

**Re-defining 'Woman' in Canada:
Gender and Social Planning in
Support Services for Immigrant Women**

by

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Abstract

In Canada's increasingly poly-ethnic society, questions of how to define and build an inclusive society are becoming particularly important. Within social planning one of the key areas of debate is how to construct and provide appropriate and responsive social/economic support services for the immigrant community, especially for visible minority immigrant women. In this context, what is inclusion? How and where does inclusion matter? The differing roles that gender considerations play in the personal experience of immigration are too seldom recognized within immigrant services policy and program planning. It is simply not the same to move to Canada as a woman as it is for a man. Particularized instances of gender difference can influence a whole range of experiences for female immigrants, including the accessibility of support services.

Chapter 1 of this study discusses how Canadian immigrant women are currently accessing existing social services and outlines some of the contemporary discourse surrounding Canadian multiculturalism. Chapter 2 details the narrative-oriented methodological framework, and emergent method(s) of analysis that were utilized in conducting this research. This chapter also presents pertinent details regarding the research participants as well as the immigrant serving agency along with its ethno-specific service partner that was examined as a case study.

Chapter 3 narrates some of the current experiences of 'place' for immigrant women in Canada, and discusses contemporary practices of how existing immigrant service organizations plan social programs for immigrant women. Chapter 4 presents the implications and considerations for social planning practice, particularly with non-Canadian born women, that emerged out of the field-work conducted for this study. The research then concludes with a narrative overview of my perspectives on this project, as well as personal and practice-oriented lessons learned.

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Glossary

Community: In this research 'community' is understood to indicate a complex group of individuals and groups bonded by a network of social relations, who may also share a heritage of common identity surrounding ethnicity, cultural background, and language (etc) which is always changing and evolving depending upon the context and circumstances at play. (Lee, 1993: 27,28).

Culture: For this research, 'culture' is understood as the "shared collective norms, values, beliefs, and traditions of a group" (Durst and Delanghe, 2003: 49), which is not necessarily tied to race or ethnicity nor is a homogeneous or static concept, but one that is always adapting and changing in response to a particular context.

Difference: In this paper, 'difference' is understood as, "that which is outside, in opposition to the congealed norms of any society" (Sandercock, 2003: 98). Here specifically, the term is used to refer to ethno-cultural minority groups and to any individual or group that is outside the western or North-American 'ideal' of white, abled, heterosexual, educated male, and secular.

Ethnicity / Ethno-Cultural Group: For this research, 'ethnicity' or 'ethno-cultural group' is used to, "entail a consciousness about belonging and loyalty to a particular 'people', homeland or cultural tradition" (Durst and Delanghe, 2003: 49). However, this research also recognizes that the systemic discriminatory aspects of Canadian society often equate 'people of colour' with 'immigrants'.

Ethno-Specific Agency: In this study an 'ethno-specific agency' is understood as indicating an agency that seeks to provide services for a, "specific or small number of ethno-cultural groups" (Howard Research, 2001: 1).

Gender: In the context of this research 'gender' is used specifically to indicate the social and personal expectations, roles, and responsibilities that individual women (and men) experience. This is also understood to vary between different ethnicities, classes, sexualities, abilities (etc.).

Gender Planning: For this research 'gender planning' is understood as an institutional and process-oriented form of planning that radically seeks to include considerations of gender and diversity within an empowering, iterative, self-reliant and negotiated process. (Kirson, 13-15).

Immigrant: For the purposes of this study 'immigrant' is understood as anyone who is not Canadian-born and who is seeking or who has obtained permanent Canadian residency within the last 20 years. This is within the understanding, however, that a 20 year 'cutoff' is a parameter introduced for the ease of this study and is not reflective of reality. The continued marginalization of immigrants in Canada does not arbitrarily end with a guarantee after 20 years of residence.

Policy: In this research, a 'policy' is understood as a statement, or set of statements, detailing an agency's or organization's priorities, values, beliefs, goals (etc.) including an overall achievement action plan.

Process-oriented planning: For this study, 'process-oriented' planning is understood as aiming to incorporate certain variables of analysis (here gender) into every stage of the planning continuum, and which considers that how a goal is reached is just as important as the goal itself.

Product-oriented planning: In the context of this examination, product-oriented planning is understood to be a form of planning that views the end result (e.g. a program or policy) as the primary focus, rather than the process used to develop it.

Program: For this study, a 'program' indicates any activity/project, or set of activities/projects, designed to address a certain service objective and organizational goal.

Mainstream Organization: Within this research, a 'mainstream organization' indicates any non-profit organization, both governmental and non-governmental, that provides social and/or economic support programs (Howard Research, 2001: 1). Specifically, this term is used throughout this document to refer to an organization seeking to provide services for all Canadian immigrants, regardless of particular individual client identification with a certain, or small number, of ethno-cultural groups.

Visible Minority: In this research the term 'visible minority' is understood to indicate any person who identifies themselves as "non-White, non-Caucasian immigrants who trace their origins to Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and North, Central, and South America, and descendants of visible minority immigrants born in Canada" (Edgington and Hutton, 2001: 3).

Woman: In this study 'woman' is understood as anyone who identifies themselves as an adult biological and/or social female.

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Dedications

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Introduction

'I moved to Canada as an early adolescent and my entire life changed. Although I was born in Alberta, and grew up with the abstract image of myself as Canadian, I moved away at the age of 3 months to return years later. My formative years were spent elsewhere on the globe, and my 'Canadianess' remained remote. I remember my first year in Canada – the snow, the people, the way I was supposed to 'fit in' but didn't. Although it was certainly not all negative the move stretched my sense of self to the utmost. This was particularly true in how I perceived myself as a woman. What I saw and felt for myself in terms of appropriate ways of acting, dressing, speaking, and dreaming were not the way other people – my school, my friends – expected me to be. I didn't sound the same, I didn't look the same, and I didn't act the same. So, what did I do? I changed. Well, not completely. The girl that I used to be is still here, but changed and incorporated into my 'Canadian self'. And it was hard. For me, moving to Canada was one of the most pivotal and important turning points in the development of my sense of self, and therefore in my interpretation, understanding, and interactions with the wider community, institutions, and social networks around me. It changed everything!'

This short story of a part of my life highlights some of my experiences and realizations about the many and varying effects of immigration. Emigrating not only affects personal considerations such as employability, language use, discrimination (etc.), but also more hidden elements such as identity formation, or the understanding of oneself as a 'certain kind' of person with a 'certain kind' of social expectation as to roles and place. For me, this manifested itself most strongly in how moving to Canada affected my understandings of self as a woman.

Even with a Canadian parental background, my 'global childhood' caused multiple conceptions of womanhood to permeate my formative years, all of which were quite suddenly thrown into confusion and questioning upon my arrival in Canada. As I have become older this facet of my immigration experience has increasingly fascinated me. If this particular component of moving was so pivotal in my personal experience despite the fact of my privileged position(s) as a white, North-American born, English-speaking person, then how, and in what ways, does gender effect the immigration experience of non-Canadian born women, particularly those of a visible minority and/or non-English speaking? And in turn, how do these experiences affect their

interactions with the larger community around them, particularly in their use and interpretations of 'help services' such as social/economic support agencies? More specifically; how are social service policies and programs for immigrant women developed, perceived, and utilized within the Canadian context particularly with regard to potentially differing gender or societal and personal understanding(s) of 'what it means to be a woman'?

Contemporary research contends that immigrant women in Canada, although often highly self-organizing, tend to participate and receive support through ethno-specific groups and agencies rather than larger, 'non-group' based community and governmental support organizations (Holder 2004; Iglehart and Becerra 1995; Reitz 1995; Tastsoglou and Miedema 2003; Truelove 2000). Within the context of this project, and based upon suggestions present in the existing literature, it is the hypothesis of this research that the access patterns of existing support services for immigrant women are significantly impacted by implicit underlying assumptions and understandings of gender/gender roles, both in the structure and procedures of these organizations, and in the behaviours and practices of the planners involved (Ahmed 1994; Dion and Dion 2004; Dhruvarajan and Vickers 2002; Elabor-Idemudia 1999; Hamilton 2003; Jamieson 2003; Kirson 1995; Ralston 2003; Schultz 1994; Usha and Rankisson 1998).

The impetus for this research grew out of my personal experiences and therefore seeks to examine certain dimensions of the manner(s) in which variables of gender manifest themselves in the lives of non-Canadian born women now residing in Canada. To help guide this research, the purpose in asking these types of questions has been to examine the responsiveness and effectiveness of standing Canadian social/economic support services, both governmental and non-governmental, for immigrant women in response to many different and potentially conflicting cultural/personal gender understandings, as well as to develop suggestions for positive change in social planning and practice.

A fundamental basis of this project is my belief that building an inclusive Canadian society for female immigrants and for all Canadians is an important social goal, and that social/economic supports and programs are (or could be) direct and viable avenues for fostering this goal. I understand an inclusive society to be one that is peaceful, cohesive, and productive, where everyone's particular talents and abilities are utilized, recognized, respected and supported within the wider societal framework (Assanand, 2006: public presentation). These convictions are based upon my personal ideals of the equality of all persons, along with every individual's right to respect and the ability to live and access resources at a comparable standard with the society in which they live (Marshall, 1964: 72).

Chapter 1:

'Mainstream' or 'Multistream'? The Path to Social Inclusion

"But I too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose.

I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose."

(Rushdie, 1994: 211)

In Canada's increasingly poly-ethnic society, questions of how to define and build an inclusive society are becoming particularly important. Within social policy and program building, one of the key areas of debate is how to construct and provide appropriate and responsive social/economic support services for the immigrant community. What is inclusion? Does inclusion require a 'multistreaming'¹ of funding and support services, designed specifically to support certain ethnic or cultural groups in targeted ways? Or does inclusion require a 'mainstreaming'² of services to encourage the merging of immigrants into 'general' Canadian society through non-group based services? Is there middle ground between these two perspectives? How and where does inclusion matter?

All of these questions reflect the increasing statistical reality of difference³ in Canada. In the 2001 national census approximately 20% of Canadians registered themselves as foreign-born. In urban areas such as Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto this number was even higher (Statistics Canada, 2001, Immigrant Status by Period of Immigration for Canada – Highlight Table). In

¹ Here, 'multistream' is used to signify programs and services planned specifically for certain ethno-cultural or community groups.

² Here, 'mainstream' is used to indicate programs and services designed to target more than one ethno-cultural or community group.

³ The term difference is used here specifically to refer to ethno-cultural minority groups. However, the term is also used in other parts of the document, dependant upon the context, to refer more broadly to any individual or group which is outside the 'western' or North American ideal of white, abled, educated, heterosexual, male, English-speaking, and secular (etc.).

Alberta⁴ approximately 11% of the population registered as foreign-born in the 2001 national census (Statistics Canada, 2001, Visible Minority Groups – Highlight Table). The province's two major cities registered immigrant populations of approximately 20% in the late 1990's, with a predominance of South and East Asian migrants, though increasing numbers of immigrants from Eastern Africa have arrived in recent years (City of Calgary, March 15, 2006:

<http://www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/81/research/dimmig.htm>).

'Not Enough': Multiculturalism and its Critics

Within Canada, the question of how to include immigrants is most often discussed within the framework of multicultural policy and programming. Multiculturalism first emerged on the Canadian political scene in the mid 1960's with the *Royal Commission on Biculturalism and Bilingualism*. Although ostensibly a report examining the status of francophone groups in Canadian society, it also investigated the status of non-Charter (non-British, non-French⁵) groups in Canada (Herbert, 1993: 7). As a result of the general recommendations for increased participation and status of diverse groups in Canadian society, and the impassioned debate that the report inspired, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau officially announced a multicultural policy for Canada on October 8th, 1971. In 1988 this policy was entrenched into law as *The Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Herbert, 1993: 8-9), which had four basic objectives:

- 1) Support for all Canadian cultural groups to retain their ethno-cultural identity
- 2) Assistance to all Canadian cultural groups to participate fully in Canadian society
- 3) Encourage national unity among cultural groups
- 4) Help Canadian immigrants to learn one of the two official languages (Ibid: 11)

⁴ Location of the organization case-study focused on in this research.

⁵ Once again, ignoring Aboriginal communities in Canada.

However, exactly what is meant by multiculturalism, both within Canada and in general, is complex and fragmented. At its most basic level multiculturalism refers to the statistical and pragmatic reality of growing ethno-cultural pluralism in many nation states. Multiculturalism also indicates, however, a certain political ideology which recognizes and supports difference. Only a handful of countries have officially espoused this doctrine, including Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Canada (Sandercock, 2004: 101). Between, as well as within these countries, multiculturalism is understood and exhibited in a myriad of ways. As Sandercock (2004: 101) states, "Each of these countries has a different definition of multiculturalism, different sets of public policies to deal with/respond to difference, and correspondingly different definitions of citizenship." In these contexts, what is meant by multiculturalism in Canada?

Governmental definitions of multiculturalism in Canada are in tune with the one suggested by Herbert (1993: 21) as, "an official doctrine and corresponding set of policies and practices in which ethno-racial differences are formally promoted and incorporated as an integral component of the political, social, and symbolic order." What, however, does this really mean? In practice, multiculturalism policy and politics in Canada most often addresses difference by promoting and recognizing ethno-cultural diversity in 'celebratory' ways such as providing financial and organizational support for community events, festivals, and holidays (Sandercock, 2004: 142). Difference is characterized as a largely positive feature of existence with policies and programs that support the maintenance of difference and the ability of ethno-cultural groups to maintain a distinct heritage and practice of living (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis, 1992: 5).

This approach to building an inclusive society has been heavily critiqued in recent years from the perspective of two different types of 'multiculturalisms'. As with national ideologies and politics of multiculturalism, different theoretical approaches within multiculturalism abound. Critiques of Canadian multiculturalism, as they particularly affect immigrant services, relate to

the perspectives of 'pluralist multiculturalism' and 'liberal multiculturalism'. As quoted in Sandercock (2004: 102):

Liberal multiculturalism seeks to integrate the different cultural groups as fast as possible into the mainstream provided by universal citizenship ... Pluralist multiculturalism formally enfranchises the differences between groups along cultural lines and accords different group rights to different communities with a more communitarian social order

More specifically, most contemporary critiques of Canadian multiculturalism, especially within immigrant services social planning and related fields, state either that current procedures pay too much attention to difference or that they do not pay enough, or fully appropriate, attention to the realities of difference. This basic typology of critique provides an overall framework for the many varying concerns and criticisms that have emerged in this area within the last several decades⁶.

Current policy and programming is critiqued by writers such as Hansen (1994: 136) and San Juan (2002: 140) as paying *too much* attention to difference, who state that this focus 'fossilizes' cultural groups through the rhetoric of 'allowing' different groups to maintain their cultural and group identity after arrival in Canada. They attack this approach for viewing culture/ethnicity (etc.) as a static concept that remains unchanging and unvarying despite the specific context of the experience and 'place' of the persons within that group. Concern has also been expressed by Ratcliff (2000: 174) that recognizing and promoting difference at the expense of a more collectivist Canadian identity encourages the formation of ethnic enclaves, thus further marginalizing immigrants from public domains of power, visibility, and discourse.

San Juan (2002: 130) discusses the limits of cultural pluralism implied in this approach. Just how much plurality can be 'allowed' while still maintaining more general Canadian values and human right legislation? An oft-cited example of this dilemma is the practice of female genital circumcision. Is this just another manifestation of cultural difference, or a gendered

⁶ Critiques of multiculturalism began almost as soon as the policy became official in Canada, but for the context and ease of this study, only the last several decades of discourse will be discussed.

human rights violation? For these critics, multiculturalism programming and policy that focuses primarily on maintaining and preserving difference is hiding behind rhetoric of diversity to excuse and allow continued inequalities in the name of cultural tolerance (San Juan, 2002: 130; Sandercock, 2004: 100).

Bannerji (2000: 64) further links these ideas with conceptions of the 'forever immigrant' in Canadian society. She contends that policies and programs which focus on ethno-cultural difference at the expense of social cohesion perversely equate the terms 'immigrant' and 'visible minority'. As discussed by Creese (2005: 24) a person who belongs to a visible minority in Canada is almost never, regardless of their actual residency status or place of birth, accorded the same social rights and respect as those who are white, or perceived to be white. Rather, these individuals are always 'from somewhere else' and never included within societal interactions as 'just another Canadian'. Current multiculturalism practices focusing on ethno-cultural (racial) difference are also critiqued by Giles (2002: 124) and Guneau (1993: 17) as continuing to blind society from the realities that other forms of difference, such as class, gender, ability, sexuality (etc.), play in the lives of immigrant and visible minority individuals.

The second overall typology of critiques made against current Canadian multicultural policy state that current procedures are *not paying enough* attention to the realities of difference. Critics such as Bannerji (2000: 72-73) attack contemporary policies for 'masking' or 'hiding away' the true extent and level of racism present in Canadian society beneath a veneer of tolerance, politeness, and integration. As Li (2003: 2-4) maintains, the idea of the 'melting pot' has never really been discarded within Canadian politics but has rather been repackaged in the more palatable form of 'multiculturalism'. In everyday life, he suggests, an explicit focus on the value of difference only serves to mask the real impetuses in Canadian society which demand assimilation as a prerequisite in order to participate in, and have access to, the same types and quality of services as 'dominant culture' (white, English-speaking, middle-class etc.) individuals

(Li, 2003: 2-4). The continued difficulty for Canadian immigrants to enter the labour market and have their educational and experiential backgrounds recognized and legitimized is one instance of this phenomenon.

In related debates critics such as Christensen (2003: 73) and Herbert (1997: 387) similarly attack current multiculturalism policy for 'making polite' discussions of racism in Canadian society. As highlighted by Sandercock (2004: 101), the history of colonialist and racist practices are often pushed away and ignored within multiculturalism:

What is common in the sociological content of the term in the West – but never spoken of – is that it was formulated as a framework, a set of policies, for the national accommodation of non-white immigration. It was a liberal response that skirted the reality of the already racialized constitution of these societies and masked the existence of institutionalized racism

This approach makes the 'r-word' a taboo word, hides its negative connotation and pushes the discriminatory nature of Canadian society back into the closet, perpetuating perceptions of difference as entirely positive, while ignoring the negative realities of marginalization and ascribed identities (Christensen, 2003: 73; Herbert, 1993: 37).

In addition to these critical perspectives, many Native Canadian leaders, communities, and individuals have critiqued Canadian multiculturalism politics and policy for failing, once again, to recognize the special status that Native Canadians have as a distinct set of groups within Canadian society as a result of their historical inhabitation of this land. Most pointedly, the 1969 *White Paper* sought to remove treaty rights from Native Peoples in order to 'include' them more 'fully' in the everyday life of Canadian citizens. Although perhaps developed with the best of intentions this movement, as illustrated by Bauhn et al. (1995: 41), "reduced Native cultural identity to a harmless exoticism where Indians, Inuit and Métis were defined on the same level as immigrant communities."

Native Canadian scholars such as Friesen (1987: 31) assert that with this type of multicultural approach, “[...the...] Aboriginal population in Canada has been relegated a third class citizenship because their treaty and aboriginal rights have been ignored under multicultural policy.” This is further complicated by the territorial (land-based) rather than cultural (group-based) claims for special consideration made by Native communities as opposed to immigrant groups (Bauhn, 1995: 16). Friesen (1987: 36) also maintains that multicultural policy not only negates the special place of Native groups in Canadian society, but also overlooks the historical relationship of discrimination, expropriation, and resistance between Aboriginal groups and the Canadian state. As well, the diversity within the Native populations in Canada is ignored by lumping communities together as ‘another minority group’. Instead, Friesen (1987: 39) calls for the fundamental recognition and guarantee of Aboriginal treaty rights and for the further development of local Native self-government structures.

‘In or Out?’:

Social Service Access and Canadian Immigrants

Critical debates surrounding the opposing thrusts of liberal and pluralist multiculturalism perspectives have become increasingly important within the world of immigrant social/economic service program planning in light of an existing service gap within the sector. A number of contemporary studies have qualitatively highlighted that immigrants to Canada, particularly female migrants, appear to more commonly access support services through ethno-specific agencies⁷ rather than through larger non-group based or mainstream organizations⁸ (Holder, 2004: 5; Iglehart and Becerra, 1995: 205, 206; Reitz, 1995: 1; Tastsoglou and Miedema, 2003: 213; Dhruvarajan and Vickers, 2002: 102). For example, this may mean that female Filipino migrants to

⁷ An ethnic agency is commonly defined within social practice as, “agencies that provide services to a specific or small number of ethno-cultural groups” (Howard Research, 2001, pg. 1).

⁸ ‘Non group’ or mainstream organizations are defined within social practice as those that seek, “to provide services to the entire population” (Howard Research, 2001, pg. 1), here in regards to Canadian immigrant communities.

Canada choose to access services through a 'Filipino Community Association' rather than through a 'City of X Immigrant Services' organization.

This phenomenon has become increasingly pertinent as Canadian funding dynamics shift within the sector. At least partially in response to some of the critiques discussed above, governmental (at all levels) and private funding sources for immigrant services are moving away from an explicit focus on difference to a more non-group based approach (Howard Research, 2001: 10; Lee, 1993: 37; Lee, 1999a: 7). Currently, for example, most funding for immigrant services is dependant upon stipulations such as this statement issued by the City of Vancouver that to be eligible for funds any, "organization cannot exclude for any reason of religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, language, disability or income" (City of Vancouver, [http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/grants/commgrants .htm](http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/grants/commgrants.htm)).

The reality of this funding dynamic suggests an important question. Why are some groups of Canadian immigrants rejecting mainstream organizations? The answers to this question are by their very nature exceedingly complex, as multiple reasons/answers interact with each other in often context specific or even 'individual-specific' ways. Despite this, little research has been conducted on this topic within social services, as most similar studies focus instead upon comparable trends present in healthcare provision (Ma and Chi, 2005: 3). A whole host of reasons, however, have nonetheless been identified including language barriers, the absence of 'ethnic' staff members, lack of information and referral services in multiple languages, and a paucity of awareness of existing services in the wider community including a confusion of 'social services' with 'social security'⁹ (Ibid.: 7-10). Reasons of emotional and relational support and comfort have also been identified. Simply having access to one's own language, own 'people', and own 'way of doing things' can be extremely comforting and

⁹ More specifically, confusion between accessing social service programs such as 'employment training' programs, and accessing social security programs such as Employment Insurance - i.e. any 'help' is the 'dole' and a shame to the family (Ma and Chi, 2005, pg. 9)

perhaps necessary in the experiences of shock and change that the process of immigration induces (Tastsoglou and Miedema, 2003: 223).

However, these factors appear to address only some of the 'reasons' for the access patterns being exhibited. Many mainstream organizations, though by no means all, have taken great strides in the hiring of a diverse staff with multiple language abilities, the publishing of referral information in a range of languages, and other 'diversifying' techniques. These approaches, however, although streamlining services, appear not to have adequately addressed the service gap(s) identified above (Reitz, 1995: 1). Other concerns have developed especially in attempting to address the service gap by virtue of hiring a more diverse staff. While not negative in and of itself, it can, and often does in practice, place an exceptional amount of pressure upon 'minority staff' members to be both representative and a 'voice for' the population that they are associated with in the community. This approach can also, possibly unintentionally, discourage or appear to alleviate the necessity to provide cross-cultural training to all staff. Instead the onus for diversity is 'loaded off' onto individual staff members (Iglehart and Becerra, 1995: 217, 218; Lee, 1999b: 98).

Scholars and practitioners might more appropriately explore deeper 'reasons' within the very structure of the services themselves. Although not widely discussed in the literature, researchers such as Cameron and Grant-Smit (2005: 23), Iglehart and Becerra (1995: 206, 207, 210), Ng (1988: 47-50), Bisset (2004: 23), and Herbert (1993: 86) identify the actual organizational *processes* within social service agencies themselves as a potential root cause for the service gap. In the Marshallian¹⁰ understanding of the social service¹¹ institution as essentially reflective (and in turn constructive) of the society within which it exists (Marshall, 1964: 71-72, 104.), present Canadian immigrant services organizations perpetuate, even with changes in areas such as staff

¹⁰ The famous sociologist T.H. (Thomas Humphrey) Marshall (1893-1981).

¹¹ And also educational institutions.

representation and language ability, a set of institutional processes that often unquestioningly reflect 'western' ideals of procedure and problem solving. This remains important despite the active personal agency of many immigrant women who seek to access and transform the available services for their own well-being as well as the positive intentions of existing staff members (Bannerji, 2000: 73-76). 'Traditional' organizational processes of this nature are also often demanded and reinforced by funding requirements (Lee, 1999a: 7; Ng, 1988: 69).

These assumptive processes are woven into every facet of organizations, including program and policy development planning and 'day to day' interactions between staff and between staff and clients. Iglehart and Becerra (1995: 219) argue that many services for Canadian immigrants, particularly for women, are simply not constructed and presented in such a manner(s) that is recognizable and responsive to the many potentially differing social and cultural understandings present, therefore limiting their relevance and usage. Such a critique helps to explain the popularity of ethno-specific agencies which may provide a culturally tailored process of help-seeking and programming. Indeed, ethnic-specific services are actively sought by various individuals and communities as providing that 'something' which mainstream organizations do not (Reitz, 1995: 10).

An example of this dynamic is the emphasis mainstream organizations continue to place on the individual as the locus of change. Programs and policies are largely developed for the individual, rather than for the family or other more collective entities, at all stages of the planning process including application, participation, and evaluation (Iglehart and Becerra, 1996: 7). It is often implicitly assumed therefore, that help-seeking behavior occurs through the individual rather than through, for example, the group entity of the extended family or community. Indeed, family as a source of solution to problems is hardly, if ever, recognized in the construction of mainstream support services (Durst and Delanghe, 2003: 65). When discussed

within this context, the concept of 'family' cannot be singularly defined, but instead understood as a broad-based framework which encompasses many different types of social relationships and networks including kin of choice, same-sex unions, single-parent families, and those not living in the same household who are nonetheless emotionally and/or socially tied (etc.).

These organizational dynamics have also been identified by Duran (2001: 3) as well as Tastsoglou and Miedema (2003: 223-224), as gendered in their effect since the 'role' of women in many societies¹² is tied more strongly with that of the family and the extended social community than that of men. These expectations potentially further influence immigrant women's ability to conceptualize and access existing mainstream services planned on an individualist basis. This is one example of an organizational assumption which influences help-seeking behaviors among Canadian immigrants.

'Multistream': The Case for Difference as the Way

Some multiculturalism scholars state that in order to build an inclusive society, a deep, fundamental recognition and support of difference in all areas of everyday and political life is necessary (Herbert, 1993: 74; Ma and Chi, 2005: 6). For the social service sector, implications of how to structure policies and programs include continuing and broadening support for programs, organizations, and processes that seek to serve the specified needs of minority groups (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005: 22).

The basic tenets behind this set of approaches is that marginalized groups require continued and additional support 'on top of' what is readily available for all Canadians in order to be able to 'compete' at a sufficient level in the broader community so that they have an equal chance at society's fruits (Durst and Delanghe, 2003: 48, 49). This is meant to secure for even the

¹² Including 'western' society.

smallest and most excluded groups (and individuals) the support and vehicle necessary for at least some form of organized representation. Cameron and Grant-Smith (2005: 25) argue that without this 'topped up' support, only the most populous and wealthy of minority groups would be able to make themselves heard politically and thus able to demand changes for their more inclusive treatment.

The difference-focused construction and provision of social services through ethno-specific programming has been championed by researchers such as Ng (1988: 69) and Iglehart and Becerra (1995: 226) for providing more culturally appropriate, responsive, and participatory services for minority groups as a result of the increased flexibility that this type of smaller-scale, and multi-faceted structure can entail. Administratively, this kind of approach also allows for the needs of a particular group to be considered not only in the 'end-product' program or policy but also in the processes used to develop them. This tacitly recognizes the 'western' undertones present in most organizational processes and cultures in Canada, and the need to tailor these to the particular context in order to maintain the effectiveness and responsiveness of programming to the differences both within and between ethno-cultural groups (Herbert, 1993: 86).

Proponents of this perspective such as Bannerji (2000: 73), also maintain that anything less than full support for difference in these contexts, runs the risk of denying the racist homogenizing forces still present in Canadian society. Bannerji (Ibid.) states that ignoring the realities of difference does not make them disappear but rather quietly encourages them to maintain themselves, albeit in more subtle forms. Marginalized groups therefore need *more* support rather than comparable support when compared with the rest of the population in order to equitably participate in society.

These arguments highlight that part of building a socially inclusive society that fundamentally recognizes the dynamics of difference is respecting the role of the family and

other so-called 'private sphere' entities in this process. Recognizing that care and caregiving is an important, but often undervalued, activity for all persons, Kershaw (2005: 113) points out that caregiving and the need for 'private time' is especially acute amongst individuals and groups who are living with experiences of marginalization in society. He argues that family and other 'private' social networks can provide the emotional grounding and affirmative support¹³ needed for individuals to culturally and temporally situate themselves in a positive way, thus building the identity confirmation needed to participate and advocate for inclusion within the larger community (Kershaw, 2005: 115, 116).

Kershaw (2005: 113-114) also sees family and 'private' caring support as protecting against the racist tendencies still present in Canadian society, by fostering continuation of the minority group or individual, biologically, culturally, and emotionally. These ideas can also be more generally extended to the emotional and caring support potentially provided within ethnic-specific agency programming which, by offering targeted programming, can act to re-affirm and strengthen group identity (Tastsoglou and Miedema, 2003: 223). The championing of 'difference-based' or ethno-specific social support services by these scholars maintains that minority groups can only be more fully included in Canadian society by allowing them 'spaces' and 'places' of difference where they can both re-affirm and support their cultural identities and also intra-politically organize for greater representation and participatory opportunities.

'Mainstream': The Case for the Whole Before the Part

In an alternative set of critiques to those described above, there is a growing dissatisfaction among researchers who suggest that the practice of focusing exclusively on difference when promoting social inclusion for minority groups is failing in its objectives. A

¹³ Realizing of course particularized familial dynamics.

main concern of scholars such as Reitz (1995: 10) is that such an approach can, obliquely if not directly, encourage the forming and maintenance of 'minority-ghettos' both in terms of actual geography, social interactions, and institutional management and usage. This critique argues that exclusively promoting difference does nothing to foster a sense of wider social cohesion or community identity. How can you have an inclusive society that is divided into distinct parts? In response to this dilemma, writers such as Herbert (1993: 20) and Gray (2000: 25) have developed a 'mainstream' approach calling for the greater inclusion of minority groups through their incorporation into the institutions, supports, and processes (political, social etc.) of the wider society.

As Lister (1997: 35) and Reitz (1995: 8) suggest, programs and policies that focus on preserving and promoting difference in reality often act as a 'token-system' of inclusion in which minority groups are blinded from the actual extent of their systemic economic, social, and political marginalization, and thus from the possibility of organizing and acting against it. For these writers (Ibid.) exclusion originates in a system which creates separate – but not equal – spheres for minority groups, thus removing them from wider circles of political and social power. According to this argument, minority individuals and groups require improved access to mainstream political and social processes, rather than just remaining a continual separate 'special interest group' (Ratcliffe, 2000: 174). Social funding, policies, and programs are encouraged in this perspective, to move further from an explicit focus on encouraging difference as a goal in and of itself. They are motivated instead to manipulate existing mainstream systems so that they can appropriately accommodate and act for a range of minority groups (Iglehart and Becerra, 1995: 219-222).

The 'difference as the way' mentality has also been critiqued by Ratcliffe (2000: 176 - 177) and others for its potential propensity, when taken to its logical conclusion, of encouraging

the formation of an essentialized self-perception where difference is '*the*' primary condition of identity. If your difference is what guarantees you a certain place with certain resources in society, then that difference can become artificially frozen or protected against contextual change as a source of self-protection and identity (Ibid.; Lee, 1993: 34). This process can encourage 'group-think' dynamics, or inward looking processes that further separate the group from the larger society (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005: 26). As San Juan (2002: 162) and Sandercock (2004: 162) identify, a sole focus on difference potentially risks the artificial calcification of both socio-cultural groups and individual identities, thus equating ideas of difference with something that is static and unchanging, as well as often unvaryingly 'good'.

Related to these concerns are the difficult issues of basic human rights and, or versus, cultural sensitivity. What is the line between a relativistic respect for difference and the maintenance of fundamental human rights? Fraser (1997: 204) argues that a greater focus on cohesion rather than difference in terms of political/social policies and programs is needed to both define and maintain the protection of baseline human rights in Canada. In short, a focus on bringing minority groups 'into the mainstream' in this ideal of social inclusion is viewed as necessary not only to increase the cohesion of Canadian society in general, but also to afford minority groups less fragmented access to the avenues of political/social representation and power.

'The Third Way': The Need for Both

Given the discussions raised in the sections above, the way forward for social/economic service planning seems unclear. In light of the many seemingly mutually exclusive yet legitimate critiques that have emerged, how can social services planning and practice be structured and developed so as to foster a more inclusive society for Canadian immigrants? In answer to this

question, a growing body of literature has called for the melding of both approaches (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005: 22). As Fraser (1997: 175) argues, it only by recognizing that *both* difference-based needs, and access to wider societal power structures are important, that building a socially inclusive support system, and society in general, can begin.

A 'multi-stream' approach is both important and requires consideration because it recognizes and validates difference, as well as experiences of marginalization. It also takes into account the many 'caring' realities of social life, and that all individuals require a space/place of comfort and recognition – as a site of cultural, social, and emotional solace – in order to participate fully in society (Kershaw, 2005: 113, 114). However, what is problematic about this approach, as Lister (1997: 34) suggests, is that it can easily become blind to the realities of existing social power structures by constructing spheres of the 'equal but separate'. This ignores the role that personal agency and the ability to participate play in the construction of social inclusion. Inclusion is simply not enough if it is active only in certain spheres (Iglehart and Becerra, 1995: 215). The more complete inclusion of Canadian immigrants also requires that attention be paid to the opportunities and responsibilities open in more 'public', or non group-based, spaces.

On the other hand, a mainstream approach is also important because it realizes and seeks to fully engage with social power structures, by calling upon existing systems to alter both process and practice so that difference can become part of the whole. This approach tries to break down barriers of difference in society, in order to foster a greater sense of social cohesion. Alone, however, this approach can discount the realities of difference and marginalization in Canadian life. The 'day to day' and systemic realities of marginalization are very real, particularly for individuals who identify themselves as members of a visible minority, which a mere 'bringing into' the system without an explicit recognition of these experiences does nothing

to solve (Creese, 2005: 24). On the contrary, this approach ignores the particular and specific needs that certain individuals and communities may have in attempting to participate on an 'equal' level in the wider society. As well, however, both approaches ignore certain aspects of existing discrimination and racism in Canada. A mainstream approach, when taken to its logical conclusion, can erase not only the value of difference but also the existence of racism, by attempting to create a homogenous 'Canadian' entity. On the other hand, a 'multistream' approach potentially encourages ghettoization and essentializes an identity based on difference, thus bolstering notions of the 'forever immigrant' and other minority based social 'categories' (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005: 28).

Clearly, neither approach is sufficient in and of itself to fully address the building of an inclusive society for Canadian immigrants. However, both appear to be necessary and important for consideration. One alternative model to these approaches, which seeks to incorporate both sets of arguments, has been termed the, 'transformative politics of difference' (Ibid.: 22) or alternatively 'interculturalism' (Sandercock, 2004: 5, 8, 86) . A process rather than product oriented approach in fostering social inclusion, this transformative outlook seeks to combine both 'multi' and mainstream tenets into a partnership that takes into account the reasoning underlying both models. It focuses primarily on bridging groups and notions of difference into a more complex and flexible whole, through responsive partnerships of individuals, groups, agencies, and organizations (Herbert, 1993: 109). 'Transformative politics of difference' strategies also encourage and demand reflective social change on both an individual and group level by creating situations within social service planning, practice, and programming for cross-group learning, and recognition with the goal to:

Contribute to the process of building citizens who are knowledgeable about and responsive to others who are different from them, and able to reflect on and reconsider their own position. (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005: 33)

This approach first creates spaces of difference, where services, support, and networks can be developed on a bonding level within a minority group. This step acknowledges and fosters the sense of care, belonging, and support necessary for minority individuals and groups to participate in wider socio-political action, and creates a situation where the 'voice' of those experiencing marginalization can be both heard and listened to. Secondly, these spaces of difference are brought together into partnership scenarios with mainstream groups, agencies (etc.) in order to foster group bridging and mutual learning opportunities (Ibid.: 30; Warr, 2005: 1).

When planning social/economic (support) service provision for Canadian immigrants, a 'transformative' approach could take the form of direct negotiated partnerships between ethnic-specific agencies and mainstream organizations. These partnerships could range from formal to informal, with ties that would allow for a greater cohesion and synchronicity of programming within immigrant services. Such a structure would allow for issues of both difference and 'power' to be fully considered in a non-combative and supportive manner while also maintaining the ability to pay particular attention to issues and specific instances of gender, race, class, and other 'difference based' categories (Iglehart and Becerra, 1995: 258).

In light of these debates and realities within the social service sector for Canadian immigrants, and as a result of my own reflections upon these discussions, I have adopted the perspective that it is just as important to foster the recognition of difference in Canadian society as it is to foster a sense of connectedness. This research seeks, through the examination of the relevance of gendered variables in the processes and planning mechanisms of a case-study organization as well as through the experiences of 5 immigrant women, to develop a set of considerations and suggestions for positive growth in the increased accessibility and responsiveness of social programming for immigrant women in Canada.

Chapter 2

'I narrate therefore I am': Stories as Knowledge

"Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive"

Lopez, 1990: 48

In conducting this research it has been my desire to work methodologically using stories and narrative as a legitimate and responsive method of research and source of knowledge. Within planning, social science, and academia in general, the later decades of the 20th century witnessed the 'rediscovery' and championing of non-positivist ways of knowing (Sandercock, 1998a: 13,14; Sandercock, 1998b: 28-30), with special emphasis placed upon 'phronesis', or practical wisdom (Sandercock, 1998b: pg. 59).

This championing of everyday knowledge created a renewed interest in personal narrative as the portal through which humans, as social beings, most spontaneously and immediately relate, interact, and express their understanding(s) of the world around them. The narrative process was also recognized as a primary means of simultaneous identity expression and creation, both for individuals and for larger non-personal entities such as institutions and movements (Somers, 1994: 606; Ahmed, 1994: 29; Randell, 1995: 84).

By telling (and listening to) stories about ourselves, our interactions with others, and of the general environment around us we are in turn actively shaping how we understand ourselves, how we wish to be, and how we will be perceived by others (Kalbian, 2005, 97; Cruikshank, 1997, 58). As such, the engagement of storytelling, as both a reflective and constructive form of communication, has emerged as a particularly legitimate and responsive mode of public participation and agency within planning research and practice (Sandercock, 2003: 26).

How can 'Narrative' be Understood?

However, what is regarded as constituting 'story' or 'narrative' is extremely complex. At a general level, narrative can be understood as a relational process within which an occurrence is recounted in a manner that embeds it in temporal space (Cronon, 1992: 1352; Nelson and Firson, 2004: 575), as well as providing it with a moral dimension and a sense of explanation (Randell, 1995: 100). The narrative process is also not necessarily tied to the act of speech. Other forms of narrative can include dance, drama, physical and performance art, as well as other expressive and responsive modes of communication (Sandercock, 2004: 11, 12).

Within this understanding narrative can be identified as containing; a temporal framework (where, when, and how), an element of coherence or explanation (carrying meaning rather than just a list), a potential for generalizations (implications), a moral background (why), the presence of some of the 'generic' conventions of telling a story such as plot structure (beginning, middle, end), and finally the presence of a protagonist that can be either a personal (animated) or impersonal (force) entity but who tells or 'leads' the story (Sandercock, 2004: 4; Randell, 1995: 86). As such, stories necessarily imply the positionality, or personal understanding in regards to place/space, of the speaker even if what is expressed is conflicted or in process (Tierney, 1998: 51). Narrative, "is the way people think they've experienced their lives" (Leydesdorff et al., 1999: 606).

Therefore, the act of telling a story, or listening to one, is a unique mode of expression as the narration process itself places specific incidents/feelings in the more abstract cultural/social scripts within which they are embedded (Rossing and Glowacki-Dudka, 2001: 733). The telling of personal stories relates specificity (experience, response and feeling) to 'foundational stories' or the inherent background assumptions, be they factually true or false, that society operates on (Sandercock, 2004: 6, 7). Such 'foundational stories' include, for example within Canada, tales of

the 'empty land' of the 'new world'. An illustration of this connective process is a personal story told by a Native Canadian person perhaps relating a specific instance of discrimination that they have encountered. This identifiable incident inserts the personal into the more amorphous background of racism, expropriation, European belief in Canada as *terra nullius*, and societal construction of the 'Other' (etc.) that this example encompasses. These connections between the personal and foundational are not often explicitly recognized and discussed in conversation as a matter of course for many of the issues involved are of a scope beyond the realm of expression and comprehension generally employed in everyday interactions.

By providing a personalized connection, story brings these societal narratives to the forefront in a manner that is identifiable, immediate, and of a scope that is more easily considered within the everyday (Lara, 1998: 42). This identification and discussion of linkages as expressed within the personal, and relational manner of storytelling, provides opportunities to create potentially non-confrontational spaces for the development of a more holistic form of understanding.

'She Said, She Said': Feminism, Diversity and Narrative

Narrative and storytelling have also been championed by feminist scholars as both an act of agency and a non-oppressive mode in which to conduct responsive and appropriate research among those who have experienced a disadvantaged place within society, such as women and/or those of a visible minority (Collins, 1994: 48). Traditional research has been criticized for valuing an unequal researcher/subject relationship that uses the participants to develop theoretically based knowledge. Feminist and non-oppressive research, on the other hand, attempts to engage in a 'co-creational' process, where the participant is an active partner in the knowledge produced (Chase and Bell, 1994: 63, 65).

Value is placed on small-scale, descriptive case studies in addition to the theoretical (Hansen, 1994: 107, 108; Del Negro, 1997: 11; Usha, 1998: 105). This focus attempts to move away from the, “racist/sexist myth of homogeneity” (Hansen, 1994: 136), and work with the reality of difference and complexity. This use of story, however, is not meant to be reductive and instead recognizes that the lives, experiences, and understandings of all of us are exceedingly complex and are often beyond the power of one form of communication to convey (Duran, 2001: 68). The use of narrative to illuminate and examine the particular (i.e. ‘everyday knowledge’) attempts to examine topics and phenomenon that are essentially “embedded in context” (Gilgun, 1994: 374).

Feminist and non-oppressive research champion narrative, as it links the ‘personal (particular and concrete) with the political (abstract)’, which allows the tellers to express “narratives of resourcefulness” (Creese, 2005: 14) while simultaneously acknowledging their subordinate and discriminatory experience in society. What gives narrative its power is that it is a form of communication that ties together both critique and explanation thereby, “shaping a new imagination of alternatives” (Sandercock, 2004: 30). Research of this type focuses in particular on the act of verbally telling a story in ‘one’s own words’ as an act of power in the reclamation of the right to speak for oneself rather than be spoken for, because “as a narrator [...the speaker...] has the power to speak as she chooses; she controls the telling of her experiences” (DeVault, 1990: 79).

‘Truth’ and Process: Considerations of Narrative Analysis

However, the mere telling of stories, as well as simply listening to them, is not enough to create this type of equalized interaction or to recognize and subvert unequal power relations (Randell, 1995, 100). Non-oppressive feminist research also requires that the researcher be explicit in positioning themselves in relation to their current project (Tierney, 1998: 51). The focus needs

to be on the relational aspect of narrative as a mutual exchange rather than one 'telling' the story and the other 'collecting' it (Holloway and Jefferson, 1997: 60). As well, engaging in this type of research requires an awareness of different forms of cultural storytelling so that differing ways of relating are interpreted not as reticence or an inability to clearly express oneself but rather as the expressions of the teller's own background, experience, and cultural history (Forester, 1989: 114, 115).

The art of listening is also of primary importance in the responsive incorporation of speech-oriented story into both planning and research. Listening involves not only physically and passively hearing the audible words spoken, but also in attending to the actual person speaking (and what we may know about them), noting the 'way' in which they are speaking (tone, pitch, gestures etc.), and in considering the plethora of possible meanings and implications of their words¹⁴. As such, listening is an active pursuit that involves the hearer engaging with the speaker to co-create the meaning that emerges from the exchange (Kimball and Garrison, 1999: 17, 21).

This does not necessarily imply, however, the expression of empathy, or 'feeling what the other person feels', but rather that to listen actively requires not only appearing attentive but also offering reciprocity (asking questions of your own to show you have been following the flow), and being willing to explore different meanings and interpretations of what has been said (Forester, 1989: 108-111). 'Overly' empathetic listening can be just as problematic as passive or 'unthinking' hearing, as it asks the listener to discount their own background and experiences thereby potentially, "trivializing that person's life and, even worse imposing our interpretations on the other person" (Kimball and Garrison, 1999: 16). Active listening on the other hand explicitly recognizes the influences that the listener has both upon the knowledge produced and the interpretation of what is said (Kimball and Garrison, 1999: 17).

¹⁴ This can become particularly complex when working across language barriers. Sometimes people just use the wrong word!

Conscious and active listening is an act of respect for the other person's fundamental right to speak and to have their words taken into account. To critically listen within the research or planning context also requires that the listener, "be able both to understand meanings and to explain social and political influences" (Forester, 1989: 114), and, "simultaneously understand what's been said and to explain the pressures that led up to it" (Ibid.). This does not necessarily imply explicit theorizing but rather a more general attention to the political, cultural (etc.) forces at work within what is being communicated (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 18).

Active listening also entails paying attention to what is not said or included in the narrative. Sometimes, silence can be more eloquent than words in highlighting issues of particular importance or consideration. When communicating through narrative, attention needs to be paid to what the teller "implied, suggested, and started to say but didn't" (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 16). As well, for some persons who have experienced discrimination and subordination as a result of their gender and/or ethnic backgrounds (etc.) silence can be a way of preserving knowledge from expropriation (Speer, 2002: 288).

An active listener also attempts to be aware of repetitions and contradictions within the narrative, as these also highlight points that appear to have particular import for the speaker, as they struggle to fully express or state them. This also entails being aware of the 'moral language' used, which means being attentive to the specific, overtly value-laden words and expressions utilized as well as any explicit self or external judgments made. Listening for 'meta-statements', or those "places when people spontaneously stop, look back, and comment on their analysis of something they've just said" (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 21), is also important as these moments of self-analysis are often when connections between the particularized and the abstract are made explicit within the narrative.

Stories within research and planning have often been criticized, particularly within the public sphere, for their lack of ability to test for veracity (Sandercock, 2004: 190). For example, how can a story be said to be 'true' or of a 'truthfulness' sufficient to provide direction for the development of a public policy? For many who champion narrative, however, this 'ambiguity' is often exactly the point, "we should stop pretending that there is any such thing as an objective answer to any public policy issue, and acknowledge that all available answers are informed by values" (Sandercock, 2004: 20). Narration, as an 'everyday' form of communication, is inexorably bound to the context of the teller (their personal emotions, background etc.), the listener(s), and the way, place and method (etc.) of telling; making them both essentially personalized and politicized statements (Sandercock, 2004: 19, 31).

However, veracity of some sort does appear to exist within storytelling, although in a less concrete and testable form than is generally desired by many academics and practitioners alike. As anyone who has ever heard a powerful story told can attest, a 'good' or 'true' story is one which resonates with its audience and which provides enough sense of explanation incorporated with an emotional impetus that it is widely repeatable. By their very nature stories defy quantifiable or testable results. The 'truth' of a story depends upon its power to identify and elucidate the connections between the personal and the social context that the narration process entails (Sandercock, 2004: 20; Randell, 1995: 266).

Another criticism of the use of case study, narrative-oriented methodology is that its very embeddedness separates it from the possibility of producing knowledge and theories that can be used to develop generalizations within the wider societal context. Again, however, this context-specific approach is often exactly the point. Context specific and embedded research attempts to enter the 'social reality', or the constructed and understood 'truth' of the entity under examination (Gilgun, 1994: 374). Within this methodological approach universal themes are

examined within the context of particular instances. By studying the specific understandings present within a social phenomenon, speech-oriented narrative is used as an experiential “entry [...] into social relations” (Campbell, 1998: 55). These approaches attempt to create research opportunities that acknowledge and accept difference rather than trying to sublimate it to some overarching, and ‘pre-given’¹⁵ greater whole, theoretical or otherwise. Rather, case study narrative-oriented methodology seeks to provide suggestions for explanation and/or further study by richly illuminating the particular.

‘But How Was It Done Here?’ Responsive Methods and This Research

In light of the methodological perspectives discussed above, I chose to direct my attention to a particular immigrant-serving organization in an Albertan city as an area of focus for the original research conducted for this study. The specific agency in question is a large non-profit social service organization, founded in the mid-1980’s. It provides services to the ever-growing civic immigrant population, with particular attention provided to services and programs for immigrant women, their children, and their families.

Over the past 20 years the organization has grown from a small entity serving several hundred clients a year to its present size of approximately 100 staff members, who operate some 29 programs in 60 different locations, serving almost 7000 clients in 2004/2005. Operations consist of 5 core departments: 1) Intake, Settlement and Integration; 2) Language Training and Childcare; 3) Family Services; 4) Skills Training and Employment Services; and 5) Volunteering and Community Development. In its growth the organization has moved from being more collectively and horizontally managed to a more ‘up / down’ bureaucratized structure, with greater systems separation between departments¹⁶.

¹⁵ For example, Marxism or some other over-arching theoretical framework.

¹⁶ Citations for this information are not included for privacy and confidentiality reasons.

This organization was specifically chosen for this research because of its partnership with a small ethno-specific agency in the local community. This ethno-specific agency carries an extremely small staff, all of whom belong to the same ethno-cultural group as the community it serves. Its client population is rapidly growing in the local area, and represents an area of the world with a large number of refugee claimants to Canada, many of whom, particularly women, have low levels of education and illiteracy both in their birth language and in English. The agency seeks to increase the self-sufficiency and standards of living within the community by offering a range of educational and support programs, including 'in home' visitations, health programs, employment training opportunities, and leadership seminars. It also maintains a separate office space from the larger organization, and continues to develop its own programs and procedures, albeit with direction and assistance from its larger partner. However, the ethno-specific agency shares in the administrative and funding structure of the larger organization and also maintains strong mutual referral ties between programming.

The partnership between the mainstream organization in question and its ethno-specific counterpart is one 'real world' example of the type of 'transformative' linkages suggested in the relevant literature as a workable suggestion in a two-pronged effort (mainstream and 'multistream') to foster the inclusion of immigrants in Canadian society by re-structuring of social/economic services¹⁷. This organization was chosen, therefore, because its partnership with the ethno-specific agency allowed me as a researcher to consider the effects that organizational processes of program/policy development within agencies have upon the access-rates of immigrant women; while still continuing to explore the possible effects that gender differences, or varying socio-cultural and individual understandings of women's roles, could have upon these same usage rates.

¹⁷ Please refer to Chapter 1.

One of the limitations of this research, however, is the danger of making overly reductionist statements about immigrant women as ‘a group’, though in no way was generalization the intended or desired outcome of this project. The purpose of the research was always to seek and explore the general through the particular rather than to indulge in any form of academic simplification. A second limitation of this study is that by seeking to delve into and examine the manner in which immigrant women are marginalized within Canadian society and immigrant services, it is all too easy to ignore or discount the agency and activism of immigrant women. I have tried to limit this potential, however, by including the actual words of the participants within this document wherever possible.

Another limitation of this study is the non-random process used to ‘find’ participants. Although positive in the sense that this ‘targeted’ method included only those both willing and interested in participating, as well as those able to participate with a basic level of ability and confidence for communicating in English, it also has meant that no openly gay participants, disabled participants, or participants admitting to being on social security – among many other complexities – were included. With one exception all of the immigrant women participants were educated and middle-class individuals in their country of birth, though their financial and personal life contexts in Canada vary widely¹⁸. Among the agency representatives interviewed one was Canadian-born and two were themselves immigrants¹⁹. Although many variations of experience, ‘position’, income, age, and education (etc.) were represented by those involved in the study, certain perspectives were none the less not included as a function of the type of recruitment process used.

¹⁸ In total 5 immigrant women were interviewed for this study.

¹⁹ In total 3 agency representatives from the immigrant serving agency and its partner were interviewed for this study.

'Listening, Story, and Words': A Narrative Based Research Framework

Within the context of this organizational case study all of the interviewees were, or were at one time, involved or associated in some way with either the larger mainstream organization or the ethno-specific agency in question. This was sought as a method of streamlining and focusing the project in order to delve more deeply into the specific research questions. Also, as a result of the non-random selection process, all participants involved were or had been accessing programs related to English as a Second Language (ESL), Volunteer Training, Community Economic Development, and a range of other initiatives run by the organization's ethno-specific partner.

All of the immigrant women interviewees were initially approached through the organizational/agency programming representatives also involved in the research. This approach was used in order to preserve the privacy of the women, as well as their ability to decline to participate. To avoid any possibility of coercion, all agency representatives were asked NOT to approach individuals currently accessing services through programs or services with which they were affiliated.

The individual women interviewees participated in a semi-standardized, narrative-oriented interview of approximately two to three hours each. Interviews took place at a location agreeable to the interviewee and were recorded with permission, for future ease of analysis. Participants were representative of many different backgrounds and parts of the world including individuals from Latin American, South Asia, and Africa. In addition, as per this study's definition of 'immigrant' all immigrant women participants had immigrated to Canada since 1985 (Please see Glossary).

The interviews were arranged to follow a 'bare bones' interview script (Please see Appendix I), designed to provide a basic framework of procedure and prompting if necessary.

Questions were structured to be kept open and inviting in order to encourage 'narrative speech' as the telling of everyday experiences and understandings. One of the participants, before agreeing to be interviewed, asked to read over the questions that had been prepared. She reviewed the questions and sent back comments and suggestions, which were incorporated before they were used for all of the full interviews. In addition, after the original interviews were conducted, copies of their individual transcripts were made available to all participants so that they could make sure that what was recorded was something that they could both recognize and feel comfortable with. Any comments were immediately noted and the transcripts altered.

Both time and effort were required for me to participate as an 'active listener' in these interviews. In the months prior to the initiation of this research I was involved with a seminar on cross-cultural planning and communication processes which greatly increased both my consciousness of self and my own personal dynamics as a listener. It was always my desire in these interviews to listen consciously and with awareness – and it is my hope that I provided a responsive, respectful, and 'partnered' presence for the participants involved. Significant time²⁰ was also invested in building a relationship with the interviewees prior to the time of the actual interview so as to foster a comfortable and trusting environment in which to 'tell', especially in light of the potentially vulnerable topics we discussed. I personally communicated with all of the participants (after they had released their personal contact information) after they had agreed to engage with the project, in order to further explain and discuss the issues and study at hand, and also to get to know each other more fully in a social sense.

Several ethical considerations presented themselves during the fostering of these relationships and the organization of the research interviews themselves. The development of

²⁰ Specifically, I communicated both by telephone and by email with all of the immigrant women participants approximately once weekly in the intervening six weeks between their agreement to participate in the study and the conducting of the actual interview.

trust and its ensuing relationships required an explicit awareness of the vulnerabilities present in this situation on both sides. Is/was my friendship contingent on their participation in the research? In communications with the participants I always tried to make this distinction clear – I would continue to communicate with them, if desired, after initial contacts even if they decided to no longer participate. I also found that on a personal level I enjoyed immensely my interactions with these fascinating women. I hope to be able to continue these relationships, out of respect for both their feelings and mine, after the termination of this research project. As such, it is my desire that ‘exiting’ from this project will happen in a more organic and friendship-oriented manner rather than through a ‘researcher’ vs. ‘researched’ dynamic.

In addition to the five individual non-Canadian born women interviewed, three agency representatives from the case study organization and its partner also participated. These interviewees were approached through the contact information available from their workplace’s website. They were specifically invited to participate as a result of their respective positions as program and policy planners. All three participants originally invited agreed to co-operate with the research. Two of the interviewees hold positions with the mainstream organization and the third with the organization’s ethno-specific agency partner. The former two are female and the latter is both male and a member of the minority community that the agency that he is involved with seeks to serve. Interviews were approximately one and a half hours to two hours long, and they took place at locations agreeable to the participants. As with the immigrant women interviews, these interactions were arranged to also follow a ‘bare bones’ interview script, again to provide a basic structure and prompting if necessary (Please see Appendix II). Here also, all of the participants were also contacted on an individual basis with a copy of the transcript of their interview in order to confirm that the data gathered from our conversation was something that

they felt comfortable with and recognized as their own. Again, all comments were immediately noted and the transcripts altered accordingly.

This research was constructed, organized, and conducted in the manner described in order to be consistent with both my own sensibilities and the literature surrounding responsive, non-oppressive, feminist-based research. As a result, the interviewees were encouraged to participate actively in the research, with the understanding that the knowledge produced from the actual interviews themselves was co-created by the mutual interactions and influences between us. Relationship building and dialogue were therefore also central components in this study. Objectivity and aloofness were rejected in favour of aware, stated, relational interactions in order to more fully recognize the reality of social research as being necessarily and unavoidably influenced by the opinions and presence of the researcher as well as of the participants (Berg, 2001: 186, 187).

It is important to recognize, however, that in the actual interviews themselves, although less so in 'outside' interactions with the participants, power relations were still a source of consideration between myself and the interviewees. Particularly in the interviews with the immigrant women my unavoidable status as a researcher, and as a 'white' woman, sometimes placed me in a position of authority on the subjects at hand, despite my efforts and communications specifically stating the contrary. It was only through a concerted effort to refer back to and interact within our previously developed relationships that this potentially unequal dynamic was mitigated, even if it was never completely eliminated. As a result, even with the 'call back' for verification of the transcripts, my presence and role as a researcher was inevitably influential on both *what* was narrated to me, and *how* it was narrated.

Upon reflection, I would have conducted the interviews slightly differently. Firstly I feel that the actual scheduled length of the interviews was problematic. While having a long period in

which to talk was beneficial in creating a safe 'telling' environment, the sheer intensity generated in these types of narrative interviews, at least in my own experience, meant that after a period of approximately 1.5 hours both I and the participant were emotionally exhausted and in need of a break. As such, in the future I would try and arrange two shorter interview times with the participants in order to encourage their full 'telling' while still allowing for the physical realities of this type of encounter. In addition, I would also forward the interview questions to the participants ahead of time so that they would have the opportunity to more fully reflect upon their thoughts and answers surrounding the topic areas. A number of the participants reacted to some of the questions posed with surprise and some discomfort, although with encouragement and interaction they appeared in general quite willing to discuss the topic areas. It has been my reflection that perhaps a previous awareness of the specificity of the questions asked in addition to the overall genre of questions (which was provided) might have been helpful in developing an even greater 'give and take' relational interviewing experience for both parties. However, the spontaneity of answering may also have contributed valuably to the discussions.

The analytic process for this research was primarily interpretative and emergent in approach (Kirson, 1995: 17). All of the material collected was taped and transcribed verbatim before analysis began. In reading through the transcripts, I inductively 'noted' and identified words and phrases, formulating them into themes, which I then sorted and 'matched' between transcripts. This emergent 'sorting' work was done primarily through the use of a personal journal in which I recorded and discussed my interpretations (i.e. my perspective or 'place'), what I was 'hearing' from the data, and the gaps and connects between these. In addition, I attempted to rigorously reflect on my own personal expectations of the data – i.e. what I 'expected', what I 'wanted' (etc.) - in order to limit the influence that these desires would have upon the analysis. For example, in light of my own personal experiences I had to bracket my

own expectations of ‘gender related’ themes within the research. If only because my own experience of moving to Canada centered around my re-understanding and re-imagining of what it meant to be a woman, I anticipated some presence of similar themes in other people’s experiences.

It was through this process, therefore, of writing and consideration that I came to an emotional and intellectual place where I could accept all of the responses that came from the data as they emerged and made themselves visible, even if I could not fully eliminate my personal expectation(s) of certain outcomes. I also used journaling to try and make explicit the effect of my own experience on the interpretation of the data, while recognizing that this ‘bias’ could never be discounted but rather acknowledged and controlled.

In my analysis of the data, I utilized all of the knowledge that I had previously gleaned from the literature review, as well as my own relational knowledge of the person(s) whose words I was examining. From this, the established themes were “considered in the light of previous research and theories, and a small set of generalizations [...were...] established” (Berg, 2001: 240), to develop a set of final outcomes for the research.

As a whole, it has been my intention with this research to use narrative and story-telling as a relational, embedded, and therefore an essentially politicized avenue through which to examine some of the dynamics present in both the planning and use of social services designed for immigrant women in Canada. Through the reality of their words – their stories – it is my hope that this research will be both topical and relevant.

Chapter 3

'You have to be double good': Gender in Immigrant Services Planning

"People call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments
that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute"

Rebecca West (1915)

The differing roles that gender plays in the personal experience of immigration are too seldom recognized within immigrant services policy and program planning. It is simply not the same to move to Canada as a woman as it is for a man (Status of Women Canada, 2000: 11). Particularized instances of gender difference can influence a whole range of experiences for female immigrants, including status in the larger society, intra-community expectations and 'place', access to employment, and accessibility of services etc. (Jamieson, 1993: 28, 29). As Abu-Laban and Stasiulis (1992: 3) remark, "Immigration is a gendered process. Women who enter a new country have many different immigration experiences, have access to different services, and create and draw upon different methods of support."

It is therefore important for policies and programs targeting immigrant women to be especially sensitive and open to exploring the differing effects that gender experiences can have in the immigration process. This is necessary in planning programs that are responsive and genuinely helpful for the population they are targeting. Experiences of gender can also be conflated with issues of ethnicity, age, orientation (etc.) to cause experiences of 'double' or even 'triple' disadvantage for immigrant women in Canada (Lee, 1999a: 15, 19). Planning policies and programs for immigrant women requires a complex, flexible, and open-minded approach.

‘Still Waiting’: The Experience and ‘Place’ of Immigrant Women in Canada

In the late 1990’s almost 1 in every 5 women living in Canada were immigrants. Immigrants to Canada represent almost every part of the globe, although the majority of recent arrivals to Canada come from Eastern (China, Japan, and the Philippines), Southern (India), and Central (Afghanistan) Asian countries, as well as from Latin America (Statistics Canada, 2000: 19). The large majority of recent²¹ Canadian immigrant women live in Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), and are also members of a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2000: 190, 192). Female immigrants to Canada usually arrive with their families, with a relation acting as their primary sponsor for the immigration process. For some women, this can create an initial situation in which they cannot, for example, leave an abusive or undesirable domestic situation as their immigration status depends on their relationship with the primary sponsor (Jamieson, 2003: 4, 9). This has the effect of increasing the vulnerability of immigrant women to domestic violence with a linked inability to seek help or leave the situation.

Immigrant women are, on average, more highly educated, especially in engineering and the sciences, than Canadian born women and are more likely to hold a graduate degree²² (Statistics Canada, 2000: 197). However, immigrant women are less likely to be employed than Canadian born men and women, and immigrant men, and more likely to be employed in positions for which they are overqualified for reasons of education and/or experience. Most often this is because foreign credentials are not fully recognized in Canada, or because they are told that they lack ‘Canadian experience’ (Statistics Canada, 2000: 202, 203). Lack of recognition for credentials gained outside of Canada is one of the most important disadvantages experienced by all immigrants to Canada, including women (Statistics Canada, 2005: 51-52). Lack of ability in

²¹ Within the last 20 years. See Glossary.

²² In 1996 approximately 13% of immigrant women held a graduate level degree compared with 9% of Canadian born women (Statistics Canada, 2000: 97).

either of Canada's official languages is also a disadvantage for immigrants, and can be a huge barrier in finding employment that also contributes to social isolation. In 1996 approximately 9% of immigrant women spoke neither French nor English at even a minimal level, compared with approximately 5% of immigrant men (Statistics Canada, 2000: 201). This relative inability to converse in Canada's official languages compared with immigrant men means that immigrant women experience language-induced social isolation at almost double the rate of immigrant men.

Immigrant women also share in the overall disadvantaged position that women hold in Canadian society. Women in Canada make up a disproportionate share of the population living in a low-income situation. The first period of the 21st century witnessed the highest levels of female poverty in over 20 years (Townson, 2002: 1). In 1997, 2.8 million women in Canada, or 19% of the total female population, lived with low incomes, compared with 16% of the total male population. Women's average earnings in Canada are also substantially less than those earned by their male counterparts. In 1997, women, even when employed full-time, earned only 73% of what their male equivalents did in similar positions (Ibid: 3-5).

This situation is exacerbated for immigrant women. In 1996 immigrant women with a university degree were four times more likely to be unemployed than Canadian-born women, and if employed they were concentrated in low-paying administrative, clerical, sales, service and domestic jobs (Statistics Canada, 2000: 201). Immigrant women, particularly those heading single-parent families and/or those of a visible minority, are even more likely than Canadian born women to live in low income situations (Statistics Canada, 2000: 'Highlight Table'). In the late 1990's approximately 3 in 10 immigrant women lived in poverty. Female immigrant children are also twice as likely to live in a low income environment as female Canadian born children (Statistics Canada, 2000: 205).

As illustrated, many immigrant women in Canada occupy a doubly (or triply) disadvantaged position as a result of their legal status, gender, and ethnicity (Giles, 2002: 124). These experiences also vary among immigrant women reflecting differences in class, ability, orientation, education, and personal background (etc.). However, immigrant women (and women in general) are not mute pawns of their circumstances but strive daily and continually for the full recognition of their rights and identities as well as for better opportunities for themselves and their families (Ralston, 2003: 5; Tastsoglou and Miedema, 2003: 208-212; Graham and Thurston, 2005: 64).

**‘I started to live my life from zero’:
Women, Immigration, and This Research**

Many of the themes present in the literature and statistical data on this topic also emerged during the 5 in-depth narrative interviews with immigrant women conducted for this study. All of the participants immigrated to Canada as a result of family ties, and all initially (although for many their circumstances have since changed) lived with these individuals. Living with family was identified as both a source of support in navigating a new country but also of vulnerability and dependence, particularly before they gained residency status. One participant who immigrated to Canada to marry a Canadian-born man stated, “I have my residency now, so I can work and things like that. It’s a big deal. Before that it’s a little scary. So I feel a little bit more secure that if absolutely necessary I can survive” (C: 6). A number of the participants also cited their existing family networks as one of their major sources of emotional and financial support, particularly after first arriving in Canada. The same participant as above stated that her main support after moving to Canada was her husband, “Well, my husband actually. He was forcing me out [...socially...]”²³ and things like that. Giving me a lot of love!” (C: 3).

²³ My insertion.

Many interviewees discussed issues surrounding the difficulty of having their education and work credentials recognized as well as finding 'interesting' employment in their field. Many of these comments were linked with language ability:

"English. This is my problem. I understand if I were you know Canadian speaking. If I don't know English how can I work? Because one of the main official languages, but here you must know English. It is normal. But yes of course I feel frustrated because I am prevented from whatever I want to do. And I feel depressed, because I don't know how to tell my opinion or how to discuss" (A: 3)

"And if you go for an interview the language is a big thing, you know 'oh yes your resume looks great' but really it is not or 'oh yeah your interview went really well' but then later it is because your language is not good and that's why we didn't hire her" (D: 5)

One participant also highlighted how upset she felt when her difficulties communicating in English were interpreted by those around her as a lack of intelligence or capacity for critical thought, "sometimes because of my English at school or something they think I'm dumb or something like that. And then I get a good grade back or do well or something like that and people are like 'oh how can you do that, you're nothing here, you don't speak English'" (C: 3). In several interviews these frustrations surrounding language ability and employment were also tied to an overall sense of having to prove themselves to society at a greater rate than Canadian born individuals just to receive the same recognition and opportunities. For example, one participant stated, "I well...feel different. I started from zero. I started to live my life from zero" (A: 4), and another, "But also – we are double competing. Not only with other immigrants but also with women within Canada. So you have to be double good in this country" (2: 2).

In combination with these themes, which are echoed in the literature, two additional strands emerged about the relational and social structure of Canadian society. Several participants made comments about the 'group-based' nature of Canadian social interactions. They felt that although Canada as a nation officially espoused the rhetoric of multiculturalism

and that the ability to preserve one's birth culture was respected, there was minimal mixing or interactions between groups, especially on an informal social level:

"But then I started to observe. It is a different culture. But I noticed that different cultures bring together here but they don't keep tight each other. And this was surprising for me for two sides. One is good because everyone can live their culture. The other side is that they isolate inside" (A: 2)

"We have to learn how to accept each other and not just tolerate. So I think many people have been raised to tolerate others but not really accept others" (2: 3)

"I'm getting used really but in the beginning 'oh my god you don't know who's living next to your door!'" (D: 4)

Remarks of this kind were connected with comments made about the nature of male-female relations in Canada. Contrary to my own personal expectations going into this research, all but one of the participants stated that their experiences of being a woman were actually easier in their birth countries, in terms of perceived access to jobs, societal power (etc.), than in Canada. However, these comments were all made with the preface that this was their individual experience and not one that they necessarily attributed to all women living in their country of origin.

"My family is conservative but the education is very important especially for women. My father encouraged me, and I said 'I want to go to university' and he said 'o.k. you go' [...] I guess I didn't um...I didn't feel any difference as a woman" (A: 1)

"Actually my experience was quite different than others. I never felt that 'oh I am not man'! I got married at the age of 17 and I went to my husband's house but I didn't stop my studies and in the meantime I gave birth to the children and even then I didn't stop. I also did the housework but my husband he helped me a lot. I never felt it. But looking at my friends it was totally different. They stopped studying. We have a joint-family system and the mother-in-law and the father-in-law they don't want their daughter-in-law to go outside" (D: 1)

"My life in my country was extremely easy and I never noticed too much differences. At least not for me [...] But at the time I was starting university and I want to...I was always thinking a woman without education in nothing because I saw how hard was their lives" (B: 1)

One participant also stressed the gap between her expectations of what life would be like as a woman in Canada and her perception of the reality of Canadian women's access to powerful employment as compared with her country of birth:

"They say that women are very important. Equal, equal. But it's so different. Like in business, for men and women to be equal they need the same job and really um...same salary and they can get high position. But I feel and observed something that they are different [...] Many people, many women can work but the high position I see are maybe more than 60 or 70 percent are men. I don't like it. Because they say that not that men are more smart than women...I don't know" (A: 3)

These types of feelings, however, appeared to differ among the participants along class, education, and age lines. All but one of the participants had at least a high school education and came from 'middle' or 'upper class' backgrounds in their birth countries. In these interviews the general feeling, with the exception of the interviewee in her 20s, was that power positions for women were more accessible in their country of origin than in Canada. For the other participant who had no formal schooling and experienced great levels of poverty in her birth country, Canada was characterized as being a place where she felt, as a woman, that she had much greater access to 'voice' and power:

"In my country for women it is a difficult life, they don't have a voice to say anything to a man. If you say something even good, you cannot [...] I'm happy here. Because I am learning to say what I believe" (C: 1 / C:3)

Another participant expressed surprise at the stigma she perceived upon men and women in Canada who associate socially in public but who are not in an intimate relationship. She told a number of stories about being caught off-guard and embarrassed in social situations about her willingness to interact socially with married men and their reluctance to be seen in public 'with another woman'. She contrasted this with her perceptions about gender relations in North America prior to immigrating to Canada:

“Yes! It was really expected that you [...North Americans...]”²⁴ were always going somewhere or doing something. Like this one time I met with one person and he said ‘o.k., I want to modify your resume’ and he said ‘o.k. you can come to my office’ and I said ‘I feel really uncomfortable working in an office so can we go for a coffee but he said ‘no I’m really sorry but I don’t feel comfortable doing that’. Well it is very different in my country, we feel uncomfortable working just with us in an office. We have lots of tables out and we share the room with other peers and talking, chatting. I like actually. And then we go the café and chatting. And after 10 or 15 minutes with people coming and going I said ‘are you o.k. with it? Why don’t you want to go?’ And he said ‘because you are lady and I feel uncomfortable’ and I was like ‘oh my god!’ I feel that the western people are free people but they are not. Their mind is very personal and we are not like that. We just go and have coffee and it doesn’t matter to us” (D: 2)

Listening to this story was particularly interesting for me as it was completely unexpected. After discussing this story, the respondent went on to surmise that perhaps the more ‘open’ nature of male/female relations in North America and Canada, such as the possibility (socially, legally) of divorce and relative sexual freedom, places an increased nuance and explicit pressure on male/female interactions outside of an intimate relationship.

As these conversations with the participating immigrant women display, the experience of immigration to Canada as a woman is shaped by a particular set of circumstances and experiences that differ both individually and from those of immigrant men. In a number of the stories told here, these experiences have been shaped by frustration. However, as these words also show, all of the women are active, articulate women constantly engaged in understanding, interpreting, and acting in the world around them.

‘Women, Women, Everywhere’: A Gender Analysis of Access

Given that the process of immigration is experienced differently by women than it is by men, policies and programs targeting immigrant women need to be developed with these varying experiences in mind (Lee, 1993: 27). As Jamieson (2003: 28) states, “a lack of sensitivity to women’s specific situations may well prevent or discourage women from gaining access to

²⁴ My insertion.

social assistance.” Immigrant women are a ‘special population’ (or group of populations) that require directed service orientation in order for programming to be effective (Lee, 1999a: 67). In response, women-focused product-oriented planning appears to be fairly common within the sector (Howard Research, 2001: 137-139). In the context of this research, product-oriented planning is understood to be a form of planning that views the end result (e.g. a program or policy) as the most important focus, rather than the process used to develop it.

For example, programs which seek immigrant women *only* as clients are relatively numerous in the immigrant serving sector. These most often take the form of ‘women-only’ employment, language, volunteering, skill development, and counseling (etc.) opportunities for immigrant women both through ethno-specific and mainstream services (Ibid.). There are also organizations like the one examined in this study whose mandate is to serve immigrant women exclusively in all of its programming. When asked to discuss ‘women-only’ programs the participating mainstream agency representatives reiterated the importance of having specific programming ‘spaces/places’ for immigrant women:

“Yes! Especially for women from more traditional societies. People are opening up here and learning other things. I remember in the past that many women couldn’t come to English classes when there were men in the room. Their husbands felt uncomfortable with them coming to English class. So we started have just women places for learning” (2:9)

“Well, I think women first. Because of the agency’s focus [...] I suspect it might be different in some of the other immigrant serving agencies. I was wondering about that myself. Husbands often come to the first class. They interpret and because their language skills are often better and they are also heads of the household” (1:5)

When conversing with the immigrant women interviewees, the importance of having women’s only programming also emerged, but not as strongly and with some conditions. They appeared to equate women’s only programs with introductory ones that provided only limited access to wider resources and experience:

“Um...I think that women need more attention, emotionally so...I think yeah it's good to have programs just for women. But of course men also need it. For couples here...it would be good then to go as a couple. Because you don't have any family and nothing here” (C: 6)

“It's o.k., in the beginning I found that most of the women they come with their husband and they don't know anything and for them it's really good. Because they are hesitant to talk with people and they are hesitant to go outside, but with people who come with lots of education like me I don't want to go. It is not necessarily for us. So it depends on the type of the women that are coming” (D: 9)

Despite these prefaces, women's only programming was identified by all participants as being important in providing opportunities for women to feel comfortable in actually attending and continuing with programs.

In addition to providing 'women-only' programs and other product-oriented opportunities for immigrant women, conversations with the mainstream organization representatives did not reflect any official (agency-wide) attention to process-oriented methods of incorporating gender considerations into policy/program planning. This was despite an individual awareness of the potential importance of these approaches on the part of the interviewees. In the context of this research, process-oriented approaches are understood as those aiming to incorporate certain variables of consideration (here gender) into every stage of the planning continuum. This strategy views the processes used to develop a program or policy of equal importance to the end result. In the interviews the most common reasons cited for this form of procedure were organizational (bureaucratic) culture and funding requirements:

Respondent 1: “Lack of funding. I think another one of the limiting or changing factors more than anything is the funder's ideas of what they want to see come out of it. I think many programs are tweaked to please the funder. Evaluations are done in a specific way to satisfy funders” (1: 10)

Respondent 2: “I think the main frustration is always with the finances. We try to be flexible but finance is the main thing. So we have to make some priorities. For example we have the volunteer program who has funding from only one source. I know that it could do much better with more resources, and with another staff person. But the priority is women. Abuse and in learning English” (2:5)

Me: "How are these priorities set within the agency?"

Respondent 2: "By the executive director" (2:5)

Focusing on product rather than process-oriented approaches in developing policies and programs for diverse population, particularly when considerations of gender are involved, has been identified in the literature as problematic (Angeles, 2005: 77).

Instead a combination of both approaches is called for (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005: 22). Iglehart and Becerra (1996: 7) argue that failing to pay attention to process-oriented approaches in recognizing difference when planning programs for immigrants can cause the programs to 'fail' or be underused. A number of important difference variables are potentially ignored by failing to examine the processes used to develop programs. A good example of this is the continued emphasis upon the individual as the key variable of change in most mainstream program planning. Programs and policies tend to target persons as individuals rather than as members of a family or another collective unit, and assume that people as individuals will seek to solve their problems as autonomous beings (Iglehart and Becerra, 1996: 7). This image is a bureaucratic hangover of individualized 'western' liberal ideals, and largely untrue of any person, but especially of many, including immigrant, women (Iglehart and Becerra, 1995: 219).

Without essentializing, and admitting numerous examples to the contrary, many immigrant women to Canada move from societies and cultures that place high value on women's role in the home and as carers of children, seniors, and other relations (etc.) both in the household and through an extended social network (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis, 1992: 7-8). This means that programs developed with an unquestioned 'individualist bias' will fail to take into account the realities of their lives, thus limiting the program's usefulness and accessibility.

Within the organization examined in this research, 'the family' of immigrant women is included in the mission statement as a key target population. In practice, however, this tends not to happen

simultaneously but instead on a continuum, “With families, but women come first” (1: 5). This means that the organization considers women as individuals first and foremost and only if initial programming remains unsuccessful are they programmed for as members of a family and/or another social network. Focusing initially on women as individuals was viewed in a wholly positive manner by the mainstream agency representatives, since they saw it as encouraging women to develop themselves and find their ‘voice’ apart from their family responsibilities:

“They are very collective. So, this is very different from our view. And so for them, to talk about self-esteem and self-worth is unknown to them. But when they start to get some empowerment and realize that they have a voice it’s huge for some of them” (1: 7)

However, the fact that the family is mentioned at all in the organization’s mission statement was identified by the ethno-specific agency interviewee as key to his agency’s approval of entering into a partnership, “Also because they try to serve the family, it is the family that has the man, women and child – all the different members” (3: 1).

The interviewees also highlighted that another oversight of this product-oriented focus is the dearth of attention given to the caring and reproductive realities of many of the women seeking to access existing programs (e.g. part-time programs, childcare provision etc.). For example, one of the mainstream agency representatives identified both her ambivalence about the numbers of children women in her program had, and the lack of resources with which to address that reality:

“And the number of children as a good thing not a bad thing. And many of them have said that in their country many children die. And they are very much more ‘what god gives you is what you have’ is what happens. And many of them don’t believe in birth control. At least the men don’t! [...] Some women don’t get to come to school because of it. They can’t access school ‘cause they always have a child under 18 months. And there are only 2 sites in this whole place for language that have care for babies” (1: 8, 9)

Another important point of consideration emerging out of the interviews is the essentializing of gender roles as either ‘liberal’ or ‘traditional’ for both ethno-cultural groups and individuals. The official process of planning policies and programs in the mainstream organization appears to

largely view the gender roles of their 'clients' as static and non-changing. For example, immigrant women are generally presumed either to *not* be able to access programs outside of their homes as a result of cultural reasons (program result: home care programs) or as *freely able* to leave the home to access services (program result: programs located in a variety of locations). This creates a polarizing of gender expectations in regards to immigrant women, which fails to consider 'gender' as it is experienced in everyday life - as always changing, in process, and rarely calcified. As a process this occurs in many varying and complex ways for immigrant women in Canada, with themselves as active participants (Graham and Thurston, 2005: 71).

One example where this trend is pertinent is the tendency of some ethno-cultural communities in Canada to be more conservative here than in their country of origin. Jamieson (2003: 41) suggests that this trend is possibly the result not only of group patterns of immigration, but also as a form of community protection for cultural celebration and maintenance. Nonetheless, a number of the immigrant women interviewed alluded²⁵, although did not directly state, that this kind of occurrence made them question their own understandings of what their roles and responsibilities were as women within their communities. This was further complicated by pressures from wider Canadian society regarding 'appropriate' roles and expectations of women. The 'family' was therefore constructed in these interviews as a site of both conflict and cooperation which as a complex entity provided solace and support as well as frustration and limitation (Sen, 2001: 36).

All of these points are examples of important gendered variables that can easily be passed over unrecognized when a product-oriented planning process is privileged over a process-oriented incorporation of 'difference-based' variables (here: gender) into all stages of policy and program planning for Canadian immigrant women.

²⁵ In my interpretation and understanding of the interview texts.

‘It was a real challenge’:

The Life Cycle of Program/Policy Planning

The processes used to develop policies and programs within the mainstream organization examined for this research, were discussed within the interviews as based upon an organizational culture of what is the ‘right way to do things’, rather than a set of specific rules and regulations. The life cycle of a policy or program begins with the development of an idea, by an individual or small group, in response to a need identified or articulated within the community. Often this ‘program’ is initially begun ad hoc as an add-on to existing programming, before seeking specific funding or personnel. The results of this ad-hoc experiment are then used as leverage to apply for funding:

“Of course, many times they start when women start coming with some specific need that needs to be met, and then we start to try and meet that need but as soon as people in the community hear that we are meeting that need here they start coming. And we use that as a springboard in applying for funding. So you can say so many women have been coming by using this service and we have been doing it without resources. And we need this amount to meet this need, can so we get a certain amount to develop the program” (2:4)

One agency representative expressed dissatisfaction with this process as, in practice, it often meant that many of the same people were responsible for all new program ideas, “Sometimes it is always the same people doing things. And people start getting spread thin. And so that affects staff retention, because they feel over-worked” (2: 5). Another staff representative stressed that programming ideas tied with a theoretical approach (e.g. Paulo Freire – dialogue based learning) had improved chances for funding. Being able to reference a theoretical background often provided needed legitimacy for unusual or innovative programming to attract funding:

“So the person who brought it back, this philosophy and methodology. Brought it back and gave it to the director and said that maybe this would be helpful for some kind of a program and so they created a pilot project and got funding” (1: 3).

As also indicated in this quotation, the next step in the planning process is to create an official pilot project using the source of initial funding. This can be problematic, however, as pilot project funding exists only for a discrete period of time – often too short to ensure longevity of the program, but long enough that the community becomes accustomed to the services being provided:

“So I think you know the big hitch is, you get enough to do a pilot project but not to sustain it. So that programs that were successful and are working have to be dropped” (1: 10)

During these initial stages of program development, one mainstream agency representative noted that sometimes a program is conceived of in one way by the person(s) planning it, and is thought of and understood totally differently by the clients, “So sometimes we have something and the women are not sure what we want or what we are doing” (1: 8). This feeling was also echoed by one of the immigrant women interviewees:

“I don’t know about much about...but they are starting a health program and people I’ve been talking to are wondering about the benefits. When people get engaged in activities they are always wanting some sort of benefit. And this is really difficult for them to understand. It’s a problem actually – everybody always expects that you could get a job or something like that. But no - agencies they are not giving any jobs they just run some programs and invite people. It is like an information session sometimes!” (D: 9)

Clearly, miscommunications and misunderstandings between planners and clients can occur even over the fundamental aims and goals of a particular project or policy when explicit discussion and participation are not incorporated into the process.

At this point in the process, the pilot project is evaluated internally and, if successful, further and more secure sources of funding are sought. If a project succeeds in obtaining funding past the initial pilot project, it enters a ‘normal’ phase of operations, although in sometimes very different forms than originally conceived. One mainstream agency representative, for example, spoke about the language program she heads and about how hard she has tried to stay true to the

program's original theoretical basis, but that it has been extremely difficult, though not impossible, given the everyday realities of working with the clients:

"It's extremely hard to apply. You're supposed to get everything you do from them. But when you've got 7-8 languages [...] Yeah, but you can still do it. Through pictures, symbols. In development on the ground they'll use anything. Rocks, sticks as symbols to mean anything. And they usually do it on the ground in the dirt with their symbols. But we can definitely use some of their tools" (1:4)

Periodic evaluations of programs are emphasized within the organization and are often required by funders, "And then we evaluate. Our goal is to always to evaluate outcomes" (1:4). The outcomes of these evaluations either end a program (if unsuccessful), or provide it with the necessary documentation to maintain its funding.

When conversing with the mainstream agency representatives, however, no explicit mention was made of an existing process-oriented approach, either individual or organizational, that explicitly accounts for gendered aspects of the immigration experience. However, both the need and the difficulty in planning programming sensitive to difference, and the needs of particular groups of immigrant women, were highlighted by the same interviewees:

"One part is that there are women from many different parts of the world and they have different points of view and really coming with very many skills. A variety of women coming with levels of education and as well in English levels. And it's sometimes difficult to have different programs and different opportunities for everyone" (2: 9)

It was also recognized, however, that serving individually/group tailored programs to large numbers of clients can be administratively both difficult and unwieldy, as well as extremely demanding of staff members. In summary, the process used for developing most programs and policies offered by the mainstream organization examined in this research, and as illustrated by the representatives interviewed follows an approximate 8-step process:

Table 1:²⁶

Mainstream Program/Policy Planning Process

1) Idea

- Development of an initial idea by an involved individual or group usually in response to a perceived or articulated need in the community.

2) Ad-hoc 'trial'

- Adding a new program/policy without specific funding in order to test its usefulness and popularity.

3) Seeking funding

- Using the ad-hoc trial as leverage to investigate and apply for funds.
- Usually involves the creation of a more formal program/policy plan with a set of program goals and objectives.

4) Formal pilot project

- Using an initial source of funding, running a formal trial of the project/policy.

5) Mid-point evaluation

- Internal evaluation of the program at the end of pilot project/policy funding.

6) Seeking further funding

- If internally deemed successful, further and more detailed applications for longer term funding are made.

7) Regular Programming

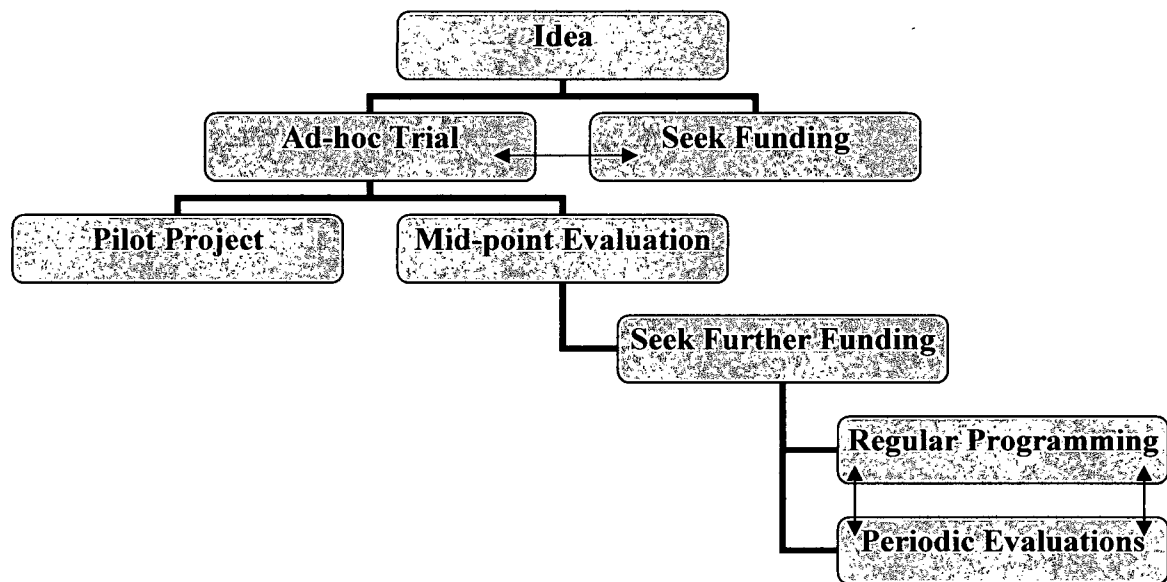
- With provision made for 'everyday' flexibility.

8) Periodic evaluations

- Required both internally by the organization in question and externally by some funders.

²⁶ All of the tables and figures included in this document were compiled by myself as a result of the interviews conducted. There are no existing agency or organization documents that explicitly document this process. They are my interpretation and reconstruction.

Figure 1: Mainstream Program/Policy Planning Process



Another intriguing component of these discussions about existing process was the feeling by the mainstream organization representatives that part of the role of existing programming was to ‘teach multiculturalism’ to immigrant women from more mono-ethnic and mono-lingual societies, and to encourage them to learn how to interact with and respect others from different backgrounds and cultures on a relational basis:

“I think that part of the learning process is to learn to be multicultural. I really do [...] So..um...we’ve talked a little bit about multiculturalism. For sure, they have concepts. They tell stories about how badly black people are treated in other countries. Some of them have told horrendous stories about how black people are treated in Egypt” (1: 11)

“It’s our mandate to help women to integrate into the community and into larger society. And it’s difficult when values are a little different. And they need to know this... (2: 2)

Both representatives quoted here felt that one of the most important roles that mainstream services offered new immigrant women was perspective and practice in relating and functioning within a poly-ethnic environment.

'I am only part time':

Ethno-specific Agency Program /Policy Planning

In comparison with the mainstream agency staff members participating in this research, the representative of the organization's ethno-specific partner outlined a more flexible and informal internal program and policy development process for the agency:

"We sit and discuss, we balance, we get participation [...] Get members from the agency community to sit down with elders. We try to get everyone. Also the Cultural Association. And then we take it to the director" (3:2)

The process used to develop programs arises less from individual or small group impetus and more from the dictates and decisions of the larger group(s) involved with the agency, although the director still maintains ultimate decision making power. Decisions are made largely as a result of internal dialogue with members of the community who are included along with agency staff and volunteers in the initial envisioning steps of the planning process.

However, when asked about how/if the existing process took into account gendered considerations of the immigration experience the interviewee simply stated, "We have volunteer women from the community" (3: 1). Although he did not elaborate further, this seems to indicate that women's concerns in the community are not explicitly addressed through a gendered process or analytic structure. Instead, women from the community are themselves physically present for the discussions at various stages of the planning process.

This presence, however, does not guarantee women an equal voice in planning and decision making. In this instance it appears to be unregulated and unexamined, therefore potentially reinforcing gender/power divisions already present within the community (Angeles, 2000: 77). As well, the mere participation of women in the program/policy development process does not necessarily mean that feminist ideals of gender equality and/or the recognition of gendered difference of experience are recognized or taken into consideration in any meaningful way (Ibid.). Ethno-specific agencies sometimes experience extreme conflict as a result of intra-

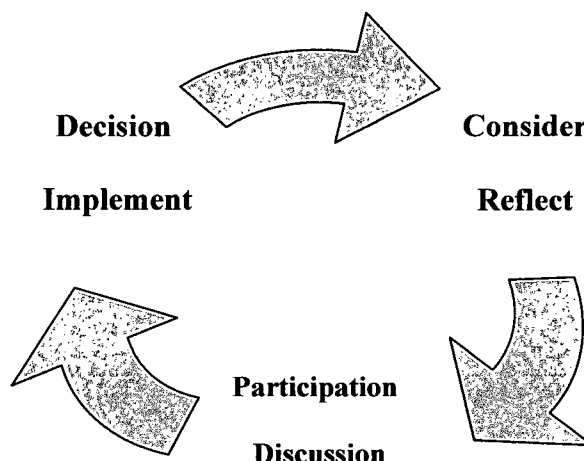
community relationships, pressures, and dynamics. Internal community tensions running along class, education, English-language ability, family situation, income, sexuality, gender (etc.) are easily reproduced within an organizational structure potentially further supporting those already holding positions of authority (Lee, 1993: 28, 37).

Although not explicitly mentioned by any of the participants, conducting this particular interview highlighted for me some of the tensions present in having a male supervisor ultimately managing and implementing programs for women in the community. When asked about any potential difficulties in maintaining this balance, the interviewee stated that, "Women is the first in our culture" (3: 3). This assertion was contradicted, however, by an immigrant woman participant who is also a member of the same ethno-cultural community, "You are not allowed to say anything. All the man is allowed to say something so all the time the women is in the backroom - it is very tough" (E: 1)

In discussing the challenges present in the agency's existing planning process, the representative highlighted two main factors - funding, and administrative capacity. He related a number of stories about the agency's difficulty in accessing sufficient, secure sources of funding for their programming, "Lack of funding to develop a lot of things" (3:2). As well, he felt that the agency lacked the administrative 'know-how' to conduct continual and frequent internal evaluations. He was concerned that this limited them from recognizing flaws in policies and programs mid-stream and that often correctable issues were not recognized until too late, "When we have a program and there is a problem we need another way to change it. Other than starting again" (3:3). As gleaned from the interview with the ethno-specific partner representative, the

agency uses a cyclical and non-linear process to develop policies and programs that also emphasizes discussion and community input, though not necessarily on gendered lines²⁷:

Figure 2: Ethno-Specific Program/Policy Planning Process



As a comparison between this process model and the process model used by the mainstream organization shows, the two partners function using quite different internal planning procedures. The mainstream organization has a more formal and linear process of program and policy development while the ethno-specific agency maintains a more flexible and cyclical process of thought and decision-making.

‘A Sweetness and Weakness’: Gender and the Reality of Access

As part of the focus of this research, all of the immigrant women interviewed were either currently, or previously, involved with programs at the targeted organization, either through its mainstream or ethno-specific component. All but one of the participants originally became

²⁷ As with the other tables and figures included in this document, all were compiled by myself as a result of the interviews conducted. There are no existing agency or organization documents that explicitly document this process. They are my interpretation and reconstruction.

involved with the organization through friends or acquaintances who had previously attended a program:

“Yeah, I’m going to church there and some of my friends say ‘you don’t know language now but you need the school and you can come and I show you’. I am going in the morning. I see the agency. I talk with her and some people tell me” (E: 4)

The remaining interviewee spoke about how she sought out the organization when looking for an avenue of involvement with wider Canadian society, “Yeah nobody told me and I searched it out and looked at the flyers and things like that” (D: 8). However, she contrasted this with the majority of other women in her community, whom she perceived as being relatively isolated and unaware of many of the options and programs open to them:

“Many of my friends who have been here for three years they haven’t heard of this organization or that one. And when I say to them ‘oh, I am going’ they say ‘oh, what is that?’ It is very interesting right? So what’s the reason? Well they are hesitant to go outside by themselves. And when they land here they just try to find any type of job and they just go to that and home and they feel really hesitant to go out, just for the groceries right and they really don’t like to talk to others” (D: 9, 10)

In further discussion surrounding this point, the same participant spoke more about her opinion that the ethno-specific agency in her community could have a huge impact in tempering this isolation, and in encouraging new immigrants to Canada to access services:

“Yes, definitely very helpful. Even if they just went to pick them up and give them accommodation for a few days and then help them look for a house. If we have no services for them then it’s really hard. Individuals here try really hard to provide, but if you don’t know anybody then it’s a problem” (D: 8)

However, as with several of the other participants, she expressed her frustration that many existing ethno-specific community groups, although providing an important social connection and release from isolation, restricted their activities to cultural celebrations. Instead she suggested that they should also pay increased attention to addressing other more pressing community needs such as employment and adequate housing (etc.). In her case, she attributed this pattern largely to the lack of existing capacity for planning and organization:

“Yes most of them are retired officers from the army and they don’t know anything actually. They know English but they don’t know how to form programs. So they don’t have any idea about how to do programs for the new immigrants. And there are not many people from my country here” (D: 5, 6)

When asked to reflect on how they felt in accessing programs offered by the mainstream organization, participants had mixed reactions. Most of the interviewees expressed that their overall experience had been positive, but were also quick to highlight some significant concerns. One of the concerns that emerged most often in the interviews was the perceived lack of flexibility within the organization, both in terms of internal interpersonal relations and policy/program development:

“I felt there a sweetness and weakness. And maybe they try to, but maybe then I don’t know what they want. I couldn’t understand really. Because really weakness I believe they are trying but something is prevented. What is it? I don’t know. But something is preventing. Because this is the...how I can say...because there is the family but the job is so serious. I prefer the family feeling. I like this, and I prefer to feel comfortable. But I don’t know something is uncomfortable [...] I’ve heard some stories and I feel really bad because I hear that because management doesn’t like the other part they don’t talk with each other. I feel sorry. Why do they work with people? Because they don’t like her – why?! I feel oh my god it’s not good. Especially I heard the director never change - is not good. It is static. It can prevent. It can be changed, and open the other’s opinion or position. Because everything is changing in the world. (A: 6)

A number of other comments addressed the perception that the mainstream organization was focusing too little on the everyday logistics of building a new life in Canada, particularly in terms of aggressively advocating for and locating employment opportunities for their clients:

“But I feel that o.k. how I can I give this woman of my own energy for help, but we can’t neglect the real reason that they are coming here - is because they want a job to protect them. I came for another reason, I didn’t come for a job I came for a family, but the main reason for immigration is to start working because they need the money. They need to develop themselves, and we don’t do enough. And probably their expectations are that if they do a lot of things that it might work. And funding, the staff doesn’t seem to always give all their attention” (B: 6)

“Well, actually my thinking is that they should focus on finding jobs. The coordinator for my program is different; if she sees a job she calls me but at other places they don’t do this not in the reality. It’s just all workshops. You need to ask every person. And lots of people don’t access the computer in their home and they miss all of this information that other people just post and don’t tell you about. They are just doing their work and when

the program is finished then everything is finished. So people are tired and they say 'oh well they is doing nothing actually'. You know what they say the public? I think the other is actually doing better. They are trying to cover all sorts of different people. They try and sometimes they run different types of programs that are a really good opportunities" (D: 9)

In general, participant's stories about the programming offered through the mainstream organization began quite positively, particularly in regard to the breadth of opportunities offered. However, in continuing to describe their experiences of accessing programs the interviewees described increasing levels of frustration with the inflexibility of movement and 'progress' both between and within programs. A number of participants felt that their existing employable and personal skills were not being properly considered or appreciated, and that they were being given limited opportunities within the organization to develop a breadth of new abilities. One interviewee told a story about her differing experiences at the organization examined here, and another smaller organization:

"Actually well with the organization I helped with the evaluation forms and after I talked with them that I wanted to do a bit more and they gave me some work evaluating services. And then she also took me whenever she went for a meeting or something like that, and I also well...I just help out to send the mail, or send the fax or something like that. But some people were working as a receptionist and some other positions. Like once when I phone to do an evaluation and I asked her the questions and I filled out the forms then I asked 'if you want to continue or not' and she 'no I don't want to stay because my background is not receptionist and so it's not related'. And for a lot of people I think it is like that. They don't have lots of opportunities to practice work other than as a receptionist. I also go to another centre. It was really good one actually. I went to 7 or 8 workshop – fundraising, and volunteer management. It was really different programs and actually I did a lot of work for them. I was volunteer and beside I also conducted research on the internet for the coordinator for different subjects and all of these things. Compared to this one I did a lot" (D: 7, 8)

Despite these critiques, however, all of the participants also highlighted the importance of the mainstream organization as a place of social connection and learning, particularly in meeting friends and in getting to know people outside of their specific community:

"In my opinion, well...there's another X-ian girl going here and she told me that actually it helped her out actually just to meet people, and just to feel like she belonged here a

little bit more. And also she was married to a Canadian and he was never in town and she was pretty lonely. So, she went there and actually she found a lot of people” (C: 4)

This sentiment was echoed by the ethno-specific agency representative who identified their partnership with the larger mainstream organization as a vital political avenue for community recognition and support, “awareness for our people, targeted services, access to political...political...opportunities, participation” (3: 2). In general, it appears that the programming offered by the mainstream organization examined here, strongly attempts, but does not fully succeed in all avenues, in meeting the specified and diverse needs of the individual women and communities accessing these programs.

After much analysis, reflection, and consideration of the interview transcripts for the immigrant women involved in this study, a few factors emerged. It is clear that issues of gender, as they shaped the experience of immigration and settlement, were very present in the lives of these women. However, in discussions surrounding their perceptions, use, and opinions of the programs and policies offered by the mainstream organization in question, none of the participants solely articulated gendered concerns as a ‘make or break’ reason(s) in choosing to access or forego certain programs. Instead, they focused upon structural and organizational reasons for their discomfort, or desire, to discontinue or change programs. These reasons centered around a perceived lack of flexibility in the structuring of programs, a lack of ability to move or advance between or among programs, a hierarchical and ‘stiff’ form of management, and a formal bureaucratic like program and organizational ‘feel’. In contrast, critiques of current ethno-specific agency programming centered on their lack of organizational capacity and weakness in long-range forecasting and planning.

As a whole, issues of gender in these discussions were both present and topical but served to exacerbate other variables of difference (e.g. language, employment, poverty, discrimination, age etc.) related to immigration and settlement rather than operating as a single, isolated variable.

Among the participants involved in this study, their gendered experience of being immigrant women in Canada both played a role in, and affected their understanding and usage of existing social/economic mainstream support services. However, their experiences of being Canadian immigrant women were not solely shaped by gender, but instead in combination with other issues of difference such as ethnicity, visible minority status, class experience, educational background (Dossa, 2006: 8). For example, as previously stated, the construction of most immigration and settlement support programs within mainstream organizations ignores the role and influence of the family and other collective units such as intra-community support networks, in an individual's life. Instead, the individual is highlighted as the actor and source of change (Iglehart and Becerra, 1996: 7).

This focus has the potential to affect the access rates of both immigrant women and men by ignoring the realities of a significant aspect of their lives and/or cultural understandings. In practice, however, it disproportionately affects women. For example, this can occur because the planning and construction of many programs do not take into account the roles and expectations surrounding child, senior, family (etc.) care that many immigrant women manage on a daily basis²⁸. As a result, factors such as not including childcare or flexible program times as part of the overall program/policy package can hugely affect access and usage rates of a program for immigrant women.

Incorporating gender as a variable of consideration into process-oriented approaches to policy and program planning for immigrant women in Canada appears, as a result of this research, to be an important element of consideration for the improved responsiveness and appropriateness of services directed towards this population(s). However, it is not a 'magic bullet' that will address and solve all understanding and access concerns within this(ese) community(ies). This is consistent with discussions present in the literature on gender planning

²⁸ Along with all women!

as articulated by writers such as Moser (1993: 176), Kirson (1995: 14, 15), and Angeles (2000: 58) who highlight the need to incorporate a gendered lens of analysis into planning processes within a negotiated and nuanced approach that emphasizes diversity between and among women as well as their fundamental ability to act on their own behalf. Within this view, gender is but one more layer of complexity that needs to be considered and incorporated into the planning processes *as well as* products (goals) of services for immigrant women if the relevance, usefulness, and accessibility of these programs and policies are to be improved both ‘for’ and with them as active participants.

Chapter 4:

'I feel we can do better!' Immigrant Services Social Planning Futures

"But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependant on un-historic acts."

(Elliot, 1985: 766)

The stories of immigration and service access told by the participants in this research raise implications and questions for social planning within immigrant services. Gender considerations play a significant part in the personal experience and understanding of immigration, as well in the process of seeking support. How can immigrant services respond to the critiques, comments, and challenges raised in these interviews? How can existing immigrant mainstream and ethno-specific support structures be altered, both in process and product, to become more responsive and appropriate in providing assistance for immigrant women in Canada? What, how, and where should we go from here?

In keeping with the respectful and co-creational spirit intended with this research, a range of suggestions for improvement and positive change were developed by the participants, for both the mainstream organization and the ethno-specific agency involved in this study. These will be discussed here in reference to themes present in the literature.

One of the most interesting ideas currently discussed in the literature of how to provide more responsive social services for immigrant women and other minority groups builds upon Cameron and Grant-Smith's (2005: 22) premise that *both* ethno-specific dynamics, and a minority group's ability to access wider structures of opportunity and power need to be recognized when planning socially inclusive programming and policies. They suggest that a holistic approach of this nature could be accomplished through the provision of partnered service structures between mainstream and group-specific (here ethno-specific) agencies and programs.

This suggestion is based upon their observation that many programs and policies for minority groups address only one of these two considerations, thereby failing to foster any cohesive or ongoing sense of inclusion (Ibid.). Cameron and Grant-Smith (2005: 26) particularly highlight how 'group only' programs and dialogues:

Potentially promotes narrow self-interest and encourages groups to focus on their own perspectives, needs, and issues to the exclusion of others. In essence it robs participants of the opportunity to hear about and learn from other positions, and to rethink and modify their own position in light of this new knowledge.

While not discounting the importance of access to 'group-only' space, Cameron and Grant-Smith (Ibid.) suggest that these need to be linked with facilitated and/or sensitively planned 'cross-group' opportunities for participation and dialogue in order to develop bonded connection, cohesion, and inclusive behavior. More simply, this means providing opportunities for individuals and communities to encourage and promote their own voice in targeted 'space', while at the same time providing access to wider political and social structures. Although highlighting the importance of planning these opportunities carefully in consideration of existing power dynamics and other variables of potential cultural conflict and/or misunderstanding, both authors maintain that it is only when different groups mix and mingle with each other often, both casually and relationally, that inclusion develops as a daily social practice. These thoughts are echoed by Sandercock:

At the core of multiculturalism as a daily political practice are two rights: the right to difference and the right to the city. The right to difference means recognizing the legitimacy and specific needs of minority or subaltern cultures. The right to the city is the right to presence, to occupy public space, and to participate as an equal in public affairs. (2004: 103)

In the context of immigrant services planning, the concept of building service provision partnerships is both an exciting vision and a practical possibility, though with some important considerations. Some existing partnerships in the sector already exist, including one between the case-study members of this research. One of the mainstream organization interviewees

particularly remarked on how these service provision agreements are positive, workable, and desirable structures that should be maintained and expanded:

Respondent 2: “What is the culture? What are their beliefs? And they take community members to talk – and how they meet their needs. We have seen some very positive impact with the community” (2:8)

Me: “Do you see the opportunity to start other partnerships with other communities?”

Respondent 2: “Actually now we are going to move to helping another community. They have been experiencing some concerns...”

Me – “So, there is potential?”

Respondent 2: “Yes, along the same model!” (2:9)

With this type of partnership, mainstream organizations can more easily access ‘hard to serve’ communities, and increase the scope, sensitivity, and responsiveness of their programming. As well, ethno-specific agencies can benefit from the greater administrative capacity of larger organizations while ‘piggybacking’ on their existing funding capacity. For example, the application of shared funding proposals can potentially provide ethno-specific agencies with the necessary credibility and experience they need in order to obtain funds independently.

More generally, however, actually building partnerships of this nature must be carefully considered within a nuanced and particularistic approach. A major concern is the potential conflict of interest for partners with unequal power dynamics. For example, many, though not all, ethno-cultural agencies are more actively involved than their mainstream counterparts in advocacy activities, which could be compromised by formal association with organizations and funding structures that either implicitly or explicitly discourage such an approach. Another concern raised by the ethno-specific agency representative involved in this study is the potentiality of mainstream organizations to ‘fight over’ ethno-specific agencies as nodes of entry into specific communities, “Also fighting between the different agencies. Fighting over the

community. Always wanting to create new programs” (3:2). There is also the more general concern that the process of ‘choosing’ a partner privileges the particular views and position of that agency or organization over others potentially present in the community thus strengthening status quo power arrangements.

To help counteract and avoid these potential problems, service provision partnerships need to be entered into within a frank and considered environment, which pay explicit attention to the power dynamics present in linking a larger organization(s) with a smaller agency(ies). One possible way to provide a balanced partnership structure is to maintain separate office space and personnel hiring processes. This allows all partners to maintain the original function and niche of the organization while also allowing them to benefit from the strengths of their partners. Another suggestion is to create a partnership liaison position to negotiate this delicate relationship and to draft an agreement document. If jointly funded by the partner members this position, even on a part-time or contract basis, could coordinate and manage the intricacies of aligning and maintaining connectedness between different sets of programming. Regardless, all partnerships of this nature are exceedingly complex and require careful negotiations and consideration between the relevant players on a case-by-case basis. Writers such as Burford (2005: 86) also highlight that:

The work of partnerships, like democracy, is ongoing and requires vigilance, reflection, and even probing into differences of opinion to continue and build understandings that incorporate different experiences of power.

Partnerships are not formed simply by constructing a co-service document agreement, but instead are the result of on-going hard work, attention and support.

Interestingly, none of the participating immigrant women mentioned the case-study organization’s partnership with the ethno-specific agency in either a positive or a negative way. Instead all of the suggestions for change that developed in these particular interviews

concentrated on improving the accessibility of existing services for immigrant women while maintaining their separate status, though with some potential for increased and improved referral systems between different ‘types’ of services.

Although it is difficult to provide a framework or typology for these types of partnerships given the necessarily case-specific negotiations, the suggestions emergent in both the literature and the interviews conducted for this research can be summarized as follows under the general guiding principles of power sharing and democratic co-decision making:

Table 2: Mainstream and Ethno-Specific Service Partnerships

1)	Draft a co-service partnership agreement that explicitly outlines shared power rights and responsibilities as well as an agreement of how co-decisions are to be made.
2)	Jointly fund a partnership liaison position to negotiate the writing and agreement of this document as well as initial implementation.
3)	Articulate a co-service delivery and referral structure for information, clients, services and programs.
4)	Submit co-authored funding applications.
5)	Maintain separate office location and staff hiring procedures to avoid co-optation and external control.
6)	Institute regular ‘partnership meetings’ so that the relationship can be further monitored, discussed, and developed as necessary and appropriate.

‘The Family Feeling’: Suggestions for Mainstream Organizations

The majority of the suggestions that were developed in the interviews to improve the accessibility and responsiveness of mainstream programming for immigrant women focused on increasing the flexibility of programs, policies and the *processes* used to develop them. One participant experienced a cold and overly formalized atmosphere at the mainstream organization’s offices, despite the dedicated attentions of individual staff:

“Because really weakness I believe they are trying but something is prevented. What is it? I don’t know. But something is preventing. Because this is the...how I can say...because there is the family but the job is so serious. I prefer the family feeling. I like this, and I prefer to feel comfortable. But I don’t know something is uncomfortable” (A: 6)

Two participants also felt that existing communication and interaction procedures within the organization were too structured which caused friction between staff and disrupted the flow and accessibility of programming:

“I’ve heard some stories and I feel really bad because I hear that because management doesn’t like the other part they don’t talk with each other. I feel sorry. Why do they work with people? Because they don’t like her –why?! I feel oh my god it’s not good” (A: 6)

“I think it’s good, because we have a head and then lots of departments and I think it’s necessary to maintain the situation. Because the entities work better in their own area, because it’s very clear what they do. So I think it’s very clear, it’s good. But the friction between each other, that’s the bad thing” (B: 7)

These interviewees suggested that in order to change this dynamic and to develop more of a ‘family feeling’ between staff and among staff and program participants, that the informal interaction and communication among staff members of different departments be facilitated through the provision of amenities such as a shared kitchen/meeting area and increased organization of social events.

Many of the immigrant women interviewees also felt strongly that their particular talents and abilities were not being recognized in the mainstream organization’s programming and referral structures. Rather than being able to move between programs as their support needs changed and developed, the participants felt ‘pigeon-holed’ into a particular area of programming, and found it difficult to get referrals and positions in other programs. As well, they felt overly categorized as ‘clients’ rather than as ‘participants’, and that their abilities to actively interact with the organization to develop a personal framework of support for themselves while accessing available programming was ignored, despite existing volunteer opportunities. One interviewee remarked, “For me I think I can work, but I prefer to work at

different parts because I want to learn different problems, how to come to a solution?" (A: 6).

The importance of increasing the participation of immigrant women 'clients' of services in all stages of the planning process including the "needs assessment, program design, goal setting, implementation, governance, and evaluation" (Burford, 2005: 84), was recognized by the mainstream organizational interviewees, though they indicated a number of difficulties:

"Immigrant women in the planning process. Ask them what they need. Because often what we think they need is not always the most important to them, and we find that all the time. We also know many of things that they must know to navigate the bureaucracy, but how they learn it, in what way they learn it, and in what order they learn it in - they need to have some say in that. Because we don't always, we think we understand and know what's best. It's like thinking you know what's best for your child. So I think that that would be one of my suggestions" (1: 14)

"One of the main constraints that we work with very limited resources. That is a major difficulty. But immigrant women are very willing to participate! They want to move from being clients to being volunteers. They want to feel like they are contributing to the community [...] Sometimes there is so much that needs to be done that it takes away from the women. But sometimes people are forced to give lip service -they cannot deliver. Sometimes we are victims of our own success" (2: 1, 6)

Increasing the participation of immigrant women in immigrant services planning means recognizing the women not only as 'clients' but also as 'partners' in creating and providing supports for themselves and their families. Altering the planning process to be more participatory requires the development of a new set of procedures within the organization to structure programs and policies that emphasize community consultation and engagement. A greater length of time for program development is also needed, as well as a staff openness and ability to work with participants, and to share some of the programming power. For this to occur, as suggested by one interviewee, more dedicated resources would have to be directed towards staff training:

"Yeah definitely, I think for sure there could be more, more training of staff. More specific training of staff. Um, there's rarely funds for training, so it has to be squeezed in and very often it's just downloaded onto someone" (1: 14)

Increasing the participation of immigrant women would also require that organizations pay more attention to advertising programs using creative, engaging, and first-language means, “yes, so we need much information in other languages – translated for sure” (2: 1).

Avenues for greater participation of immigrant women in the planning and delivery of support services need to be carefully managed, however, to avoid the further institutionalization of female (immigrant) volunteerism within the sector. Many immigrant serving organizations depend heavily on volunteer labour for their everyday functioning, relying upon the fact that women, immigrant women in particular, will be available to provide the needed labour at little or no cost (Lee, 1999b: 98, 99). While volunteering opportunities can provide much needed ‘Canadian experience’ and the opportunity to improve English-language skills they also run the risk of reinforcing a constructed social stereotype of immigrant women as ghettoized within low(no) paying positions that are largely clerical and low-level administrative in nature (Ibid.). Participation in this context, if it is to be both meaningful and useful for those involved, needs to take place within a truly open, democratic, and supportive framework that emphasizes a transfer of power with the related ability to make decisions and take action.

Another important part of increasing the accessibility of current programming for immigrant women in this context is increased consideration of the role of women *with*, rather than simply *in*, the family. While not advocating a complete disregard of an individualist focus, this means recognizing that people in general, including many immigrant women as a result of community and/or cultural dynamics, though persons with separate needs and desires, are also fundamentally members of intrinsic social networks that come with their own sets of responsibilities, conflicts and supports (Kershaw, 2005: 113). Recognizing extended family networks (including extended social networks and ‘kin of choice’) when developing programs is also essential in treating the family as a unit, rather than simply as a collection of individuals.

This remains important regardless of the 'type' of family, whether single-parent households, those not living in the same household but linked through social relationships, same-sex unions and so on (Ibid.).

A practical component of this process is the provision of childcare for all programs and for a range of age-groups²⁹, as well as part-time programs with alternative meeting or access times on evenings, weekends and in a range of locations. Although not explicitly addressed in the interviews, this type of varied program structure also recognizes additional care responsibilities such as senior care and care for other adult members in the household or extended family/social network. This was recognized by both mainstream organization interviewees:

"Well, some of the constraints that we face are definitely affected by the family dynamic. Some of the men definitely don't want their wives to go out. They don't take them. Yeah, in their own system, well in the Canadian system, they are...what is the word? They don't have the same opportunities because they are the childcare. They have the babies and they look after the babies. Lack of childcare is in all of the programs. Like in what I work in lack of childcare is a huge, huge limiting factor" (1: 9)

"And also for women with children, we provide childcare. That's very important. But also with the women who have family responsibilities they have difficulty coming [...] But we provide childcare only for women from 6 months to 5 years. So every time the school has a break we don't run programs because we don't have the resources to run school age programs. They need different kinds of programs so the thing is that many of our women, they come for a little while, they are testing the waters" (2: 2, 4)

In addition to recognizing immigrant women as members of a family and/or extended social networks, they also have to be recognized as members of a larger community whose dynamics need to be taken into consideration when planning effective programming. An example raised in one of the interviews is the existence of alternative forms of problem solving and 'justice' within various communities:

²⁹ Specifically, offer child-care services not only for infants, but also for toddlers and young school-aged children.

Respondent E: “And in our country we have a king and if there is a problem and there also 12 people with him that will decide this one. Like a court here”

Me: “o.k., do they do something like that here in the community?”

Respondent E: “Yes, yes, we do in some ways – like this now we have it. But different. Because some people have made Canadian rules. But some people there are caring, and if the problem is going to be big I go to them” (E: 6)

Intra-community support measures of this kind need to be considered in the planning of appropriate services for all Canadian immigrants, including immigrant women, if they are to be relevant and responsive for the community they are trying to serve. In this example, a program could be designed that utilizes similar forms of dialogue-based, elder-led problem-solving to support and legitimate the ‘help structures’ already in place within the community (Burford, 2005: 84).

These ideas, however, do not negate the reality of potential community and family coercion and abuse, as discussed by one participant, “And there’s definitely pressure in their own community to follow the customs from their community like in instances of marriage. Or abuse. The elders are supposed to mediate” (1: 8). It is important that a renewed focus on the family and extended social networks as important and potentially supportive not be considered in isolation from the constantly negotiated, and for women often unequal, dynamics of power which shape access to resources such as food, money (etc.) and the ability to engage in decision-making.

A strengthened emphasis of this kind within immigration services needs to be scrupulously aware that such a shift also does not unintentionally or otherwise *assume* the roles of women within their client base to be largely those of the ‘wife’, ‘mother’, and ‘carer’, thus contributing to a singular view of gender and gender roles (Angeles, 2000: 87). Instead, to work sensitively with all of these dynamics requires a willingness to be aware of, and to engage with, the many and complex existing avenues and methods of support (and control) within

communities that may influence their individual members' use and interpretation of external support services.

A number of the immigrant women interviewees suggested altering the leadership structures in the mainstream organization in order to increase its flexibility and responsiveness:

"Especially I heard the director never change - is not good. It is static. It can prevent. It can be changed, and open the other's opinion or position. Because everything is changing in the world" (A: 2)

One participant suggested that one way to address this issue would be to establish a system of joint leadership (two heads) composed of young women to lead a new movement for change. She also suggested that one head should be Canadian-born and the other an immigrant to Canada in order to balance perspectives and provide a well-rounded leadership approach:

"And we need a young head. Dynamic - probably lawyer who can really push the community [...] And the next head should be Canadian probably [...] So maybe there should be two heads. The other a young woman probably from another country because they see the problems with the young woman. Because for me the young women are the new society and we need to pay attention to them. And the young people support the old people. It's a good place this agency but could be better" (B: 7, 8)

For many of these suggested changes to be made however, existing funding structures and requirements would have to alter significantly. Much of the funding for immigrant services requires stringent procedures of documented, streamlined (efficient) development processes as well as outcome based programming and frequent, often involved, evaluation procedures (Ng, 1996: 47, 69; Lee, 1999a: 7). These requirements do not always coincide with participatory and more flexible methods of program/policy development and functioning. Mainstream organizations wishing to move in this direction, therefore, may need to enter into negotiations and advocacy activities with funders in order to change existing structures to be more flexible and open. This may be easier in theory than in practice, but change will only take place if advocacy work is begun. One mainstream organization interviewee highlighted the importance of this change by stating that the agency needs to, "get some funding with no strings attached to

meet the needs without telling us how we can use it” (2:3). A coalition between immigrant serving agencies may also be an effective and supportive way for individual organizations to more securely advocate with funders.

Overall, the discussions in the interviews about how to improve the responsiveness and accessibility of mainstream programming for immigrant women can be summarized as follows:

Table 3: **Suggestions of Change for Mainstream Organizations**

1) Flexibility

- Informalize internal communication procedures.
- Increase the participation of immigrant women, including youth, at *all* stages of the program planning and development process.
- Expand the scope of meaningful volunteering within the organization.
- Dedicate monies for staff training in topics such as cultural awareness, participatory processes, and group facilitation.

2) Advocacy

- Negotiate with funders for more ‘no-strings-attached’ resources.
- Form a coalition with similar organizations to pressure funders.

3) Family

- Recognize immigrant women as members of intrinsic social networks.
- Increase availability of childcare for all programs.
- Offer part time programming.
- Provide multiple location and time options for programming.

4) Community

- Consider existing community support and decision making structures when planning programs and policies.
- Work *with* rather than against existing community supports in terms of program design and development.

In implementing these suggestions, however, greater organizational and staff 'know-how', as well as a willingness to engage with participatory processes is required. In addition, as with any extended process, the amount of staff resources, in terms of both attention and time required, would increase. If not properly managed this could unnecessarily increase the administrative duties of staff members already overburdened, "And the other part that I feel is really hard is the paperwork. Sometimes there is so much that needs to be done that it takes away from the women" (2:5). Combined with the danger of pulled funding, the increased time and staff resources implicated requires that the organization and staff in question be particularly dedicated in implementing these changes.

**'Changes could be made':
Suggestions for Ethno-Specific Agencies**

Although discussed less extensively within the interviews, participants also developed some suggestions of how to improve the effectiveness of ethno-specific agency programming for immigrant women. Fundamentally highlighting the importance of having access to culturally-specific and relevant programming, most of the ideas focused on expanding the role(s) of the agency as well as its breadth of programming. One immigrant woman interviewee elaborated on the role of the ethno-specific agency in her community, and bemoaned its preoccupation with cultural celebrations and other festive events:

"Oh they are doing nothing actually. They just registered themselves and they celebrate once a year our national festival. That's why I say 'why don't we do some housing for the new immigrants since when they first arrive here they don't know anything'. If we do this it's really helpful for them." (D: 5)

As her comment suggests, ethno-specific agencies have an important potential role to play in providing vital settlement support services for new immigrants to Canada. It also highlights the

potential that these small, culturally embedded agencies have in mobilizing and politically engaging community members in order to push for greater representation and access on a larger social scale. This is particularly so for many immigrant women, especially those living in more traditional communities, "So the woman there is really isolated in society" (B: 7). As a result of community expectations, care responsibilities, and discriminatory tendencies (etc.) in the wider society, many immigrant women experience isolation and act within their community networks in order to develop supportive networks and knowledge of the wider society (Graham and Thurston, 2003: 22). With greater access to stable sources of funding, ethno-specific agencies could strengthen their role as forces of change and support within minority communities.

However, as highlighted by one participant, in order to increase the funding application success of many ethno-specific agencies, their administrative and organizational procedures need to be made more systematic and transparent, though without losing overall programming flexibility and adaptively:

"I see that they need a lot of administrative support. They still are at the stage where they need close monitoring. So probably that's what they need, and to have more contact and supervision" (2: 9)

The problem lies in determining how to actually accomplish this with limited funds. This is one area in which partnerships with larger mainstream organizations may be of real benefit to ethno-specific agencies. Another low-cost, though time-consuming suggestion is to encourage staff to volunteer in administrative roles within other, more established organizations, in order to develop funding proposal application and administrative skills.

A number of participants also highlighted how important it is that ethno-specific organizations do not become insulated entirely within their own community, but that they instead continue to seek relationships and exposure with other groups and in the wider society:

"I would do a festival to help open the country for other people...cultural activities. To bring people together" (3: 2)

“They try and sometimes they run different types of programs that are a really good opportunities to share your ethnic identities with other communities” (D: 9)

Ethno-specific agencies have a vital role in community support and development, however, it is necessary that communities and their members are not arbitrarily isolated because of the internal structure of their help services. The very embeddedness of many ethno-specific services equips them with a unique potential to design programs which community members will actually attend, programs that encourage the mixing of different ethno-cultural groups. While still acting as a culturally relevant support, ethno-specific agencies could facilitate the mixing and mingling of different ethno-cultural groups through their programming as well as increasing the wider society's awareness of both their community's needs and strengths.

Simply because they are embedded in the community, however, it cannot be assumed that ethno-specific agencies will automatically offer uniformly representative and appropriate services for the whole population with which they are associated. Often community services can both reflect and reproduce power, gender, age (etc.) differentials already present within the community. For example, the ethno-specific agency examined in this research is headed by a man, although the agency almost exclusively provides programming for women in the associated community. When providing services for women within a community that has low average levels of female education and English-language ability compared to its male members, this dynamic appeared to create³⁰ an often uneasy and tenuously negotiated power arrangement that also reconstructed male-based decision-making mechanisms generally present within the community.

It is doubly important therefore, that ethno-specific agencies combat internal inequalities by maintaining open and reflective linkages with other ethno-specific agencies as well as larger mainstream organizations in order to avoid blindly reproducing and reinforcing associated community arrangements which are potentially unequal and discriminatory. Dynamics of power

³⁰ As experienced and understood by myself in the conducting and interpretation of this research.

and organization within an agency should also be monitored for transparency and equality if they are to have a significant impact in providing broad-based support services for the community.

One way in which this could be done to more fully address the gendered concerns of women is to establish a set of guidelines which clearly articulates meaningful opportunities for a range (age, marital status, income, education etc.) of community women to participate in the development of agency policies and programs. To summarize, the changes suggested by the interviewees of how to improve the effectiveness of ethno-specific agency programming for immigrant women can be outlined as follows:

Table 4: Suggestions of Change for Ethno-Specific Agencies

1) Expand
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increase operations beyond community cultural and social activities.- Continue to participate in politically active engagement and advocacy activities, while paying particular attention to the status of women in these struggles.- Assertively pursue all possible funding opportunities.
2) Develop
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increase the administrative capacity of staff members through volunteer based and other 'hands-on' learning approaches.- Negotiate partnerships with mainstream immigrant serving organizations.- Develop internal policies and processes for program/policy planning.- Establish clear guidelines and review procedures for incorporating and maintaining the meaningful participation of women in these processes.
3) Network
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pursue opportunities to build relationships with other immigrant serving organizations and agencies.- Develop activities to educate other groups about both the community's needs and strengths.

Given the current reality of ethno-specific agency staff and resource bases, however, implementing these suggestions would require the extensive use of community volunteer labour, which has the potential of contributing to group volunteer burn-out as well as to staff overwork. Also, many of these suggestions, if not pursued with an explicit awareness, might expose the agency to co-optation and external control. Despite these concerns, however, ethno-specific agencies have great potential to play expanded roles in community organization, support, and advocacy by increasing their administrative and funding capacity as well as offering a broader and better monitored choice of programming.

**‘You can come up with a better plan’:
The Reality of Organizational Change**

All of these suggestions of change, for both the mainstream organization and the ethno-specific agency in question, require an extraordinary amount of staff awareness, dedication, and willingness to self-educate, as well as access to supportive hard (funding, equipment etc.) and soft (volunteers, training etc.) resources. Particularly for mainstream service providers these changes suggest nothing less than a complete overhaul of organizational procedure and culture, from an efficiency-based model to a more participatory-based one. Given the expense, effort, and dedication needed, is this sort of radical change really worthwhile? Is it feasible given the trend of political climates within the last 20 years? Is ‘western’ bureaucratic culture too engrained?

In all of the interviews conducted for this research, the participants proposed their thoughts and suggestions for positive change with great optimism that providing more responsive and effective programs for immigrant women was worth organizational upheaval and restructuring. These innovative and practical proposals point to the need to completely revamp

many existing systems of organizational procedure, especially within mainstream organizations, in order to increase the usefulness of programming for immigrant women.

As suggested by Bisset (2004: 318), Ng (1996: 71, 79), and Burford (2005: 84), implementing these types of process-oriented and perspective changes is extremely difficult given the often invisible nature of organizational culture in a whole range of everyday activities and assumptions. This breadth and level of organizational change is best implemented by a staff person or team dedicated to planning and executing 'change procedures' in a considered and coordinated way, which may be difficult or impossible for some organizations given the realities of funding and staff demands (Burford, 2005: 84). All of these writers, however, also highlight the fundamental possibility of significant organizational change (Bisset, 2004: 322; Ng, 1996: 98; Burford, 2005: 86). Bisset (Ibid.) in particular discusses how even changing simple processes of procedure, especially internal communication methods, can snowball to radically alter organizational cycles of problem-solving, planning, and program development. More responsive programs and policies for immigrant women can be developed using participatory, flexible, and relational methods for both planning and implementation.

Conclusion

'I sat back exhausted but excited. I had finally finished sifting through the comments and suggestions that the research participants had made on the transcripts of their interviews and then sent back to me. I finally saw it! Through the amalgamation of words and stories, themes and trends were starting to emerge. The comments had finally made me see 'it' – the results of the research. It had been awhile in coming. I'd felt bogged down, in a fog, and as though I was missing what was right in front of me. And it wasn't what I had expected. Not really. Gender – what I thought was the 'answer' was involved, but not on its own. The reality was much more complex than that. I reflected on what a journey this research had been. From struggling to articulate my ideas, to working with the women involved, and to sorting out – with the participants' help – the underlying themes of the research. How had I changed? I'd practiced patience, perseverance, and trust. And in some ways working on this project made me feel more at home in Canada. Discussing my immigration experience with others as well as listening to their own stories forced me to put myself and my understandings in the contexts of privilege and exclusion, and helped me to shape myself as a 'Canadian', not just because of my family, but because of myself'.

This short story of my journey in conducting this research highlights the process-oriented nature of the experience. The ultimate results, as reflected in the participants' words and stories, and interpreted by myself through reflection and emergent analysis, differ from what I expected at the beginning of the project. Although I worked to bracket my pre-judgments and frankly consider these expectations beforehand, when entering the research process I nonetheless felt and believed that variables of gender would prove to be both important and isolatable.

Gender considerations, as emergent in this research, directly affect and shape both the immigration process and the social service access experiences of Canadian immigrant women and their families. They exacerbate additional variables of difference such as class, education, family background (etc.) creating experiences of 'double' or even 'triple disadvantage'. With this realization, I now have a much more complex understanding of difference and of how variables of difference can interact and superimpose themselves on each other to form a unique nexus of experience. Blindness to these effects can affect access and usage rates as well as the helpfulness and responsiveness of the programs offered. Consequently, gendered factors are both

important and relevant to consider when planning and implementing immigration support services, especially when planning for and with immigrant women.

As stated in Chapter 3, however, incorporating gendered considerations are not a 'magic bullet' for improving immigrant services, but rather an important and complex variable that needs to be considered in planning responsive and helpful policies and programs for immigrant women in Canada, both within mainstream organizations and ethno-specific agencies. The gendered immigration and settlement process of Canadian immigrant women should be more explicitly acknowledged and 'planned for' by immigrant services. As discussed both within the literature and in the interviews conducted for this study, a 'gender-neutral' perspective is taken when planning many programs for immigrant women as a result of a primarily product-based rather than process-based program and policy planning approach present within the immigrant services sector. Indeed, as reflected in the stories told by the participants in this research, the ripple effects of gender in the use and understanding of available services by immigrant women, particularly in terms of process, are largely discounted within social planning.

Although it is difficult to establish explicit causal links in this kind of case-study and in-depth research, failing to specifically address these effects has compromised many of the participating immigrant women's access of existing mainstream services. Again, however, gender was not as an isolated variable but manifested itself in interaction with and by compounding other experiences of difference. This is important to consider, as immigrant services are often one of the first introductions immigrants to this country have of Canada, which as a result could be an important, immediate and direct avenue for fostering social inclusion. Inclusion is an important societal goal not only as a fundamental aspect of basic human rights³¹

³¹ In the Marshallian understanding that all individuals have a right to participate at a comparable standard in the society that they live (Marshall, 1964: 72).

but also because it encourages a more cohesive and productive society where all people's talents and skills are utilized and respected (Assanand, 2006: public presentation).

I have come to believe, as a result of working with this research, that social inclusion requires that minority communities have access to targeted, culturally relevant programming and space as well as clear and articulated access to more mainstream programming opportunities and structures of power. This is echoed by Sandercock:

A multicultural perspective for the 21st century cities [...] embraces the desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural exchange [...] cultural identity as the basis for a sense of belonging in multicultural societies; and social recognition as well as a just share of economic and political power for all cultures as a necessary basis for a stable, vibrant, and dynamic multicultural democracy. (2004: 87)

As a main objective of this research, the interviews elucidated a number of suggestions for mainstream organizations to use in addressing these concerns and planning more responsive programming for immigrant women. These suggestions can be grouped into four categories:

Table 5: Summary of Suggestions for Mainstream Organizations

1) Flexibility

- Increase the flexibility of intra-organizational program and policy planning to meaningfully include immigrant women in all stages of the planning process.

2) Advocacy

- Advocate with funders for more 'no strings attached' monies that can be used to foster inclusive and participatory planning processes.

3) Family

- Plan policies and programs that respect and properly consider the role(s) of immigrant women as members of intrinsic and supportive social networks, with both related rights and responsibilities.

4) Community

- Design policies and programs to work with rather than against existing community support networks, possibly through structured partnerships.

Although discussed less extensively in the interviews, participants also presented a range of suggestions for the ethno-specific agency to use in increasing the relevance and effectiveness of the services that they provide. These can be grouped into three categories:

Table 6: Summary of Suggestions for Ethno-Specific Agencies

<p>1) Expand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increase current programming into expanded community development and settlement support opportunities. <p>2) Develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Enhance the administrative capacity of the agency by mandating educational or voluntary experience training for staff, and by developing a more articulated process of internal program and policy development. <p>3) Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pursue cross-cultural, and ‘cross-group’ activities and programs including structured partnerships.
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The majority of these points suggest that extensive organizational restructuring and change is necessary, particularly for mainstream organizations, in order to provide more relevant programming for immigrant women. Changing ‘work culture’ is discussed by writers such as Bisset (2004: 318), Ng (1996: 71, 79), and Burford (2005: 84) as being both difficult and complex, though fundamentally and realistically possible. A dedicated staff and/or volunteer base is vital to this process though also potentially problematic as it may contribute to burn-out and a high turnover rate. However, the overall attitude displayed by all of the interviewees involved in this research was one of both hope and optimism that initiating organizational change, particularly in the process of internal program and policy development, would build more relevant services for Canadian immigrant women, and that this was an important and worthwhile social goal.

This research has attempted to articulate the importance of considering a range of variables of difference, including gender, in planning and implementing social and economic support services for minority individuals and groups, here particularly for immigrant women. It is also important that these variables be considered within the *process* of social planning, as well as in the formulation of goals, outcomes and in implementation of the project or policy. In the interviews conducted for this research, increasing the meaningful participation of the 'clients' was suggested as an immediate and practical step immigrant serving agencies and organizations could take to incorporate difference into both the process and implementation of policies and programs. As Canada becomes increasingly poly-ethnic, it is our responsibility to develop inclusive and responsive social programming that acknowledges and responds to difference and to the diverse needs of those individuals and families accessing immigrant services.

Appendix I

Interview Script for Individual 'Immigrant Women' Interviewees

- All of the questions may not be used due to time constraints.
- The below questions should be seen as interview 'guides' rather than directives
- Interviewees will also be contacted at a later date to confirm the accuracy of the data collected as well as any interpretations made by the co-investigator.

Subject Area 1)

- a) Tell me about what your life was like before you moved to Canada.
- b) What was your life like as a woman in your home country?

Subject Area 2)

- a) Tell me about what it was like to move to Canada.
- b) How was the decision made to move?

Subject Area 3)

- a) Tell me about what your life is like after your move to Canada.
- b) How is your life now different from your life before?
- c) What is your life like here as a woman in Canada?

Subject Area 4)

- a) Tell me about a time that you accessed social/economic support service(s) for immigrant women? What 'kind' of service was it?
- b) What types of reasons made you choose the service(s) that you did? How did you decide to choose this service?
- c) What was your overall experience in using this service(s)? What did you think about using it?
- d) Have you accessed other types of services? If so, please tell me about times you have used them. What made you decide to use these services? What did you think about using them?
- e) If no, what are some of your reasons for not using other services? How did you decide not to use other services?

Appendix II

Interview Script for Immigrant 'Service Agency Representatives' Interviewees

- The below questions should be seen as 'guides' rather than directives
- All of the questions may not be used due to time constraints.
- Interviewees will also be contacted at a later date to confirm the accuracy of the data collected as well as any interpretations made by the co-investigator.

Subject Area 1)

- a) Tell me about what it is like developing programs for the female immigrant population in Canada?
- b) What are some of the opportunities/constraints that you face in providing programs/services to the female immigrant population in Canada?

Subject Area 2)

- a) Please describe the process of how programming for immigrants, particularly women, is developed?
- b) In current practice, are different cultural or societal understandings of what it means to be a woman, included as variables in the program planning process?

Subject Area 3)

- a) Do you feel there is any need for an expanded dialogue in this regard?
If yes, Why? / If no, Why?
- b) If yes, do you have any suggestions for how this might be accomplished?

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