

Volume 27 Issue 2 (Special Issue)

**cjsae**

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

**rcééa**

Women, Gender, and Immigrant Studies in Canadian  
Adult Education: An Ethnographic Content Analysis

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*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/  
La Revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*  
Editor-in-Chief: Donovan Plumb  
[www.cjsae-rceea.ca](http://www.cjsae-rceea.ca)

27,2 March/mars 2015, 46–63  
ISSN 1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes  
[www.casae-aceea.ca](http://www.casae-aceea.ca)

# WOMEN, GENDER, AND IMMIGRANT STUDIES IN CANADIAN ADULT EDUCATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

*Since the 1970s, immigrant studies have taken a feminist turn. This paper takes stock of how Canadian adult educators have contributed to this field and vice versa. Through an ethnographic content analysis of CASAE proceedings since 2000 and other related scholarly publications, the paper shows that adult education research has paid increasing attention to immigrant women's experiences in Canada. Feminist influence of the literature mainly comes from Marxist, anti-racist, Black, and post-colonial feminist theories. Meanwhile, adult learning theories, particularly transformative learning, informal learning, and socio-cultural learning, and the adult education orientations for empowerment and social action have also expanded the scholarship of gender, women, and immigrant studies. Yet much of the literature, limited by methodological nationalism, remains descriptive of women's experiences "here and now." There is also a need for research to move beyond including women in studies to address how gender, as a social relation, implicates both men and women, both individuals and institutions.*

## Résumé

*Depuis les années 1970, les études des immigrants sont influencées par la pensée féministe. Cet article fait le point de la manière dont les éducateurs canadiens d'adultes contribuent à ce domaine et vice versa. À la lumière d'une analyse ethnographique du contenu des actes de conférence de l'ACÉÉA depuis 2000 et des autres publications savantes qui y sont liées, cet article montre que les recherches sur l'éducation des adultes porte une attention croissante aux expériences des immigrantes au Canada. L'influence féministe des recherches provient principalement des théories féministes marxiste, antiraciste, Noire et postcoloniale. Parallèlement, les théories de l'apprentissage des adultes, en particulier celles de l'apprentissage transformateur, de l'apprentissage informel et de l'apprentissage socioculturel ainsi que les orientations de l'éducation des adultes visant la responsabilisation et l'action sociale élargissent également les perspectives des études des immigrants, des femmes et de genre. Cependant, une grande partie de la documentation, limitée par le nationalisme*

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*

*méthodologique, se contente d'une description des expériences des femmes d'«ici et maintenant.» Il faut également aller au-delà de l'inclusion des femmes dans les études pour traiter de la manière dont le genre, en tant qu'une relation sociale, implique à la fois les hommes et les femmes, les individus et les institutions.*

### Feminist Turn in Immigrant Studies

Until the 1970s, women were largely absent in immigrant studies. When they received attention, they were often portrayed as secondary immigrants, trailing behind their male spouses. In the last 40 years or so, feminist scholars have endeavoured to integrate women and gender analysis into immigrant research, partly due to the "feminization of migration," or the increasing number of women moving independently for job-related reasons (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2007). In 1984, a special issue on "Women in Migration" was published in the journal *International Migration Review*. In this issue, Morokvasic (1984), among others, problematized the image of women as passive dependent immigrants. Through a critical review of the literature, she emphasized that women have always been active contributors to the economic domain of life, although their work may not be recognized and often goes poorly paid or unpaid. She also pointed out the irony that women's emigration was typically framed as an individual or familial choice, while sexist oppression and exploitation around the world have always been systematic and yet left unaddressed by researchers. Further, Morokvasic showed that immigration, understood at that time predominantly as a unidirectional movement from an oppressive to a less oppressive country, and women's subsequent participation in the labour market may change the sex roles women play at home and in workplaces, although such changes may not be uniform across social groups.

Twenty-two years after Morokvasic's special issue, Donato, Gabaccia, Holdaway, Manalansan, and Pessar (2006) edited an issue on "Gender and Migration" for the same journal. If "Women and Migration" could be considered a hallmark for what I call the first feminist wave in migrant studies, "Gender and Migration" bespeaks the second. First-wave studies focus on describing immigrant women's experiences in contrast to men's, particularly the changing roles that women play as a result of immigration. Gender, in these studies, is very much about the bipolar relationship between men and women. The second-wave studies, while still emphasizing differences between men and women, perceive gender as a fluid, contextual, and performative construct. In terms of research focus, second-wave studies are more interested in immigrants' performance of (gendered) identities, which may differ from place to place, as well as the (re)production of gendered ideologies and practices through policies. With regard to research approaches, these studies demonstrate a strong trend of interdisciplinarity: researchers have started incorporating theories and methods across disciplines such as anthropology, geography, history, sociology, and political science.

Also of note, some second-wave studies have gone beyond the "now and here" approach and taken up a transnational focus. The term "transnationalism" was initially coined to suggest that immigrants "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p. 6). It has since also been used to reference the rise of transnational social fields, interlocking networks of social relationships that are constituted by, and constitutive of, migrants' simultaneous

embedment in more than one society (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). With the lens of transnationalism, researchers have identified that women play a significant role in the maintenance of their families (Parrado & Flippen, 2005) and contribute to the interlocking spheres of productive, kin, and caring work (Kofman, 2004; Ong, 1999). Transnational movement is on the one hand characterized as offering women an escape from poverty and powerlessness in their home countries (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), and on the other hand associated with deskilling, feminization, re-domestication, and compromised careers in host countries (Meares, 2010). In this context, Mahler and Pessar (2001) proposed that it is important to understand “gendered geographies of power” through linking migrants’ experiences to different domains of life that are not necessarily bounded by national borders. The sensitivity to transnational links necessarily challenges methodological nationalism—the “now and here” approaches in immigrant studies—where the nation and state are considered natural social and political formations and thus the proper bounds of research and analysis (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

In the wake of these two feminist waves in immigrant studies, it is an appropriate moment to take stock of how adult educators have contributed to this field and vice versa. This paper takes up this task through an ethnographic content analysis of the related literature in Canada. Below, I first introduce the gendered and racialized history of immigration in Canada. I then introduce the framework and methods used to review the literature. Research findings that follow are organized by the major areas of research that emerge from the literature. I end the paper with a recap of major trends observed in the literature and a discussion of future research directions.

### **Women and Immigration to Canada**

Historically, immigration in Canada has been inextricably linked to the building of a White nation. In this nation-building project, women were deemed crucial for keeping the White race pure and distinct (Razack, 2002). In the early years of Canadian immigration history, an assisted female immigration program was used to choose women by virtue of their suitability to become morally sound wives for prairie settlers. This program was discontinued when then prime minister of Canada Sir John A. Macdonald tried to discourage the immigration of those deemed undesirable, including women who were considered to be “loose” (Knowles, 1997, p. 79). Other undesirable immigrants, such as “the Orientals,” were excluded because it was feared they “would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population” (King, 1947, in Triadafilopoulos, 2012, p. 15). In the history of Canada, gender control has been crucial in its efforts to limit the number of racialized bodies. For example, when Canada barred the Chinese from immigrating with the imposition of the head tax in 1885, it also prohibited entry of the wives and children of men who were already in Canada. As a result, according to the 1911 Canadian census, the ratio of Chinese men to Chinese women was 2,790 to 100, and it took more than half a century for the gender ratio of the Chinese to approach equilibrium (Li, 1998).

In the 1960s, as the immigration level declined from preferred-race source countries, Canada revoked previous regulations giving special status to White immigrants (Green & Green, 1999). In 1967, the introduction of the point system<sup>1</sup> officially marked the

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1 In Canada, the point system is used to evaluate people’s eligibility to immigrate to the country as skilled workers. The system grants potential immigrants numerical points based on factors such as their work experience, educational background, and language proficiency level, and they need to meet the minimal requirement, which has changed over the years, to immigrate to Canada.

end of Canada's overt discriminatory immigration practices based on racial and ethnic preferences (Satzewich, 1998); through the point system, Canada has been targeting immigrants with desirable educational and occupational backgrounds regardless of their countries of origin. As a result, immigrants to Canada today are mostly from non-European countries. This demographic change does not mean that immigration policies are free from racial biases. In fact, some have argued that the newer immigration acts may have merely reorganized racialization by "articulating 'cultural', 'social' and 'linguistic' definitions of the nation" (Thobani, 2000, p. 18). In other words, those people whose social and cultural habitus and use of language are similar to the dominant White group are more likely to be better received in the host society. This trend is complicated by the neo-liberal turn of immigration policies in which catering to the labour needs of employers has become an overarching trend, defining and redefining the desirability of individual immigrant applicants based on their occupational backgrounds.

Of note, since 1992, there have consistently been more women than men immigrating to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2013). Although in the past most women came through the family class as dependents (Thobani, 2000), today they are distributed across immigration categories. Of the 257,887 immigrants admitted to Canada in 2012, 59.9% were women. More than half of these women entered through economic categories, as skilled workers<sup>2</sup>, business immigrants, live-in caregivers, or provincial/territorial nominees (CIC). In addition to the point system, Canada has a temporary immigration program that recruits immigrants to fill specific labour shortages without extending to them citizenship rights. In 2008, for the first time in history, Canada admitted more temporary workers than immigrants, and in 2012, more than 40% of the temporary workers were women (CIC). The categories through which women came to Canada may not necessarily determine their reception in the host society; their diverse pathways to Canada may indicate that the women may have varying expectations, needs, aspirations, and struggles that warrant researchers' attention.

### **Ethnographic Content Analysis of the Literature**

I approached the literature with the goal to identify how adult education research in Canada has addressed the intersections of women, gender, and immigrant studies. In this review, I take into account all studies that have contributed to the understanding of immigrant women's experiences. That is, I include all studies that had immigrant women as research participants. However, I believe women and gender studies are not merely about including women in studies and analyzing sex roles, which is the focus of the t wave of feminist migration research. As the second-wave feminist scholarship directs us, gender analysis also requires sensitivity to how gendered identities are performed. It may also involve addressing the large social or ideological relation implicating policies and practices. Moreover, gender, as a social relation, may not work in isolation. Different traditions of feminism have looked at how gender intersects with other axes of social differences. For instance, Marxist feminism upholds the primacy of material conditions and class analysis in accounting for the marginalization of women (e.g., Tong, 2009). Anti-racist and Black feminisms

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2 A skilled worker is someone who has at least one year of work experience within the past 10 years in one of the occupations listed in either Skill Type 0 or Management of Skill Level A or B of the National Occupational Classification.

emphasize that oppression, as an intersectional phenomenon, cannot be effectively dealt with unless racial biases are addressed (e.g., Collins, 1998). Further, post-colonial feminism seeks to understand the social, cultural, and economic effects of colonialism on non-White, non-Western women in the interconnected space of the post-colonial world (e.g., Tong).

I conducted an ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1987; Grbich, 2013) of the literature. Ethnographic content analysis is a method to “retriev(e) and analy(ze) documents for their significance and meaning in context” (Grbich, p. 193). Traditional content analysis often follows a sequential approach, moving from category construction to sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. Ethnographic content analysis is noted for the reflective, interactive, and reiterative nature of the research process. Researchers are engaged in constant discovery and comparison, moving more freely between coding, data collection, and analysis. What is more, ethnographic content analysis values not only numerical counts of the *occurrence* of particular words and phrases, but also narrative understandings of patterns and processes.

Adult education as a field is broad. It encompasses areas such as work and learning, community development, labour education, literacy education, health education, and language training. Rather than delimiting the scope of the review myself, I let the field emerge from recognized knowledge dissemination venues in adult education, particularly the annual conferences held by the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE), adult education journals such as *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* (CJSAE), *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ), and *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (IJLE), and the Centre for the Study of Education and Work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, a major adult education research centre in Canada. CASAE conference proceedings became available online in 1999. In 2000, a focus on immigrant women first appeared with the panel discussion entitled “Immigrant Women and Labour Flexibility: Resisting Training through Learning,” by Drs. Shahrzad Mojab, Roxana Ng, and Kiran Mirchandani. I therefore reviewed articles from 2000. The articles I included in the review contained the following in-text words: 1) “immigrant” or “refugee”; and 2) “gender” or “women” (e.g., “she,” “her,” “wife,” “mother,” and “daughter”). All studies included are based in Canada. Due to language limitations, I was not able to examine articles written in French. Altogether, I identified 94 CASAE papers, round tables, symposiums, and poster presentations that included immigrant women as research participants. Fewer than half of these articles have immigrant women as their sole focus or refer specifically to feminist scholarship in their analysis. Additionally, I included in the analysis 12 articles from CJSAE, three from AEQ, five from IJLE, and eight from *Canadian Women Studies*, and nine reports by the Centre for the Study of Education and Work. When reviewing these articles, I also traced the work of some researchers as well as some writings referenced in these articles, which led me to a few books, theses, survey studies, learning reports, book chapters, and additional journal articles that were relevant to the topic of the review, although some of them were published before 2000.

By no means would I claim that the review of the literature is exhaustive. My intention, however, is to show the gamut of feminist influences on the work of adult educators in immigrant studies in Canada and, vice versa, the impact this field of study has had on feminist scholarship. At the outset of the review, I developed an initial coding system to sort the literature, which included topics addressed, research questions, theoretical frameworks, methodology used, ways in which gender and immigrant women were addressed, major

findings, and other observations. While categorizing and comparing the studies using this system, I identified converging patterns as well as competing discourses, which became the storyline for the report of the findings below.

### **Women, Gender, and Immigrant Studies in Canadian Adult Education**

Immigrant women were largely shuffled to the backdrop of Canadian history as "housewives" destined for the domestic space, regardless of their educational or occupational backgrounds (Ng, 1992). However, there has been a significant shift in the last few decades. In 2007, English and Irving observed a growing body of knowledge on feminist theories and immigrant women. My review echoes this observation. It shows an expanding literature on women, gender, and immigrant studies. Most studies I reviewed looked at the learning and educational dimensions of immigrants' experiences, particularly learning engaged in by immigrant women in various domains of their work and life, and the roles that immigrant-serving programs and organizations may have played in mediating the settlement experiences of immigrants and immigrant women in particular.

#### ***Immigrant Women and Learning***

To start with, Canadian adult educators have contributed to the field of women, gender, and immigrant studies by shedding light on the learning dimension of immigrant women's experiences, particularly their educational pathways to secure employment and their work-and life-related learning practices.

**Learning pathways to work.** To make a niche in the Canadian labour market, immigrant women (and men) often undergo a process of occupational repositioning (Shan, 2009a). The work of repositioning is implicated in what Ng (1992) called the social construction of immigrant women, a deeply gendered and racialized process that orders and organizes immigrant labour in relation to the political and productive processes in the host society. It is also tightly related to the neo-liberal project that seeks to fashion immigrants into self-sufficient entrepreneurial individuals (e.g., Maitra, 2011). The requisite entrepreneurialism of immigrants is demonstrated in their proactive "choice" of re-training and re-education as well as their "voluntary" work as volunteers.

To optimize their employment prospects, recent immigrants often attend post-graduate and other training programs after landing in Canada. Quantitative studies drawing on longitudinal surveys of immigrants suggest that gender has little bearing on immigrants' investment in post-migration education; the small influence of gender, as a demographic factor, is understood to be offset by immigrants' prior level of education or human capital (e.g., Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). However, when gender is taken as a relational phenomenon, it is an ever-present factor influencing immigrants' choice of re-training and re-education (e.g., Ng & Shan, 2010). Based on a life history study and institutional ethnographic analysis of Chinese immigrant women's experiences in the Canadian labour market, I (Shan, 2009b) argued that women's choice of re-training is constituted through a Canadian-centred credential and certificate regime or a complex of social and institutional relations that attribute differential values to education acquired at different places. Ng and Shan (2010) further pointed out that credentialism does not work in isolation. Rather, it interacts with the neo-liberal discourse of lifelong learning, as well as gendered relations

at home, ageism, and perceived language differences, to channel immigrant women into a segmented labour market.

To build their pathways to employment, some immigrants also volunteer to gain “Canadian work experiences” (Scott, Selbee, & Reed, 2001), the lack of which is understood to be a significant barrier preventing their entry to specific sectors of work. Three studies focus on the learning of immigrant volunteers (S. Guo, 2007; Slade, 2012; Slade, Luo, & Schugurensky, 2013). S. Guo (2007) interviewed 30 people who worked or volunteered in a community-based organization. Anchoring his study to the ideals of education for social change and learning for social action, he found that, through volunteering, the respondents learned new skills and knowledge, gained Canadian work experience, enlarged social networks, and developed a stronger sense of community. S. Guo therefore suggested that volunteering provides a means for immigrants to exercise active citizenship. Slade et al. (2013) and Slade (2012), in two separate studies, also found that, through volunteering, their respondents learned a range of knowledge, such as communication skills and Canadian workplace culture. However, they also pointed out that volunteering can be exploitative in nature given that it provides unpaid labour to Canadian employers. Of note, although all three studies included immigrant women in their research, none made specific observations on the gendered dimension of learning through volunteering.

Lack of recognition for foreign qualifications is perhaps a root reason that immigrants, particularly immigrants in regulated professions, are “avid” learners. In my study of immigrant engineers (Shan, 2013), a majority of the respondents had to study for confirmatory exams for licensure purposes, a process that not only is labour in itself, but also entails invisible labour of wives and families. Also of note, if skilled immigrants are disadvantaged vis-à-vis foreign credential recognition, temporary workers who are not entitled to citizenship are put at an even more vulnerable position. For instance, Taylor, Foster, and Cambre (2012), using social closure theory, found that temporary workers—mostly women—who came to Canada to fill the skill shortage in nursing faced financial cost as they undertook testing and more testing before a small number became registered as nurses.

**Work-related learning.** Another focus area within the literature is employer-sponsored training and other forms of work- and job-related learning. Park (2011), drawing on the Access and Support to Education and Training Survey conducted in 2008, found that Canadian-born employees were more likely to receive job-related training than their immigrant counterparts. Although immigrants are more likely to report unmet training needs, they were less likely than their Canadian counterparts to receive employer-sponsored training: 44.7% versus 54.1% for men and 33% versus 37% for women. Many immigrant women indicated that family responsibility, conflict with work, and financial constraints were barriers to learning. While Park’s survey study offered some broad knowledge on job-related training, not much information is available in the literature on the kind of training employers typically sponsor. One exception is the qualitative study by Mirchandani et al. (2010), which explored women’s work and learning experiences in the garment industry, retail stores, and call centres, sectors where many skilled immigrant women are hired on a casual basis. The study suggested that workplace training in these sectors is often provided to curtail the women’s autonomy, discretion, and control over work rather than expand their capacities.



A number of studies have explored immigrants' learning initiatives and events in relation to entrepreneurship and paid work. For instance, Laros (2012), using the lens of transformative learning and grounded theory analysis, tried to understand how immigrant women learn to become entrepreneurs. Her findings pointed to the connection between the experience of being an entrepreneur and the identities immigrant women hold. Although Laros claimed that no prior theories have been used to address learning and entrepreneurship, much earlier, Mirchandani (2002), drawing on anti-racist feminism, suggested that self-employment of women must be understood in relation to gender, race, and class relations prevalent in a host society. Maitra's (2011) feminist interpretive inquiry of the experiences of home-based South Asian women workers further fleshed out Mirchandani's thesis. Specifically, it pointed out that it is the devaluation of immigrants' skills and credentials that pushed some of the women toward self-employment. Maitra further observed that while learning to run their home-based businesses, the women also negotiated gendered relations at home, building collaborative relationships among themselves in ways that contested the neo-liberal discourse of individualism and market competition.

A few studies also addressed immigrants' learning at work. Studies with immigrant women in contingent sectors (Maitra & Shan, 2007; Mirchandani et al., 2010) showed that while being trained to conform to workplace standards, immigrant women also learned to transgress limiting work environments by becoming resourceful and learning together with their peers. Using socio-cultural learning theories, Fenwick (2008) explored the critical learning experiences of a number of women garment workers. The study showed that the women learned to negotiate their work conditions through everyday practices, small communities, labour-organizing processes, and English learning classes that gave rise to sociality as well as solidarity. Baltodano et al. (2007), studying in collaboration with an activist community organization, also reported that the immigrant workers involved in the study, such as live-in caregivers, learned to demand legal rights through unions, community associations, and day-to-day contact with other workers, as well as by taking initiative as individuals. Some of the women also developed a political analysis of their situations while exercising these strategies of resistance. While the above studies all focused on women's experiences in feminized sectors, one of my studies (Shan, 2012) centred on a traditionally male-dominated profession: engineering. Specifically, using a combination of socio-cultural theories and institutional ethnography, it explored ways through which Chinese immigrant men and women engineers refashioned themselves in relation to the competitive, alienating, and masculine engineering culture in Canada.

**Life-related (needs for) learning.** Although a majority of the studies focused on immigrants' experiences within the labour market, others have directed attention to women's learning needs and practices associated with other areas of life, such as housework, parenting, health, and legal education. Drawing on the 2004 National Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) and her qualitative interviews with Chinese immigrants, Liu (2007) showed that as a result of immigration, some Chinese women and men have learned new ways to organize food-related household routines, new ways to educate children, and new meanings of life. This study also suggested that Chinese women, as for many other women, are more likely to learn in relation to "female tasks" such as cooking and caring. Some studies were related specifically to parenting. According to these studies, immigrant mothers may experience transformation in their parenting perspectives; for example, they may change

their modes of communication and interaction with children to show more encouragement and affection (Farabaksh & Lauzon, 2008). On the other hand, their mothering practices may come to clash with Canadian norms of parenting disseminated through parenting education programs (Zhu, 2014). Immigrant parents' participation in children's school-based education is another focus. Engaged in a Black, female, middle-class standpoint, Walrond (2006) conducted a qualitative study to understand the educational philosophy of Caribbean parents. The research suggested that although the parents valued education, they had difficulty navigating the educational system, as their cultural reference framework is systematically dismissed within institutional norms and practices. Y. Guo (2011) challenged the popular discourse that immigrant parents are not active participants in their children's schooling. The Chinese respondents in her study learned Canadian curricula by using the Internet and mobilized knowledge in their first language to pass on what were perceived as the best values from both worlds. Such practices allowed parents to advocate on behalf of their children. Although there is no gender-specific analysis of the participating parents in this study, the findings suggest that mothers are likely the main learners/teachers for their children.

Immigrants are among the population most vulnerable to poor health information and literacy (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008; Quigley, Coady, Gregoire, Folinsbee, & Kraglund-Gauthier, 2009). Drawing on Black feminism, Abdelrahman Amin and Brigham (2009) explored the experiences and attitudes of 100 Arabic-speaking women concerning their breast and cervical cancer screening practices. The study showed that cultural, social, and religious factors, along with language proficiency, affected whether and how these women approached cancer screening. Using mixed methods, Liu (2013) examined the needs and barriers of Chinese Ontarians living with heart disease or stroke and the strategies they used in self-care and self-management. The study showed that language differences, and a lack of Chinese-speaking doctors, were major barriers facing the respondents. It also showed that, compared to their male counterparts, senior female participants were more likely to be both survivors and caregivers.

Some studies also pointed to the legal and training needs of women. Using transformative learning theory, Margo (2007), for instance, focused on the literacy needs of 10 refugee men and women whose lives were affected by war. Using post-colonial feminist theory, Baillie Abidi and Brigham's study with "mail-order" brides (2008) found that their research respondents required access to information on their rights as well as other resources such as language training and skill training. McDonald (2002) investigated the legal information needs of Spanish-speaking immigrant women who have experienced domestic abuse. Mojab and McDonald (2008) compared the experiences of the domestic abuse survivors in McDonald's study (2002) and the experiences of some Kurdish women who have suffered violence as a result of war. They suggested that although violence does influence learning, it should not be seen as a barrier to learning. Instead, adult educators need to take into account that violence is a reality that many immigrants live as they learn.

### **Immigrant Employment and Training Services**

A number of studies reviewed were related to immigrant employment and training services. These services are typically provided through community-based organizations and sometimes educational institutions, often with funding from the government. Often,

these services are geared towards integrating immigrants to the Canadian society and labour market. However, there are competing discourses on the roles that immigrant-serving organizations and programs play in the work and life experiences of immigrant women and men. Much attention today is focused on how to turn immigrant services and programs into transformative learning spaces.

**Roles of immigrant training and services and community-based organizations.** Since 1974, the Canadian federal and provincial governments have provided immigrant training and services for newcomers. There is, however, no consensus on the roles that these services may have played in the work and life experiences of immigrants. Some researchers see immigrant services as instrumental in the perpetuation of social stratification. In a noted study, Ng (1988), using institutional ethnographic analysis, a feminist method of inquiry, investigated how an immigrant services organization worked with immigrant women. Her study showed that accountability to funders, in terms of the number of immigrants employed, has largely shaped the work of employment services providers. As a result, immigrant women, who are in immediate need of jobs, are easily channeled into the feminized and low-end sectors of the labour market. Another well-known study was conducted by Mojab (1998). This study grappled with the role of immigrant training in relation to the political economy of Canada as a post-industrial society. Despite the rhetoric that Canada is a skill-based economy, Mojab found that processes of deskilling took place simultaneously with upskilling. Based on her examination of professional immigrant women's experiences attending training programs, Mojab argued that the demand for low-skilled labour—coupled with sexism, racism, and a lack of recognition of the women's prior experiences—has functioned to move immigrant women to the bottom of the labour market.

Today, in immigrant services, there is an explicit emphasis on bridging immigrants to their fields of training. Yet there is also an implicit expectation that immigrants need to be brought up to the minimal (cultural) standards of the host society. For instance, in her examination of a bridging program offered through a school board, Slade's institutional ethnographic study (2012) found that the program used high-school curriculum (designed for adolescents with limited work experiences) for skilled immigrants, which, to a great extent, diminished the skills and knowledge that immigrants brought with them to the host society. If Slade's study suggested cultural condescension in curriculum design, Cervatiuc and Ricento's study (2012) pointed to possible cultural imperialism in pedagogical practices. Through classroom observations and interviews, Cervatiuc and Ricento found that trainers may conveniently take a prescriptive approach to teaching Canadian culture to newcomers. Of the five interviewees in the study, three focused on functional and practical issues and avoided controversial issues such as women's rights. Only one engaged in consciousness-raising by bringing up issues of discrimination in Canadian society.

In contrast with the above research, some studies have also documented the active, if not activist roles, that communities and community-based organizations may have played in the training and learning of immigrant women and men. For instance, full-time language training and employment programs were once reserved exclusively for household heads, often men. Yet as a result of activism of ethnic communities and human rights groups, the federal government started funding English training for immigrant "housewives" in 1986 (Ng, 1992). Using Marxist-feminist, intersectional, and transnational feminism, Butterwick and Villagante (2013) documented their collaborative work with the Philippine Women

Centre in Vancouver. In their collaborative project, they organized political fashion shows as part of community-based, action-oriented, arts-informed research. These fashion shows provided the women with an opportunity to rearticulate the colonial history and personal longing. It also served as an alternative way to engage women who otherwise would not have been involved in activism.

**Spaces for transformation.** Recognizing the disadvantages facing professional immigrants, some immigrant service programs have worked to expand the social and cultural capital of immigrants so they can be recognized by professional bodies and employers (Friesen, 2011). A focus on cultural capital may help enhance the capacity of individuals to fit into the Canadian labour market. However, it does not address systematic social and structural marginalization. Some studies, on the other hand, point to the ways through which immigrant services may function as a space of social change. For instance, Gibb, Hamdon, and Jamal (2008), using the post-colonial lens of liminality, argued that immigrant services organizations may also afford a space through which immigrant women can negotiate identities, create new knowledge, and forge new conceptions of communities. The women-led organizations they examined, for instance, were able to interrupt the instrumentalism of immigrant services programs by offering some unstructured spaces of learning and connecting. The service workers they interviewed also demonstrated critical consciousness toward the deficit and remedial discourse that is dominant in the services sector. Fursova (2013), using the lens of transformative learning, also explored the conditions that are helpful or unhelpful for women's learning. The study found that when service programs validate women's prior experiences, they contribute to enhancing women's confidence and self-esteem. As such, Fursova advocated for the development of learner-oriented community-based programs for immigrant women.

There are also participatory action research efforts that explored the pedagogical practices that can serve to transform practice. In Farabaksh and Lauzon's (2008) participatory action research, the Mexican women immigrants themselves identified their research topic of interest: coping with stress associated with parenting. The study then engaged the women through the use of metaphors, journalling, and the production of a workbook for other members of their community during the program. These learning activities fostered transformative learning experiences for the women. Mirchandani and her research team (2005) designed and delivered two computer literacy programs to assist contingent immigrant women workers to gain computer literacy. This study found that by centring on the interests and needs of the women, particularly their interest in learning about the digital world of their children, computer literacy courses could be more engaging and effective. Recently, Brigham developed a series of arts-informed workshops for internationally trained teachers. These workshops, which involved writing, storytelling, art making, dialogue, and critical reflection, engaged the participants in exploring multiple ways of knowing and multiple dimensions of identities (Brigham, 2011a). The study also showed the power of arts-informed research in bringing about transformative learning for the women (Brigham, 2011b).

Among the pedagogical exploration is also an appeal for adult educators to transform their practices when working with immigrants. Mojab and McDonald (2008), for instance, argued that adult educators need to take into account trauma as a condition of, rather than a barrier to, learning. Baille Abidi, Brigham, Lange, and Tastsoglou (2013) suggested that

as service providers help immigrants to learn, they have to learn to navigate the system themselves. Margo (2007) highlighted that teachers need to be equipped with intercultural competence; that is, rather than viewing newcomers from a deficit perspective, educators need to take up an "asset" framework to engage immigrants in transformative learning. For example, Lange, Vogels, and Jamal (2011) documented the transformative learning experiences of park educators who became aware of the inappropriateness of didactic methods and turned instead to the power of rapport, educational responsiveness, and ethnocultural knowledge.

### **Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research Direction**

Based on an ethnographic content analysis of the existing literature, this paper showed that Canadian adult educators have significantly contributed to the field of women, gender, and immigrant studies, and vice versa. They have not only started developing knowledge of the learning practices of immigrant women as they navigate the labour market and social lives in Canada, but also illustrated the roles that employment services, training programs, and community-based organizations may play in the work and life of immigrant women. In terms of theoretical frameworks, the review showed a resurgent influence of feminism, particularly Marxist feminism (e.g., Mojab, 1998; Ng, 1988), anti-racist feminism (e.g., Mirchandani, 2002), Black feminism (e.g., Abdelrahman Amin & Brigham, 2009; Walrond, 2006), and post-colonial feminism (e.g., Baillie Abidi & Brigham, 2008; Gibb et al., 2008) in the literature. The literature included in this review also pinpoints the salient presence and power of adult learning theories, particularly transformative learning (e.g., Brigham, 2011a, 2011b; Fursova, 2013; Lange et al., 2011; Margo, 2007), informal learning (e.g., Y. Guo, 2011; Liu, 2007; Mojab & McDonald, 2008), and socio-cultural learning theories (e.g., Fenwick, 2008; Shan, 2012), as well as adult education orientation toward empowerment, active citizenship, and social actions (e.g., Butterwick & Villagante, 2013; Gibb et al., 2008; S. Guo, 2007). Methodologically, the review shows that conventional research methods, such as surveys (e.g., Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Liu, 2007; Park, 2011), interviews, and focus groups (Liu, 2007; Slade et al., 2013) have been extended to understand immigrant women's experiences. Meanwhile, feminist methodologies, such as institutional ethnography (e.g., Ng & Shan, 2010; Slade, 2012), participatory action research (e.g., Butterwick & Villagante, 2013; Farabaksh & Lauzon, 2008), and arts-informed research (Brigham, 2011a, 2011b; Butterwick & Villagante, 2013) have been used as effective tools to understand the worlds of immigrant women. These methodologies have also become a pedagogical tool for the learning of research participants as well as researchers and educators themselves.

Although the literature on women, gender, and immigrant studies is a burgeoning one, some areas could be strengthened. First of all, just because the studies included immigrant women does not mean that they have been influenced by feminism or engaged in gender analysis. Some studies remain descriptive of women's experiences. Further, there may be little consideration given to how women's experiences differ from men's in these studies. Such exclusion allows for little discussion on the implications that gender differences may have for policies or practices. Furthermore, few studies have attended to how men's experiences are gendered, especially as hegemonic forms of masculinity may change across transnational contexts. An opportunity is therefore missed to consider the role of men in the transformation of gendered relations at home and in the public and productive domains of

life. Additionally, most of the studies within this body of literature are place-based, looking at what happens to the women “here and now.” Limited largely by methodological nationalism, few studies have addressed the transnational social relations that simultaneously shape and are shaped by the experiences of immigrants. This is an unfortunate oversight given that transnational research may help adult educators to better “harness the cultural models” of other places and educate “for democracy in [a] non-nationalist framework” (Mitchell, 2001, in Walrond, 2006, p. 6).

Finally, gender as a social relation implicates not only individual immigrants, but also institutions, particularly workplaces and industries, educational institutions, and immigrant services. For instance, the existing literature shows that for industries and workplaces, there is an apparent need to redress the racial and gender imbalance in terms of corporate investment in work-related training. This is an area that warrants attention from employers and labour policy makers alike. As well, although there has been strong movement toward enhancing recognition of foreign qualifications, not much attention has been paid to how these practices may differentially impact women and men. In other words, there is a lack of gender sensitivity as far as prior learning recognition policies and programs are concerned. With more immigrant men and women investing in Canadian educational programs, educational institutions might need to revisit the curriculum and pedagogies that have been traditionally used. With regard to immigrant training and employment services, while women are included in these services today, it is likely that economic rationalism, rather than gender equity, has been the driver of government funding. Research efforts are needed to continuously monitor the dynamics between the two mandates, as well as how adult educators have navigated these competing dynamics in practice.

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