

**SENSE OF IDENTITY LOSS AND CONTINUITY IN NARRATIVES OF
IMMIGRATION OF A GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN CANADIAN WOMEN**

by

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Abstract

Drawing from an action theory and other perspectives on identity, which emphasize individuals' social processes and contextual factors, and utilizing a social constructivist approach, this inquiry proposes an understanding of the participants' immigration experiences. This secondary analysis explored the narratives of 25 semistructured interviews conducted in 2002 with Latin American immigrant and refugee women. Using a categorical-content (thematic) analysis, this qualitative research aimed to address the women's sense of identity loss and continuity in their narratives of immigration. Moving to Canada became problematic for half of the women when they experienced a sense of identity loss influenced by challenges of immigration.

Preface

This inquiry is a secondary analysis of narratives of immigration existing in the City of Richmond Archives. These narratives were brought together by a research project that interviewed 25 Latin American Canadian (LAC) immigrant and refugee women in 2002.

In chapter 3, I explain how I conducted a categorical-content (thematic) narrative analysis of the narratives of immigration of 25 LAC immigrant women and the criteria for evaluating the findings. I was responsible for conducting this narrative analysis.

This research did not require ethics approval because the information is legally accessible to the public and appropriately protected by regulation (in Canada publicly available archives have policies regarding how people can access their records).

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1. Introduction

The immigration process affects the identity of cultural, racial, religious and linguistic minorities in Canada (Tastsoglou, 2001, 2002). The immigration process refers to the experiences of landing and settling in a new country. The changes and challenges that immigrants experience settling in Canada and leaving their previous countries may increase their acculturative stress, which may cause a reduction in well-being in the process of adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2006, 2008). Particularly, acculturative stress and a sense of identity loss constitute a risk factor for adjustment-related difficulties, depression, and anxiety in Latin American immigrants (Lopez-Damian, 2008; Lueck & Wilson, 2011; Revollo, Qureshi, Collazos, Valero, & Casas, 2011).

In this chapter I briefly survey the context of Latin American (LA) immigration to Canada. LA immigration is relatively recent in the history of Canada, a country characterized by constant immigration. Then, there are only a few and recent studies in the experiences of immigration of the Latin American Canadian (LAC) population. This study aims to contribute with an understanding of the immigration experiences of a group of LAC women in the Greater Vancouver area, which includes the third major city and metropolitan area in Canada.

Later, I provide the context of this study within the research literature. I locate this research under the umbrella of a multi-dimensional immigration approach because it considers immigration experiences within an active complex interaction process between cultures in contact. I have a premise in mind in this study: how immigrants experience and confront encouraging and difficult situations, as they alternate between two or more cultures, influences and may create their sense of identity loss and continuity. Finally, I also introduce in this chapter: the rationale, the purpose, and the research questions that guide this study.

1.1 Latin American Immigration to Canada: Contexts and Definitions

Currently, Latin America refers to 24 countries, which include the Spanish-speaking countries in America, Portuguese-speaking Brazil, and the Caribbean. Canada is now an English and French speaking constitutional monarchy that "recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society" (Minister of Justice, 1985, p. 2). Within this geopolitical and linguistic context, LA immigration to Canada started rising significantly after the 1970s, influenced by factors such as: Canadian immigration policies, socio-economic and political conditions of Latin America and Canada, and migrant social networks (Goldring, 2006; Simmons, 1993).

Aboriginal people were well established in North and South America before the first European colonizers arrived on these continents. Canada and Latin America have different colonization histories. In the 16th century, Spain and Portugal colonized what is now called Latin America. During the colonial period, many Europeans and Aborigines mixed creating a Mestizo population, now a majority group in several LA countries. Many of these countries got their national independencies in the 19th century and created and adapted the political/geographical construct of Latin America. In the 17th century, French and British colonizers arrived in what is now called Canada. The majority of the colonizers and the Aboriginal people did not mix, and over the past 400 years, millions of European immigrants moved to this country.

Before the 1960s, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the department of the Canadian Government that decides who can immigrate to Canada, had exclusion policies against non-European immigrants (e.g., the 1911 Immigration Act). This practice started to change significantly when the policies of a national preference system was dropped in 1965, when a new point system was introduced in 1968, and when the Immigration Act 1976 came into effect.

Canada is now referred to as a land of immigrants: currently 19.8% of the Canadian population is foreign-born; CIC continues to encourage immigration to pursue the benefits of immigration; and Canada receives annually about 250,000 permanent residents and 200,000 temporary foreign workers (Berdichewsky, 2007; Simmons, 1993; Statistics Canada, 2008a; Tastsoglou, 2001).

Statistics Canada identifies Canadian immigrants as individuals who are or have been accepted by CIC as permanent residents or as citizens by naturalization (the citizenship process). This term does not include: children of immigrants born in Canada, Canadian citizens born outside Canada, and temporal immigrants with time limit on their visas, such as student visas, working visas, and temporary foreign workers (Chui, 2011). To quote content appropriately from various references or to be more specific when needed, I use the term Latin American Canadians (LAC) for individuals who have LA origins and have been accepted as permanent residents or citizens in Canada; and I use the wider category Latin American Immigrant (LAI) for individuals who have LA origins and live or have lived in Canada with diverse immigration statuses.

LAC are considered visible minorities in Canada, and thus characterized as the "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (as cited in Chui, 2011, p. 32). LAC represent 6% of visible minorities, with 304,245 persons, constituting around 1% of the Canadian population. According to the 2001 Census of Canada (Lindsay, 2007), the majority of Canadians with LA origins, are relatively young, can have a conversation in one of the official languages, are slightly more likely than the rest of the population to have university degrees, are more likely to be employed, have low incomes compared to the overall population, and feel a strong sense of belonging to Canada. They constitute one of the fastest growing groups in this country. The number of individuals reporting LA origins grew by 32% between 1996 and 2001, while the Canadian population (including all newcomers) grew by 4%.

In terms of recent immigration, both LA men and women newcomers increased 9% to 11% between 2001 to 2006 (Chui, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2006, 2007, 2008b).

The majority of LAI living in Canada in 2001 arrived after the 1970s: less than 1% arrived before the 60s, 3% in the 60s, 14% in the 70s, 35% in the 80s, and 47% in the 90s (Lindsay, 2007). During the 1970s, the majority of individuals from Latin America immigrated as refugees from South America (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Colombia). In the 1980s, LAI also arrived predominantly as refugees, and came mainly from Central America (El Salvador and Guatemala). After the 1990s, more LAI moved to Canada as permanent residents in the family or in the economic class looking for better socio-economic conditions and employment opportunities (Goldring, 2006; Mata, 1985; Simmons, 1993). Country of origin varies each year, for example, in 2001, 15% came from Mexico, 14% from Chile, 11% from El Salvador, 7% from Peru, and 6% from Colombia (Lindsay, 2007).

According to their immigration categories, individuals can have different immigration experiences, benefits, and challenges (Berry, 2006, 2011; Heine, 2008). The different immigration categories in Canada include: the economic class (e.g., skilled workers, professionals and entrepreneurs), the family class (e.g., family members of Canadian citizens), the protected persons (e.g., refugees), and others (e.g., humanitarian and compassion grounds) (CIC, 2010). Thus, individuals who immigrated as refugees might present dissimilar experiences compared to skilled workers, or to family sponsored members, and so on.

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) offers refugee status to individuals who are *in need of protection*, who face a danger of torture, a risk to their life or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment in their country of origin (IRB, 2006); and to individuals who meet the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention definition of a *refugee*, that is, any

person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable or [...] is unwilling to avail him [or her]self of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, 2005, p. 7).

Many LA individuals and communities experienced severe political violence during the 1970s and 1980s, due mainly to civil wars and state terror imposed by force by dictatorships with the help of the United States Government. The majority of LAI arrived as refugees during these two decades mostly based on Canadian immigration programs that supported them (Shayne, 2009; Simmons 1993). Most recent LAI, after the 1990s, arrived in the economic (as skilled workers) or in the family class. However, this trend is still related with lack of safety conditions and unstable economic situations in the countries of origin (Goldring, 2006).

Then, in terms of the nature of the contact between LAI and Canadian born individuals, it usually involves individuals moving from countries with less economic and social safety resources to a country that might offer to its population better socioeconomic possibilities. In addition, the Canadian multiculturalism policy and immigration policy promote and motivate individuals to come to this country, versus other potential countries, mostly based on having and giving better opportunities to qualified labor. Both situations might generate in LAI expectations of maintaining or improving their safety and socioeconomic possibilities. Therefore, these expectations and how the Canadian society responds to them might influence LAC's identities and how they adapt or integrate in the host society.

1.2 The Context of the Study within the Research Literature

According to Berry (2006, 2011), the majority of Canadians ideologically embrace multiculturalism, creating a consensus between the public policy of multiculturalism and public

opinion. Moreover, the current Canadian Multiculturalism Act states that "The Government of Canada [...] is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada" (Minister of Justice, 1985, p. 2).

Previously, in 1971, the Canadian Federal Government also announced a multiculturalism policy, which proposed that national unity must be founded on confidence on one's own individual identity and the respect for that of others. This announcement mentioned that: "The Government will support and encourage the various cultural and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for all" (Government of Canada, 1971, p. 3).

Experiences of immigration can facilitate multiculturalism, tolerance, and openness to diversity for both newcomers and host societies. This aperture to others' differences may contribute to the socio-economic advancement of society. In particular, immigration can improve the economy of the host country by providing: qualified labour when work forces shrink, innovative and different expertise, and knowledge and research exchange with other countries (CIC, 2010; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009).

However, there are several factors that influence how a society responds to immigrants. Immigration can also become a hurtful experience if immigrants are not welcomed and if the host society does not have the appropriate infrastructure to provide support, fair income employment, and equitable opportunities for new members. For example, factors such as: ethnocentrism/hierarchies, cultural and economic threats, employment discrimination, among others, play an important role for equity and tolerance towards immigrants. To facilitate

openness to diversity, it is important that both new members and host societies engage in an active process to avoid discrimination (e.g., prejudice based on racial background) and challenge internalizations of negative socio-economic discourses (e.g., exploitation) (Berry, 2006, 2011; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009).

The study of immigration is complex due to several factors such as: immigration conditions and experiences differ widely, immigration is an interactive process where host cultures vary in different ways in relation to original cultures, and theoretical perspectives about immigration have different approaches. In the field of cross-cultural psychology, acculturation studies try to understand the process by which people migrate to and learn a different culture and the changes that occur when intercultural contact is present (Heine, 2008; Hernandez, 2009).

These studies have understood immigration processes as uni-, bi- or multi-dimensional. While the uni-dimensional approach considers that the person loses the original cultural identity to gain a new cultural identity, the bi-dimensional believes that the individual can maintain both identities. The multi-dimensional goes beyond two dimensions (e.g., beyond the 'I am half-Canadian, half-LA') by proposing that the person adjusts specific elements, such as values, attitudes, behaviors, and language while experiencing those of the host society. I locate this thesis research under the umbrella of a multi-dimensional approach because it considers immigration experiences within an active complex interaction process between cultures in contact. At the same time, Hernandez clarified that there is a more recent consensus about applying this approach (Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Heine, 2008; Hernandez, 2009).

Frie (2008) defined biculturalism as the individual's experience of two different cultural traditions. He clarified that in North America, biculturalism "is perhaps best understood as the interactions between a dominant and non-dominant culture" (p. 223). How immigrants confront

encouraging and difficult situations, as they alternate between two or more cultural traditions, may affect their identities. I understand culture as the dynamic coping process in which individuals deal with their life circumstances, and interpret and negotiate their possibilities in play with their contextual elements. When I mention "original LA culture" or "new Canadian culture" I refer to the dynamic coping process of these plural societies –with their alive traditions, that each of these groups have developed and keep developing– for dealing with their circumstances.

Frie (2008) elaborated on the concepts of agency and bicultural competence, and on how culture is "constantly being transformed as individuals negotiate common meanings through social interactions" (p. 223). He argued that the process of meaning creating is cultural but also personal, in the sense that culture provides the individual with "a system of common symbolic pattern through which to create meanings and organize experience" (p. 227). Finally, he concluded that individuals become active agents in the process of making and remaking culture while navigating different cultural contexts.

The concept of identity has been used and studied extensively in a diversity of disciplines with changing historical connotations. Erikson (1968, 1974) reflected on identity's "invigorating" and "vital implications", such as a sense of identity, a sense of identity continuity and group's identities. He stated that social scientists, aiming at greater specificity in identity studies, created and used terms such as: identity crisis, self-identity, and sexual identity. Erikson's reflection was focused on considering identity beyond demonstrative items to include other not so measurable and often "more vital" implications. I elaborated more on the concept of identity in the Literature Review of this study.

1.3 Rationale

The rationale for this study is based on the understanding that immigration can become problematic for LAC women, if they experience a sense of identity loss when facing immigration issues. Immigrants experience psychosocial, economic, and cultural adjustments that can impact their identities and mental well-being. Several studies have asserted that immigrants and refugees may face discrimination and a sense of identity loss as a result of leaving behind their family, community, country, roles, status, culture, and property (Douglas, 2010; Krulfeld & Camino, 1994; Lee & Westwood, 1996). Considering that the majority of the Canadian population is multicultural, and that the number of LAC women continues to increase, we need to understand these individuals' experiences.

Previous studies have argued that a coherent, integrative, and clear self-concept is relevant for maintaining well-being (e.g., Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003; Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley, & Lehman, 1996; Diehl & Hay, 2007; Diehl, Jacobs, & Hastings, 2006; Rice & Pasupathi, 2010) "because people organize and interpret their past and present experiences in light of what they believe to be true about themselves" (Rice & Pasupathi, 2010, p. 479). Several of the previous authors define self-concept as how people think about themselves, their beliefs about their own characteristics and capabilities (e.g., Campbell et al, 1996; Rice & Pasupathi, 2010). Some authors also highlight that this "cognitive structure" –how people think about themselves– is dynamic (capable of change) and can have important adaptive and self-regulatory functions (e.g., Diehl et al., 2006; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Then, when individuals have integrated and coherent dynamic self-concepts they increase their possibilities of having better well-beings.

According to Ashmore and Jussin (1997), self-concept can be considered as one of several facets of identity at the societal level; facets which are "complexly intertwined and certainly not completely independent" (p. 8). As well, Oyserman (2001, 2012) asserts that self-concept and identity "can be considered as nested elements, with aspects of the 'me' forming self-concepts and identities being part of self-concepts." Then, from my point of view, if an individual's subjective experience is that of an integrated and coherent dynamic self-concept, there is a higher possibility that his or her identity might not be affected negatively during immigration processes which might demand fast changes and multiple challenges.

The changes and challenges that immigrants experience settling in a new country and leaving their previous countries may increase their acculturative stress. This stress is present when immigration experiences cause a reduction in well-being in the process of adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2006, 2008). Particularly, acculturative stress constitutes a risk factor for adjustment-related difficulties, depression, and anxiety in LAI (Lopez-Damian, 2008; Lueck & Wilson, 2011; Revollo, Qureshi, Collazos, Valero, & Casas, 2011).

Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987); Revollo et al. (2011); and Yearwood, Crawford, Kelly, and Moreno (2007) asserted that acculturative stress is related, among other factors, with the immigrants' culture of origin. Revollo et al. emphasized that "the relationship between immigration and mental health may partially be influenced by the characteristics specific to particular immigrant populations in specific contexts" (p. 84). As well, studies of acculturation affirm that immigrant's adjustment is based on the interactions between their original culture and the host culture (Berry, 2006, 2011; Heine, 2008). Then, immigrants experience psychological difficulties and develop ways of coping that are influenced by cultural, socio-economic, historical, and political conditions in their new country and from their previous countries. For

example, people who are Mexican immigrants in the United States have different stress-coping strategies compared to people who are Mexican-Americans or to non-Hispanic Whites (Farley, Galves, Dickinson, & Diaz Perez, 2005; Zagelbaum, 2011). Therefore, there is a need of more research (and levels of support) according to individuals' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration experiences, and particular circumstances (Heine, 2008).

Erikson (1968, 1974) called attention to the importance of environmental, socio-economic, and historical conditions for identity development. Frie (2011) emphasized that identity unfolds within specific socio-cultural frameworks. As well, several authors have acknowledged the importance of the original and host cultures' contexts in the studies of identity and immigration for particular cultural groups, such as: Mexican Americans (Farley et al., 2005), Filipino Americans (Del Prado & Church, 2010; Tuason, Reyes Taylor, Rollings, Harris, & Martin, 2007), Asian Indian Americans (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007), and Sudanese Australians (Hatoss, 2012).

According to Lopez-Damian (2008), most previous Canadian immigration studies have focused on male experiences and disregarded the experiences of women. This was probably influenced from the fact that the immigration system considered male immigrants as main immigrants, while women and children were considered as dependent family members. As immigration is gendered (Dion & Dion, 2001; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Tastsoglou, 2001), which means it is different for men and women in different areas (e.g., immigration categories, challenges and benefits, expectations and responsibilities, etc.), there is a definite need to study women's immigration experiences.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The research problem addressed in this study is that there is a lack of understanding about LAC women's identities in their narratives of immigration. Several authors (Ko & Perreira, 2010; Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2010; Simmons, 1993) emphasized the lack of research about the LA immigration to Canada. They expressed the need for studies that focus on the particular context and experiences of LAI in Canada. There are only a few and very recent academic works in this area, for example the studies of Arraiz-Matute (2010) and Lopez-Damian (2008). Furthermore, the narratives of this study, which were brought together by the project *Immigration and identity: Life experiences of LA immigrant and refugee women residents of the Lower Mainland of B.C.* (Frid, Maurer, Replanski, Sanchez, 2002a), have not been explored in an academic context.

The research purpose of this study is to explore a group of LAC women's sense of identity loss and continuity expressed in their immigration narratives. I aim to contribute to an understanding of the immigration experiences of the women of this study. Specifically, I explore the women's sense of identity loss and continuity in their narratives of immigration in terms of the research questions of the current study. The findings of this study might be helpful to understand a sense of identity loss and continuity of women who belong to cultural groups which might share various similar experiences. The findings might also contribute with culture-specific approaches to multicultural counselling, which emphasize the importance of being knowledgeable of specific populations to provide more effective counselling services.

1.5 Research Questions

This qualitative secondary analysis, using a categorical-content (thematic) narrative analysis, aims to address the following three research questions:

1. What did participants mention about themselves when they were asked about how they feel about their identities and their identities as Latina women?
2. Is there a sense of identity loss present in their narratives of immigration? And if so, how do these women construct it?
3. Is there a sense of identity continuity present in their narratives of immigration? And if so, how do these women construct it?

The relevance of this research about a sense of identity loss and continuity lies in adding to the understanding of a group of LAC women's immigration experiences. At a time when immigration to Canada continues to increase and to have relevance for the socio-economic development of this society, it is important to understand particular immigrant populations' experiences in the specific context of Canadian major cities.

This thesis is organized in five chapters, starting from an introduction in chapter one, a literature review in chapter two, the methodological process in chapter three, the description of a sense of identity loss and continuity in chapter four, and finally, finishing with a discussion in chapter five, which includes implications for counselling research and practice.

2. Literature Review

They [my mother and brother] gave me the opportunity to come from there *until* here, to do something, to have an education and move forward.

Juana, a teenager at time of arrival in Canada¹

Currently, there is an increasing interdisciplinary dialogue on identity. The discussion has enriched and focused the dialogue on the complexity and situational variability of individuals' identities. At the same time it has facilitated the recognition that identities are not completely stable, but shaped in social interactions. The relevant literature for this study includes theoretical perspectives and informs the research problem in the following areas: the concept of identity, a sense of identity loss and continuity, narratives of immigration, and narratives of immigration of LAC women. I reviewed and considered insights from studies in these areas, which were helpful to inform the constructed themes when analyzing the women's narratives.

This literature review includes mostly articles from EBSCO databases, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and other documents suggested by my research committee. Keywords used in database searches were: identity and immigration, identity in psychology, loss and continuity, and Latin American immigration in Canada. In addition, several articles used in this study were selected from the list of references of previously selected key articles. I also specifically searched these entries in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.

¹ The emphasis in italics is mine. In Spanish: "Ellos [mi madre y hermano] me dieron la oportunidad de venir desde allá *hasta* aquí, para hacer algo, para tener educación y salir adelante." Juana, una adolescente al llegar a Canadá

In this chapter I first introduce several perspectives on identity that emphasize the importance of social interactions, projects, and contextual factors for individuals' identities. Then, I present a perspective on a sense of identity continuity, which provides an understanding of the sense of identity loss and continuity concept used in this study. Later, I present perspectives on identity provided by two narrative analyses of immigration experiences. And finally, I explored two prior studies of LAC women's narratives of immigration to clarify what has been already explored within the topic of identity with LAC women.

2.1 Perspectives on Identity

The concept of identity gained importance in psychology after the Second World War. According to Stewart and McDermott (2004), during the postwar period, several theorists (e.g., Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, and Karen Horney, among others) elaborated theories that provided a link for individual-level phenomena (e.g., behaviour, attitudes, and performance) with social-level phenomena (e.g., social contexts such as family, community, and wider society). Erikson's (1968) psychosocial perspective on identity emphasized that identity is "'located' in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (p. 22). He also asserted that individuals construct their identities in reference to others:

In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. (p. 22)

Erikson (1968) asserted that an individual 'judges' himself or herself considering others' perspectives and his or her own judging of these others' perspectives. In this way, an individual shapes his or her identity while locating himself or herself in a relational process with others. In addition, according to Stewart and McDermott (2004), Erikson also proposed that identity is subject to change over the adult life based on both individual experiences and input from social structures. He called attention to the importance of environmental, socio-economic, and historical conditions that influence identity. Then, Erikson's psychosocial perspective on identity acknowledges that individuals reconstruct identities in interaction with people and influenced by social structures.

Subsequent scholars built on Erikson's theory of identity to expand on how social structural features and the individual may be linked. For example, Erikson's ideas were elaborated by social psychologists to expand on how social contextual factors increase or diminish the meaningfulness of social identities (e.g., gender, racial, feminist and sexual identity). As well, his reflections about group identification were expanded on the idea that social identities based on group identification are consequential, and that each social identity represents the individual's relationship to a group (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

Since the postwar period the concept of identity has been used and studied extensively in a diversity of disciplines with changing historical connotations. Currently, there is an increasing interdisciplinary dialogue on identity. Several authors have reviewed this dialogue within the range of traditional and postmodern perspectives. Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, and Hallett (2003) contrasted traditional or Essentialist approaches versus postmodern or Narrativist approaches. Stewart and McDermott (2004) reviewed how identity has been understood from different theories such as: psychosocial theory, social psychology, feminist theory,

postmodern/poststructural theory, and intersectionality. According to these authors, traditional approaches propose a notion of a stable individual with an essential core identity. They embrace the perspective that identity is a stable, unchanging structure, where change is marginalized. On the other hand, postmodern approaches consider identity as transitory relational forms that bind together different life pieces. As well, they explore various ways in which identities are multiple and overlapping. The discussion between these approaches has enriched and focused the dialogue on the complexity and situational variability of individuals' identities. At the same time it has facilitated the recognition that identities are not completely stable, but shaped in social interactions.

Some developments in different perspectives on identities can be considered parallel and can frequently inform each other (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). In this section I trace what I consider compatible complementarities across several perspectives that acknowledge the importance of social processes for shaping identity. Then, I present perspectives on identity that emphasize the importance of individuals' social interactions, projects, and contextual factors because LAC women experience and undertake social processes particularly important for identity, such as: socialization to create new acquaintances, second language acquisition or improvement of language fluency, search for employment, assessment of educational credentials, job trainings, and changes in professional vocation, among others.

From an *intersectionality perspective*, health professionals need to be aware of the relation between social identities (e.g., class, race, gender, etc.) and social disparities and power dynamics that affect individuals located within social structures (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). Several authors (e.g., Ang, 2001; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990, 2000; among others), conceptualized identity as framed by the complex interrelation of notions such as: culture, power, discourse,

class, race, and gender. For example, Hall (2000) clarified that identity has been deconstructed with a critique of "the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity" (p. 15). Along this line, he described that cultural identity is 'not an essence, but a positioning', located within historical and cultural discursive practices, and controlled by a politics of position. In the same way, self-identity is shaped, situated, and interpreted by discourse, and it is constructed by adapting to discursive formations.

Diggins (2011) reviewed how Ang (2001) and Brah (1996), both immigrant women in Western countries, reflected on identity as constituted within representation and emphasized how race and gender subjectivities are outlined in different contexts. Ang (2001) –born in Indonesia of Chinese descent, grew up in the Netherlands and lives in Australia– emphasized how the act of self-representation or autobiography constructs a 'useful identity' by narrating experience and emphasizing certain qualities when communicating to others. Brah (1996) –born in Uganda of Indian descent, and lives in England– explained how the politics of self are relevant to how we perceive and imagine ourselves. She was perceived and positioned by others in different ways: in social hierarchies, as a collective subject (Asian/non-white/exiled/migrant/immigrant woman), and as individual subject (African/Indian, black/feminist). She described that experiencing how others perceived her, made her question how she perceived herself also as an individual and collective subject.

Then, according to Diggins (2011), for Ang (2001), Brah (1996), and many cultural studies theories, identity is circumscribed, shaped, and interpreted by social categories (e.g., race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.), which are interlocked in continuous negotiation. These authors understand intersectionality as a challenge to subjectification based on assumptions about these categories. My study concurs with an intersectionality perspective by emphasizing identity as

framed by the articulation of social categories and by interrogating this articulation. This process might clarify and increase awareness about social disparities and power dynamics' influence on individuals' identities.

From a *social-constructionist perspective*, and in a similar way to the previous perspective, identity is not an essence but is socially constructed out of a multitude of discourses. Burr (2003) explains that, from this perspective, identity does not initiate from inside the individual, but from the social dominion. Then, from this perspective, the person's qualities are a function of her or his specific cultural, historical, and social circumstances. In terms of their agency, individuals, according to their personal histories and life experiences, negotiate subject positions or locate themselves within particular discourses during social interaction. As follows, social constructionists do not use the word personality because this term implies that the person has fixed internal psychic structures that might regulate her or his behavior and interactions. They prefer the term identity because this concept acknowledges the social context and joint interactions of individuals.

Burr (2003) asserted that 'the self in narrative' organizes our experiences in term of stories and narrative structures. He suggested that our subjective experience tell us that we have feelings of continuity and consistency and that there is coherence to the person we are. Next, he introduced narrative psychologist Sarbin (1986), who considers that we organize and craft our events and experiences according to a theme (adventure, comedy, tragedy, etc.), and to temporal and spatial dimensions (for example, with a beginning-middle-end sequence).

In addition, Arvay (2002) explained that in *narrative theory* identities are constituted through language practices. Language is the medium through which individuals explain their lives and construct themselves and their worlds. By narrating our life experiences we open new

ways of understanding ourselves, which influences our identity and knowledge. At the same time, language practices and individuals' understanding of themselves are immersed in diverse discourses. Arvey also highlighted language as performance or talk as action, because when we speak "we perform some aspect of ourselves out into the world to be interpreted by others and ourselves" (p. 115). By narrating we perform, and then we also open possibilities to carry out our goal-directed actions.

My study concurs with a *social-constructivist* and *narrative theory* emphasis on identity as socially constructed through language practices, as well as organized in terms of stories and narrative structures. It is also in agreement with the idea that identities are open to multiple interpretations and negotiations within social contexts and relationships. However, I assert that an individual act as an integrator and a motivator of her or his identity during these interpretations and negotiations. From my point of view, the recognition of an individual's agency as an integrator of her or his experience of identity needs to go together with an acknowledgement of a circular interaction between her or his identity and sociocultural frameworks.

From a contextual *action theory perspective* on identity, Young, Marshall, and Valach (2008) understand identity as an active process where people engage, driven by goal-directed actions, and as an interactive and joint process between the individual and others in his or her social environment. These authors considered Chandler et al.'s study (2003) that reviewed how Essentialists and Narrativists understood identity, and commented on how both approaches taken to the extremes can be problematic.

From my point of view, an action theory perspective on identity does not propose a middle point between Essentialists and Narrativists, if by this point we mean something like the

interaction of a core self with a diversity of environmental factors. Young et al. (2008) clarified that action theory recognizes the mid- and long-term persistence of identity, and moreover, it acknowledges the existence of on-going processes in its construction. Then, its focus is on identity "as socially constructed through our joint action with others" (p. 6). It perceives that most meaningful actions are social, this means they occur between and among people, and the focus is on an active "on-going action that is one with relationships and culture" (p. 8).

An action theory perspective informs my exploration of identity in this study. Then, I understand identity as an active process constructed over time where individuals engage, driven by goal-directed actions, in interactive and joint processes with others in their social and cultural environments. It is important to consider that the experience of living in a new country is full of goal-directed behaviours and action-driven processes for both immigrants and host societies. For example, newcomers need to learn or acquire fluency in the official language, either English or French in Canada, create a new social network, look for employment, try to revalidate their professional credentials, and interact in general with a new social context. At the same time, the host society provides the corresponding services, generates new employments by providing these services, meets labor needs, and interacts and socializes with newcomers. These examples of goal-directed behaviours and action-driven processes (socialization, employment, and professional vocation among others) are particularly important in shaping identity.

Then, an action theory perspective on identity focuses on the social dimension of joint actions and projects, which implies "the cultural goal-directed systems of the people with whom we are concerned" (Young et al., 2008, p. 9). This theory proposes the exploration of identity in terms of the goal-directed systems of particular cultural groups and in terms of the kind of data being studied. Both identity and culture are understood in terms of processes more than in terms

of social structures. Thus, when individuals participate in different cultures –as individuals who immigrate from LA to Canada and individuals who interact with newcomers do– they also participate in cultural transformation projects that influence their identities. Then, as an action theory perspective suggests, it is relevant for my study to consider that identity is related to the kind of data being studied, and that it has to be understood in terms of the data's own epistemology.

2.2 Sense of Identity Loss and Sense of Identity Continuity

Several authors have asserted the importance of a sense of identity continuity (Frie, 2011; Chandler et al., 2003; Lopez-Damian, 2008; Moussa, 1993; Rice & Pasupathi, 2010) for maintaining well-being. Frie (2011) used a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective to reflect on a *sense of identity continuity*. He asserted that people maintain identities in inconsistent and contradictory environments; that is, that people keep *a sense of identity continuity* even in difficult situations. At the same time, Frie clarified that he understands continuity in a "limited" sense because it is also open to disturbance and can be discontinuous. Thus, identities can undergo continuous transformations, and some of these transformations, like sudden or unmanageable changes, can produce major ruptures and reconfigurations.

Frie (2011) used the work of Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to develop the notion of *prereflective self-awareness* as: "a sense of mineness, self-acquaintance, or ownership, which allows us to construct narratives and form concepts about ourselves; to deliberate and take responsibility for our actions; and to consider goals and aspirations as our own"² (p. 47). Frie

² He proposed that the nature of our prereflective self-awareness is not rational, and it is different to a reflective self-consciousness, because it is a sense of self that exists at "experiential,

proposed a *sense of identity continuity* provided by three elements: our prereflective self-awareness, our embodiment (or a bodily sense of situations in which we exist and interact), and our familiar/habitual activity or knowing-how. These elements are informed by sociocultural frameworks in a continuous circle of hermeneutic self-interpretation.³

Frie (2011) explained that with the impact of globalization and the fluidity of human experience, identity is now understood as multiple and context-bound. Multiplicity is a concept that describes the fluid nature of identity in a time of globalization and postmodernism. It also explains how people can have several, and often conflicting identities. Frie suggested that the recognition of this multiplicity needs to go together with an acknowledgment of continuity. Thus, a *sense of identity continuity* is not opposed to the concept of multiplicity, but allows for a negotiation of identity and multiplicity. In addition, citing Ricoeur (1988), Frie explains how narrative identity is built on narrative configurations, and thus, is open to modification over time. But at the same time, narratives provide a platform for temporal coherence and intelligibility because they allow us to make sense of our experiences.

embodied level and in our habitual activity in the world" (p. 47). Frie also clarifies that narratives can also be a reflection of our ongoing prereflective experience and not necessarily as a product of reflective consciousness.

³ From my point of view, this is related to the Heideggerian notion of being as being in-the-world within specific sociocultural contexts (Heidegger, 1927/1996). Thus, each individual has a socialized "knowing how" which is prereflective and allows her/him to presuppose meaning while getting around in her or his world. Along these lines, Frie talks about a hermeneutical circle of self-interpretation, where our experience of identity and the sociocultural framework interact in circular ways.

In this study, I drew from Frie's conceptual framework (2011) to initially explore and identify a *sense of identity loss and continuity* in the participants' narratives. I used the term sense of identity loss to characterize a sense of rupture and reconfiguration that decreased the individuals' mental and general well-being. Then, a sense of identity loss –as understood in this study– is problematic for the participants and they could need extended support (e.g., family, friends, health professionals, or wider society support) to resolve or cope with them. Likewise, I used the term sense of identity continuity to characterize the participants' more or less continuous sense of themselves that allowed them certain emotional stability and helped them to cope with difficult situations. This concept of sense of continuity does not exclude the concept of identity multiplicity, because individuals can keep a more or less continued sense of themselves at the same time that identities are in a continuous play with changing contextual and relational factors. For example, bicultural or multicultural individuals can keep a sense of continuity while feeling shaped and loyal to different cultures and having specific ways of behaving and living in different contexts.

In this study I use the term "sense of identity" instead of "identity" to emphasize that: First, participants' narratives provide a sense of who they are that might be temporal, contextually-bound, performed, and moreover, part of wider identities. Second, the interpretation of the participants' sense of identity loss and continuity is mine. However, I hope that this interpretation sheds some light on the women's experiences explored under the research questions and methodology of this study.

2.3 Identity in Narratives of Immigration Experiences

A number of works have used narrative research to explore the transition of immigration, such as: Arráiz-Matute (2010); Lieblich (1993); Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998); and Mangila-Nguyen (2007). Two of these research projects investigated individual and collective identity and informed my research questions. Mangila-Nguyen (2007) and Lieblich et al. (1998) explored individuals' experiencing sociocultural transitions using narrative research. Mangila-Nguyen studied help-seeking experiences and negotiation of identities of refugee women in Greater Vancouver. She also reviewed Moussa's study (1993) about the immigration experiences of Ethiopian and Eritrean women living in Toronto. In a different study, Lieblich et al. explored if individuals, born in Israel to new immigrants from Muslim countries, view themselves as continuing or discontinuing their parents' way of life.

Mangila-Nguyen (2007) used a narrative analysis to explore help-seeking experiences of 16 refugee women who immigrated to the B. C. Lower Mainland. She considered how gender, class, culture, and trauma relate to refugee women's identity and acculturation process. She concluded that the interplay of these categories was clear in the women's narratives. Gender and culture, through socialization, influenced the internalization and understanding of the women's caring roles in their homes and in their workplaces as service providers. Class or economic status "coloured" the women's expectations of help and their help-seeking strategies, for example, women who had access to formal education and were from a privileged class expected to work in their field or continue their education; also, according to their English fluency, women looked for English classes and training programs. Psychological trauma was not fully explored in the study because the set of questions focused more on the women's resilience, resistance and hopes; however, women described symptoms of trauma such as: depression, anxiety, and hyper-

vigilance.

Mangila-Nguyen (2007) used Gilligan's (1993), Moussa's (1993), and Bannerji's (1995) approaches of identity to explore the women's reconstruction of their identities in post-immigration experiences. Gilligan's (1993) proposed that a woman defines her identity in terms of her relationships or connections with others. Reflecting on this definition, Mangila-Nguyen reported that when participants were asked how they view themselves as women in Canada, most of them talked about their caring roles (mothers, wives, daughters, service providers, etc.) and described their reconstructed identities as women in relation to their children's wellbeing. Also, these women were very grateful and kept present the persons who helped them during their first critical years in Canada. Then, according to Mangila-Nguyen the women's definition of self is relational. Along this line, it is important to clarify that the majority of the participants had children: twelve participants were single mothers, two were married, and two were single. In addition, the majority probably had their care-giver role very present because they expressed how difficult it was for them to raise and provide for their children on their own, when in their countries these were also extended families' and friends' roles.

In a different study, Moussa (1993) explored the immigration experiences of 16 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women living in Toronto. She expanded the notion of relational identity by emphasizing these women's personal and collective stories, their experiences as they struggle to settle in Toronto, and their continuous and active participation in reconstructing their identities. For example, Moussa pin pointed that these refugee women negotiated their ethnic identities by forming alliances to support each other, and suggested that key traditions and self-affirming values that appear to be different from mainstream Canadian values become important for feelings of continuity or self-identity.

Moussa (1993) described how these women struggle and search to create continuity in their lives by creating meaningful links over time, from their pre-migration lives (past), to their current lives in the host country (present) and their hopes and dreams for the future. Moussa explained how refugee women experienced discontinuities, either geographic (e.g., weather and landscape), material (e.g., property, possessions and income), cultural (e.g., the key role of the extended family and mourning practices) or relational (e.g., acquaintances, communities, and institutions). She emphasized that these women cannot adapt to Canadian society uncritically when "their journey was characterized for resistance to patriarchal, cultural, racist, class, and military domination" (p. 263). These refugee women embrace discontinuity as they are eager to make a new life in Canada and be accepted and recognized as contributing members of this society, and when possible, also contributing members of their original countries.

Bannerji (1995) emphasized that we have to consider the construction and fluidity of women's identity within a process of negotiations against intersecting oppressions as racism, sexism, and classism. Along this line, Mangila-Nguyen (2007) asserted that we need to consider the role of institutions (federal and provincial government) that offer immigrant refugee women employment and educational opportunities that direct them into entry-level or minimum wage jobs. For example, she mentioned that several types of health care workers in Canada, with minimum wage salaries, are predominantly immigrant and refugee women.

Mangila-Nguyen (2007) proposed five major themes that emerged in the narratives on help-seeking experiences: finding courage to seek and establish support networks, feeling isolated and lost, being suspicious of institutional and police surveillance, engaging in volunteer work, and being thankful for bridging and training programs. Also, the women's stories were divided in three stages: settlement or the time of landing in Canada; beginning to navigate

helping systems or the struggles to survive; and flirting with integration or hope for a better life for their children and for becoming full participants in Canadian society. Mangila-Nguyen explained that 'help' for the women meant practical help to settlement, training and employment, but also emotional support particularly during their first five years in Canada. This emotional support involved to be heard and understood in terms of their many losses: loss of loved ones, loss of support networks (including extended families), and loss of friends, among others.

Mangila-Nguyen study informed my research questions about the importance of a relational identity for this group of women. As well, about how gender, class, and level of academic education influenced an understanding of the women's caring roles in their homes and workplaces, and their expectations of help and their help-seeking strategies. In addition, the reported themes that emerged in the narratives of help-seeking experiences can also informed some of the themes emerged from this study, particularly the finding courage to seek and establish support networks, feeling isolated and lost, engaging in volunteer work, and being thankful for bridging and training programs.

In a different study, Lieblich et al. (1998) conducted several content analyses with narratives of individuals born to immigrants from Muslim countries who arrived in Israel in the 1950s. The interviewers gathered the participants' life stories, and later during the interview, asked more specific questions related with their research questions (e.g., about high school memories, future life expectations, and future expectations for their children). One of the authors, Tuval-Mashiach, decided to conduct a categorical-content analysis to explore the participants' attitudes toward their family of origin and their childhood environments. She studied the life story transcripts of 36 adult participants (42 years old). One of her research questions was: "Do the participants view themselves as continuing or discontinuing their parents'

way of life, and how do they feel about this?" (p. 127).

The author reviewed the participants' life story transcripts and highlighted the subtexts where they mentioned their parents and family. Then she defined content categories with an ongoing interpretive dialogue with the text. When she began her work she formulated two major categories: perception of the parents and continuity versus change. These two broad categories were useful and stayed during the analysis, but she also had preconceived subcategories in mind that changed during the analysis. The continuity versus change category explored the degree of continuity of parental heritage and lifestyle as reflected in the narratives. However, the author clarified that "the operational definition of this concept is not simple, as almost none of our interviewees referred to this subject directly in her or her life story, and all the indexes were indirectly referred" (p. 132).

She clarified that the analysis is about a subjective continuity given that "objectively" the participants were significantly different from their parents in terms of occupation, income, family size, etc. She defined this continuity not as a dichotomy, having or not continuity, "but as a continuum composed of several indexes or subcategories. Alternatively, individuals may have a "continuity profile" based on their scores for each of these indexes". The author looked for five subcategories that emerged during the analysis of the subtexts (contribution of parents to participants' education, reference to "significant figures" that are not the parents, participants' similarity to siblings, references to family history or roots, participants and their children) in the subtexts, and then scored each subcategory between 0 and 5, according to the number of relevant references in the narrative. Then, she had a quantitative processing where she determined that 15 participants had high continuity, 7 had moderate continuity, 12 had low continuity, and 2 did not score due to lack of information. Then, in light of the participants' low "objective" continuity and

their impressive economic mobility compared to their parents, she concluded that the experienced subjective continuity of parental heritage and lifestyle was quite high.

This study informed my research questions in terms of how identity continuity was explored using a narrative analysis: the author's process to create a continuity concept in terms of the own data (e.g., by documenting the preconceived and emerging themes); and her emphasis about "subjective" and "objective" identity continuity, which highlights the participants' perspectives about how close they feel themselves to their parents' heritage in spite of "objective" differences (in terms of occupation, income, family size, etc.). Indeed, the categories that emerged suggest this identity continuity in terms of the participants' appreciation for their parents' support for education, their family history, and parenting their own kids, among others.

2.4 Identity in Narratives of Immigration of Latin American Canadian Women

Frid et al. (2002a) and Lopez-Damian (2008) used narrative research to learn about the transition of immigration of LAC women. This section focuses on these two studies that explored and considered identity issues in narratives of immigration. First, I introduce Frid et al.'s study (2002a) that explored the experiences of 25 LAC women living in Greater Vancouver, and second, I present several of Lopez-Damian's findings (2008) about the experiences of five LAC women living in Alberta. The first study, which I present in the next section, attained the narratives analyzed in my study.

Narratives of LAC women living in Greater Vancouver. Frid et al. (2002a) produced a publication based on the narratives of immigration from 25 LAC immigrant and refugee women (these are also the narratives analyzed in this current study). This publication clarified that the research had a participatory and collaborative approach, where the participants were engaged in

all the stages of the study, including the exploration of the narratives and the preparation of the project publication. In the interviews, the participants shared their immigration experiences based on a list of topics prepared by the research team (see Appendix A and B). After the interviews, several women were involved in selecting and identifying significant themes which were included in the project publication. One of the main themes was 'constructing identities', and within this, the importance of practicing awareness and social responsibility was emphasized.

Most of the stories were narrated by the participants in a chronological order: from their reasons to immigrate to struggles during their time in Canada and to their current and future projects and plans. Several probes, prepared by the research team and the participants, which guided the interviews were: reasons to emigrate, social network, impact of immigration and settlement process on personal and family lives, opportunities to participate in the new society, barriers encountered and challenges, turning points, type of support received, strategies developed to adapt to the new culture, importance attached to the preservation of the mother tongue and culture of origin, participation in community groups and activities, etc. (The complete list of probes is included in Appendix A).

A summary of the women's experiences from the interviews included the following topics: security, political, and economic conditions as factors in emigration; unexpected journeys and sorrow for those who were forced to leave their countries; language as a barrier and as a future goal; access to community services; participation in peer support groups; settlement stresses; and family dynamics (including marital relationships and children's behaviour). The three main themes of the narratives selected by the research team and by the participants were: settlement strategies, constructing identities, and aging in British Columbia (B. C.). (Frid et al.,

2002a).

Sylvia, the interviewer, and the original research team were interested in the participants' "ethnic identities" (Frid et al., 2002a). They used Stasiulis (1990) understanding of "ethnicity" as the "worldviews, traditions and practices brought by immigrants to Canada and dynamically reproduced and transformed within the Canadian context" (p. 278). The participants were explicitly asked: "how do you feel about your identity as Latina immigrant woman?" According to the project publication "a gamut of experiences around identity issues" was discovered (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 22). Several findings reported within these particular questions were: "self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging to the group, attitudes toward one's group, language use, religious practices, preference of in-group friends, and participation in ethnic organizations" (p. 22).

As clarified in the project publication, the researchers considered a definition of ethnic identity as a process that is "fluid, flexible, created, manipulated and negotiated" (Krulfeldt & Camino, 1994, p. ix). This approach was consistent with one of the project's findings that explained that the women characterized and integrated dynamic identities, diverse self-perceptions, and different cultural affiliations. It was reported that all the participants "have succeeded in retaining the supportive elements of their culture of origin while learning new instrumental cultural elements" (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 25).

Several participants experienced a process of consciousness-raising about domestic violence (that they have not had in their original countries). These women mentioned that this was very helpful to get rid "of distorted social and cultural images" (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 25). Also, the publication mentioned that many of the women had an increase in their self-esteem due to their participation in this project. The publication did not specify how this participation was

helpful to these women. I wonder if this participation also increased their self-understanding, their awareness of their strengths, their possibility of a meaningful contribution, and their group identification.

Potential limitations of this publication are: First, we do not know what criteria and process the participants followed to summarize their perspectives and experiences; the publication only describes that the presented themes were selected as highlights of the broad scope of issues that were discussed in the interviews. Second, we do not know if all of the women or a sample of them were involved in this selection process. And third, the women could have felt some pressure to give socially desirable answers, however, the questions or probes do not attempt to control for this tendency.

Narratives of LAC women in Alberta. In a different study, Lopez-Damian (2008), a Mexican immigrant woman living in Lethbridge, Alberta, used narrative research to explore how five LAI women created belonging and connection to different communities and how they used stories of change and continuity in constructing their identities. The author considered narrative research as a relational activity, and the stories were considered gifts. She used conversation, instead of more structured interviews, as a tool to explore the narratives of these women's experiences. She also used critical inquiry to search for common ground between the women's narratives and her own immigration experience. To interpret the stories she considered contextual factors such as the women's individual as well as socio-cultural situation and their relationship with the researcher. The participants were found through community networking.

Lopez-Damian (2008) emphasized that it is important to explore these narratives in the context they were shared to avoid the risk of stereotyping these stories. She clarified that the women's narratives would be different when shared at different point in times, to different

audiences, or moved by different motives. Being aware of these diverse perspectives can increase the understanding of the women's construction of a personal, flexible, and livable story.

The author emphasized identity as a construct in continuous transformation because each woman creates meaning of the experiences of change and continuity in her life, and in continuously articulating the meaning of those experiences, she also re-negotiates identity, roles, and traditions. The author also explored how belonging to different groups and communities was related with the women's identities as Canadian citizens, LAs, and immigrant women.

Lopez-Damian (2008) consulted Warren's (1986) research about the experiences and self-perceptions of immigrant women in Calgary. Warren identified transitional bridges or "situational perspectives or attitudes adopted by the women on the basis of their experience" (p. 20) that linked the old and the new, facilitated to form a new identity and contributed with a transition to a new life. Lopez-Damian looked for change and continuity in the women's stories keeping in mind Warren's concept of bridges, which allowed the women to create connections and transformations between their 'old' and 'new' cultures and ways of doing things.

For Sara, one of the women Lopez-Damian interviewed, having the possibility to continue her country's cultural ways of doing things influenced her sense of identity. Sara's cultural continuity is represented by maintaining (and transmitting to her children) her country's food and the Spanish language at home. Maria, another interviewee, decided to preserve the way LA families usually care for elderly parents: to provide support and care for them at her place instead of moving them into residential care. Making this decision contributed to her sense of identity continuity in a world of constant change.

Lopez-Damian (2008) identified what "it seems to be a certain reaffirmation of identity by comparing and contrasting 'our (old) ways,' the ways we know of doing things, with the 'new

ways,' which are norm in the new cultural context" (p. 27). The comparison and the selection to do things 'our way,' gave a sense of continuity and familiarity to these women, when there was a challenging new environment. The author identified that this sense of continuity offered comfort and a renewed sense of identity during difficult times. She also emphasized that identity change goes together with continuity, because both are linked in many ways, and each of them seems to be multifaceted.

The women mentioned a certain discovery of their self, an ability to decide and re-create themselves and make sense of their lives. They all expressed experiencing changes in many ways, such as in: family roles, the way they relate to others, careers or occupations, values and traditions, and increased self-esteem (by being able to do things in different contexts and by overcoming difficult situations). Particularly, they made decisions to preserve values and traditions, and to keep the connection with their extended families.

2.5 Concluding Comments of the Literature Review

In this study I considered compatible complementarities across several perspectives that acknowledge the importance of social processes for shaping identity. Then, I presented perspectives on identity that emphasize the importance of individuals' social interactions, projects, and contextual factors because LAC women experience and undertake social processes particularly important for identity. I reviewed the following perspectives on identity: intersectionality, social constructivist, and action theory. I particularly drew from a *contextual action theory* perspective (Young et al., 2008) to understand the term identity as an active process constructed over time, where individuals engage driven by goal-directed actions and by interactive and joint processes with others in their social environment. This perspective on

identity is relevant for my study considering that the women's immigration experiences (and the host society's experiences) are mainly driven by goal-directed behaviours and action-driven processes (socialization, employment, and professional vocation among others) that are particularly important in shaping identity.

As well, I drew from Frie's (2011) conceptual framework to inform my research questions. Frie proposed that people maintain a *sense of identity continuity*, a more or less continuous sense of themselves that allows certain stability, even in inconsistent and contradictory environments. However, Frie takes continuity in a "limited" sense because it is also open to disturbances when sudden or unmanageable changes produce major ruptures and reconfigurations. I propose that these major identity ruptures and reconfigurations can influence or create a *sense of identity loss*. A sense of identity loss or continuity is not opposed to the concept of multiplicity, which describes the fluid nature of identity in a time of globalization and postmodernism, but permits the negotiation of identity and multiplicity.

Previous research projects about immigrant women's identities have used narrative analysis of immigration experiences to explore main themes related with identity loss and continuity. This research emphasized the women's identities as dynamic, adapting, and in an on-going process of continuous negotiation with the dominant culture in the host country. These studies informed my research questions in terms of: how these women engaged in their reconstruction of their identities in post-immigration experience; how gender, class, culture, influenced their identity's reconstruction process; how a relational identity can influence the women's self-understanding in terms of relationships and connections; how tradition and values that appear to be different from mainstream Canadian values become important for feelings of continuity or self-identity; etc.

These studies also shed some light in terms of how the participants of these studies

negotiated their identities by continuously creating and articulating meaning of the experiences of change and continuity in their lives. The women expressed experiencing changes in many ways, such as in: family roles, the way they relate to others, careers or occupations, values and traditions, and increased self-esteem (by being able to do things in different contexts and by overcoming difficult situations). Making decisions (which include comparing and contrasting old and new ways) to continue specific values, traditions, ways of doing things, and connection with their extended families, contributed to these women's sense of identity continuity and familiarity in a world of constant change. For these women identity change goes together with continuity, because both are linked in many ways, and each of them seems to be multifaceted.

3. Method

This inquiry is a secondary analysis of narratives of immigration existing in the City of Richmond Archives. These narratives were brought together by a research project that interviewed 25 LAC immigrant and refugee women in 2002. This project had the objective of producing an archive with oral (tapes) and written narratives of the women's experiences of immigration. The research intention "was not to produce a comprehensive collection of oral narratives representing the perspectives of all Latin American women residents of the Lower Mainland of BC" (Frid et al., 2002a, p.2), but to collect immigration experiences that provided insights into the lives of the participants.

These testimonies are historical assets with present value. The themes expressed in these narratives might echo other individuals' experiences of transition. In other words, new experiences of immigration have meaning in a socialized context of previous experiences. Then, by reading or studying prior cases of immigration, the reader (I include myself) opens up possibilities of self-understanding and context-understanding. Therefore, these previous stories resonate and are relevant today because they can broaden horizons of comprehension of new immigration experiences.

In this chapter I first describe how I carried out my research by conducting a qualitative secondary analysis and by considering the corresponding ethical requirements. Then, I introduce the participants and the procedure followed by the original research team; here, I also clarify aspects of my translation work. Next, I explain how I conducted this study within an interpretive/ social constructivist research paradigm and present a reflective practice on my own immigration story. And finally, I introduce my categorical-content (thematic) narrative analysis and the criteria for evaluating the findings.

3.1 Secondary Analysis of Narratives of Latin American Canadian Women

In this study I conducted a secondary analysis of 25 narratives existing in the City of Richmond Archives. A secondary analysis "involves the re-use of pre-existing qualitative data derived from previous research studies. These data include material such as semistructured interviews, responses to open-ended questions in questionnaires, field notes and research diaries" (Heaton, 2008, p. 34). The use of secondary analyses was slow and sometimes controversial during the 1960s until the mid-1990s. Its current use is due to various events, such as the creation of organizations for the promotion and re-use of qualitative data, and the fact that data archives in the United States and Europe have been increasingly accepting more qualitative data sets from research studies. Secondary analyses are now a well established methodology for re-using qualitative data in social research.

The narratives of this study were brought together by a research team of LAC women counsellors and health community professionals, composed by Esther Frid, Miriam Maurer, Dora Replanski, and Norma Sanchez. These researchers planned and coordinated 25 interviews with the women in this study in 2002. They received funding by the British Columbia Heritage Trust and administrative support by Family Services of Greater Vancouver to conduct these interviews.

The transcripts of the interviews in Spanish, the English translations, the consent forms, the audio tapes, and the project publication are archived at the City of Richmond Archives. The significant themes identified in the narratives were published in a short book entitled *Immigration and identity: Life experiences of Latin American immigrant and refugee women residents of the Lower Mainland of BC* (Frid et al., 2002a). This project publication was distributed by the research team to several public libraries and agencies serving immigrant and

refugee women in Greater Vancouver (Frid et al., 2002a).

The research team did not clarify specific research questions, but stated the following project objectives:

1. To develop an oral archive with records of all the testimonies provided by twenty five Latin American immigrant and refugee women residents of the Lower Mainland of BC who have come to Canada since the 1970's.
 2. To document the impact of the immigration and settlement process on these women's lives including the strategies developed and types of support received, and
 3. To produce a publication in English and Spanish based on the oral narratives' transcripts, which will be distributed to agencies serving immigrant and refugee women as well as public libraries of the Lower Mainland.
- (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 1)

The participants' experiences of immigration happened from 1972 to 2002. The research team had the objective of producing a historical oral archive to document these experiences. In addition, researchers and participants identified significant themes in the narratives and included them in the project publication. One of the main themes identified was "constructing identities" (Frid et al., 2002a). This theme was not expanded broadly (covered in pages 22 to 26 of the project publication) due to time and financial limitations of the research team.⁴

Heaton (2008) identified five different types of secondary analysis. According to this classification, in a supra secondary analysis, "the aims and focus of the secondary study transcend those of the original research" (p. 39). I then conducted a supra secondary analysis of

⁴ The time and financial limitations were mentioned by a member of the research team, during the monthly meetings of the Latin American Professional Mental Health Workers Network (APLASM) at Family Services of Greater Vancouver, on February 23, 2012.

the 25 narratives existing in the City of Richmond Archives because my aim was to elaborate further on aspects of the "constructing identities" theme, which was previously identified but not explored deeply by the original research team. In the next section I explain important ethical requirements for my secondary analysis.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

In this study I accessed public narratives, collected with archiving purposes, which meet the ethical and legal requirements for being shared with other researchers. I used a mode of secondary analysis through *formal data sharing*. According to Heaton (2008), in this mode "researchers access datasets deposited in public or institutional archives and re-use them in secondary research" (p. 35). The narratives (transcripts of interviews conducted in 2002), the consent forms, and the audio tapes are archived at the City of Richmond Archives.

I consulted with the University of British Columbia (UBC) Office of Research Ethics if this current study required a Research Ethics Board (REB) review. This office confirmed that this study does not require a REB review because the information in public archives is protected by law or regulation, and also, because in Canada all publicly available archives have policies regarding how people can access their records. This information is based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Article 2.2, which states that: "Research that relies exclusively on publicly available information does not require REB review when: (a) the information is legally accessible to the public and appropriately protected by law; or (b) the information is publicly accessible and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy" (TCPS2, 2011, Article 2.2). This information may or may not include identifiable information.

The City of Richmond Archives has policies regarding how people can access their

records and makes sure interviewees' confidentiality is protected. Thus, the original research team and the City of Richmond Archives provided the participants of this study with informed consent and confidentiality protection. Each woman signed an informed consent form and agreed that the purpose of the project had been explained to her, that she consented to participate in the project, and that her narrative would be accessible to the public for further research. Specifically, the participants agreed with the possibility that "archives audio and written material may be used in other projects or quoted in whole or in part including but not limited to possible publication, broadcast or posting on the Internet" (Frid et al., 2002b, p. 1).

Frid et al. (2002a) clarified that "each participant was thoroughly informed about the objectives of the project, received a list of topics to review before the interview, and all of them signed informed consent. Within a framework of voluntary participation, four of the interviewees opted to use a pseudonym" (p. 2). In the consent forms, the participants could choose either to be identified by name, or to remain anonymous in the transcripts that resulted, or in any further information related to these interviews. The original research team respected the participants who wished to remain anonymous, by using their pseudonyms in the transcripts and in the project publication. I read all the transcripts and verified that only pseudonyms were used in these anonymous transcripts. In my study I kept the participants' pseudonyms and, to further protect the identities of all participants, I used pseudonyms for all of them. Finally, participants did not consent to be contacted by a different interviewer; therefore, to respect their autonomy, I did not contact them to participate in this new inquiry.

3.3 Participants

According to Frid et al. (2002a), the 25 participants were chosen from a list provided by LA health and settlement community workers and other persons of the Spanish-speaking community. The selection criteria was that participants were born in a LA country, have immigrated to Canada after 1972, and have lived in the Lower Mainland of B. C. at least for four years and up to a maximum of 30 years (the number of years prior to the date of the interviews). In particular, 7 (28%) had lived between 4 and 10 years in this area and 18 (72%) had lived between 11 and 30 years.

For the majority, Canada was the second country in which they lived. The participants had in common Spanish as their first language, and could share several sociocultural characteristics, for example, religious beliefs and family dynamics, influenced by sometimes similar historical, economic, and political contexts. They were also selected considering their availability for the interviews. The majority of the adult participants worked providing services, such as settlement, support, and health education services.

Simultaneously, participants also constituted a heterogeneous group. They belonged to various economic classes and had different socio-cultural and educational backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 17 to 88 years. They were 19 adults, 2 seniors, and 4 teenagers when they arrived in Vancouver, and 17 adults, 7 seniors, and 1 teenager when they were interviewed in 2002. They were born in ten LA countries: El Salvador (7 participants), Honduras (3), Colombia (3), Argentina (3), Mexico (2), Guatemala (2), Chile (2), Peru (1), Bolivia (1), and Uruguay (1). They had various motives for immigration and different immigration categories: 11 of the women immigrated sponsored by their families (husbands, children, and other relatives) in the

family category, 10 came as refugees, 3 with tourist visa, and 1 with a special work visa.⁵

Several of the refugee women came with a special program organized by the Canadian Government to give protection to those who needed to leave their countries.⁶

Several participants expressed in their narratives being grateful with some members of the research team because they had received support services (such as counselling or settlement support) from them several years ago. Other participants expressed being acquaintances of people who used or knew about these services. These previous experiences of trust and gratitude might have influenced the interviewees' conversations to be more fluid, engaged, and trusting. For example, one participant, who had met the interviewer before and did not know who was going to interview her, expressed: "I am very happy that it's been with you [the interview] because I've felt very comfortable and trusting."⁷ Then, it is important to acknowledge the richness and uniqueness of these stories, which a new or unfamiliar researcher to the women probably could not have elicited.

At the same time, several women could have felt some pressure to give socially desirable answers. The interview questions or probes do not attempt to control for a tendency of social desirability. Therefore, some of the responses might emphasize achievements or minimize problems or family issues. Then, in my study, when the women expressed previous contact with a member of the research team, I was attentive of how social desirability could have influenced

⁵ I attained these categories of immigration according to the information in the narratives.

⁶ See Appendix C and D for a summary of the participants' demographic information and descriptive statistics.

⁷ In Spanish: "Estoy muy contenta que haya sido contigo [la entrevista] porque me he sentido muy comfortable y con confianza."

their answers. As well, I was very attentive of my interpretation of these answers.

3.4 Procedure

The participants were interviewed once and the interviews lasted between one to two hours. The interviews were conducted in Spanish by Sylvia Rossell-Ferrari from March to June, 2002. Sylvia was born in Guatemala and immigrated with her family to B. C. in 1985. She volunteered with MOSAIC as an interpreter for immigrant and refugee women and coordinated the Refugee Assistant Program at the Hispanic Catholic Mission. In the project publication, Sylvia clarified that "What I did not realize was that by interviewing these 25 women I would be re-living my own experience as an immigrant. At times I identified myself with people and situations; other times I was fascinated by the strength and determination evident in the stories [...]" (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 3).

A list of topics (included in the Literature Review section) was prepared to guide the interviews. The interviews were semistructured around these topics to give participants the opportunity to introduce important topics for them. As well, this original study was conceptualized with a qualitative collaborative approach, which involved the participants as active partners in all the stages of the study. For example, the participants "proposed names of other women to be interviewed, outlined and selected interview topics, reviewed transcripts and selected quotes to include in the publication" (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 2).

The original research team provided transcripts of the interviews in Spanish and their English translations to the City of Richmond Archives. The name(s) of the English translator(s) was not provided. From my point of view, the translation work was very good; however, sometimes idiomatic expressions and local emphasis were not translated correctly. In my study, I

did all my reading and narrative analysis with the transcripts in Spanish, but I consulted the English translations for the quotes included in this document. I then reviewed and used the quotes in English but I used my own translation when I considered that I could contribute with a more appropriate translation.

From my perspective, the original study's narrative research (as explained in the project publication) explored the narratives considering that there are plural realities and not one correct reading of a text (Lieblich et al., 1998). This research approach is also in agreement with my research perspective, interpretive/social constructivist, which considers that meaning is interpreted and co-constructed through interaction and tries to rely as much as possible on the participants' views (Creswell, 2009; Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

3.5 Research Perspective

I conducted this study within an interpretive/social constructivist paradigm because meaning was co-constructed through interaction between me, the researcher, and each woman's narrative, and between the participants and the interviewer.⁸ I explored narratives as interpretations of relational, dialogical and contextual realities. As well, I worked under a philosophical hermeneutics approach because I looked for a deeper understanding by reflecting and broadening my own perspective or horizon of comprehension, in an intent to meet and comprehend the women's perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

When I first read the participants' narratives two years ago, I was inspired to further

⁸ In this study, I understand co-construction as the creation of meaning or knowledge when there are communicative interactions. Then, from my point of view, I (as reader and researcher) co-constructed meaning by engaging in an interaction with the participants' narratives.

explore their immigration experiences. As an immigrant woman with a LA and Mexican background, living in Vancouver for more than five years, these stories resonated with me. From my perspective, my immigration experience has various similarities with the participants' experiences. Thus, I probably understood empathically some aspects of these experiences. However, to respect the uniqueness of each participant's story, I needed to be aware and make explicit how my own values, personal beliefs, and expectations could influence the analysis and interpretation of the stories presented. Each and every woman experienced and shared her story in a different way, and recounted memories of similar events with variations. Thus, each woman made sense of identity losses and continuities in relation to her own immigration experience.

A reflective practice on my own immigration narrative helped me to understand how I constructed meaning of a sense of identity loss and continuity within my own experience. I achieved this reflexivity by writing a short narrative of my immigration experience and by answering in written form the list of questions used by the original project. Then, I identified in my answers my main sense of identity loss and continuity. This practice provided me with awareness of how my own circumstances, values, and personal beliefs could influence my co-construction of meaning and interpretation of the participants' narratives. Simultaneously, it also increased my awareness of the uniqueness of each participant's experience.

I did the previous reflective exercises after reading the participants' narratives. This prior reading probably influenced the order and topics I included in my own narrative. I was moved and impressed with the women's challenges and achievements, so I was probably more eager to include these aspects in my own narrative. I included some of my reflections about my own immigration story in the next section.

3.6 My Immigration Story

I am a woman. I grew up in Mexico. I am from Latin America. I now live in Canada. I will receive Canadian citizenship in a few weeks. While being a woman means some things in a Mexican countryside, it means other things in Mexico City, and other one in Vancouver. And the same goes on for the other categories. I am continuously juggling meanings about how I experience myself and others.

Narratives help. They help to imagine, create, and give meanings and possibilities to reality. Some narratives stay, other travel longer, other vanish. Narratives share parts of wider identities, they introduce senses of identity. My immigration experience can influence how I understand other women's narratives and their sense of identity loss and continuity. I then present a short story of my immigration experience and the main sense of identity loss and continuity that I experienced in Vancouver after I arrived in 2006.

My husband and I moved from Mexico City to Canada four months after thinking about it. He applied and arrived with a student visa and a Teaching Assistantship to study for a Ph.D. I arrived with a work permit (granted by the Canadian Embassy because I was partner of a graduate student) and with the goals of finding a meaningful job and experiencing a new culture. In Mexico I finished a thesis, graduated, closed work, apartment, and said goodbye to friends and family in a few months. I did not have time to familiarize myself with the Canadian culture and its labour market –neither was this within my perception of priorities in a rather spontaneous plan of immigration (however, a Canadian friend who was living in Mexico, gave us an introduction to Canadian life and culture). Once in Canada, I landed in a quiet city surrounded by beautiful nature. I also landed in one of Vancouver's employment realities, 'the upgrading of professional credentials.' I realized that I needed to update my credentials as an Engineer and

take further training which I could not afford as an international student.

Then, my husband and I decided to apply for the Canadian Permanent Residency in the category of skilled workers. As a permanent resident, I had access to affordable education. At the same time, we were scared and worried about the lack of social safety in Mexico related with the War on Drugs policy, adopted by the Mexican Government. My family, as many Mexican families, was threatened several times and was living with the uncertainty of violence. Finally, my husband and I acquired Canadian residency in 2009.

Back to my experience in Mexico, I come from a farming family that was displaced several times by the lack of safety related with drug-trafficking violence and by difficult socio-economic circumstances related with the adverse effects of climate change and NAFTA imports. I might have benefited from my parents' skills to adapt to different environments. However, it was tough to observe in the various places where my parents lived, that many women did not have a voice in family decisions and had to depend on men's income and resolutions. My desire to find and have my own voice and to contribute financially to my family motivated me to get a University degree, which for me meant the possibility of exploring new worlds, but mainly, of being economically independent. After my graduation in Monterrey, an industrial city with terrible racism and social differences, I had a work opportunity as an Engineer in Mexico City. Then, I discovered a more diverse city, which also had more employment opportunities that were not determined mostly by the color of people's skin, gender, and social class.

When I arrived to Vancouver, I started looking for a job in my two areas of studies, Engineering and Liberal Arts Studies. I just had finished a Master thesis in LA Studies about the reconstruction of childhood memories in semiautobiographical narratives. My heart was for working with individuals and having face-to-face contact with people. During my first five

months in Vancouver I worked in several subsistence jobs. At this time I met immigrant professional people who had been working in entry-level jobs for long periods. They had families to support and did not have the resources (time or money) to update their credentials. This was one of my challenging periods in Vancouver: it was difficult to see their lack of opportunities, and to experience my own uncertainty. I found myself wondering if I would be able to achieve in Canada what I had achieved before, and what efforts the process would take.

Before coming to Vancouver I moved many times. As a child I lived with my family in different places in Mexico. Then, I moved to a bigger city to study my University degree. Later, with financial assistance from trainings and scholarships, I lived in Norway, Houston, Madrid, and Mexico City. I have been fortunate to experience several cultural encounters, enjoy different worldview perspectives, and question parts of my identity. However, this is the first time that I am acting on the possibility of living more permanently in another country besides Mexico, and that I have the opportunity to reflect how I have changed in the last seven years while living in Vancouver.

After five months of immigrating to Vancouver, I was offered a job in an area of my interest: providing health information to women who were in prison and that were doing research in how to improve incarcerated women's health. Several of these women were also writing their life stories. I accepted the position and stayed in this Participatory Action Research project and various community projects at UBC for about three years. Then I applied and was accepted into the UBC Counselling Psychology Master Program. Studying in this program has been an existential experience in terms of personal discovery and discovery of other people.

When I started listening and reading stories of immigrants in Vancouver, I was deeply moved by their experiences full of challenges, achievements, and personal processes. Sometimes

they had the resources to resolve difficult situations, and sometimes they found or created alternative ways by reinforcing acceptance and resilience. Some of my beliefs that might influence my interpretation of the narratives of the women in this study are: immigrant women in Vancouver, particularly those who have children, need more initial support in terms of accessing fair income employment, job trainings, and formal education; immigrants, their families and communities may highly benefit from the resources (e.g., time, space, means, and relationships) to understand and grieve losses and identity transformations that they might face as a result of living in a new context; and immigrants contribute very much to the Canadian society in terms of their work, volunteer job, and community building efforts, among others.

As part of my reflective practice for this study, besides writing a narrative of my immigration experience, I also answered, in written form, the same questions that the participants answered. The main sense of identity loss that I identified in my own answers was "the loss of my voice" in terms of losing confidence expressing my points of view. I understand that this loss of voice was related with various challenges at work and with the difficulties to change things facing the increase of violence in Mexico.

After my first five months in Vancouver, I was very motivated and started working in a project that was meaningful for me. I became a Research Coordinator in this project, which involved complex directions and logistics. However, after two and a half years into this project, I started feeling overwhelmed. I was working extra hours to compensate the feeling that 'I was new to Canada' and that I probably needed more time than local people to understand the challenges in the project. As time passed, I started lacking strength to express my points of view. This was happening at the same time that the 'War on Drugs' violence was increasing in Mexico and my family was being threatened. Then, I started becoming depressed.

When I became aware of this, I looked for counselling support for the first time in my life. To have a person that I could trust to talk about my fears and insecurities, and to explore my strengths and possibilities was a major life changing experience. I started recovering my confidence, my sense of being an independent woman, who has a voice and can express herself. To receive counselling support was a helpful and empowering experience. It was one of the experiences that motivated me to study counselling. I also wanted to be better prepared to work in complex projects and to support more the people served by these projects.

My main sense of identity continuity that I have strengthened in Vancouver is that I have continuously learned to adapt and be open to possibilities and challenges in life. I appreciate many people's presence and generosity: I have been fortunate to continuously enjoy the support of the people who surrounds me and, particularly, Josema's company and generosity. In Vancouver I have experienced changes, gained skills, and reinforced strengths. Some of these experiences include: more aware and flexible styles of communication (more assertive and adapting styles), my first depression (or acknowledged depression), my first counselling experiences and the importance of looking for help when this is needed, new understandings of loneliness and increased appreciation of relationships, increased understanding of more individual agentic ways of living, and increased emotional and cognitive self-awareness, among others. I continue to learn how to ground myself in my historicity and in the beauty and strength that surrounds me.

3.7 Narrative Analyses

As I mentioned in the Literature Review, previous studies (e.g., Arraiz-Matute, 2010; Frid et al., 2002a; Lieblich, 1993; Lieblich et al., 1998; Lopez-Damian, 2008; and Mangila-

Nguyen, 2007) have used narrative research for exploring particular periods in the life cycle, such as transition to adulthood, fatherhood, different career, and immigration. According to Lieblich et al. (1998), narrative analyses examine narrative material to obtain unique and rich data that can be studied along multiple dimensions, such as: content, form, values and beliefs of the narrator, and interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer. As well, each narrative is influenced by diverse factors such as: the context within which is narrated, the personal goals of the interviewee when narrating the story, and the mood of the narrator and of the interviewer.

I have chosen a narrative analysis method because it suits my research questions and research perspective, which is positioned within an interpretative/social constructivist paradigm. The narrative analysis method allows exploring in an open manner: stories that develop and change through time, emphasis of past and current actions, and interpretations of transformations and continuity (Lieblich et al., 1998). Then, it provides researchers with access to individuals' identities and with how they construct meaning to their experiences. It also takes into account that participants construct identities in the act of storying their experiences (Arvey, 2001, 2002, 2003; Lieblich et al., 1998).

3.8 Categorical-Content (Thematic) Analysis

The narrative data was collected through interviews conducted in Spanish, thus the transcripts of these interviews constitute the text for the analysis. The text analysis was based on Lieblich et al.'s (1998) typology of narrative analysis, which introduces four modes of narrative analysis based on two aspects: holistic vs. categorical, if the focus is on the whole or part of a narrative; and content vs. form, if the focus is on what is said or how it is said. I used a categorical analysis to explore narratives that describe a specific period of time, the immigration

experience, and to focus on two major broad categories: sense of identity loss and sense of identity continuity. Later in the analysis, I also formulated subcategories within these categories. In addition, I used a content analysis versus a form analysis because I was interested in what the participants said and not in how they said it.

In this study, I drew from Frie's (2011) reflection on identity continuity to initially explore and identify a *sense of identity loss and continuity* in the participants' narratives. I used the term a sense of identity loss to characterize a sense of rupture and reconfiguration that decreased the individuals' mental and general well-being. Then, a sense of identity loss –as understood in this study– was problematic for the participants and they needed extended support (e.g., family, friends, and health professionals support) to resolve or cope with it.

Likewise, I used the term sense of identity continuity to characterize the women's more or less continuous sense of themselves that allowed them certain emotional stability and helped them to cope with difficult situations. This concept of sense of continuity does not exclude the concept of identity multiplicity, because individuals can keep a more or less continued sense of themselves at the same time that identities are in a continuous play with changing contextual and relational factors. These two major categories, sense of identity loss and sense of identity continuity, were helpful and stayed during the analysis.

In this study I use the term "sense of identity" instead of "identity" to emphasize that: First, participants' narratives provide a sense of who they are that might be temporal, contextually-bound, performed, and moreover, part of wider identities. Second, the interpretation of the participants' sense of identity loss and continuity is mine. However, I hope that this interpretation sheds some light on the women's experiences explored under the research questions and methodology of this study.

This categorical-content (thematic) analysis was adapted from Arvay's Collaborative Narrative Method (2003), which considers the Lieblich et al.'s (1998) typology of narrative analysis. I used an abridged approach to Arvay's method as a reflexive monitoring of my reading and interpretation. As suggested by this method, I conducted multiple and separate interpretative readings of each individual transcript to guide my analysis. These chronological readings were guided by my research questions and guiding questions (related to the research questions). This content analysis adapted Arvay's method in that I did not include the stages of collaborative interviews and collaborative revisions of the themes that this method requires. It was not possible to include these stages with this secondary analysis because I did not contact the participants who were interviewed.

I conducted a *preliminary reading*, where I read the narratives, one after the other, to get a general overview of the women's experiences. After this, I conducted four main readings of each individual narrative. In my *first reading*, I focused on the content to get an understanding of each immigration experience. This reading was guided by questions such as: Who is telling the story? What are the main happenings, pre and post-immigration to Canada? What are some previous and current challenges that this woman has confronted or is confronting? How has she dealt with or is dealing with these challenges? What are some opportunities that she has expressed?

In my *second reading*, I focused on my first research question: What did participants mention about themselves when they were asked about how do they feel about their identities and their identities as Latina women? Other sub-questions that guided this research question were: What are the main elements that the participants mentioned about their identities? What is it important for each woman within the context of this question? What group identities does she

choose (e.g., gender, LA, Canadian, immigrant group, activist group, etc)? What elements reinforce her sense of identity? How does she feel about her identity?

In my *third reading*, I focused on my second research question: Is there a sense of identity loss present in the women's narratives? And if so, how do they construct it? Other sub-questions that guided this research question were: Are there major changes (e.g., sudden or unmanageable changes) in each woman's experiences that feel like rupture and have not been integrated in the way she describes herself? Are there absences of a continuous sense that allows certain stability of herself? Are there processes interrupted that cannot be continued or goals that were not reached? Does the participant present herself in a completely different way? And if so, does she make sense of this different way? Does she relate more to on-going or previous projects? Do these projects relate to how she describes herself?

In my *fourth reading*, I focused on my third research question: Is there a sense of identity continuity present in the women's narratives? And if so, how do they construct it? Other sub-questions that guided this research question were: Is there a continuous sense of herself that allow certain stability to each woman? Are there major changes in the woman's experiences that she has integrated in the way she describes herself? Has she changed because of her immigration experiences and, if so, how has she changed? What has she learned about herself during her immigration experience? What does this woman want to make of herself? What does she have or not have to reach these goals? Is the story told with continuity? Does the story move to where the person wants to go, or does it move away in another direction? How does this person develop a sense of continuity? What qualities contribute to create this sense of continuity? Is this sense of continuity empowering for her and, if so, how is it empowering?

I selected and separated subtexts in each narrative that described the participant's sense of

identity loss and continuity. I sorted this material, separated and selected passages relevant to the research questions, and assigned and coded them into relevant categories or emergent themes by comparing passages with these themes. Once I had a pre-final theme selected, I drew further insights by comparing the commonalities between this theme and the theoretical framework for this study. Based on this continuous comparison I established final themes. I drew meanings from these main themes to generate and organize insights and observations. These reflections compiled the main findings and discussions of this research and answered to my research questions.

3.9 Criteria for Evaluating the Findings

I reviewed the qualitative reliability, in other words, the consistency of my research approach. As suggested by several authors (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007; Yin, 2003), I followed several reliability procedures. First, I listened to three random audio tapes to review the fidelity of the transcripts and correct any mistakes made during transcription.⁹ These three transcripts were correctly transcribed and I did not correct any mistake. Second, I documented the steps conducted in the thematic analysis for each narrative, for example, if I generated a new guiding question, I clarified how this question was considered important. As well, I maintained constant the meaning of the codes during the coding process.

I also reviewed the validity or accuracy of the qualitative findings by using both clarification of researcher bias and expert debriefing (Creswell, 2009). First, as part of the clarification of researcher bias, prior in this Method section, I articulated both my research

⁹ These audio tapes were facilitated under supervision of the archivist at the facilities of the City of Richmond Archives.

perspective, and my immigration story that describes some of the values and bias that I bring to this study. Second, for the expert debriefing, I consulted if the findings are valid from the standpoint of two readers, who are knowledgeable persons in this area.

I introduced my research perspective and my immigration story to my two readers and gave them a copy of my findings. My two readers were: Esther Frid, MA in Clinical Psychology, and a family counsellor who has worked with immigrants and refugees during the last 20 years; and Andrea Sola, currently finishing a MA in Counselling Psychology, and a trauma counsellor, who has worked with immigrants and refugees during the last ten years. Both of them are LAC women, speak Spanish, and have their professional counselling practice in Greater Vancouver. Andrea Sola was not familiar with the narratives of this study, then she provided an outsider perspective. Esther Frid was part of the research team that conducted the interviews in 2002, then she provided an insider perspective. Potential bias to previous findings was not an issue with the insider perspective because my supra-secondary analysis of the narratives focused on different identity aspects (loss and continuity) compared to the original main theme "constructing identities," identified by the research team in 2002.

I gave the readers two random narratives in Spanish and used a rich and thick written description to communicate them my findings. I asked them to consider the following criteria: (1) Comprehensiveness: From her perspective, I asked if there was anything missing (in terms of a sense of identity loss and continuity)? (2) Correspondence: Do the thematic results correspond with the women's narratives? and (3) Pragmatic value: From her perspective, are these findings useful to counsellors working with LAI? I met individually with each reader to debrief their answers and suggestions. Both readers agreed that the study provided a comprehensive analysis of the women's narratives and that the thematic results corresponded with the women's

narratives. They also agreed that these findings are helpful to counsellors working with LA immigrants. They both also gave me suggestions in relation to question one. Esther emphasized the importance of clarifying that the women's sense identity loss and continuity are related with the number of years they had lived in Canada. I clarified to her that I had already elaborated on this in the Discussion section, and, that I would add a suggestion to further explore this relation in the section Suggestions for Future Research of this document (which I included it). Andrea suggested that family dynamics (e.g., conflicting parenting, traditional gender roles, separation and divorce) could be explored as part of the main participants' sense of identity loss and continuity as the participants' perceptions about their parenting roles were transformed within the Canadian context. I clarified to Andrea that a few participants elaborated on family dynamics in terms of conflicting parenting and change of roles, but that I certainly saw the relevance of these role changes in the women's identities. Therefore, I also suggested in the section Suggestions for Future Research to further explore how changes in family roles and dynamics are problematic or helpful for LAC women with children.

4. Findings

It was very difficult, especially because of the language. I was lost here, lost, automatically lost. So, little by little... I saw things here like strange. Little by little I created my space [...] I wanted to be strong and courageous.

Manucha, who painted a Chasqui, a representative of communication, in a diversity mosaic.¹⁰

From the time I was a little girl, I have always been very courageous for adventure. Azul, a participant.¹¹

In this chapter I report the findings that answered my research questions. These findings constitute the main identified themes that emerged from my categorical-content thematic analysis of the narratives of immigration of a group of Latin American Canadian women.

Through four readings of each individual narrative, I selected subtexts relevant to the research questions, and through multiple readings of the subtexts I coded the information in convergent themes. First, I present the findings about how the women appreciated and felt proud of their identities and their identities as Latina women. These findings emerged directly from a narrative

¹⁰ In Spanish: "Fue muy difícil, especialmente por el lenguaje. Estaba yo perdida aquí, perdida, automáticamente perdida. Entonces, poquito a poco, miraba las cosas, así como extrañas aquí. Poquito a poco me hice de ambiente [...] quería ser fuerte y valiente." Manucha, quien pintó un Chasqui, un representante de la comunicación, en un mosaico sobre la diversidad.

¹¹ Yo desde pequeña fui muy valiente para la aventura. Azul, una participante.

analysis of two interviewer questions: How do you feel about your identity? Or how do you feel about your identity as Latina women?

Second, I introduce the main participants' sense of identity loss: Loss of their voices and the fear of speaking, loss of their relational and group identities, loss of their self-confidence as a result of emotional and physical trauma, and loss of their student and professional identities. And third, I introduce the main participants' sense of identity continuity: Continuity of their capacity to open doors and construct meaning in life, continuity of their strength and other values to overcome obstacles, continuity of their professional identities and skills, and continuity by preserving certain elements of their original LA culture. These second and third findings are the main themes that emerged from a selection of subtexts from the narratives. The subtexts were selected according with two major categories: sense of identity loss and sense of identity continuity.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, in this study I use the term "sense of identity" instead of "identity" to emphasize that: First, the participants' narratives provided a sense of who they are that might be temporal, contextually-bound, performed, and moreover, part of wider identities. Then, it is important to keep in mind that these stories might be different when shared at different points in times and circumstances. Second, the interpretation of the participants' sense of identity loss and continuity is mine. This interpretation is focused on specific categories and guided by particular research questions. The women constructed many other aspects of a flexible and livable story that were not considered in this study.

I used pseudonyms to protect the participants' confidentiality. In the consent forms, brought together by the research team members who planned the interviews in 2002, the participants could choose either to be identified by name or to remain anonymous in the

narratives that resulted. "Within a framework of voluntary participation, four of the interviewees opted to use a pseudonym" (Frid et al., 2002a, p. 2). In this study, to further increase confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for all of the participants. In relation to the quotes included in this chapter, the reader may find the Spanish original quotes in Appendix E.

4.1 We Appreciate Who We Are and Where We Are From

In this section I present the participants' perceptions about their identities and identities as Latina women to identify their important elements of identity and to introduce how they might see or locate themselves when they narrate their experiences of immigration. First, I introduce how the women described their identities in terms of various elements, such as: several affiliations and processes, their nationalities and cultures of origin, prior and new understandings of achievements, relationships, gender positions, and current projects to reach their goals. Second, I present the participants' positioning of feeling proud and happy (and not unmotivated, indifferent, or disempowered) about their identities. From my perspective, it is important to understand this positioning because it may influence their understandings of their sense of identity loss and continuity. At the same time, this positioning is influenced and situated within the context of a multicultural society that is currently incorporating immigrants from all over the world.

Sylvia, the interviewer, asked the majority of the participants (19 out of 25) either: How do you feel about your identity? Or how do you feel about your identity as a Latina woman? Seven women were asked the first question and twelve, the second, more specific question. These questions were posed in the last part of the interview and incorporated some of the women's insights from the first part. A main theme emerged from these questions: We appreciate

who we are and where we are from. The participants also expressed diverse ways of understanding their identities or their identities as Latina women.

The participants (n=19) expressed feeling happy, proud, or satisfied either with their identity or with their identity as Latina women. The majority (14, n=19) expressed that they appreciated being from their places of origin and accepted being identified as Latinas or called themselves Latinas. Five mentioned feeling happy with their nationalities or feeling Salvadorian, Honduran, Bolivian, etc. Two participants clarified that they did not like the word Latinas and preferred their nationalities; two expressed being citizens of the world; and one mentioned feeling proud of being Mapuche, her indigenous group. Even though it was not included in the original question, several women also expressed feeling happy of being Canadians or living in Canada. For some women this exploration involved identifying what they appreciated or have incorporated from their experience in Canada.

The interviewer asked seven participants the more open question "How do you feel about your identity?" (Compared to the more specific question about their identity as Latina women). These participants mentioned feeling proud of diverse elements important for their identities: original nationalities, having dual or several nationalities, having several simultaneous affiliations, who they are, what they (or they and their families) have accomplished, and their racial characteristics. For example, Josefa explained that her identity has evolved and that her several nationalities, Latina, Jewish, and Canadian, enrich her life:

I look back to the day I got to Canada and to this day, what has changed is that my identity is richer than before. One of the things that I have learned is that one should never stop being the person that one is and that the richness of each person consists precisely in the differences between us. The fact that I am Latina makes my life richer

because of the many things that I learned or were given to me by that culture. The fact that I am Jewish makes my life richer because it has given me a lot of spiritual guidance. Now, the fact that I am also Canadian is something that has made my life richer because I enormously value the freedom in which we live, the democracy in which we live. I value the fact of being able to go to Stanley Park and see the beauty of nature around me, and to have peace and live in an egalitarian society. In that sense, I think we are in a much better position than in our Latin American countries, where the women continues to struggle, but women have the right to demand equality in all fields.¹

This participant acknowledged that her identity has evolved and been enriched by having diverse nationalities. This has enhanced her life in different aspects that she values. Then, Josefa appreciates that her identity is dynamic or evolving, but at the same time, it is also important to be "the person one is" and to respect the differences between one and others. She also reflected on "better positions" considering the unequal social women's conditions in LA compared to women's conditions in Canada. Josefa advocated for women's "equality in all fields."

Another participant, Caro, mentioned feeling proud of her racial characteristics. She explained that she is often asked where is she from due to her black hair, thick lips, and accent. She said "I like to be me, that people know that I am Latina"² and asserted that she wants to keep the previous characteristics because they identify her. A different participant, Maribel, expressed being confused sometimes and feeling fulfilled in what she is other times: "Well, sometimes I am lost (laughs). But sometimes I feel realized in being what I am. I haven't lost my identity as Honduran. It is the first point of pride I have, but I also love Canada very much."³ Besides referring to her identity as "what she is," she also mentioned both her original nationality and her appreciation of Canada. Another participant, Victoria, mentioned feeling happy and grateful with

what she has and with accomplishing what she is today. She is grateful to God for helping her "to accomplish all what I am today and all I have, which are my children, my health, my work, my security, and the peace which we enjoy here in Canada."⁴ Then, she emphasized what she is today and important assets for her identity, which included her children, health, work, and the safety she now enjoys.

Other participants expressed several affiliations. For example, Patricia acknowledged having dual nationality and being an immigrant woman: "First of all, I am Salvadorian, Salvadorian-Canadian, because I have lived here for so many years, and (laughs) obviously I am an immigrant woman."⁵

As well, another participant, Sara, expressed that she feels LA, citizen of the world, and does not feel Canadian. She identified herself with children of immigrants in terms of not knowing what the Canadian culture is. She is a permanent resident of Canada and has lived nine years in Vancouver.¹²

How do I feel? Well, you've heard the famous phrase about being a citizen of the world, which is how I feel a bit. I couldn't say that I feel Canadian necessarily because I am not and will never be it. I don't have... I am not like that. I have other patterns of behaviour. Then, I feel more Latin American, which is my identity. At this time, with some things from this society, but I haven't incorporated them to say that I feel Latin-Canadian. No, I would say, rather, that I feel very happy, that I feel Canada as my second home land, but I can't say I feel Canadian in the least. I feel Latin American, in every sense Latin American, in the way I am, in the way I act, in the way I think, and yes, I can say that

¹² Sara is an activist who has done a lot of work in Human Rights in LA. She mentioned that she was about to start an application for the Canadian citizenship at the time of the interview.

little by little, I begin to acquire things from this culture. One of my videos, it was about children of immigrants. It is a very short one that I made. For them it was also difficult to identify themselves, even after having grown up in this culture, because it is not known what the Canadian culture is. There isn't, like there are the Chinese people, there are the Hindus, we are there, there's such a vast mixture that I wouldn't be able to say what it is. Maybe that could make it difficult for someone to feel Canadian or Latin-Canadian. Then, yes, thinking and thinking about it, I would say I feel like a Latin American living in Canada, and very happy to live here at this time.⁶

Thus, Sara considers that it is not known what the Canadian culture is, but a mix of cultures. As she mentioned, this understanding might influence her not to feel Canadian or Latin-Canadian. At the same time, she noticed that her ways of being, acting, and thinking makes her not to feel Canadian. She has highlighted before in the interview several cultural differences between what she was used to in Argentina and what she has experienced in Canada, such as: ways of communication, ways of creating relationships, and ways of connecting to family. However, she also observed that she has not incorporated some things but has adapted others: "I can say that perhaps little by little I have things of this culture." Then she suggested that, as time passes, her identity is evolving by preserving ways of being and by incorporating "more things" of the Canadian culture.

Sylvia asked Sara if she considers that the presence of cultural groups (e.g., Chinese, Hindus, and LA) is related with the respect that Canada has for the determination of people as a social group to preserve their customs. Sara answered yes, that the multiculturalism in Greater Vancouver is related with Canada allowing each group to develop its own culture. She hopes that Canada continues to do this in the same way because the problem of racism also happens when

countries want people to "change from one day to the next" and do not respect people's original cultures.

The interviewer asked 12 participants the more specific question "How do you feel about your identity as a Latina woman?" (Compared to the prior more open question "How do you feel about your identity?"). The majority of the participants mentioned feeling proud of being Latina, woman, and immigrant woman. At the same time, these participants observed that they were also aware that their original cultures can be improved. For example, Victoria expressed: "I feel proud of all we are and have. As other human beings, we also have many things that we would like not to have; however, we have to accept the way we are and try everyday to improve ourselves."⁷ Another participant, Debra, also expressed that all cultures can be improved and that "one of the barriers is to idealize a culture, [...] this doesn't allow us to see in an objective way the positive part in both, as well, as putting all negative in the culture we left or in the one we arrived."⁸

Several women also emphasized the importance of being open and respectful to people from other nationalities. They expressed their awareness about avoiding preferring people in terms of their nation, class, or other categories. They were active to have a voice about increasing cultural diversity at their work places and socializing with people from different places. They also emphasized having empathy for immigrants from all over the world and being happy to work among them. For example, Lucia expressed that she feels proud of her roots and of being a Canadian. But at the same time, she is aware of how nationalisms can be dangerous and how important it is to avoid them. She emphasized the importance of valuing other cultures and of looking beyond group's needs (family, group of friends, and countries) to see the broader society's needs or the world's needs. Another participant, Juana, mentioned: "It is important to

preserve it [her identity as Latina] because I appreciate who I am and where I am from. [...] It doesn't matter which country one is from, but one is Hispanic and one is always representing."⁹ She lives in a multicultural community where she sticks out as Latina. For her it is important to represent her culture doing things well. However, honourably representing the own culture is not exclusive for Latinas, as she believes that everyone in her multicultural community can also represent their culture with pride.

In addition, half of the participants (6, n=12) talked about being a woman. Lucia expressed her affiliations as: "I feel proud of being woman, of being Latina, and of being Latino-Canadian."¹⁰ Claudia expressed feeling comfortable as a woman who stopped her husband's control and abuse. She recovered her strength to be herself again and to educate and create awareness about women's rights. She is also active about stopping discrimination. She mentioned that she has been discriminated by LA because "she does not look Latina," and explained that LA can be very regionalists. As well, she explained that in Canada she has suffered different types of discrimination: for being poor (classism), for being a woman, and for being an immigrant or "being from another country" and living in Canada. She said that she does not take it personally because discrimination is always there, but she takes it as "our chance to provide a bit of education and say: "No, wait a second, what you're saying is offending me in such and such way." It is a step toward becoming integrated to this society."¹¹

Another participant, Caro, expressed that as a woman with family she had to work hard to study and have a job. She acknowledged that this can be difficult and that more support is needed, especially for women with children. Reyna emphasized that Latinas are strong, with integrity, with a high sense of responsibility and a big spirit of overcoming. Along these lines, Clara mentioned, "but in general we, Latina women, have a great spirit for improvement. I think

that all women have it, and I say this especially in speaking of my own blood, and one experiences and lives this every day."¹²

Debra put emphasis on sociopolitical advocacy because she considered that LA women don't have the option of staying at home "like our mothers had", she emphasized that LA women have to participate more in the political life of their communities. Then, from my perspective, these participants expressed an empowered gender position by identifying themselves as resilience women and by raising awareness about women's rights and challenges. Later in the interview, when the participants were asked if they had a message or a comment, the majority took a gender perspective: They gave a motivational message for immigrant women, emphasizing women's strength, resilience, and courage.

Summarizing, the participants expressed feeling proud of who they are and of being Latina and having their original cultures. They described key elements in their identities, such as: their nationalities; simultaneous affiliations, such as being a woman and an immigrant; their physical characteristics; empowered gender positions; what they have accomplished, such as work, health, and increased safety; and meaningful projects and processes, such as increasing social awareness, professional goals, and caring for their families' health. Several participants expressed that their identities have evolved and been enriched since they arrived to Canada. When several of them emphasized feeling proud of being Canadian, they usually also explained what they appreciated from Canada: Feeling Canadian was a decision they made based on experiences and values they incorporated once in Canada.

4.2 Sense of Identity Loss

The participants are women who made the decision to emigrate or had to leave their countries to reconstruct a new life in a different and, most of the time, unknown country. The majority expressed not knowing much about Canada beforehand and not having time to prepare mentally or emotionally to leave their countries and to arrive to a new one. Several of them, mainly those who arrived as refugees, also expressed living various difficulties in their countries of origin, and sometimes in other LA countries or the United States (US), before immigrating to Canada. All of the participants described experiencing drastic and fast changes after their arrival in Greater Vancouver. They expressed "living so many things," "having to solve so many problems at the same time" and experiencing "dramatic arrivals." As well, they described feeling that they were "starting from zero," "starting from the bottom," or "being born again, like a child." In turn, these changes influenced their ways of being.

As explained in previous chapters of this study, I explored and identified a *sense of identity loss* in the participants' narratives to characterize a sense of rupture and reconfiguration that decreased the women's mental and general well-being. Then, a sense of identity loss –as understood in this study– was problematic for these participants. Having extended support (e.g., family, support groups, community centers, and health professionals) was very important for them to resolve or keep coping with this sense of identity losses.

Different challenges were factors for some participants to decrease their self-confidence and sufficiency and to experience depressions. Some of the difficulties that they experienced were: not speaking or being fearful to speak in English; cultural differences; feeling alone, being isolated or dependent on support; non recognition of their studies or credentials; and facing marital conflicts and separations. The main sense of identity loss, related with these and other

challenges, that these women described in their narratives included: loss of our voices and the fear of speaking, loss of our relational and group identities, loss of self-confidence as a result of emotional and physical trauma (abuse and separation), and loss of our student and professional identities.

Looking back to more difficult times, the majority of the women, after expressing a crisis, a difficulty, or a sense of identity loss, they also acknowledged the experiences that helped them to cope or emphasized a constructive side of their precarious immigration circumstance. In other words, these women were aware of finding the positive or constructive aspects of challenging situations. To acknowledge their efforts and resilience, I present or explain their difficulties together with their self-affirmations and constructive experiences.

4.2.1 Loss of Our Voices: the Fear of Speaking or not Being Able to Speak

Several participants (14, n=25) felt that at first they could not express themselves well in English and talked about the many frustrations due to "the impotence of the language." They mentioned experiencing fear of speaking and a decrease in self-confidence. For example, Ruth expressed that being fearful to speak English, and at the same time having the pressure to find a job and seeing her child missing her family, was "emotionally a tough time, terrible, that we've passed, thank God." She also expressed that "perhaps one also puts barriers because one cannot express oneself, and one is always thinking: if I could express what I want to say." Now, at the time of the interview, she does not get discouraged or annoyed when her colleagues tell her that "one has a strong accent or that you speak too quickly or that they don't understand." She expressed that it took her a number of years "to learn to defend myself." Now, "either I make the question in a different manner or speak more slowly or clearly, so that we understand each other,

which means that's a barrier I have managed to overcome."¹³

The majority of the participants expressed that, after living several years in Canada, they learned how to communicate again and found diverse ways to "regain strength." They used various coping mechanisms such as clarifying English questions with their families; taking things more lightly, for example, caring less about what people think of them if they do not speak perfect English; and observing that in a multicultural society people have various accents; It made a huge difference for them to take job trainings (to learn the language specific to jobs such as nurse aid, counselling, and teaching), get a job where they could start speaking more in English, and make friends little by little.

For example, Juana was 17 years old and about to finish High School when she came to Vancouver. She expressed that not speaking English "it was a big problem in a way. It is like being born again, I think, not having friends, but at least I had my family here."¹⁴ She also explained that when she started high school in Vancouver: "It was always the fear of speaking and expressing myself. Of course, it was tough at first. [...] I had to leave that behind and confront it."¹⁵ Not speaking English and not having friends made her feel like being born again, like a child who cannot speak or is dependent on other's support. Slowly, she was able to face the fear of speaking because she had family support, a space to practice English, and Rosa, a youth support worker. Rosa, who involved her as a volunteer in a project where she met friends, practiced English, and had to leave the fear of speaking behind.

Several participants were so busy during their first years in Greater Vancouver, that they did not have time to take English classes. For example, Amanda expressed: "I suffered a lot because of the language and because I had no one here, no family."¹⁶ She was busy working to support a family member who was sick in her country of origin. She also mentioned feeling

alone many moments and that it was very difficult, but that her faith in God, the support of some friends, and her efforts and strength to pursue her goals gave her the courage to stay in Canada. She also mentioned that the one thing that still limits her, after 17 years of living in Canada, is not writing in English. At the time of the interview, she was taking English classes and hoped to find a better paid job. Her suggestion for newcomers was to prioritize learning the language.

Then, not being able to communicate in English was a barrier that affected the majority of the participants when they arrived to Canada. But for three participants, who were also experiencing various settlement challenges, contributed with a loss of their voices. They felt incapable and lacked the confidence to express themselves in English. This loss affected qualities that were very important for them, such as being extroverted, independent, and courageous. At the same time, losing their voices contributed with other sense of identity loss, such as their sense of loss of relational and professional identities.

Beatriz was 13 years old when she arrived to Canada. She has lived five years in Greater Vancouver at the time of the interview. She explained that: "It is tough at first because one has to start from zero, start a new life practically, a new language, a new country, new friends, everything. But the change is worthwhile, definitively. After several years, one looks back and says: "the best option was having come."¹⁷ She described how difficult it was for her to build a new life from zero, and also, during this time she did not speak much because she told herself: ""How embarrassing, we better not speak, because they're going to make fun of us, for what?" That is insecurity. The rest of the people don't see it that way."¹⁸ Then, during her first years of immigration, she experienced drastic changes in her ways of communicating. She expressed:

In Colombia, I was one of those persons that always made people laugh, that always had something to say, a story to tell, anyhow. When I came here, I felt that the trust on myself

decreased so much because I felt a minority in this society. It seemed everyone was looking at me. Of course this is only in the meanwhile we regain strength once again. It is a matter of time, more than anything.¹⁹

From being an extroverted story teller Beatriz became embarrassed to speak, her self-confidence decreased, she felt a minority and felt observed. By the time of the interview, Beatriz has recovered her voice. She mentioned that with time she saw that immigration was worthwhile, it was the best option. She also expressed that, to overcome the loss of her voice and recover her confidence to communicate again, it was helpful to think that "people do not care if you don't speak perfect English," to leave the embarrassment and the insecurity behind, and "what are others going to say", and to have support from her family, school groups, school counsellors, and various settlement agencies.

Another participant, Manucha, came to Vancouver because a friend invited her to work in this city when she lost her job in 1974. She used to sell art at an art gallery and travelled a lot with the artist who owned the gallery. In Vancouver, she worked with a family taking care of a teenager with special needs, and also cooked, cleaned, and decorated the family's mansion for about 12 years. She felt alone and isolated at this place, but she also felt committed to the family because they constantly renewed her work permit. She learned to read and speak English slowly by translating the notes of her boss and by watching TV. But she did not learn how to write in English, which might have decreased her possibilities to find other jobs. At the time of the interview, she still had a lonely job counting and organizing medication in a pharmacy. She explained how she felt during her first years in Vancouver:

It was very difficult, especially because of the language. I was lost here, lost, automatically lost. So, little by little... I saw things here like strange. Little by little I

created my space, but there were no Latinos, it was very difficult, to ask, to have an idea about where I was supposed to go, how I was supposed to do it. But in the end, I forgot about that. I wanted to be strong and courageous. I told myself: "in any event, I can forget, I will tell myself that I am living in my own country." Little by little I got accustomed to things.²⁰

Manucha felt "totally lost" without speaking the language at a place where things looked "strange." She created her own space "little by little." She used this phrase several times to describe the pace at which she got accustomed to things. Later, she expressed having continuous feelings of loneliness and sadness. Manucha also experienced a sense of her relational identity loss, she knew many people and belonged to different groups in her country of origin, and then she was by herself in Vancouver (I explain more about this sense of identity loss in the next section). However, Manucha, also talked about how she coped with feeling lost, lonely, and sad: she tried to forget the difficulties; created ways of thinking, like imagining she was living in her country; looked for support and orientation; and found alternative work by taking care of Spanish speaking kids in a community center.

Another participant, Cristina, used to work as a social worker and a teacher in her country of origin, at the time of the interview she worked as a multicultural liaison and youth support worker. She came to reunite and marry her boyfriend in 1972, and explained that at that time there were not many classes and opportunities to practice English. During her first years in Vancouver, she became a mother and took care of her children during the day. She started doing the activities "that Canadian mothers do," for example, taking the children to classes and community centres, but she could not communicate in English. She expressed:

I didn't have a chance to practice it [English]. That made me to lose my identity, almost, I

felt as though my mental faculties had been atrophied. I thought I would never manage to learn the language or become integrated to this society or develop a career that would satisfy me. So that I asked myself the question many times: what am I doing here? Shouldn't we go back to Colombia, where I had a stable job, where my family is, where I have that whole nucleus of support? But, at the same time, I saw the situation in my country was deteriorating and the problem with the mafia was getting worse and worse and worse. And so, I would ask myself the question, what do I want more, the stability and the opportunities for my kids, or returning there, to have a job but be unable to provide my kids with the tranquility and the safety that they were going to get here. So I finally decided that the best thing was to stay here.

Cristina expressed feeling incompetent to express herself in English, like if she did not have the mental capacities to communicate. She also felt hopeless about integrating in the Canadian society and discouraged about her professional options. She felt a different person; she lost her identity, and questioned herself for leaving her professional stable job, her family, and her nucleus of support. She slowly started recovering from this sense of identity loss. When her kids started going to school, she managed to take English classes. By attending school she started meeting people from different cultures, and this inspired her to keep going, make new friends, and get trainings to continue doing social work.

Having several types of support in place reduced the impact of a sense of identity loss due to lack of fluency to communicate in English. Participants mentioned several elements that were helpful for them to recover their confidence, such as: family motivation to speak English and to clarify questions, having time to learn and practice (for women with children having access to childcare was important to attend classes), taking English classes, having access to spaces to

speak and practice English (e.g., schools, work places, and volunteer projects), and using support services in Spanish (e.g., counselling, groups, and settlement services). Only a few participants had English classes, and all of them expressed being grateful for these classes.

4.2.2 Loss of Relational and Group Identities

The majority of the participants expressed feeling lonely and isolated when they got to Greater Vancouver. They acknowledged the pain of leaving their relationships behind and described having diverse relational and group identities before immigrating. Several women expressed that family was one of the main sources of relationships and, therefore, they had not been in situations where they "had to" make friends or create connections. In addition, developing deep relationships where people can express and receive love, have deep conversations about problems and achievements, share difficulties and happiness, among others, can take time. For instance, Cristina expressed that she felt very lonely not being able to share the happiness of having children with her family or friends. As well, several women mentioned that people create relationships "in a different way" in Greater Vancouver, so they were not sure how to relate to people. Other factors that increased women's isolation were not being able to communicate in English (as explained before), living far from busy or central areas, working in lonely jobs, and staying at home taking care of children.

The majority of the women described having a sense of a relational and group identity before immigrating to Vancouver. They expressed feeling part of or belonging to a family, a group of friends, professional or community groups, and wider society. Several women emphasized strong attachments to their parents and constant support to each others, as well as having big families, which were the main source of social relationships. Many women expressed

a profound appreciation for the missing family and friends left behind in their countries.

For example, Irene acknowledged the nostalgia for leaving her previous relationships behind. She immigrated as a mature woman and lived with her daughter's family in Vancouver. She did not necessarily feel alone because she had family here, got engaged with a senior's group in Vancouver (which she also considered as family), and could communicate well because she was fluent in English. However, she still expressed how much she missed the people, family and friends that she left in her country of origin and how meaningful these relationships were to her:

All of them are intimately linked to your present day, to your today for the simple fact that they played an important role in your past. You can stop seeing them, yes, but you can't stop loving them, remembering them and thinking about them. I think that when we say we miss our country, in truth we mean that we miss those people [...].²¹

Irene emphasized that her previous relationships constitute her present because they were part of her past. Later, she expressed how much she cared and initially worried for her loved ones who stayed in Peru. She said: "You know how it is, Sylvia, in the absence, one worries more, and a straw seems to you a rafter. Fortunately, my small family here in Canada has already faced those demons. They were familiar with the problem and helped me [...]."²² Then, leaving behind deep and meaningful relationships in her country of origin, which would take time to replace in a new country, made Irene feel nostalgic and worried during her first months in Vancouver. Having family members, who had passed through this process, was very helpful for her during this time.

Irene, as the majority of the participants, continued and transformed a sense of a relational and group identity in Greater Vancouver. They had friends, work and volunteer spaces, and participated with community groups. Also, all participants expressed keeping connection with

their countries of origin. Several women expressed that knowing that they had family support back in their countries was helpful for them. However, during their first years in Vancouver, several participants described a sense of a relational identity loss and, at the time of the interview, a few women were still experiencing isolation and loneliness.

For example, Manucha, expressed that loneliness has been and is still part of her life in Vancouver. She explained that she was very alone with the family she worked for and lived with for 12 years. She described how it was for her to experience loneliness:

Manucha: [...] There's a mansion. There you were all alone also, living in those mansions.

Uy! How horrible! Loneliness is worse than hunger. I lived in that mansion full of rooms.

Sylvia: Let's talk a bit about this idea you have just shared: that loneliness is worse than hunger. How did you manage to beat loneliness?

Manucha: I don't know why, maybe it is destiny. I have no idea. It has always fallen on me to be alone.

Sylvia: But, how have you dealt with loneliness?

Manucha: I forget, you know, I forget, it is very sad. I had a mansion all by myself but I was not happy. I was afraid. I didn't have whom to talk to, looking after things and alone with the dogs. They loved dogs and horses.²³

Manucha went from a job where she had continuous interaction with people, selling art and travelling to help with art exhibits, to an isolated space and lonely job. She also left family and friends behind. It was only after 12 years, that she decided to quit this job because she became sick of anemia. At the time of the interview, 16 years after she quit this job, she still remembers this experience as horrible in terms of the loneliness she experienced.

She started working counting medication at a small pharmacy. She expressed that she had

always worked very hard, "because the truth is that my life here is work, work and work without rest."²⁴ She did not have a partner or family here, and she had to work hard to pay her expenses with a low-income salary. At the same time, she might have forgotten about her loneliness by working hard. Which at the end, because she was mostly working by herself, it did not help her to prevent isolation.

Later in the interview, when she was asked about what she would do now if she could do something different, she answered: "I would have liked to be in my country, be with my family. I think it would have been much better for me. But here we are (laughs), yes, but I have also laid a grain of sand here in Canada."²⁵ Besides working hard, she volunteered a lot. She expressed that when she has a pension in the coming years, she would like to spend more time in her country of origin, but also to stay in Canada, because she has her life made here. For her, finding a way to spend more time in her country might compensate the loneliness she still experiences in Canada.

Three of the women, who became single mothers during stressful settlement periods, expressed missing a partner and extended family support to face problems and make decisions. For example, Maria described how difficult it was for her to start from the bottom with full responsibility of two children and without family support. Although she felt very lonely during her first months in Vancouver, she affirmed that "there is always something positive." Then, she explained how she joined a church group that was very supportive for her and her family. However, this support was not enough at this time, she explained:

I was in this process of being all by myself. I went through a period of a very strong depression and I felt I was getting ill, and so I had only been here eight months, and I couldn't take it anymore. I returned to San Francisco once again with the hope of getting my papers in order. Unfortunately, I couldn't. I had to come back again. That whole

change had a strong effect on my son but, specially, my separation from my husband affected him very much, very much. He also became depressed and had a lot of problems in school.²⁶

She wanted to stay in San Francisco because she had her parents and more family there. However, she came back to Vancouver because she did not see a future for her and her children if they could not get their residency papers in the U.S. Then, for Maria, and for several other participants, experiencing a sense of a relational identity loss was partly related with lacking the possibility to interact and feel the love of her family. In addition, the feeling of being alone with her children's responsibility was new for her. Later in the interview, she explained more about her depression and how important it was for her to interact with people and express affection:

I passed through a period with a strong depression here in Canada [...]. I think that depression is an illness in which we require great support from our families. Above all, we need to feel loved. When I got here, I felt, perhaps the change was very harsh for me, in the sense that I did not have family here [...]. I felt an enormous responsibility on my shoulders and I am someone who likes to be constantly around people. I love sharing with a friend, with my neighbour, with my children, and unfortunately, here one is locked up a lot and also another thing that affects me a great deal is the weather [...]. I think one has to look for help [for the depression], there are support groups, and they helped me a lot here.²⁷

Maria felt "locked up a lot," she wasn't interacting with people enough. Then, not relating with people as she used to do it and a rainy weather influenced her to become depressed. She looked for counselling help and kept connected with various support groups and a church group during many years.

Three of the women could not travel to Greater Vancouver with their kids and left them behind with family members. They expressed that missing their children was one of the most difficult challenges. They expressed thinking about their children all the time, sending money for them, and calling them every day. Victoria expressed having very sad memories of leaving her children, but "I had the opportunity to dare to think that one day I would be able to do something better for my children; a better life [...], with freedom of speech, freedom of many things that we do not have in our countries."²⁸ She also expressed how difficult it was for her to leave her children, and how much she valued security and peace: "It's the most painful for a mother to leave their children behind, but in the despair of searching security and peace, one risks so many things, and one of those things was the that one risks the company of our children."²⁹

For these three women, once in Canada, their main goal was to get their documents to travel and save money to bring their kids. This process took five years for all of them. However, Clara explained that when different challenges arrived, she would try not to worry much, "I have always taken things with a lot of philosophy [...] I have a way of helping myself remembering that there are things that are more secondary."³⁰ Then, her goal of bringing her kids helped her to maintain serenity when struggling with other difficulties.

In this group of women's narratives, I observed that participants often used the 'one person' subject to describe their own experiences, for example "as one has to adapt." By doing this, they usually include others in their experiences. From my point of view, sometimes this could be a projection of their own experiences; other times, this could imply a perception that other LAC or immigrants share similar circumstances; and other times, be part of a more common way of speaking inter-dependently (instead of using the I subject). For example, participants used the 'one person' to include Sylvia, the interviewer, in several of their own experiences, difficulties,

and achievements. They used expressions such as: "as it is in one's country," "as one communicates," or in a direct way, "You know how it is." Thus, in this example, the women considered that the interviewer, as a LAC immigrant woman, understood what they were talking about and felt a sense of a group identity with her.

4.2.3 Loss of Self-confidence as a Result of Emotional and Physical Trauma

Several women experienced emotional and physical trauma during their first years in Canada, such as domestic violence, separation from their husbands, and hurtful accidents. The majority of the women who were married when they immigrated to Canada (8 of 11) divorced from their husbands after living several years in Vancouver. Several women mentioned that this separation was very difficult for them, moreover that it happened simultaneously with various settlement challenges. Of these women, three experienced described a sense of identity loss while experiencing emotional and physical abuse by their husbands. They felt as if they were different persons, going through new difficult feelings and situations: they doubt themselves, felt dependent, scared and out of control. They also felt very lonely; they did not have deep friendships (which can take years to develop), and did not feel safe speaking to someone about their situation.

Claudia was 17 years old when she arrived in Toronto escaping the violence of a dictatorship. She returned to Argentina seven years later when democracy was re-established. There she studied at the university, worked as a bilingual secretary, got married and had two daughters. She expressed having difficulties due to her feminist ideas in a society that has rigid gender roles and give men the power of making the family decisions. She described that her husband started abusing her emotionally and financially. Suddenly, they immigrated to Toronto

when their business went bankrupt during a socio-economic crisis.

Claudia reflected on how her husband's emotional abuse gradually increased. First, he was manipulative and she tried to make him notice this. Later, "He made me doubt what I could and could not do as a woman, what I could or could not do as a mother [...], he had so many put-downs, and it seemed he had more control over me."³¹ She noticed this abusive situation when her friends in Toronto stopped visiting her because he humiliated her in front of them. When they moved to Vancouver, the violence escalated:

I was looking after my babies the entire day, because they were small girls of one and two years of age. The emotional violence had increased quite a bit and my self-esteem had gone down dramatically; my identity as a woman was in a question, because I felt isolated from everyone, because he had gotten myself out of Argentina, where I had my friends and my sister, my relatives, and he had gotten myself out of Toronto where I had my relationship with my dad [...]. I was in something of a total isolation.³²

Claudia expressed that her husband's abuse decreased her self-esteem, she felt unable to act, scared and out of control. As well, she referred to the importance of her relationships for her identity as a woman; she mentioned that this identity was in crisis because she was isolated from everyone. Then, she experienced a sense of loss of her relational identity and a crisis in her identity as a woman. Besides, she felt she "had lost" as she had always defended women's rights and now she was being abused by her own partner. She was afraid of leaving him because she felt incapable of communicating in English and of supporting her daughters:

Many years had passed since I last worked outside of the house and one of the fears I had was not being able to find a job and not being able to support my daughters. The other fear I had, with something of an illogical reason, because it is an illogical reason, was

thinking that I wasn't going to be able to speak the language, when I spoke it perfectly well [...]. So, one is always watching over one's back. So, it got to a point where I started to believe this, that I couldn't support my daughters.³³

Claudia also explained that she could not focus and was always worried and hyper-vigilant about how she was going to be attacked. She looked for support and joined a group to increase her knowledge and awareness about abuse. Listening to other women's stories, being listened and "seen" (others knew what was happening to her), and acknowledging that she was being abused, helped her to make decisions about her situation. Then, when her husband threatened to isolate her even more by destroying her relationship with her daughters, she decided that she had to stop the abuse. Then, she reported him to the police, moved to a transition house, kept participating with a support group, was referred for counselling, and started a grieving process. Claudia expressed:

Getting separated is a loss, not a loss in the sense of saying I lost my husband, no, my loss and my mourning were about a loss of identity, a loss of my person, my loss in terms of my being as a woman, my loss of a ton of things, of feelings. All of a sudden, I started to remember things that I had lost in the way, my family, and my friends.³⁴

She mentioned the loss of her identity and meaningful elements of her identity such as: her identity as a woman, her feelings, her family, and her friends. Speaking to a counsellor, or having "someone who understands and supports you," and attending support groups helped her to recover her strength and freedom: "It was very moving for me [to speak to a counsellor] and it was, in some way, like when one is jailed for many years and hears the voice of a friend and for me that was very valuable."³⁵ Later she became a volunteer at crisis lines and got training in crisis interventions. Since then, she has worked in various health programs and in community

projects to increase women's rights awareness and stop domestic violence.

Another participant, Lucia married and left Chile with her husband in the 1970s. In Vancouver, she worked in jobs where she could manage with few English words, such as in hair salons and senior rest-homes. Having her own income allowed her financial independence, which she appreciated. After working at these places she had confidence in that she could learn anything new. Finally she quit her jobs because her husband insisted on this, but then they started fighting a lot. She kept the domestic violence in secret for many years because she did not feel safe to report this to anyone. She described having difficult emotions that she had not experienced before. She did not have a prior referent of an abusive situation, and felt like a different person, isolated, lonely, invisible, dependent, and unhappy. She described how lack of communication was part of the situation and how abuse started increasing:

We had a huge communication problem. I had never learned how to speak about my feelings. When I had a problem I would cry and keep quiet and he didn't speak, he didn't say anything either. We had problems, above all, because I was not happy. There I realized that I didn't have my family, I felt alone, I felt silly, I felt invisible, I felt that I was again a dependent little girl, and I had never been like that. I had always been independent, I always had everything I needed, and the problems started to arrive mostly because I complained, and since he didn't know what to do with my complains, I don't know, I can't get inside his head, but he responded aggressively, trying to make me shut up, I imagine, protecting himself so as not to hear this person complaining. And at one point which I don't remember, he must have pushed me, I must have pushed him back, we started to lose that respect for each other. But of course, I had never seen this in my family. I had never known anyone who had a situation as this one.³⁶

For Lucia one of her biggest challenges in Canada was to live and terminate domestic violence. She has not been in this situation before and during this time she saw herself as a different woman, dependent, isolated, and unhappy. She experienced a transition point in her life that made her aware that she had to make her own decisions. Then she recovered her strength, asked her husband to leave the house permanently, and looked for financial aid from the Canadian Government to get training as a counsellor. Now she works as a counsellor, a community worker, and a workshop facilitator.

Another participant, Yita arrived to Vancouver as a refugee escaping war violence. However, she realized that living in Vancouver was far more difficult than expected: "It was very hard, because one leaves behind one's family, one's job, and we could say, one's identity in one's country, and comes to a new country where one does not know anyone, has no family and finds everything new."³⁷ Yita experienced drastic losses: her career, her family, her identity, and her friends. She experienced a sense of identity loss and described how she started losing her self esteem. Yita stopped her English classes to deliver and take care of her child; then she felt depressed after several months of being isolated and feeling dependent on her husband who spoke English well and translated for her. She also described: "my self esteem started declining, little by little, because I felt that I couldn't do absolutely anything if I wasn't with my husband."³⁸ To stop this she returned to her English classes and expressed:

I managed to go back to school and learned English. That started to help me feel more competent, surer of myself; but there was, of course, a lot in terms of cultural and economic change, we were very much constricted economically [...] he worked and maybe felt stronger, and so I would feel weaker, I started feeling less and less, as we say [...] eventually things got very ugly, to the point that we had to get separated after a

number of years. The relationship became abusive and that's a long story. I got to a point where I was completely depressed and, because God is great, and through my faith, thank God I never lost it, I managed to move forward. Of course, it wasn't easy; it was a very, very long process. Again, I felt into depression. It was quite difficult. I thought the world had ended [...] I started getting thing after thing physically, I would get sick from one thing, I would get sick from another, to the point where I started to think that I had a serious illness, neurologically speaking, because I suffered from a lot of things. I can say that I really was terrified because I had two kids and, again, I was alone.³⁹

Yita felt less and less while experiencing many losses. At the same time, she did not have anyone to speak to about her problems, so she was relieved when she spoke to a counsellor. She looked for counselling in Spanish, got connected with emotional and mental support, and later, started volunteering, and little by little, "my attitude towards life started to change, I could say. A ray of hope started to grow inside me, and I stayed there at the Neighbourhood House."⁴⁰ She separated from her husband, and after a couple of years, she started working as a program coordinator for the "Stepping up Program" at the Immigrant Services Society, where she keeps supporting women who had suffered abuse. She expressed that this job has been very challenging for her, but has also helped her to learn a lot. She feels stronger now because she is not suffering spousal abuse anymore and has stable employment. However, she keeps struggling with loneliness and finding personal time to rest: "I feel very tired, and sometimes I feel alone, because I am still alone, with my kids, but I never lose my faith in God."⁴¹ Yita described a strong spiritual connection with God, she emphasized that her faith has been her strongest support in difficult times.

4.2.4 The Loss of Our Student and Professional Identities

Several participants described a loss of their student or professional identities as one of the challenges of "having to start from zero." They mentioned how discouraging and disappointing it was to realize that their studies and professional credentials were not recognized. Juana expressed: "Yes, that's is, I think, the most crucial I have, that I had to start from the bottom, knowing one spends who knows how many years in school in our countries, to make one's way, and one gets here, and it's back to the bottom again. I understand it also has to do with the language."⁴² She felt frustrated of not having all those "many years in school in our countries" recognized in Canada. She also expressed that this could be in relation with not being fluent in English. Nevertheless, her frustration might come from an understanding that it is not necessary to study high school again to acquire fluency in English. She explained that having her mother and brother here was an immense support that relieved her from focusing only in hardships. She also mentioned that she did better thinking positively, imagining that she "would move forward, some way or the other" and that she preferred to have a mind set on getting out of the problem. She planned to keep studying and find a job as a Police Officer.

Another participant, Maria, expressed that she wanted to be a social worker or a teacher in El Salvador, but she studied a shorter program and worked as a secretary to support her family. Later, while working and having her own family, she started taking University courses in Management. But then she moved to the US, and there, she could only find work cleaning or taking care of children. She said: "I was the secretary for the Department of Human Resources in Social Insurance and, from one month to the next, after all that effort put into working, studying, and all of a sudden, I found myself doing cleaning floors, taking care of children [...] it was a terrible shock."⁴³ She could not get her papers organized in the US and immigrated to Canada as

a Canadian Resident. In Vancouver, she also worked cleaning houses but was able to negotiate receiving English classes. However, once in Vancouver, Maria described experiencing a sense of a relational identity loss and a major depression. She left to the US, but had to come back to Vancouver. Later, working cleaning houses during the day and studying at night, and with her income and partial financial support from the Canadian government, she finished an Early Childhood Education Program and she now works as a kindergarten teacher.

Caro, another participant, expressed that she knew she could work and study as she has done it in her country of origin. When she started cleaning houses she expressed being happy because she had a job and salary, "but it was also depressing because I would do things, at times, that I wasn't used to doing. I never thought once that I was going to experience them here. I would say: "well, this is only a stage in my life, this is only a stage."⁴⁴ Caro expected to work as a homemaker while she finished some training. Later in the interviews she expressed that it is better to access support (e.g., Welfare and other financial aids) to finish first some trainings and then look for a job. She also mentioned that working in house cleaning gave her more understanding of the challenges that people who work in survival jobs for long time can face. Later, once she finished her trainings, she looked for a stable job because she felt she had already experienced a lot of instabilities. She appreciated that her first employers focused on her social work skills instead of "only focusing on my accent."

Several of these women, who faced a sense of identity loss, also experienced a sense of identity continuity. While reflecting on their story, several of them expressed: "now that I see back...", "now that I think on the past...", and saw themselves as independent women who had and re-gained the courage to speak their opinions, fought for their rights, and overcame obstacles. The majority expressed that grieving their losses in counselling and support groups,

as well as receiving practical and emotional support, volunteering and getting meaningful jobs, helped them to recover their strength and have a more hopeful understanding towards life. These participants connected with what was valuable for them in the process of remembering and narrating their stories during the interviews. This process might have contributed to the creation of new insights about themselves and their immigration experiences.

4.3 Sense of Identity Continuity

The majority of the participants acknowledged that immigrating to Greater Vancouver "has pros and cons." Within the "pros" the majority considered that they had better opportunities in Canada compared to their countries of origin. To access or open these opportunities and counteract the "cons" of immigration, they relied on several types of support and on their own internal resources and capacities. The participants mentioned receiving various support from: their families, churches, community centres, and the Canadian government (free English classes and, if they arrived as refugees, financial aid for basic needs). They also described their resilience and, their sense of identity continuity (as understood in this study) that helped them to counteract various challenges.

Drawing from Frie's conceptual framework (2011), I explored and identified a *sense of identity continuity* in the participants' narratives to characterize the women's more or less continuous sense of themselves that allowed them a certain emotional stability and helped them to cope with difficult situations. The majority of these bicultural, and sometimes multicultural, women kept more or less a continued sense of themselves while their identities were in a continuous play with changing contextual factors. The main sense of identity continuity described in the participants' narratives, involved: continuity of the capacity for opening doors

and construct meaning in life, continuity of strength and other values to overcome obstacles, continuity of professional identities and skills, and continuity by preserving and adapting elements of their original culture.

4.3.1 Continuity of Our Capacity to Open doors and Construct Meaning in Life

Clara expressed: "To get a visa [from somewhere else] in my country means you have won the lottery." However, she also added: "One comes inspired by the trip and one does not think about all the consequences that await for you when one arrives to another country."⁴⁵ All the participants acknowledged how difficult it was for them to slowly start building from below "friends, places... everything." Even though some participants expressed having confidence in their capacity to move forward and consider themselves "brave for adventure," the majority described that coming to Canada was harder than expected, because at the beginning "there are many changes, efforts, and sacrifices." Also, several participants expressed struggling making the decision to stay in Canada or go back to their original countries (sometimes this happened to refugees once they got their permanent residency). For these participants deciding to stay was a second big decision moment that provided them with some anxiety relief.

In this context, the participants described a sense of identity continuity by enacting their capacity for opening doors and constructing meaning in their lives. Sometimes they described how relying on this capacity was important to overcome various challenges. For example, Beatriz expressed:

The important [thing] is to leave the embarrassment behind, leave one's insecurity behind, and 'what are others going to say'. One gets to a new country and one has to open doors. One has to look for a way of getting into a group, and say "Yes, I don't know you, but

may I talk with you at lunchtime?"⁴⁶

The participants enacted their capacity for creating opportunities and constructing meaning in their lives in various ways, such as: making the decision to immigrate to Canada looking for a better life, engaging in what was meaningful for them like socializing and joining groups; and contributing to the Canadian society with volunteer work and with raising awareness of women's rights and stopping discrimination, among others.

For the majority of the participants *making the decision to emigrate* was a big decisive moment in their search for a better life. They expressed that this decision was a next step in a project on opening opportunities such as: increased safety, freedom of expression, better work, higher salaries, capacity to help their families, and experiencing a new culture. For example, Juana expressed: "I always had and continue to have the same idea about studying and being someone, to move forward, no matter in what, to work hard always in order to be able to help my family."⁴⁷ In several LA countries, families provide their family members part of the support that the government may supply in Canada. For example, families may support with housing, financial aid, and childcare in situations such as maternity, studies, unemployment, and illness. Juana emphasized that she "always had" the idea of moving forward. For her, as for several other participants, this moving forward to help their families was one of the goals that motivated them to immigrate to Canada.

There were various motives (and combined motives of immigration), such as reunifying with family and looking for protection and increased safety. For example, Juana also made the decision to emigrate to reunify with her main family. To reunite with her mother and brother provided her with a sense of continuity and family support. As well, several participants immigrated as political refugees because their lives were in danger. They needed to survive and

decided or had to move to a country with increased safety and, when they could choose, they also looked for a country that allowed them to construct meaning in their lives.

Caro, a social worker who supported political prisoners in El Salvador, first immigrated with her child as a refugee to Mexico. She was working as a social worker in Mexico City when she experienced the destruction and trauma caused by an earthquake in 1985. She wanted to contribute because there was so much need for help, but she was not allowed to do this in any way. She expressed that "It had to be a person with a certificate; it had to be the police. Well, we couldn't do much and that depressed me a lot. I felt like life wasn't worth anything in Mexico, like life didn't have any meaning. That's when I said: 'I'm going to Canada, I'm not staying here.'"48

Caro could not return to El Salvador because the situation there had not improved and she was afraid that her safety could be compromised. She wanted to live in a place where she could contribute making a change and where she felt that life was appreciated. She made the decision to come to Canada. Caro struggled with "starting from below," but with time and many efforts she got a job that was meaningful for her. She also volunteered at diverse support groups informing people about "the ups and downs" that people experience when they immigrate and how they can defeat them. Now Caro works coordinating a program, where she supports pregnant women and their babies.

A youth participant, Andrea, talked about the benefits of having a new start in a safer place. She arrived as a refugee with her mother and her brother. Canada provided her with a space to recover her strength and heal emotionally. For her, to immigrate "was like a revival" because she experienced traumatic times in Mexico. She said that "Inside of me, it was like being born again. I felt that, because of my suffering, I had gotten stuck [...]. It was like going back to

that moment and start again. I felt like a little girl that was starting out again."⁴⁹ When she arrived she stayed mostly inside her house because she was scared of going out. Later, she focused on learning English, attending counselling, and participating in volunteer work. Andrea expressed that now she works and plans to continue studying.

Several participants described that *engaging in meaningful activities like socializing and joining groups* helped them regain a sense of enacting their capacities to open opportunities. Several participants expressed that one of the activities that they appreciated and enjoyed the most was *socializing*, connecting and sharing with others (friends, acquaintances, community group members, and new people at different events). Participating and belonging to groups provided them with a sense of a relational and group identity continuity. Several of them mentioned that support groups were important for them. For example, Irene expressed "support groups here are like my family," in reference to the senior groups she belonged. In addition, when Sylvia, the interviewer, asked all the participants if they were in contact with community groups, the majority (21) answered yes. They kept in contact with diverse groups, such as: various multicultural support groups (at Bridge Clinic, Reach Clinic, Mosaic, Britannia, and Kiwassa Neighbourhood House), Spanish speaking seniors' group (at Minoru Seniors' Society, Reach Clinic, and Britannia), The Latin American Community Council (and within this, the Latin American Mental Health Workers Association or APLASM), church groups or committees (English speaking neighbourhood churches and the Hispanic Church), and children's activities board of directors for various groups, such as soccer, swimming, and ice-skating children teams.

A youth participant, Beatriz experienced a sense of identity loss by being afraid of speaking in English, but creating new relationships and doing activities she liked and had in common with her classmates helped her to recover her voice and "regained strength." She found

groups to belong, contribute, and continue developing previous skills and hobbies. For example, she played music with her school band and got involved in extra-curricular activities and in volunteer work. She also took leadership trainings which helped her "in a personal level" and to stop being ashamed to initiate dialogues with more people. Along these lines, she suggested newcomers to volunteer in areas where they enjoy their work and where they can contribute. This changed for her as time passed, as she looked for other choices and engaged in different volunteer options.

The majority of the participants expressed *contributing to the Canadian society* by doing volunteer community work; that is, by donating their time to help others without pay. The participants described feeling empathy and giving support to people in need. They also expressed empathy particularly to other immigrant women. For example when Sylvia, the interviewer, asked the participants "What would you tell or what comment would you have for the people who will listen to this interview?" They gave messages of support and practical advice, either implicitly or explicitly, to immigrant women. For example, to have consistency and trust themselves: "to find their selves," "to be always yourself, to have goals, to think that you can do good [...]," and "trust in yourself and don't feel less than others." To have perseverance and gratitude: "don't give up, keep going, defeat obstacles, if there is a need to protest, let's protest," "give back to this country," and "enjoy life because it is the only thing we can take." And finally, to look for help with supportive organizations and "to use settlement services."

Several participants described looking forward to connect with more people and, for some of them, volunteering provided them with this opportunity. In this sense, two participants also gave suggestions to researchers and service providers to immigrants. Irene, who has volunteered most of her time coordinating a senior's group, suggested that the priority is to help

those ones who come without speaking English. She emphasized that part of the basic human necessities are "communicating, consoling oneself, having conversations, it is being happy, enjoying, and how do you that without communication, without tools of communication?"⁵⁰

Another participant, Manucha, suggested treating volunteers with respect: "That people be courteous with all of them, because sometimes people abuse them."⁵¹ She volunteered several times and she had observed this abuse.

Manucha, who experienced a sense of identity loss, also described feeling that she has "laid a grain of sand in Canada." Besides working hard and volunteering in various community centers, she collaborated with the agency MOSAIC by painting a diversity mosaic. She said, "I won the first award there painting the mosaic, it is there forever. It was in the newspaper."⁵² She painted a Chasqui, a person that in Aymara language and culture represents a messenger, a person who delivers a message. She could not speak in English and was isolated for 12 years in her first job, but when she got an opportunity, she expressed herself using her artistic skills to emphasize the importance of communication.

The majority of the participants talked about their meaningful projects when Sylvia, the interviewer, asked them about their plans for the future. The majority wanted to keep building and using their professional skills in their jobs and studies. Several participants also mentioned that they would like to have or keep good health, happiness, a tranquil life, not living with anxiety, and good relationships within the family. Others mentioned that they would like to find a way to spend more time in their places of origin or to live part time in their countries and part time in Canada. As well, several mentioned that they wanted to keep volunteering or working serving people in the community.

Then, the majority of the participants wished to continue enacting their capacity to open

doors and construct meaning in life in their search for a better life in Canada. They described how important it was for them to socialize with friends, community group members, and new people at different events. Groups also provided them with a community to belong. Volunteering was important to contribute to society and to connect and share with others. And, as two participants suggested, volunteers should not be abused and a priority is to help immigrants who do not speak English. Both the wider Canadian society and new members of this society might benefit from volunteer work, when immigrants have spaces to communicate in English and are treated with respect.

4.3.2 Continuity of Our Strength and other Values to Overcome Obstacles

Several participants described a sense of identity continuity by regaining their strength and affirming other values that helped them overcome obstacles during their immigration experiences. Recovering trust in their resilience was an organic process for them because their lives have often been in constant change. They expressed that they have solved and done many things by themselves, even with language difficulties and without family support. At the same time, they emphasized that their immigration experiences have been difficult, but that practical and emotional support from various sources, and their strength and efforts to pursue their goals helped them to overcome challenges.

For example, Clara expressed that she has lived and resolved many obstacles during her life. This did not change when she came to Canada. She arrived as a refugee, who had to leave her children behind, then her marriage suffered a crisis, she separated from her husband, and she had to fight a depression. She expressed: "So, to have so many problems and having to solve them all, at the same time, made me break through those barriers and move forward and to

continue on, better and better every day if it's possible and I have the strength."⁵³ She considers herself a person of decisions who "could surpass all new obstacles." Clara looked for practical help to resolve problems, but also for emotional help to heal from depression. Another participant, Sara, emphasized that: "Everything depends on whether one can seek help when one needs it and that one has the strength to do it. We all have it, in a sense. It's just a matter of finding it and moving forward despite all of the challenges that can come up."⁵⁴ Sara expressed the importance of finding the strength to look for help, "we all have it." She suggested first to look for help, find their strength, exercise it, and keep moving forward.

Several participants expressed how looking for help with a counsellor, "someone who understands and supports you," and attending support groups helped them to recover their strength, as Claudia expressed: "It was very moving for me [to speak to a counsellor] and it was, in some way, like when one is jailed for many years and hears the voice of a friend and for me that was very valuable."⁵⁵ Along these lines, another participant, Reyna considered that she has developed a capacity of overcoming obstacles, and that this capacity can be shared and passed along to others. She expressed that she has dedicated to counselling, "because I am convinced that this [strength] can be communicated; this strength of character, this strength of not stopping before obstacles is something that can be passed on to another person."⁵⁶ She has worked and continues to work as a counsellor and as a law and health educator.

The majority of the participants kept and adapted several values that reinforced their strength and helped them to cope with immigration challenges, such as exercising their spirituality and making decisions about their values. Several participants observed that reaffirming their spirituality by *praying and keeping faith in God* helped them to overcome new challenges, as it has helped them before to solve prior difficulties. They expressed "God has

always helped me," and "faith has been a pillar in my life." For several women, their strength was a gift from God and they had the responsibility to exercise it. Amanda expressed that God gave her courage and willpower to move forward and that "only trusting in God and with the support of some friendships I was able to move forward. One has to make the way to keep moving and follow the goals that one wants."⁵⁷ She expressed that her faith in God and friends' support was essential for her to make her way and follow her goals. Several women described how existential and spiritual was for them to pray and trust that God was with them and that things will work out well.

Several participants described that it was important for them *to make decisions about their values* in Canada. Sometimes they had to adapt and transform prior and new values, and other times they had freedom to appreciate and accept them, dislike and reject them, or negotiate them. For example Juana described that there were things that were valued differently in Canada and Ecuador. As well, she observed that only by living in Canada she could really know these differences. For instance, she expressed that time is understood in different ways in Canada and LA:

It was not about knowing [about Canada before coming], until one gets here and realizes how things really are. I know that the change in life... one has to adapt to new habits, new things, that in one's countries we don't really think that they are worthy until we come here. Time, like time passes so quickly here and if one does not know how to manage it... while back in one's country it seems that time goes very slowly.⁵⁸

Juana noticed that managing time was more valuable in Canada compared to what she was used to in Ecuador. She expressed that she had to adapt to "new habits, new things," such as a new system of time (for instance, in Canada she worked, study, and volunteered, while in her

country she mostly focused on studying at her high school). Then, Juana, who immigrated as a teenager four years before the interview, observed and reflected on how she had to adapt to things that were valued differently in both countries.

The majority of the participants described that it was important for them to make sense, accept, reject, and negotiate new values. In particular, women with children expressed sometimes being more firm or flexible (negotiating with their children) with parenting values that differ in their countries of origin and Canada. For example, a few participants suggested that LA parents can be more protective with children compared to Canadian parents. One participant expressed that from her perspective children's independence is more valued in Canada than in her country of origin, where children's safety can be a major concern. A few participants described trying to balance between protection and independence by giving responsibility and freedom together to their children.

Along these lines, Ruth explained that she and her husband have taught ways of being from El Salvador to their children, "because the Canadian way of being is very different than ours, in terms of discipline, with respect to living life. So, my husband and I have always tried to have that influence, of our parents, of our countries."⁵⁹ She considers herself strict, but also tries to be flexible considering the cultural context in which they live. For example, she had specific rules or agreements with her children, such as going out late at night, time to be back at home, sleepovers, and codes of dressing. In addition, previously in the interview, Ruth also expressed that she feels Canadian, and is proud of being in Canada and "of seeing my kids growing up and my husband working, and being emotionally balanced."⁶⁰ She appreciates her family wellbeing and not having anymore the challenges they had at first in Canada (18 years ago). Then, for Ruth, making her own decisions to preserve aspects of her culture does not contradict being a

proud Canadian. She exercises her freedom in Canada to make decisions in terms of parenting and cultural values.

Several participants expressed how much they appreciated several values introduced to them in Greater Vancouver such as: interacting with people from different cultures, awareness of women's rights, freedom of speech and movement, increased safety, and learning about "many other new things." For example, Irene mentioned that she valued the cultural diversity of this society, she expressed that: "the multicultural nature of this society is by itself the most valuable support that immigrants can have here."⁶¹ She understands for "multicultural nature" that immigrants from all over the world can have the same rights of the people being born here.

Summarizing, several participants described a sense of identity continuity by finding and enacting their strength and other values that helped them to cope with immigration challenges, such as affirming their spirituality and faith in God and making decisions about their values. To exercise these values, it was important to "have the strength to look for help" when needed, and that this practical and emotional help was available to them. Several participants described enacting their faith in God by praying and making ways to follow their goals. As well, the majority of the participants described that it was important for them to make their own decisions about their values and make sense, accept, reject, and negotiate new values.

4.3.3 Continuity of Our Professional Identities and Skills

Several participants pursued meaningful jobs in areas they liked and that recognized their professional skills and formal education. They got these jobs after working in survival jobs and with a lot of hard work and efforts such as working during the day and studying at night. Several of them described a sense of identity continuity by using prior professional skills, by having their

skills and education recognized, and by building stronger and new professional skills in areas important for them. When Sylvia asked the participants about their plans for the future, the majority answered that they were planning to use and build their professional skills in their jobs and studies. Eleven women expressed their goals to keep working and to maintain their current jobs (most of the time, providing services in the community). Nine talked about their plans to have various trainings either for keeping their jobs or for personal fulfillment. And seven of these nine women were planning to take college or university level classes.

For several political refugees everything they wanted to do at first was in their countries of origin. But they were afraid of going back because their lives were in danger and they appreciated the protection offered by Canada. Several of them had a sense of continuity of their professional identities and the importance of their work by increasing awareness of their countries' situation from a safer space in Canada. For example, for Sara, it was very important to keep increasing awareness about human rights violations in Argentina. She helped to start HIJOS (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio, Meaning: Children for Identity and Justice, against Forgetting and Silence) in Argentina, a youth organization initially composed by children of persons disappeared by the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). Sara's own parents were disappeared. HIJOS had the purpose of investigating what had happened with the disappeared parents during the dictatorship.

Two months after Sara's arrival in Canada, she suffered a major depression and faced a fear that she had not experienced before. Sara looked for counselling support and kept speaking actively about HIJOS on the media and at several universities. When she got her Canadian residency, she came back to Argentina to interview people and to produce a film with these interviews. She also helped to found HIJOS in Guatemala (now this organization exists in

several LA countries). Later she also found continuity working in various non-profit agencies to organize and work with youth and increase social responsibility in Canada.

Another participant, Debra, felt she had to assume social and political responsibility in Guatemala, and later, in Canada. She used to work giving legal consultation to workers who had organized in unions. She and her family had to escape and live in different countries until they arrived and stayed in Canada. She continued her work at a Canadian church organization increasing awareness about human rights violations in Guatemala. She participated in the commission and sub-commission of The United Nations to get a resolution and call the government to stop the massacres and human rights violations. Debra is very grateful to Canada for accepting her as a refugee and for all the support she has received. She believes that the highest qualities that people can have is to have solidarity with others "who they not even know and that are living in other countries."⁶²

Another participant, Cristina, expressed that one of her goals in Canada was to keep doing social work. She explained that her own experiences as a newcomer made her to connect and to be supportive to other immigrants. She found professional continuity volunteering, and then working supporting newcomers at MOSAIC, "where communities were helping their own communities." She believes that it is very important to offer support services in Spanish for newcomers who do not speak English. Later she worked as a youth support worker and as a multicultural liaison at the School Board. She envisioned to work with other groups as a team and organized several agencies and support groups to work together. She is a pioneer and organizer for LAI support groups and a volunteer for several causes and organizations. Cristina expressed that her immigration experience made her stronger and more socially conscious.

Another participant, Claudia described how her current work is meaningful for her

identity because it allows her to provide support and awareness to women who have suffered spousal abuse to recover their self-confidence and be themselves again. As well, Irene, who arrived as a senior to reunite with her family, expressed how much she valued to volunteer coordinating a LA seniors' support group, which belonged and participated within a bigger multicultural seniors' group. Several goals of the LA seniors' group were:

To keep our own identity, to keep and enrich our mother tongue, to honor our traditions and at the same time, advance in our process of adaptation, to learn a bit more about our new country every day, to know not only about its landscape but about its people, social structure, history, own traditions and culture.⁶³

Irene was proud of the seniors' work because they had achieved objectives of harmony and solidarity in the group in spite of different nationalisms and religious differences. For her, and for several participants, it was important to pursue meaningful projects in an area she could use her professional skills and contribute to the community. Then, several participants described a sense of identity continuity by applying their professional skills, by having their formal education recognized, and by building new professional skills in areas important for them.

4.3.4 Continuity by Preserving Latin American Culture

The majority of the participants described a sense of identity continuity by preserving some values and traditions of their LA culture and the Spanish language. They were asked by Sylvia, the interviewer, what do they do to keep their LA culture and if it is important for them to keep speaking Spanish. All of them expressed that they preserve their original culture in diverse ways, such as: speaking Spanish at home with their families, keeping in contact with family in their countries of origin, being updated about their LA countries' sociopolitical situation, and

preserving some values, traditions, and social relationships.

In particular, women with children engage in the role of sharing their original culture with their kids. They speak to them in Spanish, and talk to them about values and traditions of their countries of origin. All of them explained that it is important for them that their children speak Spanish at home because this will give them the possibilities to connect with their families in their countries of origin, to keep part of their cultural heritage, to enrich themselves by speaking a second language, to communicate when they travel to Spanish speaking countries, and to have a skill that can open doors and jobs in a multicultural society. These women looked for spaces where their kids could interact with other kids in Spanish, such as family and friends' gatherings, LA events and churches.

The majority of the participants expressed keeping in contact with people in their country of origin. They were in communication with their families, and expressed the importance of the sense of family unity. Several of them expressed helping with some financial support for their families back in their countries of origin. Several of them were also in contact with friends and colleagues, and two of them with community and labour organizations (human right centers, church groups, and unions). The women kept in contact by calling, e-mailing, and sometimes, visiting their countries. Travelling to their countries was not always possible or it was limited to a few visits in several years. Several women expressed doing financial efforts to visit their countries. For example, Cristina mentioned that because she wanted her children to have a connection with her family, she and her partner saved as much as possible to visit her country once every two years.

Several women also expressed deep affection for their countries and did an effort to keep updated about their countries' situation by reading online newspapers and reading about LA.

Maria, who has visited her country once in 17 years, mentioned: "It is something very difficult to explain, that love for your country, although it [my country] is very small, and with all the many problems that our LA countries have, but it is something like the love for your country grows when you are far away."⁶⁴ Another participant, Beatriz, expressed that the situation in her country of origin affects her family here: "[...] and those problems [political conflicts and violence], although we are far away, they affect us in some way because our families, because of the people that live in Colombia, and because we love our countries and wish the best for them."⁶⁵ She was informed about the socio-political conflicts in her country and wished peace for Colombians.

Besides preserving Spanish, a sense of family unity, and connection with their countries of origin, the participants expressed keeping other LA values, traditions, and social relationships. For example, it was meaningful for them to keep or adapt their religious beliefs, to prepare traditional food, listen and dance LA music, keep in contact with people from LA, and attend LA events and church gatherings. They also expressed that it was important to participate and belong to support groups where they could speak Spanish.

Then, the majority of the participants described a sense of identity continuity by preserving aspects of their original culture in diverse ways, such as: speaking Spanish at home, keeping in contact with family in their countries of origin, being updated about their countries, and preserving LA values and traditions that created meaning in their lives.

Conclusions. For my first research question, I searched for main themes in the questions, how do you feel about your identity and how do you feel about your identity as Latina women? The majority of the participants reported feeling proud of who they were and where they were from. They expressed appreciating their original nationalities or being identified as Latina

women. Several also expressed feeling proud of being a Canadian or living in Canada. From this positioning, they also mentioned various elements and processes important for their identities, such as appreciating: who they were (e.g., their ways of being, thinking, acting, and believing), what they (or they and their families) have accomplished, having dual or several nationalities, having several simultaneous affiliations (e.g., women, immigrant women, and belonging to community groups), and meaningful processes and projects (e.g., increasing social awareness and contributing to society). These women incorporated negotiated understandings of themselves, of their achievements, social interactions, gender positions, and meaningful life and professional projects and processes.

For my second and third research questions, I conducted a categorical-content thematic analysis with two major categories in mind, sense of identity loss and sense of identity continuity. I constructed these categories drawing from Frie's (2011) understanding of identity continuity. These categories stayed during the analysis because the women described experiencing these senses. These categories helped me to identify major themes (subcategories) within them. Then, I proposed that a sense of identity loss included: Loss of their voices and the fear of speaking, loss of their relational and group identities, loss of their self-confidence as a result of emotional and physical trauma, and loss of their student and professional identities.

I also identified a sense of identity continuity that included: Continuity by enacting their capacity to open doors and construct meaning in life (by making the decision to immigrate to Canada, by engaging in meaningful activities such as socializing and belonging to community groups, and by contributing to the Canadian society with volunteer work), continuity of their strength and other values to overcome obstacles (reaffirming their spirituality by praying and keeping faith in God and by making decisions about their values), continuity of their professional

identities and skills, and continuity by preserving certain elements of the LA culture. This sense of identity continuity was helpful for the participants to overcome challenges of immigration.

About half of the participants (12, n=25) constructed a sense of identity loss by describing a sense of rupture, reconfiguration, or crisis in the way they understood themselves. These drastic changes were problematic for them and decreased the women's mental, emotional, and general well-being. These participants experienced a decrease in their self-esteem, self-confidence, agency, and sufficiency. Several of them also indicated experiencing major depressions. At the same time, they expressed using internal coping resources (such as strength, faith, and persistence) and looking for support to resolve, cope, or keep coping with this sense of identity loss.

Looking back to more difficult times, several of the women who constructed a sense of identity loss, they also mentioned the experiences that helped them to cope or emphasized a constructive side of their precarious immigration circumstance. Then, from my perspective, these women constructed a sense of identity loss being aware of finding the positive or beneficial aspects of challenging situations. This could imply that for some women a sense of identity loss might have contributed to grow and empowerment, when reflected after some time and when experiencing less difficult times. Still, the majority of the women described this sense as "too much happening" or "too drastic." To acknowledge their efforts and resilience, I presented their sense of identity loss together with some of their self-affirmations and constructive experiences.

The majority of the participants constructed a sense of identity continuity by describing a more or less continuous sense of themselves that allowed them a certain emotional stability and helped them to cope with difficult situations. They described experiences and elements that helped them to regain their strength and confidence, and provided meaningful links in how they

understood themselves. Several women, who experienced a sense of identity continuity, also faced a sense of identity loss. Their sense of identity continuity was helpful for them to cope with a sense of identity loss. Then, these bicultural, and sometimes multicultural, women kept more or less a continued sense of themselves while their identities were in a continuous play with changing contextual and relational factors.

Four of the participants narrated their experiences from a present suffering position, and expressed that it would have been better for them to stay in their countries of origin. Then, the majority of the women had solved major difficulties but some of them continued to face challenges and to doubt a major decision, having immigrated to Canada. In terms of identity, this may refer to identity as a social process in continuous interaction with contextual factors that individuals need to face. In terms of help, this implies that immigrant women can benefit a lot from practical and emotional help during their first years after arrival, but that constant support is important to keep coping and resolving challenges of immigration.

5. Discussions

In short, [Latin American] women's perceptions on themselves and their role in society as portrayed in the literature indicate the coexistence of traditional attitudes and beliefs regarding women's status and roles and an ongoing process of change in attitudes regarding gender issues. Frid et al., 2002a, p. 8

Here [in Canada] I really find the opportunity to express myself as a woman and to feel that I am really worthy and that I am not the only woman who thinks this way. Sara, a participant¹³

The first quote emphasizes a process of change in LA women's perceptions on themselves and their role in society in their countries of origin. In this process, traditional aspects 'coexist' with an ongoing gradual process of change in attitudes regarding gender issues. In Canada, several of the participants embraced a faster change of increased awareness and exercise of their women's rights. These women were open to embrace fast changes and reconfigurations that increased their confidence and self-esteem. The possibility to create constructive meaning of change was important for the participants' openness to change.

The first research question that guided this study explored the participants' important

¹³ In Spanish: "Aquí encontré como mujer una oportunidad para expresarme y de sentir que yo valgo realmente y que no soy la única mujer que piensa eso." Sara, una participante.

elements of identity in their narratives of immigration. The women expressed appreciating who they were and where they were from and felt proud of their identities and their identities as Latina women. From this empowered positioning, they mentioned meaningful elements and processes for their identities, such as valuing: what they (or they and their families) have accomplished, having acquired dual nationality and simultaneous affiliations (e.g., being an immigrant woman) and participating in meaningful social projects (e.g., in community groups).

My two other research questions inquired if there were sense of identity losses and sense of identity continuity in the women's narratives, and if so, how these women constructed them. I identified that, from a positioning of feeling proud of their identities and looking back to more difficult times, half of the women experienced a sense of identity loss and the majority of them experienced a sense of identity continuity. The women described a *sense of identity loss* as major changes and reconfigurations in the way they saw themselves, which decreased their mental and general well-being. Their sense of identity losses included: Loss of their voices and the fear of speaking, loss of their relational and group identities, loss of their self-confidence as a result of emotional and physical trauma, and loss of their student and professional identities.

Several women described a loss of their voices by not speaking or feeling fearful and embarrassed to speak. They were extroverted communicators and storytellers who expressed feeling like a child who has to start again and is dependent on others' support. They had continuous feelings of discouragement, impotence, loneliness, hopelessness and sadness; while they suffered decreased self-esteem, self-confidence and sufficiency.

Several women experienced a sense of a relational and group identity loss when they transitioned from being part and being connected to extended family, friends, various groups, and wider society, to loneliness, isolation, and feelings of no belonging. These women described

being used to spend more time with people than to spend time alone: they received and gave support to close relationships; were able to express affection (e.g., share happiness and sadness), and talk about meaningful achievements and difficulties with others. They missed prior strong relationships and expressed that this type of relationships can take long time to develop in Greater Vancouver. In their narratives, the majority of the women used a collective 'one' to include others in their own experiences (i.e., "as one feels"). This may refer to prior ways of speaking collectively or inter-dependently, and may refer to the women's sense of a relational and group identity. Several women, who experienced a sense of loss of a relational and group identity, also experienced major depressions.

Several women described experiencing emotional trauma and losing their self-confidence due to domestic violence and abuse. The majority of the married women (8 of 11) divorced their husbands a few years after arriving to Vancouver. Besides separation, several of them also faced spousal abuse influenced by high stress introduced by changes in family roles and dynamics, by various socioeconomic stressors, and by an increase in the women's awareness of their rights and opportunities. The women expressed feeling like if they were different persons going through new challenging situations: they felt unable to act and stop the violence, were afraid of talking to others about the abuse, were hyper-vigilant and unable to focus, had a decrease in self-esteem and felt incapable of finding work and communicating in English. They also felt lonely and isolated, invisible, dependent, scared, hopeless, and lacking control over their situations.

Finally, several women expressed experiencing a sense of loss of their professional identities and skills when they worked for long periods cleaning houses, taking care of kids, or doing other jobs that did not recognize their formal education. They expressed having to start from zero and felt discouraged, disappointed and frustrated. Several women also expressed an

increased understanding of the challenges (such as poverty or lack of job benefits) that people who work in survival jobs for long time may face.

The women described constructive aspects of this sense of identity loss. Usually, after expressing their difficult emotions, they also explained what helped them to cope or emphasized an educational side of their precarious immigration circumstances. They explained having benefited from increased: self-affirmation, self-confidence, positive ways of thinking, faith in God and spirituality, new forms of extended support, capacity of prioritizing goals and empathy with others in difficult situations. The majority expressed that grieving their losses in counselling and support groups, having practical and emotional help, volunteering, getting meaningful jobs and the recognition of their professional skills helped them to recover their strength and have a more hopeful understanding towards life.

The majority of the participants described a *sense of identity continuity* that included: Continuity by enacting their capacity to open doors and construct meaning in life, continuity of their strength and other values to overcome obstacles, continuity of their professional identities and skills, and continuity by preserving certain elements of their LA culture. This sense of identity continuity characterized the women's more or less continuous sense of themselves that allowed them a certain emotional stability and helped them to cope with the challenges of immigration.

The majority of the women described exercising their capacity to open doors and construct meaning in life. The projects that follow gave them a continuity of this capacity: making the decision to immigrate to Canada in search of a better life; engaging in meaningful activities such as connecting with others and belonging to community groups, which provided them with a sense of a relational and group identity continuity; and contributing to the Canadian

society with volunteer work. The participants described how important it was for them to have spaces to socialize, community groups to belong, and different events to meet new people.

Several women constructed a sense of identity continuity by regaining their strength and exercising other values that helped them to overcome obstacles. Several women were aware of their resilience because they had solved many prior challenges in their lives, while for others it was important to look for help to find and reinforce this strength. As well, they expressed how meaningful it was for them to connect with their spirituality by praying and trusting in God, who had been with them and had helped them in prior difficulties. They also described how reaffirming was for them to make their own decisions to preserve and transform values from their original cultures (e.g., socializing and parenting values), and to make sense, incorporate, reject and negotiate values from the Canadian society (e.g., awareness in terms of women's rights and cultural diversity).

Several women described a sense of continuity of their professional identities by working in meaningful jobs that recognized their skills and formal education, and by having the possibility to build stronger and new professional skills. These women worked hard and were flexible in terms of working at first in different areas from their previous fields. When the interviewer asked them about their future plans, the majority were planning to take more training and keep their current jobs. For several refugee women, it was important to keep doing advocacy and activism for their countries of origin and to work in areas where they could also assume social and political responsibility in Canada.

Finally, the majority of the participants described a sense of identity continuity by preserving aspects of their LA culture in various ways, such as: speaking Spanish at home with their families, maintaining a sense of family unity and keeping in contact with family in their

countries of origin, being updated about their LA countries' sociopolitical situations, and keeping some LA values, traditions and social relationships that created meaning in their lives.

Next, I present a discussion of these findings in light of two current theoretical perspectives on identity that emphasize identity as an active processes where individuals engage in agentic ways in their social environments. I also present what is the meaning of my findings in light of other research studies with immigrant and refugee women experiences in Canada. Later, I explore some implications for the practice of counselling psychology, clarify the limitations of this study and suggest future research approaches.

5.1 Links to Previous Perspectives on Identity

Erikson's (1968, 1974) psychosocial perspective on identity initiated the acknowledgment that individuals' identities are subject to change over the adult life based on individual experiences and input from social structure. Later, social psychologists expanded on how social contextual factors influence social identities such as gender and racial identities, and how each social identity represents the individuals' relationships to a group (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). This dialogue has been enriched by several perspectives on identity by emphasizing the importance of individuals' social interactions and projects and their interplay with contextual factors and social discourses to shape individuals' identities.

In the literature review, I traced what I considered compatible complementarities across several perspectives that acknowledge the importance of social processes for shaping identity. I then reviewed identity insights from the perspective of the next theories: intersectionality, social-constructionist, narrative theory, and action theory. I also consulted a reflection on a sense of identity continuity from a hermeneutical perspective.

In this study, I drew mainly from a contextual action theory perspective on identity (Young et al., 2008) and a hermeneutical reflection on a sense of identity continuity (Frie, 2011) to explore some of the women's important elements of identity, sense of identity loss and sense of identity continuity. I explored identity in the women's narrative as an active process constructed over time where individuals engage driven by goal-directed actions, and as an interactive and joint process between them and others in their social environment. These perspectives allowed me to approach the women's identities in terms of processes more than in terms of social structures (such as family, religion, and class) and to reflect on the women's identities being negotiated over time and across different circumstances.

I constructed the women's main sense of identity loss and continuity using Frie's (2011) reflection of a sense of continuity. In agreement with Frie, a sense of identity continuity characterized the participants' more or less continuous sense of themselves that allowed them certain emotional stability and helped them to cope with difficult situations. As well, a sense of identity loss characterized a sense of rupture and reconfiguration that decreased the individuals' mental and general well-being. Next, I reflect on the findings of this study considering identity as an active process in terms of this group of women's goals, goal-directed actions, social interactions, and contextual factors.

Looking now at a sense of identity loss, the majority of the women experienced drastic changes, worse socioeconomic circumstances, and various losses when they arrived to Greater Vancouver. In contrast, the majority of the women expressed having immigrated to Greater Vancouver looking for "a better life," which for them usually meant *having goals* of increased safety and protection, accessing better socio-economic opportunities and being able to construct meaning in life. However, they focused mainly on solving settlement, survival, and immigration

challenges, which were more difficult than they expected.

According to Anderson et al. (2010), when individuals' goals of immigration to Canada are not met, they experience “dissonance –between what people had expected to find in Canada and their actual experiences– and repositioning –how they subsequently restructured their lives and redefined their identities” (p. 101). My study shows a correspondent process with the participants. Experiencing these processes of dissonance and repositioning, while starting over, generated distress, decreased self-confidence, and reduced sufficiency for several LAC immigrant women. In particular, half of the women experienced a sense of identity loss and five of them suffered strong depressions during their first years of arrival. Therefore, drastic changes, immigration challenges, and sometimes how the Canadian society responded to these women –in terms of difficult access to fair income employment– were adverse factors for them to reach their goals and influenced their sense of identity loss.

Although, *the women's goals* were not reached during their first years in Greater Vancouver, their goals influenced and guided their undertakings and social projects during this time. If the women would not have engaged with these 'expectations' and goals, they probably would not have been so discouraged with themselves and with their new environment. However, I wonder, if the women would not have engaged with these guiding goals, if they would have overcome the immigration challenges, and ultimately, if they would have immigrated to Canada. Thus, the women's goals were relevant for their identities, particularly for their sense of identity continuity, and above all, for the continuity of their capacities to open doors and construct meaning in life.

During and after the first most difficult years, the majority of *the women's goal-directed actions* were immersed in social processes particularly important for identity such as

communicating in a new language, creating new acquaintances, participating in support and community groups, searching for employment and trainings, adapting and negotiating their professional vocations, dealing with personal and family changes, coping with difficult emotional states, engaging in meaningful projects and negotiating prior and new goals, among others. Then, the women were actively engaged in these social processes that influenced their identities and a sense of identity loss and continuity.

Contextual action theory (Young et al., 2008) emphasizes that identity processes happen in interactive and joint process between the individuals and others in their social environment and in continuous interplay with a diversity of contextual factors. As well, several current perspectives on identity, such as an intersectionality perspective and a social-constructionist perspective, emphasize the relation among social identities, social disparities, discourses, and power dynamics that affect individuals located within social structures (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). In this sense, several of the participants of this study mentioned experiencing classism, gender discrimination, unequal employment opportunities, unequal distribution of resources, and other forms of discrimination in their countries of origin and in Canada. Several of them, particularly political refugee women, were actively involved to stop these forms of discrimination. But besides encountering challenging contextual factors, the women also experienced helpful and motivational opportunities such as emotional and practical support and the possibility of exercising their women's rights in Canada. The majority of the participants appreciated having better opportunities in Canada (at the time of the interview) compared to their countries of origin.

In terms of *contextual factors* in the women's environment, there was a clear influence of the challenges and opportunities of immigration on the women's sense of identity loss and

continuity. For example, a sense of loss of their voices was related with lack of spaces to learn and practice English and with the women's fear to be criticized or ridiculed by society; a sense of a relational and group identity loss was related with isolation and feelings of loneliness and no belonging; a sense of continuity of constructing meaning in life was related with access to meaningful community and support groups and with opportunities to contribute to society; a sense of continuity or a sense of loss of their professional identities was respectively related to access or lack of access to fair income employment that recognized the women's professional education; and so on. Therefore, challenges and opportunities of immigration were relevant contextual factors in the women's environment; and how the women experienced encouraging and difficult environmental factors, as they alternated between two or more cultural traditions, affected their identities and influenced their sense of identity loss and continuity.

The women participated in social processes where they interacted with various individuals such as service providers, Canadians in general, other LA individuals, and family members. I concur with Stewart and McDermott (2004), in that the current discussion on identity has facilitated the recognition that identities are not completely stable, but shaped in social interactions. In my study I found that lacking strong *social interactions* (or "strong relationships") was an obstacle for these women to make sense of their changes and transformations during their first most difficult years. In addition, the women described how feeling lonely and isolated influenced their sense of a relational and group identity loss. Then, both the lack of social interactions' adverse influence and the women's initial sense of loss of a relational identity, imply how important it was for the women's identities to be constructed with others. This affirms the women's identities as socially constructed through joint action with others.

As well, at the time of the interview, the women referred to continuous on-going processes in their relational identities when they expressed that their most enjoyable activity in Greater Vancouver had been socializing, and how meaningful it was for them to keep involved in community and support groups and belong to supportive volunteer and work spaces where they could interact and support other individuals. In addition, in their narratives, they usually mentioned and were grateful to significant people or programs that assisted them during challenging moments and also had unpleasant memories of unsupportive services.

Young et al.'s (2008) action theory recognizes the mid- and long-term persistence of identity, and moreover, it acknowledges the existence of on-going processes in its construction, and perceives that most meaningful actions are social. In agreement with Young, I think that the women's strong relational identities were persistent identities constructed in their countries of origin. This persistence could have influenced even more how important it was for them to construct their identities with others. Then, the women's relational identities may exemplify a long-term persistence of identity with the existence of on-going processes in its construction.

Frie (2008) defined biculturalism as the individual's experience of two different cultural traditions. The participants in my study are bicultural in the sense that they experienced at least two cultural traditions, an original LA culture and a newer Canadian culture. Then, they had two traditions of dynamic coping processes to deal with their circumstances and to interpret and negotiate their possibilities (in play with their contextual elements). Frie also elaborated on the concepts of agency and bicultural competence, and on how culture is constantly transformed when individuals negotiate common meanings in social interactions. He asserted that individuals become active agents in the process of making and remaking culture while navigating different cultural contexts. In accordance with Frie's assertions, at the time of the interview, the majority

of the women were active agents who had continuously made sense of prior and more recent cultural processes. Several of them expressed appreciating what they have learned from their experiences of immigration. They also described acting as agentic integrators of their identities while navigating, negotiating and adapting to new sociocultural contexts.

In this respect, after the first most difficult years, the majority of the women accessed more opportunities and made sense of some of their prior and current transitions and transformations. They described getting into more stable situations by exercising their capabilities and strength and looking and finding appropriate practical and emotional help. Then, the women were actively engaged in participating in trainings, volunteer projects, and jobs in areas they were interested, such as providing services in the community (e.g., health and support workers, settlement workers, program coordinators, and counsellors). They also expressed how much they appreciated their increased awareness of women's rights and the multicultural nature of the Canadian society.

An intersectionality perspective conceptualizes identity as framed by the complex interrelation of notions such as: culture, power, discourse, class, race, and gender (Ang, 2001; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990, 2000). This perspective aims to clarify and increase awareness about social disparities and power dynamics' influence on individuals' identities. In my study, several questions arise from an intersectionality perspective: How the interaction of social identities such as LA, LAC, immigrant, woman, and working-class woman influenced the participants' sense of identity loss and continuity? How are these social identities (LAC, gender, immigrant, and class) constructed in the context of Greater Vancouver, and in the context of the women's countries of origin? How did this group of LAC women experience them? To elaborate on the answers to these questions goes beyond the scope of this research. However, and in agreement with an

intersectionality perspective, further research could explore how the interaction of these social identities can help us better understand the experiences of these women and inform us about potential assumptions that we would not consider by exploring each social identity individually.

It is relevant to clarify that for these participants, the emphasis of being Latinas or LA, LAC, and immigrant women was more salient (than other social identities, for example, being a working-class woman) in the context of their immigration experiences. As well, it is important to consider that these women had multidimensional and diverse experiences within these categories. For example, several women felt respected in some areas, but dealt with experiences of discrimination in other areas. In some cases, they felt respected as women by having protection and help when facing domestic violence and by exercising their capacity to work and contribute to the family earnings. As well, they felt proud of being LA and looking physically 'different' in the context of the significant cultural diversity in Greater Vancouver, where the majority of the people look 'different'. In this sense, several women noticed and appreciated the respect that Canada has for the determination of people as social groups to preserve and develop their customs.

However, several women expressed experiencing discrimination in getting qualified employment. They described having been denied jobs because of their accents or because they did not have Canadian studies or Canadian job experience. In this sense, several studies have indicated that there is reluctance within the Canadian society –employers, government, institutions and professional associations– to recognize immigrant professionals' academic degrees and work experience (Anderson et al., 2010; CIC, 2011; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009). For example, at the same time that there are insufficient affordable and feasible retraining options, international credentials are not recognized. Several authors

(Boekestijn, 1988; Lee & Westwood) have reported potential deeper factors behind this situation such as competition, territoriality, and covert racism in keeping good job positions. These factors can translate into barriers for LAC immigrant women such as denial of fair access to employment, as well as unfair job conditions.

These barriers greatly affected several participants during their first years in Greater Vancouver. They experienced distressing psychological dynamics underlying experiences of unemployment and underemployment such as feelings of loss and isolation, low self-esteem and sense of professional identity loss. These dynamics were present simultaneously with various challenges such as lack of strong social support networks –which take time to build–, financial distress, a sense of loss of a relational and group identity, and being fearful to speak English. Summarizing, being a LAC immigrant women in Greater Vancouver was adverse for these women in terms of finding qualified employment. The participants' professional identities were affected by various socio-political and educational systematic constraints for immigrant professionals.

A social constructionist perspective on identity, in a similar way to previous perspectives, acknowledges identity construction in terms of the dynamics of social interaction and social processes. As well, it emphasizes that identity is not an essence but is socially constructed out of a multitude of discourses. In addition, concurring with *narrative theory*, it asserts that individuals organize and constitute their experiences and identities in terms of stories and narrative structures and through language practices (Arvey, 2002; Burr, 2003; Sarbin, 1986). Thus, it is relevant for a process of meaning making how individuals organize and craft their experiences, for example according to a theme (adventure, comedy, tragedy, etc.) and to temporal and spatial dimensions. These premises were relevant for the development of my study.

The women's narratives of immigration were organized chronologically with a beginning-middle-end sequence. Along with the interviewer questions, they started narrating their first experiences in Canada, main challenges and opportunities, turning points, current perspectives about their identities, and future plans. By narrating their stories these women created meaning of their past actions, structured their experiences and identities, and anticipated their future projects. These women answered the interviewer's questions "how do you feel about your identity and how do you feel about your identity as a Latina woman" at the end of the interview. I believe that it was important for these women to remember and recount challenges they overcame, opportunities they appreciated, people they met, and achievements they (and their families) made, to present and situate themselves as being proud of their identities. Then, these women created legitimate and meaningful stories that empowered them.

Arvey (2002) highlighted that identities are contingent and open to multiple interpretation during the process of being negotiated within our relationships and within power relations and agency dynamics. In my study, I found that that the women felt safe with the interviewer because the conversations were fluid, engaged, and trusting. The participants had the power to name and interpret their lived experiences during the interviews. The interviewer's assistance in the reconstruction of prior narratives was helpful to enhance the women's agency. It is then important to acknowledge the richness and uniqueness of these stories, which a new or unfamiliar researcher to the women probably could not have elicited.

In addition, Arvey (2002) explained that by narrating our life experiences we open new ways of understanding ourselves, which influences our identity and knowledge. She also highlighted language as performance or talk as action, because when we speak "we perform some aspect of ourselves out into the world to be interpreted by others and ourselves" (p. 115).

By narrating we open possibilities to carry out our goal-directed actions. In agreement with Arvay, I believe that the women's narratives constitute a form of verbal action, where the participants reinforced their agency as narrators of their stories and as sense makers of their actions into a meaningful whole.

In conclusion, these women described their identities, which include their sense of identity loss and continuity, as active processes constructed over time where they engaged driven by their goal-directed actions, and in interaction and joint processes with others in Greater Vancouver. The women's goals, goal-directed actions, contextual factors, and social interactions influenced and interplayed reciprocally in their sense of identity loss and continuity. Accordingly, these women referred to their identities as social processes when they identified as important elements in their identities several of their goal-directed actions, social projects, and interactions with others. In this respect, they highlighted their (and their family) achievements, meaningful activities (e.g., socializing and belonging to community groups), important affiliations (e.g., gender identity, immigrant women, LAC women, and dual nationalities), and work projects where they contributed to society.

5.2 Links to Previous Studies on Identities

Lieblich et al. (1998) proposed an operational definition of continuity with parents' ways of life for individuals born to immigrants. These authors constructed a major continuity theme (where continuity as a term does not appear in the explored narratives) considering the data provided by the participants. In agreement with these authors, the important elements of identity for the participants in my study (capacities, strength, achievements, relationships, affiliations, and meaningful social projects) can be seen as meaningful elements in the participants'

descriptions of their sense of identity loss and continuity.

In agreement with exploring identity in terms of the own data provided by the participants, the majority of the women in my study narrated their experiences from the perspective of someone who has overcome the most difficult part, and from the perspective of feeling fulfilled with their identities. In particular, when they were asked about their identities and their identities as Latina women they reported feeling proud of their identities. I believe that this empowered positioning influenced the women's appreciation and gratitude of the elements and social processes important for their identities. As well, these women were able to describe negotiated understandings of themselves, their achievements, social interactions, gender positions, and meaningful life and professional projects. I believe that if these women had been asked the same questions during their first most difficult years, when they were facing sense of identity losses, their appreciations about their identities would be different. Then, women experiencing their first years of immigration might have provided different findings. This may also refer to an understanding of identity as a dynamic social process constructed over time, which considers women's undertakings and contextual factors.

In this respect, Mangila-Nguyen (2007) considered different stages according to the number of years that participants had lived in Canada. In a narrative analysis of help-seeking experiences of refugee women in Greater Vancouver, she divided the women's stories in three stages: settlement or the time of landing in Canada; beginning to navigate helping systems or the struggles to survive; and flirting with integration or hope for a better life for their children and for becoming full participants in Canadian society. In agreement with this position, the majority of the women of my study, who had lived between 11 and 30 years in Greater Vancouver, had also experienced the most difficult years of immigration. This can be observed in their narratives,

where the majority described their experiences from the perspective of someone who has overcome the most difficult part. Accordingly, they experienced a sense of identity loss during their first years in Canada.

Mangila-Nguyen (2007) also explained that, for the immigrant women of her study, help meant practical support to settlement, training and employment, but also emotional help particularly during their first five years in Canada. I add to her view, that for the participants of my study, help also meant the prior types of practical support, as well as emotional support in terms of their sense of identity loss. Then, the women of both studies experienced similar stages in terms of facing more difficulties at arrival, and therefore, in terms of looking for and accessing more practical and emotional help during their first years in Greater Vancouver.

Several of the main contextual factors (e.g., challenges and opportunities) and a sense of identity loss and continuity for the women in my study are related with the findings of several studies of narratives of immigrant women in Canada. Mangila-Nguyen (2007) identified, in the narratives of help-seeking experiences of refugee women: finding courage to seek and establish support networks, engaging in volunteer work, and being thankful for bridging and training programs. This author also reported different themes and situations not present in the narratives of my study, for example, being suspicious of institutional and police surveillance. Also, in a previous study, Moussa (1993) highlighted that a group of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women negotiated their ethnic identities by forming alliances to support each other. She also emphasized that keeping self-affirming values that appear to be different from mainstream Canadian became important for these women's feelings of continuity. As well, she asserted that these refugee women could not adapt to the Canadian society uncritically, when they came from prior experiences of activism to decrease patriarchal, cultural, racist, and class domination.

These themes are related with the sense of identity continuity of the women of my study, such as continuity by engaging in meaningful activities and contributing to Canadian society with volunteer work; socializing and belonging to community groups; making decisions about prior and new values; and preserving certain elements of their LA culture. As well, several participants expressed increased awareness and exercise of women's rights, for example, acting to stop discrimination (which they also experienced and sometimes tried to stop in their countries of origin) by standing up and communicating with the person offending them.

In addition, Mangila-Nguyen (2007) and Moussa (1993) emphasized the importance of a relational identity for refugee women and also reported several cultural and relational discontinuities experienced by these women, such as feeling isolated and lost, the loss of the key role of extended family, and the loss of acquaintances, communities, and institutions. As well, Mangila-Nguyen proposed, given the high number of refugee women who worked in caring roles, that gender and culture, through socialization, influenced the internalization of the women's caring roles in their homes and in their workplaces.

Concurring with these prior studies, the majority of the participants of my study also described the importance of a relational identity, faced similar discontinuities that influenced their sense of loss of a relational identity, and had caring roles as service providers. As well, several mothers expressed that they prioritized their children's wellbeing during their own personal or free time. This could also imply, as Mangila-Nguyen (2007) suggested, that gender and culture, through socialization, had influenced the internalization of the women's caring roles in their homes and in their workplaces. However, and adding to this idea, I propose that for the participants of my study: it was meaningful to contribute with supportive work places, where they had previously received support; it was relevant to work in interaction with people (and not

in lonely jobs); and it was important to keep fair income jobs in areas that were meaningful for them (several of them worked at places where their volunteer positions became job positions after some time).

In conclusion, there are several parallel aspects but also some differences in findings reported by other studies of women's narratives of immigration in Canada (in addition, there are also some unrelated themes). For example, a parallel finding suggests that participants who faced initial similar challenges of immigration experienced a sense of a relational identity loss. However, there were specific sociocultural characteristics in how each group of participants constructed and preserved this relational identity, and the same may apply for other themes. It is then important to consider both parallels and differences, because they both contribute with an understanding of the immigration experiences of particular cultural groups.

My findings are in agreement with two other narrative studies of LAC women (Frid et al., 2002a; Lopez-Damian, 2008) that emphasized how important is for the women to create connections and meaningful links in the ways they see themselves. They explored identity as a construct in continuous transformation and emphasized how LAI women renegotiated their identities by continuously articulating the meaning of their experiences. These authors concluded that the women had succeeded integrating new cultural patterns and keeping the supportive elements of their culture of origin. As well, the original researchers (Frid et al.), who brought together the narratives of this study, highlighted the importance of: a sense of belonging that the women ascribed to their LA affiliation, a proactive participation of the women in peer support groups, a practice of awareness and social responsibility, and a process of consciousness-raising about domestic violence, which was very helpful to get rid of "distorted" socio-cultural images.

All these topics relate to the main sense of identity continuity identified in my study.

However, the major contribution of my study consists in exploring the women's important elements of identity and sense of identity loss and continuity in light of contextual action theory and hermeneutic perspectives. These perspectives allowed me to explore the women's identities in terms of their undertakings and social processes and in terms of their sense of identity loss and continuity. Particularly, I also contributed to identify the major changes and ruptures that were difficult for these women to reconcile with the ways they understood themselves, and for which they needed extended support to recover a more integrated sense of themselves. My study also helped to identify the sense of identity continuity that facilitated the women a more or less stable sense of themselves that was helpful to overcome challenges of immigration.

5.3 Implications for Counselling Practice

The needs and levels of support among immigrants can differ according to their immigration experiences and particular circumstances. This understanding has created ethical awareness in Canada to provide specific cultural groups with multicultural counselling (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2007; Samuda & Wolfgang, 1985). The findings of my study can inform counsellors and other mental health professionals about elements of identity and a sense of identity loss and continuity of LAC women. These findings can also inform culture-specific approaches to multicultural counselling, which emphasize the importance of being knowledgeable of particular populations to provide more effective counselling services.

The participants of this study experienced psychological difficulties and developed ways of coping that were influenced by cultural, socio-economic, historical and political conditions in their countries of origin and in the host society. Once in Greater Vancouver, they experienced

challenges and opportunities in interplay with their goals, goal-directed actions, experiences and social interactions. Then, it is important to consider that LAC women may have particular needs, ways of approaching these needs, difficulties, coping resources, and solutions. These findings might also provide some insights to inform experiences of other immigrant women who belong to cultural groups that might share some conditions and experiences.

These findings can also inform us about the adverse consequences of decreased self-esteem, self-confidence, and a sense of identity loss in LAC women's identities. At the time of the interview, the majority of the women described being thankful for having better opportunities in Canada compared to their countries of origin. Then, these findings can also inform benefits on women's identities, such as a sense of identity continuity, higher self-esteem and self-confidence influenced by respectful opportunities, such as appropriate emotional and practical support, and fair income employment. Several participants expressed acquiring increased agency and awareness about their women's rights in Canada.

Several participants described that counselling and support groups were helpful to be heard and seen, grieve their losses, learn about their challenges, and decrease difficult feelings related to a sense of identity loss, and regain strength. In addition, community groups provided them with a sense of a relational identity continuity, a sense of belonging, and with opportunities to interact, establish stable relationships, and contribute with society. Several participants mentioned that it was important for them to look for emotional help with a Spanish speaking counsellor.

With these prior means of support, the majority of the women described recovering their strength to engage in training programs, volunteer projects, meaningful jobs, and live with a more hopeful understanding towards life. Then practical and emotional help provided in

counselling and community and support groups were very important for the well-being of the participants of this study.

5.4 Limitations of this Study

According to Frid et al. (2002a), the selection criteria for the 25 participants was that participants were born in a LA country, have immigrated to Canada after 1972, and have lived in the Lower Mainland of B. C. at least for five years and up to a maximum of 30 years. However, these participants were also chosen from a list provided by LA health and settlement community workers and other persons of the Spanish-speaking community. They were also selected considering their availability for the interviews (which may imply that these participants were interested in this type of projects in the community). Given that the majority of the adult participants worked providing services (such as settlement, support, and health education), the participants' may represent a group of women who were actively working in the community or actively accessing community services, and that for these reasons they were known by the LA workers who proposed them. Then, it is important to consider that this group may represent a group of women that was well connected providing or accessing services. However, I wonder if these were skills that the majority of the LA refugee and immigrant women already had (in the LA context, many women who emigrated or were forced to exile during the 1970s and 1980s, were actively working in their communities for sociopolitical changes), and therefore this group is a representative sample of these active and engaged women.

The delimitations of this study are that it does not include immigrant men, neither immigrants who are from non-LA countries. It does not include either LAC women who decided to return and stayed in their countries of origin (all the participants lived in Greater Vancouver at

the time of the interview). Then, these narratives are from women who decided and found ways to stay in Canada. Further research with LAC women who decided to return and stayed in their countries of origin might provide alternative insights in terms of the challenges, opportunities, and a sense of identity loss and continuity of these women.

In this secondary study, I did not get in touch with participants because they did not consent to be contacted by other interviewers. The main limitations are in terms of losing the participants' engagement in the narrative analysis and interpretation of the findings. Finally, because the interviews were audio-recorded and not videotaped, I did not visually explore participants' body language, facial expressions, movement, or any environmental (interruptions, space setting, noise, etc.) changes during the interviews.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research and Conclusions

The sample of this study was a heterogeneous group of LAC women in terms of various categories, such as age, number of years living in Greater Vancouver, immigration categories, conditions at arrival and year of arrival, among others. In the women's narratives of immigration, the prior categories were contextual factors that might have influenced their sense of identity loss and continuity. Then, it is relevant to conduct research with more homogeneous and controlled groups in terms of the prior categories.

The most recent LA immigration, after the 1990s, arrived in the economic (skilled workers) or in the family class. This trend is still related with lack of personal safety conditions and unstable economic situations in the context of the majority of the LA countries (Goldring, 2006). Then, the women's goals of immigration in terms of increased safety might share similarities in all the immigration categories. However, other goals and conditions of arrival

might differ for LAC women with different immigration categories. It is then important to consider that none of these women immigrated as skilled workers (although several of them had professional degrees) and that the findings of this study may differ from a more controlled group in terms of immigration category.

In addition, according to previous studies and to the findings of this study, the number of years living in Canada is relevant for immigrant and refugee women's identities and a sense of identity loss and continuity. Then, a suggestion is to prioritize controlled groups of participants who have the same number of years living in Canada (e.g., at 1, 5, 10, and 20 years), and then, if possible, also control other categories of immigration. This research with more controlled groups might provide further insights about a sense of identity loss and continuity of LAC women.

In my study I emphasized that participants were asked two direct different questions about their identities: how do you feel about your identity (asked to seven women), compared to the more specific question, how do you feel about your identity as Latina women (asked to 12 women). The 2002 research publication (Frid et al., 2002a) did not refer to these different questions. The participants of this study were asked only one of these questions, and the majority were asked about their identity as Latina women. Given that the women emphasized more meaningful elements of their identities, besides being Latina women, when they were asked the more open question, I suggest for further research about LAC women's identities, to first ask the most general question to all participants, and then explore the most meaningful elements of identity for each of them. This may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the important elements of identity for the participants.

The majority of the married women of this study (8 of 11) divorced their husbands a few years after arriving to Vancouver. Besides separation, several of them also faced spousal abuse

influenced by various stressors related to challenges of immigration and by an increase in the women's awareness of their rights and opportunities. Then, it is relevant for a different study that considers narratives of LAC women with children, to further explore how changes in family roles and dynamics are problematic or helpful for these women, and how these might influence their sense of identity loss and continuity.

Conclusions. Several authors (Ko & Perreira, 2010; Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2010; Simmons, 1993) expressed the need for studies that focus specifically on the particular context and experiences of LAI in Canada. My study contributes to this research as an exploratory inquiry of the narratives of immigration of a group of LAC women in Greater Vancouver. My study also confirms a definite need to study women's immigration experiences.

Through the stories of the women who participated in this study I have gained and presented insights into the women's immigration experiences and the immigration process' influence on their identities. In particular, I proposed an understanding of the women's main sense of identity loss and continuity and important elements of their identities in the context of their experiences in Greater Vancouver. Immigration became problematic for several women when they experienced a sense of identity loss related to immigration issues, drastic changes, and contextual challenges. However, they were able to cope or resolve a sense of loss and recover their emotional health and well-being by exercising their own internal resources and capacities and by receiving the appropriate practical and emotional help. They benefited when the infrastructure to provide them support was in place, and several times, they reinforced or helped to create this infrastructure for newcomers with their volunteer and professional work. Emotional help provided by counselling services and support and community groups was helpful and

relevant for them. Also, spaces to learn and practice English, fair income employment, and equitable opportunities were important for their integration in the Canadian society. The women also expressed that their experiences of immigration have facilitated their openness to cultural diversity and aperture to others' differences.

These women also experienced a sense of identity continuity, which sometimes acted as coping mechanism, during their transitions and transformations in Greater Vancouver. This sense was also related to exercising prior capacities, strength, and values; to affirmation of some aspects of their original cultures; and to support and motivation provided by equitable opportunities. They also experienced a sense of identity continuity by contributing to society providing diverse cultural expressions and values, qualified practice and knowledge in volunteer and paid work, social organization and awareness expertise, inspirational strength and resilience, and bicultural (or multicultural) competence to support other newcomers. They became active agents in their identity social processes while navigating different cultural contexts.

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Appendix A

List of Topics Discussed During the Interviews

(As cited in Frid et al., 2002a) Organized by N. Espinoza

- Year of arrival
- Reasons to emigrate
- Time to make the decision
- Arriving alone or with relatives
- Previous knowledge of Canadian society
- Places of residence before arrival to BC
- Social network
- Impact of immigration and settlement process on personal and family lives
- Opportunities to participate in the new society
- Barriers encountered and challenges
- Turning points
- Type of support received from family, friends, and community agencies
- Strategies developed to adapt to the new culture
- Educational opportunities
- Perceptions of the school system
- Employment experiences
- Importance attached to the preservation of the mother tongue and culture of origin
- Participation in community groups and activities
- Historical events that had an impact in their lives
- Plans for the future and personal messages to newcomers

Appendix B

Interview Questions in English and Spanish

(As cited in Frid et al. 2002a) Organized by N. Espinoza

The most common questions that guided the interviews were:

- ¿Cuándo llegó usted a Canadá? / When did you arrive to Canada?
- ¿De dónde es originaria usted? / Where are you from?
- ¿Sabía con anticipación que vendría a Canadá? / Did you know in advance that you were coming to Canada?
- ¿Vino sola o cuántos miembros de la familia vinieron con usted? / Did you come alone or how many members of your family came with you?
- ¿Qué la motivó y cómo se preparó para emigrar? ¿Residió antes en otros lugares? / What motivated and how did you prepare to emigrate? Did you live in other places before?
- ¿Qué conocías de la sociedad canadiense antes de venir? / What did you know about the Canadian society before coming?
- Y cuando llegó acá ¿cómo se contactó con grupos u organizaciones? / Once here, how did you contact groups or organizations?
- Platíquenos un poquito de sus primeras experiencias acá, por ejemplo, ¿cómo los cambios impactaron su vida personal y familiar? / Tell us a little bit about your first experiences here, for example, how the changes impacted your personal and family life?
- ¿Cuáles oportunidades encontró usted para participar en la nueva sociedad? / What opportunities did you find to participate in the new society?
- ¿Cuáles barreras o retos encontró usted? / What barriers or challenges did you find?

- ¿Cuáles fueron algunos momentos cruciales? / What were some turning points?
- ¿Recibió apoyo de familia, amigos, o agencias comunitarias? / Did you receive support from family, friends, or community agencies?
- Cuando dice que tiene amistades ¿son amistades canadienses o LA? / When you say you have friendships, are they Canadian or LA?
- ¿Estás estudiando? ¿Trabajando? ¿Cómo fue esa búsqueda de estudio o empleo? / Are you studying? Working? How it was the search for studies or employment?
- ¿Cómo se siente en cuanto a su identidad como mujer Latina? o ¿Cómo se siente en cuanto a su identidad? / How do you feel about your identity as a Latina woman? Or how do you feel about your identity?
- ¿Es importante para usted conservar el español? ¿Qué cosas hace para preservar su cultura? / Is important for you to preserve Spanish? What things do you do to preserve your culture?
- ¿Mantiene contacto con su país de origen? / Do you keep contact with your country of origin?
- ¿Participa en algún grupo? ¿Hace alguna actividad comunitaria? ¿Qué le gusta hacer? / Do you participate in a group? Do you do a community activity? What do you like to do?
- ¿Qué piensa que hubiera ocurrido si usted no hubiese venido a Canadá? ¿Qué hubiera sido igual o diferente? / What do you think would have happened if you had not come to Canada? What would have been equal or different?
- ¿Hay algún acontecimiento histórico que la haya impactado? / Is there a historical event that had an impact in your life?
- ¿Cuáles son sus planes para el futuro? / What are your plans for the future?
- ¿Que mensaje les darías tú a las personas que van a escuchar esta entrevista? / What message would you give to the people who is going to listen to this interview?

Appendix C

Participants' Demographic Information

Collected at Interviews. Organized by N. Espinoza

Name = Pseudonym, Country = Country of origin, Category = Immigration category, Year = Year of arrival at BC, BC= Years living in BC at interview, Age 1/Age 2 =Age at interview/Age at arrival

	Name	Country	Category	Year	BC	Age 1/ Age 2	Current Profession
1	Juana	Honduras	Family	1998	4	Adult/ Teen (17)	Student/ Travel agent
2	Maria	El Salvador ^a	Special program/ refugee	1985	17	Adult/ Adult	Supervisor/Pre-school
3	Caro	El Salvador ^b	Special program/ refugee	1986	16	Adult/ Adult	Counsellor
4	Claudia	Argentina	Family	1991	11 ^e	Adult/ Adult	Community health worker
5	Beatriz	Colombia	Family	1997	5	Teen/ Teen (13)	Student
6	Sandra	El Salvador	Special program/ refugee	1984	19	Senior/ Adult	Community worker
7	Azul	Chile	Family	1984	18	Senior /Adult	Artcraft instructor
8	Sara	Argentina	Tourist/ Refugee	1993	9	Adult/ Adult	Filmmaker/Activist
9	Patricia	El Salvador	Family	1982	20	Adult/ Teen (12)	School Board Teacher
10	Ruth	El Salvador	Family	1984	18	Adult/ Adult	Nurses' aide
11	Irene	Peru	Family	1992	10	Senior/ Senior	President Seniors' Group
12	Maribel	Honduras ^c	Family	1988	14	Adult/ Adult	Legal Aid secretary
13	Manucha	Bolivia	Work visa	1974	28	Senior/ Adult	Works in a pharmacy counting medication.

	Name	Country	Category	Year	BC	Age 1/ Age 2	Current Profession
14	Amanda	Colombia	Work visa	1985	17 ^f	Adult/ Adult	Caterer
15	Clara	Honduras	Refugee	1991	11	Adult/ Adult	Education/ community worker
16	Debra	Guatemala	Refugee	1982	20	Adult/ Adult	Community worker/Activist
17	Lucia	Chile	Tourist/ residency	1974	28	Adult/ Adult	Counsellor/ Community worker
18	Milagros	Guatemala	Tourist/ work visa	1987	15 ^g	Senior/ Adult	Childcare provider
19	Cristina	Colombia	Family	1972	30	Senior/ Adult	Multicultural liaison worker
20	Andrea	Mexico	Refugee	1995	7	Adult/ Teen	Works in a restaurant
21	Reina	Uruguay	Refugee	1995	7 ^h	Adult/ Adult	Law and health educator
22	Victoria	El Salvador ^d	Refugee	1987	15	Adult/ Adult	Stylist/owner of a hairstresser salon
23	Josefa	Mexico	Family	1980	22	Adult/ Adult	Executive secretary School Board
24	Yita	El Salvador	Special program/ refugee	1986	16	Adult/ Adult	Program, assists battered women
25	Laura	Argentina	Family	1996	6 ⁱ	Senior/ Senior	Participates in community groups

^a She emigrated first to San Francisco (lived 3.5 years), then BC

^b She emigrated first to Costa Rica (lived six months), then Mexico (lived 3.5 years), then BC

^c She emigrated first to USA (lived 3.5 years), then BC

^d She emigrated first to Los Angeles, USA (lived 2 years), then BC

^e She has lived 19 years in Canada, first arrived to Toronto (lived seven years), returned to Argentina (lived six years), then Toronto (lived one year), then BC

^f She arrived first to Toronto, Montreal, and then Vancouver

^g She arrived first to Nanaimo

^h She arrived to Canada 25 years ago. First arrived to Montreal (lived ten years), returned to Uruguay (lived seven years), then Vancouver (currently, lived seven years).

ⁱ She has lived 16 years in Canada, first arrived to Calgary

Appendix D

Participants' Descriptive Statistics

Country of origin	Count	Percent
1. El Salvador	7	28
2. Honduras	3	12
3. Colombia	3	12
4. Argentina	3	12
5. Chile	2	8
8. Guatemala	2	8
9. Mexico	2	8
6. Peru	1	4
7. Bolivia	1	4
10. Uruguay	1	4
Total	25	100

Immigration Category	Count	Percent	Accumulated Percent
Family	11	44	44
Refugee	10	40	84
Tourist visa	3	12	96
Special work visa	1	4	100

Lived in BC	Count	Percent	Accumulated Percent
4 to 10 years	7	28	28
11 to 15 years	6	24	52
16 to 20 years	8	32	84
21 to 25 years	1	4	88
26 to 30 years	3	12	100

Age at interview	Count	Percent	Accumulated Percent
Teenager	1	4	4
Adult	17	68	72
Senior	7	28	100
Age at arrival	Count	Percent	Accumulated Percent
Teenager	4	16	16
Adult	19	76	92
Senior	2	8	100

Appendix E

Participants' Spanish Quotes

¹ Miro hacia atrás el día que yo llegué a Canadá al día de hoy, lo que ha cambiado es que mi identidad es más rica que antes. Una de las cosas que he aprendido es que nunca debe uno de dejar de ser quien es y que la riqueza de cada persona consiste precisamente en las diferencias entre unos y otros. El hecho que soy latina enriquece mi vida por las muchas cosas que aprendí o que me fueron dadas en esa cultura, el hecho de que soy judía enriquece mi vida enormemente porque me ha dado una guía espiritual muy grande. Ahora, el hecho que soy canadiense también es un factor que ha enriquecido mi vida porque valoro enormemente la libertad en que vivimos, la democracia en la cual vivimos, valoro el hecho de poder salir a Stanley Park y ver la belleza de la naturaleza a mi alrededor y de tener paz y de vivir en una sociedad igualitaria; en ese sentido creo yo que estamos en mucha mejor posición que nuestros países latinoamericanos en donde la mujer sigue teniendo una gran lucha, pero la mujer tiene el derecho de abogar por la igualdad en todos los terrenos.

² Me gusta ser yo, que se sepa que soy latina.

³ Bueno, algunas veces estoy perdida (risa). Pero algunas veces me siento realizada de ser lo que soy. No he perdido mi identidad como hondureña. Es el primer orgullo que tengo pero también tengo mucho amor por Canadá.

⁴ A realizar todo lo que hasta ahora soy y tengo, que son mis hijos, mi salud, mi trabajo, mi seguridad, y la paz en que uno vive aquí en Canadá.

⁵ Bueno, primeramente soy una salvadoreña, salvadoreña canadiense, porque ya tengo tantos años de estar aquí, y que (risa) soy mujer inmigrante obviamente.

⁶ ¿Cómo me siento? Bueno, dicen por ahí la famosa frase de ser ciudadana del mundo, así me

siento un poco. No podría decir que me siento canadiense necesariamente porque no lo soy y nunca lo voy a ser. No tengo, no soy así, tengo otros patrones de conducta. Entonces, yo más bien me siento latinoamericana, esa es mi identidad. En este momento con algunas cosas de esta sociedad, pero que todavía no las he incorporado como para decir que me siento latina-canadiense, no; yo más bien diría que me siento muy feliz, que siento a Canadá como mi segunda patria, pero no puedo decir que me siento canadiense para nada. Me siento latinoamericana, en todo sentido latinoamericana, en la forma en que tengo de ser, en la forma que tengo de actuar, en la forma que tengo de pensar y sí puedo decir que de a poco voy teniendo cosas tal vez de esta cultura. Uno de mis videos, era sobre hijos de inmigrantes, uno cortito que hice y a ellos también les costaba identificarse, aún habiendo crecido en esta cultura, porque no se sabe cuál es la cultura canadiense. No hay, como que están los chinos, están los hindúes, estamos nosotros, hay una mezcla tan grande que yo no podría decir qué es, y también eso puede ser que haga difícil que uno se sienta canadiense o latino-canadiense, así que sí, pensándolo y pensándolo yo diría que me siento Latinoamericana viviendo en Canadá y muy feliz de vivir acá en este momento.

⁷ Yo me siento orgullosa de todo lo que somos y tenemos. Y como todo ser humano, tenemos también cosas que no querríamos tener; pero tenemos que aceptar como somos y tratar de ser cada día mejor.

⁸ Una de las barreras es idealizar una cultura, ya sea a la que venimos o la que dejamos, porque esa barrera no nos deja ver de manera objetiva, la parte positiva que existe en ambas o bien poner todo negativo en la cultura que dejamos o en la que vinimos.

⁹ Es importante mantenerla [su identidad como latina] porque yo aprecio quien soy y de dónde soy [...]. No importa si es de cualquier país, pero es hispana y uno siempre representa no importa de dónde sea.

¹⁰ Me siento orgullosa de ser mujer, de ser mujer latina, de ser mujer latino-canadiense.

¹¹ Nuestra oportunidad para dar un poquito de educación y decir: "no, espere un momentito, lo que usted está diciendo me ofende a mí de esta y esta manera." Es un poquito empezar a integrarse en esta sociedad.

¹² Pero en general nosotras, las mujeres latinas, tenemos un espíritu de superación muy grande. Creo que toda mujer lo tiene, y en especial lo digo por ser mi propia sangre, que uno lo experimenta y lo vive alrededor cada día.

¹³ Ruth's quotations:

- Emocionalmente fue una época dura, tremenda, que bueno gracias a Dios ya la pasamos.
- Quizás uno se pone barreras, porque al no poder expresar lo que uno quiere, porque uno está siempre pensando si tan sólo pudiera expresar lo que quiero decir.
- Que uno tiene un acento fuerte o hablas muy rápido o no se te entiende.
- A mí me llevó hartos años para poder defenderme.
- Quizás uno se pone barreras, porque al no poder expresar lo que uno quiere, porque uno está siempre pensando si tan sólo pudiera expresar
- O hago la misma pregunta en diferente manera o hablo un poco más despacio o más claro, para lograr entendernos o sea que esa es una barrera que he logrado romper.

¹⁴ Pero era un gran problema en cierta forma, es como volver a nacer, me parece, no tener amigos, pero siquiera iba a tener a mi familia aquí.

¹⁵ Era siempre el miedo de hablar. Claro al principio era duro. Realmente en ese tiempo siempre

hablaba español con las personas que estaban ahí en la escuela y siempre era el miedo de hablar y de expresarme. [...] tuve que dejar eso atrás y enfrentarlo.

¹⁶ Sufrí mucho por el idioma, porque no tenía nadie aquí, ni familia.

¹⁷ Al principio es duro, porque uno tiene que empezar de cero, empezar una nueva vida prácticamente, un nuevo idioma, un nuevo país, nuevos amigos, todo. Pero el cambio vale la pena definitivamente. Cuando uno está ya después de unos años y mira hacia atrás, uno dice: "la mejor opción era haberse venido.

¹⁸ "Qué pena, mejor no hablemos, porque si se van a burlar, ¿para qué?" Eso es inseguridad. El resto de la gente no lo ve así.

¹⁹ En Colombia, yo era una de esas personas que siempre hacía reír a la gente, que siempre tenía algo que decir, algo que contar, en fin. Al llegar a este país yo sentí que mi seguridad personal bajo muchísimo porque me sentía minoría en la sociedad, me parecía que todo el mundo me estaba mirando. Claro que eso es sólo mientras uno coge las fuerzas otra vez. Es cuestión de tiempo más que todo.

²⁰ Fue muy difícil, en especial por el idioma. Estaba yo perdida aquí, perdida, automáticamente perdida. Entonces, poquito a poco, miraba las cosas, así como extrañas aquí. Poquito a poco me hice de ambiente; pero no había Latinos, era muy difícil, preguntar, tener idea de adónde debo ir, cómo voy a hacerlo. Pero al final de cuentas, yo me olvidé de eso, quería ser fuerte y valiente. Decía: "total yo me olvido, diré que yo vivo en mi país". Y poquito a poco me fui ambientando.

²¹ Todos ellos resultan íntimamente ligados a tu presente, a tu hoy, simplemente por el hecho de que jugaron un papel tan importante en tu pasado. Puedes dejar de verlos, sí, pero no puedes dejar de quererlos, de recordarlos, de pensar en ellos. Creo que cuando decimos que extrañamos nuestro país, en realidad queremos decir que extrañamos a esas personas.

²² Tú sabes cómo es, Sylvia, en la ausencia, la preocupación es mayor, una pajita te parece una viga. Afortunadamente, mi pequeña familia aquí en Canadá ya se había enfrentado con esos demonios. Conocían el problema y me ayudaron mucho a enfrentar mis propios demonios.

²³ M: [...] Ahí tiene una mansión. Ahí también uno estaba tan solitario, vivir en esas mansiones ¡Uy, qué horrible! La soledad es peor que el hambre. Yo vivía en esa mansión con muchos dormitorios.

S: Hablemos un poquito de este pensamiento que acaba de decir que la soledad es peor que el hambre, ¿cómo logró sobreponerse a la soledad?

M: Yo no sé por qué, el destino, no tengo idea, siempre me ha tocado estar sola.

S: Pero ¿cómo ha sobrepasado la soledad?

M: Me olvido, sabe que, me olvido, es bien triste. Yo tenía una mansión para mi solita, pero no era feliz, tenía miedo; no tenía con quien hablar, yo cuidando y sola con los perros, porque a ellos les encantan los perros y los caballos.

²⁴ Porque la verdad mi vida aquí es sólo trabajar, trabajar y trabajar sin ningún descanso

²⁵ Me hubiese gustado estar, por ejemplo, en mi país, estar con mi familia y yo creo que hubiese sido mucho mejor para mí. Pero aquí estamos (risa). Sí, pero también he puesto un granito de arena aquí en Canadá.

²⁶ De ahí yo estuve en este proceso de estar sola. Entré en un período de depresión muy grande y yo sentí que me estaba enfermando y entonces solamente ocho meses estuve acá y no aguanté más. Me regresé otra vez a San Francisco con la esperanza de que podía arreglar mis papeles. Lamentablemente no pude. Tuve que regresarme de nuevo. Todo ese cambio le hizo mucho efecto a mi hijo; pero en especial, la separación con mi esposo a él lo afectó muchísimo, muchísimo. Él también se deprimió y tuvo muchos problemas en la escuela.

²⁷ Pasé por un período de depresión bien grande acá en Canadá [...]. Pienso que la depresión es una enfermedad en la cual necesitamos un gran apoyo de nuestra familia. Ante todo, necesitamos sentirnos queridos. Yo sentí cuando vine acá, tal vez el cambio fue muy duro para mí en el sentido que yo no tenía familia acá [...]. Sentía sobre mis hombros una tremenda responsabilidad y no sé, yo soy una persona a la que le gusta estar constantemente con gente, me encanta compartir con una amiga, con mi vecina, con mis hijos y lamentablemente acá uno está muy encerrado y también otra cosa que me afecta a mí bastante, es el clima. [...] Yo pienso que uno tiene que buscar ayuda [para la depresión], hay grupos de ayuda, de apoyo, y eso me ayudó a mí grandemente acá.

²⁸ Tuve la oportunidad de llegar a pensar un día que podía hacer algo mejor para mis hijos; una vida mejor con derecho a todo lo que un ser humano quiere en la vida y que en nuestros países no lo tenemos, la libertad de expresión, la libertad de muchas cosas que no las hay en nuestros países.

²⁹ Es lo más doloroso de una madre dejar a sus hijos, pero en la desesperación de la búsqueda de la seguridad, de la tranquilidad, uno arriesga tantas cosas, y de una de las cosas fue que uno arriesga es el estar con sus hijos.

³⁰ Siempre he tomado con bastante filosofía las cosas [...] tengo la forma de ayudarme yo misma recordando que hay cosas que son más secundarias.

³¹ El usaba mucho abuso emocional. Me hacía dudar acerca de lo que yo podía o no podía hacer como mujer, de lo que yo podía o no podía hacer como madre [...], más put downs hacía, parecía que él tenía más control sobre mí.

³² Yo estaba todo el día atendiendo a mis bebés, porque eran niñas pequeñas de uno y dos años.

La violencia emocional se había incrementado bastante y mi autoestima había bajado una

barbaridad. Mi identidad como mujer, estaba un poquito dubitativa, porque me sentía aislada de todos, porque me había sacado de Argentina, donde yo tenía mis amigos y a mi hermana, mis parientes, y me había sacado de Toronto donde yo tenía también la única relación con mi papá [...]. Estaba en una forma de aislación completa.

³³ Hacía muchos años ya que no trabajaba fuera de la casa y uno de los miedos que tenía era no poder conseguir trabajo y no poder mantener a mis hijas. El otro miedo que tenía era, con alguna razón ilógica, porque es una razón ilógica, pensar de que no iba a poder hablar el idioma, cuando yo lo hablaba perfectamente bien [...]. Entonces, uno está siempre cuidándose la espalda. Entonces, llegó un momento que yo me llegué a creer eso, que yo no iba a poder mantener a mis hijas.

³⁴ La separación es una pérdida, no una pérdida en sí de decir perdí mi marido, no, mi pérdida y mi duelo fue por mi pérdida de identidad, mi pérdida de persona, mi pérdida de mi ser como mujer, mi pérdida de un montón de cosas, de sentimientos. De repente empecé a recordar cosas que había perdido en el camino, mi familia, mis amigos.

³⁵ Para mí fue muy emocional y fue en una manera, como cuando uno está preso por muchos años y escucha la voz de una persona amiga y para mí eso fue muy valioso eso.

³⁶ Teníamos un problema enorme de comunicación, de parte de los dos. Yo nunca había aprendido tampoco a hablar de mis sentimientos, cuando tenía algún problema lloraba y me quedaba callada y él no hablaba, no decía nada tampoco. Teníamos problemas sobre todo porque yo no estaba contenta. Yo ahí me di cuenta que no tenía a mi familia, me sentía sola, me sentía tonta, me sentía invisible, me sentía que había vuelto a ser una niñita dependiente y nunca había sido así. Siempre había sido independiente, había tenido todo lo que necesitaba y empezaron a venir problemas más que nada porque yo me quejaba y él como no sabía qué hacer tampoco con

mis quejas; no sé, no me puedo poner en la cabeza de él, pero respondía agresivamente, tratando de que me callara, me imagino, protegiéndose él mismo para no escuchar a esta persona quejándose. Y en algún momento que no me acuerdo, él me debe de haber empujado, yo lo debo haber empujado de vuelta. Empezamos a perdernos ese respeto; pero por supuesto yo nunca había visto esto en mi familia, nunca había conocido a nadie que tuviera una situación así.

³⁷ Fue muy duro, porque uno deja a su familia, su trabajo y podríamos decir, su identidad en su país y viene a un país nuevo donde uno no conoce a nadie, no tiene familia y todo es nuevo.

³⁸ Mi self-esteem poquito a poco se fue yendo abajo, porque yo me sentía que no podía hacer nada absolutamente sino era con mi esposo.

³⁹ Logré ir a la escuela y aprendí inglés. Eso me empezó a ayudar a sentirme más competente, más segura de mí misma; pero sí, por supuesto, hubo tanto cambio cultural y económico, estábamos completamente bien restringidos económicamente [...] que él trabajaba y se sentía quizás más fuerte y entonces yo me sentía más débil, me fuí sintiendo poco a poco más poquita cosa, como decimos nosotros [...], eventualmente las cosas se pusieron muy mal al punto que tuvimos que separarnos después de varios años. La relación después se convirtió en una relación de abuso y es una historia larga. Yo llegué a un punto que me deprimí completamente y porque Dios es grande y por mi fe que gracias a Dios nunca la perdí, logré salir adelante. Por supuesto, esto no me fue nada fácil, fue un proceso muy, muy, largo. Repito, caí en una depresión. Bastante difícil. Pensé que el mundo se me había acabado. [...] Me iba surgiendo una y otra cosa físicamente, me enfermaba de una cosa, me enfermaba de otra, hasta el punto que yo empecé a pensar que tenía una enfermedad grave, neurológicamente, porque padecí muchas cosas y realmente, podría decir que estaba muy aterrorizada porque tenía dos hijos, y repito, estaba sola.

⁴⁰ Fue cambiando mi actitud hacia la vida, podría decir. Fue naciendo en mí una esperanza, y me mantuve ahí en el Neighbourhood House.

⁴¹ Me siento muy cansada, y a veces me siento un poco sola, porque sigo sola, con mis hijos, pero siempre no pierdo mi fe en Dios.

⁴² Sí, eso es creo, lo más crucial que tengo, que tuve que empezar desde abajo cuando no sé cuantos años uno pasa en la escuela para poder salir adelante y llega uno aquí y para abajo otra vez. Entiendo que es por el idioma también.

⁴³ Era la secretaria del Departamento de Recursos Humanos en el Seguro Social y de un mes para el otro, todo aquel esfuerzo de trabajar, de estudiar, de repente, yo me vi haciendo limpiezas, cuidando niños [...]. Fue un choque terrible.

⁴⁴ Era deprimente porque a veces hacía cosas que nunca había estado acostumbrada a hacer. Nunca pensé en mi vida que iba a vivirlas acá. Yo decía: "bueno, esto es sólo una etapa de mi vida, esto es sólo una etapa."

⁴⁵ Clara quotations:

- Conseguir una visa en nuestros países es como ganarse una lotería.

- Uno viene inspirado por el viaje y no piensa en todas las consecuencias que lo esperan al llegar a otro país.

⁴⁶ Lo importante es dejar atrás la pena, dejar atrás la inseguridad en sí mismo y el qué dirán. Uno llega a un nuevo país y uno mismo tiene que abrirse las puertas. Uno mismo busca la forma de integrarse a un grupo y decir "sí, no te conozco, pero será que puedo conversar contigo en el almuerzo?"

⁴⁷ Siempre tuve y sigo teniendo el mismo pensamiento de estudiar y ser alguien, salir adelante no importa en lo que sea; siempre trabajar duro para poder ayudar a mi familia.

⁴⁸ Porque tenía que ser una persona con certificado, tenía que ser la policía; bueno, no pudimos hacer nada y eso sí me dio una gran depresión a mí, como sentir que no valía nada, que no tenía sentido ninguno y ahí fue donde dije: "me voy a Canadá, no me quedo acá".

⁴⁹ Interiormente, fue como un volver a nacer; me sentía como que por mis sufrimientos me quedé emocionalmente estancada en una misma estación de mi vida y fue como volverme a ese momento y empezar de nuevo. Me sentía como una niña que empezaba.

⁵⁰ Comunicarse, es consolarse, es departir, alegrarse, disfrutar ¿cómo haces eso sin comunicación, sin instrumentos de comunicación?

⁵¹ Que las personas sean más corteses con todas ellas y con todos ellos, porque a veces la gente los maltrata.

⁵² Gané el primer premio ahí pintando el mosaico, ahí está eterno. Ha salido en el periódico.

⁵³ Entonces, el tener tantos problemas a la vez y tener que resolverlos me hizo romper esas barreras y salir más adelante y continuar cada día mejor si es posible y tengo fuerzas.

⁵⁴ Todo depende si uno puede buscar ayuda cuando la necesita y que uno tenga la fuerza para hacer. Que todos de alguna forma lo tenemos adentro. Sólo es encontrarla y salir adelante a pesar de todas las barreras que se pueden oponer.

⁵⁵ Para mí fue muy emocional y fue en una manera, como cuando uno está preso por muchos años y escucha la voz de una persona amiga y para mí eso fue muy valioso.

⁵⁶ Porque yo estoy convencida de que eso se puede transmitir, esa fuerza de carácter, esa fuerza de no detenerse ante los obstáculos es una cosa que se puede pasar a otra persona.

⁵⁷ Sólo confiando en Dios y con la ayuda de algunas amistades pude salir adelante. Uno mismo tiene que hacerse el camino para poder salir adelante y seguir las metas que uno quiere.

⁵⁸ No era tanto el saber, hasta que uno llega acá y uno se da cuenta como realmente es. Sé que el

cambio de vida, nuevas costumbres, nuevas cosas a las que uno tiene que adaptarse que en los países de uno realmente no piensa que valen hasta que uno viene acá. El tiempo, como el tiempo se va tan rápido y si uno no lo sabe administrar mientras que allá en los países de uno parece que el tiempo se va muy despacio.

⁵⁹ Porque realmente es muy diferente la forma del Canadiense con nosotros el Latino, en cuestiones de disciplina, en cuestiones de vivir; entonces, siempre mi esposo y yo hemos tratado de tener esa influencia de nuestros padres, de nuestros países.

⁶⁰ De ver a mis hijos creciendo y de ver a mi esposo trabajando y estar balanceados emocionalmente.

⁶¹ La naturaleza multicultural de esta sociedad constituye por sí misma el más valioso apoyo que pueda ofrecerse al inmigrante.

⁶² Que ni siquiera han conocido y que están viviendo en otros países.

⁶³ Mantener la propia identidad, conservar y enriquecer la lengua materna, honrar nuestras tradiciones y al mismo tiempo avanzar en el proceso de adaptación, aprender un poco más cada día sobre nuestro nuevo país, tratar de conocer no sólo su paisaje sino también su gente, su estructura social, su historia y sus propias tradiciones, o sea, su cultura.

⁶⁴ Es algo que yo siento que la verdad es bien difícil de explicar, ese amor por su país aunque es tan pequeñito y con tantos problemas que tienen nuestros países latinoamericanos, pero es algo que el amor a su país de uno, estando lejos más crece, esa es la verdad.

⁶⁵ [...] Y esos problemas [conflictos políticos y violencia], a pesar de que estemos lejos, nos afectan en cierta parte por los familiares y la gente que todavía vive en Colombia y porque queremos a nuestro país y sólo deseamos lo mejor para él.