well, just because we felt lonely and estranged. We wanted to connect with someone speaking the same language…."

Missing friends and family. Another reason that Iranians sought relationships with, and support of, other Iranians was the lack of close connection once held with friends and family members. Given the communal culture of Iran, many participants expressed a longing for a close, supportive relationship. One participant stated, " … because of not having family [members] here, one subconsciously and suddenly dives into [creating] friendships!" In the absence of family support, individuals needed to establish new connections in order to fulfill the

emotional needs and support that they normally received from close family members or old friends.

Mutual living spaces. Aside from relationships that had begun pre-arrival, most interactions and relationships occurred in the context of mutual living spaces, and sometimes while longing for social connection. For one participant, a new relationship was formed with another Iranian who lived in her building at a time when she felt she needed friendship: "She lived in the same building that I was living at the time, and we met accidentally through my previous roommate. Our friendship became very strong and good … it changed the whole trajectory of my life in Canada."

As the point-based immigration system in Québec favoured certain professions, several participants met other Iranians in their French or educational classes for immigrants that were funded by the government of Québec. Meeting other Iranians in educational classes was very common, as "Obviously no one has any job right after moving to Canada. Everyone goes to 'Francization' classes. Everyone goes to business classes [i.e., educational classes of the government of Québec]. [laughs] Everyone receives loans and bursaries." Therefore, "…for good or bad, in any college [here in Québec], if you look into any class, you see 50 percent of it are Iranians." As well, participants met other Iranians later on while working in their jobs. For example, one participant explained, "We have a group [in a social network], just like a family. I have less experience in [her job] ... It's a great group, and if someone feels down, or sick [people will help her]. I even cook for them."

Forming relationships based on national identity. Given that the majority of participants had to attend the same classes or share the same spaces with Iranian newcomers, they often did not choose the spaces and conditions in which interactions were formed. As a

result, diverse individuals from different ethnicities and economic, social, and cultural backgrounds were able to meet with each other. However, participants discussed how they used to pay attention to others' cultures or SES in Iran when choosing friends. For example, one participant said, "In Iran … we made sure that we [the participant and her family] are at the same level as the other individual [before befriending them] … only people within the same level would socialize, and individuals' statuses were recognizable in Iran." For some, a preference for relationships based on shared cultural and familial traditions or SES was a continued practice in Canada. For example, one participant noted, "I choose my friends in a way that they are closer to my level of education. Like I don't like having a relationship with someone who has a lower educational level than me."

Nevertheless, after moving to Canada, participants noticed that it was harder to quickly discern other Iranian immigrants' ethnic, economic, and socio-cultural backgrounds for the purpose of finding friends. The diversity came at the cost of an inability to recognize people's "levels":

> I always say that here, all Iranians have one of those IKEA lamp-stands in their homes! – it doesn't matter if they used to be rich or poor in [Iran] – they all have the same lamp! All the levels are mixed, and you cannot distinguish them. … You cannot identify the differences [between individuals], unless if you start a relationship [with that individual].

As participants were in need of support in various aspects of their lives during their transition stage, new relationships were often created based not on the same level of SES, culture or familial traditions, but on the shared grounds of having an Iranian identity (both parties being Iranian) or speaking the same language. Another participant discussed the challenges of the

above process, "If you get too intimate before actually getting to know each other, your differences and disagreements will be multiplied, and this will result in you losing that friend."

Factors Impacting Quality of Interactions

Although initiating relationships with other Iranians was preferred over creating bonds with non-Iranians right after arrival, most participants decided to substantially limit their interactions with Iranians after a few months or years. One participant had decided to have most of her interactions with non-Iranians right from the arrival in the new society, stating that, "I have very few Iranian friends because … when you stay in your community, you won't get integrated." However, many participants had most of their initial interactions after arrival in Québec with Iranians. Another participant reported, "Deep down one always prioritizes relationships with Iranians. One would have the most traumas and hurt by them as well." In the next sections, three significant factors impacting the quality of participants' interactions will be discussed: receiving help and support, interpersonal expectations, and prying and judging.

Receiving help and support. Participants used their interactions as a major source of help and support. Those who wished to immigrate started gathering information about the immigration process through friends or Iranian groups on social media, such as Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp. For example, one participant explained, "We consulted in these Facebook groups [with others who had already immigrated] and learned that we have to first improve our [French/English] language and then move to here." Receiving help and information continued into the first few months after having arrived in Québec. One participant said, "We did a complete research before coming to Canada. Our friends truly helped us in the early stages, although we cut our relationships with them later on. …like they'd tell us 'guys this place is better'." Another stated, "…I had a very good friend whom I knew since high school …who

had previously come here with her husband… when I came here, I stayed at their place [for a few weeks]. She had great suggestions for me." Nevertheless, some participants felt that they received better help and mutual support from non-Iranians. For example, one participant expressed, "I think non-Iranians treat Iranians kinder than other Iranians. It had happened that I had bags of groceries, and Iranians would not help me but, a *khareji* [foreigner, i.e., non-Iranian] who did not know me at all, helped me."

Although participants noted receiving help from non-Iranians as well, receiving help from Iranians continued to be a strong source of support for the first few months or year after immigration.

Interpersonal expectations. Even though participants greatly benefited from the support of other Iranians throughout their immigration process, they each had conflictual feelings about offering help to others or accepting help. As help is considered an important act in Iranian culture, participants explained ways in which culturally based expectations often pressured them to help fellow Iranian immigrants even when they preferred not to:

> … [an Iranian] woman approached me and said, '….I have recently immigrated … can I have your number so that when I feel lonely, we can go out together?' Honestly, I knew I did not have time to go out with her, but I said, 'Sure! we will go out for a coffee or something.' She said, 'no! I don't mean going for coffee, I meant going to clubs!' I couldn't tell her anything at that point, but I didn't like going to clubs … how could she ask someone whom she had just met, to accompany her to a club?

On the contrary, participants felt less pressured while interacting with non-Iranians, as they were not worried about potentially unreasonable expectations.

> Iranians expect too much from each other … for example, they expect you to let them give you a lift to your home even if you have just gotten to know the person … this is too much … and here it is different. The whole atmosphere and [people's interaction] style here is different and does not let you have the same expectations.

Participants also praised some of the expectations that non-Iranians had from their relationships – like independence:

> They [non-Iranians], from the age of 15-16, learn not to rely on others…we say in Iran that non-Iranians do not have any affection and do not value family ties. But to me, this is not a sign of lack of affection, it's just that parents … raise their children independently.

In the following paragraphs, participants' explanations of the way they experienced these expectations, their responses, and their coping strategies regarding expectations are discussed.

Access to resources as a ground for expectations. Interpersonal expectations of other Iranians were often imposed on participants because of their access to resources or because of their social positions. A clear example was stated as, "My new friends – who have [recently] landed – expect me to do a lot for them: to come to my place and stay for a month or to get my credit card number … they get hurt if you tell them 'no!'…." Another participant gave a similar example. While applying for immigration, she became familiar with an Iranian immigrant who had helped her as well as others with the visa application process. She recounted, "He had also helped several other people … but some of those people had felt that my friend had not done enough! These people's reactions hurt my friend to the point that he said, 'you know what? I'm not going to help anyone anymore'…."

Feeling disrespected and exploited. When participants felt their expected help was not appreciated or reciprocated they felt disrespected. For example, one participant explained, "I worked there [a space belonging to an Iranian institution] and helped him … but I will never go there again. Not when he forgets thanking me – or not even thank me, just invite me [for an event there]." In these instances, participants who had enough resources offered their help, but in return they felt disrespected or insulted. Another example was given by a participant whose financial situation allowed her to help newcomers. In several cases, she was disappointed in return: "…I take care of their needs free of charge … as I believe people do not need to suffer, or have the negative experiences, that I had … but in return, she treated me so bad that even her own friends condemned her." She had always felt she was expected by Iranians to help because of her access to government-related resources in Iran. Later, she was insulted when, at a party, the same family she had previously helped were discussing their negative views on divorced mothers, of which she was one. She was insulted, as the family was comparing divorced mothers to potential prostitutes.

In addition to a lack of reciprocation for participants' aid, some participants felt they were exploited because others had befriended them for reasons beyond true friendship. For instance, one participant who was a French teacher in Iran, explained: "This previous student of mine insisted on becoming friends with me … I knew that this was because she needed me for my French skills…. When you know there is another motivation involved, you automatically bring up your guard."

Coping strategies. In the face of pressure caused by cultural expectations, participants developed strategies to manage how they could help or support others. Given the difficulty in managing expectations, participants often had to limit the relationship or create boundaries to

protect themselves. One participant noted: "…Yes, I help them … but I have my own special framework … I don't go beyond my framework, and I don't let anyone else overstep it either." Another participant also insisted on the importance of boundaries:

> I think it is very important that people recognize boundaries and how much they can ask…. [for example,] I might ask two very close friends of mine about their tax calculations … but I don't allow myself to ask the same questions from just anyone. Because such [personal] questions, can offend the other party, while I [might see the person getting offended] and ask myself, 'what?! She doesn't want to help me!?

Prying and judging. The perception of being judged by Iranians in various ways was frequent in the narratives. It is essential to note the way in which participants felt judged by others in the context of a small community and opportunities for prying in others' lives. Therefore, the small community context for these Iranian immigrants will be explored before expanding on prying by others and participants' perceptions of being judged.

Privacy and small size of community. Almost all participants expressed their thoughts on the small size of the Iranian community in Québec and the implications of the community size on judgments and prying between individuals. One consequence of the small size of the community was lack of privacy:

> In the first two years of my arrival, I used to go to every single event in the Iranian community … but now even if I get paid like $100 to go to an event, I would never go! … because, well, you go there, you see someone whom you knew from a class, and then another one from another class. And then you see them all at once in the same place, and they all know each other … and they like to snoop around each other's lives.

Concerns over privacy result in limiting relationships or decisions about what should be shared. As one participant explained, "I never tell anyone about my personal stuff … because I am certain that it will be told somewhere else eventually…." Moreover, participants at times decided to limit themselves in order to avoid judgments and prying,

> If someone sees me [in an event], they might say: 'Oh, why is she here? She had previously said that she does not like these types of events' … since people might say all these things, one might always fear to be judged by others and therefore decides not go to any event.

Concerns over privacy were also extended to what could be shared with me as both a researcher and a member of the Iranian community. For example, often, participants refrained from using the names of other individuals during the interview in order to protect their privacy.

Given the small size of the Iranian community, participants were concerned about others prying into their private affairs. For example, one participant felt interrogated by her friends about her relationship with her boyfriend: "I think we Iranians judge others too often and … try to get into the details of others' lives, and I don't like this … I don't ask unwarranted questions from others and don't like receiving too many questions either."

Comparisons with non-Iranians. Participants were accustomed to a culture in which prying was a frequent occurrence. Nevertheless, it was harder for them to manage this behaviour in Canada as they noted receiving fewer judgments or prying from non-Iranians. As one participant explained,

> I have come to the conclusion that I would be more in peace if I befriend with non-Iranians. First of all, Iranians are very nosy! … I go to this French class and there are a few Iranian women there, and it is impossible that a day passes without them

> commenting on my look, like, "You look fat today! You don't have makeup today! Why do you look so sad?' … But I tell them that since I don't want to speak in Persian [i.e., I want to practice my French]. I want to go and sit close to a Syrian or a Japanese woman. There, I do not receive such questions!

Another participant gave an example of comparing Iranians with non-Iranians in terms of prying and judgments: "My non-Iranian friend … has never asked me why don't you have children? But with Iranians, within ten minutes of seeing them in the metro or bus, they ask you that question." Participants noted that they all tried to get away from these judgments. One participant stated, "One of the reasons that forced me to leave Iran was … this mentality [in Iran] that everyone judges you…." In addition to judgments around personal preferences, judgments about age, SES or education level were also common. For example, one participant reported that among Iranians, having higher education credentials was a matter of status and said that Iranians judged others' life trajectories based on acquired educational degrees. She noted that contrastingly, "there is no such mentality here … not all people are supposed to go to university and not everyone is supposed to have higher education."

Others blamed the immigration process for rushing people towards "mismatched" relationships from the start:

Preconceptions, Racism and Discrimination

About half of the participants discussed experiencing some form of discrimination or prejudice solely based on being an Iranian or coming from the middle east. Some participants attributed the lower level of perceived discrimination to the presence of various ethnic and racial groups in Québec. As one participant put it, "The multicultural nature of [name of the city in Québec] helps a lot so that immigrants do not feel like strangers or foreigners … here people

have accepted that this is an immigrant-based country and immigrants play a positive role." However, the same participant noted that she did not feel welcome in another city of Québec, where she felt the city was not multicultural. Other participants discussed a range of racist or discriminatory acts against them because of being an immigrant, such as being ignored, labelled or called out inappropriately. Others expressed pessimism about their place in the larger society as an immigrant: "This is a country that functions thanks to immigration, but they have devised their system [of governance] in a way that immigrants will never be in control … even though the majority are immigrants, but the minority is ruling the majority."

Other participants discussed instances in which they were aware of preconceptions about Iranians held by non-Iranians and whether they wanted to address or correct them. For example, one participant stated,

> When I had recently arrived, if anyone learned that I was Iranian, their first question was … about ISIS…. Now I have learned that I should not try to prove anything. I smile, and then I go on with my business.

In another situation, one participant said that he had to eat pork in front of his colleagues to prove that their preconception that all Iranians are Muslim was wrong.

Even though conversations around discrimination were often not labelled as such by participants, there were two participants who clearly named events as discriminatory and described them in detail. One participant, who identified as an atheist and political activist against the Iranian regime, explained:

> It seems when someone critiques Islam, people here think that he is critiquing Muslims … But these two are not related. … I feel very limited when I want to discuss these matters in social media with Canadians or Québecers … many have condemned me and

> [even] cursed me – especially from white [people] – … just because I was describing my memories of Iran, they said that I had attacked Muslims. But I was just telling my horrible memories of living under an Islamic regime [as an atheist]

In his experience, being an Iranian and an atheist political activist made him a target of hate speech and discrimination. In another instance, one participant and her husband, who were Sunni Muslims and who had been previously discriminated against in Iran, experienced situations in which they were discriminated against in Canada for being Muslim or Middle Eastern: "Even though we are really not that strict in religion, – like we don't have Hijab – when they realize that we have come from the Middle East and we are Muslims, they don't like it."

Experiences Specific to Women

The analysis of results showed that women faced particular challenges both prior to their immigration and after arrival in Canada. Moreover, being a woman often nuanced interactions and community engagement in ways different than men. Therefore, this section focuses on women's reasons for leaving Iran, interaction with the Iranian community, interpersonal interactions, challenges in dating, and romantic relationships. The topics covered in these sections were either uniquely discussed by women (e.g., Hijab, legal restrictions for women in Iran, dating, and limitations imposed by partners on women) or were rarely discussed by male participants (e.g., age).

Reasons for leaving Iran

For women, issues of safety, discriminatory laws, and limitations imposed by the family were noted among factors that contributed to their negative feelings about Iranian society. For example, one participant noted, "Whenever I and my husband went out together … I always had this fear that there will be an argument [with police] … police bothered women for their Hijab,

and they did stop us for my Hijab…." Issues of safety for women dominated all aspects of life. One participant remembered that "I was always fearful -like, after 9 pm, I would not dare to set my foot in the street … I would not feel safe."

Moreover, legal limitations were also sources of concern for women: "Why women's lives worth half of the men's lives in case of murder or death by accidents? Why women's testimony worth half of the men's in a court? ... why do they treat women like this? All these really bothered me." For female participants, attaining equal rights was a major source of motivation for leaving Iran: "Being a woman in Iran really equals to be a second-class citizen."

For participants, family was an important aspect of everyday life, but the relationship between family and emigration varied. For some women, joining other family members in Canada acted as the incentive for emigration: "My parents wanted to immigrate just to be close to my sister as she had a child … therefore I decided to come here so that it gets easier for everyone." However, for several other women, getting independence from the family, or getting away from issues within the family was a driving force of emigration: "In my country I had everything. Good job… my own car… I was financially independent…. I wanted to live independently, but my family said: 'If people find out that you live on your own, it will be so bad!'"

Strict expectations for women, especially concerning marriage and family life, often dictated what was socially and culturally acceptable, and sometimes served as participants' reason for leaving Iran. For example, one participant who had a boyfriend with Permanent Residency status in Canada said: "My family were strongly against our marriage … this had become a motivation for me to immigrate." Being a divorced woman or being a mother added to the complexity of decision making about emigration. For one participant, creating a better future

for her child was a strong motivator for leaving. However, another participant, who also had a child, explained that "The reason I immigrated was that I got divorced and even though I was a very successful [title of her job] in Iran ... after divorce people's behaviour towards me changed altogether…" Her own family rejected her, and the pressure of being a divorced woman became so difficult that she decided to leave her job:

> Everyone around me wanted to hide my divorce, fearing that it will dis-honour them. My ex-husband constantly threatened me to take away my child. It got to the point that I told him… that, 'If I am not going to have something [i.e., my child], I am the one who will decide not to have it [not that you take it from me]!'

She enjoyed her income, liked her job, and did not have plans for emigration; however, she felt forced to leave to gain her independence. "If others immigrated for a better life, a better job, for education or Canadian passport, I immigrated because I was a divorced woman in Iran. My family and my society forced me to immigrate."

Women who participated in this study all agreed that immigration and living in the new society had improved the quality of their lives. Women generally reported feeling safer and enjoying more independence. For example, one participant reported: "The rights one has here [as a woman] is incomparable with women's rights in Iran. Oh, and safety! The feeling of safety I have had here! In the past three years, I have not been bothered by anyone here." Moreover, another participant explained: "Being a woman is a good thing here…. Here they respect you as a woman, support you, and observe your rights … for me, being a woman is meaningful here, while it did not have the same meaning in Iran."

Interaction with the Iranian Community in Québec

Even though women reported enjoying the safety and equal rights in Canada, several participants talked about aspects of the Iranian community in Québec that reminded them of limitations they had experienced in Iran. For example, some participants complained that Iranians in Canada still want to control women or judge their behaviours based on their social status (e.g., being a divorcée) or hold on to what the participants considered to be outdated gender norms. One participant gave an example of this unmet expectation.

> I volunteered in this Iranian [community center] as they needed help … most women teachers there had Hijab [head-scarf] … after a while, they told me that … 'well, it's great that you are helping us, but if you could have some scarf on, it would be much better!', as this is a Muslim school, … I told her that I would never put on a scarf here just because you ask for it.

Other participants reported that they became discouraged when they realized that Iranian women in Canada were still expected to leave their careers, focus on children, wear hijab, and even occasionally refrain from driving, all because male relatives or their families in Canada demanded it.

Another participant gave an example that showed cultural norms and limitations for women in the Iranian community in Québec resembled the norms in Iran. She detailed the story of the first apartment in which she resided after immigrating. A mutual friend had found a temporary residence for her so that she can spend a few nights there right after her arrival:

> We went to their place with all our luggage. I never learned [about the exact reason,] if they had arguments between them, or maybe they thought that our mutual friend [who was a man] was my boyfriend [and they were not ok with an Iranian girl having a

boyfriend]- you know how Iranians think. … Anyways, the husband told us that they could not accept us!

The above participant explained that she was shocked and scared as she did not know what to do at that moment. Moreover, her mutual friend refused to offer her his place, as "he said: 'I have a male roommate. We can't- I mean, our culture does not allow me to invite you to my place'."

Interpersonal Interactions with other Iranians

All of the women and one of the two men in this study (who were all heterosexual) commented on the existing norms around respectful customs observed when men and women interact at get-togethers and activities. For example, one participant who was a single woman insisted that: "I interact differently with men when I know that they are married … there should be a limit … if the other party is a married man or has a girlfriend … I don't joke around them or like I don't sit close to them." In all of the cases, female participants saw themselves as being responsible for keeping a distance from men, and they did this to deflect others' judgments.

Furthermore, the family members of some participants played a unique role in participants' interactions with other Iranians, or lack thereof. Six women out of ten married or dating participants expressed that their relationships with other Iranians or the community had been limited because of their partners' views or issues. For example, one participant explained that "My husband is not a social person- not a type that likes to enjoy life. Therefore, our relationship with other Iranians is limited".

Judgments based on marital status. Having a boyfriend or being divorced often added to the possibility of being judged by others. For one participant, who was not married, but lived with her boyfriend (something that is not widely accepted in the Iranian community), others'

judgments around their relationship were bothersome: "This Iranian friend kept asking who pays for the shopping? Why and who bought the furniture?!... It's like I'm being attacked by these questions!" Others asked questions about why she had decided to live with him if they were not engaged. In all instances, women were the focus of judgments and needed to adjust their behaviour or avoid conversations to protect themselves.

Being a divorced woman significantly increased the chance of being judged, controlled, or verbally harassed by others within the Iranian community. One participant often felt judged by others in both Iran and in the Iranian community in Canada because she was a divorced woman and a mother. She explained that before leaving Iran, "My ex-husband took away my child from me … the atmosphere of family and society got to the point that I left my child in Iran … So to not to be under judgment and constant scrutiny of others…." Later, when she moved to Canada, she continued feeling being judged because of being a divorced mother: " … they would say: we hope your son forgives you for leaving him. And I would reply: ' … you should worry about your own way of mothering your child. No one should question others' way of mothering."

Furthermore, one participant had to always be vigilant not to make herself focus of others' attention, fearing their expectations and judgments: "I will never … ask a man to help me install something [as a favour] to save money … so that he goes and tells everyone [that he has helped her]." Fearing how she, as a divorced woman, would be judged by others within the Iranian community, her options to ask for or offer help would be different from those of other women, especially single women.

Dating and Romantic Relationships

Dating and initiating romantic relationships was a theme that came up with some women participating in this study. Women expressed the difficulty of dating and keeping certain information private in a small community. One participant highlighted that "When you date Iranian boys, the first issue is that everyone knows each other. Unfortunately, the news goes around quickly that this girl is dating that guy…." Participants also compared their dating experiences with Iranians and non-Iranians. For women, dating experiences with Iranians were assessed within the larger scheme of interacting with Iranians. For example, one participant explained the boundaries she held while talking to other Iranians, saying, "They might be taking advantage of you, even your closest friend." She further explained that her Iranian boyfriend was unfaithful to her and that " … this gives a negative image to one, and one always tries to keep up her guard [with Iranians]." She compared the situation to dating a non-Iranian:

> Dating *khareji* [i.e., non-Iranians] has its problems, such as language issues. But at least I think they [i.e., non-Iranians] are honest…. I don't say they don't cheat [at all]. What I say is that there is less chance that they cheat.

Even when the goal of interactions was not dating or a romantic relationship, women reported being forced to limit themselves and be vigilant in order to not "send the wrong message". This was exacerbated in the case of one female participant who was financially affluent: "[they talk about me and say:] 'Oh! She enjoys herself well! ... She just sits there, goes on trips, doesn't work…' Well, I am not stealing anything from you! [or they say:] 'She's got a problem. She does not have a boyfriend'." In another instance, the same participant explained that some of her male classmates (some of them married) repeatedly asked her out, and when she refused, some pointed out her financial level as the reason she is rejecting them: "They used to

say: 'We know we are not at your level' … I am the one who should be mad because of your [outrageous] propositions! ... Then he said: 'let me buy this good car! [then I will come after you]."

Age and marital status. Age was a factor that came up several times during female participants' discussions about dating and immigration. One participant reported: "Women in their 30s … they know what they want from life … Like you know whom you want to date, whom you want as a partner … what you want to do." The motivation for finding a partner would often face several difficulties as a result of immigration or Iranian community challenges. Another participant discussed the way age and career or educational aspirations of immigrant women impact their decisions about dating:

> Women face a crisis when they come here … if they are single and want to marry and have kids,…it is impossible…to find a partner, study at the same time, while you have the language barrier and need to find a job- and you [find yourself] close to 40 years old [if you want to do it all] … it is directly related to age. … Men, even when they get old, they have more options than women.

Age had a visible presence in interactions and judgments of other Iranians. For example, one participant who had gone to a party with a male friend felt judged by another man based on her age: "He said: 'oh, I'm so sorry for you … you deserve better than that man- the bald one! …' I told him [sarcastically]: 'which one?!...as you know I am rather old and all men at my age are kind of bald!'."

Being a middle-aged divorcée added another layer of complexity. One participant had overheard or personally received many comments within the Iranian community about divorced women being vulgar and being thieves of others' men. This participant noted that when she

received friendship requests from married Iranian men who met her in classes or community events,

> They say 'there is certainly something wrong with her! She has no boyfriend!' …other times, when I am having a simple conversation with a man, they [i.e., other people] say: 'Well! Be careful! He does not suit you!' [I get frustrated and tell them:] 'First of all, it was a simple conversation. Second, even if something serious was going on, I do not need your opinion!'

This participant tried to cope by censoring herself, changing the topic of conversations, or avoiding these situations altogether: "… I did not comb my hair – I went to college in the worst appearances [so that no one looks at me]."

Community Engagement and Solidarity

The relationship between Iranians and Iranian communities was complex and multifaceted. While Iranians enjoyed many aspects of being connected to their communities, they remained critical and, at times skeptical about their level of involvement in the community.

In this section, a general picture of Iranians' interaction with events and places within the Iranian community will be presented. Second, Iranians' understanding of the level of cohesion and belonging in the community will be reviewed. Lastly, socio-cultural expectations of the community and feelings of security and safety about connection with the community will be discussed.

Places and Events

When asked about various places and events associated with Iranian communities in Québec, participants named several of which they had attended. Almost all participants had attended at least one or several community events, such as parades, concerts, or a celebration of

an Iranian or Muslim event. For example, participants attended Nowruz (Iranian New Year), Yalda (an Iranian winter solstice celebration) and religious ceremonies such as Ashura. Some participants attended ongoing activities, such as classes, workshops, and cycling groups. Two participants demonstrated a long-term commitment to the community, for example, through helping at community centers, organizing activities and classes, and organizing major events. Participants also discussed various levels of presence in online groups or social media pages for Iranians in Québec, living in neighbourhoods with many other Iranians, or supporting Iranian businesses such as grocery stores and restaurants. Nevertheless, almost all participants reduced their level of attendance in Iranian community events due to poor quality of events or behaviours of event participants.

Poor quality of events. Participants identified poor quality of the events and lack of proper management as major reasons for losing interest in community events. For example, several participants who had paid for tickets for an Iranian concert or a New Year celebration ended up standing for the duration because of a lack of space at the venue. But what constituted the most troubling aspect of these events for participants, was the damage caused to the Iranians' pride and collective reputation as a result of their mismanagement. When participants felt that an event was poorly managed or of low quality, they felt a loss of pride or humiliated and ashamed. For example, one participant reported that the way food was messily distributed in a series of religious events was not appropriate for the dignity of the attendees. In another case, a participant explained, "I had attended [an event] …it was terrible. It was the last time I would attend such an event … they had a speaker who was just saying irrelevant things. I left the event right in the middle of it." Another participant who had attended the same event, explained

further that the event scorned and shamed the Iranian community. He insisted that it was not just the low quality of the event, but more than that: "…it was shameful".

Embarrassed due to the behaviours of participants. Participants reduced their engagement with community events when they witnessed behaviours that they found embarrassing. For example, one participant reported that "everyone would tell me that you will go to that Iranian concert, but you will regret it! You will see another level of [behaviours of] Iranians there, and you will feel sorry. And that was what exactly happened!" Examples of embarrassing behaviours were when other Iranians became extremely intoxicated, started fights or pushed themselves in the queues. These were behaviours that they did not expect of Iranians in public places. One participant who was angry at the sight of those incidents explained: "If Ebi [an Iranian pop singer] is singing on the stage, you should not drink so much that you start a fight! When you start a fight, I will be looked at denigrated and belittled. Therefore, I won't go again to such crowds."

One participant, who was married to a non-Iranian, expressed how they felt pressured because of others' looks at them,

> Me and my husband went to this Iranian event together, and suddenly we realized that everyone is looking at us with curiosity! My husband got very uncomfortable there…. There are many differences between my husband and me in terms of our appearances [because we are from different countries with different colours of skin] … and this is all new to the Iranian community … my husband does not really like to attend Iranian events anymore, and I don't go either.

Even though participants reduced their intra-community interactions, they continued maintaining a minimum level of connection with the community, either by going to Iranian

businesses, utilizing social media, or living in a mostly Iranian neighbourhood. Almost all participants, referred to the imperative role of online social media groups as their point of contact with the Iranian community in Québec. One participant, who had consciously decided not to attend any Iranian events, explained that online social media helps her stay connected: "Yes, I follow that [specific] Facebook page of Iranians, but you never see me leave a comment there… well, there is so much good information in it… I read it to know what's going on [in the community]." Further, some participants still preferred to live in neighbourhoods that had a high concentration of Iranians. For example, another participant expressed: "…Because I like some habits of Iranians, like cleanness, respect for neighbours… I prefer to live within an Iranian community, but I don't like to let them into my household. I live in the community but detached from it."

Community Belonging and Solidarity

When asked about solidarity and mutual support, participants mostly believed that solidarity within the Iranian community was low. One participant discussed the role of diversity of opinion and ethnicities in lack of solidarity:

> Iranians do not really have any solidarity. … they cannot agree on anything. They want to say that we are right, and you are wrong…. Iranians are very fragmented [and grouped into certain categories] like what they say here about 'Canadian mosaic', we also have an 'Iranian mosaic' of [ethnicities] such as Lor, Kurd, Fars, etc. and none of us can stand the other group…our races and languages are different … I feel like other nationalities have more [within group] harmony.

Most participants used their personal experiences of receiving or giving help as a basis for understanding support in the Iranian community. One participant explained, "I don't think

Iranians support each other. Maybe a group of friends who knew each other… and right now are searching for jobs or are in a vulnerable situation, they try to help each other."

Lack of support for community activities. Lack of support for community activities (e.g., in the form of criticism) was another sign of lack of solidarity among Iranians. For example, one participant stated,

> That event… was $10,000 financial loss for me. But the amount of [negative] feedback I got from the Iranians was to the extent that if…. [an Iranian guest of mine] comes to this city and wants to go out [to an Iranian event], … I will tell him that I will not accompany you to any Iranian event.

Participants discussed how their sense of belonging to the community was reduced as they were disappointed over the lack of solidarity between community members. Following are other examples of the way a sense of solidarity among Iranian community members was deemed low.

Rivalry within the community. Participants believed Iranians were competing for resources and work opportunities, and this has reduced the sense of solidarity. For example, one participant expressed: "A man in our college… found a job, [but] I felt that he didn't really want me to find a job too. Maybe he wanted to be the only one who was successful in finding a job… I don't know."

At other times, participants felt that deliberate attempts were made to withhold information or sabotage their position. One participant believed that sense of rivalry was about status or being successful: "often you see that the person does not even directly benefit from *zir aab e to raa zadan* [i.e., hurting you by taking away your access to resources or conspiring against you], but he still does so…we Iranians cannot enjoy seeing each other's success."

Another participant stated: "it is as if they only want to abuse you or sabotage your position or lie so that they themselves can go higher… I have seen many Iranians, especially in [her domain of practice] doing those things." Another example was given by one participant who was explaining the relationship between a lack of community solidarity and sense of rivalry:

> We don't support each other; we don't have solidarity… the owner of [name of an Iranian Café] has invested [a large sum] in it. How many Iranians do you see in it? Why? [because Iranians say]: 'Oh if I go there, he will earn more!'

Participants believed that many Iranians intentionally withheld information from each other that could potentially result in obtaining resources or higher social positions. One participant believed, "we [Iranians] don't support each other… we ran away from each other… for example, this friend of mine who had found a job in a clinic, he didn't like other Iranians to learn about it and to work there." Withholding information could include keeping the news about a sale in the town as well as more serious matters such as resources and job advertisements.

Comparisons with other communities. Participants frequently compared their experiences of relational support and solidarity to those of other immigrant or ethnic communities. For example, one participant said,"I am sorry, but my experience is that we want to destroy others to show ourselves better. Maybe that's why despite the large number of Iranians who live in Québec, we don't have a strong unity like Chinese, Indians, or Arabs." Another participant stated, "I see some sort of solidarity in other communities that I don't see among Iranians … they help each other… I had a non-Iranian friend who told me that you Iranians are strange! You know something and try to hide it from others!"

Several participants noted that they had a harder time trusting Iranians than non-Iranians due to previous experiences. For example, One participant noted,

> I don't understand how an Iranian – who does not even benefit from your falling – makes you fall, while those [non-Iranians] – whom you can't even understand their language and cannot properly communicate with them – try their best to help you out, support you, and empower you.

Reasons for lack of solidarity. Participants hypothesized possible reasons behind the negative actions they witnessed within the Iranian community that reduced community solidarity or their sense of belonging to the community. One participant believed that Iranians have a limit in supporting each other, and that "the limit is when he thinks you are getting better than him." Moreover, participants noted that achieving higher education or prestigious jobs for Iranians was equivalent to gaining social status. As such, regaining previously held jobs, social positions could become the point of rivalry. One participant explained:

> Well, he clearly got sad when I got this job, because he was trying to get a job in the same field as mine for three years and it hadn't happened … when he saw that I got this job, he might have been reminded of his misfortune throughout all these years. … It's hard. They all had good jobs before coming here. After arriving here, they had to study again. But even after finishing their studies, they still can't get into their own fields of work.

Separating Iranian identity from community issues. While participants described their disappointment in the Iranian community and their lowered sense of belonging to it, many also described regret for the current state of the community. One participant noted, "we Iranians – including myself – have adopted this habit to [criticize ourselves and] say: 'oh these Iranians!'

what about Iranians?! Why we question ourselves [and critique ourselves] like this?" Moreover, despite doubts surrounding the Iranian community's solidarity, participants stressed the importance of separating their own identities as Iranians from any ongoing issues (e.g., lack of solidarity) in the Iranian community: "If someone asks me 'where are you from?' I would automatically reply, 'I am from Iran'…. My identity is still very much Iranian, even though I don't have an Iranian friend [or don't go to any Iranian community event]."

Sociopolitical Expectations and Experiences

One major frustration that participants faced when interacting with Iranians was the unmet expectations relating to the sociopolitical aspects of immigration. Specifically, participants discussed contrast between the way Iranians should behave after leaving an undemocratic society and immigrating to a democratic and free country. Leaving the negative aspects of life in Iran was often a central reason for immigration for these participants:

> Iranian community and many Iranians who move here, they want to recreate and copy another 'Iran' in here. And that is exactly why this approach does not work here – because someone like me… surely has had some problem with those types of mentalities [and issues in Iran] that has moved here [and does not want to see another "Iran" is created in Canada].

In the following sections, unfulfilled expectations and being disappointed in the community are discussed in detail.

Unfulfilled expectations. Participants frequently discussed expectations of post-immigration change for themselves and for other Iranians. One participant believed that Iranians should learn from "Canadians" (e.g., learn to be more independent) and that "I think the first important thing [to learn from the] immigration is that we really need to accept that change is

necessary… I think the problem of many Iranians is that they do not want to change." Two major types of expectations were sociocultural expectations and moral or relational expectations.

Sociocultural expectations. When referring to "change," each participant's expectations of change among Iranians were unique to their own experiences of immigration. For example, one participant believed that abiding by the rule of law is what Iranians have not learned from Canadian society:

> In practice, we are the same thing here: we all have a dictator or anarchist in ourselves. None of us care about the law. When we know that there is police or speed-cameras in the roads, we will drive 110km/h, but if police are in a strike, we will drive 160km/h!

Participants gave other examples of practices and values that they felt Iranians needed to learn or refused to learn in Canada. For example, they suggested more independence and freedom for women, refraining from bribing and corrupt practices, and, given that they no longer live under the rule of an oppressive regime, the act of being more honest with one's self and society.

Other participants gave examples of what they saw as the continuation of "old ways" and values. One participant explained why she thought Iranians continue some corrupt practices in Canada:

> Maybe because of gaining some positions here, although I think attaining positions [and dreams] are much easier here compared to Iran, but maybe not for everyone. Some believe that it is harder here: you have no network here, your language skills are not good, etc. I think if you are honest and trustworthy here, you do much better and get better results. But I don't think Iranians think like that. I mean if in Iran we thought that

> in order to gain something we had to commit fraud or sabotage or play tricks on others, here they think they should do these things 100 times more to get to something!

Moral/relational expectations. Many participants expressed their frustration over a lack of change in moral and relational values and the behaviour of some Iranian immigrants, especially when the other immigrants were well-educated. For example, one participant explained: "I went to this party and… can't remember what happened … apparently, I had done something … and the day after the hosts were so angry at me. I asked them several times to tell me what I had done wrong." The participant explained that the hosts never replied to his pleas and instead spread rumours about him and his wife. This behaviour may be consistent with an aspect of Iranian culture in which arguments and disagreements are often not discussed to save face for the relationship, but the participant later explained that he did not expect to see such behaviours here in Canada, especially that "… they [the hosts of the party] were both highly educated and had received their qualifications from France- after several years of living there."

Being disappointed in the community. When participants had experiences in which they realized that Iranians' behaviours or values did not change as a result of their exposure to the host society, they often got disappointed in the community. For example, one participant noted,

> Those who have immigrated here … they have either arrived here as refugees during 80s or have immigrated as skilled workers. To be a skilled worker ... you need to know one or two other languages and be educated, and therefore be an elite member of that former country. Now, if one person of the [so called] elite members of that former country does such [shameful] actions in this new society, then what is the difference [in being here]? I will not attend in that community at all.

Being disappointed in the community, the same participant deducted that changes in values and behaviours do not necessarily proceed immigration: "How much do we differ from the ones who are still living in Iran? … not much. Our clothing, our cars, and the language we use for communication here have changed- but we have not really changed [otherwise]."

Political Activities and Feelings of Security

Political issues related to Iran, engagement with political events, political groups within the Iranian community, and discussions about political viewpoints were sensitive topics that were mostly avoided by the majority of participants. Out of 12 participants, only the two male participants explicitly talked about their political identity, while conversations around politics by other participants were limited.

Politics mostly limited to reasons of leaving. For many participants, conversations surrounding their engagement with politics or political movements were limited to discussions of their reasons for leaving Iran. One participant summarized her stance, saying, "I don't get involved in politics … my Iranian friends who immigrated here at the same time as us are all the same as well… a group of normal people who immigrated to live better and to flee Ahmadinejad! [former president of Iran]." She agreed that leaving Iran was due to the political situation, but she chose not to be involved in politics post-immigration. Several other participants had the same political stance: they admitted that leaving Iran was at least partially due to the harsh political situation, but they tried hard to keep a distance from anything that might be politically charged against the Iranian regime in Canada.

The main reasons given for not being politically involved were a concern for family members and a desire to maintain the ability to travel back to Iran, as participants feared repercussions by the Iranian regime. One participant explained, "I have family members who

live in Iran and therefore, I really don't have any patience right now for having political issues with the regime."

Negotiation over security and level of involvement with politics. Some participants followed the news about Iran and Iranian political activists outside of Iran. Two male participants, who openly discussed their political perspectives, noted their concerns over security and safety in the Iranian community, given their political standpoints. One of these participants actively engaged in online and in-person conversations around politically charged subjects and frequently mentioned an aggressive bipolar atmosphere around these conversations. He explained, "I and my wife used to write in the Iranian community social media against the elections in Iran. … We received a call from an unknown number. They threatened us that something might happen to us! Just like that!" The same participant explained how his collaboration with a magazine in Iran was suspended due to his political perspectives in Canada. Political activism did have serious consequences for these participants both within the Iranian community in Québec, for their families, and possibly even their ongoing activities in Iran.

Participants had to negotiate their level of involvement in politics based on their concerns for security and safety. In this negotiation, involvement in politics could come with a cost. A few participants expressed concerns over being watched by agents of the Iranian regime and therefore having to adjust their level of attendance in community events. One participant stated, "At [a university] I am sure that there is this Iranian guy, who is an agent of the Iranian regime. He is very active in the community. … I will never attend any event that this guy attends." The benefits and costs of participation in the community and interactions with others were often analyzed by participants as a matter of personal safety.

For some participants, a political standpoint was often informed by their relationship status or connections to others. More specifically, being a wife or partner of someone with a political perspective or security concerns impacted their relationships and at times their political standpoint. For example, one participant and her husband were both followers of Sunni Islam, a denomination which, in Iran, is in the minority and oppressed. She explained that "My husband does not like to go to any Iranian gatherings at all … Our Iranian friends are all my connections. … He cannot trust Iranians." Having a history of discrimination based on his minority status, her husband could not trust Iranians in Québec as "he thinks most Iranians in Iran had the same mindset of clergies [ruling class in Iran]." Her relationships with Iranians were subsequently limited as her husband preferred interacting with non-Iranians.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed in light of relevant literature and the epistemological framework. Research questions one and two (How do people from Iran living in Québec experience their multiple intersecting identities and interact with other individuals from Iran?) are primarily addressed in the first two sections, namely contextualizing immigrants' experiences within the transition process, and intersectional analysis. The third research question (How do people from Iran perceive collective identity and belonging to the Iranian community in Québec?) is primarily addressed in the community belonging and solidarity section. Later, strengths and limitations, and the unique contributions of the research will be reviewed. Lastly, implications for policy, practice, and future research will be explained.

Contextualizing Immigrants' Experiences within the Transition Process

Current literature (Hojati, 2012; Nabavi, 2011) notes that the experience of immigrants should be studied within the history and context of immigrants' lives. Consistent with extant literature (Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006), the findings of this study indicated that Iranian immigrants' experiences and the meanings they derived from them were understood within the context of the immigration story.

Reasons for Leaving

Previous research (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2010; Torbat, 2002) discussed the dominating reasons and immigration motivations for each wave of Iranian immigrants following the 1979 revolution. The findings of this study indicated that socio-political factors, including political oppression, legal and cultural restrictions for women, and the search for social freedoms, acted as motivating factors for participants' emigration.

Moreover, the reasons for emigration and their significance were diverse as a result of the varying social positions of the participants. Participants in this study had mostly stable economic conditions prior to immigration, and the intersection of their higher education level and financial stability positioned them favourably in Canada's points-based immigration system. Nevertheless, the SES level of each participant (here referring to a combination of financial capacity and educational level) interacted differently against the identities and social positions of the participants. Whereas political oppression and a loss of job-status were major stressors for men and married participants, they weighed less heavily for unmarried or divorced women. For the latter, independence from family or legal and cultural limitations for women convinced them to leave Iran. In other words, financial reasons played different roles for participants based on their gender, marital status and familial conditions.

Economic Immigrants: A Contested Label

Recent literature (Chaichian, 2011) has emphasized the pursuit of better economic and living conditions as one major factor in the emigration of Iranians. Malek (2015b) emphasized that since 2006 there has been a surge of "economic immigrants" from Iran to Canada who have been able to enter Canada based on Canada's points-based immigration system, which gives preference to highly skilled and educated individuals. Iranian immigrants to Canada in the 80s and 90s were mostly described as political or religious refugees or those who had fled Iran's socio-political atmosphere. However, recent immigrants (since the early 2000s) are mostly labelled as "economic" and "investor" immigrants who respond to the demands of the global market (Chaichian, 2011).

Participants in this study discussed hopes for attaining a better financial situation in Canada as one factor impacting their decision to emigrate. However, it was actually

dissatisfaction with aspects of living in Iran (e.g., socio-political oppression, legal and cultural limitations for women, and seeking independence from family) that propelled participants to leave Iran. Contrary to the dominant understanding in extant literature that reduces emigration motivation to economic reasons, the findings of this study demonstrated a broader picture. Most participants in this study were from middle to higher SES and had established lives and careers in Iran. Leaving Iran was a significant financial or status loss for many of them. Therefore, as participants in this study reported, the "push" of harsh socio-political oppression, legal and cultural limitations, was the major source of desire for leaving Iran. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the "pull" of better living conditions was the defining reason for emigration for these participants. It might be hypothesized that the discourse around "economic immigrants" is mostly shaped by the selection criteria and immigration policies of Canada (i.e., the point-based system of immigration), rather than realities of the host society.

Career Expectations at the Heart of Transitioning Challenges

Previous research documented the role of immigrants' expectations before and after immigration in terms of career and employment in their process of transitioning and integration in the host society (Sinacore et al., 2017). The points-based immigration system in Canada resulted in the acceptance of individuals with higher educational credentials and from particular fields (mostly engineering, nursing, or traditionally "hard" sciences) and, as well, those with a better command of French or English (Reitz, 2012). As a result, participants in this study already held positions of higher privilege in terms of education, career, and SES before coming to Canada. Many of these participants had high expectations regarding career opportunities and aspirations. However, consistent with extant literature (Shirpak et al., 2011; Sinacore et al., 2017; Sinacore & Lerner, 2013) the findings of this study indicate that these individuals faced

multiple challenges, such as proving the equivalency of their credentials, managing job-search strategies, and entering the job market. As a result, these participants experienced distress in the process of transitioning.

Dealing with Diversity: Reduction to National Identity.

A few studies on Iranian immigrants in Canada have previously focused on Iranians' approaches towards Canadian citizenship or their national identity (Khanlou et al., 2008; Mazaheri et al., 2009; Nabavi, 2011). Although Nabavi (2011) discussed the role of various dimensions of immigrant identities on their perception and development of Canadian citizenship, none of the above studies had discussed the ways new Iranian immigrants see and negotiate their identities from a within-group perspective.

The findings of the current study indicated that Iranian immigrants with different SES, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, culture or value systems were forced to spend time together in the early stages of arrival. Whereas before emigration, participants could identify and select friends who shared the same intersection of identities, resources or preferences; in these new shared spaces, it was hard to know the individuals' backgrounds before starting interactions with them. Moreover, as they all shared the same language (everyone more or less knew Persian even if their mother tongue was another Iranian language), were in need of help with a settlement or were feeling lonely, it seemed natural for them to interact, support each other, and start relationships. Therefore, the basis on which all these interactions were formed was the mere fact that all parties were Iranian. In other words, the complexities of the individuals and their identities were reduced to their national identity in the interactions formed pre- and post-emigration. Therefore, within-group diversity, at least in the first few months after immigration, were often missed.

Interestingly, the same process of reducing "national identity" could be seen in the way participants talked about "non-Iranians". "Khareji haa" or "Canadians" were often understood as a homogenous entity, just as "Iranians" were understood as a homogenous entity. It seemed that being introduced to different sets of cultural or value systems provided participants with a context in which they could compare the cultural nuances of their interactions with Iranians. In this process, however, the heterogeneity of cultural values was reduced in order to simplify understanding and make meaning out of the complexity of overwhelming experiences of the first few months or years of arrival.

Interpersonal Interactions

The literature on Iranian immigrants in North America has mostly focused on acculturation (or integration) and mental health (Abdolsalehi-Najafi & Beckman, 2013; Kheirkhah, 2003). Moreover, studies that have focused on identity have primarily discussed the ways in which Iranian immigrants negotiate aspects of their identity in relation to their immigrant status (Mazaheri et al., 2009; Mobasher, 2006). Very few Canadian studies include information on the interaction of Iranians within Iranian communities (Kafili, 2013; Karimi, 2018; Khaleghi, 2011). These studies often note that Iranian immigrants face challenges when interacting with other Iranians in terms of values, morals, and mutual trust. However, previous research has not described in detail what these challenges looked like. The findings of the current study shed some light on the complications of these interactional challenges.

First, the findings showed an abundance of interactions upon arrival and a gradual, deliberate and, at times, extreme decrease in the interactions in these relationships over time. This is in sharp contrast to a pattern of communication that Kafili (2013) reported for her participants in Halifax. Kafili reported that her participants first started having interactions with

non-Iranians, but then substituted those relationships with Iranians due to preferences for having mutual cultural understanding. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Kafili's participants were all university students who had not received their permanent residency, wanted to practice their language skills, and were living in a small city with a small Iranian community.

The findings of this study indicated that interactions were often compared to and understood within the greater context of interacting with non-Iranians (or "Canadians"). The analysis of interpersonal interactions resulted in the identification of three themes of receiving help and support, interpersonal expectations, and prying and judging. In the following sections, the above findings of the study will be reviewed using intersectionality as the epistemological framework.

An Intersectional Analysis

Employing an intersectional epistemology allows the researcher to identify major social locations, identities (e.g., national identity, gender, and age) and interactions that shape participants' experiences (Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). Moreover, intersectionality literature posits that any discussion about the interconnectedness of social locations is necessarily embedded within the matrix of power and privilege that govern those social locations (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). The analysis of results, as presented in the previous chapter, showed the role of Socio-Economic Status (SES), social class, gender, age, political identity, and national identity/ethnicity and the interplay of the above identities in the experiences of Iranian immigrants.

The majority of participants in this study were from middle to higher SES before their immigration to Canada because Québec's skilled worker program favoured individuals with higher educational credentials who had privileged access to resources (e.g., knowledge of

English or French and the ability to financially support themselves upon arrival). Nevertheless, participants' intersections of their various identities and social locations (such as age, gender, religion and political stances) diversified their experiences. In other words, although being from the middle to higher SES was a common factor amongst most participants, the intersection of participants' SES with other aspects of their identities (e.g., age, gender, political status) resulted in different experiences. Consistent with Shin et al. (2017), the results of this study highlighted that it is important to consider each person's unique intersection of identities within structures of power and privilege while admitting that individuals' identities are dynamic and evolve over time.

Social Class and Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Social class and SES were two main social locations that explained the way participants in this study made meaning out of their experiences of transitioning into the new society and connecting with other Iranians in the Iranian community. For participants of this study, being from the middle to higher SES was mostly related to higher financial income or better access to economic resources (e.g., economic stability and financial support by family). Moreover, a higher social class was defined by a combination of job type (i.e., only professional jobs and not general or odd jobs), higher educational credentials, and behaviours consistent with cultural expectations of a "higher class". Some of these behaviours included respecting others' individual rights, having reasonable interpersonal expectations, and refraining from "shameful" behaviours such as getting drunk in Iranian events. Participants noted how they preferred interacting with individuals from their own social class and expected individuals from higher social classes to behave "properly".

Very few studies have discussed the impact of Iranian immigrants' SES and social class on their transitioning and sense of belonging to the host society (Fathi, 2015). Fathi (2015) studied the intersection of social class, gender and national identity on the sense of belonging in highly educated Iranian women who immigrated to Britain. Fathi (2015) used the term "translocational class", defined as "a dislocated social class in a new context" (p. 162) to explain the way Iranian immigrants from higher SES and social class faced difficulties, and made meaning of their sense of belonging, in the host society. Fathi explained that her participants believed that they belong to a higher social class, while as immigrants, they found themselves lower in the power structure of citizenship and belonging in the host society.

Consistent with the findings of Fathi (2015), the findings of this study showed that Iranian immigrants from the middle to higher SES enjoyed higher social class privileges back in Iran (such as higher income and education, and access to financial and cultural resources) while immigration resulted in the loss of privileges and power status. Moreover, the findings showed that rivalry within the community and the use of corrupt methods were methods of attaining and maintaining higher social statuses. Several examples were given by participants in which attempts to block others' success or access to resources were interpreted as ways to stop others from "prospering" or attaining higher social status.

Another factor that enabled participants to be critical about the within-group interactions of Iranians was the comparisons they made with non-Iranian individuals or communities. Participants soon noticed that several attributes of power within the hierarchy of class in Iranian culture or community had different connotations or statutes within non-Iranian contexts. One clear example was the role of higher education and the type of job and judgments amongst Iranians. Participants noted that, in Iran, having higher education and professional jobs (e.g.,

engineering) were equated to being in a higher social class and also earning more. Other types of jobs or lower educational credentials were "shamed". In this way, classism exerted its power within the structure of Iranian society through shaming and judgments based on job type or educational level.

The same process of shaming non-professional jobs (e.g., general jobs) and fewer educational credentials were observed by participants within the Iranian community in Québec. The shaming occurred regardless of the fact that many jobs that do not require higher education can offer high salaries in Canada compared to Iran. Therefore, earning money and having higher education did not similarly relate to social class and status among non-Iranians. In other words, structures of classism and attributes of class power were defined differently in Iranian communities in Québec compared to the larger host society. Participants used the larger society's hierarchy of class to critique the classism impacting interpersonal interactions and cohesion within the Iranian community. Classism, as exerted in various ways (e.g., shaming and judgments based on access to resources), often drove participants away from interacting with Iranians or going to the Iranian community events.

Even though being a member of the middle to higher social class came with its privileges, the intersection of these privileges and challenges of immigration did not always work in participants' favour. Some of the privileges afforded to participants as a result of their SES level were the ability to keep their businesses open in Iran, save their financial assets, take unpaid leave at the time of emigration, and have the financial capacity to travel back to Iran. These participants used these privileges as a backup plan in case their immigration plans failed. Given the high expectations of this group of immigrants for the host society and challenges of transitioning, having the option of moving back to Iran provided a sense of relief and support,

but also kept the participants in a state of limbo, and at times more critical or irritable in the face of hardships. In other words, being from higher SES and having career and living options in the home country resulted in alleviating the burden of being ambivalent.

Moreover, attaining jobs in Canada that required more education or professional credentials was highly valued and having odd jobs was considered shameful. The immigrants experiencing this shame felt demoted and, as a result, experienced high levels of dissatisfaction. Moreover, they feared receiving judgments from other members of the Iranian community and therefore restricted their interactions with the community. Therefore, having high expectations for a society that did not offer immigrants the same socially-valued-positions that they used to have in their home country (e.g., having a professional job that is deemed as honourable) had negative psychological consequences for immigrants.

The findings of this study indicated that men (male participants or participants' partners) who were already from the middle to high SES or had strong educational backgrounds complained about being demoted to less-professional jobs and, at times, restricted their interactions more than women. This result is consistent with extant literature (Moghissi, 1999; Shirpak et al., 2011) that discussed differences in dealing with career difficulties between immigrant men and women and the sense of shame around downgrading to lower-level jobs. However, the findings of this study indicated that satisfaction with having general or odd jobs in Canada remained high in the case of highly-educated male immigrants who did not have the option or hope of moving back to Iran (due to the lack of family support or being a political dissident). These findings suggest that career difficulties and feelings of being downgraded to less-professional jobs intersected with participants' gender, SES, political identity, and options for moving back to Iran.

Gender and Age

Gender and age were other important identities that explained participants' interactions and the process of transitioning. Interpersonal judgments, shaming, and prying was not only experienced as a result of classism but also as a result of sexism and ageism embedded within the structure of community interactions. Participants explained structural sexism in Iranian society (e.g., laws against women's rights and limitations imposed by family) as being among primary reasons that propelled them to leave Iran. Nevertheless, just like classism, participants reported experiencing at least a portion of the same oppressive dynamics and traditions within the Iranian community in Québec. Once again, the experience of living in Canadian society gave context to women's experiences within the Iranian community in Québec. Moreover, experiences of living in Canada informed women about the ways the hierarchy of power and oppression worked against them within the Iranian community. While women were satisfied with egalitarian rules, safer spaces, and the way larger society treated women in Canada, they gave numerous examples of the way they felt oppressed in their interactions with other Iranians, Iranian associations, and community events. Women were aware of the existence of sexism and discrimination against women in the larger society. Nevertheless, they believed the level of sexism and gender discrimination was lower in this society compared to the Iranian community in Québec.

Women's other identities, such as marital status and age, often intersected with their gender role and, at times, positioned women less favourably in terms of the power structure. For example, women were shamed, pried upon, and judged based on their age, parental status, or marital status (e.g., being a divorcee or someone who lives with her partner without marriage were all seen negatively). Themes of romantic relationships and acute awareness of age (and being commented on age by men) were prominent and unique to women's concerns for their

interactions within the Iranian community. Ageism showed its oppressive impact on women through sarcastic comments and judgments of men based on age. Therefore, ageism acted hand in hand with sexism as comments and judgments around age were directed to women with the intention of positioning them lower in the hierarchy of power in interactions.

Age also interacted with other aspects of women's lives as new immigrants. Single women who wanted to start a family discussed the difficulty of managing several tasks upon arrival (e.g., managing the language barrier, attending educational programs, and finding a job) while they also had to be wary of their age limit for finding a partner and having children, particularly if they wanted to choose their partner from the Iranian community. Single women noted that age limited their choices for jobs, studying, and other aspects of life in a new country, while the same limits did not exist (or maybe acted differently) for men. Even though biological limits of having children for women who want to have children later in their lives is part of the above challenge, it can be hypothesized that cultural factors and community dynamics provided a context for the above interaction. For example, men could be proactive in searching for partners, while women's roles were more passive.

Even though women employed a diverse set of coping mechanisms and developed resiliency in the face of judgments and shaming comments, they mostly reported ending their relationships with other Iranians as their primary coping method. The findings of this study showed that Iranian women's experiences of oppression were best explained in the context of an interlocking system of power that governed age and marital status within the Iranian community.

In addition to the way sexism and ageism interconnected in situating women in structures of power within the community, the findings of this study showed that sexism intersected with class. The findings showed that single women were often targeted with judgments and rumours,

particularly when a single woman had a higher SES or financial affluence. In such an instance, when a woman was labelled as financially affluent by other people in the community, she was expected to help others, while, at the same time, she was questioned and judged for her wealth. In other words, her SES did not help her social status in the community, as the intersection of sexism with classism in the case of affluent women situates them lower in the hierarchy of power. Therefore, the interlocking systems of class and sexism work hand in hand in subjugating women and forcing them to adopt coping mechanisms.

Race/Ethnicity

Race or ethnicity was almost exclusively pointed out by participants in the backdrop of experiences of racism. Extant literature discussed ways in which middle-easterners experience racism and discrimination. More specifically, Khanlou et al. (2008) reported that middle easterners were often labelled as terrorists or felt unwanted in Canada. The findings of the current study confirmed the extant literature in that participants had, at times, felt discriminated based on their race/national identity.

Religion was another identity that intersected with race/ethnicity in experiences of racism. Previous literature discussed the way Iranian immigrants were portrayed as a homogenous Muslim group (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013; McAuliffe, 2005, 2008). Consistent with extant literature, the findings of this study showed that participants had to often correct preconceptions about Iranians as being Muslims or extremists. Participants reported having to explain that they were not Muslims, while some of them did not even identify as a Muslim or did not practice Islam. Two individuals who were members of a religious minority or atheist in Iran also discussed their negative experiences of discrimination both in Iran and in Canada.

Language as a site of privilege and discrimination. Consistent with the extant literature (Kafili, 2013), findings of this study indicated that language skills played an imperative role in self-esteem, the ability to successfully apply and interview for jobs, or present at community spaces and events. Moreover, an intersectional analysis of findings showed that the experience of racism was impacted by participants' language skills, and previous SES or social class in the context of xenophobia or hate towards non-white immigrants.

Several examples were given by participants that illustrated how they felt rejected because of their lack of language proficiency or for reasons other than their professional identity. Since participants were highly educated professionals mostly from the middle to higher SES, getting rejected, especially when it was interpreted as disrespectful, was a humiliating experience. As they were given the message by Québec's immigration policy that they had been selected because of their professional skills, getting rejected or feeling demoted were often interpreted within a discriminating and racist discourse. In other words, participants situated themselves as oppressed within a racist discourse in order to prove that these barriers (e.g., language barrier) were unjustly imposed and were ultimately depriving Québec of a potential professional benefit. In other words, participants believed that the limitations imposed on them were not due to their lack of language proficiency; rather, they were being discriminated against because of racism or immigration status. Moreover, some participants believed that Canada's current social and immigration structure was made to prevent immigrants' success. Therefore, immigrants' higher position of power within the class system of their host country intersected with the way they made meaning of their challenges with language proficiency in the context of racism and xenophobia.

Language acted as a site of power and privilege within the Iranian community as well. Immigrants who had previously higher SES in Iran and fluency in French or English were less understanding and, at times, even actively ridiculing and marginalizing other Iranian immigrants who had difficulties with language. In the accounts of those participants who were more fluent, immigration was reduced to a free personal choice without attention to pushing factors. These participants felt that those who had immigrated to Québec were cognizant of their choice, and therefore were expected to adapt to the conditions and requirements of life in the new society as soon as possible. Language proficiency acted beyond mere skills as it brought power and privilege into interpersonal interactions. Therefore, language acted as a site of privilege and power that nuanced the experiences of being oppressed both in interaction with Iranians and with the larger society.

Political Identity

Shafafi (2015) documented that new waves of Iranian immigrants and younger members of Iranian communities have been frustrated with conflicts and discords among Iranians based on religion and political fractures. According to Shafafi these more recent immigrants are trying to distance themselves from religion and politics in the hope of reaching solidarity. Consistent with the literature (Fathi, 2015), the findings of this study showed that participants separated themselves from politics or religion. Even though all participants criticized the current political regime of Iran, most of them actively refrained from engaging in any interactions (in-person or online) or community activity directly related to their political identity.

However, those participants who distanced themselves from any political activity or kept their political identity hidden, did so not in the hope of setting aside political differences to reach solidarity within community, but mostly to secure their access to resources back in Iran or in fear

of repercussions. Participants mostly feared that they could lose their privilege of going back to Iran or that their families in Iran could be subjected to the regime's oppression due to participants' political activities. Fear of repercussions while living in Canada or during a trip back to Iran has been documented in the literature (Nabavi & Mahboub, 2013). Consistent with extant literature (Gutierrez, 2013), the findings of the study showed that political acts did come with their consequences at times (e.g., losing previous positions in Iran or receiving threatening calls in Canada) and participants expressed their security concerns over the reach of the Iranian regime's spies in Québec's Iranian communities.

Given the above explanations, I argue that the political identity of the participants had a major impact on their lives, privileges, and choices. Moreover, political identity intersects with class identity. Those who dared to oppose the policies of the Iranian regime expected possible repercussions and oppression by the Iranian regime. Therefore, participants protected privileges unique to their social class (e.g., being able to go back to Iran, preserving financial and familial resources and job opportunities in Iran) by remaining silent about their political identity or refraining from engaging in political acts in Canada against the Iranian regime. When participants did not have privileges in Iran that could be threatened by their political activities in Canada (e.g., they did not have financial resources or family members in Iran), they were more vocal about their political choices and their political identity. Therefore, political identity and class appeared as two interlocking systems of power, oppression, and privilege.

Community Belonging from an Intersectional Perspective

The findings of this study showed how transitioning experiences and intersections of participants' identities impacted community belonging and a sense of collective identity.

Community Events: Role of Political Identity and Class

The current literature has documented the importance of community events in community engagement and cultural belonging (Malek, 2015b; Mostofi, 2003). Malek (2015b) documented poor teamwork, lack of trust among Iranians, and "prioritizing personal benefit far above the common goal" (p. 200) amongst the reasons for which the Iranian community events in Toronto were criticized as being low-quality. The findings of this study confirmed the importance of community events in participants' understanding of community life. Participants reported low-quality events, poor management, and rivalry within the community as major factors negatively impacting the experience of participating in community events.

In addition to the role of proper management and quality of events, some researchers have discussed how cultural organizations within Iranian communities, and members of the community in general, can avoid political and religious affiliations in an attempt to unify the community based on "common beliefs" or pre-Islamic cultural practices (Malek, 2015b; Mostofi, 2003). An example of such an approach is found at the Tirgan Festival in Toronto. Malek (2015b) explained that the Tirgan Festival, which is the largest attended Iranian cultural festival outside of Iran, has been successful because, according to its organizers, it avoided religion and politics, focused on art and culture (pre-Islamic and modern), and benefited from a teamwork structure led by non-Iranian organizations.

However, as explained previously, the findings of this study showed that political aspiration and affiliations were not set aside by participants for the purpose of solidarity within the community. Rather, participants avoided politics or kept various aspects of their political identity hidden, in attempts to preserve the class-related privileges. Moreover, the findings of this study provided evidence for the intertwined structures of class and political identity. The

interlocking systems of classism and political power necessarily tied the power benefits and privileges resulting from one system to the other. In other words, political choices and privileges were embedded within the class privileges of the community. The resulting structures of power shaped the structure and cohesiveness of the community.

Based on the above, it can be said that having successful community events by avoiding political and religious identifications were not necessarily a sign of achieving cohesion or solidarity within the community or a sign of resolving long-held political or socio-cultural challenges or class-driven power differentials. Moreover, even though national identity was more apparent right after immigration, it certainly was not a unifying factor among participants.

Classism and Sexism as Challenges of Community Belonging

One of the common themes in the literature – agreed upon by most researchers – is the overarching lack of cohesion and sense of solidarity amongst Iranian immigrants in the diaspora (Malek, 2015a; Mostofi, 2003). Regardless of the definition of "cohesion" or solidarity (terms that are seldom defined in previous studies), studies done in Canada also confirm that community belonging is at best challenging and, at times, non-existent (Khaleghi, 2011). The current literature mostly focuses on the role of political and religious factions in the challenges of community membership and the solidarity among Iranians (Malek, 2011).

However, the findings of the current study highlighted interpersonal and structural factors, as well as unfulfilled expectations for the community as important factors impacting feelings of belonging to the Iranian community. The findings showed that Iranian immigrants greatly reduced their interactions with other Iranians and felt less connected to the Iranian community over time due to negative experiences with interpersonal interactions. Participants' descriptions revealed how attempts to re-gain the lost social status and to access privileges and

resources might result in the sense of rivalry within the community. In other words, access to privileges and resources within the class system as a power structure impacted the interpersonal relationships. In addition to classism, sexism put limitations on women and negatively impacted the interpersonal interactions of women. Based on the findings explained above, it can be argued that a lower sense of belonging to the Iranian community (as reflected in reduced interactions with other Iranians and avoiding community events), was not solely explained in terms of disagreements over political or religious identities or practices. Rather, classism, sexism, and other intersecting systems of oppression (e.g., ageism) that had roots in the structures of culture and traditions of Iranian society greatly impacted the sense of belonging to Iranian communities in Québec. Moreover, Iranian immigrants realized that class, gender, age, and other social locations were more egalitarian or had different meanings in the larger society of Québec compared to the Iranian community. Therefore, Iranian immigrants better identified the impact of these systems on their interactions with other Iranians when they compared the interactions with those of Québec or Canadian society.

Individual Shortcomings or Structural Challenges? Revisiting Failed Expectations

The findings of this study showed that expectations of behaviours and actions of other Iranians played an important role in the engagement of immigrants with their communities. Previous research has discussed living-style or values of Iranian immigrants that remained the same or changed in a small scale after immigration (Moghissi, 1999). Kafili (2013) argued that Iranians try to "cut and paste" their way of living in Iran in the new society. Moreover, Moghissi (1999) noted the way gender role norms and definitions within Iranian families remained the same and women continued to experience barriers in families even after immigration. The findings of the current study confirmed and expanded on the literature by elaborating on the

ways in which expectations for change impacted interpersonal interactions, community dynamics and a sense of belonging.

Participants expected changes in Iranian immigrants' behaviours such as refraining from the use of corrupt practices to attain resources or higher social status, stopping judgments of others' social status based on educational credentials, and suppressing the rights of women in families or interpersonal behaviours. As discussed earlier, an intersectional analysis of these expectations categorized most of them under the systems of power, such as classism, sexism, or ageism.

Immigration gave participants the opportunity to compare the values, rules, and power structures regarding class and gender of within-group interactions among Iranians with those of the larger Canadian society. At times, the comparison was a personal reflection on an individual level. Participants asked, "why don't Iranians change?" or "what is the difference, now that we have immigrated?". At other times, the comparison was on the community level, especially when comparing ethnic communities within Canada or feeling ashamed for Iranians' behaviours (as a collective group) in the eyes of the larger society. This phenomenon has been discussed in the literature as sensitivity towards the image of Iranian immigrants in the context of the broader community or media (Malek, 2011). The findings of this study showed that when the expectations for change in the behavior of other Iranian immigrants failed, participants lost their hope for success and solidarity within the Iranian community, stopped attending community activities, reduced interactions with Iranians, and started questioning why these individuals (i.e., other Iranian immigrants) had decided to immigrate if they did not intend to learn something from the host society or the process of transitioning.

Moreover, the findings of this study showed that participants held *individuals'* behaviours as accountable for the current state of "Iranians" (as in collective identity) or community, and therefore they felt that their expectations and hopes for the community were failed. In other words, it was evident that participants rendered their negative interpersonal experiences of sexism, classism, and ageism within the Iranian community to characteristics, inadequacies, or values of individuals who had remained the same even after immigration. However, sexism, classism, and ageism are broad interlocking systems of oppression that do not merely start or end with individuals. Rather, as Shin et al. (2017) argued, sexism, classism, or ageism have roots in the structure of the society and assign power differentially (and unjustly) to various social locations and standpoints through legal, cultural, axiological, interpersonal, and social measures.

Participants hoped that immigration could bring change to the identity and interpersonal interactions, while these interactions were impacted by interconnected systems of classism, sexism, or ageism rooted in the structures of the Iranian community. Immigration simply put the above-mentioned systems of oppression (which acted on both individual and community levels) in the context of a new society and made them more visible. Therefore, the findings of this study showed that to fully address the interlocking systems of oppression (e.g., sexism and classism), the transformation of society and structural changes within the community should be addressed.

Strengths and Unique Contributions of the Study

This study primarily responded to a gap in the literature on Iranian immigrants' interactions in (and belonging to) Iranian communities in North America, and particularly in Canada. Previous research lacked a detailed description of the ways in which Iranian immigrants interact with each other within Iranian communities. The findings of this study offer new information and insights about the role of the immigration narrative, transitioning expectations

on the interaction of Iranians with the host society, the impact of classism and sexism on interactions, and major interpersonal challenges as perceived by Iranian immigrants.

A strength of the study is that an intersectional epistemological lens was used to study the lived experiences of new Iranian immigrants and their interactions within the community. Adopting intersectionality as the epistemological lens allowed the identification and analysis of the role of the intersection of various identities and privileges/resources (or lack of privileges) in the process of transitioning and connecting with individuals and communities. As a result, the diversity of interactional patterns and narratives of belonging were elucidated. Moreover, the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of the Iranian interactions while taking into account the social-cultural context of new Iranian immigrants. As a result, IPA enabled the researcher to describe meanings that participants assigned to their experiences of interaction and transitioning to the new society.

This study was able to offer some unique contributions to the literature. Firstly, the findings of this study offered a critique of the labels assigned to recent waves of immigrants in the literature (i.e., "economic immigrants") through focusing on the reasons for leaving and the intersection of identities of immigrants. As a result, the role of socio-political and oppressive realities of the home country was reiterated. The study offers new insights into the impact of Canadian immigration policies on immigration discourse.

Another contribution of this study was a thorough analysis of the way national identity was experienced and understood by immigrants within the first few months or years of arrival. Given that new immigrants share an array of needs and face similar steps through the transitioning process, various aspects of immigrants' identities were reduced, for a limited time, to the shared national identity. Therefore, relationships were formed mostly on the basic

assumption of shared national identity. This was while expectations and modes of relationships were always nuanced based on the intersection of identities and preferences, all of which were hard to discern in others post-immigration. As a result, immigrants faced challenges in addressing diversity in their interpersonal interactions and transforming their rashly made interactions into long term relationships. It can be hypothesized that the dominance of national identity in immigration literature (McAuliffe, 2008) is also partly a by-product of the above process that has reduced Iranian immigrants to their national identities and disregarded their heterogeneity.

A major contribution of this study was the identification of several important intersections of identities that informed and shaped the transitioning experience and interactions of Iranian immigrants. These identities were: Socio-Economic Status (SES), social class, gender, age, political identity, and national identity/ethnicity. The findings of this study showed the importance of SES and gender as two major social locations that explained Iranian immigrants' choices, expectations, privileges, challenges and modes of interactions with other Iranians.

An intersectional analysis of the findings emphasized that immigrants' intersections of identities were embedded within larger systems of power, mainly classism, sexism, ageism and racism. Interpersonal expectations, judgments, and modes of offering and receiving help acted within larger systems of power and oppression. Also, the findings added to our understanding of the way political choices and privileges were embedded within the class privileges. Moreover, the findings showed how language was not only an important factor/skill in the transitioning process of immigrants, but it also was a site of power and privilege, impacting the experiences of discrimination and oppression both within the Iranian community and the larger society.

In addition to contributions to our understanding of the interpersonal interactions, the findings of this study added to our knowledge of community belonging among Iranian immigrants. The findings showed the imperative roles of interpersonal interactions and structural factors (e.g., sexism and classism) in hindering or facilitating a sense of belonging to the community. Moreover, Immigrants' comparisons of their within-group interactions with those interactions with non-Iranians, resulted in adopting a critical standpoint about the structures of power – such as rivalry and classism –within the Iranian community. Lastly, the findings of this study showed that Iranian immigrants' expectations for a change in behaviours, values, and actions of other Iranian immigrants as a result of immigration were important for their sense of hope and belonging to the community.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the strengths and contributions of this study, it had some limitations. First, the data collection (interviews) and data analysis were conducted in Persian. Although rigorous mechanisms such as member checking and auditing translations were used, the accuracy of translations for quotes and themes remains limited as translations never fully impart the cultural nuances and exact meanings of the original language. Second, almost all participants in this study were immigrants who were living in Québec. It should be noted that Québec is a unique province in Canada with distinct policies regarding immigration and French as the official language (Boudarbat & Grenier, 2017). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that some aspects of the transitioning process may look different for immigrants living in other parts of Canada. Additionally, participants in this study had lived in Québec for only a few years, and it is possible that those immigrants from Iran who lived in Québec for a longer period or who had originally arrived in Québec through other systems (e.g., as a student or refugee) have different

perspectives about interactions in, and belonging to, the Iranian community. Third, access to relevant literature was difficult as the majority of literature on Iranian immigrants in North America is unpublished (mostly is in the form of theses and unpublished research). Fourth, participants in this study were all heterosexual and Persian-speaking. The lack of diversity in sexual orientation and language diversity of the participants should particularly be taken into account as some research with minority groups with the Iranian population in Canada indicate unique trends of interaction with communities (Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016; Karimi, 2018). Moreover, even though most participants were from middle to higher SES, it should not be assumed that the Iranian immigrants arriving in Canada in the past few years are all from the middle to higher SES. Nevertheless, the point-based system of Canada's immigration system is inherently preferential and will naturally result in the admission of individuals who are privileged in one or several aspects of their lives. Lastly, building rapport and attempts to make participants feel comfortable was difficult. As discussed in the literature (Kheirkhah, 2003), trusting other Iranians, particularly researchers who ask questions about the community, politics or religion, is a major issue among Iranians in North America. Participants in this study, at times, explicitly expressed their concerns over what can be shared with me, given the small size of the community, despite previously explained measures of confidentiality.

Implications and Recommendations

In this section, the implications of the finding are discussed. Following the guidelines of Shin et al. (2017), the implications for practice are offered in three levels: macro (society and policies), meso (community and advocacy), and micro (individual). At the macro level, implications for immigration policy will be discussed. Then, implications for practice at meso and micro levels will be reviewed. Later, recommendations for future research will be outlined.

Immigration Policy

The findings of this study have implications for immigration policies and future research. Canada's immigration system is a point-based or skill-based (also called "merit-based") system that screens immigrants based on their level of education, language proficiency and other factors and chooses privileged individuals who have attained the highest levels of each category or skill (Reitz, 2012). Although the skills-based system has been praised as one of the most effective immigration policies, critiques have raised alarms on the use of a system that favours privileged groups of individuals (Goksel, 2018; Qidwai, 2016; Tannock, 2011). The point-based system contributes to social injustice and brain drain for the immigrants' home countries, and has been criticized as inherently discriminatory, and can negatively impact the diversity of the population in the host society (Tannock, 2011). This system, therefore, creates false expectations, particularly for a group of individuals that have been admitted based on a privileged status (Goksel, 2018).

The findings of this study confirmed that high expectations of participants who were educationally privileged often resulted in disappointments and negative feelings in the process of transitioning. It can be hypothesized that the influx of immigrants who are highly privileged in certain social locations (e.g., education and class) might impact the class system, the power dynamics of ethnic communities, and the larger society. The findings of this study showed that systems of power, (e.g., classism) not only reproduced themselves within immigrant communities but also complicated the process of transitioning and perceived discrimination.

It should also be noted that the dominant paradigm of immigration policies mostly focuses on the post-migration narrative of the immigrant and places emphasis on one-way "integration" into the host society. It can be hypothesized that this dominant paradigm sends the

implicit message that resources, skills, human capital, and reasons for leaving the home country are either not essential or, at best, dependent on the integration to the host society. Whatever the meaning of integration, the above paradigm dismisses the challenges and suffering of new immigrants through this process.

Moreover, when policies and models of immigration focus only on the immigration challenges and stories after arrival in the host society, immigrants are given the message that they are solely responsible for the choice of emigration. As the narratives of participants in this study showed, immigrants internalized the message of the above policies in that they were made to believe that the challenges and stresses they endured during their transitioning process were the direct results of their own choice of emigration, as one participant noted, "… when you wanted to move here, you knew the condition here… so, you need to get used to that [conditions]." On the contrary, the findings of this study indicated that what made these participants leave their home country was not, at least solely, attractions of the host country, but the push of the oppressive socio-political forces within the home country. Therefore, future research on immigration policy should attend to how immigration policies can incorporate the full range of immigration procedures, and instead of framing successful immigration as integration, consider a transitioning process of immigrants as a two-way process that adds to the diversity and richness of the host society as well (Sinacore, Kassan, & Lerner, 2015).

Practice

On an individual level (micro-level), the findings of this study have some implications for mental health workers (e.g., counsellors, psychologists, and social workers) working with Iranian immigrants in Québec or other parts of Canada. First, mental health workers should consider the importance of reasons for emigration, immigration story, and the intersection of immigrants'

identities in psychological challenges that immigrants experience in the process of their transitioning to the new society. Mental health workers should be aware that the intersection of each person's identities might result in a unique combination of expectations from self, the others (be them from the Iranian community or non-Iranians) and the host society.

Second, psychotherapists and psychologists should be aware of the ways systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, ageism) impact immigrants both within the structures of the Iranian community and in intersection with the larger society. In particular, it is important to help clients understand that some personal challenges or interpersonal issues are directly affected by the larger systems of oppression, and not necessarily individual issues or shortcomings (Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006).

Third, mental health practitioners should be aware of the challenges of working with immigrants coming from countries such as Iran in which systematic and structural oppression has greatly impacted all members of society. As the findings of this study demonstrated, immigrants are often given the message that immigration has been their own decision and therefore, they cannot complain or should merely accept the transitioning difficulties. Mental health practitioners can help immigrants realize that their decisions for immigration were formed in response to harsh conditions and therefore, they are only partly responsible for their current suffering (or failures) in the process of transitioning. In most cases, the major responsibility should be placed on the oppressive forces that resulted in the emigration of the individual, and ways for individual clients to address these larger oppressive forces can be explored.

Fourth, mental health practitioners should be knowledgeable about the divisions and challenges of ethnic communities and not assume that the mere existence of a large number of

immigrants (e.g., Iranians) in a Canadian city will necessarily provide new immigrants from that ethnic background with a supportive community.

Following the guidelines of Shin et al. (2017) to address the implications of research at the meso-level, the last implication of the findings for practice is about community work and advocacy. Mental health practitioners (e.g., psychologists, social workers) and community activists are strongly advised to directly address the current unjust structures of powers within Iranian communities (or any ethnic community). Research in the field of counselling psychology shows that it is not enough to address the impact of larger oppressive systems (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, and ageism) on single individuals (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). For the individual members of a society to have minimum mental health standards, larger systems of oppression should be directly addressed and dismantled. Therefore, community activists and mental health practitioners can discuss the role of sexism, racism, classism and ageism with larger members of the community using community events, art, workshops, or social media.

Future Research

The present study added to the knowledge of immigration processes, transitioning to the host society, and interactions of individuals within Iranian and other communities. Adopting an intersectional lens helped provide a level of analysis that did not reduce individuals or major factors impacting their transitioning to one or two social locations (e.g., national identity or gender roles). Therefore, future research should attend to the intersection of immigrants' identities in order to provide an in-depth analysis of forces that impact individual immigrants. Moreover, future research should also consider interlocking systems of oppression that impact individual health, interpersonal interactions and the community belonging of Iranian immigrants.

In addition to attending to within-group diversity in interpersonal interactions, future research should study how immigrants from Iran define and envision solidarity or cohesion within the community in the broader context of living in solidarity with the larger society.

The findings of this study also indicated the imperative role of transnational relations on Iranian immigrant's behaviour in Canada. Given the oppressive nature of the Iranian regime, and that many recent waves of Iranian immigrants have strong ties with their home country, future research is needed to elaborate on ways Iranians negotiate aspects of their identity in Canada, particularly political identity.

The findings of this study on intra-community interactions also raised questions about the way Iranian immigrants approach diversity within the Iranian community and integration into the host society. Several participants mentioned the important role of online media and platforms throughout their transitioning process. Participants' accounts demonstrated diverse ways of sharing identities on social media and approaching the Iranian community. Future research is needed to investigate Iranian immigrants' use of social media and online platforms in accessing resources and connecting with Iranian communities and the host society, with a focus on the intersection of participants' identities.

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APPENDIX A: Advertisement

McGill

Are you an **IRANIAN immigrant or refugee**
with Permanent Residency or Citizenship?
Have you **lived in Canada for 3-10 years**?
Were you **19 to 40 years old when arriving** in Canada?
IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO THESE QUESTIONS, THEN
WE INVITE YOU TO A RESEARCH PROJECT!!

Iranian immigrants with Canadian Permanent Residency or Citizenship status, who have lived here between 3 to 10 years and had been between 19 and 40 years old when they arrived, are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation study conducted by Shakib Nasrullah under the supervision of Dr. Ada Sinacore.

The goal of this study is to learn more about unique and divergent experiences of Iranian immigrants in Canada. Participants will be offered a $10 gift card as a compensation for their time.

If you are willing to participate in a 60-90 minute confidential interview, please contact:

Shakib Nasrullah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate in Counselling Psychology
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University
E-mail: shakib.nasrullah@mail.mcgill.ca
Contact number: 514-944-4542

Research Supervisor: Dr. Ada Sinacore
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University
E-mail: ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca
Phone: 514-398-3446

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in the following research project entitled:

Iranian Immigrants' Interaction within Iranian Communities in Canada

Conducted by me, primary researcher: Shakib Nasrullah, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, shakib.nasrullah@mail.mcgill.ca

My Research Supervisor is: Ada Sinacore, Ph.D., Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, (514) 398-3446, ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca

I, Shakib Nasrullah, am doing this research for completing my doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology. Dr. Ada Sinacore, my supervisor, from the department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, is supervising this research. Moreover, this research has been subject to evaluation and approval by the Review Ethics Board (REB file number: 150-0817), which adheres to the Tri-council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants.

Goals of Research Study:

- To study the lived experience of Iranian immigrants in Canada and within Iranian communities
- To study the ways Iranian immigrants interact with each other and construct their sense of belonging to Iranian community
- To examine the role of ethnicity, religion, gender, sex and sexual orientation, political orientation and other sociopolitical factors in interaction within Iranian community.

Process of Study:

- You will Participate in a 60-90 minute audio recorded interview (first come, first serve basis), conducted in Persian or English (choice of participant), at the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab (EDUC B111/112)
- Before the interview, I will discuss the consent form in detail
- You will be asked to share personal information regarding your experience of living in Canada within Iranian community, your interaction with other Iranians, and how you experience your sense of belonging and connection to other Iranians in community.
- You can refuse to respond to any questions you are not comfortable answering
- You can withdraw from the study at any time

Potential Risks:

- There are minimal potential psychological risks of the study, since you have the right to choose the information that you wish to share during the interview and to refuse to answer any questions
- In case of any unforeseen psychological distress, I have expertise in psychological interviewing and I will make every effort to address any problems that arise
- Should the need arise, the researcher can refer you to the appropriate mental health services in the community/city

Potential Benefits:

Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we hope to learn more about the experience of Iranians in their interactions with other Iranians or non-Iranians in Canada. Moreover, by describing your experiences you might have the opportunity to reflect upon your experiences.

Confidentiality:

- The interview will be audio recorded and the data will later be transcribed by a professional transcriber. The transcriber is bound by a confidentiality contract and will not have access to the identifying information of the participants or their contact information.
- Following transcription, I will verify the transcription and at that time, will take out all identifying information (e.g., names, names of cities and schools, etc.) and store transcripts and audio recorded files in locked filing cabinets in the researcher's lab
- I will keep the informed consent and the contact data in separate, secure environments (i.e., locked cabinets) in the researcher's lab
- Only I and my supervisor, Dr. Ada Sinacore will have access to the identifiable data (i.e., contact information, informed consent and audio files). I, my supervisor, and research assistants will have access to password protected de-identified data
- Throughout the process of communicating results, your confidentiality will be protected
- If quotes are used, all identifying information will be removed
- Audio recordings will be kept until the completion of the study and will then be erased. The transcribed de-identified and ID coded data will continue to be stored in locked filing cabinets.

Compensation:

- You will be given a $10 gift card as compensation for your time

How Data Will Be Used:

- Disseminated in my doctoral thesis
- Disseminated at professional conferences and published in scholarly journals
- Develop materials to help policy makers understand the unique needs and characteristics of Iranian communities in Canada

After reviewing the form with the researcher:

- The above information is intended to clearly describe the purpose of this study and the risks, benefits and inconveniences involved in this project. Moreover, the way confidentiality will be maintained during this research project and anticipated uses of data, particularly with respect to publication, communication, and dissemination of results are described.
- You are free to withdraw at any time from the study without any penalty or prejudice

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of

your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Principle Researcher's Name: Shakib Nasrullah

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Version September 14, 2017

APPENDIX C: Contact Information Form

CONTACT SHEET

DATE: _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER(S):

	Number	OK to leave message? (Yes/No)	Best time to be reached?
Cell			
Home			
Work			

APPENDIX D: Demographics Information Form

Please answer all of the following questions by circling the appropriate response(s). Please fill in additional information where necessary.

Background Information:

1. Age: _____

2. Preferred pronoun (e.g., he, she, they): _____

3. Relational status:
    a. Married
    b. Common Law
    c. Partnered
    d. Single
    e. Divorced/Separated
    f. Widowed/Widower
    g. Other: _____

4. Sex:
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Other: _____

5. Sexual Orientation:
    a. Heterosexual
    b. Gay
    c. Lesbian
    d. Bisexual
    e. Questioning
    f. Other: _____

6. Ethnicity/ies:
    a. Fars
    b. Turk

c. Kurd
d. Baluch
e. Arab
f. Lor
g. Gilak
h. Other: _____

7. Class of immigration: _____

8. Languages spoken: At home: _____

a. At school: _____
b. At work: _____
c. With friends: _____

9. Year of arrival to Canada: _____

10. Indicate your reason(s) for moving/immigrating to Canada:

_____

_____

_____

11. Primary Religious Affiliation:
a. Christian
b. Jewish
c. Muslim
d. Zoroastrian
e. Buddhist
f. Hindu
g. Baha'i
h. None
i. Other (specify): _____

12. Educational Information:

13. Highest educational degree obtained:
    a. Bellow High School
    b. High School
    c. Cegep
    d. Bachelor's
    e. Master's
    f. Doctorate
    g. Other: _____

14. Specialization _____

15. Name of city where you received your highest degree:
    _____

16. **Occupational Information:**

    a. Current occupation: _____

17. Employment status:
    a. Full-time (35 or more hours per week)
    b. Part-time (less than 35 hours per week)
    c. Unemployed
    d. Other _____

18. Family Structure:

    a. At the time of immigration, which family members immigrated with you?

    b. Did you all live in the same household after moving to Canada?

        At this time, who currently lives in the same household with you?

APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The following protocol consist of a series of questions designed as a framework of the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview format allows the participants to openly discuss their perspectives while a general structure is maintained across the interviews. In the following interview protocol each topic is explored in a specific section using several questions. The main question for each section is an initial prompt that is broad enough to give some space for the participants to explore their perspectives in their own pace and tone. However, there are also several detailed prompts for each topic. If the participants cover the key concepts within each topic area, then the researcher will only follow the participant's line of explanations, and no further questions will be asked. However, if the participants did not cover the key concepts within each topic area, then the list of detailed prompts can be used to further explore the topic. In short, the detailed prompts will not be used as a fixed framework for the interview, rather, the detailed prompts are used as a guide in case further discussion or structure for the interview was needed.

Research questions

(a) How do people from Iran living in Canada experience their multiple intersecting identities? (b) How do Iranians living in Canada, experience their multiple intersecting identities when interacting with other individuals from Iran? (c) How do people from Iran perceive collective identity and belonging to the Iranian community in Québec?

Topic A: Experiences of multiple intersecting identities and various contexts in Canada

Initial Prompt: Tell me about your experience of living here in Canada/. As you speak, together we will draw some of what we are talking about on this paper [pointing to the paper].

Now, could you tell me a bit about your experience of living in Québec/Canada? What brought you to Québec?

Detailed Prompts:

- When did you come to Québec?
- What have you been doing here?
    - What activities (e.g., studying, working, etc.) have you engaged with so far in Québec?
    - Where (which places/gatherings/institutions/…) do you often go/attend?
- How was it like to learn about living here?
- Was there anyone to help you settle in?
- What places do you like to hang out? What do you like to do?
- Are there places/gatherings that you prefer not to go/attend?
- How satisfied have you been with your experience?
- Do you ever/often go back to Iran for visits?

Topic B: Collective identity and belonging to Iranian community(ies)

Initial Prompt: Let's talk about what it means to be/live as an Iranian here in Québec. How is it like to be an Iranian in Québec?

Detailed Prompts:

- What places (e.g., classes, gatherings, events, parades, etc.) do you go that Iranians go/have created?
- What is your experience of going to these places?
- Are there places that Iranians gather/go and you try to avoid? [Give example of places from the bellow list]
- How do you perceive the general atmosphere is in… .[x event, context]?
- How/why do you choose how/what you engage/avoid ……
- Examples of gatherings, events, or associations:
    - Student societies
    - Religious associations, mosques, etc.: e.g., Aashoora parade, Bahá'í Center
    - Galleries and the associated events (e.g., Mekic, Café Lit, etc.)
    - Cafés
    - Human rights associations,
    - Events: e.g., Parades (Naw-Ruz, etc.); Sizdeh-be-dar
    - Political events/associations : e.g., Honoring the 60s massacres; waving different flags

Topic C: Experiences of interaction with other individuals from Iran

Initial Prompt: What is your experience of interacting with other individuals from Iran here?

Detailed Prompts:

- Do you see other Iranians in Québec? How often?
- Who do you like to hang out with? [family members, friends, etc.]
- Who do you talk to when you have a problem? Why? Where and when and with whom do you feel safe?
- How do you explain your interaction with other Iranians in….[specific context, event, venue]
- What is your experience of Iranians supporting/not supporting each other?
- Safety:
    - Where do you feel it is Ok/not-Ok to talk about yourself or what you think/believe in interaction with Iranians
    - What do you share/not share with other Iranians in each of the places you described? How do you decide about sharing/not sharing?

Closing Questions:

- Was anything important missing from the discussion?
- What was this process like for you?
- What was helpful about the discussion? What was not?
- What was meaningful about the discussion? What was not?

- Is there anything else about your experiences with living in Iranian community(ies) that you think it would be important for me to know?

APPENDIX F: Ethics Application and Revision

McGill

1

Applicable Research Ethics Board
__REB-I__X_REB-II__REB-III

Application for Ethics Approval for Research Involving Human Participants
(please refer to the Application Guidelines [www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human/] **before** completing this form)

Project Title: Iranian Immigrants' Interaction within Iranian Communities in Canada: Issues of Diversity and Belonging

Principal Investigator: Shakib Nasrullah **Dept:** Educational and Counselling Psychology

Phone #: (514) 944-4542 **Email:** shakib.nasrullah@mail.mcgill.ca
(a McGill email MUST be provided)

Status: Faculty ___ Postdoctoral Fellow ___ Other (specify) _____
Ph.D. Student _X__ Master's Student ___ Undergraduate ___

Type of Research: Faculty Research ___ Thesis _ X __
Honours Thesis ___ Independent Study Project ___
Course Assignment (specify course name and #)_____
Other (specify) _____

Faculty Supervisor (if PI is a student): Dr. Ada Sinacore **Email:** ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca

Co- Investigators/Other Researchers (list name/status/affiliation): Not Applicable.

List all funding sources for this project and project titles (if different from the above). Indicate the Principal Investigator of the award if not yourself.

Awarded: Not Applicable.

Pending: Not Applicable.

Principal Investigator Statement: I will ensure that this project is conducted in accordance with the policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of research involving human participants at McGill University. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures.

Shakib Nasrullah

Principal Investigator Signature: _____ **Date:** __August 8, 2017_____

Faculty Supervisor Statement: I have read and approved this project and affirm that it has received the appropriate academic approval. I will ensure that the student investigator is aware of the applicable policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of research involving human participants at McGill University and I agree to provide all necessary supervision to the student. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures.

Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ **Date**: __August 8, 2017_____

Respond directly on this form to each section (1-8). Do not re-order or omit any section or any of the questions under each section heading. **Answer every part of each section. Forms with incomplete sections will be returned.**

1. Purpose of the Research

a)*Describe the proposed project and its objectives, including the research questions to be investigated (one-two page maximum).*

Canada is home to a diverse group of immigrants, including Iranians. According to the 2006 Canadian census, there are around 92,000 Iranians immigrants living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). Moreover, in 2014, the fourth-largest immigrant group in Canada who received permanent residency was that of Iranians (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). Iranian immigrants, like immigrants from other countries, encounter challenges in the process of integration into a new host society. However, the sociopolitical history of Iran, combined with the general negative atmosphere about Iranians in North America, makes their integration and living in North America unique.

The sociopolitical change in Iran in the past few decades has resulted in several waves of Iranians emigrating for a variety of reasons (Bozorgmehr & Douglas, 2010; Torbat, 2002). These reasons range from studying in the U.S. and Canada, to fleeing extreme persecution against political groups, religious minorities, women and LGBTQ individuals. More recently, many Iranians have been leaving Iran for economic reasons (Chaichian, 2011). Therefore, the Iranian immigrant population in North America has been described as heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, and political affiliation (Mobasher, 2006). Moreover, the 1979 revolution and the events that followed it, such as the American embassy hostage crisis after the Iranian revolution, and the constant threat of the U.S. and other countries by Iran, have created a generally negative atmosphere for Iranians living in Canada and the United States (Hojati, 2012; Marvasti, 2005). This negative atmosphere has resulted in perceived feelings of discrimination and has complicated the relationship Iranians have with their host societies in North America (Nabavi, 2011).

Given the diversity of social locations and immigration reasons, and the general negative atmosphere against Iranians, several scholars have documented the challenges Iranians face in re-defining individual and collective identity in North America (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003; Sadeghi, 2016). Even though the recent socio-political history of Iran has resulted in a commonly shared dislike of the Iranian government, it has not proven to be a strong unifying force within Iranian communities (Moghadam, 2007). Therefore, the literature has documented challenges of constructing a sense of belonging and establishing membership in groups within Iranian communities in North America (Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003).

Studies on the integration of Iranians in North America have described ways in which Iranians define and express their identity based on their social locations, such as by gender, or a member of religious or political groups. However, most studies have focused only on individual identities and not their intersections. In other words, while some scholars have agreed upon the role of within group diversity and heterogeneity of Iranian population in North America, very few have addressed the challenges of negotiating this diversity in the context of living in the host societies using a complex intersection of social locations. Therefore, the proposed study aims to qualitatively analyze the retrospective accounts of Iranian immigrants in Canada and their experiences of negotiating their intersecting identities.

The goal of this study is to explore the living experience of Iranian immigrants within Iranian communities in Canada. The proposed study will address the following questions: (a) How do people from Iran living in Canada experience their multiple intersecting identities? (b) How do Iranians living in Canada, experience their multiple intersecting identities when interacting with other individuals from Iran? (c) How do people from Iran perceive their collective identity and belonging to the Iranian community in Montreal?

b)*What is the expected value or benefits of the research?*

The proposed study will be beneficial in several ways. This research will offer insight into how Iranian immigrants make sense of their relationship with the communities in which they reside. Community involvement and receiving support from members of the immigrants' community have been linked to lower psychological problems among immigrants (Sedighdeilami, 2004). Therefore, research on the interaction of Iranian immigrants within Iranian community and their sense of belonging to and communication with other members of Iranians' community is warranted. The research on interaction of individuals within Iranian community can also increase our understanding of the factors contributing to community building or fragmentation of the Iranian community.

Moreover, as the diversity (such as religious and ethnic diversity) of people living in Iran is not celebrated by the Iranian regime or society, and in fact, in most cases actively suppressed, the individuals immigrating to Canada from Iran face a society in which diversity is fairly celebrated. Egalitarian rules in Canada allow for the expression and maintenance of one's multiple intersecting identities. Given the differences between Iranian and Canadian societies regarding the approach towards diversity, a research on the ways Iranians experience and approach their within-group heterogeneity in Canada is warranted.

The results of the current study can also illuminate the ways Iranians would approach the diversity within Iran in future (i.e. within Iran's geographical borders). The current study addresses the fundamental question of how Iranians would approach diversity, and even though the context of current research is Canada, it might have implications for the society in Iran. That is, learning about how Iranians approach their diversity here in Canada might result in learning related to the future of Iran if the Iranian regime and its legal system undergo radical changes tailored towards honouring diversity and human rights,

c)*How do you anticipate disseminating the results (e.g. thesis, presentations, internet, film, publications)?*

The results of the proposed study will be disseminated through the primary researcher's doctoral dissertation. Moreover, the results of this study might be disseminated at peer-reviewed national or international conferences (e.g. Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association). The findings of the proposed project will be published in refereed journals (e.g. Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy) workshops, professional magazines or books.

2. Recruitment of Participants/Location of Research

a)*Describe the participant population and the approximate number of participants needed.*

The current study will seek to recruit 10 to 12 participants who are considered sufficient numbers for qualitative research purposes (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Polkinghorne, 2005). First generation Iranian immigrants with Canadian Permanent Residency or Citizenship status, who have lived here at least 3 years and no more than 10 years and have been at least 19 and at most 40 when arriving in Canada will be recruited.

The criteria of having Permanent Residency or Canadian Citizenship is included to make sure that the participants have the intention of staying in Canada as these participants will be more likely to meaningfully engage with the Iranian community in Montreal. Moreover, the minimum 3 years of staying in Canada ensures that the participants have had enough time to interact with Iranian community in Montreal. The maximum number of 10 years per staying in Canada has been chosen to limit the participants to those who have recently left Iran- as literature shows that several waves of immigrants have left Iran in the past decades and each wave has their specific reasons and context of leaving and receiving.

The lower age range of 19 ensures that only adults who had finished their secondary education at the time of entering Canada will be recruited. Moreover, several studies have shown that those who immigrate to the U.S. or Canada in later adulthood undergo unique experiences in their process of acculturation (McConatha et al., 2001; Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006). Therefore, the maximum age criterion for inclusion in the current study has been chosen as 40.

b)*Describe how and from where they will be recruited. Attach a copy of any advertisement, letter, flier, brochure or oral script to be used to solicit potential participants (including information to be sent to third parties).*

Recruitment methods will consist of online advertisements on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), online forums (e.g. Kijiji), and flyers posted on university campuses. Moreover, participants will be recruited via word of mouth, and advertising in printed Iranian weekly magazines (e.g. Hafteh) and their corresponding websites (e.g. Hafteh.ca).

Appendix A is the advertisement designed for this study. A Persian translation of this ad will be produced using back-translation to make sure that the Persian translation is consistent with the English version (Back-translation: the principal investigator will translate the ad into Persian, then will send the Persian version of the ad to a Research Assistant who is fluent both in English and Persian. The Research Assistant will translate the Persian version back to English. Finally, both English versions- the original and the back-translated one- will be compared to make sure there is consistency between English and Persian versions).

c)*Describe the setting in which the research will take place.*

Interviews will be held face-to-face in the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab (Education Building, B111/112) at McGill University or in a private location suitable for data collection agreed upon by both the participants and the principle researcher.

d)*Describe any compensation subjects may receive for participating.*

Each participant will be compensated for their time with a gift card valued at $15.

3. Other Approvals

When doing research with various distinct groups of participants (e.g. school children, cultural groups, institutionalized people, other countries), organizational/community/governmental permission is sometimes needed. If applicable, how will this be obtained? Include copies of any documentation to be sent.

Not Applicable.

4. Methodology/Procedures

Provide a sequential description of the methods and procedures to be followed to obtain data. Describe all methods that will be used (e.g. fieldwork, surveys, interviews, focus groups, standardized testing, video/audio taping). Attach copies of questionnaires or draft interview guides, as appropriate.

This study uses a hermeneutic phenomenological method. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative method that is used to capture participants' perspectives and contextual data based on participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon under study (Polkinghorne, 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Iranian immigrants who meet the criteria and are interested in taking part in the study will be encouraged to contact the principle researcher via email or phone call (for details of recruitment process, please refer to letter b of question 2 in this application). A designated McGill email will be set up for this study. The potential participants will then have a phone conversation with the principal researcher in which the principle researcher will explain what is involved in the study and will make sure that all the recruitment criteria are met. If the participant expresses interest in taking part in the research, an in-person 60-90 minutes' interview

will be scheduled. Interviews will be held face-to-face in the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab (Education Building, B111/112) at McGill University or in a private location. Interviews will be audio-taped using an electronic audio-recorder and will then be transcribed word by word. After verifying the transcripts, the interviews will be de-identified and a password-protected one-page summary of the interview will be sent back to participant for "member-checking". In "member-checking", participants can give feedback to the researcher regarding the clarity of the information gathered in the interview and whether they want to respond, reflect, or provide further information regarding the interview.

The data will be gathered using a demographic form (Appendix D), a concept map (sample can be found in Appendix E), and a semi-structured interview protocol, all designed specifically for this study. The data gathering materials will all be available in Persian using the back-translation method to ensure the quality of translation. The participants will have the option to respond questions either in English or Persian.

The demographic form, concept map, and semi-structured interview protocol will be further reviewed by two members of the researcher's lab or other professionals that have the relevant knowledge to the subject. This review will be done in order to receive feedback on the clarity and use of the procedures and whether or not the questions effectively ask the information needed for the study. The semi-structured interview protocol will be used as a guide for the interview and actual interview questions might be slightly different based on each participant's experiences.

The semi-structured interview will cover three major areas of inquiry: (a) Experiences of multiple intersecting identities and various contexts, (b) Collective identity and belonging to Iranian community, and (c) Experiences of interaction with other individuals from Iran

Before starting the data gathering procedure (using demographic form, drawing concept map, and answering interview questions for each participant), the researcher will explain the purpose and goals of the study, any potential risks involved in participating in the study and that the participants can stop the interview or cancel their participation at any time. Then, the participant will have time to read the consent form (Appendix B) and ask any questions. The researcher will make sure that the participant has understood all aspects of the consent form and will answer the participants' questions. After obtaining the participants' signature on the consent form, participants will be asked to complete the contact information (Appendix C).

The data gathering, and audio-recording, will start at this point. All of the following steps can be done using either English or Persian. The language is chosen by the participants to make sure they are comfortable with the procedure. Participants will be first asked to fill out the demographic form (Appendix D). Using the demographic form, the concept of social location and identities will be explained (e.g. religion and family roles are social locations). Then a discussion will follow about the examples of most salient identities for the participant (e.g. for participant A, religion and sex are the two most salient identities). Following the identification of most salient identities, the researcher will ask questions about the participants experience in Canada and within various contexts of Iranian community using the semi-structured interview protocol. As the interview advances, the participant and researcher will collaborate on drawing the interaction of social locations/identities with various contexts of living on a concept map (See an example of concept map in Appendix E). Concept mapping has roots in constructivist theory and has been suggested as a useful alternative approach in multistage data collection (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). Moreover, other contextual factors and venues that Iranian individuals might interact with (such as a local mosque or an Iranian festival) will also be drawn on the map. The relationship between the salient identities and contextual factors and venues will also be drawn on the map.

Audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed by the principle researcher. After the transcription of the interviews, all identifying information (e.g. names, city and places names, etc.) will be omitted from the transcripts.

5. Potential Harms and Risk

a) *Describe any known or foreseeable harms, if any, that the participants or others might be subject to during or as a result of the research. Harms may be psychological, physical, emotional, social, legal, economic, or political.*

There are minimal potential psychological risks in taking part in this study. Participants have the right to refuse to answer any questions and can choose what information they wish to share. There is a minimal chance that some disturbing memories of an interaction within their Iranian community or any other experience of living in Canada might surface during the interview.

b) *In light of the above assessment of potential harms, indicate whether you view the risks as acceptable given the value or benefits of the research.*

The risks are acceptable, in my perspective, as they are very minimal. The involvement in the study and reviewing one's perspective about the Iranian community and interaction with other Iranians will not cause a greater risk than what participants would encounter in their day to day lives and interactions within Iranian community. The opportunity to discuss experiences with the phenomenon under the study might be beneficial for the participants in that new meanings and understandings might form out of the discussion or the recounting of their experiences might be a validating experience of itself. Therefore, given the potential benefits of the study, and the level of risk involved in taking part in the study (which is not above and beyond normal living situations for the participants), I believe all minimal risks are acceptable.

c) *Outline the steps that may be taken to reduce or eliminate these risks.*

In case of the unlikely event that a disturbing memory surfaces or any other unforeseen psychological disturbances, the researcher has the basic counselling skills needed to counsel the participant and will further provide a list of the referral resources.

d) *If deception is used, justify the use of the deception and indicate how participants will be debriefed or justify why they will not be debriefed.*

No deception will be used in this study.

6. Privacy and Confidentiality

a)*Describe the degree to which the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of data will be assured and the specific methods to be used for this, both during the research and in the release of findings.*

The audio recorded interview files, transcribed hard copies of the interviews, and computer files of the transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's lab. Other materials such as contact information forms, consent forms, and demographic forms will be kept in a separate locked cabinet in the researcher's lab.

Audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed by the principle researcher. After the transcription of the interviews, all identifying information (e.g. names, city and places names, etc.) will be omitted from the transcripts. The resulting de-identified interview transcript files will be stored in the locked filing cabinet in the researcher's lab (together with audio recorded files). Moreover, a copy of the de-identified interview transcript computer files will be kept on the researcher's personal computer. All the computer files (whether on the researcher's personal computer or in the locked filing cabinet) will be password protected.

No part of participants' identity or any identifying information will be used in any form of dissemination of data. Further, if any quotes are used in the dissemination of the results of this study, all identifying information will be removed.

b)*Describe the use of data coding systems and how and where data will be stored. Describe any potential use of the data by others.*

All data will be stored in locked filing cabinets. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all the demographic information forms and transcribed interviews will be de-identified (i.e. all identifying information will be eliminated) and they will be coded (with numbers associated with the contact information forms) and kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's lab. The coding key, consent forms, demographic forms, and contact information forms will be kept in a separate locked filing cabinet than the filing cabinet designated to the audio and transcribed interview files.

The de-identified transcript files will be password protected and will be kept on the researcher's lab-computer and on his personal computer. Only principle researcher, his supervisor, and research assistants will have access to de-identified transcript files that will all be password protected.

c)*Who will have access to identifiable data?*

The identifiable data will only be accessible to the principle researcher and his supervisor. All the identifiable data will be stored in a separate locked cabinet in the researcher's lab.

d)*What will happen to the identifiable data after the study is finished?*

After the study is complete, the audio-recorded interviews will be erased. The contact sheet and coding key will continue to be kept in a separate, locked filing cabinet.

e)*Indicate if there are any conditions under which privacy or confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (e.g. focus groups), or, if confidentiality is not an issue in this research, explain why.*

Not Applicable.

7. Informed Consent Process

a)*Describe the oral and/or written procedures that will be followed to obtain informed consent from the participants. Attach all consent documents, including information sheets and scripts for oral consents.*

After an initial phone call and setting up a date for the interview, the researcher will meet with the participants face-to-face in either the researcher's lab (Education Building, B111/B112) or a private place selected by the participant (e.g. their home). The researcher will verbally review the consent form and will go over the purpose of the study, how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained, potential risks involved in the study, and the voluntary nature of the participation. Participants will have time to go over the consent form and ask any questions they might have. Moreover, participants will be informed (both verbally and in through the informed consent) that they can withdraw from the study at any time, within and up to six months of their transcript being verified. The period of "six months" is allocated since after six months into the data analysis, the data from multiple participants will be aggregated and it will be no longer possible to pull out a specific participant's data from the analysis.

b)*If written consent will not be obtained, justification must be provided.*

Not applicable.

8. Other Concerns

a) *Indicate if participants are a captive population (e.g. prisoners, residents in a center) or are in any kind of conflict of interest relationship with the researcher such as being students, clients, patients or family*

members. If so, explain how you will ensure that participants do not feel pressure to participate or perceive that they may be penalized for choosing not to participate.

Not applicable.

b) *Comment on any other potential ethical concerns that may arise during the course of the research.*

Not applicable.

McGill University

ETHICS REVIEW
AMENDMENT REQUEST FORM

This form can be used to submit any changes/updates to be made to a currently approved research project. Changes must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.

Significant or numerous changes to study methods, participant populations, location of research or the research question or where the amendment will change the overall purpose or objective of the originally approved study will require the submission of a complete new application.

REB File #: 150-0817
Project Title: Iranian Immigrants' Interaction within Iranian Communities in Canada: Issues of Diversity and Belonging
Principal Investigator: Shakib Nasrullah
Email: Shakib.nasrullah@mail.mcgill.ca
Faculty Supervisor (for student PI): Dr. Ada Sinacore

1) Explain what these changes are, why they are needed, and if the risks or benefits to participants will change.

The original ethics application for this study did not include use of a professional transcriber. This amendment request explains my intention to use the services of a professional transcriber to transcribe the audio-recorded files that are gathered. As such, the only change to the original ethics approval is the inclusion of the following lines:

"After data is gathered in the format of audio-files, a professional transcriber will be approached and a confidentiality agreement between the researcher and the transcription service provider will be signed. When the data is transcribed, the principle researcher will go through the transcription of each file and will take out all the identifying information (e.g. names, names of the cities, and any other identifying information)."

A copy of the confidentiality agreement is attached to this form.

Use of a professional transcriber is considered a routine research practice with very minimal risks to the confidentiality of the data. As professional transcribers are bound by confidentiality agreement (please see the attached form), the confidentiality of the materials is preserved to the highest degree possible.

2) Attach relevant additional or revised documents such as questionnaires, consent forms, recruitment ads.

A copy of the confidentiality agreement that will be signed between the principle researcher and the professional transcriber is attached to this form.

Principal Investigator Signature: Shakib Nasrullah Date: 16 Jan 2018

Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: 16 Jan 2018
(for student PI)

APPENDIX G: Final Approved REB

Research Ethics Board Office
James Administration Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West. Rm 325
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Tel: (514) 398-6831

Website: www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board II
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 150-0817

Project Title: Iranian Immigrants' Interaction within Iranian Communities in Canada: Issues of Diversity and Belonging

Principal Investigator: Shakib Nasrullah **Status:** Ph.D. Student

Department: Educational & Counselling Psychology **Supervisor:** Prof. Ada L. Sinacore

Approval Period: **September 25, 2017 to September 24, 2018**

The REB-II reviewed and approved this project by delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

Deanna Collin
Ethics Review Administrator, REB I & II

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* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
* Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.
* A Request for Renewal form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.
* When a project has been completed or terminated, a Study Closure form must be submitted.
* Unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications must be promptly reported to the REB. Serious adverse events experienced by a participant in conjunction with the research must be reported to the REB without delay.
* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

THOU seest, O my Lord, my dwelling-place in the heart of this mountain and Thou dost witness my forbearance. Verily I have desired naught else but Thy love and the love of those who love Thee. How can I extol the effulgent beauty of Thy Lordship, conscious as I am of my nothingness before the habitation of Thy glory?