

**EXPLORING IDENTITY-AS-NARRATIVE IN THE SCHOOL NARRATIVES OF
IRANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Human Development, Learning, and Culture)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

November 2017

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Abstract

Based upon semi-structured interviews with 11 university students from Iran between 18 to 24 years of age at universities in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia, this research addressed a gap in the literature by documenting the narratives of participants' school experiences in Iran and Canada. In addition, this research explored the construction of identities as the narratives we tell other people and confirmed by what others tell about us (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Two main research questions guided this study: What narratives do participants tell of their school experiences? What narratives do participants tell of their actual and designated identities?

The data was analyzed and interpreted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and informed by sociocultural theory (Wertsch, 1985). Five themes were identified: Ritual practices in establishing the school context and constructing identities; English language as a cultural tool in mediating identities; social relationships in shaping identities; and actual and designated identities. This study contributes to the literature by examining the educational experiences of Iranian immigrants to Canada. Implications for schools, along with limitations and suggestions for future research, are addressed in the conclusion.

Lay Summary

This study explored the construction of identity as the narratives of school experiences with 11 Iranian undergraduate students in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia. This thesis adds to the extant qualitative research on Iranian immigrants in British Columbia, Canada. Through semi-structured interviews, the school narratives of 11 Iranian immigrant university students in British Columbia were elicited. Through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) five themes were identified: 1) Ritual practices in establishing the school context and constructing identities, 2) English language as a cultural tool in mediating identities, 3) Social relationships in shaping identities, 4) actual identities: Who I am, and 5) Designated identities: What I aspire to be.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work of Negar Amini. This research project was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board on March 23, 2016. The certificate number of the ethics certification obtained for this study was: H16-0046.

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Glossary of Terms in Farsi

Dini-Religious studies

Emlah-Dictation

Ensha-Essay writing

Enzebat-Participation/behavioral score

Gilaki-A dialect spoken in the Northern part of Iran

Herfeh-va-fan-Vocational and Technical Studies

Konkur-Iranian national University entrance exam

Moaven-Vice Principal

Mobser-Classroom monitor

Namazkhooneh-Praying room

Nimkats-Classroom benches

Oloom-Science subject

Parvareshi-Pastoral/developmental education

Sorood-Anthem and/or songs recited by students representing the social and cultural events at the time

Vasati-The game of Dodge ball

Acknowledgements

I feel immense gratitude to the 11 young men and women who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing your stories with me and for your contribution to this research.

My sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur, my supervisor. Your scholarship, continuous guidance and mentorship with patience and care throughout the program and my research project were significant for my learning in the field and beyond. I am deeply thankful Dr. Barbara Weber who provided me with insightful comments and inspirations during the various stages of this study. Thank you for encouraging me to engage with my research from diverse conceptual and methodological angles at times. I also wish to give gratitude to Dr. Marla Buchanan for agreeing to be my external examiner and for the positive and uplifting energy you brought to my oral defense presentation. Your detailed feedback and thought provoking comments made this thesis more grounded.

My time in this program has been enriched by the friendships and support I received from fellow students and colleagues, including: Karen Forsyth, Claire Alkoutli, Natacha Monestel, Bruce Moghtader, Maryam Dalkilic, and Louai Rahal. I have been honored to receive their intellectual and academic guidance and friendships within and outside of the classes. I also wish to thank Nina Conrad for her editing work.

Special thanks to friends from outside of the academic milieu, including: Soroush, Pouya, Mahtab, Mehrnaz, Nazanin, and Yalda. You have continually made me feel that my work was important and have helped to keep me grounded with your love and presence at various stages of this journey. Thank you!

To my parents who continue to be a source of support, love and motivation, thank you for teaching me to work hard and love completely. I am here because of all the sacrifices and challenges you took upon yourselves to bring us here in search of enriched education opportunities. Words cannot express my sense of appreciation and gratitude for you two loving souls.

To my brother Peyman, thank you for being there when I needed a sister-brother uplifting conversation and for the constant reminders that “I can do it.” I have learnt to be a better person because of you. Wising you love and light on all your endeavors. I am forever a proud sister.

To my loving partner, friend, and husband, Amir: You have had a tremendous influence on my life since the day we met. Thank you for your unconditional support and understanding over the past four years and for keeping me on my toes. I love you. Now onto the next chapter with you!

Dedication

To my parents: Mino and Ali

Chapter 1: Introduction

Within the wide array of literature on immigrant studies in Canada, there is a dearth of qualitative research studies that explore the school experiences of immigrant students in British Columbia, Canada. In this study, participants' school narratives in both Iran and Canada were collected as a means of exploring their "identities-as-narratives" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). This research highlights the school narratives of 11 university students who immigrated from Iran to Canada and settled in British Columbia. As Iranians ranked fourth of the top 10 countries of origin for immigrants in Canada, this study contributes to the literature on immigrants' experiences living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Following Sfard and Prusak's (2005) definition of identities, this thesis provides insight into the school experiences of a subset of the immigrant population in British Columbia. In this chapter, first I provide the context in which the study takes place: Iranian university students in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia. Second I explain the rationale behind this study, purpose, and the research questions. Third, I provide a brief discussion of the theoretical framework. Fourth, I describe the qualitative methods I use to examine my research questions. Last, I end with an overview of thesis.

1.1 Context of Study

Canada has welcomed immigrants since the 17th century (Garousi, 2005), although it has always welcomed some groups more than others. Global migrations have changed the social and cultural landscape of Canada. Due to the growing immigrant population in Canadian society, more students from diverse ethnicities, languages, and nationalities are entering higher education institutions. The history of Canada is shaped by successive migrations and the interaction of these groups within society; yet despite the growing diversity of the immigrant population, there

has been a lack of research attention to linguistically different groups of young adults in Canada (Kiernan, 2014).

Beginning in the 1990s, the origin of the majority of immigrants to Canada shifted from Europe to Asia and the Middle East (Garousi, 2005). Iranians are a fast-growing immigrant community in Canada, and their population has increased 147% between 1996-2006. In 2006, Iran ranked eighth among the top 10 countries in the number of immigrants to Canada between 1981 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). The National Household Profile in Canada recorded 6,775,765 foreign-born residents in 2011, representing virtually 1 in 5 (20.6%) of the total population. Among the 1,162,900 foreign-born people immigrated to Canada between 2006 and 2011, roughly 67% came from Asia including the Middle East. In 2011, Iran rose to fourth place. Iranians accounted for 10.4% of the total immigrants and Iranian permanent residents accounted for the fourth largest number of permanent residents immigrating to Canada bringing their total population to 163,290 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

The vast majority of Iranian immigrants come from urban areas, particularly large and mid-size cities, and they continue to live in major urban centers in Canada, particularly Toronto (Jalali-Kushki, 2014). In 2011, over 94% of Canada's foreign-born population lived in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. The three main cities that welcomed the majority of Iranians in Canada were Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2011). Canadian census figures suggest that Metro Vancouver is home to 27.5% of the total Iranian population in Canada, and Iranians constitute the sixth highest immigrant population in Vancouver at 4.2% (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Given this percentage of immigrants from Iran, it seems surprising that little academic research has been conducted with young Iranian immigrants in the Canadian university context

(Hojati, 2012) that reflects their school experiences in Iran, transition to schools in Canada, and advancement to university. To respond to this gap in the literature, the current research explored the schooling and immigration narratives of Iranian university students in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia.

1.2 Research Rationale, Purpose, and Questions

Empirical research on Iranians, although it has increased over the past 10 years, continues to be limited (Nabavi, 2011). Existing research has examined mainly adult Iranian immigrants in Canada, and some studies have excluded male Iranian immigrant students (Hojati, 2012; Sadeghi, 2008). The rationale for conducting research on the school narratives of Iranian university students in Greater Vancouver is two-fold. First, there is little empirical research on the experiences of Iranians residing in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia (however see, Nabavi, 2012; Yazdi, 2013). The exploration of narratives of any immigrant group can be a springboard for other immigrant populations who, amidst their differences, may share experiences of both alternative ways of being and the significant narratives that exist in their families and communities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Second, there has been little if any qualitative research to date exploring the school narratives of Iranian university students in the Canadian school context prior to and post migration. For these reasons, this qualitative research included both male and female Iranian university students between the ages of 18 and 24 from two universities in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the school narratives of Iranian university students as they reflect on their years as young learners in Iran before immigration, during their subsequent settlement and resettlement experiences (De Fina, 2003), and during

school experiences after migration to Canada. In addition, this study examined the impact their school experiences had on their aspirations for learning and post secondary education.

Two central questions guided this research:

1. What narratives do Iranian immigrant participants tell of their school experiences?
2. How do these narratives inform participants' actual and designated identities?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Sfard and Prusak (2005) defined *identity-as-narrative* as the narratives people tell about themselves and their experiences, as well as the narratives told about them by others. *Identity-as-narrative* is a “collection of stories about persons, or more specifically, those narratives about individuals that are reifying, endorsable, and significant” (p. 16). Sfard and Prusak (2005) define reifying stories as those when the discursive focus shifts from actions to the actors and into stories of states by the use of verbs such as have, can, and be and adverbs such as always, sometimes, usually to mark the frequency of actions. They defined endorsable narratives as those stories about a person or an identities-person that when asked would claim the stories as faithful and significant narratives are those that if any change is made in the story, the storytellers' feelings about the identified person is effected.

Sfard and Prusak's (2005) narrative theory of identity was further explicated by their definition of actual and designated identities. Actual identities make use of present tense and consist of stories that reflect the current state of affairs; whereas, designated identities use future tense to mark what is yet to happen with words that express wish, obligations, and commitments (p. 18). In this research, the narratives that participants shared about their school experiences were considered their identities. This definition highlights the relationship between narratives

and identity, such that identities are constructed in the telling of narratives. The resulting question is how we give meaning to our lives, experiences and how in so doing, we construct our identities through the stories we tell others and what others tell of us that make up our first-person, second-person, and third-person identities. The told narratives in effect shape ones' actions and goals. In this research, the terms *narratives* and *stories* are henceforth used interchangeably.

Following the theoretical framework, this research elicited narratives of school experiences as participants migrated from Iran to Canada, as a reflection of participants' identity construction. The narratives, elicited in semi-structured interviews, of participants' school experiences were defined broadly as a "recounting of things spatiotemporally distant" (Toolan, 2001, p. 1). According to Toolan (2001), narratives are constructed on the basis that there is always a teller, a listener, and a story that involves the "recall of happenings that may be not merely spatially, but, more crucially, temporally remote from the teller and his audience" (p. 5).

From a sociocultural perspective, language is the primary semiotic tool (Ochs et al., 1992), mediating among participants in a social interaction and impacting their ways of thinking. These authors argued that language is not just a medium for communicating "facts" and "ideas," but a tool for collaboratively constructing and evaluating ideas (p. 39), and by extension in this research, identities.

1.4 Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted in the lower mainland of British Columbia with 11 Iranian university students between the ages of 18 and 24 who immigrated from Iran to Canada and who were attending university at the time of the interview. Using qualitative methodology permitted me to explore the richness of experiences among a small sample of

participants (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in quiet study rooms on two university campuses' libraries.

Interviews were conducted in English and transcribed, in a preliminary analysis, at a level consistent with the analysis of narratives to explore the narratives the participants told of their school experiences (Ochs, 1979). Data analysis was guided by the research questions following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, which was adapted to identify recurring themes and patterns in the narratives of participants' schooling experiences. The narratives of participants were analyzed beyond the semantic content to "examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations" that gave meaning to the surface descriptions beyond participants' input to the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out based on the following steps: (a) familiarization with data, which was achieved in this study by listening and re-listening to recorded data; (b) transcription of recorded data and later cross-checking the transcribed interview with the audio recordings; (c) generation of themes in relation to the research questions; (d) refinement and review of themes, which involved checking for the data underlying each theme and checking if they constituted a coherent narrative that accurately represented the data; (e) definition and naming of themes; and (f) writing of the thesis. This method of analysis is described further in Chapter 3.

1.5 Overview of Thesis

This qualitative study was grounded in Sfard and Prusak's (2005) research proposing *identity-as-narrative*. The two research questions were: (1) *What narratives do participants tell of their school experiences?* and (2) *How do these narratives inform participants' actual and designated identities?* In this chapter, I presented a discussion of the context of this study, a brief

overview of literature related to Iranian immigrant experiences in Canada, and the rationale and purpose of the study, including the research questions. In addition, I briefly described the theoretical framework and methodology.

The thesis unfolds as follows. Chapter 2 provides a literature review with key sociocultural concepts central to understanding the relationship between learning and identity construction. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methodology of the study. It discusses researcher positionality, the research context, and the participants; introduces the data sources, procedure, and analysis; and concludes with ethical considerations. Chapter 4 describes three themes, which explores the participants' narratives of the role of ritual practices in establishing the school context and the construction of identities; the role of cultural tools in mediating the participants' learning and identities in their educational contexts; and the role of social relations in facilitating learning and shaping identities. Chapter 5 describes two themes, including the narratives of actual and designated identities. Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings linked to the research questions, as well as possible implications, limitations, and future directions. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a literature review for the current study. The review includes three sections that provide a foundation for the research questions and the theoretical approach. The first section provides an overview of the history of immigration to Canada, followed by the immigration of Iranians to Canada and Vancouver, British Columbia. The second section provides an overview of Vygotsky's theory on human psychological functioning (Wertsch, 1985). The third section describes the theoretical framework, identity-as-narrative, as grounded in the work of Sfard and Prusak (2005), including a literature review of the concept of narrative and the relationship between narrative and identity. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

2.1 Immigration to Canada

Immigration in the 21st century continues to shape Canada. The pattern of immigration to Canada over the last century has fluctuated, reflecting a diversity of languages, cultures, and values. The size and character of immigration flows have been influenced by world wars, national immigration policies, and expanding transportation and economic links (Boyd & Vickers, 2000).

In addition, there has been a remarkable shift in the population of immigrants to Canada, including people from both European and non-European cultural backgrounds (Statistics Canada, 2006). In the most recent household survey, of the 30,895,310 total population of Canadian citizens, approximately 6,775,800 were immigrants (National Household Survey, 2011). Of those immigrants, there was about 163,300 Iranians in Canada of which 120,700 were Canadian citizens who resided in Canada. Between 2006 and 2011, Asia, including the Middle East, was Canada's largest source of immigrants (National Household Survey, 2011).

2.1.1 Outbound Immigration from Iran

Iran has seen an increase in the departure of its citizens as immigrants outbound to Canada. Thus the number of Iranians living in Canada has increased significantly in recent history. Despite the common representation of Iran as a homogenously Muslim country, it is a nation of great diversity, both ethnically and religiously: “Iran is home to many diverse communities of Assyrians and Armenian Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and it is home to more than 60 indigenous language groups” (Price, 2005, as cited in McAuliffe, 2008, p. 66). In Canada, Iranian immigrants reflect this ethnic and religious diversity, as well as being diverse in terms of age and social class (McAuliffe, 2008).

Iranians have a history of immigration to nations in the West as immigrants in search of opportunities for economic and educational advancement and freedom. Prior to the 1979 revolution, immigration to both Canada and the United States occurred on a small scale, from a few hundred to less than 10,000 people (Chichian, 2012; Garousi, 2005). These immigrants primarily came from affluent families who had the means to send their children abroad to study in order to ensure high socioeconomic status upon their return to Iran.

The 1979 Islamic revolution contributed to an increased migratory stream flowing out of Iran (Chichian, 2012; McAuliffe, 2008; Garousi, 2005). Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, there was a drastic ideological shift, which resulted in religious restrictions and gender-based discrimination that made life in Iran almost incomprehensible for some members of society. The Iran/Iraq war, which took place over nine years ending in 1989, led to a second wave of immigration between 1981-1990 as many Iranian families left Iran out of fear that their children would become casualties of future wars (Chichian, 2012; Garousi 2005).

This picture has changed since the mid-1990s, however. The third wave, in the mid to late 1990s, when the then liberal president failed to bring change and justice to the country as a result of the influence of the autocratic regime, consisted of two distinct populations: immigrants who were educated and professionally skilled, and immigrants from working-class backgrounds (Hakimzadeh, 2006). After 2000, the fourth wave of immigrants arrived in Canada when evolving migration policies provided more opportunities for businesspeople to invest in Canada (Knowles, 2007, as cited in Hojati, 2012, p. 43). The fifth and most recent wave occurred after 2009 as the Green movement, consisting of mostly young people, was silenced and disappointed by a lack of positive change in terms of social justice and cultural and political freedom in Iran. During this period, more highly skilled individuals left Iran's universities and research institutions for Canada (Hakimzadeh, 2006).

In this thesis, as all participants completed primary school, middle and some high school in Iran before they immigrated to Canada, here I briefly describe the education system in Iran. Education in Iran is divided into various levels: Preschool is a one-year program for children 5 years old. Primary school (*dabestan*) includes Grades 1 to 5. It starts at the age of 6, and students take a nationwide exam at the end of the Grade 5. Middle school, also known as the guidance cycle (*rahnamayi*), is from Grades 6 to 8. It starts at the age of 11, and students take a regional examination at the end of the cycle. Secondary school (*dabirestan*) is from Grades 9 to 11 and starts at the age of 14. It is divided into two main branches, namely academic/general and technical/vocational. The final level is post secondary education.

Upon completion of middle school cycle, students can choose either the academic branch, also known as the "theoretical branch," or the vocational/technical branch as they proceed to the secondary cycle. A high school diploma is granted after completion of the three years of

secondary school. Thereafter, those who are interested in post secondary education in Iran must enroll in a one-year preuniversity course (*dowre-ye pish daneshgahi*) to be eligible to attend the university entrance examination known as *Konkur*. This centralized nationwide entrance examination is the sole criterion for student admissions into universities (Farrokhi-Khajeh-Pasha et al., 2012; Kamyab, 2008). Students wishing to enter the most prestigious publicly funded universities, such as Tehran University or Sharif University, and to study in their desired program must rank in the top 10 percent on the *Konkur*. Thus, the competition is fierce and the exam is rigorous, contributing to the brain drain from Iran and psychological and social problem in the examinees as students are under extreme pressure to prepare to sit for the exam (Shirazi, 2014).

2.1.2 Iranian Immigration to Vancouver, British Columbia

According to the 2016 Census, British Columbia was the third most populated province in Canada with the population of 4,648,055 (Statistics Canada, 2016). In 2011, the two provinces with the largest percentage of people born outside the country were Ontario, with approximately 3,611,400 immigrants (or 53.3%), and British Columbia, with approximately 1,191,900 immigrants (or 17.6%). Of the total 4,400,100 population there were about 1,191,900 immigrants in British Columbia; approximately 30,100 were Iranian-born immigrants by Canadian citizenship (National Household Survey, 2011). More specifically, of the approximately 913,300 immigrants in metro Vancouver, there were about 28,500 Iranian-born immigrants with Canadian citizenship. Both nationally and regionally, Iran was among the top 10 countries of origin for immigrants.

2.1.3 Research on Iranians in Canada

There exists scant research on Iranians in Canada and in particular little qualitative research that has explored and studied Iranian immigrants' school experiences in Canada. In one study, Sadeghi (2008) explored how immigrant Iranian women in higher education assigned meanings to the concept of higher education and how they viewed the role of learning and literacy in their lives through their personal narratives. Her research drew from theoretical underpinning of sociocultural theory while critical ethnography and phenomenology influenced her approach to methodology. Her participants included six immigrant Iranian women between 28 and 37 years old who lived in Montreal. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews focused on the women's views of the value of literacy and learning in their lives. Three different sets of interviews were conducted with each participant over a span of nine months.

The findings revealed that all participants expressed a strong willingness to learn and to continue pursuing their educational aspirations in the host country. Their analysis revealed three themes: First, they emphasized the importance placed on learning and the pursuit of higher education within Iranian culture and society, as well as in their families. Sadeghi (2008) explained that learning to value literacy and education seemed to be deeply rooted in the women's early experiences of socialization at home and school. Second, the opportunities in the host country helped them redefine their roles as women, mothers, wives, daughters, and educated individuals. Thus, for these women, higher education symbolized achievement, and the lack of it represented failure with learning and education as a "gendered" process (p. 226). Last, through their efforts "to renegotiate their identities as educated women in the context of traditional cultural images of housewives" (p. 222) they believed that knowledge is gained through

education and that through knowledge they can exercise power in their families, communities, and host society.

Jafari, Baharlou, and Mathias (2008) examined the factors affecting the mental health of Iranian immigrants residing in Greater Vancouver through qualitative focus groups and in-depth interview methodology. The participants included 44 Iranians representing equal numbers of men and women across three focus groups: younger adults (younger than 25 years), adults (between 30 and 60 years), and elderly (older than 60 years). Data were coded according to major themes and subthemes. For the adults (between 30 and 60 years), occupational and financial difficulties were the two stressors in adaptation to a new culture. For the younger age group (under 25 years), the participants' main concern was the issue of interfamily disharmony, such as challenges to traditional ways of thinking about values and norms. The study revealed that the majority of adults and elderly were unwilling to accept Canadian culture, while the young adults were more interested in absorbing the new culture and believed that their parents were reluctant to understand their priorities. Thus, for the young adult group the main concern was their parents' resistance to the new social norms while the main issues of the adult group was lack of English language skills, unemployment or underemployment and interfamily conflicts. For the elderly group (over 60 years), poor social and family support, an inability to communicate with mainstream culture, and a lack of English proficiency were the main concerns. The authors suggested that culturally sensitive mental health programs could be implemented in response to these issues.

In dissertation research, Nabavi (2012) examined citizenship learning of 12 young Iranian adults between the ages of 19 and 30 who had immigrated to Canada. She conducted an ethnographic study in Vancouver, British Columbia. This study examined how the participants

learned to be citizens and their experiences of citizenship within multicultural Canada. Learning for these Iranian immigrants occurred across diverse formal and informal sites. Nabavi explored the strategies that shaped an “immigrant youth citizen identity” and its ramifications for construction of the boundaries of citizenship through semi-structured interviews and participant observation (p. 5). She argued for improving the model of citizenship education in Canada, both as a concept and as a practice in the lives of immigrants, particularly young Iranian immigrants. The findings demonstrated that citizenship as a concept has a range of meanings based on experiences of citizenship in the lives of participants. Further, participants’ interpretations of citizenship were informed by nuanced understandings of place as a sense of belonging to imagined spaces and places.

Dastjerdi, Olson, and Oglivie (2012) explored the processes by which Iranian immigrants learn to access health care services in Canada. They used a qualitative research design with a grounded theory approach to analyze their interview data. Their sample included 17 participants (11 women and six men) between the ages of 25 and 49 years who lived in a midsize city in Western Canada. Data were collected through unstructured interviews, and analysis occurred concomitantly. The findings revealed that the participants adopted different methods to access health care based on their education, English ability, and previous experiences. For example, those who were educated and younger at the time of immigration, had previous experience living in another country outside of Iran before Canada, and had a better command of the English and language learned to use the health care system more quickly. The authors recommended the implementation of systems that would help immigrants make decisions based on their historical, cultural, and social world as they construct and reconstruct their experience. They suggested that

health care providers should be aware of cultural expectations and that hiring providers who are immigrants of different countries can help build trust among culturally diverse populations.

Further, Dastjerdi (2012) identified obstacles and challenges Iranian immigrants faced in accessing health care services as seen through the narratives of Iranian health care providers and social workers in the Greater Toronto area. A narrative inquiry approach was used in semi-structured interviews with 33 health care professional and five social workers. The author described three major themes: language barriers and a lack of knowledge of Canadian health care services, lack of trust in Canadian health care services due to financial limitations and fear of disclosure, and the need for psychological support. Even though the participants were immigrants themselves and were familiar with the patients' culture, norms, and expectations, the findings revealed that patterns of misunderstanding were still prevalent in the system. Dastjerdi (2012) concluded by suggesting that health care service providers should build a strong relationship with their communities, use plain language, create informative websites in both Farsi and English, and deliver workshops on health topics.

Hojati (2012) utilized a critical feminist approach to explore marginalized voices of Iranian women through their narratives of experiences in Canadian graduate schools and workplaces. She argued that migration is a source of marginalization and exclusion in Canadian universities. Hojati conducted in-depth interviews with 11 Iranian immigrant women graduate students between 26 and 55 years of age in six different graduate schools in Ontario, each of whom already had a degree from an Iranian university. In general, her study highlighted the women's hope and aspirations to achieve justice and freedom in Canadian society, something they had not achieved back home. Hojati (2012) explained that her participants hoped that their previous education and experience in Iran would help them integrate into their Canadian

university and the workforce. However, they encountered marginalization and racism as barriers to integration into the Canadian university context, evidenced by the lack of support on the part of the students' supervisors and instructors. On this ground, she argued that the participants' past education and post secondary experience in Iran in addition to their inner strength helped them to develop resilience. This permitted them to tolerate discrimination and succeed despite negative experiences in Canadian universities because they did not internalize oppression and marginalization.

In a thesis study, Yazdi (2013) explored meaning making in Iranian immigrant youths' narratives in gang-related activities in Vancouver and its relation to identity. In her ethnographic field research, Yazdi employed in-depth interviews to ask eight male ex-Persian Pride gang members who had immigrated to Vancouver as teens in the 1990s to recall and share their stories of migration and gang membership. The study's objective was to explore the experiences of this particular group of young Iranians in their transition to their new environment, as well as to understand how the participants' identities became linked with gang involvement and how they were embodied and enacted. In regard to the multiplicity of identities, the author supported the position that the participants' identities, in relation to their gang membership, was influenced by historical relations with dominant discourses in different places, as well as their interpretations of discourses. The participants' gang involvement narratives explained the desire for belonging, struggles against exclusion, and rejection of the position imposed on them by others. The identification with the gang was part of the process of finding and locating themselves within their new environment as the "other."

In a more recent dissertation study, Jalali-Kushki (2015) examined the life narratives of seven Iranian women in Toronto between the age range of 30 to 60 who had immigrated from

Iran with a child with a disability. Her research was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's developmental framework to explore these women's experiences by accounting for the various individual, contextual, and temporal factors that impacted their experiences in accessing disability-related supports and services for their children. More specifically, based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) narrative inquiry methodology, the women were asked to reflect back on their experiences and think about how immigration and disability might have impacted their experiences. The findings indicated that the women's experiences of responsibility, blame, and stigma often isolated them and reduced the availability of emotional support. The study emphasized the need for culturally relevant opportunities for the advancement and education of immigrant women who have a child with a disability.

2.1.4 Summary

Prior studies with Iranians in Canada, all except one, have been conducted with older age groups within the adult population, and some have focused on participants of a single sex. Studies have yet to explore narratives of participants' school experiences in Iran prior to high school and university studies in Canada. Thus, there is a gap in the literature with regard to early school experiences for Iranians and educational experiences of Iranian immigrants in Canada and British Columbia in particular. This study was conducted, in part to address this gap and contribute to the scant research on Iranian young adults living in Canada as university students.

2.2 A Sociocultural Perspective to Learning and Development

Wertsch (1985) explicated Vygotsky's theoretical vision in three main themes for understanding the development of psychological functions. First, development is best examined through genetic or developmental precursors. Human activities are best understood when investigated in the context of historical development, which suggests development should be

studied in the process of change (Gajdamaschko, 2015). Second, individual development, including higher psychological functions—such as thinking, voluntary attention, and logical memory—has its origins in the social practices and social life that surround the growing individual. Third, human action can be defined as mediated by culturally derived tools and signs. These themes are further explained below. This sociocultural perspective is based on the scholarship of L.S. Vygotsky (1896–1934) and provides a foundation for Sfard and Prusak’s theoretical framework (2005) described in next section.

2.2.1 Genetic/developmental History

Vygotsky argued that it is possible to examine psychological functioning only if one understands their origin and the transitions they have gone through (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky’s theory is fundamentally a “genetic,” or process account of human development (Wertsch, 1985), and Vygotsky noted multiple histories at work in the development of psychological functions, each with its own set of explanatory principles and mechanisms of change. The four developmental histories—phylogenesis, sociocultural history, ontogenesis, and microgenesis—are interrelated, and consideration of each is required to understand human development. These four domains are summarized as follows.

The first developmental history, phylogenesis was defined as the comparison between the history of higher primates and human beings explained by the tool-mediated actions in the social organization involved in labor activity. Wertsch (1985) explained that while Vygotsky recognized the phylogenetic resemblance between apes and humans with regard to tool-mediated action, he did not undermine the qualitative gap that divides them. Here, the locus of developmental change is within organic evolution, which “may have been influenced by early

forms of culture” (p. 30). Thus, the social activity around labor transforms human mental functioning along qualitatively different lines of development from those of other primates.

The second developmental history, sociocultural history was defined as the historical development of society. Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985) argued that the domain of sociocultural history is governed by cultural tools and signs valued by society. These cultural tools and signs provide for the continuation and transformation of culture and the impetus for learning and development. Thus, developmental change in this domain is attributable to the “decontextualization” of mediational means, which is linked to the transition from rudimentary to advanced forms of higher mental functioning (Wertsch, 1985, p. 40).

The third developmental history, ontogenesis differs from the other genetic domains in that it involves the “simultaneous, interrelated operation of more than one force of development” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 41). Here the cultural line of development involving mastery of the mediational means provided by culture is combined with a natural line of development involving biological development and maturation. This domain studies the appropriation of these mediational tools and how they are integrated into the psychological functioning of the individual during the process of learning and development. Thus, this domain involves both a “natural” and a “social” or “cultural” line of development that work in tandem (Wertsch, 1985, p. 41).

The last developmental history is microgenesis, the “short-term formation of a psychological process” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 55) that unfolds over seconds. Together with the other three domains, microgenesis provides evidence of individual psychological functioning as the result of development within each of these four genetic domains. Vygotsky’s approach to

development is thus defined as a dynamic process with no fixed stages and with multiple principles that account for development (Wertsch, 1985).

2.2.2 Social Origins of Mental Functioning

The second theme that runs throughout Vygotsky's writings is that higher mental functioning in the individual has its origins in social life (Wertsch, 1985). A central assumption is that individual psychological functioning is intricately social in origin, also known as the "social situation of development" (Gajdamaschko, 2015, p. 331). This concept explains that an individual's development is related to his/her social environment and the tools that society provides. This assumption is grounded on the premise that psychological functioning, which is initially shared between individuals as "interpsychological functioning," is later reconstructed on an individual plane:

Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. (Vygotsky, 1981, as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 61)

This claim, known as Vygotsky's "general genetic law of cultural development," explains that learning first takes place on a social level, among people in social interaction, and subsequently on the individual level, as it is internalized by the growing person. In other words, the individual can gradually take control over a process that was originally executed in an interaction with another individual. As Gajdamaschko (2015) described, "all the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (p. 332).

For the purpose of this research, schools become one site where learning, participation, and social and cultural practices are internalized and transformed. Vossoughi and Gutierrez

(2014) argued, “schools not only take into account students’ backgrounds, but also become transformed by their authentic engagement with students’ social worlds and practices” (p. 613). Learning is thus a continuous process that unfolds across time and space with various interlocutors and social situations. In a given learning context, social practices, such as standing up as a sign of respect when the teacher enters and exits the room, have meanings attached to them that learners internalize. Thus, the social and ritual practices experienced in different school contexts shape learning as individuals co-construct their identities. Hence, identities link learning and sociocultural contexts (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

2.2.3 Mediation

Vygotsky’s most important and unique contribution is the claim that human activity is mediated by tools and signs (Wertsch, 1985). Mediation through cultural tools and signs reflects the relationship of the individual to his/her environment and includes the role of tools and signs not only in the continuation of culture, but also in the transformation of culture. Cole (1996) referred to tools as a subcategory of the more general conception of an artifact. An artifact [or tool] “is an aspect of the material world that has been modified over the history of its incorporation into goal-directed human action” (p. 117). In his writings about the use of tools as mediating artifacts, Vygotsky (1978) made a distinction between “tool” and “sign”: A tool, such as a knife or a spade, mediates object-oriented material activity, whereas signs, such as language, function as a means of social or interpersonal interaction. Signs, like tools, provide a means for actively engaging with the world. In this regard, the role of language (as a sign system) in mediation is particularly important in Vygotsky’s theory:

The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and

practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge.
(p. 24)

In light of Vygotsky's idea of language as a psychological tool, words are embedded with cultural meanings; in development, these meanings mediate individuals' learning and identities. Thus, following Wertsch (1985) language is a cultural tool that can mediate higher psychological functions one such as identities (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002). More specifically, language plays an important role in Vygotsky's analysis of human mental functioning and serves as one of the most important mediators of development (Eun, Knoteck, & Heining-Boynton, 2008).

2.2.4 Summary

In this study, the theoretical framework is grounded on the sociocultural perspective to learning and development that examines the history of human evolution, the history of cultures, and the history of the individual, social practices and cultural tools (Vadeboncoeur, 2017; Wertsch, 1985). In this research, I specifically examine narratives as a cultural tool in the construction of identities as the participants engaged in narrating their schooling experiences prior to and post immigration to Canada.

2.3 Situating Sociocultural Perspective on Identity-as-Narrative

In recent years the notion of identity has gained an increasingly visible position in educational research, yet more often than not the term identity is not clearly defined (Vadeboncoeur, Vellos, & Goessling, 2011). The few attempts at defining identity tend to pigeonhole the individual "as a certain 'kind of person' in a given context" (Gee, 2001, p. 99) or focus on "who" or "what kind of person" a given individual is (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, as cited in Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16). However, these definitions of identity seem to be anchored in essentialism. By focusing on a person's "nature," they represent the individual

as an entity formed outside of discourse whose identity is purely biological (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15).

In other ways identity is often defined metaphorically. Moje and Luke (2009) examined five metaphors that conceptualized identity in terms of difference, sense of self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, position, and narrative. Sfard (1998) argued that, metaphors are elusive yet greatly informative objects of analysis. The first metaphor identified by Moje and Luke (2009) was identity as difference, which focuses on national, racial, and ethnic identities. In other words, it conveys how one is represented by a group membership. This captures an essentialist perspective, which pins people down to their countries of origin and other qualities of difference. The second metaphor, identity as sense of self/subjectivity, is closely linked to the first one and is defined as “how selves come to be at all” (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 422). Here the authors drew on the work of developmental psychologist Erikson (1994), whose theories of identity development emphasized the movement toward a stable self, and social behaviorist Mead (1934), who argued that the self emerges through interactions with others. This definition rests on the explanation that the self exists as a reflection of how the mind is impacted by the relationships of meanings in social relationships.

The third metaphor, identity as mind or consciousness, derives from Karl Marx through the learning theories of Vygotsky and sociocultural theorists. This metaphor defines identity as the activity within which one is involved through the use of cultural tools and signs, in particular linguistic signs (Vygotsky, 1978). An individual’s consciousness is developed through the use of tools and the creation of new tools, which leads to higher consciousness in an “unlimited semiosis of activity” (Witte, 1992, as cited in Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 425). Here Moje and Luke (2009) referred to the transformation of “the entire flow and structure of mental functions”

through the use and introduction of new tools. The fourth metaphor, identity as position, is drawn from the work of Holland and Leaner (2004) and Davies and Harré (1990) and defines identity as the way people are positioned and called upon in particular interactions, times, and spaces and how people take up and/or resist those positions (as cited in Moje & Luke, 2009). This means that individuals position themselves or are positioned in different conversational locations according to changes in storylines. The fifth metaphor, identity-as-narrative, is defined as the narratives people tell about themselves, their experiences, and those of others (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Thus, “identities are at least in part represented in and through language” (Moje & Luke, 2008, p. 427).

Sfard and Prusak (2005) have argued that from a sociocultural perspective the notion of identity—unless it is provided with a clear definition—renders itself useless for understanding the link between learning and development, “a pivot between the social and the individual” (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Sfard and Prusak, 2005, p. 21). In their narrative theorization of identity, Sfard and Prusak (2005) argued that identities are “collections of stories about persons... that are reifying, endorsable, and significant” (p. 16). A reifying quality comes with the use of verbs such as “be, have, or can” and also with adverbs that stress the frequency of actions, such as “always, never, usually, and so forth” (p. 16). To be endorsable, the narratives need to fit with the world as the individual experiences it. The most significant stories are those that if any change is made in the story, the storytellers’ feelings about the identified person are affected. Sfard and Prusak’s narrative approach to identity is relevant to this research because it also explores “the dialectic between learning and its sociocultural context” (p. 15). In this thesis, I explore the school narratives that are reifying and significant in the participants’ lived experiences.

2.3.1 Identity Defined

Motivated by Gee's (2001) understanding of identity as an "analytic lens for educational research" while taking into account ontological and epistemological issues, Sfard and Prusak (2005) defined "identities with stories about persons" (p. 14). They positioned "identity-making as a communicational practice" and rejected the idea of identities as "extra-discursive entities that one merely represents or describes while talking" (p. 16). In other words, identities are not given to individuals as entities, but rather are produced in social interactions with others. These narratives about an individual are considered as multiple stories that surround an individual and as those narratives that are reifying, endorsable, and significant. In this thesis, only narratives that were reifying were considered for analysis and the reporting of findings.

By rendering identity-as-narrative, they further highlighted human agency throughout their framework of identity construction:

As stories, identities are human-made and not God-given, they have authors and recipients, they are collectively shaped even if individually told, and they can change according to the author's and recipient's perceptions and needs. As discursive constructs, they are also reasonably accessible and investigable. (p. 17)

These notions of identity highlight the dynamic nature of narrative constructions of identity; how it changes from one social context to another. Hence, identity is moving, tentative, and negotiated in social spaces. This definition gives agency to the learner by opening space for re-authoring of identities. Reflection should lead to re-authoring of negative stories that may be obstacles to learning into narratives that may enhance learning. With this definition of identity, the re-authoring of identities is not only possible but could enable and give momentum to learning. Therefore, part of what drew me to Sfard and Prusak's (2005) definitions of both

identity and learning—as closing the gap between actual and designated identities— is the increased agency they afford to learners in giving them the opportunity to deliberately reject unfit narratives and re-author more productive ones: learning includes “realizing that these are just stories and that there are alternatives” (p. 18). Thus, with this definition, the individual is recognized as active in shaping his/her activities and experiences.

Sfard and Prusak (2005) distinguished between “*actual identity*, consisting of stories about the actual state of affairs, and *designated identity*, consisting of narrative presenting a state of affairs which, for one reason or another, is expected to be the case, if not now then in the future” (p. 18). The authors argued that a person’s designated identity directs the person’s actions as the individual aims to reconcile the “gap” between his/her actual and designated identities. They also asserted that these identities can be created based on the narratives the person is told by other “*significant narrators*, the owners of the most influential voices . . . carriers of those cultural messages that will have the greatest impact on one’s actions” and those deemed valuable to an individual (p. 18). These identifying stories told by others can further define the individuals’ second-and third-person designated identities depending on the significance of these stories for the identified person. These narrators express cultural narratives that are likely to have a great impact on an individual’s actions that can then be incorporated into one’s designated identities.

Interestingly, such cultural narratives may become part of a person’s designated identity despite the person’s own wish. This can happen for various reasons, such as because the told stories are good for her/him, because the stories fit into her/his sociocultural practices, or simply because the stories present the kind of future she/he is designated to have. Thus, a sense of authority and influence may emerge from parents, teachers, and other close acquaintances who

play an influential role in a person's life. Hence, with the assumption that parents are in a position of authority, the participants in this research were asked to reflect on their parents' ideas on education.

This theorization of identity may serve as a "missing link" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15) for understanding individual learning in sociocultural contexts as a person's designated identity gives direction to actions and influences future practices. This formulation might make visible the individual's future educational and participation in social practices: "words that are taken seriously and that shape one's actions" (p. 21). To realize this statement, is to understand that the narratives we tell about ourselves and others tell about us, can shape our identities through language, "*as discursive counterparts of one's lived experiences*" (p. 17).

Borrowing from the work of Sfard and Prusak (2005), I used this identity-as-narrative theoretical approach in interpreting the participants' school experiences as expressed through their narratives of school and immigration. Thus, the emphasis is placed on learning as a social and an individual activity that leads to construction of identities, which are revealed in the narratives of participants' experiences of school before and after their immigration from Iran to Canada. Data was not gathered on narratives that endorsed the narratives of the participants, however, participants reported the narratives that were meaningful to them from significant others.

2.3.2 Narrative Reviewed

In order to address Juzwik's (2006) critique that Sfard and Prusak (2005) did not provide a clear definition for what they mean by *narratives*, I define narratives of personal experiences by drawing on Toolan's (2001) definition of narrative as "a recounting of things spatiotemporally distant" (p. 1) and Bruner's cultural psychological approach to lived stories as

“life narratives” (Bruner, 2004, p. 694). Thus, in this research a narrative is seen as a cultural “tool” (Wertsch, 1985) that invokes past experiences and constructs present and future identities.

In this section, I provide a review of how others have defined narrative.

Baynham (2003) stated that a narrative does not simply reveal, “what happened,” as individuals represent their experiences along with their present reflections and understanding of those experiences. In this study, by examining the relationship of time and space across the participants’ narratives of both arrival as immigrants and their experiences over the school history, I am able to situate the participants’ narratives in the past and explain how these retrospective narratives shape and construct both current and prospective identity construction in the “here-and-now” (Baynham, 2003, p. 362).

As a “recounting of things spatiotemporally distant” (Toolan, 2001, p. 1), telling a narrative involves the recall of happenings that may be both spatially and temporally remote from the teller and his/her audience. In other words, there is distance between the narrator and the social, cultural, and emotional elements embedded in the context of the story. However, in seeing narratives as cultural tools (Ochs, 1997), it is important to background the study of identity-as-narratives within a theoretical perspective that highlights human psychological functioning embedded in cultural, historical, and social contexts.

Bruner (1991, 2004) provides a definition of narratives as literary analyses and cultural approaches to narratives. In his view, narratives consist of a “landscape of action” organized around a theme and a problem or an event that is “unexpected,” as well as a “landscape of consciousness” that specifies the goals, motivations, emotions, and beliefs of the protagonist involved in the action (Bruner, 2004, p. 698). In particular, Bruner’s narrative stance looks at how narratives organize the structure of human experience in both a landscape of action and a

landscape of thinking and feeling upon which events unfold. This emphasizes that human experience and action are shaped by our intentional states. For Bruner, “the representation of experience in narratives provides a frame which enables humans to interpret their experiences and one another” (Cole, 1996, p. 128). According to Ochs (1997), this description suggests that the landscape of action consists of the social context of the story, such as the goal or situation, whereas the landscape of consciousness, or the inner landscape, corresponds to the individual’s interpretations of beliefs, desires, and perspectives. In other words, the landscape of consciousness represents what those involved in the action do or do not feel, think, or know.

Another definition of narrative is provided by Labov (1972) and Labov and Waletzky (1968), who attempted to determine what is a narrative and what is not a narrative (as cited in Ochs, 1997). These authors defined a personal narrative as “any sequence of clauses that contains at least one temporal juncture” (Labov & Waletzky, 1997, p. 21). In sociolinguistics, a narrative is conceptualized as a sequence of past tense main clauses, where the order of clauses is presumed to follow the order of events (Toolan, 2001). However, as Ochs (1997) argued, a narrative can also involve a sequence of events unfolding in the present or event sequences suggesting future plans and agendas. Ochs’s (1997) most interesting point is her explanation that the narrative functions to allow for a “sense of continuity of self and society” as our stories of the past seep into our present reflections by way of planning for the future (p. 191). The sociolinguistic tradition has not, however, sought primarily to understand processes through which “the wider community, with its distinct cultural discursive traditions, impinges on its members’ learning” (Sfard & Prusak, p. 19).

While this type of analysis has made invaluable contributions to various fields (e.g., discourse analysis) and has been adequate for the analysis of individual narratives, it may not be

sufficient to establish connections with the sociocultural context that influences the narratives. I am interested in exploring how narratives are intimately linked with the cultural norms in which the narrative of experience is embedded. In this study, a narrative was defined as a recounting of experiences, reflected as a state of being using reifying verbs, and the participants' narratives were interpreted to reflect their underlying emotions and ideologies, which acknowledged the way they made meaning of their experience. In the next section, I review the literature that examines how identity is linked to learning from a sociocultural perspective.

2.3.3 The Relationship between Learning and Identity

To link learning with its sociocultural context and to unfold its dialectical relationship with identity, Sfard and Prusak (2005) distinguished between actual and designated identities. As they explained, designated identities may not necessarily be desirable, but they direct the individual's actions as they are "a pivot between the social and the individual" aspects of learning (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Sfard and Prusak, 2005, p. 21). A gap between these identities may lead to unhappiness unless closed by learning. As they explained, "learning is our primary means for making reality in the image of fantasies . . . the only hope for those who wish to close a critical gap between their actual and designated identities" (p. 19).

Several studies have addressed the relationship between identity and learning. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) examined epistemological and ontological parts of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on learning, and a review by Penuel and Wertsch (1995) examined identity as a psychological phenomenon by integrating different elements of both Vygotsky's and Erikson's work. Scholarship and empirical research by Vadeboncoeur and Portes (2002) further grounds this research on identity from a sociocultural perspective exploring the production of students labeled "at risk."

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) advanced a sociocultural perspective on learning that explicitly linked learning with identity construction. They argued that in contrast to psychological research that defines identity as self-concept—that is, as epistemological—“the sociocultural conception of identity addresses the fluid character of human being and the way identity is closely linked to participation and learning in a community” (p. 229). Therefore, they introduced ontological questions regarding learning and development and identified six themes grounded in sociocultural theories that address identity, learning, and construction of knowledge. The themes were contextualized as follows: (a) the person is constructed, (b) in a social context, (c) formed through practical activity, (d) and formed in relationships of desire and recognition, (e) that can split the person, and (f) motivating the search for identity (p. 228). This definition asserts that learning is a process that takes place via participation in different social practices and relations with cultural tools, and within multiple learning activities and contexts.

A sociocultural perspective views learning as an integral part of broader ontological changes that stem from participation in a community such as a school, “as a process in which students actively reorganize their ways of participating in classroom practices” (p. 230). In other words, learning involves the construction of identities. Hence, Packer and Goicoechea (2000) asserted that the concept of identity must be understood not from a traditional psychological/epistemological point of view of individual functioning, but from a sociocultural/ontological perspective that addresses the dynamic character of the individual and the way identity is linked to learning in a community. They expressed, “our claim here, then, is that the constructivist perspective attends epistemological processes and structures that the sociocultural perspective is able to locate in an ontological process, and so trace their cultural and historical genesis” (p. 235).

They further argued that because such learning entails development, in particular, schools are particularly well suited to change the kind of person a child becomes, and in line with this current research, what one aspires to become is a reflection of his/her designated identity embedded in ones' cultural context. Therefore, a sociocultural perspective on identity construction as one part of learning, are evidently ontological, meaning the "human being is becoming—striving to be what is not (yet)" (p. 234). As a researcher adopting a sociocultural perspective, I am interested in examining what identities are co-constructed for immigrant students as they share their narratives of learning contexts with different social practices and rituals than what their previous school experiences afforded them. In this study, identity was further linked with learning as a process of knowledge construction, changes in being, and striving to become what one is not yet, as a member of one's culture and community (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Penuel and Wertsch (1995) extended the general Vygotskian principles to the concept of identity formation and explored the common ground between the work of Vygotsky and Erikson. Erikson defined identity as "a subjective sense of invigorating sameness and continuity" (Erikson, 1968, as cited in Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 87) and tended to emphasize individual functioning and choice, whereas Vygotsky tended to emphasize sociocultural process. These authors argued that it is possible to "integrate individual functioning and sociocultural processes into a kind of mediated-action approach to identity formation" (p. 88). That is, by seeking to merge the "dynamic tension" that exists, they both recognized in individuals on the one hand, and society, on the other hand, a relationship that links social, cultural, and historical processes in the formation and transformation of individual identities as possible and necessary. Through this approach to identity formation, the authors suggested that the goal was to interpret and

explain human action, rather than the individual functioning or sociocultural process in isolation (p. 91). Their “mediated-action approach” to identity formation, included the decisions individuals make regarding fidelity, ideology, values, and commitment to work and how they, select, choose and commit to different people and ideas in the course of their activities (p. 91). Thus identity is conceived as a form of action to persuade others about oneself and what one values and it is always addressed within a historical, sociocultural context that individuals are situated.

Vadeboncoeur and Portes (2002) challenged Erikson’s work on identity formation by illustrating that individual identity can be conceptualized within sociocultural frameworks; in other words, identity is constituted in social contexts and mediated by the use of cultural tools. In their analysis of “at risk” construct, they asserted that the identities of the students labeled “at risk” were constituted within social practices and cultural activities embedded in intergroup relations within the political organization of schooling. Thus, their research focused on the influence of the discourses and social practices on the production of “at risk” student identities. Their goal of extending and integrating the study of identity within the sociocultural framework was based on Vygotsky’s emphasis on the use of cultural tools such as language in mediating higher mental functioning such as identity by studying the dynamic nature of identity construction in relation to social relations in a given social context. The theoretical arguments made by these authors are commensurate with the theoretical approach to identity utilized in this research, as they noted the significance of understanding “language and discourse system as centrally implicated in both the construction and deconstruction of identity” (p. 93). Thus, in this study, this conceptualization was applied as the participants narrated their experiences of

relationships with teachers and classmates across the different schooling cycles in both Iran and Canada.

2.3.4 Review Summary

In this research, I used Sfard and Prusak's (2005) identity-as-narrative approach in interpreting the narratives of the participants' school experiences in both Iran and Canada and for defining what identities are: as a collection of stories told by participants embedded in cultural messages. A narrative was defined as a recounting of experiences, and the participants' narratives were interpreted to reflect their underlying emotions, ideas, and ideologies, in a way that acknowledged the way they made meaning of their experience (Bruner, 2004). The link between learning and identity was further illustrated and expanded by adopting theoretical concepts grounded in the research by Packer and Goicoechea (2000), Penuel and Wertsch (1995), and Vadeboncoeur and Portes (2002). Thus, identity was further linked with learning as a process of knowledge construction, changes in being, and striving to become what one is not yet, as a member of one's culture and community.

2.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter two reviewed the literature that grounded this study. The chapter began by reviewing the literature on the immigration history of Iranians to Canada, followed by a review of the existing literature on the Iranian immigrants in Canada in general and specifically in Greater Vancouver. This section revealed that there is scant research that has explored the experiences of Iranians who live in the major cities of Canada. More specifically this review highlighted the limited and almost non-existing qualitative research to date that has explored the school narratives of individuals from Iran. Second, I grounded identity-as-narrative in a sociocultural perspective following Wertsch (1985), which was discussed as the overarching

theoretical framework of this research. This perspective was founded on three main themes that defined the development of psychological functions such as learning as follow: first, development is best examined through genetic or developmental precursors; second, individual development, including higher psychological functions—such as thinking, voluntary attention, and logical memory—has its origins in the social practices and social life that surround the growing individual; third, human action can be defined as mediated by culturally derived tools and signs. This sociocultural perspective is based on the scholarship of L.S. Vygotsky (1896–1934) and provided a foundation for Sfard and Prusak (2005) that was described in the third section of this chapter. Third, I situated my approach to identity construction in Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) definition of identity-as-narrative, particularly narratives about school experiences. Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) identity–as–narrative theoretical framework was described that guided this study’s data analysis. and findings. Last, I reviewed the literature on the relationship between learning and identity. This body of literature links identity, narrative, and learning, with learning as the link to identity construction and with identity as the pivot between the social and individual aspect of learning. Identity, learning, and narration are interrelated concepts for development. In other words, identity and learning are not only directly connected, but also simultaneously connected through narratives that are collectively shaped as cultural tools that mediate identity construction.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used for this qualitative study. The qualitative design was useful in determining participants' emic, or insider, perspective in greater depth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This chapter includes five sections. First, I identify my researcher positionality and my biases, including a discussion of reflexivity and challenges. Second, I describe the research questions and the context: two research-intensive universities in the lower mainland of British Columbia, Canada. Third, I describe participant selection and explain the method of data collection through semi-structured interviews. Fourth, I outline the procedures for analysis, using thematic analysis. Fifth, I discuss some ethical considerations and my commitment to both my participants and the community at large. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

3.1 Researcher Positionality

Through the methodological approach for this research, I aimed to explore sociocultural influences on the relationship between learning and identity construction through eliciting participants' narratives on their school experiences. As the researcher I acknowledge that my epistemic assumptions inevitably shaped this study and how I situated myself in the writing of this thesis.

As a graduate student and co-investigator, and as a member of the Iranian community in Greater Vancouver, my shared understanding of the language, norms, and expectations enabled me to be both an insider and an outsider as a researcher. I saw my position as an insider and outsider in the research as significant. On the one hand, I shared the same country of origin with the participants in this study, as my family and I were among the third wave of immigrants from Iran. The familiar linguistic and cultural background, and my personal lived experience of

schooling in both Iran and Canada, created a sense of familiarity with the participants' cultural narratives and enabled me to generate trust with the participants. On the other hand, this assumed familiarity became a challenge in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data as I reflected on my own school and immigration experiences. I tried to be aware of my own personal biases, emotions, and resistance given the commonalities that I shared with the participants. Their narratives of schooling were both similar and different to my own. Yet despite the familiarity, I realized that "no two members of a cultural group can be expected to have internalized the same parts of whatever whole might be said to exist" (D'Andrade, 1989, as cited in Cole, 1996, p. 124).

My reasons for selecting this particular topic and participant group were two-fold. First, I was interested in exploring Iranian students' narratives of schooling as a result of my own personal experience with migration to Canada, and in particular, Greater Vancouver. As an Iranian-born woman who spent my formative education years in Iran, I was reminded of the cultural impact of my early school years and connected with my memories as a young student amidst war, post-revolution reforms, and later immigration and resettlement in Canada. Even though I left Iran as an adolescent, my learning and life in both countries has had a significant impact on my learning aspirations throughout my academic career. Second, there is a paucity of research with young Iranians in Canada and particularly British Columbia; therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute to this gap in the literature.

Framing a study around the narratives of a small sample of participants, I recognized that the knowledge claims I made were situated in my vantage point as a member of the group I was studying and the findings were not generalizable to all Iranians in Greater Vancouver. On the other hand, while my insider position shaped how I framed the study, I cannot speak for my

participants. It was thus imperative that I wrote about their narratives in ways that constructed their resources without imposing normative cultural categories on their learning experiences (Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014). To situate myself more transparently, I intend to expose some personal context in relation to this study.

I was an adolescent immigrant to Canada from Tehran, Iran. I speak both Farsi and English fluently, although the fluency can waver depending on the context and topic of conversation. I immigrated to Canada with my family after I completed Grade 6 in Iran, and we settled in Greater Vancouver. I completed half of Grade 7 and all of high school and post secondary education in Canada. Although I spent the majority of my formative years as an adolescent and later as a young adult in Canada, I have strong ties to both places that I call home. My memory of my schooling years in Iran as an elementary student is filled with narratives of rituals, playing with friends, liking and disliking some teachers, and lots of homework.

My memories of the immigration process to Canada is remembered by when one day I was told by my parents to say goodbye to my friends at school, and that was the last I saw of them. In retrospect, I was never given an explanation why we left Iran, and only later was I told that it was “for a better future for us,” meaning my younger brother and me. From the early days of immigration, my father insisted that we only speak Farsi while at home. This was at times conflicting, and I felt a sense of confusion and frustration because I needed to improve my English to understand the course work at school and make friends with my classmates.

I come from a family whose beliefs and ideologies put them more on the liberal side of the spectrum. A common thread in my family is that post secondary education and professional development is highly praised and encouraged, and I grew up with the understanding that the way to advance and “grow” to have a secure and comfortable life was through further education.

My childhood was situated in a social and cultural environment where people's degrees of emotional expression, involvement, and engagement with others were used as markers to judge whether they could be considered a nice or friendly person. Thus, my school years in Iran were filled with messages of respect and obedience toward one's teacher, parents, and elders with no questions asked, because "they were wise" and "we were only young." Yet I was not one to play by the rules as I resisted these assumptions at times.

My parents' decision to immigrate greatly impacted my life choices, goals and my learning experiences were filled with periods of conflict, reconciliation, and gratitude. My early days in Canada as the oldest child in my family were not easy at all. I began Grade 7 with almost no working knowledge of the English language, which led me to be bullied and feel isolated from others because it was hard making friends. In high school it was no different; if anything, I was even more isolated and unseen because I was one of the ESL students. My sense of "not fitting in" and "not being welcomed" was the highlight of those school days in Canada. Even though years have gone by and I am a successful adult woman pursuing a second graduate degree, happily married, and a long-term avid yoga practitioner, my schooling experiences in both Iran and Canada and who I am today were the impetus behind this study.

3.2 Research Questions and Context

This study was guided by an exploration of the sociocultural shaping of learning and identity construction that informs a group of young Iranian immigrants' school experiences and career aspirations. The research questions were developed with an understanding that discussions of Canada and Iran were made with reference to participants' experiences in a particular city in each country. The two research questions that guided this study were: (1) *What narratives do*

Iranian immigrant participants tell of their school experiences? and (2) *What narratives do participants tell of their actual and designated identities?*

The context of the research site was the Metro Vancouver Regional District. This region includes the southwest corner of mainland British Columbia, surrounding and including Vancouver, with a population estimated to be just over 2.4 million (Census Canada, 2016). The research sites were two public research universities with campuses and facilities in the Greater Vancouver area.

3.3 Data Collection

In order to address my research questions, I used semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) to elicit participants' narratives of their school experiences. The 11 interviews culminated in 318 pages of transcribed interviews. Throughout the interviews, participants shared narratives of their pre-and post-immigration school experiences, their current positions as university students, and their future aspirations.

3.3.1 Participants and Recruitment

This qualitative research study took place in the Greater Vancouver area with 11 participants (see Table 1): eight females and three males between the ages of 18 and 24 who had immigrated from Iran to Canada. Participants were recruited from two student-led Iranian organizations at two universities. To avoid compromising anonymity, the names of the universities are omitted. I invited participants in the manner used in Lightfoot's (1997) research on adolescent risk-taking, drawing on "cluster sampling," and invited potential participants of these organizations to be involved, as well as to share my name and contact details with friends who might be interested in participating. The participant eligibility criteria included the following: (1) having been born and raised in Iran and having moved to Canada as an adolescent,

(2) being over the age of 18 but not older than 24, (3) living in the lower mainland, (4) being proficient in both Farsi and English, (5) having completed primary school and some part of secondary schooling in Iran prior to moving to Canada, and (6) being an undergraduate student at a university in the Greater Vancouver area. Thus, Greater Vancouver provided the geographic base for my research. An interview guide with open-ended questions was prepared before the pilot interview, and was revised with some minor changes in the wording of questions for the subsequent semi-structured interviews.

Upon receiving ethical approval for the study through the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) at University of British Columbia, I approached the two Iranian student organizations at the universities, shared my research aim, and invited members to participate. These organizations were a nonprofit student organization with the goal of empowering the Iranian community at the two universities by acting as a social hub for Iranian students.

Table 1 Participant Biographical Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Field of Study	Undergrad Year Standing	Number of Years in Canada	Location of High School in Canada	K-12 Grades Completed in Canada
Sara	Female	21	Biochemistry	3	4	AB Edmonton	12
Goli	Female	19	Integrated Sciences	3	5	BC North Vancouver	10 to 12
Sadaf	Female	23	Political Science	4	7	BC North Vancouver	11 to 12
Ali	Male	23	Combined major in Computer Science and Commerce	3	8	BC West Vancouver	10 to 12
Leila	Female	20	Integrated Science Neuropharmacology	3	5	BC North Vancouver	10 to 12
Feri	Male	24	Business	4	4	Ontario Hamilton	12
Tara	Female	21	History	4	4	BC West Vancouver	12
Samira	Female	24	Interactive Arts and Technology	3	9	BC Burnaby	10 to 12
Parmis	Female	23	Interactive Arts and Technology	4	10	BC New Westminster	9 to 12
Pouria	Male	21	Biomedical Physiology	4	7	BC Coquitlam	9 to 12
Kajal	Female	19	General Sciences	2	3.5	BC New Westminster	11 and 12

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The interview guide used in this research was created to gather narratives of participants' school experiences in a comprehensive manner (Flick, 2009). This stance allowed participants to “express their own understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 2002, p. 348). Semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) were utilized to elicit narratives regarding school experiences. My aim in employing semi-structured interviews was three-fold: (a) to combine structure with flexibility, for the exploration of the interview questions; (b) to interact and encourage the participants to recount their narratives; and (c) to use probes to achieve depth of responses for further exploration and explanation on the part of the participant as needed.

One pilot interview was conducted in June 2016 to ensure that the questions were neither too complex nor repetitive (see Appendix A). As a result of the pilot interview, I made simple modifications to the wording and ordering of interview questions. The interviews ranged from 80 to 110 minutes and were conducted in reserved library rooms selected by participants at their convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded using an iPhone. Each participant was interviewed one time for a total of 11 interviews. Interviews were conducted in English with Farsi phrases translated as needed.

I began the interview session by sharing the consent forms with the participants a week prior to the scheduled interviews (see Appendix B). I explained the nature and purpose of the research, reaffirming confidentiality and anonymity, and sought permission to record the interview (Patton, 2002). I assured participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and discontinue the interview process at their wish. After the participants and researcher signed the consent forms (one copy for my records and one for theirs), I turned on the audio-recorder and started by asking some demographic questions, such as their age, year in their

undergraduate studies, age at immigration to Canada, and the city in which they lived. Next, I guided the participants through the interview questions. To allow for more in-depth responses, probes were used as follow-up questions where needed. Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003) explained that probing should continue, “until the researcher feels they have reached saturation, a full understanding of the participant’s perspective” (p. 152).

As Patton (2002) explained, semi-structured interviewing involves open questions, rather than yes/no questions. Questions such as “What happened then/next?” were used in place of “why” questions because this allowed the participant to narrate the actions taken and their feelings. During the interview process, I needed to build rapport by “conveying empathy” and neutrality as “understanding without judgment” (Patton, 2002, p. 366). There were a few times when I found myself struggling to withhold my own story in order not to cross the line from empathy to giving advice and also not to interrupt the flow of the participant’s narrative. As participants articulated their experiences, I was aware that some aspects of the discussion could trigger strong emotional responses for them. In the case of emotional reactions, I was prepared to provide the contact details of the counseling services available within the university.

During the interview, I recorded some gestures and facial expressions in my notes, to provide clarifications for meaning in the analysis. The narratives were co-constructed, and I was an active listener (e.g., using “hm,” “yes,” “I see” to signal interest in the narratives). I supported and encouraged the participants to continue their narratives until they signaled an end to their story. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they cared to add or change anything. It is important to highlight that as the researcher I may have acted in ways to endorse their narratives in the interview process.

3.3.2.1 Member Checking

Once the raw data were transcribed I conducted a member-check through emails with the participants to request feedback where they felt the intention behind what they said was not clear. They were also invited to comment on whether they felt the transcription adequately protected their identities and if desired to make changes to the pseudonym they had chosen. Following each interview, participants were contacted by email to conduct a member check. Each participant received a transcript of his/her interview by email, and they were invited to comment on the highlighted sections to provide further explanation and/or to indicate whether they had any suggestions for changes, deletions, and/or additions. Of the 11 participants, only four responded and provided further explanation and clarification.

Upon completing the description and interpretation of the findings, I checked once more with the participants to request their feedback on the interpretation of their narratives. Three responded with consensus and agreement to the findings.

3.3.2.2 Data Management

Audio recordings were stored as digital files and transcribed using the transcription conventions (see Appendix C). To protect the participants' confidentiality, participants chose a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. All electronic files were encrypted and password protected. Consent forms, which contained participants' names, were stored separately from other research materials in a locked cabinet in the primary investigator's office, so the names could not be associated with the respective data sets.

3.4 Data Analyses and Procedure

Data analysis was conducted in an iterative process from the time I started data collection to the time I finished gathering my data. I had read and reread the transcripts and jotted down

concepts from both the sociocultural and identity literature. In this section, I describe the procedure I used to conduct my analysis, as well as the type of analysis that contributed to the findings I report in subsequent chapters. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method, thematic analysis was adapted and used for the analysis of interviews. For this reason, from the data transcription phase to data description and the write-up of the interpretation, I maintained an "active role" in identifying themes (p. 80). Throughout the research process, I questioned the core assumptions underpinning my theoretical framework, analysis, and interpretations and how to engage in the presentation of the findings. In order to validate and to ensure trustworthiness of my analysis, reflexivity guided my practice throughout this study by asking the worthiness of my interpretations of their experiences. Bruan and Clarke's (2006) 15-point checklist further guided my analysis and the production of the findings.

3.4.1 Reflexivity

I employed reflexivity as an analytic tool in the entire research process from data collection to analysis to reflect how "meanings are made rather than found" (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, as cited in Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 414). By this commitment, I was able to discern how my values and biases and the desire to know shaped the interpretation and analysis of my data, and at the same time I recognized the "partial, provisional and perspectival nature of knowledge claims" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 416). During the initial contact with the participants and before and after the interviews, I made meaning of my interactions and the notes I had taken while in the presence of the participant and later on my own. I recognized the importance of acknowledging and interrogating the constitutive role I played as the researcher in the research design, data collection, and analysis, as well as any pre-conceived ideas and assumptions I brought to my analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003) and knowledge production.

Thus, I was encouraged to reflect on my interpretations and was reminded that the validity of these interpretations was dependent on my ability to demonstrate how they were reached.

Mauthner and Doucet (2013) demonstrated that neglected factors such as the interpersonal and social contexts of research are powerful elements that influence reflexivity. Thus, I made every attempt to stay neutral in my interactions with the participants and kept the interview setting as receptive as possible. Moreover, these authors remind researchers of “ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying data analysis methods and how they are used can greatly influence research processes and outcomes” (p. 418). This suggests that as a researcher I attempted to stay cognizant of the importance of connecting my research question and subsequent analysis to the theoretical framework the study was built on and my own understanding of this relationship.

Throughout the data analysis, Patton’s (2002) triangulated reflexive inquiry was a guide that I followed to maintain my reflexivity regarding the positions of the participants, the potential readers of this study, and myself. The questions I asked myself were respectively as follows: *What do I know and what has shaped my perspective and understanding of what I know? What has shaped the participants’ perspective and worldview? How do the perceptions of the audience affect what I report in this thesis write-up?*

To further situate myself socially and emotionally in relation to my participants, I was aware of the intersubjectivity between each participant and me (Matusov, 1996), a dynamic relatedness and commitment to respecting diverse opinions. Thus, throughout my study, I tried to be cognizant of the fact that my research was inevitably shaped, enabled, and constrained by my relationship with my past and present teachers and mentors, my sociocultural contexts, my linguistic skills, and the institutional settings within which I operated.

One way I attempted to address the bias that could permeate my interviews and subsequent stages of this research, while keeping a reflexive stance, was to keep a reflexive journal. After each interview, I logged how I might have negatively or positively influenced the dynamic of the interviews and any other reflections. I used the research diary to reflect on different aspects of the research and my role in co-creating the knowledge and the narratives the participants shared. These reflections helped to inform my final analysis and at times highlighted my preconceptions and biases. Doing Analyses

After each interview, I took notes on key concepts related to my theoretical framework. Although the interviews were conducted in English, there were a few minor instances when a participant made use of a word or phrase in Farsi, which were influential in contextualizing the participants' narratives in their sociocultural contexts. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), I recognize that the following analytic framework corresponds to the active decisions I made throughout this process. In this section, I describe the procedure I used to conduct my analysis and the type of interpretations that built the subsequent chapters.

This research employed an adapted thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). One of the hallmarks of this method is its flexibility as it can ensure researchers who use thematic analysis of their “active choices about the particular form of analysis they are engaged in” (p. 78). Paralleling the six-step guideline provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) in performing thematic analysis—familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and writing the analysis—my analysis consisted of six steps. In Step 1, I became familiar with the interview data through constant engagement: I transcribed all 11 interviews, read, and reread the transcriptions and crosschecked with audio recordings to ensure accuracy. In Step 2, using Toolan's (2001) definition of what constitutes a

narrative, I identified narratives amongst the data set. This stage culminated in more than 100 narratives. In Step 3, of the narratives identified in Step 2, I identified narratives of identities following Sfard and Prusak's (2005) definition of reifying narratives. In this light, I began looking for sentences with reifying verbs, particularly "is-sentences" (i.e., *be*, *have*, or *can* with the adverbs *always*, *never*, and *usually*) and the accompanying adverbs that addressed the frequency of actions. (p. 16). According to Sfard and Prusak, our experiences in the world are grounded in is-sentences despite the process of change, as identity talk "makes us able to cope with new situations in terms of past experience and gives us tools to plan for the future" (p. 16). These reifying features were spotted in the narratives of participants in the form of first-person, second-person, and third-person narratives, which referenced these verbs with the pronouns *I*, *we*, *you*, *they*, *he*, or *she* (e.g., "I was just generally interested in sciences" Kajal, line 627). This step corresponds to the coding step of data described in step 2 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guideline.

Next, the actual identities were further distinguished from the participants' designated identities following Sfard and Prusak's signification of future verbs such as *should*, *ought to*, *have to*, *must*, and *want*. Sentences with such verb formations were selected to identify the designated identities in the form of first-, second-, or third-person narratives (e.g., "what you will study in future, what you will be" Kajal, line 293). In Step 4, I created an outline that was made up of the five themes that guided my research questions and mapped these identified narratives onto each respective theme (e.g., Ritual practices), which allowed me to manage the data in a descriptive way. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that a theme captures the important aspects of the data "in relation to the research question, and represents some levels of patterned response or meaning within the data set" and at the same time warned that there is no strict requirement

“of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme” (p.82). Therefore, at this stage I identified themes important in relation to the two research questions. In Step 5, I described and analyzed the data within each theme and subtheme and identified what was of interest. This descriptive template had a section theme (e.g., School Narratives in Iran), and a subtheme (e.g., Ritual Practices). To further expand the descriptive analysis and the overall story about my data, I added paragraphs under each subsection that highlighted commonalities to indicate the prevalence of the commonality amongst the data set (e.g., of the 11 participants, seven mentioned that they had a morning ritual) and also to underline any differences or outliers. In the sixth and final step, I presented a compelling story about my data through selecting “vivid” data extracts to produce “a scholarly report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This stage demanded a deeper level of self-awareness, affirming Patton’s (2002) argument that “how we sample in the field, and then sample again during analysis in deciding who and what to quote, involves decisions about whose voices will heard” (p. 495).

While every voice mattered and was no more or less important than others, my selection of those extracts in this thesis exemplified representations of what the data showed (Bruner, 1990) and were dependent on my perceptions. In Step 6, the data extracts were interpreted to reflect the participants’ underlying emotions, ideas, and ideologies, which acknowledged the way they made meaning of their experiences and what was left unsaid beyond the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What is left unsaid is as important as what is said. This type of interpretation also coincided with Bruner’s (2004) explanation of a dual landscape by going beyond what the characters’ actions did in order to convey what they did or did not know or feel.

Thus, with each data excerpt that exemplified the particular theme, I first described it and then wrote my interpretation of it.

In this final step, these interpretations were embellished by the link to the theoretical framework on identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), and by interweaving in the literature on learning and identity construction shaped by participation in cultural communities, cultural tools, and social relations and practices (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002) and the previous literature on Iranians in Canada (Hojati, 2012; Sadeghi, 2008). These identified themes were interpreted beyond what a participant had said in an “attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 1990, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The analysis of these themes with respect to the research questions is discussed in the subsequent chapters. Five themes are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.2 Criteria to Ascertain Rigor of Findings

Throughout the research process, I questioned the core assumptions underpinning my analysis and interpretations and how to ethically engage in the production of knowledge to ensure validity and trustworthiness of my findings. First, I strove for transparency throughout the research process by checking with my supervisor during every stage of the analysis to ensure theory and method was applied consistently. The development of findings was continuously reviewed and revised in a recursive manner. Second, in order to ensure rigor and systematization, I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) “15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis” to determine a transparent and congruent analysis (p. 96). I made sure that the data was transcribed to an appropriate level of detail and crosschecked with the audio recording to make sure transcripts were accurate. The themes were generated from multiple examples across the

interviews and all relevant extracts were collected. The data extracts were described and interpreted and the extracts were used to illustrate the theoretical and analytical claims. The specific, adapted approach to thematic analysis was clearly explained and the language used in the interpretation of data was consistent with the epistemological and theoretical position. Overall, there was ample time and reflection given to each phase on analysis. Also included was a brief discussion on ethical concerns for the production of thesis.

3.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter three described the methodology of the research. The chapter began by describing the position of the researcher as aligned with a sociocultural perspective. This chapter continued by outlining the research questions and the method of data collection. Recruitment through cluster sampling and collecting informed consent forms from the research participants were discussed. Chapter three described semi-structured interviews as the main method of eliciting narratives and generating data. For the section on data analysis and procedure, a discussion on thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and informed by Sfard and Prusak's (2005) theoretical framework of identifying narratives with reifying verbs was provided. It was noted that thematic analysis was chosen due to its "theoretical freedom" and flexibility as it can ensure researchers who use thematic analysis of their "active choices about the particular form of analysis they are engaged in" (p. 78). In order to ensure the systematization of the process of analysis and to ascertain the worthiness of my findings, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point checklist of criteria for. Finally the chapter ended with a brief discussion on ethical concerns for the production of thesis.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Schools in Iran and Canada

This chapter primarily addresses the first research question: *What narratives do participants tell of their school experiences?* I do this by exploring the narratives of participants' school experiences in both Iran and Canada, and their trajectories of immigration and settlement in Canada. As narrative accounts of lived experiences can be telling of individuals' unfolding lives, narratives of school experiences can be essential in understanding how the social institution of schools impacts learning and identity in individuals (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Nine participants completed elementary, middle, and some high school in Iran. Two did not experience high school in Iran. All participants completed their high school studies once they immigrated to and settled in Canada.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which are representative of the first research question. In the first section, I discuss the first theme of my research, which explores the participants' narratives of the role of ritual practices in their school experiences. In the second section, I discuss the second theme, which explores the role of cultural tools in mediating the participants' learning and identities in their educational contexts. In the third section, I explore the third theme, which explores the role of social relations in facilitating learning and transition as participants experienced different school contexts. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

4.1 Ritual Practices in Establishing the School Context and Constructing Identities

4.1.1 Morning Rituals: “We Would Lineup in Several Lines” (Sara, lines, 31-32)

Seven out of the 11 participants described the morning ritual when they remembered their elementary school experiences in Iran. The morning ritual was conducted with each grade in a line: students listened to either the principal or vice principal talking, engaged in some physical exercises, and/or sang songs such as the national anthem. Morning ritual was an example of a

social practice within the school community (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000) that the participants described. Performing the morning ritual was one way to bring students and teachers together in one space and time to inform, connect, and control.

The morning ritual was described in both neutral and negative ways. For example, Ali¹ remembered the morning ritual or the “lineup” before going to classes as a structured physical “warm-up” that was a regular practice implemented throughout all of the elementary grades. He added that the morning ritual was a time when the vice principal checked students’ grooming practices. As he described:

Yeah we were lined up in different grades all the way to Grades 5 and depending on which grade I was in, we had to start with some sort of warm-up, just to start the day. [...] And we had to line up firmly and we had to raise our hand just a distance between the person in front of you, and then you start the day with 10 to 15 minutes of warm-up and then, sometimes every two weeks or three weeks we had this I don’t know how we can define it here in Canadian culture, but the vice principal back in Iran was a pretty good position, but here it’s not that tough I would say, he would check how long your hair was, sometimes (laughs) he would check your nails, so that’s the situation I went through. [Ali, 12/07/16, lines 61-75]

Ali’s narrative of the morning ritual seemed to construct his identity in reference to his engagement with this particular social practice common to his elementary school days in Iran by using reifying verbs and frequency of actions (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), it can be said that Ali’s use of “is-sentences,” with verbs such as be, have, or can

¹ All participant names are pseudonyms.

as an identifying technique, alluded to Ali's state of being as a young child who felt required to be engaged in those activities (p.16). Thus, the reifying sentence is a way to transform actions and events into properties of individuals. Ali's narrative further seems to follow the pattern of participation in a school community that defined what Packer and Goicoechea (2000) explained as "participation in both the formal and the hidden curricula" as a way to answer the question "who am?" (p. 237). Here this morning ritual can be interpreted as a hidden curriculum, as a way for Ali to push against his second and third-person identities conferred by his school culture and community.

Similarly, Tara recounted what took place once they were lined up in the schoolyard before heading to classes. She described the morning ritual as a "ceremony" where students were lined up in their respective grades in the schoolyard, listened to announcements, engaged in morning stretches, and recited songs including the national anthem.

[...] I remember I was late a lot of days to school cuz {because} I lived very close by and I just assumed I'd get there on time, so my day would usually start like that. I would be 5 minutes or 10 minutes late, so I wouldn't make it to the, there's kind of like a ceremony in the morning like *saf* like cue or line, so we would all stand in lines from Grade 1 to Grade 5 and then there would be some announcements, we would be in the yard, the schoolyard. We had quite a big yard which was nice and then there was some announcements, there was like a sport thing, someone would lead make us do jumping jack or something like that and then there was like a *sorood* [choir] I think, I'm not sure if this was every day which was like an anthem. [Tara, 02/08/16, lines 25-35]

In this example, Tara's description of the morning ritual was with an indirect reference to being late to school in the mornings. Through this narrative she constructed her identity by making use

of reifying verbs as to suggest her state of being that stressed the frequency of her actions: she was late often (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). She explained that sometimes she sneaked into the lines, but at times she was faced with the glaring stares of her teachers and the principal. Tara's tardiness in the mornings could be seen as an act of resistance to a practice in which she didn't want to participate and be a part of that school's culture. This narrative resonates with Packer and Goicoechea's (2000) last theme on "motivating the search for identity" when a person is split between wanting to embrace the costs of participation on one hand and seeking to avoid on the other (pp. 236-237). According to these authors, Tara adopted an attitude that allowed her to take a stand on the practices of her school community membership that set the stage for her identity search.

In another narrative, Kajal described her middle school days with a memory of the "morning lineups," but highlighted that they were not as fun and spirited as they had been in the elementary years. She noted:

The studying had heavier loads but it was still okay, the school was much smaller but still we had around 20 people in the class, we still had uniforms and we still did the lineup thing when the weather was okay, but you know when you get older they used to instead of singing and doing fun things, we still did exercise, and they made us pray that no one really knew we just repeated what they said. [Kajal, 25/08/16, lines 155-159]

Kajal's narrative about the "morning ritual" in middle school grades emphasized reciting prayer texts, which seemed not to have been the case in elementary grades. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), her use of reifying sentences, was a way to reflect her state of being as a young child participating in the activities of her school context in a neutral way. In middle school, expectations were higher. This narrative further reflects Packer and Goicoechea's (2000)

description of the costs of membership and participation in activities: in their words, “occasions of what might seem a failure to learn can be reinterpreted as a struggle for identity,” as she expressed her state of confusion with what took place in those morning lineups.

4.1.2 “It Was Really Competitive for Those Grades” (Sadaf, line, 126)

In Iran, there was a national exam at the end of primary school that was based on school subjects, including mathematics, science, Persian literature, social sciences, and theology. For the participants, middle school was considered a transitional period because it shaped their preparation for higher education; how much a student achieved academically in these grades influenced his or her chances of attending a prestigious secondary school and in turn a good university. Seven out of the 11 participants when characterizing the middle school grades referred to more studying as there were more tests, and it was considered to be a stressful transitional period. For example, Pouria expressed that being accepted to a middle school was a “nightmare.” He described his middle school years by remembering the entrance exams he needed to take in order to enroll at a private middle school. He explained:

[...], they are like a nightmare like as a kid that young being worried about those exams, [...] and it’s testing a lot of things like math, sciences, religion so I was really stressed for that. I wrote a few exams for different schools, I got rejected for almost all of them.

[Pouria, 22/08/16, lines 118-122]

Pouria’s narrative emphasized the sentiment of frustration and anxiety that he experienced while preparing to start his middle school years. According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), his way of using reifying verbs was an identifying technique as a way to suggest he identified as an adolescent “stressed” about his school activities and academic qualities. From a sociocultural perspective, Pouria’s narrative of a young child failing in a competitive educational context that

was exam based, is in line with Vadeboncoeur and Portes (2002) research that reflects how some students are placed “at risk” in the context of the political organization of schooling that produces “at risk” identities. These authors discussed the affordances of identities in educational contexts, which can be applied to Pouria’s narrative, of his early school experience with failure and rejection as he negotiated an identity as a successful or a weak student that represented his social relations.

In another narrative, Leila remembered herself as a teenager being stuck in a conundrum of wanting to have fun, yet feeling burdened with a heavy load of schoolwork, like others her age. Leila’s explanation of “all those exams” described a system in which, at the end of the third year of middle school, students take a region-wide exam administered by the local board of education. She noted:

Well middle school was sort of a transition because all of a sudden the studying was just so much more compare to elementary school, because you were going to go to high school and you had to do all those exams, but overall it was the best part of my whole education in Iran, because I was going through my teenage years, 12, 13 and it was fun times, but yeah there were a lot of pressure from homework and examinations because I switched from going from public to private for my middle school. [Leila, 15/07/16, lines 120-125]

Leila’s paradoxical description of those years as fun yet stressful rests on the “complex dialectic between identity-building and other human activities” that explained the inevitable pressure she perceived from both the society and her family to attend a well-known private school (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 17). According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), her use of reifying verbs was an identifying technique used to reflect her state of being a teenager engaged in activities defined by

her school culture and the wider sociocultural context at odds with her desires. Like the others, she identified with a system that put a premium on attending private schools to secure a more promising academic future.

In contrast, one participant did not feel the pressure to comply by the sociocultural norm to enroll at a private middle school. Parmis remembered attending after-school events and activities during her middle school years in Iran. Rather than feeling the pressure to enroll in a private middle school, at the encouragement of her parents and despite the fact she was a high-achieving student, Parmis continued in the public system, where she participated in sports and activities with friends. She remembered:

So in those grades I finally settled in one school and then I had the time of my life [...] my parents they didn't like private schools. [...] But my parents were like "it's up to you but we don't suggest you go"! Just because I was very good at studying and I loved studying and my grades were always 100% so they were like "if you go there it's just stress." [...] and they were like "you're good at studying anyways and you are going to get wherever you like so we're not going to put that pressure on you, so if you want to do more with your life go to sports or learn an instrument" [...], anyways I always went to public schools. [Parmis, 16/08/16, lines 202-217]

Parmis felt that she had been saved from the fierce competition of private schools and the pressure that existed for other students her age. In a culture where attending a well-known private school was a ticket to attaining a university degree, it seems that Parmis's parents had a more moderate approach for their daughter's educational goals. While acting as "significant narrators" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p.18) her parents constructed her second-person identities as a good student and who enjoyed studying, which impacted her decision to not attend private

schools. This narrative further testifies to Vadeboncoeur and Portes (2002) argument identities are “categories provided to us through other’s perspective” (p. 119).

4.1.3 “The Biggest Milestone of Any Iranian” (Feri, line, 301)

Among the nine participants who completed some high school in Iran, the most common characteristic of high school, noted by seven participants, was a reference to those years as a big milestone referring to *Konkur* (The National University Entrance Examination). The participants emphasized that this period of education defined their future; preparing for *Konkur* influenced everything they did. This academic achievement, one of the hallmarks of aspiring students, can be seen in the following data excerpts.

Kajal and Tara, for example, remembered high school as a critical period for students to prepare for the university entrance exam in hopes of securing entry in a top government-funded university. Kajal remembered her high school years as strict and devoted to preparing for *Konkur*. She further added that this exam defined students’ future academic and professional goals. She described her high school years as follows:

Oh I loved my high school! It was, high school it’s probably the most strict period of schooling in education, because at the end of the fourth year you know we have *Konkur*, this big exam [...] what you will study in future, what you will be, [...] this exam is once a year so if you miss it or don’t do good, you have to study for another year and do it again! But that’s why high school is really strict in Iran there’s no excuse for not studying... but if you don’t study you won’t get into good universities and it’s just your loss. [Kajal, 25/08/16, lines 290-298]

In her experience, the sole purpose of high school was to study for the *Konkur*. Recalling Sford and Prusak (2005) Kajal’s use of reifying sentences suggests “turning properties of actions into

properties of actors,” suggesting that the failure to attaining a decent score on *Konkur* could result in a negative image of her identity as a weak student. Kajal seemed to have alluded that the score on the *Konkur* was a defining factor in shaping her designated identity, that could determine not what she planned to study but who and what she could become (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) almost suggesting that admission into a “good university” was a more promising future for making reality in the image of fantasies (p.19). In other words, this was the only way she could turn her dream come true by the merging of her actual and designated identities.

Similarly, Tara viewed high school as a high-stakes time when many students were worrying about the university entrance exam. However, she also introduced enrolling in Olympiad, as another strategy for securing a spot in university. A second avenue for securing university enrollment was described as participation in international Olympiad competitions and being awarded with gold, bronze, or silver for their efforts; with a medal, students could choose any university major they wanted.

[...] Typical day... each grade was different Grade 9, 10, 11... [...] The classes were maybe smaller and there were a lot more studying, cuz {because} there's the *Konkur* as you know, the national exam for entering university so people were already starting to worry about that in Grade 9. It was either that or the Olympiads that people were studying for, which is also a way to get to university without doing the *Konkur*, so if you like ranked really high in Olympiads in Grade 11, then you get to if you get a gold medal you go straight to university or if you get a different medal it kind of boosts up your *Konkur* grade, so people were a lot more focused on getting to university. [Tara, 02/08/16, lines 339-348]

Tara's description of her high school years in Iran attested to the importance of passing the national entrance examination and securing university enrollment at a prestigious university. Tara's narrative is a reminder that individuals "often search and make commitments within a cultural menu of options" that is offered to individuals to highlight the social construction of identity in a particular social and historical moment in her developmental history (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002, p. 101).

In contrast, one participant remembered her high school experience as fun, despite the *Konkur* culture. Sara described her school environment as less strict, with a "cool" principal who was more concerned about students' grades and scores than what they wore. She described:

High school was very fun for me because we had this cool principal and she would let us do anything, wear nail polish and hijab wasn't that STRICT like we had to wear something but it wasn't strict. I remember I used to even wear jeans and she didn't care as long as you studied as long as you got the marks and the grades they didn't care, because there's another test in Iran in Grade 12 it's a university entrance exam [...] but yeah Grade 11 studies got more intense. [Sara, 21/06/16, lines 209-215]

Sara described enjoying her high school years in Iran since it had a more welcoming environment than her previous school grades. She seemed able to choose how and what to wear within the confines of the rules. Sara's school principal was able to create a space for students' activities that may have alleviated some of the external pressure those students like Sara experienced. Sara's narrative is a reminder that identity construction is a fluid process constituted in social contexts with defined practices and relations (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002).

4.1.4 “We Had to Switch Classes” (Leila, line, 402)

For the participants of this study, the narratives of their school experiences in Canada were filled with challenges, surprises, and changes as they settled in Canada and became more familiar with the new school environment. Nine participants referred to school practices and expectations, such as instructional methods and overall school organization, as different in their high schools in Canada compared to Iran. For example, Parnis, whose first schooling experience in Canada was in Grade 9, remembered that on the first day she expected a “morning ritual” and felt confused because there was more than one door for entering the school. She explained that she felt awkward about her clothes because none of the other girls were wearing a “dress.” She also remembered that her math teacher had made fun of her for being the “new student.”

...So yeah I went there and sat in the cafeteria waiting for a morning ritual (laughs) and there is nothing there, that was the first thing. [...] there is just no instructions, the school has so many doors and everyone just goes through the classes, I mean it's like “can you tell me where to go?” cuz {because} over there the school has one door and somebody welcomes you and you find your class and all of a sudden here it was like “okay what do I do where do I go?” [...] the first class I went to the math teacher he was very horrible, so racist and so rude! [...] and I was almost tearing up because everyone was staring at me and there are boys now right? now it is just different, and I'm like “what the hell am I wearing?” I looked at them and they are all wearing the same thing and I'm like “why am I wearing a dress!” [...], so I sat down and he came he's like “who are YOU?” [...] I'm like “I'm a new kid!” (laughs) he was like “you are a new kid what do you mean you are a new kid?” [...]. Here the teacher himself was making very

rude comments, and then everybody in the class like 20 people were laughing out loud so I was like “just get me out of here!” [Parmis, 16/08/16, lines 616-643]

Parmis’s narrative described feelings of disorientation and being ridiculed. From the infrastructure of the school, to the co-educational environment with both sexes, to her unwelcoming teacher: schooling in Canada was strange and different. Based on her previous schooling experiences in Iran, she saw this teacher’s role as integral to facilitating a newcomer’s transition into the new school environment. Here the teacher as a “significant narrator,” and carrier of cultural messages, instigated an interaction that supports Vadeboncoeur and Portes’s (2002) argument: “teachers create possible identities for students dialogically” as Parmis was trying to negotiate her identity, reflecting the tension between her individual agency and the social discursive context (p. 117). Furthermore, Parmis’s feeling of being discriminated against by her teacher fits with Hojati’s (2012) research of Iranian graduate students in Canadian post secondary context, where they felt discriminated against by their professors based on their identity as “the other” (p. 50).

In another narrative, Leila, whose first Canadian schooling experience was in Grade 11, described her typical school day in Canada as one that involved switching classes within a blocked schedule. She also explained that because of the change in classrooms from one block to another, she was not in the same class with her friends in every block. She noted:

[...] the main difference is that, between Iran and Canada in a typical day was that, [...] we had to switch classes which we didn’t do in Iran. It was one class, everyone was together and the teachers changed, but here you have to go from block one to block two, you have social studies block one and English block two, and you have to change, so you

weren't in one class with all your friends you might have one friend here and not have a friend in another class. [Leila, 15/07/16, lines 400-406]

Leila explained that her education experience in Iran did not allow for classroom changes because everyone in the same grade was housed in one classroom. Unlike her experience in schools in Iran, in Canada she had to go from one class to another for different subjects. She also perceived the classroom changes to be a hindrance to making friends with her classmates, who changed with every block rotation. This made some classes feel lonelier than others resulting in an identity construction that positioned her as someone who did not have friends in one setting, as a less likable classmate, compared to other settings where she had friends. This experience further affirmed the fluidity of identity and other higher mental processes that “shift over time and in relation to the activities and contexts in which students participate” (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002, p. 92).

Likewise Sara described her memory of switching classes as:

[...] but in Canada it was like we moved to each class for each subject so we would change classes and it was with different people, so it's really good it's good in a sense that you would meet different people and you would make different friends, [...], but you don't have that time to become best friends with someone. [...] [Sara, 21/06/16, lines 501-506]

It seems being in the same classroom over the academic year, supported Sara in her relationship with friends and recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005) she identified as someone who valued more intimate friendships and clearly this new learning context was not conducive to her identity construction.

One participant's narrative highlighted the easier Canadian approach to homework assignment and study expectations from students. For example, Ali, whose first schooling experience in Canada was in Grade 10, compared his high school experience in Canada to a "kindergarten," owing to less stringent classroom rules and expectations he perceived from the teachers. He added that he completed the assigned homework out of habit, yet he soon found out it was not fully enforced.

(Laughs) It reminded me of my kindergarten. Like the way that the whole school was actually not a school for me. It was a place to spend time and meanwhile there were some subject[s] to learn [...]. I remember that my first homework that I had, I spent like two hours that I'm 100% sure that the native speakers would not spend that much time, [...], [...], and I was one of the five or six people who actually did their homework! [...] and from that point I was demotivated for studying and Grade 10, Grade 11 I was just barely meeting the grade that I needed... [...] up to Grade 11 NOTHING is important, it just starts when you are in Grade 12. [Ali, 12/07/16, lines 540-562]

Ali's narrative speaks to a school system where students were not competing for grades or status. The accountability he had been familiar with, as a student in Iran, was not expected of him in Canada. His use of reifying verbs recalls Sfard and Prusak's (2005) explanation for using "is-sentences" that replaces verbs with nouns that talks about his identity as being or having a certain proclivity (p. 16). He was surprised to find that his classmates did not complete their homework and were not penalized. The "kindergarten" metaphor could imply an overall easier school system. Ali's narrative resonates with Hojati's (2012) research with her Iranian graduate student participants who "hoped that their previous education and experience would help them integrate into Canadian society" as they worked hard to become familiar with the educational system in

Canada (p. 46). Thus, Ali's past education and experience with schooling in Iran supported his first-person identity as a keen student, who was eager to complete homework assignments, as his early previous school experiences had placed an emphasis on homework completion.

4.2 English Language as a Cultural Tool in Mediating Identities

4.2.1 "It Was Really Hard for Finding Yourself and Start as Others Like Native Speakers" (Ali, lines, 535-536)

When participants were asked to remember their experiences of settlement in Canada, eight out of the 11 participants remembered their initial days in Canada with a reference to their understanding and competence with the English language. For example, Goli described her experience with English was not without its challenges in the beginning, since she realized it was not easy to understand when other people talked to her in this "weird" accent. She explained:

Well I knew English because I took classes in Iran for two years, so I knew how to speak and I knew the grammar, but everything is so different here because people speak so fast with this weird accent at first and then you don't know the slangs (laughs) and the swear words it's important right! It was really hard at first and your listening is not that good, I mean you do listening for exams in Iran [...] ...but like it's nothing to be compared [...] it was really hard to adjust to be honest especially for the hearing you know? [Goli, 27/06/16, lines 551-558]

Goli seemed to have realized quickly upon arrival to Canada that her previous English learning was inadequate since it did not allow her to communicate freely with the other English speakers. Even though English, as a foreign language was a subject in her education in Iran, it was not enough to equip her with a more confident foundation. As a cultural tool (Wertsch 1985), the

English language was privileged and speaking English allowed students to gain status influencing their identity construction as mediated by the use of cultural tools.

Similarly, Parmis linked her initial days in Canada with the start of school and her assignment to the ESL classes. She described her experience with the English language when she first started school as a Grade 8 student as alienating and degrading, when she was “separated” from the others even though she knew she was well versed in the subject.

...It was alright, I didn't like it I mean when we entered they completely separated us from everybody else, they put me in this ESL [...], I was there the whole day just learning English and I was like, [...] and I was like “why am I separated from everyone else? I don't get it!” [...] yeah like in those two, one and a half months I did nothing else I was just sitting in the same classroom with the same people and I was like “why can't I do math? I can kick everyone's ass like math is math it's x, y and numbers let me do that! Or like the sciences, I don't know the language but I know more than you!” (laughs). I was really offended [...] and I was separated into this room that I was like “okay what do I do with this?”... Yeah anyways it was horrible, it was bad. [Parmis, 16/08/16, lines 526-539]

Parmis dismissed the ESL experience because she felt she was being robbed of the opportunity to express her understanding and knowledge in other subject areas resulting in her feeling unacknowledged. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), her use of reifying verbs transformed the properties of the events she narrated into what constituted her identity as a student with strong understanding of mathematics and sciences. She considered herself resourceful and felt debased for what she was being offered instead: a “separated” learning space. The relegation to ESL classes and the act of “separation” was experienced as an obstruction to the integration in

mainstream subject classrooms and connection with the English-speaking classmates that could have negatively impacted her relationship with them. Thus, English was a cultural tool that negatively impacted her identity construction as a student.

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) referred to six themes demonstrating the ontological processes of schooling that linked learning and identity. Following these authors, Parmis was split in relationship of “desire and recognition” that her new school context afforded her, which motivated her search for her identity as an academically strong student in mathematics and sciences (pp. 233-234). School communities and classroom routines define and redefine the proper behavior of a “good student” thus, Parmis seemed to feel that she had alienated herself and her unique sense of being an individual when she discovered she was not recognized for her knowledge (p. 237).

In another narrative, Leila described her new school and her classmates as accepting and welcoming of students with different levels of English proficiency, which inevitably helped with her arrival. She explained:

[...] when I went to high school they put me in an ESL class, cuz {because} I did a test so they could see what my level is, [...] there was this class called language strategy which was like a higher level ESL class, [...], a lot of Iranians were there, from other cultures too, that my transition was smoother because I didn't have to speak English all the time, I could speak Farsi. It had its pros and cons [...]. So I remember it wasn't as hard as I thought in my mind “it'd be so much bullying and I can't do anything in the class” because other students were really considerate because I guess they were raised in an environment that is multicultural and they are accepting of the fact that I may

not know English as well as they do, [...] having Persian friends helped as to make my transition smoother. [Leila 15/07/16, lines 361-375]

Leila referred to a feeling of familiarity; as a newcomer who embodied a different cultural and linguistic background, she seems to have found comfort in the company of her new classmates who were also from Iran. This may have culminated in her contribution to the classroom discussions and activities “in the midst of a vast but structured field of signs, symbols, and voices from the culture(s)” in which she lived (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 90). No less important was the welcoming and nurturing aspect of her school environment, which encouraged diversity and acceptance of everyone despite language barriers. Students were encouraged to share their cultural practices and language with other students, who seemed interested to learn. Her ability to speak her first language “Farsi,” when she felt the urge or the need to communicate, allowed her to participate and to shape her identity building as a resourceful individual of culture and knowledge.

4.3 Social Relationships in Shaping Identities

4.3.1 “She Was Just Really Kind, She Never Got Pissed Off” (Kajal, line, 70)

When participants were asked about their favorite teacher(s) during their school years in Iran, nine described him or her as nurturing. Three added that the teacher was “firm” when necessary. For example, Tara remembered her first- and second-grade teachers as her favorites and described them as sweet, like a “mom” at times, yet with a serious approach when needed. She explained that unlike other teachers, these two teachers taught them to share their opinions.

[...], yeah I had like my Grade 1 and 2 teachers were really amazing like there [they] were sweet ladies and were kind of young. [...], they were really lovely they were strict at times but they would never, there was a lot of weird condescension and humiliation [...],

like kids are supposed to respect and they are supposed to not have a lot to say [...] and at the same time they were kind of trying to teach us how to speak up which was weird, but then these two they were just really good teachers. It was good to be in their classes, they were a bit like “mom like” but not too much, they were kind of cool. [Tara 02/08/16, lines 104-115]

Tara referred to a general perception of elementary students as people who did not have valued opinion to know or express many ideas. It seems that, at the time, asking questions and expressing an opinion was perceived as disrespectful and not the norm for proper classroom behavior and students that age. These two teachers provided an environment that evoked Tara’s curiosity while helping her to develop analytical skills and develop an identity as someone who had valued opinion. Tara’s use of reifying verbs woven with her third-person identities as stories about her teachers’ approach, confirmed an identity as someone who had valued opinion even as a young child (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

In another narrative, Feri remembered his fifth-grade teacher as his favorite in elementary school and described him as someone who played the role of a mentor in his life with a serious yet caring approach. He described:

[...] And I remember that my last teacher, the fifth year he was like one of the milestones of my life he was a really inspiring person in my life [...]. He was really sympathetic, [...] he was strict and I love strict people. I love having a mentor in life, he was a mentor and I think whenever we are on our own without having a mentor we might, it is really hard for anyone to find their way so he was one of the mentors that I found in my life and he gave me a perspective about how I should approach my education and about life in general. [Feri, 21/07/16, lines 43-59]

For Feri, the teacher was not just a classroom facilitator, but also a mentor who inspired and guided him on the whole on his actions inside and outside of school. His relationship with this particular teacher seemed to have a significant effect on his overall learning and development. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), his use of reifying verbs in his third-person narrative of his teacher, conferred Ali with an identity as a student who was passionate about his education goals and life plans in general with a sincere yet serious approach to his life goals.

Seven out of the 11 participants described their favorite teacher(s) as progressive and avant-garde. For example, Parmis described her favorite teacher in the middle school grades as young and enthusiastic and as a teacher who allowed students to experience their learning without imposing stringent assessments as others did. She noted:

[...] We had one, there is this *herfeh o fan* [vocational and technical studies] subject [...] and if it wasn't safe for us to try she would show us everything, she was very great she was very young and athletic and fit, she would always be jumping around so energetic and teaching us "this is how you do this, this is how you do that" and we always had these projects that we had to make and she was like "don't worry about the marks just enjoy and learn and show me what you can make" [...]. Like in SIAT [School of Interactive Arts and Technology] we do a lot of practical work and I can hear her voice in my head. [Parmis, 16/08/16, lines 242-256]

This teacher's practical approach to teaching extended the syllabus and engaged students in the joy of learning without making them concerned about their grades. While academic standing was important, Parmis was given the opportunity to believe that she had some control over her learning environment without competing for grades; the focus was simply on learning and improvement. Thus, through the voices of this particular teacher she constructed an identity as a

learner who enjoyed learning in a less competitive and more experiential learning environment in a “cooperative and collaborative” context of learning (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Even as a university student, she was reminded of this particular teacher when faced with a difficult or challenging learning task; this teacher had a significant impact on Parmis’s identity as someone who enjoyed learning in social relations and contexts that involved trust and exploration.

In another narrative, Leila remembered her favorite teachers as two sisters who taught history and literature. She described them as teachers who encouraged readings and exploration outside of the assigned textbooks for a more holistic, contextualized understanding of concepts introduced in the classroom.

She was our history teacher as well and her sister was our literature teacher. They would always just give us books to read and with history they would always tell us “oh read more than what the textbook says, cuz {because} there are always 2 different ways to see one thing or many different ways of seeing one thing.” [...], they were really bright in that way that, they would always tell us to go know different aspects of one problem or any events that happened. [...] she would always tell us to read books and watch different movies [...] and she would always tell us do things outside of the school. [Leila, 15/07/16, lines 202-211]

These teachers encouraged Leila to seek out extra sources outside of the classroom walls. They invited her to search and inquire as well as to question what she read, which were ways of gaining autonomy over her learning environment. As “significant narrators” they seemed to have encouraged an interest in learning by uncovering different perspectives that may have shaped Leila’s identity construction as someone who valued diverse perspectives (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 18). Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005) through the use of reifying verbs and adverbs with

notation of frequency of action, Leila's narrative highlighted the relationship between identity-building and human activities. Moreover, these teachers' encouragement of students to participate in the community in different ways was a reminder that their learning was culturally and historically situated echoing the work by Packer and Goicoechea, (2000), when they asserted: "Not just our knowledge but we ourselves, and the objects we know, are constructed: What counts as real varies culturally and changes historically" (p. 232).

Three participants described their favorite teacher(s) as someone who was approachable and passionate about what they were teaching. For example, Kajal described her favorite teacher as her high school math teacher, who was young, highly educated, and passionate about teaching mathematics to her students. She explained that because of the teacher's own interest in math and her approach to teaching in simple steps, despite the difficulty of the level of math in those grades, students in her class attained high scores on tests, and most enjoyed the subject.

I loved my math teacher, she was just perfect the way she taught [...], she just had her own way [...], she was in love with math she had PhD in math [...], she used to put it up in mini steps and she went through it in such simple way that everyone understood, although the level of math was really high but everyone loved math and they used to do really good on tests. [...] She was such a popular teacher because of that, because she was in love with what she was doing that's why she could really make us understand. All kids don't usually like math right? But then we all liked that class because of that teacher.

[Kajal, 25/08/16, lines 335-346]

Kajal likened the popularity of her favorite teacher to her passion for mathematics, which was reflected in the way she taught the subject by accommodating for the different learning levels that existed in the classroom. This teacher's competency in teaching math did not just make her

students good test takers, but shaped students' further interest in math in positive ways and constructed the students' third-person identities as individuals with an interest in mathematics. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), Kajal's third-person identities were shaped by this narrative of her favorite teacher's approach to teaching, as a student who enjoyed and valued mathematics. This data excerpt further suggests what Packer and Goicoechea (2000) called "institutionalized way" of meeting students' needs for "connection and recognition" as Kajal evaluated her academic work and her interest into "the classroom community of practice," in relationship to her teacher (p. 236). Through her teacher's passionate approach to teaching mathematics, Kajal identified herself as a student who enjoyed mathematics contrary to the most who did not enjoy the subject. This teacher's enthusiastic approach to teaching mathematics helped her students discover the joy and utility of mathematics, as the students were "actively engaged in the ongoing reproduction of the classroom community practice" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 236).

4.3.2 "We Were Really Good Friends, We Did Everything Together" (Samira, line, 375)

When participants were remembering their relationships with classmates during their school years in Iran eight out of the 11 participants described classmates as welcoming, supportive, and friendly relationships in general. For example, Kajal, described her classmates from those grades as fun and playful. She remembered sharing school supplies with her classmates and playing games like tag at break. She described:

I was friends with all the girls in the class we had all different kinds of kids in the class, we had quiet kids, we had really noisy, we had all kinds, but they were all really nice to each other... they used to share a lot cuz {because} kids in Iran they would buy huge pencil cases and these colorful pencils and pens and they used to lay it on the benches and

use it together [...], they were nice to each other. I don't remember any bullying from that time, [...] so the kids had a good relationships. [Kajal, 25/08/16, lines 126-134]

According to Sfard and Prusak (2005) Kajal's first-person narrative constructed an identity as someone who was friends with everyone, which seemed to have been cultivated by the sitting arrangements of her classroom in those grades and the school culture. In this classroom environment, students learned through cooperative learning activities and experienced the joy of learning together as they shared a bench with other classmates. Later in the interview, when she reflected back on her classmates in Iran, she also said, "in Iran someone is sitting by your side, 'do you want to be my friend?' 'yes,' and you're just friends" [...] [lines 517-518]. In other words, these classroom arrangements fostered social practices and relations that allowed Kajal to form relationships with all her classmates and be part of the school community (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002).

In another narrative, Ali recalled a strong sense of unity and support amongst his classmates in Grade 6 as he recalled a story of uniting against a teacher who had administered a tough and unfair exam, despite the degree of closeness among classmates. He noted:

[...] Because of that strike we had, but we all supported each other and then we switched the exam to another day and it was a fairer test. It was pretty amazing now that I think about it the thing that we did in Grade 6, I don't think that we can have the same collaboration even at university level with students here, although we could see the same thing happening at university level back in Iran, like students are like "we are done, do WHATEVER you like, we are done"! [...] Even the students that didn't like each other, [...], we knew that we had to support each other at that specific point. [Ali, 12/07/16, lines 306-315]

Ali's story of peer solidarity with strong support for one another has a clear message: in solidarity, the unjust can be defeated, as "students can always actively align with or against the power and authority of their teacher" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 236). Students actively embraced social relationships offered in the classroom culture. Student unity was explained by the relation between social, cultural, and historical conditions that shaped how Ali and his classmates constructed their identities "in relation to the history of inter-group relations in a given social context" (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002, p. 91). Further, following Sfard and Prusak (2005) Ali constructed his first and third-person identities as someone who despite differences with classmates was supportive of his relationship with them at the times when he needed to stand for his beliefs.

Three participants had different descriptions of their classmate that were different from the rest of the participants. For example, Goli, remembered her preference to make friends with the "popular" classmates as a way to engage in activities that only the cool kids were part of those activities. In other parts of the interview she also mentioned that these "cliques" of popular kids were responsible for the "bad things" in school [lines 341-344]. She expressed her sadness about missing out on the rest of the high school years in Iran because she only completed one year there.

[...] so like for me in high school I would always look for people who were popular and I wanted to be friends with THEM so I did my best to become friends with them I don't know why and there were a lot of popular kids in my school [...] so it was fun... we would also do crazy stuff there too but you don't want to hear about it! (laughs) [...] High school is really fun there and I'm really SAD that I missed the next three years of it because I came here (coughs). [Goli, 27/06/16, lines 466-472]

Goli's narrative affirms Sfard and Prusak's (2005) definition of designated identities, with one of the sources being the "stories about others" (p. 18). For Goli, it seemed that being part of the "popular kids" crowd was an important identity builder as she identified herself in relation to those classmates (p. 18). According to these authors, her use of reifying verbs reflects how the event of leaving her high school in Iran, translated into her state of being "sad" as an identifying technique in constructing her first-person identities. Perhaps this identification allowed her to express a part of her individuality that was otherwise not expressed; hence her regret for her absence in the rest of the high school years in Iran and the possible loss of friendships. Goli's designated identity as a popular kid was grounded in her "conviction about being 'made' in the image of a certain person," such as a popular student (p. 18).

In another narrative, Sadaf remembered her middle school years as competitive due the overall atmosphere of her school and described less close relationships with her classmates. She also likened her difficulty in finding friends to a lack of shared interests and passions with the majority of students, as she was not interested in the more mainstream subjects.

...Well I still had good relationships with them, but it wasn't as easy as elementary school to find close friends and to find people with same interests and passions... so you know the environment wasn't friendly because it was all about competition, we couldn't get close to each other that much. [...]... cuz {because} it was all about winning who was gonna {going to} go to a better university, so people were trained to be like that. [...] It was really hard for me because I wanted to socialize and especially because I didn't have siblings. [...] But the environment didn't give me this chance. I had to be part of that. I couldn't just be all different. I had to follow something that wasn't my thing! [Sadaf, 05/07/16, lines 194-207]

Sadaf's narrative alluded to a competitive school environment, as the middle school grades prepared students to be qualified to enroll in top private high schools, which in return prepared them for achieving top scores on *Konkur*. Since Sadaf was not interested in the sciences, she had an even harder time finding friends with similar interests in literature and humanities and in general benefiting from the "full membership" of her school community (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 236). School is a site of the production of persons; membership and participation in a classroom's community is one way for students to construct their identities. Sadaf either had to become a full member by being an active participant in the practices of her school community following the "explicit rules," or become subject to "implicit sanctions" for rejecting to participate in the community (p. 236). This was in line with a system that endorsed the teaching and learning of science and mathematics as more important subjects than other subjects labeled as soft, such as literature and the arts, which were allotted less teaching time, resources and worth.

4.3.3 "They Knew My English Wasn't That Good So They Tried Their Best to Make Me Feel Comfortable in the Class" (Kajal, lines, 507-508)

In the context of the participants' transition to life in Canada, some teachers played a more significant role than others in fostering their adjustment to the new school environment. One participant indicated that he did not have a favorite teacher. Of the rest of the participants, when participants were asked about their favorite teachers in Canada, six characterized their him/her as welcoming and caring. For example, Leila remembered her social studies teacher as her favorite. She described him as a considerate teacher who helped with making her feel welcomed and encouraged her to participate in discussions, without necessarily putting pressure or stress on her.

[...] one of the things was that he acknowledged the fact that I was a new student and it's hard for me to participate in the class [...] and would always support me in some ways and I wouldn't feel left out! [...], but he was kind of made me feel welcome in the class but not in the way that he would pick on me and I would get nervous and every time we had to do a bit of homework and I would always do it and some kids would not and he always appreciate me for doing my homework [...] even though I didn't participate in class as much as other people cuz {because} I was uncomfortable talking in a group especially in English. [Leila, 15/07/16, lines 433-444].

Leila's narrative seems to portray a teacher who was attentive and caring to English learners. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005) this teacher's supportive approach helped to construct Leila's third-person identities as a student who was important and worthy of the teacher's support and attention while being recognized for her previous knowledge and learning. This teacher was influential in instilling hope in Leila and giving her recognition when she was struggling as a new student to construct her identity as a competent student. In other words, Leila's efforts to communicate were valued. Within a safe and welcoming classroom environment, this teacher provided the opportunity to connect and to tap into the resources and experiences Leila brought to class. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) argued that to participate in a community is the start of a struggle for identity and as Leila was transitioning into her new school context, it was in relation to this teacher that she was drawn into the classroom community and her new way of being a student. This teacher's approach to helping Leila's transition as a newcomer was an attest to Vadeboncoeur and Portes's (2002) claim of possible identities afforded through discursive and social practices (p.97). Her narrative further supports Hojati's (2012) research on the success of

Iranian graduate students; when a student feels supported by her teacher, the “school become a pleasant place where she/he is more likely to succeed” (p. 51).

Two participants characterized their favorite teachers as knowledgeable with a sense of humor. For example, Goli remembered her math teacher as her favorite because he “could teach” and his classroom was fun despite the fact that he was teaching math. She noted:

[...] ... I had one in Grade 11, it was my math teacher, he was comparing to the rest of the teachers he was knowledgeable, he could teach. [...] he could actually teach, not a lot of people here can teach, they know it, they can't teach it to other people, I don't know why so I had to learn EVERYTHING on my own, but the good thing was I already had the knowledge because I had because of my high school experience and my academic life in Iran. [...] he was funny his classes weren't boring even though it was math, it wasn't boring and he knew what he was talking about and he could teach it to us. [Goli, 27/06/16, lines 689-700]

Goli seems to have alluded to differences in teaching approaches embedded in social and cultural practices of her school community in Canada (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Perhaps she was used to more didactic, top-down teaching, and in Canada, the more student-directed or inquiry-based learning was so foreign that the experience compelled her to perceive some of her teachers in Canada as simply not competent to teach. For Goli who seemed to be grappling with her new schooling context, and her first-person identity as a student who enjoyed math, her narrative of her favorite teacher further confirmed her third-person identity as a student who was knowledgeable and competent in math (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Two participants had different descriptions of their favorite teachers compared to the rest of the participants. For example, Sara remembered her biology teacher, who taught using detailed explanations and administered tricky tests. She noted:

Yeah this might seem a little biased but I really liked my biology teacher everyone in our class liked her so much because...[...] in biology the key thing is to draw on the board and write down every detail [...], and she was like that, [...] and her tests were actually tricky but then I studied very well for her test and I would get a really good mark and I would feel good about myself because it was just a tricky test that I got a good mark on...
[Sara, 21/06/16, lines 464-474]

Sara explained that since her favorite subject was biology, she was relieved to be in a class with a teacher who explained the content with details and drawings that perhaps facilitated her learning. It seems that this teacher administered “tricky” tests, but she provided students ample opportunities to learn in class with her detailed explanations. For Sara, who already enjoyed the subject and had a strong background in biology, her third-person identities was reified through the telling of her favorite teacher’s approach that validated her identity-building as a good student (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). This was an important part of her “critical elements” of her identity (p.18). It can be assumed that had Sara received a low score on these tests, the perceived gap between her actual and designated identity may have generated a “sense of unhappiness.” This feeling can be generated as explained by Sfard and Prusak (2005) by a change in the “core elements” that if involved, would make her feel as if her whole identity had changed (p. 18).

4.3.4 “It Was Like Just Lack of Anything in Common” (Tara, line, 573)

Following participants’ experiences with classmates in Iran, it seemed participants had expected welcoming classroom environments with classmates who were interested to make

friends with them in their high schools in Canada. The majority of participants shared a description of groups or “cliques” (e.g., Goli, line 670), which they found difficult to approach. Six of the participants made reference to this aspect of school culture and described most classmates as unapproachable, indifferent, unwelcoming, and distant. For example, Parmis remembered that her classmates were not approachable or welcoming. She stated that they had “their own groups,” that they always hung out together, and that there was a lack of care and attention on the part of her classmates to the newcomers who were struggling to fit in to the school culture.

Oh very horrible! [...]. It was just very hard to make friends, and I had nothing to talk to them. [...] like I know the language but I have nothing in common “what do I talk to you about?” [...] and there is this barrier and they all have this group of cool people and this group of whatever people and they have these groups and you are just not welcome, you actually are not welcome! It’s hard, people are not just approachable and nobody would approach you too! I gave up on that with the first 2 days I’m like “nobody is ever gonna {going to} come say like are you lost you look lost, you are standing in the corner crying do you want me to show you the room?” ... just never happened I gave up on that already I’m like “okay fine I go and try to talk to people.” [Parmis, lines 656-669]

Parmis’s narrative exemplified a school environment that was the antithesis of feeling welcomed and included as she tried to find her way as a newcomer in a school culture that was unfamiliar. She highlighted the difficulty in making friends with students who belonged to different “groups.” In the study research project that Sfard and Prusak (2005) described, they distinguished between the native students and those newcomers, as “OldTimers” and “NewComers” respectively (p.19). For Parmis, there seemed to be a lack of recognition on the

part of her classmates as the “OldTimers” of the difficulties faced by newcomers (Sfard & Prusak 2005). Parnis’s experience reflects the difficulties faced by students who must learn a particular school and classroom culture alongside transitioning as an immigrant to Canada. Furthermore, through her use of second-person narrative, she reified her third-person identities as a student who was not interesting and cool to become part of the group.

Sadaf likewise remembered feeling lonely as she explained that her classmates were indifferent and uninterested in making friends with her or learning about her background and interests. She compared this experience to her relationship with classmates in Iran, and the painful feeling of “not belonging,” in Canada. She then justified her classmates’ lack of interest in her, explaining that it was not because they were “mean” but because they already had other friends.

Well the most difficult thing for me was finding friends, because I never felt that I’m part of that school community... and I didn’t have any friends, and this was something which wasn’t the case for me in Iran. I was always a popular kid in Iran with lots of friends but here so lonely! (low voice laughs) and I thought I didn’t have anything to offer to these people cuz{because} it seemed that I was so different... I didn’t have any place in their groups. [...] no one was interested to know me! They were so indifferent to me. (low voice) [...] Not that they were mean, it’s just they didn’t... realize the need to know new people maybe they had their own friends why they had to bother to know a stranger?

[Sadaf, 05/07/16, lines 417-426]

Sadaf’s narrative is filled with feelings of loneliness and insecurity in her description of noticing a lack of “interest” on the part of the students in the high school she attended in Canada. Her use of reifying verbs accompanied by the adverb “always,” was in an attempt to identify with being a

popular student back in Iran, which was not the case with her experience in Canada. In the words of Sfard and Prusak (2005) this identifying was a way for Sadaf to cope with her new relations in Canada that had changed from those in Iran. Following these authors, her first and third-person identities were constructed as someone who was not able to fit in her school culture in Canada grounded in the “experience-engendered expectation” because she was a stranger (p. 16). Sadaf alluded to a school environment that was “indifferent” to newcomers, and students who did not realize the need to reach out and welcome a new student who was waiting to be approached. Research conducted by Hojati (2012) with Iranian graduate students, also reflected feelings of alienation and marginalization within their graduate school experiences with professors and colleagues. Hojati (2012) argued “nationality, religion, body, language, and accent are thus factors for rejecting one’s experience” (p. 51). She called for the creation of contexts where other voices were given a chance to be heard: “the authorization of experiences is thus a crucial form of student empowerment—a way for them to enter the classroom as speaking subjects” (p. 51).

Two participants described their preference for making friends with the Iranian classmates, which they reasoned was easier because they were more similar and familiar. For example, Ali, explained he preferred to make friends with Iranian classmates for the reasons that he had more shared interests coming from the same cultural background, in compare to the non-Iranian classmates. He further grounded his explanation in “cultural difference” ingrained factors that the others were not privy to.

[...] because I would prefer to hang out with a Persian friend than a non Persian friend, regardless of whether he is Chinese or white Canadian, and the reason is, not because they may not be as sociable as I want them to be, but I think it’s just a matter of cultural difference that I just prefer, that I don’t want to spend more time with them! [...]

the cultural set that I was raised is totally different, and I need to have some basic some foundation to share with someone that I am spending my time with, other than that many things that I do may not make sense to them!. [Ali, 12/07/16, lines 648-652].

Following Sfard and Prusak (2005), Ali's first and third-person identities were constructed by using reifying verbs— as he identified with the Iranian classmates, and dismissed of non-Iranian classmates— as a person who valued the perceived familiar cultural ways of being, practices and nuances in his social relations. Ali's narrative further alluded to the barriers created by differences in cultural practices that make up multicultural schools. In the context of a multicultural school environment, Ali's narrative called for students to embrace each other's differences in their countries of origin in ways that “serve to mediate the process of adaptation between individuals and other groups in society” (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002, p. 103).

There were three participants who had different descriptions of their classmates. For example, Pouria remembered that he was more comfortable interacting with his classmates in the ESL classes than the mainstream classes, where he experienced stress about participating. He explained that in the other classes, there was an implied pressure to conform, since his classmates did not recognize him as an English language learner, and he found the experience stressful and unfair. He noted:

So in ESL classes everyone were new and because everyone we were all in the same boat, it was less stressing in class because we could interact with them, but the moment I got into other classes it was stressing to interact with other students [...], I don't know why but they didn't think I was in ESL so it sort of put a pressure on me, [...] but other students treated me as if I was a normal student, as if I knew English and I could speak and everything... it was a good thing like I thought it was cool because it wasn't that

good to be an ESL student like “hey I’m in ESL!”, especially if you were there for a long time which we were but it also created a pressure on me... . [Pouria, 22/08/16, lines 403-419].

Pouria’s statements revealed the extent to which language acted as a barrier to adapting to his new environment, where the language of communication was mainly English. He also alluded to the lack of recognition as an English learner on the part of his classmates. Recalling Packer and Goicoechea’s (2000) discussion of ontological processes of identity construction, Pouria’s identity as an ESL student was formed “in relationships of desire and recognition” (p. 233). While he recognized the unnecessary pressure of being burdened by the perception of a competent English speaker, he did not desire to be perceived as an ESL student. Thus he was split between his identity as an ESL student in one context and a normal student in another, yet he seemed to be more comfortable in his interactions with others who were also learning English. Perhaps, the ESL classroom was a place where Pouria found relief and freedom; he was freer to participate in the learning activities without feeling pressured to act “cool.” Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), he also rejected his third-person identities as someone who was “normal” as to mean he was comfortable with speaking in English, where he had rather to be recognized for his effort in learning to speak English.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the first three themes embedded throughout this thesis study: narratives of ritual practices, narratives of cultural tools, and narrative of social relations in mediating and constructing participants’ identities within their schooling experiences. The findings of this chapter revealed common elements in school narratives, yet there was a range of diversity among each participant’s interpretations of those school narratives. This chapter

explored the concept of narrative as a recounting of experience in the participants' school experiences before and after immigration to Canada. A sociocultural perspective to identity construction was proposed to highlight participants' identities as socioculturally, institutionally, and historically situated. Participants' identities were constructed and mediated by the cultural tools specific to school cultures, context areas like mathematics and biology and positioning as a "good student" or an "ESL student." Participants shared their school narratives in Iran, immigration to Canada and, subsequent school narratives in Canada demonstrating the constitutive interplay between their identities, the role of others, such as teachers and classmates, social practices, cultural and discursive tools, and the sociocultural contexts they were situated in as students in both Iran and Canada.

Chapter 5: Narratives of Actual and Designated Identities

In this chapter, I introduce two themes to address the second research question: *What narratives do participants tell of their actual and designated identities?* The first theme explores the participants' current identities as university students and their motives for pursuing post secondary education. The second theme explores the participants' designated identities as defined by their parents' expectations and the participants' vision of themselves in the future.

5.1 Actual Identities: Who I am

5.1.1 "Education Makes You a Better Person" (Parmis, line, 876)

When I asked participants to explain the meaning of the role of learning and education in their lives, seven out of the 11 participants mentioned realizing growth, strength and perspective, and tolerance. The terms, education and learning were used interchangeably. Following Sadeghi (2008), for the majority of these participants knowledge was gained through education. For example, Kajal described the role of education as a tool for self-growth and studying in greater depth what she found enjoyable. She noted:

I enjoy education a lot, I think it can change someone's perspective a lot when you study and you can get to know many new people on your way of education that might influence and change your mind completely. I just see it as a way of growing yourself, and your personality that's why I like it and want to continue my education and when I study something I like I just go into it, and then I can study every single part of it, so it's something I enjoy and also helps me grow. [Kajal, 25/08/16, lines 702-707]

Kajal stated that education allowed her to delve deeper into her area of interest and extended her horizon in return suggesting that her actual identity is explained as someone who enjoyed learning (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Her narrative also highlights the interwoven aspect of

narratives that navigates between actual and designated identities, in which her actual identity as a university student also foreshadowed her designated identity as someone who identifies with further education. She mentioned the way education can change a person's mind, and who a person becomes (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). She alluded to the transient, changing and dynamic nature of identity reflective of different learning contexts through her educational path. That she can meet other people through education seems to be a means for her to identify with a community of peers and teachers, which provided the opportunity for discussions, cultural activities, and further inquiry.

Similarly, Parmis explained that education had provided her with a wider perspective on the world around her, and she had learned to be more "broad minded." She noted:

I think the more you know, the less you hate things and the less you hate people, cuz {because} like you would see some person who's like they look horrible but then the more you know about them, I don't know, I feel like the more I learn about different things and the way things work I just love the world more, [...]... I feel like education makes you a better person you just become a more broad minded, you have perspective, it gives you perspective I think. [Parmis, 16/08/16, lines 870-877]

Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), Parmis's actual identity is being reified through the use of second-person narrative to suggest that she identifies her actual identity as someone whose perspective on life is to love everyone despite the differences. Parmis's narrative reflects the idea that education helped her to become a person with "better" qualities, reflecting an ontological aspect of change and transformation (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000), by becoming less judgmental and have a more situated understanding of people that leads to a happier life. Following these authors, they argued that learning "entails both personal and social transformation—in short,

ontological change” (p.235). In other words, Parmis transformed her social context in her search for identity through her interaction and participation with her “community” (p. 235).

In contrast, two participants rejected the idea that education was necessarily associated to learning within the context of “schools” per se or degree certifications; rather, they stated that there were alternative ways in which education could play a role in the lives of individuals. For example, Feri explained that education was an important aspect of people’s lives especially in this technologically driven society, but for him education was “good” learning from a “good” mentor who taught him to live an inspiring life. He explained:

Well it depends on how you define it in my opinion, because whenever you say to anyone education they think school, but it’s no, it’s not school [...] well learning is everything. [...], because art, creation, creativity, mathematics, science anything like that anything that is kind of [a] hobby a beautiful hobby for anyone to do in the world instead of destroying their lives, comes out of good learning. Good learning means having a good person, a good mentor teaching them the aspirations in life. That’s why you have a lot of kids in this world in this generation, this is my observation, that are all lost because they were never told about the beauty of this world, the things they can do with things they can learn, all they did was being fed just information that doesn’t last more than a week or two. [Feri, 21/07/16, lines 845-864]

For Feri, his actual identity can be spotted through his use of reifying verbs to suggest his sense of control and empowerment over his overall learning trajectory. Thus he is an individual who values good leaning that can be experienced through good mentorship (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Feri’s description of the role of education alluded to the interaction and the social relationships that impact an individual’s learning and identity construction. For him, it was the idea that good

mentors facilitate good education, and the reverse. By focusing on the details of interaction between student and teacher, or an “advisor-advisee,” the learner’s appreciation for his/her learning transforms, his/her identities (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 238). He expressed that “good” education was not what one studied, but rather that the meaningful relationships and community involvement that surround a person’s life are the foundation for “good” learning. Feri’s mention of aspirations in life further connects with what Sfard and Prusak (2005) called designated identities that are shaped by learning in school contexts and the cultural messages embedded in his social interactions.

Two participants explored different aspects of education in their lives. For example, Samira explained that besides the affordances of knowledge that education provided her, education facilitated the (co) construction of knowledge with her as “a member of a community,” that she valued. She expressed:

Education itself? maybe not a whole lot but the people and the community that’s more valuable in my life, [...]... they teach us how to think, they teach us how to think creatively more or less different professors with different methods, [...] But they kind of lead me in the path of “this is how you should think, these are the tools that you should know that helps you think this way or create what you’re thinking!” [...] it’s like you have, it’s like having grown-ups help you in life you know, your parents teach you your parents give you an education early in life “this is how to walk, this is how to ride a bike, this is how to eat, this is the morals that are good to have in life,” and then you go and make your decisions yourself and grow up yourself. [Samira, 11/08/16, lines 1035-1047].

It seems that Samira’s experience with education in general as a young child and now as a university student was shaped by the more experienced others within a social context, as she was

equipped with the tools to create and re-create knowledge that mediated her learning context (e.g., see Wertsch, 1985; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Recalling Penuel and Wertsch's (1995) "mediated- action approach to identity formation," human action is mediated by tools and signs (p. 88). Identity is formed as the person in a given social context uses "one or more resources from a cultural 'tool kit' to accomplish some action" (p. 89). Samira's identity was constructed through participation with cultural tools in her school community and her wider cultural context shaping her thinking and her actual identity as an active learner as she learned to be a critical thinker (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

5.1.2 "It's a Persian Thing That You Need to Go to University" (Pouria, line, 537)

When participants were asked to describe the reason they had decided to pursue post secondary education, the most common response provided by eight out of the 11 participants was that this level of education is a family and sociocultural norm. Recalling Sadeghi's (2008) research on how immigrant Iranian women in higher education assigned meanings to the concept of higher education, the majority of the participants in the current study mentioned the culturally engrained value of higher education. For example, Tara reasoned that she needed to enroll in university as a "natural" next step after high school because her sister had also followed the same path. She explained:

It was never really a choice, like I never considered not going to university, it was always set in the stone like "okay I'm going to UCW," not UCW but going to university, I had a bit of trouble just deciding what to study [...] like it was the natural thing that I do after! [...] like my sister had gone to university right after and I never thought that I would do anything else, rather than going to university after high school...
[Tara, 02/08/16, lines 642-647]

Tara's narrative alludes to a set of expectations that she perceived from both the society and her family, which had a direct impact on her actions. Following Sfard and Prusak (2005), Tara's actual identity as a university student was molded by "significant narrators" as the cultural voices of the community that had a direct impact on her actions and decisions (p. 18). The sociocultural context provided expectations that attending a university, like others in her family, was a step she had to take. Tara identified with her sister and her family's commitment to post secondary education, a commitment to an "ideological structure" (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995) that defined the role of education in her life (p. 88). In the words of Sfard and Prusak (2005), this commitment also impacted her actual identity as a young adult affiliated with the academic world situated in a university context.

Similarly, Goli explained that her decision to pursue post secondary education was impacted by her upbringing in Iran, and her immigration to Canada was a further impetus in her decision to enroll in the "best" university. She added that attending university was partly to express gratitude for the sacrifices that her parents had endured and to satisfy her own desire to advance her education. She noted:

It's... in your blood, if you are Persian it's in your blood. (laughs) [...] I grew up it's like you study and study, you go to university, you become a doctor, and you help people. As a little kid that's what I thought and I grew up with that. And I came here and I was always thinking how much my parents sacrificed for me to be here, so I HAVE to pay back too, so I have to go to university, I have to go to the best university and I'm going to try my best and get it and... also personally I'm never satisfied with a diploma from high school. I would never be satisfied with that, [...] the thirst for more education and having

a better degree, and all these reasons come together and I'm like I want to come to UCW.

[Goli, 27/06/16, lines 793-803]

Goli's narrative was embedded in metaphors. Her metaphor of "it's in your blood" was used as an indication to cultural influences to understand socially constructed practices that her family valued. As evident in her narrative, early socialization and schooling experiences were geared toward university preparation, but she also felt indebted to her family because they had provided her with the opportunity to create a better future in Canada. In the words of Sfard and Prusak (2005), the second- and third-person identities that were informing Goli as "significant narrators" were now part of her self-addressed first-person actual identity that shaped her actions (p. 18). Goli's narrative can also be seen as impacted by the "narrative osmosis" that Sfard and Prusak explained travels from a direction of designated to actual identity as she noted her thirst for more education (p.18). Motivated to earn a degree, Goli believed that getting a university education was a way to a fulfilling career.

Four of the participants explained their pursuit of post secondary education as the result of their own choice and inclination. For example, Sadaf explained that as an Iranian, there were certain expectations and norms that were dictated to individuals as milestones to achieve one after another. Despite this, she decided to attend university of her own choice and college was not an option. She explained:

Well I think it is something, which is predesigned for Iranian students, they have to go to post secondary, they have to go to university! They expect their children to go to university directly after finishing high school. There are certain things Iranian families think they have to finish after each other. Finishing high school, finishing university, getting married (laughs), making children [...] it is something culturally preset to do, [...]

for me I wanted to do that myself, I wanted to come to UCW. [...], but I was like “no college for me” I had to directly come to university. [Sadaf, 05/07/16, lines 517-532]

Sadaf’s narrative includes sociocultural influences and socially constructed practices that she was exposed to growing up in her cultural environment. In her cultural “surround,” post secondary education seemed to have “prowess” as “one of those properties that compensated with the more prestigious, place-independent status of ‘people of education and culture’” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 20). Perhaps this sense of prestige associated with higher education (Sadeghi, 2008) for Iranians, and her use of reifying verbs constructed her second-person identities as someone who valued post secondary education in particular a university education. Thus, Sadaf’s narrative is rooted in her early experiences of socialization in her home and society as significant factors shaping her desire to pursue post secondary education despite her personal conviction that she was in charge of her own decisions. Her narrative further appears to allude to an association of post secondary education with achievement while the lack of a university education was perceived to be associated with failure (See Sadeghi, 2008).

5.1.3 “You Would Always Go for the Hardest Thing That’s Out There” (Goli, line, 833)

The path to choosing a major in university can vary for different people and is shaped by the individual’s lived experiences. With this understanding, when I asked participants to provide the motive behind choosing their respective majors, six out of the 11 participants explained that their decision was due to personal interest and passion.

For example, Sadaf described how she changed majors in her second year of studies from the sciences to the arts, deciding to study political science in alignment with her interest and passion in the social sciences. She explained:

[...]. I was in sciences but then in second year I thought that's not what I want to do [...]. I can't be a doctor (laughs). I can't see myself to become a doctor. [...] Well my initial interest was always social sciences. It wasn't something new to me, but I finally found the courage to do what I like to do and want to do, and it was a really hard decision for me [...] and it seemed like I'm doing something odd or different which is not common in the Iranian community and I thought "how am I going to do social sciences in a foreign language?" It is something that works not just with language but with culture as well. I thought I am foreign to this culture. "Can I be successful in it?" "Can I do it?" [Sadaf, 05/07/16, lines 538-558]

Sadaf had initially chosen a major that was incongruent with her personal interests yet more in line with her family's and her "significant narrators'" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) expectations. By using reifying verbs, she attempted to construct her first-person identity as someone who was passionate about social sciences, despite the dominant narratives in her cultural context that favored the hard science educational prospects. Similarly with the participants in Sadeghi's (2008) research, who described their view on education as influenced by their family and early socialization in Iran, Sadaf's narrative reflects cultural values and family expectations that shaped her decision initially to pursue sciences to become a doctor. Her decision to change her major to study social sciences seemed contradictory to the general expectations of her family and the bigger community she belonged (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). With her diligent decision to switch majors, Sadaf was able to direct her designated identities that had been formed in childhood in order to exercise more power over her actual identity to be what she desired: being a social sciences major (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

In another narrative, Leila explained that she chose to major in science because of her intention to apply for medical school. She stated that in the second year, she applied and was accepted into the integrated program, with a focus in neuroscience and pharmacology, as she was passionate about these areas of study. She explained:

I knew that I was gonna {going to} be in sciences but picking a major was kind of hard for me cuz {because} I wasn't sure, [...], so the major didn't really make a difference in my career path because I have to transfer from my undergrad to medical school, [...] to do something that I love because I always think that even though it was a hard decision for me, [...] but I always thought that if I love something I'm gonna {going to} put 100% of my time and effort to get good I guess be the best at it. So yeah that was the reason I chose because I was genuinely passionate about it [...] and in integrated you can chose your major, you can choose your discipline. [Leila, 15,07/16, lines 558-569]

Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), Leila's first-person identity was constructed using reifying verbs followed by the adverb of "always" as a student who was confident of her passion and her post graduation career plans for medical school. For Leila, her actual identity as a science major was informed by her designated identity to become a medical student, as she was passionate about her major which encouraged her to work harder and be more committed to her goals. Recalling Sfard and Prusak's (2005) explanation on how designated identities change and develop, it is likely that for Leila her narrative seemed to follow a less likely direction of an identity osmosis that traveled in the direction of her actual identity to designated identity (p. 18). Thus choosing a major in the sciences was critical to her actual identity because the image of a medical student was a "means for making reality in the image of fantasies" (Sfard & Prusak,

2005, p. 19). In other words she was a science major undergraduate in the hope to become a medical student.

The rest of the five participants each had different responses. For example, Goli stated that her decision to major in science was grounded in a unanimous agreement between her groups of friends, who also had other friends completing degrees in science. She further explained that she chose to pursue a degree in the Faculty of Science because it was considered the hardest and only “smart” students got into the sciences. She explained:

Oh that was like a group thing (laughs) [...] because everyone is Persian like “yeah I’m going to sciences,” [...]. ...Some of my friends had their sisters at UCW and they would always be like “yeah sciences is so good my sister is in sciences and it’s great”! [...]. [...] so in a way this was like if you are in food and nutrient you are not smart, but if you are in sciences you are so smart, if you go to arts you are not so smart because you can get in with any kind of average but not anyone can get into sciences you have to be above 92% and you’d be like “I got into sciences because I’m smart”! [...] and you would always go for the hardest thing that’s out there!. [Goli, 27/06/16, lines 805-833]

Goli’s decision to major in a degree program in science seems to have been highly influenced by a collective decision among her friends and by her community’s “significant narrators” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p.18) perception of the sciences as a field for “smart” people. Goli’s narrative captures Wenger’s (1998) claim that identities are “a pivot between the social and the individual” aspects of learning that shaped her learning experiences and the goals she set for herself (as cited in Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 21). Moreover, her identifying narrative as a “discursive activity” is evidenced by her use of the reifying verbs that explained her actual identity as being smart (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

5.2 Designated Identities: What I Aspire to Be

5.2.1 “To Go into a Higher Level Like Master’s and PhD” (Kajal, line, 686)

Following Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) interest in “the cultural shaping of learning,” I asked participants to explain their parents’ ideas about and stance on post secondary education. Ten out of the 11 participants explained that their parents valued, encouraged, and supported the participants’ decision regarding post secondary education. For example, Sadaf explained that her parents supported her decision to pursue post secondary education like most “Iranian families”; they would not have been “proud” if she had not gone to university and had considered other options.

Aha well they probably wanted me to go to university (laughs). [...]. I mean most Iranian families value post secondary education especially if they are educated themselves too... I mean I’m sure they wouldn’t be happy if I would tell [them] I don’t want to go to university. [...]. It wasn’t something they would be proud of. [Sadaf, 05/07/16, lines 586-593]

It seems that Sadaf’s parents were relieved by her decision to attend university because they highly endorsed this cultural practice. Perhaps they would not have been “happy” if Sadaf had decided against going to university, given that she was the one who encouraged her parents to leave Iran. Thus, they were assured by her plan to further her education in the field of her interest and entrusted her to uphold the family’s “values” which was part of her second- and third-person designated narratives that was incorporated into her designated identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 18)

Similarity, Pouria explained that his parents valued post secondary education because they considered a university degree an “accomplishment.” He also described how his father

supported his co-op position that he was offered, but was soon advised that he should only see it as a temporary position, since he needed to further his education and career goals.

[...] oh yeah they highly value it, like sometimes not anymore I felt lots of pressure on myself because of all the sacrifices my mother and father did, because my dad had founded 3 companies in Iran by the time we left he had 3 companies and he had shares in those. [...] and he sees going to university and being active, like I got the co-op job he was really happy same thing with my mom so for sure they see university and completing university as an accomplishment. [Pouria, 22/08/16, lines 584-594]

In this narrative, Pouria's family made "sacrifices" in their immigration process to Canada, and because of that Pouria seemed to feel obliged to his father to meet the least of his expectations that he complete his university education. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005) his third-person designated identities was shaped by his father's direct influence to pursue post secondary education despite his own interest in pursuing his current plans to invest in the co-op position he was offered. He added later in the interview that his father insisted that he needed to major in a program area that was "good," implying it did not need to be of interest. Perhaps a "good" program signified a degree that had promising career prospects in terms of income and stability. He noted:

... so he always told me "whatever you gonna {going to} pick since we went through a lot, make sure that's good, sometimes you got to pick something that you don't 100% like but make sure it's something good! [...]. [lines 603-605]

Pouria may have been conflicted between his own desires and the wishes of his father when he had to follow a career path following his father's advice. Overall, he seemed to be "pushing beyond the identity conferred" by his father by trying to "take a stand" on the way his

relationship with his father positioned him (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 234). As for his identity construction, Sfard and Prusak's (2005) description of second-person designated identities can be applied here as to suggest, Pouria's narratives incorporated the stories other people like his father told him into his own narrative about himself that impacted his actions. Two of the participants indicated not only that their parents valued post secondary education, but that they asserted explicit education and career expectations for their children to follow. For example, Goli described her father as influential in her post secondary education planning. She explained that he "pushed" her to become a dentist, and when she opposed the idea, he then suggested that she pursue the "next best thing," which was medical school. She also explained that because her father was a pharmacist in Iran, he discouraged her from pursuing pharmacy, which he did not consider a promising career option in Canada.

Well my dad I should say is a little narrow minded, because he wanted me to be a dentist because he's like yeah "you should go become a dentist because you make more money" [...] from my perspective I don't want to do that, and then he's like "the next best thing is med school [medical school] go to med school then!"(laughs) and so I'm like "okay (laughs) I'm going into med school!" [...] so he's like "pharmacy is not a good business here so don't go after pharmacy it's not good here the business is not going well here." [...], but somehow I have been pushed to be a doctor in a way... and my mom is like "you can do anything you like but you should be the best in it and work hard." She's better she's like "you can do whatever you want to!" But it should be a good thing at least. [Goli, 27/06/16, lines 844-858]

Goli seemed to have been pressured to follow a path that may have been incongruent with her own interests, yet she conceded to her father's suggestion to "do the next best thing," become a

doctor as her plans to apply for medical school was mentioned in another part of the interview. Her narrative is filled with second and third-person narratives that appears to have shaped her actions toward building her designated identities following the advice of his father as a “significant narrator” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 18). In another part of the interview she also described her mother’s implied position:

even though my mom is like “you can do anything”! I can still see it in her eyes that she wants me to go to med school and she has sacrificed so much for us to be here and have the best and be the best, and I assume they see the best as the highest maybe as the highest position a doctor or a specialist you know? [...] [lines 874-877].

Thus, Goli’s designated identities are combined from her parents’ suggestions as second and third-person narratives, into what can be understood as her first-person designated identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) aspiring to become a doctor.

Similar to Goli, Ali explained that his parents supported him and encouraged him to pursue his interest. He described their expectation to advance his education to postgraduate degrees. He compared his parents’ “mindset” to that of other Iranian families in the wider cultural context of Middle-Eastern families. He explained:

To be fair he and my mom both of them, they want me to do what I like and is in my area of interest, and they don’t have any objection about what I am studying right now [...]. What he says is that “you have to earn the degrees up and up” and that’s the typical I don’t think it’s just restricted to Persians, all Middle-Easterners have that mindset that “okay you have to get to the end of your program that you are studying and it’s not your undergrad, it’s not your master’s degree, it’d be better to be your PhD” and same mindset is happening for me as well. [Ali, 12/07/16, lines 766-774]

Ali's parents emphasized "higher" university credentials in the form of a graduate degree without necessarily directing his decision toward any specific career path. Perhaps they associated the higher degrees with social standing, income, and better employability prospects. However, without seeming to appear that he was merely being "enculturated" into the ways of his community (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 235), it seemed that Ali proceeded along the course he wished to take while respecting his parents' wishes and what seemed to be appropriate for a person of his sociocultural origin (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In other words, he incorporated his second and third-person identities with their "relation-shaping task" into his designated identities.

There was one participant with a different narration of his parents' ideas on post secondary education compared to the rest of the participants. For Feri, who lived away from his parents for a number of years after he left Iran, his parents considered post secondary education as a token to establish oneself financially, get married, and start a family. He likened his parents' views to the generalized belief of parents the world over when he said:

[...] well their idea is that you being financially safe and sound, finding a job. [...].

Marrying, having a kid, being able to support your family, that is a successful career from a perspective of any parents, at least a classic parents anywhere in the world. [Feri,

21/07/16, lines 818-823]

Feri's parents did not encourage or pressure him to follow any specific career path, as long as his education qualified him to later support himself and his future family. His narrative also suggested that his parents did not consider the aspect of enjoyment as an important factor for his chosen field of study, a premise that Feri dismissed when he stated, "[...] so for me it's to do what I like, so it's either cooking or pursuing my music career, [...]. [lines 829-830]. Following

Sfard and Prusak (2005), his first-person designated identity was considerably at odds with his parents' expectations, in other words his second and third- person identities did not have a measurable influence on his actions and goals. In the words of Sfard and Prusak (2005) he was not attracted to the “heroes” of those narratives, and did not incorporate them into this designated identity (p.18).

5.2.2 “Hopefully I’ll be Doing What I Like” (Goli, line, 944)

Upon asking participants to imagine their future and to describe their vision of what they would like to be doing and becoming in the next five years, similar to their parents' expectations, the majority, seven out of the 11 participants referred to further post secondary education in their respective fields of study. For example, Leila explained that in five years she imagined either being a medical student or graduating from medical school. She explained:

Hopefully in five years I’ll be in med school and studying so that’s my vision. (laughs) I want to I think this is what I want to do even if it’s going to take a long time or it’s going to be hard, I think that’s what I’m gonna {going to} do and I’m gonna {going to} try [...] but I know I want to keep trying and hopefully in five years I’ll be studying or finishing my studies. [Leila, 15/07/16, lines 703-707]

Leila was determined to become a doctor no matter how long it took to complete her studies. As evident by her first-person narrative, Leila was working her way toward her designated identity as a medical doctor: becoming a medical student seemed to be the only way for her to close the gap between her actual identity as a pre-med student and her designated identity as a medical doctor (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Similarly, Goli expressed her desire to further her post secondary education to study medicine under the auspices of doing “something” she enjoyed. She noted:

Hopefully I'll be doing what I like! [...] the hardships that you have to go through to get there it's really scary, and you're like "no I'm not going to do it" (lower voice)... but hopefully I mean probably I'll be in med school and doing what I like! [...], and that's probably the vision!. [Goli, 27/06/16, lines 944-947]

In Goli's narrative, her vision appeared unsteady and was filled with a sentiment of obligation; as if she had no choice but to enroll in medical school to become a doctor. She seemed to have convinced herself that this was also what she liked to do even though it was at the request of her father that she had made a career choice to enter a medical profession. Thus the messages and stories of her that were told by others, particularly her father, seemed to have succeeded in seeping into her first-person self-addressed designated identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), influencing her goals and actions.

In another narrative, Kajal described her vision in five years to center around a part-time job and further post secondary education in graduate school. She hoped to travel while attending university outside of British Columbia. She noted:

I would probably want to get a part-time job to support myself and not lean and depend on my parents as much, and just continue my education for higher levels [...], I want to experience other things too like travelling around in different countries, and maybe move to some other place if I get into a different university. There is a lot I can do I would just see where this way I am going takes me! [Kajal, 25/08/16, lines 760-765]

Earlier in the interview, Kajal had mentioned that her mother's expectation for her education and career plans was that she would be independent. It seemed that Kajal wished to transcend the limits that her cultural context might have placed before her and take advantage of the learning opportunities beyond her cultural community. She expected her "first-person identities to evolve

with the world in tandem” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 20). In other words, in agreeing with Sfard and Prusak (2005), Kajal seemed to perceive her designated identities as changeable and flexible.

There were four participants who each described different visions for the next five years without alluding to further post secondary education compared to the rest of the participants. For example, Pouria’s narrative of his vision in five years involved the horse breeding industry, which at this point in the interview he even considered as his main career option. This image was becoming clearer because he doubted his academic aspiration of enrolling in dental school, a path he had thought he wanted to pursue. He explained:

One of the as I mentioned, the horse riding thing, it has its own industry [...]... like I always want to go and compete in competition and breed horses... go to Germany buy horses but that requires money so I’m just working on the pathway but I love to do it even as my main job or something on the side, I will for sure do that. For my school-related or like science-related stuff I’m not sure if I’m going to get into dental or not!
[Pouria, 22/08/16, lines 675-683]

Pouria’s narrative involved “critical elements” that seemed to be part of the gap he perceived between his actual and designated identities; thus, there seemed to be a sense of “unhappiness” and a division between what he perceived as his first-person and second-person designated identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 18). It seemed that in his vision of five years in the future, he appeared to finally reconcile what he truly aspired to be and change the designated identities that had been formed for him in childhood: becoming a dentist.

In another narrative, Feri explained that in five years he wished to manage a music company to tour around Europe or North America and to work with a team that was committed and aspired to the same values and goals:

[...]. Me, I want to be able to in that age, oh that would be awesome, to form a band to be able to tour around Europe or North America, and that is just like a little kid or a teenager, but I know that's possible because I know all the people that are able to do this with me and if they are committed enough. [...], but I want to be so musically strong to be part of such experiences, because if I don't do it, at that age, 40 years old that is not that fun to do. [Feri, 21/07/16, lines 992-998].

For Feri, his narrative of his first person designated identity was not far from his actual identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) as he was already involved with music production events that had connected him with people in the music industry. Feri seemed to be confident in his wish to be “identified as someone who knows music good” [lines 957-958]. His narrative can further attest to how his current experience provided the tools “to plan for his future” plans and activities (Sfard & Prusak, p. 16).

5.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the fourth and fifth theme embedded throughout this thesis study: participants' actual and designated identities as a reflection of their current identities as university students and their designated identities shaped by their parental influences on their education and future aspirations. This chapter further defined the concept of identity-as-narrative through the narratives participants told of their actual and designated identities. Designated identities were further categorized into first, second, and third-person identities to reflect narratives about themselves and others. To map the participants' identities, I elicited narratives about their current positions as university students, the meaning of education in their lives, and their future career aspirations along with their parents' expectations for their future education goals. This theoretical framework further explored participants' actions through the exploration

of identity as a link between learning and their sociocultural context. The participant's narratives emphasized the importance of the pursuit of higher education within Iranian culture and society, as well as their families. Through the telling of these narratives, participants showed the relational, cultural, and contextual factors of their identity building processes and its "relation-shaping task" that contributed to their narratives about themselves and others (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p.18). Education and learning were perceived to play an important role in the identities of all participants; however, the meaning that they assigned to post secondary education was influenced by their earlier socialization in schools, social practices with cultural tools, social relationships, and the cultural messages embedded in their sociocultural contexts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to learn about participants' school experiences in Iran and Canada and to apply Sfard and Prusak's (2005) identity-as-narrative theoretical framework to define identity construction. This study was based on the understanding that identity and learning are culturally shaped and identities are the narratives we tell other people and the narratives other people tell us. The two research questions that guided this study were: (1) *What narratives do participants tell of their school experiences?* and (2) *What narratives do participants tell of their actual and designated identities?* Five themes were identified: ritual practices in establishing the school context and constructing identities; English language as a cultural tool in mediating identities; social relationships in shaping identities; actual identities: who I am; and designated identities: what I aspire to be.

In this concluding chapter, first I summarize the study and the main findings in relation to the research questions with a focus on how the participants' identities were constructed through the narratives of their school experiences as young children growing up in Iran and later as adolescents living in Canada. I then link the themes to the theoretical framework and the literature discussed throughout the thesis. Second, I note educational implications. Third, I highlight the limitations of the study. Fourth, I propose a direction for future research building on the limitations of the study. I end the chapter with a brief summary.

6.1 Summary of Themes in Relation to Research Questions

Each narrative a participant told is an identity, according to Sfard and Prusak (2005), and each data excerpt reflects the identities of participants in this study. These narratives allow the reader to see identities-in-construction and made available to the participants as they narrated their school experiences, including immigration, different schools and classroom contexts, and

future aspirations. These narratives reflect identities as shaped by the lives of the particular participant in this study, in this city and province, at this time, within a larger social and historical context. For participants in this study, the process of narrating identities occurred through a semi-structured interview that engaged them in narrating their past school experiences in both Iran and Canada followed by their post-migration transitional narratives and future visions. The participants' narratives were informed by social, cultural, and historical influences that shaped their engagement and participation within particular contexts.

Following Sfard and Prusak's (2005) inspired conception of identity-as-narrative, this current research was conceptualized within a framework of identities as a pivot between the individual and sociocultural aspects of learning as embedded in cultural narratives surrounding the participants. The goal of this research was to fill in such gaps in the literature by exploring the schooling narratives of a selected group of Iranian university students. This thesis illuminated how a sociocultural approach to learning and identity construction could contribute to existing research on immigrants' school experiences in education research. It aimed to explore how individual learning experiences and trajectories are shaped by sociocultural influences, and why university students, particularly those who are immigrants to the host country, find different contextual features relevant to their learning situations. The thesis aimed to highlight the differences and similarities grounded in students' prior school experiences and sociocultural contexts as contributing to future ambitions.

The first research question, *what narratives do participants tell of their school experiences?* and the accompanying interview questions specifically sought to explore the participants' school experiences in Iran and their subsequent school experiences in Canada, as well as how these experiences were influenced by the experiences surrounding immigration. In

concert with Sfard and Prusak (2005) the definition of identity was defined as “collection of stories about persons,” and as woven through with cultural narratives that were constructed using reifying verbs followed by adverbs that stressed repetitiveness of the those events and actions narrated which further reified their identities as a state of being (p.16). The responses to the first research question culminated in three themes. These themes illuminated the ways participants negotiated their identities in relation to ritual practices, cultural tools, and social relationships in the context of their school communities. Thus, the participants’ narratives were analyzed with reference to participation in ritual practices within their respective school communities (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000), cultural tools (Wertsch, 1985; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995), and social relations (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002). The participants’ narratives of their diverse school experiences elucidated their negotiation of their identities, and the co-constitutive nature of identity construction across sociocultural influences before and after immigration to Canada. As part of the narratives elicited on school experiences in Iran, the majority of participants remembered the morning rituals and the preparatory years for writing the national exam at the end of high school: *Konkur*. For example, participants shared narratives of the morning line up, when they engaged in some physical activities, recited songs and passages of Quran, and in some cases were checked for grooming practices before heading to classes. As they remembered their middle and high school years in Iran, they shared narratives of heavier study loads, more strict expectations on part of the teachers and school administrators, with an intense competition atmosphere among students who competed for university acceptance.

As part of the narratives elicited on school experiences in Canada, participants shared narratives of different school expectations and practices, such as classroom switches for each subject and an overall easier education system in terms of grades and homework assignments.

For the majority of participants, they shared narratives of alienation as they struggled to find membership in their school communities in Canada, finding friends and feeling recognized by their classmates and in a few cases by teachers. For example, the majority of participants recalled a school environment where many students belonged to certain “cliques” or groups, which made it difficult for the newcomers to approach. Their schools in Canada was narrated as a context where they experienced other ways of being identified one such as an ESL student by their respective communities. It seems that the majority of participants regarded having friends and good English language as priorities and values for a good adaptation life in Canada. Thus, the participants’ pre- and post-immigration narratives shaped the meanings and interpretations they ascribed to their diverse school experiences.

The second research question, *what narratives do participants tell of their actual and designated identities?* and the accompanying interview questions specifically sought to explore participants’ narratives of their current and future identities. They culminated in the final two themes of the study: their actual identities as constructed through narratives of current positions as university students, and their designated identities constructed through narratives of their parents’ and culture’s expectations for their future career and vision. The concept of identity as the missing link between learning and sociocultural context was applied in analyzing the findings as reflected in the narratives participants told in relation to their parents’ expectations and their own goals. The majority of the participants highlighted their parents’ expressed expectations regarding further education and post secondary advancements. This was shared and common in the majority of participants’ narratives regarding their future career plans and visions: to continue their studies to higher levels. Thus the participants’ second and third-person designated identities was shaped by the role of parents’ implicit and explicit messages in their children’s

education and career planning: to pursue their post secondary education further. Agreeing with Sadeghi (2008), the majority of participants' narratives emphasized the importance placed on learning and the pursuit of higher education within Iranian culture and society, as well as in their families.

6.2 Educational Implications

Canada is a country impacted by migrations. The implications arising from this study include the need to consider educational initiatives and policies that influence immigrant students' school experiences to better facilitate their sense of connection, recognition, learning, and belonging to the school environment. One way to assist teachers to educate children from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, who often come to school with a range of experiences such as previous English language learning, and school practices prevalent in the students' previous education contexts, is to learn about their school narratives and academic trajectories. These first-person narratives can encourage immigrant and newcomer students to bring their own sociocultural understandings to their new school communities and the language learning context by feeling recognized for their stories. Recalling Sfard and Prusak (2005), the narratives as identities—molded by the cultural narratives between the individual and his/her community—impacts their actions and goals; thus it can address the differences and similarities perceived in students' learning performances. In other words students' identities can account for the difference in learning processes between immigrant students and those of the local students.

Second, as relationships and experiences change, another way educators can facilitate immigrant students' educational prospects, is through the stories they tell about those students' achievements, that sees beyond their current level of language understandings, whose school experiences are sought and valued. An educator's role in telling these new narratives may, in

addition, contribute to the role as significant narrators that impact the students' education goals and future academic events. More especially they may later become part of the students' second and third-person designated identities as participants in social relations in the Canadian education contexts. Thus teachers can help students to redefine their designated identities.

Vadeboncoeur (2017) argued that school is only one place that provides access to a selective set, or a "cultural tool kit" of knowledge and ways of thinking, and that other informal settings are also places for sharing and engaging young people in cultural ways of knowing, being, and becoming (p. 41). Thus it is inevitable that schools as sites of cultural production for dominant values and ideologies, can impact the extent to which a student, who has immigrated and is unfamiliar with the social practices and cultural histories of her/his new school, feels welcomed and recognized as a valued member of the culture of the school. As Vadeboncoeur (2017) explained "for students from non-dominant cultures, with different intellectual histories and social practices, the concern and the values for what is learned may differ, and school participation may require more support and/or a different form of mediation" (p. 42). Knowing the powerful effects of how children are welcomed into school cultures may inform educators and educational researchers and educators about the interconnectedness of student learning in context, and may help to uncover students' narratives and stories, to learn about their past experiences, present activities, and future hopes.

Schlein and Chan (2010) argued, "despite the abundance of studies that advocate for the inclusion of culture in school curricula, there remains little research focusing on the school experiences of students from underrepresented cultural backgrounds" (as cited in Schlein & Chan, 2012, p.136). In response to these authors' assertion, one way to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity and resources that immigrant students bring to schools, and to build a

more inclusive school environment, may be to provide them with the opportunities to narrate their previous school experiences. Perhaps the opportunity to share personal narratives of past experiences and future aspirations may help to bring about an understanding of the cultural shaping of learning and help build classroom community.

6.3 Study Limitations

The study's limitations with regard to data collection and analysis are considered here. The first limitation was the use of English as the interview language. This may have limited some participants' ability to fully engage with the interview questions and narrate their experiences. The potential language barrier between the interview language, English, and the participants' first language should have been more systematically addressed in the interview process. Even though the participant recruitment advertisement noted fluency in both English and Farsi as eligibility requirement, it was not carefully endorsed. For example, three of the participants' narratives may have been more descriptive; they struggled to at times to find the right words.

The second limitation is regarding the participant recruitment method of "cluster sampling." While qualitative research is not generalizable, using cluster sampling further reduced the scope of the perspectives learned here given that most of the participants were known to each other and, as members of two student organizations, formed an affinity group. Thus, this sampling method further narrowed the findings. The third limitation was the use of a single interview. Two of the participants did not respond to my request for member checking. The use of a second interview may have enhanced the findings to fill in the gaps when clarification was required. Fourth, the interview context on its own limited the narratives that

were elicited through the interview process and the protocol. Gathering data in a naturalistic setting may have elicited different narratives.

6.4 Future Research

This study used qualitative interviews to explore the narratives of school experiences of Iranian young adults who were undergraduate students at two of the universities in the Greater Vancouver area. This research with students from Iran could be stepping-stone for future education research with immigrants in general and other Iranians in particular who attend schools and universities in Canada. One way to build from the aforementioned limitations could be to use a combination of multiple interviews, in particular an interview with parents and teachers to both triangulate the findings and to potentially endorse those narratives elicited from students. Second, ethnographic observations of the school experiences of Iranian youths and other immigrants who attend schools in Canada may provide additional data about the learning context within classrooms, as well as how narratives emerge in day to day classroom life as students engage with their identities.

Ideally, future research needs to continue to challenge and extend existing theories of identity. Scholars working with Sfard and Prusak's (2005) identity-as-narrative framework need to take into account the transient, interwoven and moving nature of narratives. What data from this study highlights is the concurrent and interwoven nature of actual or designated identities in narratives. With this rendering, the "narrative-minded researcher" may be better prepared to analyze the interwoven aspects of narratives as moving, negotiated identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 21). Thus, future research can explore the multiple, diverse, and seemingly contradictory narratives of individuals who have experienced other education systems than what they are experiencing in the host country. Furthermore, future education researchers are

encouraged to explore the K-12 school narratives of students from Iran in other major cities in Canada with large Iranian populations, such as Toronto, Montreal, and Calgary. This could lead to comparative research that takes into account each city's particular social, cultural, and historical influences in shaping the school experiences of Iranian immigrants in Canada. Finally, Canadian researchers and educators are encouraged to conduct more research with immigrants that explore their school experiences as a foundation for developing multicultural curriculum. Through more qualitative research, teachers and educators can learn about supporting immigrant students in ways that respect their cultural messages embedded in their school narratives and the significant narrators woven in their identifying stories that shape their learning and actions.

6.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter six provided a summary of the themes, educational implications and discussed some of the limitations with regards to methodology and suggested a future direction. This research sought to understand a small group of Iranian university students' narratives of schooling, settlement, and career aspirations in Canada. It is my hope that this thesis has provided the reader with a thorough understanding of how identity—as a concept and identity-as-narrative as an action—exists in the narratives we tell about our lives and lived experiences in our social interactions. One of the most important insights that this study offers is how these young Iranian university students, despite the challenges, fears, and tensions they experienced as immigrants in their unfamiliar Canadian school contexts, managed to stay on a path toward their aspirations to bridge their actual and designated identities. Moreover, despite the challenges they faced as immigrants in their high schools in Canada, most envisioned a place for themselves in Canadian society once they completed their university studies.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Semi-Structured Pilot Interview Protocol

1-Demographics

- “Tell me a bit about your self.”
- How old are you?
- What are you studying?
- What year of undergraduate studies are you in?
- How long have you lived in Canada?
- Do you live with family?

2- School Experiences in Iran

- “I’d like you to remember your school days in Iran before immigrating to Canada.”
- What do you remember of a typical school day during your elementary years?
 - How many hours were you in school?
 - What was your favorite subject? Why?
 - What was your least favorite subject? Why?
- What do you remember from your teachers? Did you have a favorite teacher? PLEASE DESCRIBE HER.
 - What was her teaching style like? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT.
 - What do you remember from the classroom environment?
- How was your relationship with your classmates?
- How many years of Middle/high School did you complete in Iran?
- What do you remember from your middle/high school?
- What do you remember of a typical day?

-What was your favorite subject? Why?

-What was your least favorite subject? Why?

-What was your favorite class? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT.

- What was her teaching style like? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT.

-What do you remember from the classroom environment?

-How was your relationship with your classmates?

“Before I ask you some questions about your settlement experiences in Canada, are there any additional comments that you want to add about your schooling experiences in Iran?”

3-Settlement in Canada

“So far we’ve been talking about your school experiences in Iran. Now I’d like you ask you some questions about your immigration experiences to Vancouver, Canada.”

-Why did you or your family decide to leave Iran?

-How old were you when you left Iran?

-What do you remember prior to leaving?

-How was your experience of saying goodbye to your friends?

- How were the initial days like in Vancouver?

4. School Experiences in Canada

“We’ve been talking about your immigration experiences to Canada. Now I’d like you to remember your school days in Canada after immigrating to Vancouver and ask you some questions about your school experiences in the Canadian context.”

-What grade were you when you started school in Canada?

-What do you remember of a typical day in high school?

-What was your favorite subject? Why?

- What was your least favorite subject? Why?
- What was your favorite class? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT.
 - What was her teaching style like? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT.
 - What do you remember from the classroom environment?
- How was your relationship with your classmates?
- How easy was making new friends?
- What was it like being a student in a Canadian high school? Probe: I want to make sure I understand what you are saying; can you say some more about that experience?
 - How does your schooling experience in Iran compare to your schooling experience in Canada? (contrast probe)
 - In what ways does it differ?
 - In what ways is it similar?
 - Do you see any other differences between the two educational systems?

6- Current Position

“We’ve been talking about your school experiences in both Iran and Canada and how they compare and contrast. Now I’d like to ask you some questions about your current status as an undergraduate student at UBC.”

- Tell me about your decision to pursue post-secondary education. How did you come to that decision?
- How did you come to the decision to major in x?
- Other people sometimes influence what we do. What other people, if any, played a role in your decision to major in x?
- What was about the program that attracted you to it?

-What do you think about your program?

-How do you feel about your current status as an undergraduate student?

7- Family Relation

“We’ve been talking about your current experiences as an undergraduate at UBC. Now I’d like to ask you some questions about your family relation and dynamic.”

-What is your relationship with your family?

-What are their ideas and stance on higher education?

-What are your parents’ expectations regarding your future career?

-Do other people other than your parents and immediate family members play a role in your future planning and aspirations?

8- Career Aspirations

“We’ve been talking about your family relation and involvement. Now I’d like to ask you some questions about your future goals and aspirations.”

-What are your plans after graduation?

-What do you envision to do/be in 5 years? In 10 years?

-What kind of career path do you aspire to achieve?

-How would you describe your future goals in 5 years? In 10 years?

Closing

Is there anything else you care to add?

Appendix B : Participant Informed Consent Form



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Educational and Counseling Psychology, and Special Education

Vancouver Campus

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel 604 822 0242

Fax 604 822 3302

Website ecps.educ.ubc.ca/

Consent form

Exploring Identity-as-Narrative in the School Narratives of Iranian University

Students in British, Columbia, Canada.

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Negar Amini

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Department of ECPS

University of British Columbia

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Dear Participant.

My name is Negar Amini and I am conducting this research as part of the fulfillment of a Master's thesis in the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur (the principal investigator for this project). This document is intended to inform you about your rights and responsibilities, if/when you decide to partake in this research project. Please keep this document for your records, for my contact information, and for future reference in the case your participation in this project changes. What follow is an explanation of my research project and a detailed description of what it means to participate in this project. Please read this document thoroughly to decide if you are interested and willing to participate. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone if you have any questions/concerns regarding this document or the project itself and I will do my best to assist you as much as I can. Thank you for your time and consideration in this research.

1. Purpose of the study: To fulfill the requirement of my MA degree, I am investigating the schooling experiences for Iranian immigrant undergraduate students, pre and post immigration, to explore Iranian students' cultural shaping of learning and its impact on identity construction. Specifically, I will explore the narratives of the participants'

schooling experiences, as they reflect on their years as young learners in Iran before immigration, their subsequent settlement post immigration and their schooling experiences in the Canadian system, and the impact these schooling experiences have had on their aspirations for post-secondary education and future career goals. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are an Iranian immigrant undergraduate student aged 18–24, who currently lives in Metro Vancouver, who has had K-12 schooling experience in both Iran and Canada, and you speak Persian and English with fluency. Your involvement will be approximately 2–4 hours. Your participation in this study is voluntary and no payment for your participation is offered.

2. Research Procedures: You are being asked to participate in one individual interview, of which will be approximately 60–90 minutes. Interviews will be in English, and with your permission, I would also like to audio record the conversation so as not to worry about taking notes while talking, but will not do so if you wish not to be recorded. You will have access to all interview transcripts if you desire. During the interview you will be asked to reflect and share various aspects of your experiences in schools and your migrations to Canada. Should there be a need for a follow up interview, we will meet a second time for approximately one hour.

3. Benefits to Participation: This research project has been constructed with both the participants' and the researcher's interests in mind. I have tried (with the guidance from my thesis supervisor and committee) to create a research project that will be enlightening to both the academic and community at large. I hope that your participation will provide enhanced awareness and more meaning to your schooling and immigration experiences in current context and provide aspirations for your future endeavors. Your participation will

help educators think about the ways they can integrate the students' stories into their teaching and the learning environment in the context of multicultural education. By participating you will be engaged in co-creating educational knowledge about the diverse experiences of an understudied immigrant population of Vancouver, BC-Iranian students- and in effect contributing to the unheard voices of such group of students in both K-12 and post secondary institutions in Vancouver, BC.

4. Potential Risks or Discomforts: While I do not foresee any potential harm, if at any time during the research interview you wish to withdraw, please let me know. You will never be forced to answer any questions or share any information you don't want to and if you find any question upsetting please let me know. You are under no obligation to participate and you can terminate your participation with no consequence at any time.

5. Confidentiality: All of the information that you share with me and my supervisor Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur, who is the principle investigator, will be kept strictly confidential. No names or identifying information will be used on copies of individual files and recordings. Before, during, and after data analysis, including any of my notes will have only your pseudonym (false name). The files will be kept for five years, as per UBC policy, in a locked filing cabinet in the principle investigator's office as well as in computer files protected by passwords known only to me the researcher, and the principle investigator. All researchers have a legal obligation to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, except under the following conditions: a) the participant expresses the desire to harm herself/himself, b) the participant intends to harm others.

6. Dissemination of Information: This study forms part of the requirement for the MA

degree sought by Negar Amini. The thesis, once completed and accepted by the supervisory committee, will be reported in a graduate thesis and become a public document. The main findings may be published in journal articles and in order to maximize the spread of knowledge I may also publish generalized findings in newsletters and other non-academic outlets.

7. Contact for information about the study: Although I am the researcher responsible for physically carrying out the research, I am conducting this research for my Master's thesis and I am considered as the co-investigator. The principle investigator is my thesis supervisor Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur. If you have any questions or want further information in regards to this project, you may contact me or Dr. Vadeboncoeur at the email addresses and phone numbers below.

8. Contact for concerns about the rights of research participants: If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights or treatment as a research participant while participating in this research project, you may contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or email RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

9. Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without giving any reason and any consequence.

I have read this participant consent form and understand what my participation entails. I am participating freely without any pressure from the researcher, Negar Amini. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form for my future reference. The

researcher has reviewed this informed consent form with me, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions concerning all aspects of my participation in this project. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project, and to give the researcher, Negar Amini, permission to record information as outlined in this consent form.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Please Print Your Name _____

Negar Amini

Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur

MA Candidate, ECPS, HDLC, UBC

Associate Professor, ECPS, HDLC, UBC

Appendix C : Transcript Convention

Adapted from Schiffrin (1987a) and Ochs (1979)

1.	Each utterance is numbered.
[]	Additional description and/or Eng. Translation by researcher
()	nonverbal notes
{ }	modified orthography by researcher
<i>italics</i>	Farsi words/ Emphatic stress
“	A quote within an utterance; participant quoting others or herself.
//	Overlap demarcation
]	Denotes the end of overlap
.	Falling intonation followed by a noticeable pause (declarative sentence)
,	Taking in a breath maybe followed by a pause (shorter than “.” Or “?”)
?	Rising intonation followed by a noticeable pause (inquiring sentence).
!	Animated tone.
CAPS	Very emphatic stress
...	Indicates pause of .5 second or more
:	Indicates elongated vowel sound
/?/	indicates inaudible utterance