Migrant Social Workers' Experiences of Professional Adaptation in Alberta Canada: A Comparative Gender Analysis

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Migrant Social Workers’ Experiences of Professional Adaptation in Alberta, Canada:
A Comparative Gender Analysis

by

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A THESIS
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Abstract

There is limited global research addressing the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in general, and a dearth of scholarship specific to the unique context in Alberta, Canada. While academic attention on the broad topic of professional migration of social workers has gained some traction over the past decade, the emerging literature has so far lacked a comparative gender analysis of the experiences of professional migration among social workers. The purpose of the present study was to develop enhanced understanding of the experiences of professional adaptation of migrant social workers in the Albertan context through a comparative gender analysis. This dissertation emerged from my involvement as a research assistant on a national study on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Canada. While coordinating data collection for the Alberta site of the national study, I conducted in-depth interviews with 17 male and female migrant social workers that had migrated to Alberta, Canada within the past decade. From these 17 interviews, 10 transcripts of interviews were selected as cases for secondary analysis in order to answer the question: How do female and male migrant social workers in Alberta experience their professional adaptation to practice in their new context? The research method employed in the secondary study was interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a form of qualitative inquiry that examines how people make sense of significant lived experiences. Intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms provided the theoretical framework for the study, facilitating attention to both the macro-level factors that structure lived experiences and interactions, and the micro-level processes and interpretations that shape social identities. Engaging with the detailed personal accounts of the participants provided new understandings of how male and female migrant social workers both similarly and differentially interpret and make meaning out of their experiences of professional
adaptation. The study makes an important contribution to existing knowledge about professional adaptation in the context of transnational labour mobility. Notably, it is among the first studies to explore the professional adaptation processes of migrant social workers in Alberta, as well as among the earliest works to engage in a qualitative comparative gender analysis that explores these experiences.
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I respectfully and gratefully acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples and nations of Alberta on whose traditional lands myself and all settlers in Alberta lives their lives, build their futures and fulfill their dreams.

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Finally, I would also like to thank the research participants who generously shared their time with me, and entrusted me with their stories.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to migrant social workers that come to Alberta with a dream to practice their profession in their new home. I hope that this work helps to make that journey a smoother one.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my grandparents, George Stirling Fulton, Norah Elizabeth Fulton (Wright), and Patricia Elizabeth Halliwell (Clark).
Inscription

To acknowledge privilege is the first step in making it available for wider use. Each of us is blessed in some particular way, whether we recognize our blessings or not. And each one of us, somewhere in our lives, must clear a space within that blessing where she can call upon whatever resources are available to her in the name of something that must be done.

~ Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light: Essays
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. iv
Dedication ................................................................................................................................................ vi
Inscription ............................................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1
  Organization of the Dissertation ........................................................................................................... 2
  Rationale for Studying the Albertan Context ....................................................................................... 5
  Problem Statement ............................................................................................................................... 6
  Statement of Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 6
  Research Question ............................................................................................................................... 7
  Research Approach .............................................................................................................................. 7
  Assumptions ......................................................................................................................................... 8
  Conceptualization of Gender .............................................................................................................. 9
  Significance and Benefits ..................................................................................................................... 11

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................. 13
  Neoliberalism and Human Capital Theory ......................................................................................... 15
  Globalization ....................................................................................................................................... 18
    Global Economy ............................................................................................................................... 21
  Canada’s Immigration Framework ....................................................................................................... 27
  Gender-Based Policy Analysis ............................................................................................................ 29
  Alberta in Context of Canada ............................................................................................................. 31
  Social Work in Context ....................................................................................................................... 34
  Research on Professional Adaptation of Migrant Social Workers ..................................................... 41
  Skilled Migration and Professional Adaptation .................................................................................... 47
    Credential Recognition, Licensure, and Registration ...................................................................... 49
    Induction, Orientation and Transition ............................................................................................... 57
  Implications ......................................................................................................................................... 62
  Linking Professional Migration and Gender ....................................................................................... 62
    Home and Family Domain ................................................................................................................ 63
    Workplace and Career Domain ........................................................................................................ 66
    Community and Social Domain ........................................................................................................ 68
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................. 73

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .................................................................................. 76
  Acculturation and Adaptation ............................................................................................................ 79
  Plural Feminist Theoretical Frameworks ............................................................................................ 82
    Intersectionality Theory .................................................................................................................. 82
    Postcolonial Feminisms .................................................................................................................... 92
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................ 96

CHAPTER IV: METHODS .................................................................................................................. 98
  Researcher Background ...................................................................................................................... 99
  Analytic Expansion ............................................................................................................................. 102
  Interpretive Framework ..................................................................................................................... 108
CHAPTER V: RESULTS

Overview of Data Analysis

Themes

Presentation of Themes

Theme #1: Different Education and Career Trajectories Divided Along Gender Lines

Theme #2: Traditional Gender Norms and Roles

Theme #3: Proficiency in Communicating in English is Critical

Theme #4: Preferential Status within the Social Work Labour Market in Alberta

Theme #5: Experience of Discrimination Based on Social Identity

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the Findings

Gender-Based Comparisons

Discrimination/Oppression along Multiple Axes

Privilege along Multiple Axes

Interconnecting Discrimination/Oppression and Privilege

Implications

This thesis has both methodological and theoretical implications, which are discussed below.

Evaluation

Limitations

Delimitations

Self-Reflexivity

Future Research

Recommendations

Credential Recognition and Professional Registration

Labour Market Access and Attachment

Induction, Orientation and Transition
### Conclusion

240

### References

242

### APPENDIX A: DATA SHARING AGREEMENT

276

### APPENDIX B: PHASE TWO SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

280
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Due to the current trend of globalization, coupled with concerns about shortages of skilled labour, transnational professional migration is on the rise (Forum of Labour Market Ministers [FLMM], 2009; Li, 2003; Guo, 2015). Countries around the globe, including Canada, are competing with one another for “talent” and tailoring their immigration policies and systems in order to attract the “best and brightest from around the world” (FLMM, 2009, p. 1). Indeed, transnational labour mobility is the characteristic “demographic pattern” associated with globalization (Friedman, 2000). While transnational labour mobility is a macro-level policy issue, at the micro-level it is also a lived experience for migrants and their families. Migrant professionals vary widely in how they perceive and experience migration and its associated transitions (Austin, 2007; Barreto, 2013; Ngo & Este, 2006). This study sought to understand the lived experience of professional adaptation to working in a new context post-migration from a gendered perspective. Specifically, the purpose of this secondary analysis is to explore the perceptions and experiences of migrant social workers in their professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta, Canada. The study aimed to determine how the experience of professional adaptation might be similar or different when gender is foregrounded as a critical factor in meaning making (Hayden & Hallstein, 2012). This qualitative study employed the methodology of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the experience under investigation. The unit of analysis for this study included a purposefully selected set of transcripts of interviews with male and female migrant social workers in Alberta. The interviews were originally conducted as part of a larger Canadian study on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of
MIGRANT SOCIAL WORKERS IN ALBERTA


This chapter provides an overview of the organization of the dissertation document and describes the background and context that form the framework for the study. The problem statement and the statement of purpose follow this. Next is presentation and discussion of the central research question that informed the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the rationale for, and the significance and benefits, of the study.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. Following the introduction is chapter two, the literature review. Chapter two draws on previous research in order to contextualize the study in regard to existing scholarly work. In particular, seminal works and other research on the professional adaptation of migrant professionals, including social workers, is reviewed. In addition, the study is situated within Alberta through a multi-layered description of this unique provincial context. The theoretical framework for the study, a plural framework (Mehrotra, 2010) of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Creswell, 2013; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2000; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Shields, 2008) and postcolonial feminisms (Ali, 2007; Anderson, 2004; Deepak, 2012; DeSouza, 2004; Mohanty, 2003; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Schutte, 1998), is described in detail in chapter three. In chapter four, the research methods are presented. Specifically, the paradigm and procedures associated with interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), the research methodology employed, are explained. Rationale for the selection of IPA as the research methodology and discussion of its suitability is provided. Other key features of chapter four include explanation of the researcher’s background, description of the epistemology, presentation of the interpretive framework (Creswell, 2013), and
elucidation of the unit of analysis, sample, data analysis and evaluation processes and procedures. Chapter four also offers an in-depth explanation of the use of secondary data analysis within this study. Information about research ethics is located in chapter four as well. Next, chapter five contains the presentation of results, organized thematically. Chapter six is the final chapter in this dissertation. Chapter six provides the discussion of the results, which includes analysis and synthesis of the findings in light of the study’s research question, context and theoretical framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Evaluation of the study, including discussion of limitations and delimitations is provided. Chapter six also includes conclusions and recommendations for future research and for policymakers.

**Background and Context**

Across a range of professions, some migrant professionals find that the adaptation process is relatively smooth, while many others experience it as challenging and even traumatic (Aure, 2013; Barreto, 2013; Fang, 2012; Fulton, Pullen Sansfaçon, Brown, Éthier, 2016; Jose, Griffin, Click, & Fitzpatrick, 2008; Lim, 2006). The success of the process depends, at least in part, upon each individual migrant’s ability to make use of coping mechanisms such as managing stress (Jose et al., 2008; Lim, 2006), learning an additional language (Aure, 2013; Harrison, 2013; Liversage, 2009), and adapting to local practices and methods of intervention (Brown, Pullen Sansfaçon, Éthier & Fulton, 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Pullen-Sansfaçon, Brown & Graham, 2012), as well as styles of communication (Barreto, 2013). Migrant professionals are required to adjust to new regulations, standards, attitudes, roles, behaviours, customs, values and expectations (Barreto, 2013). In addition, the many dimensions of the adaptation process, such as credential recognition and sociocultural integration, are often experienced in a manner that is far from seamless (Aure, 2013; Brown et al., 2015; Fang, 2012; Fulton et al., 2016; Pullen-
Sansfaçon et al., 2012). Negative experiences in these domains of adaptation have the potential to cause migrant professionals to feel vulnerable, devalued and excluded (Barreto, 2013; Basran & Zong, 1998; Beddoe, Fouche, Bartley, & Harington, 2012; Beddoe & Fouche, 2014; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). On the other hand, receiving full credential recognition and engaging in successful professional adaptation to the new context may contribute to an enhanced sense of belonging to a profession and strong identification with the new practice context (Barreto, 2013; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012).

Prior research has established that there are some gender-based differences in identities (Liversage, 2009), perceptions of discrimination (Iredale, 2005; Man, 2004; Liversage, 2009), family roles and relationships (Aure, 2013; Iredale, 2005; Man, 2004; Meares, 2010), levels of labour market exclusion (Man, 2004; Meares, 2010), and labour market entry experiences (Aure, 2013; Meares, 2010) among professional migrants based on numerous interconnecting individual and/or group-level factors. However, to date gender has been rendered largely invisible in mainstream studies of professional migration (Liversage, 2009; Man, 2004; Meares, 2010). In turn, the corresponding theoretical frameworks for comprehending the adaptation of migrant professionals to their new contexts that have been developed through existing research are said to have been founded within a narrow, economically focused, “male-dominated” agenda (Aure, 2013; Liversage, 2009; Man, 2004). Feminist researchers have critiqued the “gender bias” in skilled migration research because it has investigated migration from a limited perspective that often focuses solely on male experiences (Liversage, 2009, p. 121). In turn, there is a resultant gap in the literature in regard to exploration of women’s unique experiences of skilled migration (Iredale, 2005; Liversage, 2009). Aure (2013) argued that the “gendered locations of migrants and gendered aspects of labour market entries must be considered” in future migration research.
My dissertation accepts this argument and applies a gendered lens to the study of the lived experience of professional migration of social workers to Alberta.

**Rationale for Studying the Albertan Context**

According to Aure (2013), the specific context and conditions of the local labour market are important considerations in studying gendered experiences of skilled migration. Examination of gendered experiences in “spatial, social and cultural” context strengthens embedded understandings of access to and exclusion from labour markets (Aure, 2013, p. 275). In taking up a local labour market lens for my dissertation research I have employed a contextual perspective focused on gender and place, specifically the Canadian province of Alberta.

The Albertan context represents a unique sociopolitical climate, economy and demographic profile within Canada, as well as a distinctive migration and social work practice context that has received limited academic attention (for further discussion of the Albertan context see chapter 2). Therefore, I believe that professional adaptation of migrant social workers within this context warrants explicit study. Indeed, the rationale for my study emanated from my desire to uncover ways to better facilitate successful adaptation of migrant social workers in this unique context. It further stemmed from my belief that it is important to view the lived experience of professional adaptation among social workers as a gendered experience (Boucher, 2007; Iredale, 2005). As Boucher (2007) argued, if a gendered perspective is not taken then analyses are often conducted as if people are genderless or androgynous, often with a focus on economics rather than more holistic and complex experiences and issues. In addition, the gender bias and gender equity concerns associated with migration that have been raised in the literature over the past two decades risk being swept under the rug (Boucher, 2007; Iredale, 2005).
I believe that increasing our nuanced understandings of the pitfalls and pathways toward successful professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta will not only increase the numbers of migrant social workers who adapt successfully to practice in the Albertan context, but also offer additional benefits to Alberta’s social welfare systems, communities, and economy. This is consistent with Berry’s (1992; 1997) assertion that most of the conditions that facilitate migrants’ successful adaptation are “subject to some degree of control by policy makers” and that “in principle, it should be possible to increase the rate of successful adaptations by making appropriate policy choices and by implementing appropriate programmes” (p. 78).

In sum, I believe that in order to support migrant social workers to adapt successfully, understanding the context in which they are attempting to professionally adapt, and taking up a gendered lens with which to explore this issue are both critical. In chapter two, I look at what the academic literature says about professional migration in the context of globalization and then apply that knowledge to the Albertan context.

**Problem Statement**

Research indicates that a significant number of the migrant social workers that arrive in Canada experience challenges in their professional adaptation to practice in their new context (Brown et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Pullen-Sansfaçon, Brown & Graham, 2012). However, there is little information as to how this phenomenon is experienced in the context of the province of Alberta specifically. Likewise, the professional adaptation of migrant social workers has not been explored from a gendered perspective.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative secondary analysis is to explore a sample of male and female migrant social workers’ perceptions and lived experiences regarding their professional adaptation
to social work practice in Alberta, focusing in particular on the similarities and differences in the experiences of male and female migrant social workers.

**Research Question**

In order to better understand the lived experience and perceptions of professional adaptation among migrant social workers, the study addresses the following research question: How do female and male migrant social workers in Alberta experience their professional adaptation to practice in their new context?

**Research Approach**

Upon receiving approval from the Conjoint Faculties Ethics Review Board, I studied the perceptions and lived experiences of 10 migrant social workers living in Alberta. These cases were selected through a process of purposive sampling from the transcripts of in-depth semi-structured interviews that I conducted in Alberta during phase two of the Canadian study on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Pullen Sansfaçon, Brown and Graham, 2011-2012, 2012-2015). The sample consisted of transcripts of interviews with four male and six female participants. The investigation undertaken used the qualitative research methodology of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), which is described in detail in chapter four, methods. I applied a plural theoretical framework of intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms to my analysis. The theoretical framework is described in detail in chapter three. The results of the analysis are presented in chapter five and discussed in chapter six.

As noted above, during my involvement with the Canadian study on professional adaptation of migrant social workers, I collected data using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The
information obtained through a purposeful selection of transcripts from 10 of these interviews formed the dataset for this study. I obtained permission to re-use the transcripts for this study through a formal data sharing agreement with the investigators from the Canadian study funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Pullen Sansfaçon, Brown and Graham 2011-2012, 2012-2015).

The transcripts consist of the verbatim transcription of audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with each of the research participants. A unique code identifier identifies each participant in order to protect his or her confidentiality. As noted, the nature of the present study involved a re-use of a selection of data (Heaton, 2004). The unit of analysis is transcripts of previously analyzed data, rather than the research interviews themselves.

Assumptions

Based on my experience and background as a research assistant with the Canadian project investigating the professional adaptation of migrant social workers, and my plural theoretical framework of intersectionality and postcolonial feminisms (described in chapter three), three primary assumptions were made regarding this study prior to data analysis. First, many migrant social workers face challenges and receive inadequate support in their efforts to adapt to social work practice in Alberta. Second, because social work is a global profession that exists around the world, there should be elements of the work that are highly transferrable between contexts, thus making successful professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta among migrant social workers possible, regardless of country of origin. Third, gender is a social construct that permeates all areas of identity and lived experience in the social world, and therefore the lived experience of professional adaptation among migrant social workers is inherently a gendered experience.
Conceptualization of Gender

I have employed a feminist intersectional and postcolonial feminist theoretical lens in this dissertation (for further details see chapter three, theoretical framework). According to Delamont (2003), a feminist sociologist and methodologist, it is important to specify gender within a research question in order to increase clarity by “sharpening” the question itself. Delamont (2003) asserted that the researcher must be explicit about the gender of the participants included in a study’s sample. As Delamont (2003) explained;

To be fireproof, a piece of research has to state clearly whether its focus was men, women, or both…the analysis, the writing up and the publication of the research have to avoid making sexist assumptions and reporting conclusions in a sexist manner. (p. 63)

Delamont (2003) argued that gender based differences can only be “legitimately reported” when “both sexes” are asked about the same topics and different answers are received (Delamont, 2003, p. 66). My dissertation work is consistent with Delamont’s (2003) assertions about identifying and naming each participant’s gender in order to identify gender-based differences among men and women through research practices. However, there are two important limitations that this creates.

First, in Delamont’s (2003) use of the wording, “both sexes” (p. 66), she is upholding the conceptualization of gender binarism as opposed to encompassing a non-binary perspective that treats gender as a “social construct” rather than a “biological designation” (Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner, & Schmitz, 2008, p. 56). Following Delamont (2003), in my dissertation research I refer to male and female gender from a distinctly “cisgender” perspective. The Oxford English Dictionary defines cisgender as “designating a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds to his or her sex at birth” (2016, n.p.). Cisgender can be contrasted with
transgender, which is a “label for individuals ‘who move away from the gender [sex] they were assigned at birth’” (Worthen, 2016, p. 31). Western society’s conceptualization of gender is dominated by “cisnormativity” which is the “assumption that it is ‘normal’ to be cisgender” (Worthen, 2016, p. 31). However, this is not the case in other societies where individuals are free to self-designate from a variety of “legitimate” genders and/or to hold a fluid gender identity (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014). Ansara and Hegarty (2014) have identified that assignment of “permanent” gender identities from, or even before birth, is a notable feature of “English language contexts” where sex is commonly assigned by authorities, namely physicians, based on physical biology rather than being self-identified (p. 259). Thus, from birth onwards individuals grow up being socialized into cisnormative gender roles (Sisneros et al., 2008). The problem with cisnormativity is that it marginalizes transgender people, identities and experiences through privileging cisgender individuals and discriminating against “anyone perceived as noncisgender” (Worthen, 2016, p. 31). The negative and prejudicial treatment often experienced by transgender people in mainstream Western society is sometimes referred to as “transphobia” (Sisneros et al., 2008; Worthen, 2016). Feminist researchers, including Johnson (2015) have problematized “transgender marginalization” within social science research and advocated for the expansion of feminist research to study “transgender people and phenomena” (p. 22). Likewise, Ansara and Hegarty (2014) have provided a set of recommendations for “reducing cisgenderism in psychological research” (p. 259). Johnson (2015) has also argued for the development of a unique “transfeminist methodology” with specific focus on inquiry into the experience of being transgender from the perspective of transgender people (p. 22).

A particular issue with research conducted from a cisnormative perspective is the potential for “misgendering” which is defined as “the use of gendered language that does not
match how people identify themselves, such as when people who identify as women are described as men” (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014, p. 260). As my research reflects a cisnormative bias there is a distinct possibility that I have misgendered participants, which is a delimitation of my research (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014).

The second caveat to be noted regard to the use of a binary cisnormative conceptualization of gender speaks to the concept of “designating” gender identities to individuals (Oxford English Dictionary, n.p.). As sex and gender were not explicitly inquired about during the semi-structured interviews with the participants in the national study on social work migration and professional adaptation in Canada, I ascribed gender to the participants for the purpose of secondary data analysis. This process diverges from exploring “gender identity” in a pure sense, as gender identity is best determined by the individual, based on their “internal sense of gender” (Sisneros et al., 2008, p. 56). Further discussion of the limitations of ascribing gender to the participants is provided in chapter four, methods and chapter six, discussion.

**Significance and Benefits**

This study is among the first to look specifically at the professional adaptation processes of migrant social workers in a specific province in Canada, as well as the first study on the professional migration of social workers to engage in a comparative gender analysis. The study simultaneously works toward answering recent calls for more research on the following topics: (a) gendered analyses of professional migration (Aure, 2013); and (b) the professional adaptation of migrant social workers (Beddoe et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2015; Hussein, Stevens, Manthorpe, & Moriaerty, 2011b; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). In particular, it is one of the first studies to address the recommendation to explore “variances” in migrant social workers’ “cultures and genders” and how these factors shape their experiences and needs (Hussein et al.,
2011b, p. 1154). This is accomplished through explicit application of a plural (Mehrotra, 2010) intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2000; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Shields, 2008) and postcolonial feminist (Ali, 2007; Anderson, 2004; Deepak, 2012; DeSouza, 2004; Mohanty, 2003; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Schutte, 1998) lens during analysis. Dissemination of the findings has the potential to aid social workers, social work educators, social work professional regulatory bodies, social service organizations, and policymakers in both Alberta and other regions to better understand professional adaptation and in turn, to develop and advocate for supports and resources that will enhance the successful achievement of the professional adaptation of social workers and other skilled migrants.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of my doctoral research was to explore perceptions and lived experiences of male and female migrant social workers’ professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta, Canada. By conducting a comparative gender analysis the study focuses on the similarities and differences in the post-migration professional adaptation experiences of male and female migrant social workers in Alberta. To carry out this study in an informed manner, it was necessary to first complete a review of the literature. Given my pre-existing knowledge of the literature and the participants’ accounts, as well as my work with the Canadian study on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers, the purpose of this literature review was to broaden my knowledge beyond the information that I was previously sensitized to. The literature review began at the time that I commenced development of the research proposal, and continued throughout the data analysis and writing up phases of the project.

The literature review process was consistent with the guidance on conducting a literature review for interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) in the seminal text regarding this methodology, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is an exploratory qualitative research methodology that is concerned with understanding significant personal lived experiences. The IPA research approach allows participants to express themselves and make claims on their own terms while the researcher remains open-minded and attempts to suspend preconceptions and interpretations during data collection, holding off on analysis until further on in the research process (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and colleagues (2009) emphasize that there is no such thing as “too much” or “too little” in regard to “previous knowledge” instead, the researcher is required to be self-reflective regarding their preconceptions and the consequences of these for the data analysis (Smith et al.,
2009, p. 42). As preconceptions and interpretations are to be limited during data collection there was no conflict in applying IPA to a secondary data analysis since the data was collected prior to engaging in my dissertation research.

It is recommended that the IPA researcher be familiar with key contributions in their field of study prior to engaging in data analysis (Smith et al., 2009). As I reviewed the literature I was mindful that in IPA research the emphasis is on letting the participants’ experiences speak for themselves rather than on being theory-driven (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the fact that the focus of IPA research is on practical experiences as opposed to theory, an IPA literature review is often shorter in length and smaller in scope than are literature reviews conducted for studies using other research methods. However, I was mindful of potential conceptual limitations that a cursory literature review might create, and therefore I delved deep enough into the literature to ensure that I had strong familiarity with it and therefore I was able to identify gaps in the existing knowledge base. This was important because IPA literature reviews often take on an evaluative tone in order to inform the reader of the perceived strengths and limitations of the existing knowledge base (Smith et al., 2009).

While IPA methodology does not require a comprehensive literature review, the researcher is expected to be explicit about the “particular aspects” of a topic that are of interest for their research project (Smith et al., 2009). In light of this guideline I critically reviewed four major areas of the literature: (a) skilled migration in global contexts; (b) social work in local and global contexts; (c) theoretical frameworks based on feminist theory and feminisms in social work research (see chapter three where the theoretical framework for this study is discussed in detail) and (d) gendered experiences of migration and professional adaptation.
To conduct the literature review I drew from multiple information sources including scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, dissertations and Internet resources. Most of these sources were accessed through multi-database searches available through the university library. Throughout the literature review process I tracked and critically evaluated numerous studies in my substantive area of study in order to identify gaps in the existing literature. As part of this process I took note of instances where divergent views and findings amongst various authors and studies covering similar or related topics had been put forward. The literature review was useful for informing my understanding of the substantive area of my study more broadly, as well as familiarizing me with important documents and research findings. This was particularly beneficial as I defined and narrowed the scope of my dissertation project and identified the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underlie my research.

**Neoliberalism and Human Capital Theory**

Becker’s human capital theory was introduced in the 1960s as part of rising interest in the academic study of economic growth, especially household incomes, that was occurring at that time (Weiss, 2015). Becker was especially interested in looking at how income in the form of earned wages equated with the qualities of the labour force, namely, education (Weiss, 2015). In the half-century since Becker’s work was first published human capital theory has become highly influential across a range of disciplines (Weiss, 2015), including migration studies (Hagan, Lowe, & Quingla, 2011; McHenry, 2015; Williams, 2007). The fundamental principle underlying human capital theory is that “peoples’ learning capacities are of comparable value to other resources involved in the production of goods and services” (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004, pp. 545-546). In essence, human capital theorists posit that the human capacity to learn
productive skills is a labour market resource that can enhance corporate performance and profitability provided that the proper investment is made in the available human resources, either by the individual her/himself (Syed, 2008; Weiss, 2015), or by their employer (Nafukho et al., 2004). Human capital theorists therefore conceptualize people as being a form of capital that can be leveraged in order to “increase productivity” and promote “growth and development” at individual, organizational, national, and international levels (Nafukho et al., 2004, p. 546). Human capital theorists believe that by employing and deploying human capital strategically, profitability can be maximized and that this economic return on investment will benefit society as a whole, at the micro, mezzo and macro levels (Nafukho et al., 2004).

The human capital discourse surrounding immigration is grounded in neoliberal ideology (Root, Gates-Gasse, Shields, & Bauder, 2014). According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). While neoliberalism has “multiple and diverse origins” (Brown, 2016, p. 4), it is commonly conceived that the global process of neoliberalization began to gain prominence as a political ideology in the late 1970s in countries around the world including China, the United States and Britain (Harvey, 2005). In these countries conservative leaning politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were elected as national leaders who in turn instituted sweeping political-economic policy changes aimed at promoting free-market capitalism, reducing state regulation of non-market systems and issues, and strengthening national “social fabric” by enhancing personal freedoms and responsibilities (Brown, 2016, p. 4). Under neoliberalism, the primary role of the state is to guarantee “proper functioning of markets” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).
Today, almost all nation-states have embraced some version of neoliberalization (Harvey, 2005). Harvey (2005) stated that neoliberalism has become a “hegemonic…mode of discourse” (p. 3). The neoliberal state is constantly looking to make arrangements that “improve its competitive position as an entity vis-à-vis other states in the global market” (Harvey, 2005, p. 65). Under neoliberalism the state holds individuals accountable for their own actions and well-being in all areas of life, including welfare, education, health care and pensions (Harvey, 2005). Evaluation of success and failure is highly individualized rather than being viewed as a structural or systemic outcome. This “conversion” of traditionally non-economic life domains and activities into economic ones is termed “economization” (Brown, 2016). The goal of neoliberalism is to economize “all spheres of life” (Brown, 2016, p. 3).

Under neoliberalism freedom of mobility and global exchange of capital and commodities is crucial (Friedman, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Li, 2003; Brown, 2016). Canada’s current immigration policies, including the Express Entry system, can be viewed as an effort to apply the same type of state-led initiatives that reduce barriers to the movement of goods across national borders, to the transnational mobility of skilled people. In 2015 the government of Canada launched a new skilled migration fast-tracking scheme called the Express Entry program (CIC, 2015b). Based in neoliberal human capital ideology, this program seeks to ensure better linkages between immigration and labour market integration through implementation of a points-based ranking system where applicants are scored based on criteria believed to be critical for economic integration upon arrival in Canada, including language ability, education and work experience (CIC, 2015b; Drolet et al., 2015; Flynn & Bauder, 2015; Phan, Banerjee, Deacon, & Taraky, 2015). In a sense, such an approach serves to commoditize migrants by equating their
worth with their labour and then treating their labour as a “commodity like any other” (Harvey, 2005, p. 171).

According to Brown (2016), neoliberalism has generated a reconceptualization of the human subject where all subjects are now seen as “market actors” and every person is now a “speck” of “human capital” (p. 3). Under neoliberalism social identities are universalized and human uniqueness are deemed unimportant. As Brown (2016) states, neoliberalism itself views each individual as an “unmarked subject” with “no gender, sexuality, race or other subject position” (p. 13), thereby creating the illusion of meritocracy (Davison & Shire, 2014).

Nonetheless, through the promotion of free-market capitalism, neoliberalism has intensified socioeconomic inequities, heightened social stratification and institutionalized multiple forms of oppression. In drawing out the connections between racism and neoliberalism, for example, Davison and Shire (2014) identify that the “contemporary global economy is deeply embedded in the histories and practices of racism” which are grounded in domination, subordination and colonialism. The resultant power imbalances and marginalization have resulted in citizen-led resistance movements or “eruptions” such as Occupy Wall Street in New York during the fall of 2011 (Brown, 2016). However, Brown (2016) has identified that an acceptable and sustainable alternative to neoliberalism is yet to be articulated. At present neoliberalism remains the “dominant theory” that guides capitalist systems and policies at all levels in the current era of globalization (Kotz, 2002, p. 3). The next section will discuss globalization in greater detail.

Globalization

As I embarked upon my doctoral study I adopted a feminist theoretical lens (for a fulsome discussion of the theoretical framework see chapter three). In doing so I became keenly aware of the importance of developing a gender-informed understanding of globalization and its links with
transnational labour mobility. I found that gender is an important yet largely neglected viewpoint from which to explore professional migration in the context of globalization (Aure, 2013; Iredale, 2005). Given that my doctoral study focuses on carrying out a comparative gender analysis, I sought out both mainstream and feminist literature on these topics.

Globalization is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, the exact definition of which is widely contested (Gibb & Hamdon, 2010). Indeed, the meanings and consequences of globalization are broad, subjective, and variable depending on one’s perspective. This diversity of opinion has resulted in the emergence of varied discourses on globalization within the academic literature (Gibb & Hamdon, 2010).

In order to better understand globalization I sought out a definition of this concept that I could identify with. Through this search I encountered Friedman’s (2000) definition of globalization. Globalization, Friedman (2000) explains, is:

> the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before – in a way that enables individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is enabling the world to reach into individuals, corporations and nation-states farther, faster, deeper, cheaper than ever before. This process of globalization is also producing a powerful backlash from those brutalized or left behind by this new system. (p. 9)

This definition of globalization highlights that power relations are a critical topic when considering globalization as a concept, as well as its processes and their impacts on societies, groups and individuals. Power relationships are also of critical importance within feminist theory in so far as feminists are generally interested in analyzing, critiquing and resisting power
relations that are based on oppression and result in injustices such as sexism, heterosexism, racism and classism (Allen, 1999).

For the purpose of my doctoral research, adopting a feminist perspective allows me to take up a particular stance from which to gain further insights regarding the connections between power relationships and globalization (Allen, 1999; Deepak, 2012; Livesey, 2005). For example, a feminist lens makes visible the parallels between the power imbalances among men and women in society, and those found within the system of globalization itself. Indeed, as with most male-female relationships, globalization is structured and supported by power imbalances rather than equilibrium (Deepak, 2012). According to Friedman (2000), globalization has its own “defining structure of power” which is “built around three balances, which overlap and affect one another. The first is the traditional balance between nation-states…the second balance…is between nation-states and global markets…the third balance…is the balance between individuals and nation-states” (pp. 13-14).

Adopting a feminist lens (Allen, 1999; Mason, 1997) also allows me to identify additional power relations that Friedman’s (2000) definition of globalization neglects. For example, from a feminist perspective I noted that Friedman (2000) fails to clearly identify the macro-institutional and micro-individual power imbalances between the rich and the poor, and between men and women, that are perpetuated and deepened by the socioeconomic structures and effects of globalization (Livesey, 2005). To illustrate, feminist researchers have been drawing increasing attention to the “dangers of globalization” for women and children due to the perpetuation of inequalities that result in their victimization, such as can be seen in the cases of human trafficking (Livesey, 2005), child labour (Deepak, 2012), sweat shops (Deepak, 2012) and the overall growth in the gaps between the rich and the poor that are further stratified by race,
ethnicity, gender, age, ability and class (Dominelli, 2010). Dominelli (2010) has asserted that at the bottom of almost any socioeconomic hierarchy that exists, you will find women and children. The inequalities faced by women around the world show that the human degradation that is occurring as a result of globalization is a gendered phenomenon (Dominelli, 2010). Thus, it can be argued that women and children are paying an unfair price for the systems, policies and practices that uphold the socioeconomic inequities that characterize globalization.

According to Livesey (2005), feminists concerned with the structural and institutional inequalities and negative effects of globalization cannot necessarily be referred to as an “anti-globalization” movement or group as they themselves often benefit from advances made by globalization such as international travel and extensive use of email and telephone communication. However, feminists are doing important work by calling into question the gendered ethics of globalization as it currently exists. They are asking vital questions regarding whether it is possible to shift power relations to create greater equity at the local, national, and global levels (Deepak, 2012; Livesey, 2005). Mohanty (2003) calls for feminist scholars to theorize and critique globalization and to engage in antiglobalization activism due to the fact the capitalism as it functions under globalization “depends on and exacerbates” racism, heterosexism and patriarchy (p. 510).

**Global Economy**

No country in the world functions completely separate and apart from the integrated system of global markets, goods, services, communication, transportation, technology and finance that has increasingly taken hold since the end of the Cold War era (Castles, 2011; Friedman, 2000; Hick, 2010). Under globalization the world economy has become highly integrated, which has served to expand international trade in goods and services through the driving force of free-
market capitalism (Friedman, 2000). Free-market capitalism involves several elements that serve to create an integrated global economy including free trade, deregulation, privatization and competition (Castles, 2011; Friedman, 2000; Grewal, 2005; Li, 2003). This has resulted in increased transnational economic activity coupled with huge increases in global migration rates, as the flow of people across national boundaries has risen alongside that of goods and services (Li, 2003). As Li (2003) explained, transnational immigration is an important means by which “advanced capitalist societies address their labour needs” (p. 1). Li (2003) referred to this phenomenon as a “freedom of movement” that is “closely associated with free trade” (p. 2). However, others have called into question the amount of freedom and choice that truly exists for individual migrants (Grewal, 2005). The human capital discourse surrounding transnational migration reflected in Li’s (2003), statement quoted above, takes a narrow focus on national and global economic interests while neglecting to acknowledge the personal needs and interests of individual migrants as human beings, and members of families, communities and cultures. As Syed (2008) aptly identified:

skilled migrants constitute much more than a factor of production flowing across international borders, and…their employment opportunities are not only shaped by their skills and economic factors but also by their perceptions and experiences of the host society and its occupational structure. (p. 29)

In this dissertation I have adopted the widely used terminology of Global North and Global South to classify nations (Midgley, 2016; Mohanty, 2003). The Global North classification consists of the most advanced capitalist societies in the world, including North America, Australia, parts of the Middle East, and Western Europe (Castles, 2011; Li, 2003). The Global South classification consists of all other countries, most of which are considered to be “low-
income”, “developing” or “communist”, such as Vietnam and North Korea (Midgley, 2016). I have employed this classification system as a tool for analytic and discussion purposes although I acknowledge that a variety of classification schemes exist and that the validity, value, precision and appropriateness of each one is contested (Midgley, 2016; Mohanty, 2003).

According to the literature, nations in the Global North are generally viewed as benefitting the most from transnational migration (Castles, 2011; Li, 2003). With the rise of a global capitalist economy, the demand for skilled labour in the Global North has skyrocketed, leading market forces to pressure governments to open their borders to large flows of immigration (Castles, 2011). Many regions in the Global North, including Canada, are now classified as being “positive net-migration countries” (Phan et al., 2015, p. 2061) due to the large number of residents that are foreign-born. The reasons for this phenomenon and the implications that it brings about for individuals and societies are complex and multi-faceted. Below is an examination of these topics that delves more deeply into the specific realities and concerns regarding globalization and professional migration in North America.

Professional Migration

Over the past four decades, increased transnational migration under globalization has brought about dramatic social, economic and cultural shifts. While human migration has traditionally followed measurable flow patterns consisting of two primary types: natural and manipulated (McElmurray et al., 2006), over the past several decades the manipulation of migration flows has increased, creating new complex transnational migratory patterns (Czaika & de Haas, 2014; McElmurray et al., 2006). For example, the number of migrant professionals arriving in North America has steadily grown, partially as a result of international recruitment activities and competitive national skilled migration policies (Castles, 2011; Phan et al., 2015). As Czaika and
de Haas (2014) explained, migrants are congregating in a “shrinking number of prime destination countries” (p. 315). This pattern is forming a trend where, for example, increasing numbers of non-Europeans are moving to North America, a region that historically primarily attracted European immigrants (Czaika & de Haas, 2014). Overall, the current dominant migration pattern around the world involves people from “developing” countries, such as those in the Global South, relocating to the Global North (Crozier, 2009; Jose et al., 2008; Iredale, 2001; McElmurray et al., 2006). This pattern is at least partially reflective of the fact that internationally educated professionals from around the globe, including the Global South, are highly sought after as migrants by governments and employers in the Global North because they can bring a wealth of highly valuable skills, knowledge and experience with them, which will benefit the economy in the destination country (Iredale, 2001; List, 2009; McElmurray et al., 2006; Phan et al., 2015). The current pattern of manipulated migration from the Global South to the Global North is expected to continue for the foreseeable future (Iredale, 2001; Mackey & Liang, 2012).

At a national policy level, in full awareness of labour shortages in critical areas of the labour market such as the health services sector, governments have been implementing strategies to alleviate the labour shortages since the 1960s (Iredale, 2001; List, 2009). Chief among these strategies is recruitment of internationally educated professionals (Iredale, 2001; List, 2009; McElmurray et al., 2006). Steps have been taken by governments and employers to support, fast-track and foster the immigration processes of these “desirable” professionals in order to eliminate potential barriers to migration (Iredale, 2001). A variety of legislative policies that essentially open the borders to migrants whose skills and training will help to address domestic
workforce shortages have been implemented in various nations, including Canada (Kingma, 2006; McElmurray et al., 2006; Phan et al., 2015).

**Reasons for Migration: Push and Pull Factors**

Paat (2013) asserts that there are three “non-mutually independent” motivations for migration which are: “economic motive”, “family reunification”, and “political motive” (p. 404). However, a plethora of more specific factors impact each individual family’s decision to migrate (Paat, 2013). Migration research often characterizes these specific motivations to migrate in a binary categorization of “push” and “pull” factors (Paat, 2013; Parkins, 2010). In the case of migrant professionals who come to North America there are a large number of possible push factors and pull factors that come into play in the decision-making processes of each migrant. Furthermore, decisions to migrate can be placed on a continuum of being proactive or reactive (Paat, 2013). Factors that fall into the category of being pull factors are typically related to proactive decision-making, for example, economic reasoning such as the decision to seek out higher paying employment opportunities abroad, while push factors are more likely to fall on the reactive end of the continuum, for example, political reasoning, such as the threat of war (Paat, 2013).

**Pull factors.** The top pull factor identified in the literature across professions relate to the economic motive for migration (Chikanda, 2011; Khan et al., 2015; Kingma, 2006; Ronquillo, 2012). This major pull factor is founded on the idea that through migration it is possible to create a “better life” than one is currently living (Khan et al., 2015). This concept is supported by the availability of jobs internationally, especially for those migrant professionals whose qualifications are in high demand in North America and other areas of the Global North, such as is the case for internationally educated physicians (Chikanda, 2011; Khan et al., 2015).
In addition, wages, professional development opportunities, job security, workplace relationships and benefits in North America are typically significantly better than in the Global South (Crush & Pendleton, 2010; Khan et al., 2015; Kingma, 2006). North American employers are also often willing to provide flexible work schedules, which are less common elsewhere in the world (Crush & Pendleton, 2010). In addition, better education and information sharing through improved access to television and the Internet have increased awareness and access to migration options, which may be contributing to accelerated emigration rates and shifting patterns of migration overall (Czaika & de Haas, 2014; Iredale, 2001; McElmurray et al., 2006).

In regard to the family reunification motivator identified by Paat (2013), other literature expands on this idea by linking this motivator not only to the migrant’s immediate family, but also to their ethnocultural group and social network from their country of origin (Grewal, 2005). Indeed, an emerging source of pull factor comes from the growth of international diasporic communities (Chikanda, 2011; Grewal, 2005). Through contacts with the diaspora, others set an example of what can be gained through professional migration to a “more developed” or wealthier country within a potential migrant’s network (Chikanda, 2011; Grewal, 2005). Chikanda (2011) states that “friends and colleagues in the diaspora not only provide information about job opportunities, but essentially become a mirror which enables them to see what their life will be like if they take up the emigration option” (Chikanda, 2011, p. 90). Still others migrate specifically to follow their spouses or other family members who have already moved to a new country of residence (White, 2006). Migrants who relocate for reasons primarily associated with their partner and/or family are typically women who have been referred to in the literature as “love migrants” (Aure, 2013).
Push factors. Push factors are defined as those considerations that motivate migrants to relocate away from their home country (Jose et al., 2008; Parkins, 2010). Push factors often include socioeconomic and political conditions in migrants’ countries of origin (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012), especially when these circumstances create a lower than desirable quality of life (Chikanda, 2011; Crush & Pendleton, 2010; McElmurray et al., 2006). Specific push factors noted in the literature include racism and other forms of discriminatory treatment, low workplace morale, poor living conditions, avoidance of military conscription, escape from war, persecution, violence, crime, and fear for personal and family safety (Chikanda, 2011; Crush & Pendleton, 2010; Jose et al., 2008; McElmurray et al., 2006; White, 2006). However, the economic motive may also serve as a push factor (Paat, 2013). Professionals may leave their home countries due to a lack of opportunities for career advancement, as well as inadequate salaries and benefits (Chikanda, 2011).

Canada’s Immigration Framework

In Canada, migration policies implemented by the department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], formerly referred to as Citizenship and Immigration [CIC], promote immigration of internationally educated professionals who are highly valued for the wealth of skills, knowledge, and experience that they contribute to Canadian society and the Canadian economy (CIC, 2013; CTV News, 2015; Guo, 2015; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009; Man, 2004; Phan et al., 2015). The Canadian government has expressed a preference for economic class immigrants over family class immigrants and refugees due to the former group’s ability to add human capital within the Canadian labour market (Guo, 2015).

However, according to its immigration policy framework, Canada has three basic immigration categories: economic, family and humanitarian (Phan et al., 2015). Within each of
these basic categories are several sub-categories (IRCC, 2016). For example, under the economic category are the following sub-categories: high skilled, caregivers, business, provincial nominee program, Quebec skilled worker and Quebec business. Further subdivision of each of these sub-categories into “streams” is also made (IRCC, 2016). Like other developed nations in the Global North, and consistent with human capital theory, Canada is currently taking large-scale intensive measures to attract new economic class immigrants and streamline its immigration processes for skilled workers (Boucher, 2007; Brown et al., 2015; CIC, 2015a; CIC 2015b; Phan et al., 2015). In 2014 alone, Canada welcomed a record-breaking 262,000 new immigrants (CIC, 2015a), with plans to admit 285,000 more in 2015 (Drolet, Hamilton, Esses, & Zavrazhyna, 2015), and another 300,000 in 2016 (IRCC, 2016). Specific numbers of immigrants in each of IRCC’s categories and sub-categories discussed above, are targeted annually and these targets are published on the IRCC’s website.

Social workers are included among the professionals that Canada seeks to attract and recruit under bi- and multilateral agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Mexico (NAFTA Secretariat-Canadian Section, n.d.), and several other similar free trade agreements. International social workers that wish to move to Canada are also eligible to migrate under the new Express Entry system, described above, which expedites the migration process for selected skilled workers. Due to their level of education and professional credentials, social workers from abroad can be assessed under the Express Entry system to come to Canada as part of the Federal Skilled Worker program which categorizes them as economic immigrants in the high skilled class (IRCC, 2016). However, it is also possible for social workers to migrate to Canada under other categories, such as family immigration,
provided they meet the criteria established by the IRCC for the corresponding category under
which they apply.

Despite its interest in promoting economic integration of immigrants, Canada does not have a
national immigrant settlement policy and therefore settlement services and supports are provided
by a patchwork system of provincial government, community-based, religious, private sector and
higher education institutions resulting in inequalities and lack of standardization in settlement
services across the country (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Among numerous other concerns, the
failure to provide standardized high-quality settlement services across Canada ignores the fact
that almost all migrants to Canada, including those in the economic class, arrive in Canada
together with their family unit rather than as individual migrants who come to Canada for purely
economic purposes (Phan et al., 2015). Moreover, the issue of gender continues to be a
neglected subject within Canada’s immigration programs and policies despite the fact that the
Government of Canada recognizes the need for gender-based analysis to ensure that the specific
and unique needs of males and females in the population are met (Government of Canada, 2010).
The Government of Canada’s commitment to gender-based policy analysis (GBA) will be
discussed next.

Gender-Based Policy Analysis

A system of gender-based policy analysis was implemented by the federal government
following Canada’s adoption of the *Beijing Platform for Action* in 1995 at the Fourth United
Nations World Conference on Women where Canada joined several other nations in committing
to “effective integration of a gender perspective” throughout its “operations, policies, planning,
and decision making” (Government of Canada, 2010, n.p.). Under this agreement the federal
government obligated itself to “carry out gender impact assessments of the effects of government
bills or political decisions on women and men before decisions could be taken” (Government of Canada, 2010, n.p.). Following signing onto the Beijing Platform the Canadian government implemented a national action plan to carry out gender-based analyses (GBA) throughout its operations, agencies and departments. The Government of Canada noted that GBA is not only focused on women but rather it aims to “enhance the efficiency of programs and services” for all (Government of Canada, 2010, n.p.). The government has explained that GBA provides a “lens through which certain factors that are less obvious may be brought into focus and dealt with in order to ensure the equality of results for both women and men” (Government of Canada, 2010, n.p.). According to Matthew Graham, an official with the former CIC (now IRCC), staff at CIC “recognize and value the contribution of female immigrants” to the Canadian economy and society, and therefore the CIC is rigorous in conducting GBA in order to mitigate “negative impacts” on women in particular (Graham, 2015). Yet, a GBA of the impacts on the government’s Express Entry program is not readily available on the IRCC website.

While GBA has been useful in “mainstreaming” the analysis of gender-based inequities at the federal level, it has also met with some criticism (Paterson, 2010). Concern has been raised that each governmental department, including IRCC, is responsible for its own implementation and monitoring of GBA without any provision for external oversight or audit (Boucher, 2007). A further critique is that the GBA process follows an “expert-bureaucratic” model rather than a “participatory-democratic” one, meaning that community consultation regarding the impact of policies and programs is essentially nonexistent and thus there is very little opportunity for public input into the analyses, policy evaluations and decisions made based upon them (Paterson, 2010). In addition, by treating gender as a binary and privileging it over other forms of oppression, GBA may obscure important intersectional differences and
distinctions (Paterson, 2010). In an attempt to address this concern Status of Women Canada has recently launched a revised format for GBA called GBA+, which takes the form of a specific tool for conducting GBA that has been designed to account for diverse “identity factors” such as age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability and language, among others (Status of Women Canada, 2015, n.p.).

Alberta in Context of Canada

Within Canada, the province of Alberta is a popular destination for both interprovincial and international migrants (Government of Alberta, 2014). Alberta is a landlocked province in Western Canada with a total population estimate of 4.2 million people (Government of Alberta, 2016a). An illustration of Alberta’s geographic location within Canada is provided in Figure 2.1 (Government of Canada, 2015), where Alberta is highlighted in blue.

Figure 2.1: Geographic Location of Alberta within Canada

Traditionally, Alberta has had one of the strongest economies in Canada (Government of Alberta, 2014). Given the strength of the economy, it is not surprising that Alberta also has one of the highest rates of population growth in the country (Government of Alberta, 2014). In recent years Alberta was lauded for having a thriving labour market that featured a high rate of matching qualifications-to-jobs for immigrants working in regulated professions (Statistics
MIGRANT SOCIAL WORKERS IN ALBERTA

Canada, 2010). Alberta also has had the highest overall labour force participation and employment rates of immigrants among all provinces in Canada (Government of Alberta, 2012). Although Statistics Canada (2007) has defined Alberta’s economy as being “robust” and “non-cyclical” the lack of diversification of substantial revenue streams outside of the oil and gas sector means that Alberta’s prosperity is inextricably tied to oil production and the performance of energy markets (Leach, 2015). Given the recent downturn in oil markets many Albertans are experiencing financial issues after being laid off from their jobs in the oil and gas sector (Markusoff, 2016). As of 2016, entire office towers once occupied by oil and gas giants are sitting empty, the housing market is crumbling, retail spending is drying up and many Albertans are leaving the province altogether in search of new employment opportunities elsewhere (Markusoff, 2016). According to Statistics Canada (2016), Canada has been experiencing a “slowdown in population growth” and this has been “particularly pronounced in Alberta, falling from 2.38% in 2014 to 1.72% in 2015” (n.p.). An economist from one of Alberta’s leading financial institutions has summarized the current state of affairs within Alberta by stating that the downturn in the oil and gas sector has caused the Albertan economy to become “unhinged” (Markusoff, 2016).

Prior to the slowdown in the economy, approximately 320 new people were estimated to be moving to Alberta every day (Government of Alberta, 2014). The tremendous level of population inflow to Alberta that occurred for several years was stimulated by the province’s strong resource-based economy and corresponding labour shortages (Government of Alberta, 2009). Economically, until recently, Alberta had the highest gross domestic product (GDP) of any province in Canada (The Conference Board of Canada, 2014). As noted above, the main driver of Alberta’s economy is the oil and gas industry, although forestry and agriculture are also
strong components. Overall, until very recently, the robust economy stimulated job creation, population growth, and consumer spending, along with an active housing market within the province (The Conference Board of Canada, 2014).

In total, Alberta attracts approximately 16% of incoming international migrants to Canada (Government of Alberta, 2014). The majority (59%) of immigrants to Alberta come from Asia, with the greatest proportions coming from China and the Philippines (Government of Alberta, 2009). Long-term projections suggest that Alberta’s population will continue to grow, with international migration becoming the major driver of the population increase, in turn expanding the ethnocultural diversity of the province (Government of Alberta, 2016b). However, the Government of Alberta (2016b) projects that the economic downturn will slow immigration to Alberta in the short term. The majority of immigrants landing in Alberta enter Canada as skilled immigrants with permanent resident status (Government of Alberta, 2009). The next highest number of immigrants arriving in Alberta is family-class immigrants (Government of Alberta, 2009).

In addition to its typically high rate of population growth, Alberta has additional demographic characteristics that have made it unique within Canada. In particular, Alberta has an unequal sex ratio featuring more males than females (105 males for every 100 females) and this trend is expected to continue long-term (Government of Alberta, 2013). The pattern of having an uneven sex ratio is connected to the resource-based economy in Alberta and the fact that more men than women are employed in sectors such as oil and gas. The most populous region in Alberta is the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. This is also the area where the majority of international migrants to the province settle (Government of Alberta, 2013). Alberta’s
population is also aging. The median age in Alberta in 2015 was 36.2 years and this is expected to increase to 40.3 years by 2041 (Government of Alberta, 2016b).

Politically, Alberta has historically been right wing and conservative (CBC News, 2015). In fact, until the provincial election of May 5, 2015, Alberta’s Progressive Conservative party’s government was recognized as the longest-serving government in Canadian history (Kleiss, 2014). However, during the 2015 provincial election, the left wing Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP) won a majority government with the right wing Wild Rose Party forming the official opposition (CBC News, 2015). The electoral victory of the NDP has presented a major shift in the political tide within the province. Notably, this political transformation occurred commensurate with the start of the downturn in the Albertan economy, specifically within the lucrative oil and gas sector, as the global price of oil per barrel began to reach unanticipated lows in early 2015 (Howell, 2015).

Given the potential personal, interpersonal, economic and social risks and rewards associated with adaptation of newcomers to Alberta, a lack of comprehensive and strategically offered supports for the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in the province and across Canada has recently been raised as a concern (Fulton et al., 2016). However, due to the lack of fulsome analysis of this topic little is known about the lived experience of being a professional social work migrant in the Albertan context in particular.

**Social Work in Context**

Globally, social work is practiced within “diverse settings through a multitude of approaches” leading it to be a profession characterized by “incredible heterogeneity” (Dominelli, 2010, p. 1). Within the social work literature, and amongst social workers themselves, there is an ongoing debate about whether social work is best conceptualized as being a localized or
globalized profession (Simpson, 2009). Dominelli (2010) has characterized social work as a “profession in flux” (p. 151). Indeed, several authors have already concluded that while some social work knowledge, skills, methods, and values have commonalities and can be said to be universal (Dominelli, 2010), other aspects of social work practice are localized and indigenized (Al-Makhamreh, Hasna, Hundt, Al-Smaïran, & Alzaroo, 2012; Bradshaw & Graham, 2007; Dominelli, 2010). However, many social work scholars believe that these localized and indigenized aspects of practice can be transferred or adapted in order to fit new practice contexts (Beecher et al., 2010; Dominelli, 2010; Graham, Brownlee, Shier, & Doucette, 2008; Simpson, 2009).

At present, the globalization/localization debate in social work remains unresolved (Dominelli, 2010; Lyons, 2006; Midgley, 2016; Webb, 2003). This lack of resolution serves to create what Dominelli (2010) referred to as “contested spaces” that are based on opposing “worldviews, ideologies and belief systems” among groups of social workers, administrators, academics, policymakers and service users (p. 1). Indeed, globalization is a strong force pushing the social work profession to “(re)configure the boundaries of what constitutes professional social work” (Dominelli, 2010, p. 1). In many cases, the dialogue on this subject has become controversial with strong opinions expressed on both sides (Dominelli, 2010; Lyons, 2006; Midgley, 2016; Webb, 2003). However, in acknowledging that the “current state of knowledge in social work is partial” this debate can be seen as one part of the continued development of the profession itself (Dominelli, 2010, p. 11). Indeed, in the Western context social work has a history of being “partial” as it has developed over time by drawing on perspectives, theories and practices from allied academic and professional disciplines in the social and human sciences (Healy, 2005). Within the current context of globalization, both global and local realities can be
seen as fundamentally shaping 21st century social work practice, education and research (Lyons, 2006; Midgley, 2016).

In terms of global or universal aspects of social work practice, it is generally agreed that regardless of the practice setting, it is important for social workers to have specific knowledge and skills based on their local environment (Al-Makhamreh et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2008; Simpson, 2009; Webb, 2003). In order to practice effectively, social workers must understand the local culturally based system in which they are working, and in particular, the political, economic and social aspects of that system (Al-Makhamreh et al., 2012; Beecher et al., 2010). Below I provide an overview of current understandings of social work in global, as well as in the national (Canadian), and local (Albertan) contexts.

Global Context

The formal professionalization of social work in the Western context can be associated with the relatively recent rise of the Industrial Revolution, and even more recently, the two World Wars (Hick, 2010). These significant historical events created new challenges for individuals, families, and communities during times of rapid change and increasing social, economic, and personal problems (Dominelli, 2010; Hick, 2010). Social work emerged to help people through these difficult times. Thus, in the modern Western context, social work is a relatively young profession, having been established during the 19th century where first in Europe, and then in North America, women began to deliver care to people in need outside of their immediate families on a voluntary basis as a form of charitable duty (Dominelli, 2010). Following the World Wars and the Cold War era, the rise of globalization can be viewed as the next major historical phase in the evolution of social work as a profession. Indeed, never before has social work faced the issues and dilemmas that mass migration and transnational social and
economic inequities are presenting and never before has a profession been called upon to “transcend” so many diverse “social divides” as currently exist (Dominelli, 2010, p. 10). The new shape of world finance, characterized primarily by the rapid expansion and growth of capitalism and global markets, has resulted in greatly unbalanced social and economic development (Li, 2003), and, in turn, increasing social and economic inequities that are apparent on both global and local scales (Hick, 2010). It is the direct and indirect outcomes of these inequities that social workers must address both personally and professionally as they directly impact social workers themselves, as well as the individuals, families, and communities with which they practice (Deepak, 2012).

Prior to the rise of globalization, the broadest level that the social work profession operated at was at the level of the nation-state (Dominelli, 2010; Midgely, 2016). Now that social work has expanded to the “international domain” within the context of globalization, we can see anew how complex and “fractured” our understandings of social work as a profession and social work practice are (Dominelli, 2010, p. 16). The acknowledgement of this fractured understanding has led to various initiatives and movements to better define and explain social work’s scope of practice and professional domain. Perhaps the largest and most well-known attempt at repairing the fractured understandings and conceptualizations has been carried out over the past decade through international bodies related to social work practice, education and social welfare, including the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Council on Social Welfare, and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IFSW, 2012). Their collaborative efforts have resulted in three key products including the development of a global definition of social work (IFSW, 2014a), global standards for social work (IFSW, 2012) and most recently, a Global Agenda for social work (Gray & Webb, 2014; IFSW, 2014b).
According to Jones and Truell (2012), the stated purpose of creating the Global Agenda was to respond to the “increased global complexity” in which social workers work and live (p. 455) and to “re-position” social work as a global profession of skilled people who are working for similar outcomes and “creating multi-faceted, pragmatic solutions to highly complex problems, both individual and social” (p. 456). A central concern with this document is that the development of the Global Agenda was a way for the international social work organizations that were behind its development to increase their national and international power and influence (Jones & Trill, 2012). Gray and Webb (2014) have also raised concern about the purported lack of inclusivity of diverse perspectives during the documents’ development, especially with regard to social workers from the Global South. They further contended that the Global Agenda is short on specific strategies and details such as where and how the recommended initiatives can be carried out, as well as how they relate to the daily practice activities of social workers (Gray & Webb, 2014). Another concern is that the Global Agenda is not progressive enough. For example, it does not take a political stance against poverty and other widespread social and economic inequalities brought about under globalization (Gray & Webb, 2014).

Each nation-state around the world has its own welfare regime for addressing social and economic issues within its borders. Various conceptualizations of state welfare provision have been developed by academics (Cammett & MacLean, 2014). The influence of globalization on the welfare state (Cammett & MacLean, 2014), and its subsequent impact on social work practice is an emerging area of discussion within the academic literature (Dustin, 2007). However, as Campanini and colleagues (2012) asserted, at this point in time “social work as a profession and institution is constructed through nation states – in terms of policy, legal systems, economics and practice” (p. 36). With that established, I will turn attention to the national and
local social work context in Alberta, Canada.

**National and Local Context in Alberta, Canada**

In each nation-state the welfare of citizens is supported through the provision of social, educational and medical services by a diverse array of state and non-state actors. The services provided by non-state actors, such as families, community groups, businesses, and religious communities, often have deep historical roots and pre-date the establishment of more formalized models for state provision of public welfare (Cammett & MacLean, 2014; Guest, 1985). The range of social services and income security programs provided by a nation-state to its citizens are commonly referred to as public social welfare (Hick, 2010), or social security (Guest, 1985).

In the industrialized Western context state provision of public social welfare is a central component of the relationship between a nation-state and its citizens (Cammett & MacLean, 2014; Guest, 1985). As a wealthy, developed, democratic, capitalist society the nation-state of Canada provides its citizens with universal healthcare and public education systems (Hick, 2010). Since Confederation in 1867 Canada has also recognized the importance of providing financial support to individuals and families who experience “income interruption” (Guest, 1985). These public welfare systems, which change and evolve over time, are designed to support citizens in meeting their needs, especially when structural inequities create social, medical, and financial hardships that require external support to address (Cammett & MacLean, 2014; Hick, 2010). As a benevolent society, Canada’s goal is to make public social welfare system available as a “safety net” in order to provide assistance to citizens in “difficult times until they can rebuild their lives” (Hick, 2010, p. 5). However, from a statistical perspective, Canada invests just 17% of its gross domestic product on social expenditures, which is below the average of 19% among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
countries (OECD, 2015a). Nonetheless, the level of combined public social, educational and health services provided to Canadian citizens is comparatively extensive when viewed on an international scale (Hick, 2010). Taken in combination, Canadian expenditures on both education (OECD, 2015b) and health (OECD, 2015c) together are above OECD averages.

In Canada, the rules that dictate which state-provisioned social security programs citizens are eligible for, are based on social policies set out by the Government of Canada (Guest, 1985; Hick, 2010). Delivery of public social security programs is undertaken by the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, regional and municipal governments, as well as non-governmental agencies in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors (Hick, 2010; Midgely, 2016). Taken together these social policies and social programs form the “backbone” of Canada’s public welfare system (Hick, 2010).

Broadly speaking, delivery of governmental social programs is the domain of practice for the majority of social workers in Canada and in many other countries globally (Hick, 2010; Midgely, 2016). Constitutionally, responsibilities for delivery of health, social welfare, and education programs is allocated to the provinces and therefore many social workers are provincial government employees (Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2012). The provincial governments also have authority to regulate professions, including social work (MacDonald & Adachi, 2001). Across Canada social workers practice according to a national Code of Ethics that was first put forward by the Canadian Association of Social Workers in 1994, and revised in 2005 (Hick, 2010).

The social work profession in the province of Alberta is regulated by the Alberta College of Social Workers [ACSW] (ACSW, 2013). Social workers in Alberta are required to be licensed by the ACSW in order to legally practice and hold the title of Registered Social Worker
MIGRANT SOCIAL WORKERS IN ALBERTA

This requirement is enacted under provincial legislation, specifically the *Health Professions Act*. Registered social workers in Alberta are also required to complete and report on their “continuing competency activities” (ACSW, 2013, p. 2). Additionally, some of the activities that fall under the domain of clinical social work practice are restricted to social workers that meet the criteria for being a part of the ACSW’s clinical social work registry.

In Alberta, social workers are employed in a range of roles across public, non-profit and private settings. The total number of registered social workers in Alberta continues to rise on an annual basis. As of 2014 there were over 7,000 registered social workers in Alberta (ACSW, 2014). The growth in the number of social workers in the province is attributed to social work students graduating from the 10 post-secondary institutions that offer social work education programs in the province, as well as those arriving in Alberta from other provinces and countries (ACSW, 2014). In terms of international arrivals, between 2013 and 2014, 89 individuals with international qualifications applied for registration with the ACSW (ACSW, 2013; ACSW, 2014).

**Research on Professional Adaptation of Migrant Social Workers**

Research on the professional migration and adaptation of social workers has been increasing in volume over the past decade, as exemplified by the work of research teams in New Zealand (Beddoe et al., 2012; Beddoe & Fouche, 2014; Fouche, Beddoe, Bartley, & de Haan, 2014a; Fouche, Beddoe, Bartley, & Brenton, 2014b), the United Kingdom (Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein, Manthorpe, & Stevens, 2010; Hussein et al., 2011a; Hussein et al., 2011b; Hussein, 2014; Manthorpe, Hussein, & Stevens, 2012; Moriarty, Hussein, Manthorpe, & Stevens, 2012; Simpson, 2009; Sims, 2012; Walsh, Wilson, & O’Connor, 2010; Welbourne et al., 2007) and Canada (Brown et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Pullen-Sansfaçon, Spolander, &
Engelbrecht, 2011; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012; Pullen-Sansfaçon, Brown, Graham, & Michaud, 2014). Yet, the literature on the professional migration of social workers is still considered to be in its infancy (Pullen- Sansfaçon et al., 2012). Currently, there are more questions than answers regarding the topic of professional adaptation within this population. Unlike the much more extensive work that has been carried out in regard to transnational migration of other professionals, such as healthcare workers, we are just beginning to learn about trends in transnational social worker migration, and the obstacles and opportunities faced by migrant social workers in the current context of globalization and labour mobility. Below I will review some key findings from the initial research that has been conducted within Canada and internationally.

**International Research**

Internationally, over the past decade, research on professional migration of social workers has emerged out of the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Research from both of these geographic areas confirms the trend of increasing international mobility amongst social workers (Beddoe et al., 2012; Hussein et al., 2011b; Moriarty et al. 2012; Walsh et al., 2010). In their study of the trends of social work migration to the island of Ireland, Walsh and colleagues (2010) found that most migrant social workers came from either English-speaking Commonwealth countries including England, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, or from the United States. However, increasing numbers were also arriving from South Africa, Nigeria and Eastern Europe (Walsh et al., 2010). Of particular note in their findings was the important role that language appears to play in social work migration. Walsh and colleagues (2010) observed that few social workers from European nations outside of Great Britain arrive in Ireland despite various governmental programs that promote workforce mobility across Europe. The authors called for
further research to better understand this trend and its implications (Walsh et al., 2010).

Indeed, migrant social workers seem to be well aware of the importance of language skills and fluency to their practice. This concept, first identified by Walsh and colleagues (2010), is supported by another study carried out by Manthorpe and colleagues (2012). They found that a lack of English language skills caused communication barriers between migrant social workers and service users, resulting in negative experiences for all involved (Manthorpe et al., 2012).

A shortage of social workers across the United Kingdom has led to extensive international recruitment initiatives in order to meet the demand through importing social workers from other countries (Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein et al., 2011b; Welbourne et al., 2007). Hussein and colleagues (2011a) found that in England, the majority of migrant social workers arrive from the United States, Australia, India and Africa. Recruiting social workers internationally is a priority in the United Kingdom because it is acknowledged that domestic social work education programs are unable to produce enough new social workers to meet the labour market demand (Moriarty et al., 2012). Recruitment agencies play a significant role in acting as intermediaries between migrant social workers and employers in the United Kingdom, however this has not been well studied (Hussein et al., 2010). Welbourne and colleagues (2007) warned of ethical issues associated with international recruitment of social workers. These authors likened the recruitment of migrant social workers from nations in the Global South to the brain drain phenomenon occurring within the healthcare sector (Welbourne et al., 2007). They provide the example that approximately 50% of the social workers trained in Zimbabwe relocate to the United Kingdom, and they expressed concern about the impact this has on the Zimbabwean social welfare system (Welbourne et al., 2007).
Initial work on identifying social workers’ motivations to migrate has been conducted in the United Kingdom (Hussein et al., 2011a; Welbourne, et al., 2007), with financial, altruistic and political motivations cited most frequently (Hussein et al., 2011a; Welbourne et al., 2007). However, further research on this topic has been recommended (Moriarty et al., 2012; Welbourne et al., 2007).

A theme that carries across research from both the United Kingdom and New Zealand is the experience of discrimination faced by migrant social workers. In New Zealand, discrimination in the workplace has been found to have a negative impact on successful adaptation of migrant social workers (Fouche et al., 2014). Likewise, in the United Kingdom, Hussein and colleagues (2011a) found that over half of migrant social workers who responded to their survey had experienced bullying and mistreatment in the workplace.

Researchers from both the United Kingdom and New Zealand have also found that migrant social workers experience challenges related to professional adaptation once they arrive in their new country and gain employment within the social work profession. In particular challenges arise as migrant social workers attempt to apply the concepts, practices and skills they learned in their countries of origin to their new practice contexts (Beddoe et al., 2012; Dominelli, 2010; Sims, 2012). As I noted elsewhere (Fulton et al., 2016), Beecher and colleagues (2010) characterize such struggles as a lack of “generalizability” of the social work education received in one’s home country to a new context. Likewise, Hussein and colleagues (2011a) found that migrant social workers from around the world who migrate to the United Kingdom often experience their new practice as being “very different” from what they were accustomed to in their home countries, in terms of the availability and types of services, the regulation of the profession, the structure of health and social service systems, the resources and funding available
for programs and services, the pace of work, the workload, the public perception of the social work profession, as well as opportunities for career advancement. Thus, for many social workers, transitioning to social work practice abroad requires time and supports in order to successfully acculturate to new practice contexts (Beddoe et al., 2012; Sims, 2012).

Welbourne and colleagues (2007) classified the obligation to provide ongoing training and support to migrant social workers recruited to the United Kingdom as an ethical issue. They suggest that the provision of ongoing supports and training is a proactive response to potential issues associated with adaptation, competency, safety and job satisfaction, however design and implementation of such programming requires further cost/benefit analysis (Welbourne et al., 2007). As a form of support for migrant social workers a university-based training module designed to facilitate cultural adaptation and encourage successful settlement among migrant social workers has been developed in England (Sims, 2012). Sims (2012) formally evaluated this program and found that such training can offer useful acculturative supports to migrant social workers, provided that the delivery of the program is well timed.

Although there is broad agreement that support with acculturation is beneficial to migrant social workers’ professional adaptation, the existing research lacks specificity as to the exact shape and form that such support should take. As I have discussed previously (Fulton et al., 2016), Beddoe and colleagues (2012) argue that the process of professional acculturation should be a “two-way exchange” between migrant and local social workers as each group brings strengths, assets and unique perspectives into practice. Mentorship programs in combination with additional forms of support are recommended (Beddoe et al., 2012). Similarly, the need for better access to formal induction opportunities for migrant social workers has also been identified (Fouche et al., 2014).
Canadian Research

Drs Pullen Sansfaçon, Graham, and Brown have conducted research on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Canada for approximately five years. I worked along with them as a research assistant for approximately three years. Part of my role involved collecting the data, which I have re-analyzed for this thesis. Through my work with this team I have come to realize that due to potential context-driven practice differences within Canadian social work practice environments, the learning curve that migrant social workers face upon commencing practice in Canada may be especially steep compared with that experienced by other migrant professionals. Differences in practice contexts and expectations between migrant social workers’ home countries and the Canadian context that are of significance for social work practice include “local context, policy, laws, culture, values, and organizations” (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012, p. 42). In a recent manuscript (Fulton et al., 2016) our team published further results of the study with migrant social workers in Canada, specifically relating to the pre-employment experiences of foreign credential recognition and labour market attachment, two related processes that are challenging for migrant social workers in Canada, even before the work of “on-the-job” professional adaptation can begin. The national research project is the first social work-specific study reflecting evidence from earlier studies from other disciplines that have demonstrated the devaluation and penalization that immigrants face in the Canadian labour market (Al Ariss, 2010). Still, there is much learning yet to do about the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Canada both pre-employment and once they have secured employment and started working (Brown et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2014).
Skilled Migration and Professional Adaptation

Lived experiences of professional migration are variable and range from a relatively smooth transition to a traumatic event, depending on a host of highly individualized factors as well as broader social, political and economic dynamics, such as those identified by Berry (1980; 1992) in his theory of acculturation. Other dynamics that shape the migration experiences of professional migrants identified in the literature include gender, race, language, and cultural backgrounds (Khan et al., 2015; Xu, 2007; Xu, Gutierrez, & Kim, 2008). However, lived experiences of skilled migrants, especially those who move from the Global South to the Global North remains an under-researched area despite this being among the most predominate migration pattern under globalization (Al Ariss, 2010; Iredale, 2001).

The amount of research attention being dedicated to understanding professional migration is increasing (Khan et al., 2015), including some recent studies that are specific to the Canadian context (Akbari, 2011; Al Ariss, 2010; Buzdugan, & Halli, 2009). Al Ariss (2010) reviewed the research of several scholars from the field of management who have examined professional migration. Al Ariss (2010) noted that the work he reviewed was largely focused on the “structural influences” that individual migrants must “navigate” while pursuing professional migration and adaptation (p. 339). In Canada, much of this navigational work is left up to the individual rather than being facilitated by an organization or government, thus it has been established that there is often a direct relationship between a person’s ability to navigate the necessary structures and their career trajectories once they arrive (Al Ariss, 2010). Others have similarly suggested that immigrant adaptation to living in “Western immigrant countries” such as Canada, has conventionally been understood to require “several years or even generations” as an “adjustment period” before the migrant can be considered to be “integrated into the host
economy” due to the “disadvantage” that they experience in the labour market through processes of “active exclusion” that are perpetuated by various state and regulatory policies (Bauder, 2003, p. 699). According to Bauder (2003), non-European immigrants are “particularly disadvantaged” in the context of the Canadian labour market (p. 699). This is interesting given the fact that the number of non-European immigrants to North America is rapidly increasing (Czaika & de Haas, 2014). The pattern of greater labour market disadvantage being experienced by non-European immigrants in Canada has been validated by a field experiment conducted in Toronto, Ontario by Oreopoulos (2009).

However, other research indicates that not all migrants experience a long adjustment period post-migration. This may be due, in part, to the fact that among professional migrants there are various “starting points” that they originate from in terms of geography, as well as other factors such as social location, lived experiences, financial means, and migration motivations and expectations. As Al Ariss (2010) contends, migrants vary by “geographic origin”, the “forced/chosen nature” of their movement, their period of intended “stay abroad”, as well as their legal status in both the sending and destination countries (p. 340). Language fluency and race are also critical factors in the lived experience of migration (Khan et al., 2015). Many of the factors identified in the academic literature as being crucial considerations in terms of post-migration adaptation in Canada are reflective of a long history of racism and xenophobia in Canadian society, which has been mirrored in discriminatory immigration policies such as the Chinese head tax of 1885 and more recently the pre-1976 Immigration Act which allowed for immigrant selection based on racial categorization (Décoste, 2014). Given the diverse circumstances and considerations surrounding migration and adaptation, transnational migrants should be regarded as a heterogeneous group.
Existing research has demonstrated a great diversity in professional migrants’ subjective experiences due to a host of factors at key stages of the post-migration professional adaptation process. These stages typically include: a) credential recognition, licensure, and/or registration (Al Ariss, 2010; Bauder, 2003; Khan et al., 2015; McElmurray et al. 2006; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Ngo & Este, 2006), b) labour market access and attachment (Al Ariss, 2010; Aure, 2013; Bauder, 2003; Drolet et al., 2015; Meares, 2010; Oreopoulos, 2009; Phan et al., 2015), c) professional induction, orientation and initial transition (Khan et al., 2015; Lim, 2006; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012; Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010; Sims, 2012), and d) personal and interpersonal adaptation and community integration (Barreto, 2013; Berry, 1992; Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011; Jose et al., 2008; Khan et al., 2015; McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Phan et al., 2015). Below is a review of the existing literature on the lived experiences of migrant professionals at each of these stages.

**Credential Recognition, Licensure, and Registration**

Prior to practicing their profession in their new country, migrant professionals whose profession is regulated in Canada must obtain credential recognition, licensure, and/or registration (Drolet et al., 2015; Ngo & Este, 2006). Credential recognition is one aspect of the professional adaptation and transition process that has received significant attention in the academic literature (Ngo & Este, 2006). Either before arriving in their new country, or soon after arrival, migrant professionals must approach the appropriate body to have their credentials recognized and apply for registration and/or licensure in order to legally and ethically practice in their new country (Barreto, 2013; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012; Ngo & Este, 2006). Navigating the various steps and requirements in this process can prove challenging (Hall & Lunt, 2005; Murphy & McGuire, 2005). Not only must migrants determine who the appropriate licensing
body is, they must also produce various documents and pay fees, often while encountering numerous additional barriers associated with language, finances, culture, and transportation issues (Hall & Lunt, 2005; Ngo & Este, 2006). The process is often regarded as being frustrating, costly, time-consuming and complicated (Khan et al., 2015; Kingma, 2006; McElmurray et al., 2006).

In addition to the expenses associated with credential recognition, professional migrants often arrive in their new country together with their families, and therefore they must also invest time and money into establishing a new home, obtaining transportation, and sending children to school (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Phan et al., 2015). The investment of time and money involved in the relocation process has long been said to contribute to acculturative stress (Berry, 1992), including identity conflicts, low self-esteem, as well as other emotional, mental and physical health problems (Rudmin, 2009). However this widely held perspective has been challenged in light of recent conflicting research evidence (Rudmin, 2009). According to Rudmin (2009), there is now “abundant empirical evidence that acculturation in general is not stressful” (p. 116). The nuance here is that while acculturation itself may not be stressful, many of the other experiences that migrants face in their new country post-migration are inherently psychologically stressful, such as the perception that one is experiencing discrimination (Rudmin, 2009).

As noted above, financial considerations, namely low socioeconomic status, is a known stress factor among migrants that has been correlated with the development of physical health issues (Rudmin, 2009). In addition to the cost of establishing and running a household in their new country, migrant professionals may be engaged in sending remittance payments to extended family overseas (McElmurray et al., 2006). As a result of financial demands, some migrant
professionals delay engaging in the credential recognition process, deciding instead to seek employment in other fields or focus on raising their families (Ronquillo, 2012).

A further factor contributing to migrant professionals’ decision to obtain work in other fields is that the credential recognition and registration/licensure processes are time intensive (Bauder, 2003; McElmurray et al. 2006; Ngo & Este, 2006). In particular, there is often an unacceptably long lag time between initial application for credential recognition and receipt of official registration/licensure (Murphy & McGuire, 2005). In some cases, migrant professionals may also be required to take courses or undergo prior learning assessments and/or examinations in order to be granted registration/licensure (Khan et al., 2015; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Ronquillo, 2012). While these requirements have some social and legal value, for example, they may play a role in safeguarding quality of care, for the migrant professionals themselves these requirements may create a host of difficulties (Kingma, 2006; Xu et al., 2008). The examination process is often experienced as being stressful (Khan et al., 2015). There can also be serious implications if one fails a required course or licensure examination. It has been suggested that issues surrounding examinations are the top impediment to career progression for migrants in the medical field (Khan et al., 2015). Despite the personal stress and discomfort, and the failure rates, there are still many proponents of licensing examinations and other re-accreditation measures. For example, in their discussion of migrant social workers, Pullen-Sansfaçon and colleagues (2012) argue in favour of such measures, stating that “global standards for education and practice…cannot be the sole means for ensuring preparation for practice across countries and cultures” (p. 38).

Yet, evidence also demonstrates that it is possible to successfully streamline some accreditation and credentialing processes across international borders through mutual recognition
agreements (Iredale, 2005). For example, within the profession of psychology active measures to facilitate greater international mobility through creating credentialing agreements have met with success (Hall & Lunt, 2005). Developments such as the creation of the *EuroPsy Diploma* in Europe allow for endorsement of psychologist’s credentials across European nations, thereby enabling ease of mobility for European psychologists (Hall & Lunt, 2005). A similar initiative has taken place for recognition of social work credentials between New Zealand and Australia (Social Workers Registration Board, Government of New Zealand, 2014) as well as between France and the Canadian province of Quebec (Brown et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016). However, as Iredale (2005) has identified, mutual recognition agreements that are occupation-specific do not challenge pre-existing gender biases within occupations themselves.

Individuals who successfully complete examinations and other accreditation processes may experience a boost in confidence surrounding their capability to successfully practice in their new country (Barreto, 2013). In addition, their sense of belonging within their profession may be enhanced (Barreto, 2013). On the other hand, given their experiences with challenges and barriers some professionals decide that professional adaptation in the North American context is simply too arduous, and they choose to work outside of their profession in favour of other opportunities. Thus, from a human capital perspective their potential contribution to their profession and the economy may be minimized or lost altogether (Murphy & McGuire, 2005).

Non-recognition of foreign qualifications and experience is noted in the literature as a significant issue among migrant professionals in Canada (Al Ariss, 2010; Bauder, 2003; Li, 2001; Picot & Sweetman, 2012). Challenges associated with credential recognition, as discussed above, are broad based and not specific to a handful of professions, pointing toward the possibility that there is a broader systemic issue with the credentialing system itself that is going
unaddressed (Bauder, 2003). Indeed, there is mounting evidence to support the claim that Canadian professional associations “actively exclude immigrant labour from the most highly desired occupations in order to reserve these occupations for Canadian-born and Canadian-educated workers” (Bauder, 2003, p. 699). In particular, professional migrants from ethnic minority groups are believed to face discrimination at both the organizational and national policy levels in ways that impede career development and access to the labour market (Al Ariss, 2010). Next we will take a closer look at labour market access and attachment for migrant professionals in the Canadian context.

**Labour Market Access and Attachment**

Pre-migration legal, health and employment status and method of obtaining entry into the country are linked with post-migration outcomes and characteristics internationally (Paat, 2013). For example, in Canada, there are numerous rules and restrictions placed on international recruitment and migration that are imposed by governmental agencies (Al Ariss, 2010). These rules and restrictions carry legal implications. They also serve to legitimize some migrants while deeming others to be inferior or unworthy (Al Ariss, 2010; Bauder, 2003; Phan et al., 2015). Only those who go through formally sanctioned migration channels and obtain documentation showing that they are legally entitled to work in the country will be able to move forward to the stage of accessing the labour market within their profession. Certain methods of entering Canada, such as formally applying through NAFTA or the Express Entry program for skilled workers, are more likely to result in receiving the proper work visas or resident status required in order to work legally in the country.

Once they have arrived, migrant professionals face numerous challenges and barriers when seeking out their first job in their profession in Canada (Oreopoulos, 2009; Phan et al.,
Skilled migrants in Canada often experience problems getting hired for jobs that match their qualifications and skills (Al Ariss, 2010; Aure, 2013; Meares, 2010; Phan et al., 2015). This is despite growth in the Canadian economy and established labour shortages in various professional fields (Barnetson, & Foster, 2014; Carey, 2014; Drolet et al., 2015; Sakamoto et al., 2010). The struggles with occupational attainment and labour market integration faced by migrants in Canada (Brown et al., 2015; Drolet et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Stobbe & Harris, 2013; Phan et al., 2015) and elsewhere (Barrett & Duffy, 2008; Bevelander, 2005) have been widely discussed in the academic and grey literatures.

Overall, a decline in economic outcomes among migrants has been occurring in Canada since the 1970s (Picot & Sweetman, 2012). Various formulae have been developed to measure this effect and all have found similar patterns and results (Picot & Sweetman, 2012). In addition, race and gender-based differences in labour market access and attachment experiences and outcomes have been identified (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). For men, the central problem is underemployment rather than unemployment, resulting in lower than expected annual earnings, while migrant women are more likely than men to be completely unemployed (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). Among professional migrants, women are more likely to be underemployed when compared with professional male migrants (Phan et al., 2015). Taken together, the skills, knowledge and competencies of migrant women are particularly underutilized in the economy (Phan et al., 2015). This gender-based marginalization results in the perpetuation of social and economic inequity, including an overall trend of rising numbers of immigrants in Canada living in poverty (Picot & Sweetman, 2012). Furthermore, the trend indicates that migrant women are more likely than migrant men to live in poverty as a direct result of labour market access issues (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). Both unemployment and underemployment are serious issues
for professional migrants in Canada (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Regardless of gender, migrants are more likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to be overqualified for their jobs, and this likelihood is higher among racialized migrants than White migrants, pointing to racial discrimination as a contributing factor to both underemployment and unemployment among Canadian immigrants (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011).

Aside from global economic issues, such as the IT bust of the early 2000s and the economic downturn of 2008-09 which account for some of the trend in declining labour market access and economic outcomes for migrants in Canada, the outcomes are also closely correlated with language skills (Picot & Sweetman, 2012). Advanced language skills in French or English assist skilled migrants to “convert their education to earnings” (Picot & Sweetman, 2012, p. 8). Thus, language skills are said to explain a “considerable portion” of the gap in earnings between migrants and their Canadian-born counterparts, with language becoming increasingly important the higher the level of education that the migrant has (Picot & Sweetman, 2012). Migrants whose first language is not English or French are the most likely to be overqualified for their current job (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). In addition, the older the migrant is, and the longer they have been in Canada, the less likely that over-education for current employment will be a factor, suggesting that it is possible for migrants to overcome barriers to labour market access over long periods of time (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). Additionally, obtaining a unionized position appears to minimize race-based differences in earnings, however racialized immigrants are less likely than Canadian-born workers to work within unionized settings (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011).

Human capital theory attempts to explain the labour market access issues of migrants by suggesting that migrants are not competitive with Canadian-born and Canadian-educated
workers due to the inferior quality of education that they receive abroad (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011; Phan et al., 2015). Discrimination theory suggests that in general, migrants are less likely than Canadian-born workers to be offered employment commensurate with their skills and education (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). In addition, migrants are more likely than Canadian-born workers to “settle” for positions that are below their skill level (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011). Foreign credentials have long been given a lower “market value” than Canadian credentials by employers (Li, 2001, p. 23). In terms of pay equity, migrants, especially those who are non-White, appear to be subject to a “significant income penalty” within the Canadian labour market across industries and occupations (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011, p. 7). Migrant women are also often paid lower wages than others, including migrant men, in many occupational categories (Phan et al., 2015). An additional contributing factor is that the Canadian job market is complex and it can be difficult for newcomers to navigate thereby creating a barrier to accessibility (Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011).

In a field experiment in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, involving replying to online job advertisements with six thousand resumes constructed to look like they were from recent immigrants from China, India, Pakistan and Britain, as well as non-immigrants with and without “ethnic-sounding names” (Oreopoulos, 2009, p. 5), Oreopoulos (2009) found that interview requests were highest for English-named applicants with Canadian education and work experience by triple the amount over resumes with Chinese, Indian or Pakistani names and foreign education and work experience. The number of interviews for the resumes representing recent British immigrants were the same as for the English-named Canadian applicants. This experiment suggests that immigration status cannot solely account for the differences in interview request rates, and that ethno-racial characteristics appear to be an extremely important
factor in being invited for a job interview. Canadian work experience is another key factor in the decision of employers to invite applicants for job interviews (Sakamoto et al., 2010). In the experiment mentioned above (Oreopoulos, 2009), when the resumes that were intended to look like they were from recent immigrants were revised to show just one job that qualified as Canadian work experience, the callback rate increased by 11%, on average. These results suggest a high level of employer discrimination against racialized applicants, especially those with exclusively foreign education and work experience (Oreopoulos, 2009).

**Induction, Orientation and Transition**

Transitioning into a new workplace at the same time as adapting to the broader cultural context in the receiving country is an adjustment process (Barreto, 2013) that includes an element of “professional acculturation” (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). This process is non-linear (Barreto, 2013). Professional migrants face numerous challenges in integrating into their new workplaces and professional culture once they begin work in North America (Ranquillo, 2012). These challenges exist at the personal, interpersonal and organizational levels, and may also encompass language barriers (Barreto, 2013; Brown et al., 2015; Harrison, 2013; Liversage, 2009; Picot & Sweetman, 2012; Xu et al., 2008). The success of the professional acculturation process is said to depend, at least in part, upon the migrant professional’s ability to make use of coping mechanisms such as managing stress, learning the language, accepting new practices, using problem-solving skills, and adapting a new style of communication (Jose et al., 2008). These coping mechanisms are required to in order to successfully adjust to new policies, procedures, standards, technologies, attitudes, roles, behaviours, language, values, expectations, and systems (Barreto, 2013; McElmurray et al., 2006; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2008). The adjustment process can also involve “unlearning”
certain aspects of what the migrant professional knew and did in practice in their home countries (Xu et al., 2008).

For migrant professionals who do not speak the dominant language of their new country fluently, language is commonly cited as the greatest professional adaptation issue (Barreto, 2013; Khan et al., 2015; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Xu et al., 2008). In addition, cultural differences in non-verbal communication and establishing shared meanings for vocabulary and colloquialisms can also be a source of tension and concern when working with clients and colleagues (Brown et al., 2015; Jose et al., 2008; Khan et al., 2015; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Xu, 2007). Accented speech can also present issues (Brown et al., 2015; Harrison, 2013).

Language can be an area of great apprehension for social workers, mental health professionals, medical personnel and others who work in relationship-focused, talk-centered professions where developing close relationships with clients, patients, service users or customers based on complex verbal and non-verbal communications is required (Barreto, 2013; Brown et al., 2015).

At the organizational level, researchers in the health sector have found that many healthcare organizations fail to make full use of the skills and knowledge of migrant professionals (Murphy & McGuire, 2005). In addition, patients, clients, colleagues, supervisors, and employers often provide a less than friendly welcome (Xu, 2007). Interpersonally, migrant health professionals have reported that they are often made to feel that they are taking job opportunities away from domestically educated workers, despite the established labour shortage in the healthcare field (Lim, 2006). Indeed, intersecting social and cultural integration issues, in the forms of racism, gender-based discrimination, harassment, marginalization, alienation, and other such indignities in both the workplace and in the community have been found to be major stressors for professional migrants across sectors (Aure, 2013; Brown et al., 2015; Jose et al.,
These issues are also correlated with unemployment and a lack of career progression (Khan et al., 2015; Sakamoto et al., 2010). The associated stress can further result in or contribute to a variety of family and/or personal problems (Phan et al., 2015; Xu, 2007). Thus, in his discussion of migrant nurses in the United States, Lim (2006) states, “nurses harvested from abroad – and made to grow very fast in a new environment – risk rejection, like transplanted organs” (p. 52).

Encountering the many dimensions of the adaptation and acculturation process can leave migrant professionals feeling isolated and marginalized (Barreto, 2013). While some professionals, such as nurses, appear to benefit from bridging programs offered by employers, post-secondary institutions or professional associations, which assist with cultural transitions and access to employment opportunities, many others are left on their own to succeed or fail within their new context (Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Ranquillo, 2012; Syed, 2008). Even when they are available participation in bridging programs can be cost prohibitive, especially for women who may perceive engaging in such an activity as being “selfish” given their family and financial needs and circumstances (Iredale, 2005).

Migrant professionals may experience discrimination, marginalization and alienation in the workplace (Aure, 2013; Bauder, 2003; Dominelli, 2010; Hussein et al., 2011a). In the United Kingdom, for example, migrant social workers identified that they experienced “bullying and mistreatment” as a major issue in the workplace (Hussein et al., 2011a, p. 491). Among these migrant social workers, mistreatment was more commonly experienced by women than men, with over half (54%) of the female participants in the study reporting that they had experienced mistreatment from either clients, colleagues, or both. The mistreatment took the form of verbal threats as well as intimidating or humiliating conduct. However, male migrant social workers
are not immune from mistreatment. Both men and women who reported experiencing mistreatment in Hussein and colleague’s (2011a) study identified that the mistreatment that they experienced was related to prejudice based on the fact they were from “overseas” and furthermore the discrimination was largely centred on “social markers, particularly skin colour” (p. 491).

**Personal and Interpersonal Adaptation and Community Integration**

There is limited research on the social and cultural challenges that professional migrants experience while engaging in professional adaptation and how these may affect their career trajectories (Syed, 2008). We do know that, in general, migrant professionals are often able to transition successfully to new contexts, following a period of adjustment, despite the potential to experience major stressors associated with adaptation and integration into a new context (Liversage, 2009). Nonetheless, they may be disillusioned with both the migration process and the results. For example, they may find that their hopes and expectations for their new career is not all they dreamed of, or were promised by recruiters (McElmurray et al., 2006). As McElmurray and colleagues (2006) found “the working conditions, salaries, and living conditions” in the new country might be less than what was anticipated (p. 232). Socio-cultural dynamics involved in developing a sense of belonging or “fitting in” to a new community can also present a struggle for migrant professionals (Brown et al., 2015). Some evidence suggests that the type of community migrants move to is also a factor, with settlement in rural areas often being perceived as more challenging compared to relocation to an urban area (Khan et al., 2015).

Migrant professionals who relocated hoping to enhance their social standing may find that their professional status does not lead to that outcome. In fact, their profession may be less well regarded in their new country than it was in their home country, a circumstance that, when it
occurs, often comes as a surprising disappointment (Fouche et al., 2014a). Fouche and colleagues (2014a) have observed this particular phenomenon among migrant social workers in New Zealand, for example. Among migrant professionals in the healthcare field, such issues have been shown to create a variety of psychosocial problems, however these have not yet been well studied (Khan et al., 2015). In one qualitative study involving female migrants in Canada, those who were unable to secure employment, even after taking further education in Canada and improving their English language skills, reported issues such as being afraid, feeling a loss of control, developing physical health concerns, and being diagnosed with clinical depression (McLaren & Dyck, 2004). Reflecting the human capital discourse, these women longed to become self-sufficient through earning an income. Most also realized that they needed to continue to improve their English language skills in order to obtain employment, but they faced barriers in doing so related to finances and time commitments involving their household and mothering tasks (McLaren & Dyck, 2004).

Being unsuccessful in obtaining employment can have a negative impact on individual and family well-being (McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Phan et al., 2015). Migrant professionals often face financial difficulties, suffer from a lack of personal support networks and family separation, experience changes in family roles and structure, and have issues related to transformations in their identity, sense of self, security, autonomy, as well as their personal values and belief systems (Barreto, 2013; Khan et al., 2015; McElmurray et al., 2006; Ngo & Este, 2006; Phan et al., 2015). Some also report experiencing “homesickness” (Murphy & McGuire, 2005, p. 28) and “cultural displacement” (Jose et al., 2008, p. 47). The fact that financial hardship is a common circumstance among migrant professionals means that they are susceptible to being taken advantage of and devalued both within the workplace and in the community (Barreto,
When migrants’ socioeconomic needs are unmet their overall health and quality of life suffers (Khan et al., 2015). While this is believed to be true for both migrant professionals and their family members who migrant with them, there is a dearth of literature discussing the impacts of adaptation outcomes on the family members of professional migrants (Khan et al., 2015).

**Implications**

A case for enhancements in terms of the quantity and quality of supports that are made available to migrant professionals in Canada has been made within both the academic (Brown et al., 2015; Man, 2004; McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Phan et al., 2015; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012) and grey literatures (Drolet et al., 2015; Root et al., 2014). Benefits associated with enhancing our understandings and supports for successful professional adaptation among migrants are evident in the literature (Barreto, 2013; Murphy & McGuire, 2005; White, 2006). For example, removing barriers to professional adaptation and enhancing supports aimed toward successful integration can enhance quality of work performance and employee retention (Murphy & McGuire, 2005). Realization of these benefits requires taking action to support migrant professionals who are already here, and those yet to arrive in the future (Brown et al., 2015; Crozier, 2009). Developing systematic programs of research on potential enhancement strategies is crucial to their advancement and has been called for in the literature on numerous occasions (Bauder, 2003; Brown et al., 2015; Lim, 2006; Mackey & Liang, 2012; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012; White, 2006).

**Linking Professional Migration and Gender**

In contrast to mainstream theoretical understandings of migration and adaptation such as Berry’s (1992; 1997) that largely ignore gender, feminist scholars have long held that migration
can be thought of as a fundamentally gendered transition because men and women experience it differently from one another (Boucher, 2007; Meares, 2010). The shifts in careers and finances associated with international migration are said to have a tremendous impact on identities of women in particular (Meares, 2010). For migrant women, the domestic identity of wife and mother often becomes increasingly prominent post-migration as women tend to spend more of their time and energy on their domestic responsibilities, childrearing and home life following migration (Meares, 2010). Similar shifts in careers, identity and behaviours are not commonly found among male migrants (Meares, 2010), although there is some evidence that this may be starting to change (Phan et al., 2015). Thus, I believe that it is important to apply a feminist lens to the study of international migration in order to better understand the differential experiences, opportunities, obstacles and outcomes that migrant men and women face within the context of globalization. This focus is consistent with recent attention that feminist scholars have been devoting to linking together gender and skilled migration (Boucher, 2007). Below is an overview of some key issues associated with international migration in relation to gender across the following domains: home and family, workplace and career, and community and society.

**Home and Family Domain**

Recent research has confirmed that migrant families typically follow traditional gendered divisions of labour (Phan et al., 2015). A rich volume of literature on these traditional gendered patterns places the central role of women (within the traditional heteronormative family unit) as providing care for family members (Bass, 2014; Cairns, Johnston, & Baumann, 2010; Doucet, 2006). This caregiving role often leads to women assuming a “disproportionate amount of household labour and childcare responsibilities when compared with their male partners” (Cairns et al., 2010, p. 22). These duties and the skills required to complete them successfully
are often devalued in comparison to participation in paid labour outside of the home (Phan et al., 2015). However, even when women join the labour force, indeed, even when they become the primary breadwinner in the family, they often also remain the primary family caregiver (Doucet, 2006). On the other hand, men who are not the primary breadwinner in the home usually remain secondary caregivers for children and other family members. While the amount of time allocated to “fathering” and the involvement of men in child care in particular have increased significantly in recent times, the level of “responsibility” [original emphasis] for raising children and other domestic duties still primarily falls on women (Doucet, 2006, p. 6). This is a nearly universal phenomenon across countries, including Canada (Phan et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, this does not mean that men do not experience stress and other challenges associated with fulfilling the roles of providing caring labour within the family and/or being the family breadwinner (Phan et al., 2015). Furthermore, although feminists view traditional “relations of care” as signs of women’s oppression, in Western society many women are heavily invested in fulfilling these traditional roles based on their socially constructed gendered identities and beliefs about gender roles (Bass, 2014; Cairns et al., 2010; Meares, 2010). Engaging in tasks such as cooking meals for the family can thus be interpreted as a way in which women “do” or perform their gender (Cairns et al., 2010).

Across various disciplines, scholars have identified that the “arrival of children” is the most profound marker of “long-term systemic inequalities between women and men” (e.g. Doucet, 2006, p. 5). The importance of considering the tasks and duties associated with parenthood and particularly looking at the similarities and differences between “mothering” and “fathering” is an area of scholarship that is only starting to be addressed within migration research (Bass, 2014; Lee & Johnstone, 2013). Sociological research has established that
parenting roles have a significant impact on the labour market experiences of immigrants, including their planning and decision-making regarding their career trajectories, with women more commonly reducing their labour market involvement or ambitions as childrearing becomes a priority, and men often ramping up their occupational involvement in order to create financial security for their families (Bass, 2014; Phan et al., 2015; Scott, 2006).

However, there is evidence of some variability in this trend as well. For example, a recent Canadian study documented several cases of men taking on full or part-time domestic responsibilities when their female partner had the higher paying job (Phan et al., 2015). Men who are not the primary family breadwinner may become increasingly involved in family caregiving post-migration, which often requires a period of role adjustment for everyone in the family. For men who align their thinking with traditional gender roles having their wife become the family breadwinner can be difficult to accept and can even be considered shameful. Some negative consequences for professional dual career couples that make such adjustments to accommodate for childcare or other family caregiving needs have been documented in the literature and include mental and physical health issues, as well as marital problems (Phan et al., 2015).

In a recent study looking at self-rated levels of satisfaction regarding the experience of integration to life in Canada, professional migrant women who were responsible for the care of young children while also pursuing a career consistently had lower ratings than their male counterparts (Phan et al., 2015). However, satisfaction scores were higher in cases where migrant women had high levels of social support and external help in fulfilling their family caregiving responsibilities (Phan et al., 2015). Lee and Johnstone (2013) suggest that migrant women are essentially “picking up the tab” associated with hidden costs of globalization,
especially in regard to their work as family caregivers.

**Workplace and Career Domain**

Feminists have asserted that gender is actively practiced and performed in the workplace (Martin, 2003; Ridgeway, 2009). In other words, “workplaces are infused with gender” (Martin, 2003, p. 343). As is the case within the sphere of the home and family, in the workplace people also engage with one another according to their gendered “ways of being” which involve visible gendered differences (Ridgeway, 2009), invisible gendered privileges (Doucet, 2006), and gender typified behaviours (Martin, 2003; Ridgeway, 2009). Martin (2003) argued that in essence “men and women socially construct one another at work” by “practicing gender” and “gendering practices” (p. 343). These practices are said to “impair” women’s identities and levels of self-confidence by reproducing socially constructed gender inequalities that are rooted in the wider gender inequities in Western society within workplace settings (Martin, 2003). In addition, women and the skillsets that they bring into workplaces are more likely to be devalued and in turn, women often receive lower remuneration than that provided to men (Phan et al., 2015).

The workplace and career experiences of professional immigrant women are an under-researched area (Meares, 2010). The few academic studies that have focused on this topic show that migration tends to have a “negative” and “damaging” effect on migrant women’s professional careers (Meares, 2010, p. 473). For example, professional migrant women have experienced “downward occupational mobility and/or a re-orientation away from professional life toward the home and family” (Meares, 2010, p. 473). Professional migrant women have also established patterns of taking part-time rather than full-time work, re-training for new careers, or leaving the workforce permanently (Iredale, 2001; Meares, 2010; Phan et al., 2015; Scott, 2006).
In his review of research on professional migration experiences, Al Ariss (2010) cited past studies that demonstrate that both “ethnic and gender discrimination” are present in professional workplaces that employ immigrants in Canada and that these dynamics serve to “pervert” the “operation of principles of meritocracy” (p. 354). In particular, Al Ariss (2010) noted a pattern of “double penalization” for ethnic minority migrant women in Canada that has resulted in an unequal distribution of employment opportunities. Phan and colleagues (2015) similarly describe professional migrant women in Canada as experiencing “compounding, negative, and interdependent effects” based on a combination of factors including gender, immigration status, family status, and pre-existing gender equity issues in the labour market (p. 2063). Essentially, professional migrant women face a triple-bind where they encounter family and social expectations to maintain their family caregiving responsibilities in the same manner they did in their home country while also working professionally within the context of a market-based system that undervalues their human capital, often while further experiencing social isolation and struggles to integrate into their new community and society (Phan et al., 2015). It is currently unknown whether female migrant social workers in Canada specifically experience the triple bind identified by Phan and colleagues (2015), as there are no published studies examining the experiences of female migrant social workers in Canada at present.

Although social work is often described as being a female dominated profession (Dominelli, 2010), men have traditionally been encouraged to become social workers through targeted recruitment into the profession, especially into administration, management, policymaking and academic positions (McPhail, 2004). Around the world the treatment of social workers within the labour market is reflective of gender-based discrimination and inequities in society more broadly, with frontline social workers, who are mostly women, often being paid
low salaries, as well as being “underappreciated” and “subjected to discriminatory practices” (Midgely, 2016, p. 101).

Williams (1992) found that men who enter female dominated professions “take their gender privilege with them” (p. 362), which translates into preferential hiring, increased opportunities for mentorship, and accelerated rates of job promotion, which is sometimes referred to as riding a “glass escalator” (Williams, 1995). However, in conducting further research on the glass escalator effect within the field of nursing, Wingfield (2009) concluded that the concept of a glass escalator is both gendered and racialized, resulting in Black male nurses experiencing “glass barriers” in the form of interpersonal issues with colleagues, biased promotion processes, and discrimination from patients (p. 22). As Wingfield (2009) summarized “race and gender intersect to determine which men will ride the glass escalator” (p. 22). Wingfield (2009) recommended that the experiences of “racial minority men in women’s professions” be further studied (p. 24). Likewise, McPhail (2004) called for research on the role and status of men and women in social work in order to monitor the glass escalator trend, and the corresponding glass ceiling effect experienced by female social workers.

Community and Social Domain

For several decades the immigration discourse in Canada has focused on deriving national economic benefits from welcoming carefully selected individuals as newcomers (Costigan, Lehr, & Miao, 2016). Costigan and colleagues (2016) state that Canada has an “individually-oriented immigration class system” (p. 19), which is consistent with popular neoliberal human capital immigration discourse which promotes selection of immigrants based solely on their employability and earning potential in the Canadian economy (Creese, Dyck, & McLaren, 2008; Li, 2003). Canada adopted an economically focused points-based immigration
system in the late 1960s, laying the groundwork for skills and employment to become the standard evidence considered for immigrant selection (Reitz, 2011). While support for immigration to Canada is high among native-born Canadians, and has been stable over a time, according to Reitz (2011), this support stems from the dominant human capital discourse on immigration which touts its economic benefits. A second discourse surrounding pride in Canada being a multicultural nation has also had a positive impact on perceptions of migration among Canadians (Reitz, 2011). In the global context, the pro-immigration sentiment in Canada is rather unique, as other countries such as the United States and various European nations often view immigration as unwelcome and harmful to their national or regional interests (Reitz, 2011). Aiding the positive perception of migration within Canada is that Canada receives relatively few “illegal” immigrants compared to many other countries (Reitz, 2011).

The feminist perspective on the perception of immigration in Canada differs from the one reported by Reitz (2011), discussed above. From a feminist perspective, it is argued that many migrant women are not warmly welcomed into Canada and also that they are being systematically marginalized and excluded from full participation in society by governmental policies that exploit their caring labour and fail to take their unique needs into account (Lee & Johnstone, 2013; McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Thobani, 2000). Thobani (2000) explained how, through a series of public consultations and discussion documents on immigration policy reform held during the 1990s, the Canadian government actively constructed immigrants in general, and immigrant women in particular, as a “problem” and a “threat” to Canada’s national “prosperity and wellbeing”, thereby turning many Canadians against immigrant women in the name of national interests (Thobani, 2000, p. 35). During these public consultations human capital discourse was employed to reinforce the notion that migrants’ economic productivity is equated
with their value to Canadian society (McLaren & Dyck, 2004). Immigrants who are not economically self-sufficient were cast as taking advantage of vulnerable Canadian public welfare programs. It was then suggested that this issue could be best addressed by limiting immigration to those immigrants who have the potential to be self-sufficient and contribute to the Canadian economy (Thobani, 2000). Thobani (2000) characterized Canada’s immigration policies and mantra of jobs, skills and self-sufficiency that developed at this time as racist, sexist and oppressive as they failed to enforce action based on the best interests of immigrant women, and in fact, served to close Canada’s doors to migrant women completely in many cases (Thobani, 2000).

The neoliberal human capital discourse continues to inform Canadian migration policy today (McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Phan et al., 2015). For example, this ideology is reflected in the use of language to describe spouses who migrate together. The government classifies the spouse who meets the desired criteria for being an economic immigrant as the “principal” applicant and the individual’s spouse as a “dependent”, or sometimes “trailing spouse”, with the trailing spouse being a woman in the majority of cases due to the fact that it is often more difficult for women to meet the application criteria than it is for men, even among highly educated professionals (Boucher, 2007; Phan et al., 2015). The dualistic terminology applied to migrant spouses has been critiqued for being overly rigid and not reflective of the complexity of family characteristics, dynamics, roles, plans, or finances, including the potential and real economic contributions of the “dependent” (Creese et al., 2008; Phan et al., 2015).

In their critique of Canada’s Express Entry system for professional immigrants, Flynn and Bauder (2015) liken the new approach to allowing employers and provincial governments to go on a “fishing expedition” where newcomers are cherry-picked directly by employers and
provincial governments from a pool of potential migrants who meet a set of minimal requirements. This cherry-picking approach is based on a similar model in Australia that was devised in order to fill immediate job openings, thus creating conditions under which immigrant selection is essentially handed over to the private sector (Brown et al., 2015; Flynn & Bauder, 2015). While engaging the private sector in immigrant selection is not necessarily a negative phenomenon in and of itself, it does create distance between the Canadian government and their traditional responsibility for immigrants, thereby reducing overall governmental involvement and accountability for settlement and integration. In essence, by allowing the private sector to dictate which immigrants will come into Canada the federal government is also effectively privatizing immigrant settlement service provision by making individual businesses responsible for the settlement and integration of the workers that they bring into the country. The proposed benefits of this new system are based in neoliberal human capital ideology and include reduced government spending and increased productivity and growth for the national economy (Flynn & Bauder, 2015).

Offloading immigrant selection and settlement responsibilities to employers is a recent phenomenon in Canada. Most employers are not yet equipped to provide the necessary settlement supports to their newcomer employees, which in turn can result in a lack of quality settlement service provision (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). This situation may be particularly disempowering for migrant women due to their known difficulties with labour market access and social isolation (McLaren & Dyck, 2004). Failing to receive adequate settlement services and supports can result in a variety of deleterious effects based on failed integration with the migrant’s new community (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Flynn and Bauder (2015) note that relocation is a negative outcome of unsuccessful community integration resulting from
inadequate provision of settlement supports. Migrants’ relocation away from their communities
of settlement effectively defeats the central purpose of the Express Entry program. Thus, the
overall strategy underlying the Express Entry program may be flawed (Flynn & Bauder, 2015).

Phan and colleagues (2015) have also articulated concern that the Express Entry system
focuses on individuals as labourers rather than on holistic family units, despite the fact that
family members accompany the majority of economic class migrants to Canada. In fact, due to
the likelihood of younger workers being seen as more desirable for selection under the Express
Entry program, the chances are high that these migrants will be in the “family-forming” stage of
life and have young children migrating with them to Canada. However, the policies that underlie
the Express Entry program do not specifically take these children and their needs, including
childcare services, into account. Indeed, the high cost of quality childcare services and other
forms of domestic help in Canada have been identified as direct barriers to post-migration labour
market integration for professional migrant women (Creese et al., 2008; Phan et al., 2015).

Overall, the current immigration system, informed by neoliberal human capital ideology
(McLean & Dyck, 2004), provides what hooks (2000) referred to as a set of “inadequate
choices” for professional immigrant women, across personal and professional domains.
According to McLaren and Dyck (2004), the neoliberal restructuring of Canada’s social and
immigration policies and programs that has been underway since the 1990s has increased the
need for women to engage in invisible unpaid caring work as public responsibility for meeting
social needs has been slowly replaced by a market-orientated human capital model focused on
privatization and self-sufficiency. As education, public welfare and healthcare programs get
eroded, women are typically the members of families who are most likely to “self-sacrifice” by
contributing additional unpaid labour in the form of childcare and housework to support the
family’s unmet needs (McLaren & Dyck, 2004).

Effectively, the provision of supportive caring labour by migrant women within their households is a “critical lynchpin” for successful family social and economic integration post-migration (Creese et al., 2008, p. 269). By ignoring the unique needs of migrant women, social policy continues to be based in a male-dominated neoliberal economic agenda that fails to embrace the ideals of gender equity. As an alternative, Costigan and colleagues (2016) promote adopting a “family-based” immigration lens for evaluating current immigration policy and developing future policy, which they suggest will enhance the long-term cultural diversity of Canadians and promote multiculturalism, which they believe will benefit Canadian society in all ways, both economic and non-economic (p. 19).

Summary

While globalization has created a world of possibilities and increased mobility it has also generated negative human consequences that are potentially devastating, including increases in disease, poverty and natural disasters (Dominelli, 2010). Friedman (2000) refers to these negative consequences as a “powerful backlash from those brutalized or left behind” in the system of globalization (p. 9). For social workers practicing in the era of globalization, these issues are simply added on top of the problems that they have traditionally addressed such as domestic violence, child mistreatment, mental health issues, and other social welfare concerns (Dominelli, 2010; Jones & Truell, 2012). As a result, multi-level work toward realizing equity and justice in global health and social care through improved welfare systems and resource distribution is an incredibly important challenge facing the entire world. According to Mackey and Liang (2012), improving global health and socioeconomic inequities requires research and policy that focuses on professional migration. They call for the establishment of “an integrated
set of global policies that operate under a unified global health governance framework, recognizing the varying challenges and stakeholder interests of both source and importing countries” (p. 71).

I believe that the call for more research on professional migration is one that should be answered as we are currently working to address a crisis we know little about. While the global demand for skilled professional migrants is apparent, it has been suggested that researchers should also work to deepen understandings and dialogues on migration patterns of the full spectrum of migrants, including family groups (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012; White, 2006). Developing a more comprehensive picture of the migration patterns and experiences of the entire workforce will aid in ensuring actionable solutions to global human rights issues that are comprehensive, equitable and sustainable in the long term. Critically, I believe that this work needs to be done through a gendered lens. A push still needs to be made to include a gendered perspective on the academic research agenda on this topic.

In a multicultural country like Canada, I believe that having a diverse social work workforce is essential to effective and ethical service delivery in the public welfare system. Successful adaptation of migrant social workers will help to make achievement of such a richly diverse social work labour force a reality. In order to better facilitate professional adaptation, enhancing the quantity and quality of training and other supports that are made available to migrant social workers has been recommended (Beddoe et al., 2012; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). In addition, standardization of social work practice, knowledge, skills and education around the world has also been discussed as a means to facilitate transnational mobility among social workers (Beddoe et al., 2012; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). However, concerns about the desirability and feasibility of standardizing social work education and practice have also been
put forward (Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). Furthermore, the range of strategies for enhancing professional adaptation of social workers that have been proposed in the literature have not been fully explored or tested (Beddoe et al., 2012).

In sum, existing research has shown that despite the system of globalization that promotes their mobility, social workers and other professional migrants are vulnerable to experiencing discrimination, disadvantage and other hardships that may negatively impact their social and community integration, labour market access and attachment, family income and even their health and wellbeing (Abu-Laban, 1998; Al Ariss, 2010; Bauder, 2003; Fulton et al., 2016; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2014). While some solutions to these issues have been developed and implemented, it has been done in a patchwork fashion rather than providing a comprehensive framework that facilitates successful adaptation overall (Fulton et al., 2016). Furthermore, this phenomenon is yet to be thoroughly examined through a gendered lens. My dissertation research is an effort toward addressing this gap.
CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers employing various qualitative research methodologies invoke feminist philosophies, values and principles as theoretical foundations of their research projects (Cancian, 1992; Mason, 1997). Feminist research approaches are not the domain of any one particular qualitative research method (Mason, 1997). Indeed, feminist research is best described as being “highly diversified” and “enormously dynamic” (Olesen, 2005, p. 235). As Mason notes (1997), all research methods may be regarded as “potentially feminist” (p. 27). Although there are “different feminist positions” (D’Cruz & Jones, 2004, p. 46), researchers who identify as feminists are connected by their skepticism of mainstream, positivist, “value-free” research and its treatment of gender in general, and women in particular (Cancian, 1992; D’Cruz & Jones, 2004; Mason, 1997). Feminist researchers tend to view both the substance and methods of traditional scientific research as patriarchal and sexist, and therefore the results of studies conducted under these methods are said to reify male privilege in epistemology, theory, research and practice (Cancian, 1992; Mason, 1997). Thus, feminist researchers work to pursue alternative research strategies that challenge these deficiencies and promote inclusion and equity (Cancian, 1992). In particular, feminist researchers are interested in ensuring that the distinct voices of women are represented within research processes and findings (Cancian, 1992).

According to Olesen (2005), among feminists there are many disagreements on several theoretical and methodological issues, however what unites feminist researchers is the “question of knowledges” (p. 238). Broadly speaking, feminists are concerned with whose knowledges are obtained, how they are acquired, and the purposes for which they are collected (Olesen, 2005).

Based on critiques from feminists writing within the professional migration literature such as that of Aure (2013), Boucher (2007) and DeSouza (2004), the lack of acknowledgement of
gender in the existing research in this area has been highlighted as a concern. I felt that it was important for my dissertation to contribute to developing explicitly gendered understandings of the phenomenon of professional migration and adaptation, rather than to re-produce the gender-blind approach adopted in past studies (Creese et al., 2008). Consistent with my interest in conducting a comparative gender analysis, I selected feminism as a broad theoretical perspective for my dissertation research (Cancian, 1992; Creswell, 2013; D’Cruz & Jones, 2004; Mason, 1997; Olesen, 2005). According to D’Cruz and Jones (2004), “a feminist perspective understands social problems as gendered experiences and therefore the approach exploresexperiences as positioned and structured by patriarchy and potential inequality between men and women” (p. 46).

The breadth and depth of qualitative feminist research makes it both a complex and controversial endeavour (Cancian, 1992; Olesen, 2005). Yet, selection of a feminist theoretical perspective to inform my thesis follows a tradition of feminist principles and values being implemented in a growing number of studies that use a diverse array of research methods in order to address a broad range of research questions. The emergence of feminist research dates back to the 1960s (Cancian, 1992; Mason, 1997). One aspect of employing a feminist perspective that particularly appealed to me is that this perspective permitted me to explicitly explore how social forces, such as gender-based discrimination and oppression, impacted the research participants and shaped their lived experiences (Mason, 1997; Olesen, 2005).

Through my review of the literature, I identified that both my research methodology (IPA) and feminist research principles share a focus on participants’ accounts or narratives regarding their lived experiences. By using a feminist theoretical framework coupled with IPA
MIGRANT SOCIAL WORKERS IN ALBERTA

methodology I was able to explore participant’s stories about their lived experiences through a gendered lens.

Mason (1997) stated that a “hallmark of feminism” is exploration of women’s experiences “in their own terms” (p. 13). In the present study I have extended this principle of exploring experiences in the participants’ “own terms” to both male and female participants. In addition, feminist inquiry presents a good fit for me, because like other feminist researchers, I am also concerned with the broad social and political context in which my study is being conducted (Mason, 1997). Specifically, I view the social, economic and political context in Alberta as an important element in my dissertation research. A further point of consistency between the feminist perspective in research and my goals in carrying out this study is my alignment with what is often regarded as the key principle of feminist research, which is to improve the lives of research participants through challenging inequity (Cancian, 1992; Creswell, 2013; Mason, 1997).

As I reviewed the literature I sought to understand how other scholars have tied together gender, globalization and professional migration. Applying a feminist theoretical lens during the literature review process was useful in gaining insights into how the current literature on transnational professional migration treats the topic of gender and gender-based uniqueness regarding experiences and perceptions of skilled migration. Through this process I identified a significant gap in the literature, as I found that studies examining professional adaptation from a gendered perspective are rare (Aure, 2013; Boucher, 2007; Man, 2004). This discovery served to heighten my commitment to engaging in a comparative gender analysis using a feminist lens, as I believe that men and women have fundamentally different lived experiences, and in turn, policies and programs need to be responsive to this uniqueness in order to be inclusive and
promote equity. However, through my involvement as a research assistant with the Canadian study on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers, I learned that language, race and ethnicity are also important considerations for many of the research participants. Therefore, I was concerned that a focus exclusively on gender would narrow my scope of vision too much and may cause me to inadvertently neglect other important experiences and considerations, such as race and language. Through my review of the literature on feminist research however, I identified that the branch of feminist theory called intersectionality centres on an examination of the intersections of multiple aspects of social identity including race, class and gender and therefore I located a theory that fit well for me and my research goals (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Shields, 2008). I also identified postcolonial feminisms as a supplementary framework for my thesis (see below for elaboration of the selection of a plural theoretical framework). However, I also reviewed theories beyond feminisms in order to ensure that I had a well-rounded theoretical perspective. My review of acculturation and adaptation theories is detailed below.

**Acculturation and Adaptation**

According to Ngo (2008), scholars in sociology and anthropology first began writing about acculturation and adaptation in the early 19th century as insights were gained about interactions between immigrants and the cultures of their new homelands. Early theory development in acculturation and adaptation took a unidirectional focus that only considered the adaptation of the immigrant to the new society, and not the reverse. However, over time acculturation and adaptation began to be regarded as a bidirectional phenomenon wherein change is viewed as a two-way exchange between the newcomer(s) and members of the host society (Ngo, 2008).
Canadian scholar, John Berry, was pivotal in conceptualizing acculturation and adaptation as a bidirectional process (Ngo, 2008; Ward, 2008). In his early work Berry (1980; 1992; 1997) began to refine earlier definitions of acculturation and adaptation and to create graphic models to illustrate how these bidirectional processes work. The graphic representations have become known as “Berry boxes” (Ward, 2008). According to Ward (2008), the Berry boxes have been fundamental in conceptualizing acculturation processes and outcomes on the group and individual levels in much of the present academic research on acculturation and adaptation.

Building on earlier definitions, Berry (1992) offered a basic definition of acculturation as being “the cultural change that results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups” (p. 69). He posited that adaptation is the outcome of acculturation and it occurs on two levels: psychological and sociocultural. According to Berry (1992; 1997), while going through the process of acculturation, individuals and groups apply various adaptation strategies in order to increase their chances of successfully acculturating and adapting. A psychologist by training, Berry was particularly interested in studying the variability in psychological changes that occur at the individual or micro level during the acculturation process. Some of his work focused on linking individual’s attitudes, values and identities with “behavioural shifts” during acculturation (Berry, 1992). At the individual level the three strategies utilized to facilitate acculturation are: adjustment (individual changes in order to fit more harmoniously with their environment), reaction (retaliation against the new environment), and withdrawal (removal of the group or individual from the adaptive arena). At the group level, Berry (1980; 1992; 1997) defined the following acculturation and adaption strategies, sometimes referred to as the fourfold model: assimilation (the group gives up their prior cultural identity and assumes the identity of
the larger society); integration (old and new cultural identities are blended into a single new integrated identity); separation (the old cultural identity is maintained and interaction with the larger society is minimized); and marginalization (the group loses contact and identification with both their former cultural identity and the new society).

In reviewing Berry’s work (1980; 1992; 1997) I developed a list of adaptations that migrants experience when they arrive in a new society:

- Physical (home and neighbourhood; urbanization; environmental; recreational)
- Biological (nutrition; health and wellness; exercise)
- Political (autonomy; self-determination; knowledge of system)
- Economic (employment; income; benefits; taxes; knowledge of system)
- Cultural (language; religion; education; recreation)
- Social relationships (interpersonal; family; group)
- Psychological (behaviour changes; values and attitude changes; shifts in identity)

Berry (1992; 1997) introduced the term “acculturative stress” to identify the micro-level psychosomatic and psychological problems that frequently appear during acculturation and which may lead to poor adaptation, identity issues, negative health consequences and a variety of other personal and social problems. Berry (1992) stated that the emergence of acculturative stress depends not only on the presence of stressors, but also on the implementation of coping strategies and resources to mitigate the stress being experienced. Criticisms of the conceptualization of acculturation as being inherently stressful, such as Rudmin’s (2009), have been discussed above, in chapter two.

Despite the importance of his terminology and modelling work, Berry’s theorization around migration and adaptation has been criticized for lacking a social justice and anti-
oppression focus (Ngo, 2008). In particular, within his theorization, Berry does not directly address the role of structural and other socioeconomic inequalities, or the complexities of intergroup and intercultural relations in a diverse multicultural society, like Canada. Thus, Ngo (2008) urges researchers to engage in critical reflection on these topics and to be cautious about the impacts of using this theory as it was written due to concerns about furthering a discourse on immigration that fails to take structural inequities and differential power relations into account. Likewise, Ward (2008) expressed concern that an “over-reliance” on “Berry’s boxes” may be constraining and prevent further advancement in conceptualization and theorization about acculturation processes and intercultural relations (p. 105). In heeding Ngo’s (2008) and Ward’s (2008) cautionary notes I believe that applying a feminist lens to my doctoral research will help to ensure that my work is anti-oppressive, since social justice and equitable power relations are chief concerns within feminism (Allen, 1999).

**Plural Feminist Theoretical Frameworks**

Under the broad umbrella of feminist research (Cancian, 1992; Creswell, 2013; Mason, 1997; Olesen, 2005) I selected the specific theoretical frameworks of intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms to guide my study. Using more than one theoretical framework for analysis is an approach supported by social work scholars who embrace “critical pluralism” in theoretical perspectives, provided that the perspectives are “intentionally and rigorously applied” (Mehrotra, 2010, p. 422). In fact, Mehrotra (2010) specifically recommends combining intersectionality theory with other theories, such as postcolonialism, in order to broaden the lenses being used for analyzing and theorizing around identity and oppression (Mehrotra, 2010).

**Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality theory, one of the two theoretical frameworks I used in my doctoral
study, is premised on the idea that social identities “serve as the organizing feature of social relations” (Shields, 2008, p. 302). Furthermore, these social relations serve to reinforce social identity categories. According to intersectionality theory, we are all responsible for using and reinforcing the current dominant set of social identity categories, such as male and female, which in turn result in opportunities for some, and oppression for others (Shields, 2008). Thus, social identity categories are reflective of “power relations among groups” in society (Shields, 2008, p. 302). Many authors from the field of gender studies have challenged the dominant conceptualization of gender as binary, as was discussed in chapter two. Intersectionality theory is also credited with creating greater awareness among feminist researchers of the need to consider various aspects of an individual’s social location simultaneously in “any investigation of gender” (Shields, 2008, p. 301).

According to Cho and colleagues (2013) “intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of anti-discrimination and social movement politics” (p. 787). Although intersectionality theory is widely associated with feminism in general, and Black feminism in particular, it is actually rooted in a variety of struggles for social justice and engages knowledge from multiple theoretical frameworks and perspectives (Cho et al., 2013; Mehrotra, 2010; Mullings & Schulz, 2006; Shields, 2008). The origins of intersectionality theory are often traced back to the work of feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Shields, 2008) and to Patricia Hill-Collins’ seminal work, *Black Feminist Thought* (Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2000). These authors (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2000) have helped intersectionality theory to become the “primary theoretical lens” for engaging in research on issues of “interlocking and interdependent
Intersectionality theory can usefully be applied as a “way of thinking” or “frame of analysis” for developing deep understandings of how gender combines, imbricates, and interacts with race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, class and other sites of inequity (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795). Iterations of intersectionality theory have now been used in academic research in a variety of disciplines for close to three decades (Mehrotra, 2010; Weber, 2006). The shared foundation underlying this work has been the taking up of a particular approach to the “framing” of the “problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795).

Intersectionality theory initially emerged through feminist scholars’ recognition that gender should not be studied in isolation, but rather it should be studied in combination with issues of race and class, for example, in order to better understand the complexities of multiple social inequities and the experiences of “multiply-marginalized groups” (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 130). Intersectionality theory is said to extend feminist perspectives by revealing how an individual’s multiple social identities profoundly influence their beliefs and experiences regarding gender (Shields, 2008). Intersectionality theory operates on the macro-institutional level by analyzing “structures of inequality” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 797), and at the micro-individual level through exploring subjective identities (Shields, 2008). Intersectionality theory is not a “grand theory” that reveals ultimate truths; rather, it is a broad and open “umbrella” of scholarship and praxis that can be seen as “travelling” across time and contexts (Cho et al., 2013, p. 789). Thus, one of the best methods for understanding intersectionality theory is to examine the various ways in which it is being “deployed” and the scope of current and past projects that engage it as a theoretical framework (Cho et al., 2013, p. 797).

At its core, intersectionality theory is concerned with an “analysis of power” (Cho et al.,
2013, p. 797). Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) defined intersectionality as a “handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (p. 187). Cho and colleagues (2013) liken engaging with intersectionality theory to looking through an “intersectional prism” which exposes “multilayered structures of power and domination” and “shapes and influences the interpretive lenses through which knowledge is produced and disseminated” (p. 804). Cho and colleagues (2013) also contend that engaging intersectionality theory as a frame of analysis should lead to complementary forms of praxis such as policy critique, legal advocacy and community organizing, in order to seek remedies to discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity and/or class (Cho et al., 2013; Mehrotra, 2010; Morgen, 2006). Thus, according to intersectionality theory, theory and practice are intended to be mutually informative (Cho et al., 2013). For many, the ultimate goal of taking up an intersectionality lens is to intervene “against the social reproduction of power” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 806).

Under intersectionality theory, social categorizations should be understood as being permeable, fluid and existing in a constant state of change (Cho et al., 2013). Essentially, social and identity categorizations are in a continuous process of being (re)created by “contextual dynamics of power” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788) leading to overlaps among definitions and categorizations of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. In this way, the social category of “gender” is itself pliable and open to being reshaped and redefined (Patil, 2013). Shields (2008) contended that individuals are not “passive recipients” of social identities, but rather active agents in producing and reinforcing identity categories and “identity positions” (p. 302). It is through the dynamic process of social interaction, and social relations, that identity categories, including gender, are formed, reinforced, maintained and take on specific meanings. In addition,
through social interactions, identity categories are “practiced” and take on meanings in relationship to one another (Shields, 2008).

Over time, identity categories become “naturalized” which means that they become seen as self-evident and come to form our basic understanding of power relations in the social world (Shields, 2008). Identity categories are also “historically contingent” (Shields, 2008, p. 302). For example, currently everywhere in North America, a basic mainstream understanding is that there are multiple racial categories, but only two genders (Shields, 2008). Thus, within mainstream society, other possibilities, such as having multiple or shifting rather than dual gender categorizations, are not well understood or accepted. Indeed, the conceptualization of gender as a male/female duality is argued to be the most “codified”, “visible” and “pervasive” social categorization across time and cultures, therefore it makes sense to use it as a “starting point” in intersectionality research (Shields, 2008, p. 307). Intersectionality theory is said to extend feminist perspectives by revealing how an individual’s multiple social identities profoundly influence their gendered ways of thinking and gendered lived experiences (Shields, 2008).

Upon concluding my review of the literature on intersectionality I decided to select intersectionality theory as an explicit theoretical framework to underpin my dissertation research. In this way I was able to combine my interest in examining gender with my awareness of the importance of language, race and ethnicity to my research participants (Creswell, 2013). Further, I found that intersectionality theory provided me with an analytic framework through which to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of marginalization and subordination faced by migrant social workers in Alberta.

Initially, I selected intersectionality as a theoretical framework for my study because I
believed that it would help to bring forth new dimensions and insights regarding the gendered and racialized experiences of professional migration and adaptation among migrant social workers in Alberta because it engages a wide variety of social identity categories along multiple axes of diversity (Cho et al., 2013). I believed that intersectionality theory would enable me to address Hussein and colleagues’ (2011b) recommendation to explore “variances” in migrant social workers’ “cultures and genders” and how these factors shape their experiences and needs (p. 1154). Indeed, I felt a sense of alignment with the notion expressed by some feminist scholars that analyzing gender alone, without taking the entire social identity of research participants into account is inappropriate (Mehrotra, 2010; Shields, 2008). As Shields (2008) stated “feminist researchers have come to understand that the individual’s social location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in any investigation of gender” (p. 301). Thus, intersectionality theory points to the need to “treat social positions as relational” (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006, p. 187).

Intersectionality theory has several strengths that make it a compatible and useful theory for explicating the phenomenon of migration and adaptation of social workers in Alberta. I identified the following advantages that intersectionality theory offered as a frame of analysis for my study: (a) intersectionality theory focuses on power relations, an important consideration in comparative gender analysis; (b) intersectional analysis is a non-additive process, allowing for deep exploration of complex combinations of multiple disadvantages; (c) intersectionality theory is consistent with my commitment to “catalytic validity” (Lather, 1986) in that it includes components of transformative action and social justice; (d) intersectionality theory provides scholars with the concept of advantageous and disadvantageous intersections to use as an analytic tool with which to explore hierarchical power relations and categorizations; and (e)
intersectionality theory is known for its adaptability to diverse research questions and methods, making it a promising frame of analysis for my topic of study and research methodology.

My study provides an opportunity to demonstrate the utility of intersectionality theory as a burgeoning frame of analysis based on lived experiences of oppression that is compatible with social work’s social justice mission. Although I am not a Black women myself, I believed that I could still appropriately engage in my research project from this lens as Hill-Collins (2000) has stated that people other than Black women should not be excluded from making important contributions using intersectionality as a theory base. Indeed, numerous feminist scholars from diverse geographic and ethnoracial backgrounds have set a foundation of successfully engaging intersectionality theory in their academic work since Hill-Collins first published her seminal work in 1990 (Cho et al., 2013; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2000; Mehrotra, 2010; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006).

Despite the plentiful strengths and benefits of intersectionality theory, as I immersed myself in the intersectionality theory literature I grew concerned that it was not comprehensive enough to stand on its own as a sole theoretical framework for my particular study. I found that intersectionality theory presented some limitations for my specific purpose of explicating the phenomenon of professional adaptation among migrant social workers in Alberta. My chief concern was that much of the current scholarly work using intersectionality theory as a frame of analysis that I was encountering had not been positioned within a larger context of globalization. I was troubled by this absence because I identify a contextual lens rooted in globalization as being elemental to my research, yet I did not see this being explicitly reflected in other studies engaging intersectionality theory as a research framework (Castles, 2011; Cho et al., 2013; Patil, 2013). Underlining this apprehension was the fact some scholars have actually argued that
intersectionality theory is currently best applied “domestically” as opposed to “transnationally” as the theory is under ongoing development (Cho et al., 2013, p. 805). Indeed, Patil (2013) argued that “given the global context in which feminist social work scholars are working”, intersectionality theory must not only attend to gender, race, and class but must also address the “experience of diaspora, nationality, and migration as salient oppressions, identities, and processes” (p. 425). However, work in broadening the scope of intersectionality theory along the lines suggested by Patil (2013) is still in an embryonic stage.

This draws me to another limitation of intersectionality theory. Some are concerned that, to date, intersectionality theory has largely lacked coherent development and definition (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). As a burgeoning theoretical perspective, intersectionality theory has taken on different forms and meanings as individuals from various disciplines and geographic locations have framed it to fit their contexts and epistemologies. Thus, there is potential confusion surrounding the term due to the fact that it is inconsistently defined and applied and thus, variously understood, in turn leading to some perplexity about its meaning and appropriate application in social research (Mehrotra, 2010; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). For example, it has been argued that intersectionality theory has been taken up differentially in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), with scholars in the US focusing on “systemic intersectionality” and scholars in the UK primarily addressing “constructionist intersectionality” (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). The central difference between these two variations of intersectionality theory is that the US-based systemic intersectionality “foregrounds” structural inequality and power relations, while the UK-based constructionist intersectionality is primarily concerned with the agency of the human subject in “categorizing and naming” identities, actions and experiences (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006, p. 188). The focus of constructionist
intersectionality is on “gendering and gender performance rather than genders” and on “racialization rather than races, economic exploitation rather than classes” (Choo & Ferree, p. 134).

In addition, work on developing intersectionality theory has been undertaken in other countries in ways that do not fit neatly into either of the above types of intersectionality (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). Taking another perspective, Mehrotra (2010) contended that various theories of intersectionality co-exist on a “continuum” and that these theories can be drawn upon on an “as needed” basis depending on the research setting and the needs or goals of research participants. Mehrotra (2010) explained that it is through the act of engaging in intersectional research that scholars will find more “robust” ways to position themselves and their work within the “murky” intersectionality theory landscape. Simultaneously, intersectionality theory itself will continue to be debated, interrogated, and elaborated upon, as it evolves through the ongoing process of theory building (Mehrotra, 2010).

It is argued that despite its apparent value, intersectionality theory has been underutilized among social researchers, including feminist scholars, perhaps in part due to the concerns discussed above (Choo & Ferree, 2010). It has been suggested that intersectionality theory should be employed more widely in order to gain enhanced understandings of “institutions, power relationships, culture, and interpersonal interaction” (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 130). However, there is no “one size fits all” approach to incorporating intersectionality theory into research projects, therefore researchers who intend on doing so have been encouraged to take a pragmatic approach to this activity (Shields, 2008). Shields (2008) stated that incorporating an intersectionality perspective into research requires taking up a “both/and” strategy where “individual identities” are compared to each other and are also examined at the interpersonal and
structural levels (p. 307).

As I reviewed the literature on intersectionality theory I came to the realization that while I am particularly interested in gendered experiences, I am also keenly aware that gender cannot be fully understood in isolation from the larger picture of participants’ multifaceted social identities and lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins, 2000; DeSouza, 2004; hooks, 2000; Schutte, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As West and Zimmerman (1987) theorized, gender can be conceived of as “situated conduct” that involves internal, interpersonal and institutional arenas. Intersectionality theory offered me an important lens for taking participants’ social locations or “situatedness” into account in my interpretive analysis. However, a limitation of intersectionality theory is that it does not expressly look at ways to confront and contend with Western-centric biases (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). Exploring this limitation served to deepen my belief that in the present era of globalization, application of a truly transnational lens is also imperative in feminist migration research. Being mindful of various constraints of intersectionality theory (Daley, Costa, & Ross, 2015), I felt that adopting intersectionality theory as a sole framework for my study could constrict my vision. A primary concern I had with intersectionality theory is its lack of specific transnational focus and how this might shape my perspectives should it go unaddressed. I am aware that Canadian immigration policies, neoliberal ideology and socioeconomic conditions do not exist in a national vacuum. Rather, they are manifest within a complex and interactive global system which variously shapes individual lived experiences of migration (Castles, 2011; Friedman, 2000; Mehrotra, 2010; Patil, 2013). I wanted to ensure that I was attending adequately to the nuances involved in transcultural construction of knowledge and interpretation of meaning that I realized would be central to my research endeavour (DeSouza, 2004). I found a solution with postcolonial
feminisms which demand reflexivity and challenge Western-centric biases while also permitting retaining a primary, but not exclusive, focus on gendered experiences (DeSouza, 2004; Mehrotra, 2010; Weber, 2006).

Postcolonial Feminisms

Schutte (1998) defines postcolonial feminisms as “those feminisms that take the experience of Western colonialism and its contemporary effects as a high priority in the process of setting up a speaking position from which to articulate a standpoint of cultural, national, regional, or social identity” (p. 65). Postcolonial feminisms acknowledge the importance of culture and language in shaping subjectivities, while at the same time drawing attention to the influence of patriarchy and colonialism in the social construction of difference (Schutte, 1998). According to DeSouza (2004), postcolonial feminisms seek to “dismantle hegemonic discourses through the displacement of dominant discourses by marginal epistemologies that engage and challenge them” (p. 472). By engaging postcolonial feminisms, the assumptions, motives and interests of the dominant social or cultural group are exposed, bringing exploitation of marginalized peoples into focus and deconstructing the logics of oppression (Schutte, 1998).

Ali (2007) characterized feminism and postcolonialism as “interlocking” and being “intricately bound up in each another” (p. 193). Ozkazanc-Pan (2012) stated that postcolonial feminist approaches to research makes the diversity of our experiences and the “material conditions” under which we live more visible than do other theoretical frameworks that are grounded in the epistemological assumptions and privileges of the Western world. Postcolonial feminisms have also been identified as useful theoretical perspectives for studying the lived experiences of immigrant women in Canada (Anderson, 2004), as well as experiences of migration and labour (Ali, 2007). In addition, they provide an additional lens through which all
forms of oppression can be viewed simultaneously (Anderson et al., 2007). In this way postcolonial feminisms align well with intersectionality theory. Furthermore, postcolonial feminisms have been recognized as being well aligned with social work’s social justice mission and social work values and ethics (Deepak, 2012). Mohanty (2003) argued that:

If when we pay attention to and think from the space of some of the most disenfranchised women in the world, we are most likely to envision a just and democratic society capable of treating all its citizens fairly. Conversely, if we begin our analysis from, and limited to, the space of privileged communities, our visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges. (p. 510)

As I knew that for my thesis I would be conducting research with data provided by a mixture of Western and non-Western peoples, within a multicultural colonial Westernized context, as a White Canadian-born woman I found it important to set a theoretical structural in place that would facilitate addressing my Western-based colonial perspectives. Although I intended to use intersectionality theory as my primary lens, I also wanted to challenge myself and sensitize myself to the similarities and differences in the experiences of the Western and non-Western research participants, as expressed through their first-person narrative accounts, in a deeply attuned manner while acknowledging my own subject positioning. In particular, I sought to identify and deconstruct emerging colonial discourses throughout my data analysis process (Mohanty, 2003).

A central reason that I have selected postcolonial feminisms as a theoretical framework for my dissertation research is that this framework forces me to be continuously critical and self-reflexive regarding my Western-centric perspectives and assumptions, as well as my social
identity in terms of my own gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability and class (Ali, 2007). I was especially concerned about engaging in what Mohanty (2003) refers to as “discursive colonization” which can sometimes occur through engaging in “Western feminist scholarship” (p. 501). As we did not formally attend to this issue in a direct manner through applying a specific theoretical lens to guide us in consideration of Western-centrism and colonialism in the national study on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers while I was a research assistant, I was curious about what I might discover if I made a concerted effort to attend to this issue in my secondary analysis for my thesis. Specifically, for my dissertation research, I was concerned that my own Western-centric biases would unintentionally overshadow my perspectives and interpretations during data analysis, and that it would be inappropriate for me to allow for these biases to influence my analysis without acknowledging and exploring them. Adopting a postcolonial feminist lens aided me in remaining diligent and accountable in regard to acknowledging my assumptions and preconceptions, especially in respect to my position of privilege as a White Canadian-born and Canadian-educated social worker (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). I share some insights into my personal growth and self-reflexivity that emerged through my engagement in my dissertation project in chapter six.

As I considered adopting postcolonial feminisms as a theoretical framework I questioned whether it was appropriate for me to do so as a White Canadian-born researcher. However, I was reassured by Anderson’s (2004) assertion that “postcolonial theories are relevant to all” and that postcolonial feminist research is intended to be an entirely “inclusive scholarship” (p. 244). According to Anderson (2004), there are “no spaces that are not colonized” and we all experience being looked upon and looking through a “racializing gaze” (p. 239). These sentiments are not intended to negate the often-times horrific past and present consequences of
colonialism, but rather to “disrupt” race-based thinking and encourage the construction of new pathways forward in addressing social inequities in a pluralistic and diverse social world (Anderson, 2004). In this way, postcolonial feminisms offer the possibility of developing new insights that will “help us to understand the world around us” by “opening up” new ways of “knowing and seeing” (Anderson, 2004, p. 245).

Unlike intersectionality theory, postcolonial feminisms specifically acknowledge the complexities and intersections of globalization, power, positionality and identity (Mohanty, 2003; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). In many ways postcolonialism has opened the door for feminist scholars to engage in “political and intellectual projects within a global arena” (Ali, 2007, p. 203). Supplementing intersectionality theory with postcolonial feminisms as a second theoretical framework for my thesis countered limitations of either theory and created new possibilities for analysis.

Combining frameworks. Anderson and colleagues (2007) argued that gender-based analyses alone are inadequate because in many situations of marginalization, racialization plays an important role that must also be analyzed simultaneously with gender. Thus, I planned to explore issues of race and ethnicity in combination with conducting a comparative gender analysis. Consistent with Anderson and colleagues (2007), I believe that race and ethnicity must be examined in combination with gender if we are to gain a fulsome understanding of the lived experiences of migrant social workers in Alberta. This is because race and gender, along with class and other social categorizations, continue to play a large role in how we organize and understand our social and professional worlds (Anderson et al., 2007). Likewise, Boucher (2007) noted that at the macro-institutional level, gender-based analyses of migration policies should be evaluated within the context of racial inequities. In my opinion, the adoption of
intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms as research frameworks provides an appropriate and accountable foundation from which to “research and report on issues” while honouring my own identity or “locatedness” and also respecting the differences and uniqueness of each of the study participants’ narratives (Livesey, 2005, p. 152).

My research methods are described in detail in chapter four. Here, I will highlight some points of congruence among my research methodology, IPA, and my theoretical framework of postcolonial feminisms and intersectionality theory. The following points of congruence between my research methodology and my theoretical framework are: (a) the importance each places on acknowledging positionality and diversity of lived experiences; (b) the belief that the production and interpretation of narratives is a legitimate source of knowledge about the social world; and (c) an emphasis on context (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Given these central points of congruence I found that my theoretical framework and research methodology are compatible.

**Summary**

Historically adaptation and acculturation theories such as Berry’s (1980; 1992; 1997) have not focused on the unique lived experiences of men and women (Aure, 2013; Ngo, 2008; Ward, 2008) and therefore, I determined that they were not appropriate to guide work toward answering my research question, which is listed in chapter one. The aim of the purposeful selection of intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms as theoretical frameworks for my dissertation research was to develop a fine-grained understanding of differential experiences, disadvantages and needs of male and female migrant social workers in Alberta with a vision toward concrete action to ensure that those specific needs are met and to enhance fairness and opportunities for migrant social workers in Alberta in the future. I determined that imbricating
intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms would help to ensure that broader issues and processes associated with globalization and neoliberal ideology could be thoroughly incorporated into my data analysis (Patil, 2013). I recognized that engaging both of these theoretical frameworks in my research could offer helpful safeguards to me as I aimed to acknowledge and address my biases, while retaining a primary analytic focus on the participants’ gendered experiences of professional migration and adaptation. Engaging these plural theoretical frameworks was a form of accepting accountability for the interpretations of other’s experiences that I was engaged in making (Bishop, 2005). My approach is also reflective of Mehrotra’s (2010) advice to social work scholars to adopt a rigorous and intentional “critical plurality” of theoretical perspectives.
CHAPTER IV: METHODS

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research methodology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), was employed in conducting my doctoral research. IPA research methodology is grounded in the assumption that “participants seek to interpret their experiences into some form that is understandable to them” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 88). In turn, through engaging with participants about their interpretations of their experiences, the researcher and the participants co-interpret meanings (Todorova, 2011). IPA was first articulated as a research methodology in the field of health psychology in 1996 (Wagstaff et al., 2014). Since that time a growing body of research has engaged this methodology but some researchers who have utilized IPA have reported struggling to receive support from their “immediate academic communities” (Wagstaff et al., 2014, p. 4).

As an exploratory research approach, IPA was an appropriate methodology for my research study given the lack of prior research on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta. The study’s contextual focus on Alberta was also a good fit with IPA due to IPA’s requirement that the researcher “show sensitivity to…the socio-cultural milieu in which the study is situated” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180). As Smith and colleagues (2009) stated, “sometimes the very choice of IPA as a methodology, the rationale for its adoption, will be centered upon the perceived need for sensitivity to context through close engagement with the idiographic and the particular” (p. 180). Todorova (2011) also highlighted the importance of context in IPA research, by stating that the focus of IPA analysis is “the person-in-context and their subjective experiences, as interpreted together with the interviewer” (p. 35). Todorova (2011) called for increased attention to contextual factors within IPA studies in order for issues of diversity to be sufficiently attended to. Todorova (2011) recommended that IPA researchers
consider “socio-cultural situatedness” as a term that encompasses the “local worlds” of participants (p. 36).

**Researcher Background**

As recommended by numerous scholars, an essential step in my research journey was exploring my positionality and its effects on my research (Cousin, 2010; Crossa, 2012; Four Arrows, 2008; Hill-Collins, 2093; Naples, 1996; Potts & Brown, 2005). Investigation of my positionality deepened my attunement to social identity and location, epistemology, theoretical frameworks and my personal background and biography. Being reflective about my positionality is also important for understanding my interpretations of participants’ lived experiences (Cousin, 2010). As Sisneros and colleagues (2008) explained, critical reflection is a chance to assess one’s “beliefs, intentions, and attitudes” in order to better understand one’s behaviour (p. 24). It also offers a contextualized experience of self whereby people “begin to understand how their experience of themselves is embedded in their interactions with others and how shared meanings are created” (Sisneros et al., 2008, p. 24).

Crossa (2012) stated “researchers enter the research process with a constitution and positionality that shapes and is shaped by our relations to other subjects” (p. 115). At the same time, positionality is “not fixed, uniform, or homogenous” (Crossa, 2012, p. 112). While conducting this study, I was living in Calgary, Alberta and studying social work at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. Thus, I brought practical experience as a professional social worker and knowledge of the environmental context of Alberta into the inquiry process. I identify characteristics of my social identity (DeSouza, 2004; Potts & Brown, 2005) as consisting of being a White, Canadian-born, able-bodied, middle-class (Hodges & Brown, 2015), highly educated, millennial (Stein, 2013), cisgendered, heterosexual woman. Given my social
identity and the various ways it is similar to and dissimilar from the social identities of the participants, I found it important to reflect on how my positionality influenced my interpretations of the participants’ accounts of their lived experiences through keeping a research journal (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Cross, 2012; D’Cruz & Jones, 2004).

Exploring my positionality and social identity in a conscious manner involved making time and space to critically reflect on who I am in relation to my study as part of the research process (Crossa, 2012; D’Cruz & Jones, 2004). Thus, I was mindful to set aside time to analyze my positionality through critical and mindful reflection, and journaling on a continuous basis (D’Cruz & Jones, 2004). In addition to journaling, I accomplished deep reflection through engaging in mindfulness and meditation exercises and making appropriate use of supervision with my co-supervisors Dr. Christine Walsh and Dr. John Graham.

From the outset of my dissertation work, I acknowledged that my interpretations would be inherently subjective (D’Cruz & Jones, 2004; Four Arrows, 2008). In conducting a secondary data analysis in particular, I was mindful that I would hold certain biases and preconceptions when reading the responses of the participants. I also approached the study with the understanding that “there is no neutral research” (Lather, 1986, p. 67), and therefore, being neutral was not my intent. I knew that, whether consciously or unconsciously, I would undoubtedly “create forms of representation…in harmony with [my] own…unique sensibilities” (Four Arrows, 2008, p. 4).

In addition, I premised my work in my belief that my findings should have “catalytic validity” (Lather, 1986). In other words, the findings need to possess the potential to impact and improve the lived realities of both my study population and broader society. As a prerequisite in designing my study in a way that would facilitate the achievement of catalytic validity, I was
intentional about building high degrees of rigour and relevance into the research design in order to ensure that the findings could be deemed authentic, trustworthy and accountable (Potts & Brown, 2005).

My interest in studying the professional adaptation experiences and perceptions of migrant social workers in Alberta grew out of my role as a research assistant on a Canadian federally funded research project investigating the professional adaptation of migrant social workers across Canada (SSHRC, grant number 435-2012-0391). The Canadian study aimed to investigate both the transactional adaptation processes of migrant social workers, as well as variations in internationally educated migrant social workers’ perspectives about social work roles and interventions. Specifically, the Canadian research project used grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Tan, 2010) to achieve two core objectives:

(a) To examine how migrant social workers experiences of education, along with their values and understanding of the profession in their country of origin shaped social work interventions in their country of origin.

(b) To explore and understand migrant social workers experiences of professional adaptation to their new social work practice context in Canada.

The underlying premise for the Canadian research project was that processes of professional adaptation to new social work practice contexts needed to be investigated. The study aimed to provide the empirical evidence necessary to identify social policy implications for immigrant receiving organizations and influence future policy development with regard to the migration of social workers to Canada.
The concept of re-analyzing a portion of the larger dataset for my dissertation research first arose through dialogue with my co-supervisor, Dr. Graham, from the University of British Columbia, who was a co-investigator on the Canadian study. Dr. Graham encouraged me to develop a framework for an in-depth qualitative analysis of the professional adaptation experiences of migrant social workers in the Albertan context involving a comparative gender analysis. My pre-existing relationships with Dr. Graham and Dr. Pullen Sansfaçon, the principal investigator for the national study, set a solid foundation for them to advise me on my dissertation research, along with the other members of my supervisory committee: Dr. Christine Walsh from the University of Calgary (my co-supervisor along with Dr. Graham), and Dr. Marion Brown from Dalhousie University who was also a co-investigator on the Canadian study.

Additionally, my role as the primary data collector for the Alberta site of the Canadian project, and my thorough and consistent involvement in the team-based data analysis process as a research assistant over a period of three years, deepened my desire to explore the data that I had collected in Alberta using an interpretive feminist lens. This lens allows for the adoption of a distinct perspective from that taken during the Canadian study as the original study did not explicitly consider gender as a variable and was focused on theory generation as opposed to deep idiographic interpretation.

**Analytic Expansion**

Qualitative secondary analysis has undergone considerable development as a research strategy since the 1990s, resulting in the emergence of a spectrum of specific approaches to this form of research (Thorne, 2013). For example, in conceptualizing data analysis Sandelowski (2011) discusses the idea of “interpretive flexibility” offering the researcher the option to take successive “re-takes” on data in ways that “blur the hard lines often drawn between varieties of
qualitative methods…[and] primary and secondary analysis; and between take and mis-take” (p. 346). This perspective serves to disrupt more traditional ways of differentiating research methods and levels of analysis. For example, Sandelowski (2011) questions whether subsequent takes on a set of data after the first one must be viewed as being “secondary simply by virtue of coming after the first” (p. 347). While I feel aligned with Sandelowski’s (2011) conceptualization of interpretive flexibility I also identify my dissertation project as a secondary analysis.

Sandelowski (2011) states that the “meaning” of the data are found in the person(s) “looking for meaning” rather than in the data itself (p. 347). Taking this individualized perspective on deriving meaning from data creates the opportunity for the same data to be analyzed and interpreted in multiple ways by the same or different persons at the same or different times (Sandelowski, 2011). My dissertation focuses exclusively on analysis of data that I personally collected through interviewing research participants in Alberta in my capacity as a research assistant for the Canadian study. Through my personal involvement in the national study, I had previously worked with the primary dataset during both the data collection and data analysis processes. Therefore the specific form of secondary analysis that I engaged in for my dissertation is termed “analytic expansion” (Thorne, 1998). Analytic expansion is a distinct type of qualitative secondary analysis that allows a researcher to complete a “secondary interpretation of his or her own database to answer new or extended questions” (Thorne, 1998, p. 548). Analytic expansion allows the researcher to ask novel questions of the data derived from the original analysis, but “not envisioned within the original scope of the primary study aims” (Thorne, 2013, p. 397). According to Heaton (2004) and Thorne (2013), analytic expansion is the most common kind of secondary analysis in qualitative research. Analytic expansion can usefully be contrasted
with “armchair” secondary analysis which is re-use of data collected by a researcher who was not involved in the primary field work and/or data analysis (Thorne, 2013).

I found it useful to engage Gadamer’s notion of the genuine conversation when conceptualizing how secondary analysis could be undertaken while applying IPA methodology (Binding & Tapp, 2008). This is also why I highlight the fact that I personally conducted the research interviews sorted for the secondary analysis. Gadamer emphasized that the development of understanding of lived experience occurs through engaging in authentic and sincere dialogue. What emerges from such conversation has “its own existence” and “significance” (Binding & Tapp, 2008, p. 124). Therefore, for the purser of interpretive data analysis it is useful for the researcher to be able to access both the dialogue as it was spoken, as well as the text of the transcript in order to fully “reveal the phenomenon being researched” through interpretation and the emergence of new understanding which is arrived at through fusing together the views of both people within the genuine conversation (Binding & Tapp, 2008, p. 124).

Another reason why I believe it was important that I collected the data myself is, as Baydala and colleagues (2006) stated, that “no one can hear for another” (p. 165). Similarly, Husserl, who is considered the father of phenomenology (Wagstaff et al., 2014), emphasized the importance of “direct seeing” (Gearing, 2004). To me these notions have to do with conveying that there is importance for the interpretive researcher to be directly involved in the data collection process. As a member of the research team for the Canadian study I had the opportunity to interview each Albertan participant and hear their story firsthand. I believe that this is an important factor in justifying my ability to re-interpret their narratives for my thesis work. In essence, my engagement with both the study participants and the substantive area
under investigation through my role as a research assistant on the national study situated me in a favorable position to carry out an analytic expansion of the Alberta data from a gendered perspective for my dissertation project because I was there. As Binding and Tapp (2008) concluded, engaging in a genuine conversation allows for an encounter with “another’s truth” which in turn allows for “something else to emerge” (p. 129).

**Insider/Outsider Positioning**

Naples (1996) suggested that reflecting on one’s social location and position in relation to research participants promotes the “re-examination of taken-for-granted assumptions” and “heightens sensitivity” to the experiences and perspectives of others (p. 84). As a female Canadian-born and Canadian-educated social worker, I understand my position in relation to the study participants as straddling a blurred line between the insider-outsider dichotomies (Moore, 2012; Naples, 1996). I believe that I possess a degree of “insiderness” due to the fact that I share an occupational identity, official designation (Registered Social Worker), and code of ethics with my participants (Moore, 2012). However, I also possess “outsiderness” due to the fact that I am not an immigrant to Canada myself (Moore, 2012). In addition, I share the same gender as the female participants, but not the male participants. I agree with Naples (1996) that viewing insider/outsider positioning dichotomously is an overly rigid conceptualization of the power relations that exist between researchers and participants. Relationships between researchers and participants may shift through the processes of interacting and negotiating shared meanings and understandings (Naples, 1996). Overall, my positioning in relation to the research participants is consistent with the “dual role” of the IPA researcher which Smith and colleagues (2009) defined as being “both like and unlike the participant” (p. 35).
Although I am not an immigrant to Canada myself, I had relocated inter-provincially within Canada (from British Columbia to Alberta) within a year of conducting the research interviews. Therefore, I have some familiarity with the lived experience of personal and professional adaptation. Furthermore, migration and adaptation have shaped my life in many other ways. First of all, I acknowledge my own family history of immigration to Canada. I am considered a second or third generation Canadian, depending on the definition of immigrant generation chosen (Rumbaut, 2004). As my family has largely assimilated to mainstream Canadian culture I feel a sense of loss and curiosity about my own ethnocultural background. I believe that this curiosity is partially responsible for the development of my interest in the adaptation of immigrants in Canada’s multicultural milieu. Second, growing up and living in Canada my entire life, I have been exposed to a great deal of diversity and multiculturalism. Through friendships made with immigrants from around the world over my lifetime, I have been fascinated with learning from their stories, experiences, and cultures. Finally, as a social work educator, my own experience of working with diverse students, faculty, staff, and practicum field instructors has piqued my curiosity about the role of culture, language, migration, and adaptation in the education and professional socialization of social workers in Canada and abroad. Taken together, each of these aspects of my background informed my interest in and approach to my dissertation topic.

A unique element to this study is the re-analysis of previously collected and analyzed data. Although my prior experience as a research assistant and my pre-existing knowledge of the data provided valuable insights, I was careful to remain both open-minded and critical in my interpretations of the data during the secondary analysis (Heaton, 2004). At the same time, my existing familiarity with the participants and the dataset was a manageable issue.
methodologically speaking. While phenomenological research methods typically require that the researcher engage in the practice of “bracketing” their pre-existing knowledge and assumptions when first encountering a text (Gearing, 2004), the role of bracketing within IPA research specifically is controversial (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Although Smith and colleagues (2009) recommend that IPA researchers engage in bracketing, they also contend that in IPA research there is no such concept as “too much or too little in the way of previous knowledge” (p. 42). However, they encourage IPA researchers to be aware of the “likely consequences” of their “preconceptions” even as all of a researcher’s preconceptions may not be apparent from the outset of a study (Smith et al., 2009, p. 42). Thus, they recommend ongoing reflection as the primary tool for identifying, and working with and through preconceptions (Smith et al., 2009).

As discussed above reflective work that kept me on track and accountable were my research journal, dedicated reflection/meditation time, supervision, and dialogue with advisors and doctoral and professional colleagues. In addition, adopting a different research design and theoretical orientation from that used in the original study served to offer a new lens through which to view the data allowing for original interpretations and understandings to emerge. Part of the issue with engaging in bracketing is that the concept is not well defined and understood (Gearing, 2004). I found that the literature on IPA methodology does not provide clear guidance on how to engage in bracketing within an IPA study therefore I developed what I felt was an accountable and appropriate approach.

In considering how I could ensure that I could re-analyze the data from the national study from a fresh perspective I felt it was appropriate to take a “rest period” of approximately six months during which I was not actively involved in the Canadian study and I did not work directly with the data, before commencing secondary data analysis for my doctoral research.
Taking the time away in order to allow myself to re-analyze the data from a different framework is consistent with Husserl’s assertion that phenomenological researchers must actively engage in studying the “the things themselves” through “direct seeing” which involves looking past “constructions, preconceptions, and assumptions (our natural attitude) to the essences of the experience being investigated” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1430). I found that engaging in a secondary data analysis added a degree of complexity to the task of looking past preconceptions. The crux of the complexity in determining how I should appropriately take up Husserl’s directive to study the things themselves lay in the fact that I had previously engaged in theorizing about migrant social workers’ professional adaptation in the Canadian context as part of the national study in my role as a research assistant. In spite of this prior engagement with the topic area in general and the data in particular, I was committed to engaging in as much ‘direct seeing’ as I possibly could in order to allow for a fresh analysis and new insights to emerge. While not being a specific form of bracketing per se, the rest period that I took between studies was a practical step that effectively allowed me to create distance and disengage myself from the primary data analysis before engaging in the secondary data analysis.

**Interpretive Framework**

According to Creswell (2013), interpretive frameworks are used from the beginning of a qualitative research study to identify the researcher’s position from the outset of a study and to inform the procedures that will follow as the study is carried out. Interpretive frameworks are underpinned by “philosophical assumptions” including the following: “Beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)”
(Creswell, 2013, p. 20). In this section I identify the ontology, epistemology and axiology underlying my study. Methodology is discussed in detail in chapter four.

A challenge with identifying the ontology, epistemology and axiology of my study is that the philosophical assumptions underpinning IPA methodology have not been well articulated in the existing IPA literature (Wagstaff et al., 2014). As IPA draws on “diverse intellectual sources” a sense can emerge that IPA engages multiple, even contrasting “ontological standpoints” which can be considered to be “problematic” but also “creative and flexible” (Wagstaff et al., 2014, p. 11). Consistent with this diversity I view my ontological beliefs as spanning both social constructivism and feminism. I believe that there are “multiple realities” which are “constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others” (Creswell, 2013, p. 36) and also that these social constructions have resulted in experiences of living with both “privilege and oppression” which results in “power and identity struggles” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37). Locher and Prugl (2001) state that feminism and constructivism can be combined as a form of “feminist constructivism” because despite their differences the two approaches can inform and “add to each other in combination” in order to “yield better theoretical and empirical understanding of the world” (p. 111). Feminism contributes an integral understanding of power to social constructivism thereby helping to explain how certain social constructions emerge and gain influence. Social constructivism offers feminism an understanding of human agency in constructing realities through lived experience (Locher & Prugl, 2001).

Crossa (2012) contended that positionality serves to “anchor us in particular epistemologies” (p. 115). I recognize that together with my social identity, the perspectives and positionality that I brought with me into my doctoral research were shaped by my identification with constructivist epistemology (Appleton & King, 2002; Morris, 2006). Adopting a constructivist lens directed
my attention to the unique lived experiences of each of my research participants based on their individual social positionalities while simultaneously “problematizing” the notion of positionality itself. Following constructivist thinking, one can argue that a person is not entirely able to “see” their own position because it is always a position in relation to the “other” and therefore the other has something to say about the positions we hold (N. Moules, personal communication, April, 2014). In other words, “reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 36). With this in mind, I adopted a learning posture towards the discovery and evolution of my positionality, as well as the varied positionalities of the research participants throughout my study.

In terms of axiology, my beliefs align with the social constructivist philosophy that “individual values” should be “honoured” and that values are socially “negotiated” among people through the social construction process (Creswell, 2013, p. 36). I also align with the feminist notion that there are a “diversity of values” that may be emphasized among “various communities” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37).

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), IPA involves attempting to stand in the participant’s shoes while simultaneously acknowledging that doing so completely is impossible. To me this statement speaks to both the methodology and axiology of IPA research in that there is acknowledgement that attempting to understand someone else fully is a socially mediated and negotiated exercise, which speaks to honouring diversity and difference. In reading about anti-oppressive qualitative research I encountered Ricoeur’s (1981) notion that all interpretation is a form of appropriation. In turn, I acknowledge that there is a space between what the participants said, and what I interpreted from their statements, where new meaning is created. As Baydala and colleagues (2006) explained:
When we listen to another’s message, we must recognize there is a world from which that message comes. Ultimately, if I understand the message of another, then that understanding must be respected as my own understanding, and understanding of the appropriated into my own world. Although we may meaningfully share a lived world, insofar as we each stand at the center of a world, we are each responsible for our own understanding. (pp. 164-165)

Baydala and colleagues (2006) emphasize the importance of the researcher taking ownership of their interpretations. With my thesis, I wanted to ensure that as I engaged in data analysis, I was developing awareness of how my unique subjectivity, and in particular, my positions of power, were interfacing with those of each of the participants. My goal in this regard was not necessarily to “control” my subjectivities but rather to consciously recognize and acknowledge them, and their origins within Westernized discourses (Bishop, 2005).

Cousin (2010) explained that language is our most significant “cultural resource” and that it shapes our worldviews (p. 10). In addition, she suggests that “language is best seen as paradoxically capable of both enabling and inhibiting understanding” (p. 10). The specific combination of theoretical and interpretive frameworks that I selected for my research forced me to attend to my use of language, as well as my interpretation of the language used by participants as they described their experiences of migration and professional adaptation (Cousin, 2010). Throughout my dissertation work I found myself reflecting often on how I was interpreting others’ experiences through their use of language, which was based in their cultural understandings, whether Western, or non-Western. I was also aware that one of the purposes of my making interpretations was for my interpretations to be re-interpreted by others who will review my research findings from their own linguistically and culturally-informed perspectives (Baydala et al., 2006). This realization fostered my personal commitment to attend carefully to
representation and articulation through language within my research process as I recognized that my socially privileged positionality shaped my vision and my application of theory. Out of this came my commitment to write in the first person, as Cousin (2010) contends that writing about our research in the first person offers a personalized human voice which acknowledges the researcher’s investment in their work.

**Theoretical Frameworks Underlying IPA Methodology**

In terms of specific theoretical frameworks underlying my methodology, IPA has strong links to symbolic interactionism and pragmatism (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Both symbolic interactionism and pragmatism blend well with my feminist theoretical framework. Indeed, feminism is recognized as an emerging voice within symbolic interactionism (Sandstrom & Fine, 2003). Feminism and symbolic interactionism align well together as they share a conception of gender as “a set of social meanings, relationships, and practices through which sex differences are made salient” (Sandstrom & Fine, 2003, p. 1046). Both also are concerned with exploring how gender is “constructed, enacted and reproduced through cultural beliefs, social arrangements, and interpersonal relationships” (Sandstrom & Fine, 2003, p. 1046). Likewise, pragmatism and feminism are noted to have many intersections and overlapping commitments (Bradwell-Jones & Hamington, 2012). Most notably, feminist pragmatism has been developed as a “robust framework” that attends carefully to context and draws out “intimate connections between theory and practice” creating space for individuals to play a central role in developing theory about their lived experiences. In this way, both feminism and pragmatism view lived experiences as “important sites of knowledge” (Bradwell-Jones & Hamington, 2012, p. 2).

Brocki and Wearden (2006) explain that the theoretical perspective underlying IPA can be summarized as follows: “Human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but
rather that they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them” (p. 88). This perspective fits well with intersectionality theory, which holds that individuals are not “passive recipients” of social identities, but rather they are active agents in producing and reinforcing identity categories and “identity positions” (Shields, 2008, p. 302). Feminists would say that the participants’ biographical stories are socially constructed within the context of patriarchal power relations (Allen, 1999).

Applying both IPA methodology and an intersectional lens to data analysis are interpretive acts. By considering how the social processes by which identity categories are formed and reinforced, are experienced, intersectional theorists place the perspectives of research participants at the centre of their research (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Both IPA methodology and intersectionality theory also attribute agency to individuals. Thus, both attend to the dynamic processes of social interaction that shape identity categories, including gender, and are also concerned with understanding the particular meanings that these categories take on (Shields, 2008). Additionally, in line with Todorova’s (2011) emphasis on attending to context within IPA research, intersectionality theorists posit that social categorizations are formed during specific time periods within specific locales (Weber, 2006). In other words, both intersectionality theory and IPA methodology believe that the experiences of oppression and privilege that people make meaning of are experienced within specific social-cultural-historical contexts and from particular biographic positions that can change over time (Choo & Ferree, 2010).
Hermeneutics, Idiography and Phenomenology

Like many other forms of qualitative research the primary goal of IPA research is “to investigate, how individuals make sense of their experiences” (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012, p. 362). IPA focuses on understanding subjective experiences, perceptions and interpretations through “in-depth analysis of single cases…in their unique contexts” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 363). In particular, IPA research should focus on life experiences that are considered to be “big” or “significant” and therefore “engender a considerable amount of mental activity” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 188). In order to generate understanding of how people develop meaning associated with important phenomena IPA draws on some of the fundamental principles associated with hermeneutics, idiography and phenomenology (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

IPA methodology is founded on the premise that by taking an idiographic approach to combining hermeneutics and phenomenology, participants’ individual experiences can be both seen and interpreted by the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). As noted above, the role of the IPA researcher is to attempt to “stand in the shoes of the subject” while simultaneously recognizing that doing so is an impossibility (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 363). This is done as an interpretive activity in order to make the meaning of the experience to the participant more comprehensible to the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The IPA researcher should be both empathic and critical toward the participants’ interpretation of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2014). The centrality of the “researcher’s ability to reflect and analyse” in IPA research is well recognized in the literature (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 88).

According to Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty and Hendry (2011), the idiographic nature of IPA research could be seen as a limitation of the method. IPA’s focus on studying individual
lived experiences means that deriving generalizations from the findings of IPA research is “largely not feasible” (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 21). In addition, some critics may regard IPA research as being overly subjective and intuitive. Indeed, IPA researchers are encouraged to be deeply interpretive, which critics may view as drawing conclusions that are inconsistent with participants’ meanings. Nonetheless, Pringle and colleagues (2011) argue that IPA research has value and that findings from IPA studies can contribute to theory development. IPA research is especially useful for contextualizing and validating existing theories through gaining insight into the transferability of theory to individual experiences of phenomena (Pringle et al., 2011).

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for my dissertation research is Alberta transcripts from phase two of the Canadian research project on professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Canada along with the memos that were written following the completion of each interview. At the Alberta site for the Canadian project, phase two involved completing 12 semi-structured interviews using an interview guide that was developed based on analysis of data from an initial round of subject interviews (phase one). The semi-structured interview guide for phase two included questions about each research participant’s background, such as country of origin, education, and immigration status, along with several questions about their lived experiences of migration and professional adaptation to social work in Canada, including the credential recognition and job search processes, as well as adapting to working with Canadian colleagues and service users. Participants were also asked about their personal and professional identities and values, and their personal adaptation to life in Canada (see Appendix B for the phase two interview guide). I personally conducted the phase two interviews with male and female migrant social workers in Alberta in 2012-2013, through my role as a research assistant in the Canadian
study, as discussed above, which inspired me to engage in analytic expansion as a specific form of secondary data analysis (Heaton, 2004; Thorne, 2013).

**Sample**

According to Pringle and colleagues (2011), sampling is a point of “inevitable tension” in IPA research (p. 22). IPA methodology has traditionally emphasized the importance of small sample size (Wagstaff et al., 2014). The small sample size used in IPA studies has been reported as a point of tension with other researchers and with ethics approval committees in the experience of some IPA researchers (Wagstaff et al., 2014). According to IPA methodologists, a small sample size is useful in ensuring that the researcher offers each case the intense time, energy and rigour required to explore it in a great amount of detail (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015). A common practice for doctoral dissertations using IPA methodology is to include between six to eight cases (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). However, guidance on using larger and smaller sample sizes is also available in the literature (Smith et al., 2009). IPA researchers should aim to collect data from relatively homogenous samples. Pringle and colleagues (2011) asserted that while too heterogeneous of a sample will detract from the depth of exploration on a specific phenomenon, too homogenous of a sample will create difficulties in regard to transferability of the findings to other individuals and groups (Pringle et al., 2011). However, transferability is not the aim of IPA research per se (Wagstaff et al., 2014).

For the purpose of my dissertation research 10 of the available 12 transcripts from phase two of the Canadian project on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers were selected as cases for analysis. In IPA research, cases are transcripts from in-depth interviews in which participants provide firsthand accounts of their lived experiences. The interviews should
elicit the participants telling their personal story about a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

According to Smith and colleagues (2009), data collection in IPA benefits from detailed direct engagement with a small sample. Various data collection strategies are possible, however semi-structured one-to-one interviews tend to be the most popular as they allow for relationship building between researcher and participants (Smith et al., 2009). Although a secondary data analysis was conducted the initial relationships I built through interviewing the participants and doing data analysis for the primary study were able to inform the secondary analysis. Reviewing the transcripts which formed the units of analysis for the secondary analysis was informative and allowed for new insights to emerge over time. This experience is reflective of Heaton (2004)’s assertion that the exact point where “primary research stops and the secondary research starts” can become difficult to pinpoint in some cases of secondary analysis (p. 10).

In secondary analysis the term “sorting” is applied to the process of selectively identifying a “sub-sample” of the primary dataset to study again (Heaton, 2004; Long-Sutehall, Sque, & Addington-Hall, 2010). In my case, by sorting a subset of the data from the national study and exploring it in-depth for my dissertation research I was able to engage in a “supplementary analysis” that extended and expanded upon a portion of the original work done by the Canadian study team. According to Heaton (2004) shifting themes or issues is permissible in a supplementary analysis provided that the “foci” of such analysis is “compatible with that of the primary work” (p. 8). Appropriately for supplementary analysis, my interest in conducting a comparative gender analysis with sample consisting of an Alberta-specific subset of the data from the national study “emerged as a post hoc matter of interest” (p. 8). Therefore it would not be expected that the primary data was collected in order to answer my specific
research questions or that the interview guide developed for the purpose of the primary data collection would be targeted toward my analysis (Heaton, 2004; Hinds et al., 2013).

The 10 cases that I used for my study were selected through a process of purposive sampling that was carried out in order to ensure maximum variation. My justification for this approach was that since I was engaging with a pre-existing dataset based on a sample of migrant social workers who arrived in Alberta from various countries around the world within a specific timeframe (2001 or later) I felt that I was working with a relatively homogenous sample that would have some shared characteristics and lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). As I believed the sample to be relatively homogenous based on their shared traits I wanted to ensure that my analysis would capture the diversity within the sample.

Transcripts from interviews with four male and six female participants who participated in phase two of the Canadian study at the Alberta site were hand selected according to the following process: In phase two of the Canadian study, I interviewed four male participants and eight female participants for the Alberta site. I included the interviews with all four male participants in the sample for my dissertation research in order to achieve maximum variation within the sub-sample of male participants. I also initially selected interviews with five of the female participants based on level of education, depth of content covered in the interview, and country of origin. To explain these criteria further, there is one female participant who has the equivalent of a diploma in social work from her country of origin. I excluded this person from the sample due to the fact that this presents a negative case in the sense that all other participants have more education and higher-level credentials than she does and therefore including her would have made the sample less homogenous. Two of the female participants came from the same country of origin, thus I eliminated one of them from the sample in order to ensure
maximum variation based on nationality. Finally, I selected female participants based on depth of information provided in the interview. One interview with a female participant was briefer and less detailed than the others; therefore, I initially excluded that interview from my sample. However, after completing analysis on the initial nine interview transcripts selected, I decided to add this brief interview back into the sample in order to increase the ethnoracial diversity of the sub-sample of transcripts from interviews with female participants. This was an important step in my accountability as a researcher, as Pringle and colleagues (2011) have suggested that it is important for IPA researchers to acknowledge and clarify limitations relating to their sample.

The interview transcripts that were selected for the sample in the present study were from migrant social workers who settled in different locations across Alberta: the city of Calgary (n=5), the city of Edmonton (n=3), the city of Red Deer (n=1), and rural Southern Alberta (n=1).

In sum, the sampling and classification strategies employed in my study are consistent with the most common sampling strategy in IPA, namely to “recruit purposive samples of participants who share a particular lived experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180).

Ascribing Genders to Participants

In the national study on professional migration and adaptation of social workers the participants were not directly asked to identify their sex or gender during the interview process, although some chose to do so. Thus, for the purpose of my dissertation I have ascribed sexes and gender classifications of either male or female to the participants based on the gender expressions I observed while conducting the research interviews. Specifically, I interpreted participants’ appearances and behaviours and then ascribed a gender based on my socially constructed interpretations of their gendered expression and performance through my filter as a female cisgendered member of mainstream Canadian society (Dozier, 2005). More plainly
stated, I assigned gender classifications based on my interpretations of participants’ “gender display” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Ascribing gender classifications to the participants is consistent with the feminist notion that gender is a “historically and socially constructed category” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 23). However, in doing so my interpretations have conformed to the dominant view of gender binaries in Western culture (Sitton, 2000), including the normalization of cisgender (Worthen, 2016). This was done strategically and with consideration for both the strengths and limitations of adherence to this perspective on gender binarism and gender identity that have been presented in the academic literature and which are discussed in greater detail in the literature review in chapter two and the section on limitations of this study presented in chapter five (Dozier, 2005; Sitton, 2000; Worthen, 2016). Using the two traditional gender categories associated with gender binarism as a classification system within my study is justifiable because this system is profoundly codified and pervasive; some would even argue that it is a ubiquitous system of self and other categorization in the Western world (Dozier, 2005, Shields, 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This codification of gender binarism shapes conceptualizations and understandings of the social world (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and has traditionally been founded within the English language itself (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014; Sitton, 2000). As Sitton (2000) argued “because English has no gender-neutral pronoun to describe animate beings, we are virtually incapable of discussing another person without attributing a masculine or feminine gender” (p. 3). However, emergent change is afoot in this regard as the use of the pronoun ‘they’ in the gender neutral singular form is gaining ground within the English language. It was awarded the title of most significant word of the year in 2015 by the American Dialect Society (Guo, 2016).
Ethics

Ethics approval for the study was obtained through the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) at the University of Calgary. All information was collected, utilized, and stored in accordance with University of Calgary ethical regulations.

The transcripts that form the unit of analysis were obtained through a ratified formal data sharing agreement with the investigators from the Canadian research project investigating the professional adaptation of migrant social workers (Appendix A).

Participants provided their informed consent for their interview transcripts to be utilized in this secondary analysis as part of the consent process undertaken when they participated in interviews for Canadian research project. Thus, participants were unable to withdraw their consent to participate in this study. Individual responses are kept confidential and a unique coding system was implemented in order to identify specific participants and protect their identities. All data are securely stored electronically with hard copy back-ups located in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Sharing and Informed Consent

Transcripts from audio-recorded semi-structured interviews that I conducted in Alberta through my role as research assistant for the Canadian study were re-analyzed for the purpose of my dissertation research. As noted above, the data were obtained through a formal data sharing agreement with the investigators from the Canadian project (Appendix A). For the Canadian project, the consent form signed by all participants that I have interviewed included the following statement: “I agree that data collected in this study will be used for subsequent research projects of similar nature, conditional on approval by an ethics committee for research and respecting the same principles of confidentiality and protection of information”. Thus, all
participants whose transcripts were used for data analysis for my dissertation research can be confirmed to have given informed consent for data re-use.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative research literature commonly states that a dataset can be interpreted in numerous ways (Sandelowski, 2011). Here I will discuss what the literature advises in terms of interpreting data in IPA research in regard to active involvement of the researcher in an interpretive process and use of the hermeneutic circle. First, the IPA researcher needs to be actively involved in the interpretive process in order to “fully uncover” meanings through a process of “sense-making” (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 21). Second, IPA requires the use of a “hermeneutic circle”, also referred to as a “double hermeneutic” or “dual interpretation process” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 362). Generally speaking, the first hermeneutic is the meaning that participants make of their world and the second hermeneutic is the decoded meaning that the researcher generates in order to “make sense of the participants’ meaning making” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 362). Moving through both interpretive processes involved in the double hermeneutic aids the researcher in understanding the complex relationships between the whole and its parts (Smith et al., 2009). The goal is to understand what the experience under study is like, from the perspective of the research participant, while simultaneously being critical of the participants’ interpretation of their experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In order to generate this form of understanding the IPA researcher should engage in dynamic non-linear thinking on a number of levels using different configurations of the whole and the parts of the dataset in order to deepen analysis and ask questions of the data (Smith et al., 2009).

My work as a research assistant completing data collection and analysis for the Canadian study provided me with pre-exposure to the participants and their narratives. I began the process
of engaging the double hermeneutic while conducting data analysis for the Canadian study by interpreting the meanings that participants made of their lived experiences. However, the original study was conducted using a different research methodology, namely grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Tan, 2010). Thus, my dissertation research presented the opportunity to engage with the narratives of the subset of Albertan participants in isolation from the rest of the Canadian dataset, and to explore meanings of professional migration and adaption with a different analytical focus. Specifically, the Canadian study does not explicitly address the topic of gender, which my dissertation focuses on in detail. In addition, the goal of the initial study was to build a theory of professional adaptation among migrant social workers in Canada, whereas my dissertation research seeks to generate a rich description and interpretation of the lived experience of professional migration and adaptation among migrant social workers in the Albertan context through taking an idiographic approach to data analysis and engaging a feminist lens.

Initial Research Strategy

The following table provides an overview of the step-by-step process that I engaged in, in order to ensure that I remained true to the objectives and procedures associated with IPA research throughout the data analysis process (see Table 4.1) (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Below the table each step is described in greater detail. Consistent with the language used in IPA research, I use the word “case” to refer to individual interview transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 4.1

*Step-By-Step Overview of the Initial Research Strategy*
Step #1: Reading of each case. An idiographic approach to data analysis is achieved by deeply exploring individual cases and then generating themes (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, in IPA the researcher begins by reviewing the transcripts of each individual case and producing a complete understanding of each participant’s account (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This involves a process of coding the text. Next, the researcher searches for patterns across cases in order to make more generalized statements based on themes emerging from the coding process (Smith, 2011). The focus, however, is on understanding the perspectives of the specific people in their specific context and consequently any generalizations must be established cautiously and
IPA researchers are cautious about making claims regarding the “transferability of results to wider populations” (Wagstaff et al., 2014, p. 3). If attempts are made to draw generalizations from IPA research findings this should done on a theoretical rather than empirical basis (Wagstaff et al., 2014). The researcher then forms their understandings by exploring the data through the lens of existing theories and concepts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 365).

I reviewed the interview transcripts with a commitment to remaining open to new understandings and interpretations. I kept a research journal where I recorded my observations and reflections based on my reading of the participant’s narratives. I engaged in critical reflection in order to become attuned to the participants’ meanings and my initial interpretations, prior to intentionally and rigourously applying the lens of existing theories and concepts to the data. This process helped to ensure that I did not prematurely attempt to fit the participants’ narratives within existing concepts, and/or develop hypotheses about the narratives as I engaged in the initial data analysis steps (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). By delaying the explicit application of theory and the extant literature to participants’ accounts until my attunement with the data had significantly progressed, I allowed myself to remain open and flexible in my interpretations. This is an appropriate approach given the novelty of my research topic and the fact that it is commonplace in IPA research to engage in bracketing, or in other words, to avoid, to whatever extent is reasonably possible, “coming into the analysis with preconceived ideas” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 92). At the same time, avoiding preconceptions was not fully possible given my high level of pre-existing attunement with the data and the secondary nature of the data analysis, as explained above.
Step #2: Interpretation of each case through the lens of intersectionality theory.

Once I believed that a strong level of attunement with the narratives had been achieved I then read each transcript again, this time seeking to pinpoint key aspects of each participants’ social identities, such as their ethnoracial identification and their roles within their families. Through multiple readings of each narrative through the lens of intersectionality theory I interpreted the axes of privilege and oppression that shaped each person’s story of their lived experience. I used Nvivo computer software to document and organize my initial coding of the data according to the various forms of privilege and oppression that I interpreted from the transcripts.

Step #3: Filter initial interpretations through postcolonial feminist lens. Next, I applied a filter of postcolonial feminisms to my initial interpretations in order to identify Western-centric biases or prejudices in my analytic process, such as racist or sexist assumptions. In many ways this process paralleled Charmaz’s (2014) “focused coding” stage of data analysis in construstivist grounded theory. As in focused coding, I studied and assessed the initial coding work that I had done. This is appropriate as Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest that it is suitable for IPA researchers to borrow analytic techniques from grounded theory. In applying a postcolonial feminist lens to my initial coding I took a critical second look at ‘what [my] codes say” and how my Western-centric perspective was bearing on the analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140). As Charmaz (2014) encouraged, I was concerned with attending to what the codes “imply” and “reveal” about my Western-centric perspective (p. 140). Application of this additional lens led to greater reflection on my positionality in relation to the participants’ narratives as I tested my interpretations and addressed any prejudices that became evident. I paid careful attention to the language the participants used to tell their stories, as well as the language I was then using to represent those narratives (Cousin, 2010). This process led to editing and
refining the initial codes that I had developed using only a intersectional lens, in order to be more precise and anti-oppressive in my conceptualizations and wording.

**Step #4: Repeat steps 1 through 3 for cases 1-9.** I repeated steps #1 through #3 for cases 1-9 in the sample. Systematic repetition was necessary in order to understand the unique lived experiences and narrative of each participant on its own, independent of the other cases in the dataset and before engaging in rigorous thematic development. According to Pringle and colleagues (2011), the process of analysis in IPA requires approaching each case on its own terms while also being open to the possibility that themes may be carried forward from the first case to subsequent accounts. While I attempted to “bracket” off ideas that emerged from each case, I found that points of commonality and divergence across cases and the extant literature frequently came to mind during this process. When such thoughts would arise, I would note them in my research journal in an attempt to “park” the idea(s) there and return my focus back to the specific case I was reviewing.

**Step #5: Compare and contrast my interpretations across cases using intersectional lens.** The next step was undertaking a comparative analysis process whereby I looked for patterns of similarities and differences across all of the narrative accounts using an intersectional lens (Smith, 2011). This comparative process was useful in capturing instances of convergence and divergence among each of the participant’s accounts (Pringle et al., 2011). Given my commitment to conducting a comparative gender analysis I employed a strategy of comparing and contrasting the accounts of male and female participants, thereby illuminating the similarities and differences in male and female migrant social workers experiences of professional adaptation in Alberta. I repeated this process several times in order to test and revise my emerging understandings. Across iterations of the process I made comparisons of
multiple aspects of the participants’ lived experiences and identities which formed the foundation for the subsequent intersectional theme development that emerged. With the assistance of Nvivo data analysis software, I continued to re-organize and categorized my coding of the data according to the similarities and differences in the stories of the participants by gender and by emergent theme allowing for the identification of five key themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 369). According to Pringle and colleagues (2011), there are no specific guidelines on using computer software packages in IPA data analysis. To be clear, I used the software to organize and record my coding and thematic analysis; I did not use it to run any sort of computer-generated data analysis.

**Step #6: Filter comparisons across cases through postcolonial feminist lens.** Themes were filtered through a postcolonial feminist lens. This encouraged reflection, facilitating my ability to check my interpretations and representations for any gaps and biases, especially as they related to issues of power, perspective (Western or non-Western) and diversity of the sample. This process is consistent with the iterative nature of IPA analysis where backwards and forwards movement through different ways of thinking and working with data is important as the researcher sifts through meanings and completes the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009).

Through this checking process I found it useful to begin the development of a diagram that visually depicts the the components of social identity that contributed to the oppression and/or privilege of the research participants in regard to their professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta (see Figure 6.1).

Through engaging in step #6 a significant gap in the diversity of the sample was revealed which led to undertaking additional steps. The gap identified was a lack of ethno-racial diversity in the female subsample within the dataset. It concerned me that lacking the narrative of non-
White female participants would limit my analysis. Therefore, I purposefully selected an additional case to add to the dataset. The sampling procedure is described above.

**Additional Procedure to Address Gap in Sample**

Table 4.2

*Step-By-Step Overview of the Initial Research Strategy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Purpose(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7      | Sampling of additional case to add to dataset               | • Increase ethno-racial diversity of the sample  
|        |                                                             | • Ensure unique narrative of non-White female participant was not missing from the dataset |
| 8      | Reading the additional case                                 | • Attunement with participant’s narrative and my initial interpretations                    |
| 9      | Interpretation of the additional case through the lens of intersectionality theory | • Apply intersectionality theory in order to pinpoint participant’s social location and other key aspects of identity.  
|        |                                                             | • Identify axes of privilege and oppression that shaped the narrative                       |
| 10     | Filter initial interpretations through postcolonial feminist lens | • Deepen reflection regarding social identities and axes of privilege and oppression  
|        |                                                             | • Identify my Western-centric biases and how these have shaped my interpretations  
|        |                                                             | • Test emerging understandings and address prejudices                                     |
|        |                                                             | • Attend to use of language to enhance clarity and ensure that my interpretations do not change participant’s meanings |
| 11     | Compare and contrast my interpretations across all cases using intersectional lens, incorporating the additional case | • Identify patterns of similarities and differences across cases, incorporating the additional case  
|        |                                                             | • Test and refine themes (including identifying supporting quotations from the corpus) |
| 12     | Filter comparisons across cases through postcolonial feminist lens | • Test/check interpretations  
|        |                                                             | • Identify gaps/limitations in analysis                                                    |
| 13     | Finalize themes                                             | • Comprehensive review of thematic analysis  
|        |                                                             | • Attend to language                                                                        |
| 14     | Interpret themes from a plural intersectional and postcolonial theoretical framework and link them to the extant literature | • Articulate a coherent interpretation of the findings that situates the study theoretically and within the context of the extant literature  
|        |                                                             | • Develop recommendations emerging from the research                                      |
|        |                                                             | • Identify limitations and delimitations of the research                                   |
Steps #7-10: Sampling, reading and interpreting the additional case. Steps 7 through 9 involved sampling of the additional case to add to dataset in order to increase the ethno-racial diversity of the sample and ensure that the unique narrative of a non-White female participant was not missing from the dataset (step #7). This was followed by careful reading of the additional case in order for me to develop attunement with the participant’s narrative and my initial interpretations of it (step #8). Next came purposeful interpretation and coding of the additional case through the lens of intersectionality theory. Application of intersectionality theory allowed me to pinpoint the participant’s social identity, as well as to identify axes of privilege and oppression that shaped her narrative (step #9). The following step was to filter my initial interpretations through a postcolonial feminist lens in order to test my interpretations and identify gaps or limitations in my analysis (step #10).

With my dataset complete I had a full listing of the 10 cases in the order in which I reviewed them along with the social identity profile markers that I coded for, which included gender, region of origin, race, English skills and age/appearance. Table 4.3 lists the cases in the order in which I reviewed them (P1F-Romania was first followed consecutively down the list to P10F-Phillippines). The social identity markers coded for represent either a position of privilege or oppression. In Table 4.3 I have classified the social identity markers according to being either a marker of privilege or oppression. By placing all of the social identity markers and positioning of participants in a single table I am attempting to illustrate how each participant is uniquely positioned along multiple axes of oppression and privilege which together form a matrix of domination (Hill-Collins, 2000). At the bottom of Table 4.3 I have provided the frequency counts for each identity marker in order to illustrate the number of times each marker is
represented within the sample. I chose not to provide a total tally of the number of oppressions and privileges per participant as a final column on the right-hand side of this table due to the tenant of intersectionality theory that holds that “categories of analysis” such as race and gender are “distinctive yet interlocking structures of oppression” (Hill-Collins, 1993, p. 26). Therefore, it is important to resist “ranking oppressions” in order to quantify them or to establish a hierarchy of the oppressed via an “additive analysis” that shows how some groups are “more oppressed than others” (Hill-Collins, 1993, pp. 27-28). Instead, Hill-Collins (1993) recommends viewing these categories as “complex web” (p. 26) where dichotomous classifications are replaced by the possibility of having “both/and” positions of being simultaneously “oppressed and oppressor” (p. 28).

Table 4.3

*Cases in Order of Review (Descending) and Coding for Social Identity Profile*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>English Skills</th>
<th>Age/Appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (P)</td>
<td>Female (O)</td>
<td>Global North (P)</td>
<td>Global South (O)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1F - Romania</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2F - Netherlands</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3F - New Zealand</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4F - Israel</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5F - United States</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6M - United States</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7M - India</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8M - India</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9M - Liberia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10F - Philippines</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Frequency | 4 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 1 |

(P) = privilege   (O) = oppression
Steps #11 and #12: Group level analysis. Once the individual level analysis for the additional case was complete, I moved forward with the group level analysis where I compared and contrasted my interpretations across all cases, incorporating the additional case in both existing and new interpretations (step #11). This process allowed me to identify patterns of similarities and differences across cases, incorporating the additional case, and to test and refine themes, including identifying supporting quotations from the corpus. Next, I sought to filter comparisons across cases through a postcolonial feminist lens in order to check interpretations for Western-centric biases and identify any remaining gaps or limitations in my analysis (step #12). It was important to repeat these steps at both the individual and group levels of analysis in order to complete the hermeneutic circle through multiple encounters with the cases at various levels of interpretation.

Steps #13 and #14: Finalizing theme development and linking with extant literature. Finalizing theme development required me to complete a comprehensive review of my thematic analysis where I examined both the quantity and quality of the phenomena that appeared to be most meaningful across cases (step #13). I also took the finalization stage as an opportunity to carefully attend to, explore and refine my intentional use of language (Cousin, 2010). Once themes were finalized the critical work of interpreting those themes in the context of my plural intersectional and postcolonial feminist theoretical framework and the extant literature was undertaken. I also contextualized my interpretations so that the arising implications and recommendations would be relevant to the current Albertan context (step #14). Through this process I was able to articulate a coherent interpretation of the findings that situates the study theoretically and within the context of the extant literature and the Alberta social work milieu. I developed recommendations emerging from the research and provided suggestions for further
research. I also identified the limitations and delimitations of the study. As discussed above, this was followed by the development of a broader discussion that relates the specific themes generated in the analysis to intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms, and the extant literature (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Through adherence to this step-by-step process I ensured that I remained true to the objectives and procedures associated with IPA research while simultaneously engaging in an iterative secondary data analysis process (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2009).

**Evaluation**

Evaluative guidelines for assessing the quality and validity of IPA studies have been developed (Smith et al., 2009; Smith 2011). These guidelines are based on Yardley’s (2000) principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011). I applied these evaluative guidelines in my dissertation. According to Smith (2011, p.17) the four criteria for an acceptable IPA paper include:

- Clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA: it is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic.
- Sufficiently transparent so reader can see what was done.
- Coherent, plausible and interesting analysis.
- Sufficient ‘sampling from corpus’ to show density of evidence for each theme

The concept of “sampling from corpus” is primarily concerned with selecting verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts (Smith, 2011). The guideline is to include extracts from a minimum of three participants per theme (Smith, 2011). Additionally, in order to be judged as “good” a paper must be “well focused” offering an engaging in-depth analysis of a specific topic based on “strong” data and interpretation (Smith, 2011, p. 17). Smith (2011) further stated that
IPA studies must be conducted with both “rigour” and “interpretive flair” (p. 23). The reader must deem that the findings are “plausible” and “persuasive” (Smith, 2011, p. 23). Persuasiveness is to be judged on the presentation of evidence to support the claims made by the researcher. Finally, the writing in an IPA paper should be “bold and confident” in its presentation of the “unfolding” trail of evidence that supports the interpretation that has been made (Smith, 2011, p. 23).

**Summary**

The research methodology underpinning my dissertation research is novel in that I am employing IPA for the purpose of re-analyzing data, is often referred to as conducting a secondary data analysis (Whiteside et al., 2012). Through rigourous application of the steps in IPA data analysis outlined by Smith and colleagues (2009) I applied an intersectional and postcolonial feminist lens for the purpose of conducting a comparative gender analysis of the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta through re-analysis of a sample of 10 transcripts from a Canadian study for which I was a research assistant. My dissertation committee was a powerful support system in helping me to design and implement this unique research design. Chapter five provides the results of the analysis.
CHAPTER V: RESULTS

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) investigation was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of professional adaptation among migrant social workers who arrive in Alberta, Canada, with a particular focus on investigating gendered similarities and differences. The study engaged a feminist framework employing intersectionality theory and postcolonialism feminisms to explore how the social construction of genders and social identities shapes the lived experiences of migrant social workers in the specific context of Alberta, Canada.

This qualitative study involved secondary analysis of a purposive sample of data that was collected through a larger Canadian investigation of migrant social workers’ experiences of migration and professional adaptation (Brown et al., 2015; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2012; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2014; Fulton et al., 2016). Thus, the unit of analysis was transcripts from semi-structured interviews with 10 migrant social workers who settled in Alberta after 2001 along with the corresponding memos that were written following each interview. All participants had been living in Alberta for a minimum of three years and maximum of 11 years prior to the time of the individual qualitative interviews, which took place in 2012-2013.

Transcripts of interviews with four male participants and six female participants were selected for secondary analysis. The selection process and criteria are explained in chapter four. Participants’ permission for re-use of the data in the secondary analysis was granted at the time of the initial interviews. Permission for sharing of the data with the investigators from the Canadian study was obtained through a formal data sharing agreement described in chapter four and included as Appendix A.
In order to protect each participant’s anonymity a coding system was used for the purpose of identity concealment. Each participant has been assigned a unique code as an identifier. The codes contain alphabetical and numerical values, for example, P1F-Romania stands for participant number 1 who was female. Table 5.1 provides a demographic view of the participant sample including their gender, region of origin, qualification/degree, and year of arrival in Alberta along with a listing of the unique code assigned as an identifier for each participant.

Table 5.1

Demographic Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region of Origin (Global South or Global North)</th>
<th>Qualification/ Degree</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Year of Arrival in Alberta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1F-Romania</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Global North</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2F-Netherlands</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Global North</td>
<td>BSW; graduate degree (obtained in Canada post-migration)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3F-New Zealand</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Global North</td>
<td>BSW; post-degree qualification in mental health</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4F-Israel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Global North</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5F-United States</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Global North</td>
<td>MSW; clinical designation</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6M-United States</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Global North</td>
<td>MS; clinical designation</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7M-India</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Global South</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8M-India</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Global South</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9M-Liberia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Global South</td>
<td>MSW; additional graduate degree</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10F-Phillipines</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Global South</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of Data Analysis

Data analysis for my doctoral research began following a rest period of approximately six months during which I was not actively involved in the Canadian study and I did not work on analysis of the data. This time away allowed me to disengage myself from the analysis originally completed for the Canadian study and to begin to examine the data from a fresh perspective for the purpose of secondary analysis. I began the data re-analysis process by re-reading each transcript in detail and simultaneously reviewing the interview memos that I had written following each interview. In this manner I was able to re-sensitize myself to the raw data as opposed to the themes that had emerged from the previous analysis. I then completed the remaining steps in the data analysis process described in chapter four. As noted above, these steps were undertaken while engaging a plural theoretical framework (Mehrotra, 2010) of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Creswell, 2013; Hill-Collins, 1990; Hill-Collins, 1993; Hill-Collins, 2000; Shields, 2008) and postcolonial feminisms (Ali, 2007; Anderson, 2004; Deepak, 2012; DeSouza, 2004; Mohanty, 2003; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). The theoretical framework is described in detail in chapter three and applied to the analysis in chapter six, discussion. Completion of this process resulted in the emergence of the five themes identified below.

Themes

The data analysis resulted in identification of the following themes:

1) Migrant social workers arrive in Alberta on different education and career trajectories divided along gender lines.

2) Migrant social workers in Alberta follow “traditional” gender norms and roles within their family units and these have an impact on professional migration and adaptation experiences.
3) Migrant social workers in Alberta perceive proficiency in communicating in English as critical for successful professional adaptation.

4) Particular intersections of country of origin/nationality, race/ethnicity and language fluency/accent are given preferential status within the social work labour market in Alberta.

5) Migrant social workers in Alberta experience discrimination based their social identity profiles.

The themes are significant because they reflect the lived experiences of migrant social workers in Alberta in the context of gender, race and social identity, as well as the larger social systems and structures that shape these constructs permitting them to be experienced as personal and social phenomena. The first two themes represent significant pre-existing circumstances that migrant social workers brought with them when they migrated to Alberta, namely their levels of education and career trajectories (theme #1), and their gender roles and norms within their family units (theme #2). The subsequent three themes relate to their post-migration context specific experiences of professional adaptation in Alberta. The following section discusses each theme in-depth. Consistent with IPA research methodology, extensive excerpts from the corpus of interview transcripts are provided below in order to illustrate the findings and support the themes interpreted from the data (Smith et al., 2009). The frequency counts for direct quotes cited from the corpus by theme and by participants is found in Table 5.2. As noted above, the theoretical framework and discussion grounded in the extant literature described in chapter three is applied to the analysis in chapter six, discussion.
Table 5.2

Frequency of Direct Quotations Cited from the Corpus by Theme and by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
<th>Theme 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P1F - Romania</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P2F - Netherlands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3F - New Zealand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P4F - Israel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P5F - United States</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P6M - United States</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P7M - India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P8M - India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P9M - Liberia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P10F - Philippines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentation of Themes

**Theme #1: Different Education and Career Trajectories Divided Along Gender Lines**

**Social Work Education and Qualifications**

The migrant social workers in the present study arrived in Canada from a diverse range of countries of origin in the Global North (Romania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Israel, United States) and the Global South (India, Liberia, Philippines). Many of the migrant social workers arrived from non-European countries, which is an established trend in professional migration globally (Czaika & de Haas, 2014). Those from the Global South followed the current dominant professional migration pattern of Global South – Global North migration (Crozier, 2009; Iredale, 2001; Jose et al., 2008; List, 2009; Mackey & Liang, 2012; Phan et al., 2015). It is important to note however that the present study engaged a small purposive sample and therefore the observations made here in regard to the global migratory patterns followed by the participants
are not representative of any established patterns of transnational social worker migration to Alberta per se.

Overall, male participants had more education and higher social work credentials than the female participants regardless of year of arrival in Alberta, region of origin, or race. In discussing their social work education from their countries of origin, only female participants disclosed obtaining 3 or 4-year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degrees (P1F-Romania, P2F-Netherlands, P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P10F-Phillipines), whereas all of the male participants had obtained Master of Social Work (MSW), or equivalent degrees (Master of Clinical Social Work) (P6M-United States, P7M-India, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia). P9M-Liberia was the only participant who obtained his Master of Social Work education in a country other than in his country of origin. In this case, the participant was originally from Liberia but obtained a MSW in the United States prior to migrating to Canada. P9M-Liberia was also the only participant who held multiple graduate-level degrees, including an MSW. The only female participant with an MSW degree was from the United States (US) (P5F-United States). However, some of the female participants had completed additional post-baccalaureate education, including P3F-New Zealand who holds a post-degree qualification in mental health from her country of origin and P2F-Netherlands who completed a graduate degree in a field related to social work in Canada, post-migration (Master of Counseling).

When asked about the quality of the social work education that they received in their countries of origin only female participants expressed concerns about the quality of education received (P2F-Netherlands, P5F-United States). P2F-Netherlands explained her experience with low quality instruction:
We did have two ethics courses. One in the first and one in the second year, and, I have to admit to you that the professor was just not the best teacher….The teacher was incredibly boring. I don’t know if that, it probably didn’t help [me to learn about ethics].

(P2F-Netherlands)

Likewise, P5F-United States expressed concern about her social work education program’s ability to prepare her well for professional practice:

I think that’s the frustrating thing in social work. It’s like when you leave school, you expect to have this strong foundation that you can go out and do good work, and you don’t. At least the school that I went to didn’t give that to me.

Conversely, no male participants in the present sample expressed any concerns about social work education quality. All of the participants, both male and female, with the exception of P1F-Romania, felt that at least part of their social work education was relevant to their practice in their country of origin. P3F-New Zealand stated that she “felt that my undergraduate education was a good preparation for social work practice”. Similarly, P7M-India asserted that “what we were taught, we applied everything there [India], directly and indirectly”. And, P8M-India reported that “what I learned, step-by-step I applied it”. P9M-Liberia also provided a parallel perspective:

I think the most important thing is that I was taught the fundamental principles of social work practice and theories and then I was given the knowledge. So with that, you can apply it to any situation. So I think that is the most important thing.

Among participants a wide array of values learned through social work education in their countries of origin were identified. However, there were some notable variations in the values identified that are distinguishable based on gender and country of origin/nationality. The three
most prominent values that participants learned through their social work education were authenticity (P5F-United States, P8M-India, P10F-Phillipines), respect for diversity (P5F-United States, P6M-United States, P9M-Liberia) and belief in self-determination (P6M-United States, P9M-Liberia). Several values that may be expected to be universal among social workers were only mentioned by the two male MSW-prepared participants from India (P7M-India, P8M-India) who both reported learning about values such as confidentiality, being patient and conveying respect to others. Female participants highlighted learning some values that male participants did not mention at all; these included equality (P2F-Netherlands), conveying empathy to others (P5F-United States, P10F-Phillipines) and exercising integrity (P5F-United States, P10F-Phillipines). Overall, it seems that there may be variation in the social work values taught in social work education programs in different regions globally, as well as some disparity regarding which social work values are emphasized by gender. This subject warrants further exploration in future research.

In addition, participants reported learning a wide range of theoretical frameworks and practice models in their social work education in their countries of origin. While some participants had trouble naming any specific theories that they learned through their social work education, participants who were educated in the United States were able to name them easily (P5F-United States, P6M-United States, P9M-Liberia), as was P2F-Netherlands (educated in the Netherlands). Further, all of these participants have graduate degrees either in social work, in a related discipline, or both (P7M-India, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia, P2F-Netherlands). In terms of comparisons regarding gender and level of education, theories and models of practice learned in social work education in participants’ countries of origin the medical model was only mentioned by male participants with MSW degrees and group work was only mentioned by female
participants. Some of the female participants who held only BSW degrees were unable to name specific social work theories that they learned in their countries of origin (P1F-Romania, P3F-New Zealand, P10F-Phillipines). Cognitive-behavioural theories were only named by participants with graduate-level education. Other specific theories and models identified by participants with graduate-level education included evidence-based practice (P9M-Liberia), problem-centered practice (P8M-India), Rogerian theory (P5F-United States), psychodynamic theory (P6M-United States), ecosystems theory (P6M-United States), family systems theory (P2F-Netherlands), and human development theory (P2F-Netherlands). Again, it is possible that there are some global variations in the theories and models of practice taught in different countries, as well as some disparity regarding which social work theories and models of practice are emphasized by gender and/or level of education. This subject also warrants further exploration in future research.

**Preparedness for Social Work Practice in Alberta**

When asked whether or not their education in their countries of origin had prepared them well for practice in Alberta, two participants, both of whom are males with MSW degrees from the United States (P6M-United States, P9M-Liberia) commented that the social work education that they received was highly transferrable to the Albertan practice context:

I think I had a really solid background and I’m very grateful for my education at [name of university]. Very grateful. It was rock solid. And then it spurred me on to learn more in the years after my Masters. (P6M-United States)

I had opportunity of studying in North America. So there was not much difference in the culture and practices [between the United States and Alberta]. And even in the social policies and all the things like that. I think there were just nuances of differences in terms
of behaviour and all the things like that. And policies in terms of service provisions but, I didn’t have many challenges. (P9M-Liberia)

On the other hand, for some female participants (P1F-Romania, P3F-New Zealand, P10F-Phillipines), it was extensive practice experience as a social worker in their countries of origin as opposed to their education that was perceived to have prepared them well for practice in Alberta. As P3F-New Zealand reported “the experience I gained through my initial 10 years of working in a number of different social work settings prepared me well”. P10F-Phillipines also commented: “Did I feel that I was prepared? Absolutely. Because [of] my experience…back in the Philippines…”.

Social Work Experiences in Countries of Origin

All participants reported practicing social work at the micro (practice with individuals and families) and/or mezzo (practice with groups or communities) levels in their countries of origin. The female participants, who held BSW degrees reported that their micro-level social work practice in their countries of origin involved working directly with women, children and youth in community and medical settings (P1F-Romania, P2F-Netherlands, P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P10F-Phillipines). In contrast, the only female participant with a MSW degree characterized herself as a “clinician” who specialized in domestic violence, including work with male offenders (P5F-United States). Three male participants with MSW or equivalent degrees reported that they were specialized in micro-level health and mental health counselling (P6M-United States, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia). Two social workers that came from countries with significant poverty-related issues (Romania and India) reported working at the mezzo-level in community development to address economic needs (P1F-Romania, P7M-India). Only one participant identified a research component to his professional practice (P9M-Liberia).
Obtaining Credential Recognition and Professional Registration in Alberta

Migrant social workers reported experiencing numerous issues with the credential recognition process in Alberta, which is a function of the provincial regulator for the social work profession, the Alberta College of Social Workers [ACSW]. To complete credential recognition the ACSW works in coordination with one of three bodies deemed to be capable of assessing social work qualifications obtained in a country outside of Canada or the United States: (a) an agency of the Alberta provincial government that specializes in assessment of foreign credentials called the International Qualification Assessment Service [IQAS]; (b) The Canadian Association of Social Workers; or (c) an accredited university-level Canadian social work education program (ACSW, 2016). The issue with credential recognition and registration that was cited most frequently by participants was dealing with the bureaucracy involved in the process, especially meeting the ACSW’s documentation requirements and paying the required assessment and registration fees (P2F-Netherlands, P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P5F-United States, P9M-Liberia).

As of 2016 the application fee to have foreign social work credentials assessed by the Canadian Association of Social Workers is $339.00 (Canadian Association of Social Workers, n.d.). Then, when applying for licensure and registration with the ACSW the applicant pays an initial application fee of $80.00 (ACSW, 2016a). Once registered social workers in Alberta pay additional annual registration fees to the ACSW of approximately $350.00 (ACSW, 2016a). In addition, social workers in Alberta are strongly encouraged by the ACSW to purchase professional liability insurance, even if such insurance is also supplied by the social worker’s employer (ACSW, 2016a). Among participants female participants emphasized concerns about the financial costs of pursuing credential recognition while males did not. For example, P5F-
United States, a migrant social worker from the United States explained her experience with pursuing credential recognition and professional registration in Alberta like this:

It takes lots of phone calls and answering lots of questions. I think the hardest part was understanding and getting the clinical piece transferred over. They accepted my license, which was a Licensed Clinical Social Worker [LCSW] license, but then they wanted an additional piece of information and documentation, and of course an additional fee to get a clinical license.

As P5F-United States identifies, applying to the ACSW’s clinical registry requires payment of an additional fee of $50.00 on top of all other fees (ACSW, 2016b).

P3F-New Zealand explained the process that she followed to become a registered social worker as follows:

I contacted the Alberta College of Social Workers who told me about getting registered and they directed me to submit my qualifications to IQAS [International Qualification Assessment Service]…So that was quite a bit of work and expense.

The two participants from the United States, one male (P6M-United States) and one female (P5M), who held MSW or equivalent degrees received their clinical practice designation from the ACSW. Both of these participants had held the designation of LCSW in the United States, which had required passing clinical licensing examinations; they had done this prior to migration. For both P5F-United States and P6M-United States, successful completion of these exams in the United States translated directly to a clinical designation in Alberta once the required forms were submitted and fees were paid. None of the other participants held a clinical practice designation either before or after migration to Alberta.
In Alberta, newly graduated social workers are required to complete 1500 hours of supervised social work practice before they can be granted a full practice permit by the ACSW and hold the title of Registered Social Worker (ACSW, 2015). During the 1500 hours of supervised practice new graduates are referred to as “provisional social workers”. In the case of international credential recognition some migrant social workers also reported being provisionally registered as social workers in Alberta (P2F-Netherlands, P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P7M-India, P8M-India) and being required to complete 1500 hours of supervised social work practice, while some others did not (P1F-Romania, P5F-United States, P6M-United States, P9M-Liberia, P10F-Phillipines). It is clear that MSW or equivalent degrees from the United States transferred directly to full Registered Social Worker status in Alberta, however holding a MSW degree from another country, such as India, required provisional registration and supervised practice. Yet, this practice was not standardized as two female participants, one from Romania and the other from the Philippines, who held BSW degrees did not have to go through the provisional registration process. This leads to one of three possibilities: a) there are some inconsistencies across individual cases in the international assessment and accreditation processes conducted by the bodies approved by the ACSW; or b) social work degrees from some countries, such as India, are not viewed as being fully transferrable to the Albertan context and therefore holders of these degrees are deemed to require additional preparation beyond their graduate-level education in social work in order to practice in Alberta; or c) social workers who have been previously registered in their countries of origin may be able to transfer their registration to Alberta, whereas social workers from countries that do not have a professional regulator cannot transfer their registration from one regulator to another and therefore they are assigned provisional status once they apply for registration in Alberta, regardless of level of
education and degree held. A clear explanation of this process and criteria is not publicly available leading to a perceivable lack of transparency.

Theme #2: Traditional Gender Norms and Roles

The participants reported migration application patterns consistent with the literature on skilled migration in Canada which has established that within families, men are more likely than women to be the principal applicant for migration (Boucher, 2007; Phan et al., 2015). Two female participants moved to Alberta to follow their husbands who had already obtained employment in Alberta (P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel). Another female participant came to Alberta as a family-sponsored immigrant following marriage to a Canadian citizen (P5F-United States). On the other hand, all of the male participants arrived in Canada as a principal applicant under one of Canada’s foreign skilled worker programs (P6M-United States, P7M-India, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia). Most male participants also mentioned that their motivation for moving to Canada was to obtain better quality of life for themselves and their families (P6M-United States, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia). This motivator was only mentioned by one female participant (P10F-Phillipines) who was also the principal applicant for immigration in her family: “Initially my husband and I had to go be assessed and because I have the higher points in the system - in the way they were doing the points system, I became the main applicant”.

Participants’ perceptions of the migration process were a mixture of positive and negative views. Female participants tended to have more positive perceptions of the migration process while male participants held more negative perceptions. On the positive side, P5F-United States commented that the sacrifices that she had made to come to Alberta were “worth it”; while P1F-Romania stated that she considered the six months it took for her and her husband to be approved to come to Canada as being “pretty fast”. On the negative side P6M-United States and P7M-
India reported that they found the migration process to be stressful and challenging. As P7M-India explained: “Migration is not easy. Migration from another country to [Canada] is very difficult. There are a lot of procedures. They are analyzing our qualifications, our experiences and our language [skills]”. It appears that, in general, male participants may have more negative views and experiences of professional migration to Alberta than female participants. My analysis reveals that this may be in part in linked to the pressures that male migrants feel to act as financial providers and breadwinners for themselves and their family members. In contrast, many of the female participants were focused more on their family roles and responsibilities than on economic survival through securing an income post-migration. This distinction is discussed in greater detail below.

**Breadwinning and Childrearing**

Male participants exclusively discussed the need to join the labour force quickly post-migration in order to fulfill the role of primary breadwinner within their family units (P7M-India, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia). This issue did not seem to be a factor for P6M-United States as he had been hired into a social work position in Alberta prior to migration and therefore he had a secure source of income. Challenges and delays with the credential recognition and registration requirements and processes threatened these men’s abilities to provide for their families. For example, P9M-Liberia explained that the length of time required to receive credential recognition endangered his ability to provide adequately for his family’s basic needs:

> IQAS took four months! Four months! Then, they wanted an original of all my degrees and certificates, which I can understand because some people want to fake it, but four months! For God’s sake, am I supposed to go for four months before my family could eat? You know, I just found that outrageous.
A further financial issue associated with the accreditation and registration process was covering the cost of living expenses for a family while completing the 1500 hours of supervised practice required for those who received provisional registration from the ACSW. As P7M-India explained, after searching fruitlessly for three months he was unable to secure a paid position with a qualified supervisor that would meet his 1500-hour requirement. Therefore, he completed his required 1500-hours of supervised practice through unpaid voluntary work. He described the experience like this:

I had to work five months for free, eight hours a day. I was working and there was no recognition of anything about it…one of my friends, he is doing social work here [Alberta] now too and he has to go to work, and he has a family to take care of. Still, he has to do eight hours every day of free work and has to do it for five months without getting paid. I don't know if I could…support my family. Some of these issues are very challenging for us when we come. There is no financial support for us when we have to do free hours. That is the most difficult part I find. (P7M-India)

No female participants mentioned the linkages between credential recognition requirements and registration timeframes and being able to provide financially for their families. In general, female participants did not appear to view themselves primarily as income earners, whereas in contrast, male participants used language that framed being an income earner as a central part of their identities.

Several participants worked outside of the social work profession prior to entering the social work labour force in Alberta. Male and female participants with both BSW and MSW qualifications worked in a variety of lower-skilled or paraprofessional positions including retail employee (P7M-India, P8M-India), construction labourer (P9M-Liberia), group home worker
MIGRANT SOCIAL WORKERS IN ALBERTA

(P9M-Liberia), childcare provider (P10F-Phillipines), and disability support worker (P2F-Netherlands). However, in three cases female participants opted to focus on family and domestic life, rather than work outside of the home. This pattern was exclusive to some female participants (P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P5F-United States), but not all (P1F-Romania, P2F-Netherlands, P10F-Phillipines). Of the three female participants who did not take time post-migration to focus on family and domestic life, P10F-Phillipines was the only one who is a mother, while P1F-Romania and P2F-Netherlands were childless.

Evidently, female migrant social workers sometimes chose not to enter the workforce upon arriving in Canada in order to focus on childrearing (P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel), or family life (P5F-United States). For example, P4F-Israel was in Alberta for 15 months before she started work in a social work position. She delayed her entry into the social work labour market to focus on childrearing. Once she was ready to enter the social work labour market she focused on obtaining part-time rather than full-time employment. However, she realized that there may be stigma attached to the decision that she made to delay entry into the workforce after arriving in Canada rather than working in her profession in order to stay at home and raise children, as she explained: “When my daughters grew up and I found that I am ready for a part time job, I started to apply, and like always it’s, oh no, I shouldn’t say that!” P3F-New Zealand similarly stayed at home to raise children for two-years before seeking social work employment in Alberta: “I had been in Canada a couple of years and it wasn’t until my youngest child was starting kindergarten that I was ready to look for work”.

The three female participants who did not work outside of social work post-migration (P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P5F-United States) all shared a common motivation to migrate to Alberta – their husbands. Also, they each entered Canada as family class migrants sponsored by
their husbands rather than as principal applicant skilled workers. For example, P3F-New Zealand shared that “my husband got a job here [Alberta] so that enabled us to move… I was included under my husband’s work visa. Similarly, P4F-Israel reported, “I just moved to Canada [to be at] my family’s side. [I’m] married with kids…my husband was offered a job [in Alberta]”. While on one hand, P3F-New Zealand and P4F-Israel are what human capital migration theorists would call “trailing spouses” who followed their husbands who were skilled economic-class immigrants (Boucher, 2007; Phan et al., 2015), the case of P5F-United States, on the other hand, is unique in that she married someone who was already a Canadian citizen living in Canada full-time. P5F-United States explained that she was “sponsored by [her] spouse so it was family [migration]. That was the word that they used”. As noted, in each case these women entered Canada through familial relationship rather than through applying as skilled workers. This presents an interesting parallel between immigration class and social work labour force attachment among migrant women social workers in Alberta.

**Theme #3: Proficiency in Communicating in English is Critical**

All of the male participants identified that they spoke English fluently prior to migrating to Alberta, whereas only some of the female participants did (P2F-Netherlands, P3F-New Zealand, P5F-United States, P10F-Phillipines). Proficiency in communicating in English was discussed by participants as being either an asset or a challenge to their professional adaptation. Most participants reported employing a variety of strategies in order to enhance their English language proficiency and/or reduce their accent, even if they considered themselves to speak English fluently.
English Language Proficiency as an Asset

In terms of English language proficiency, five migrant social workers identified that speaking English prior to arriving in Alberta was an asset in their professional adaptation (P2F-Netherlands, P3F-New Zealand, P6M-United States, P7M-India, P9M-Liberia).

Coming from the United States, P6M-United States, reflected that his early adaptation to living and working in Alberta was facilitated in part by his ability to speak English:

I mean probably the acclimation from the US to Canada is probably one of the easiest, maybe from the UK also would be similar, but where language or there’s more cultural variation, I mean, I can’t imagine what it would be like coming here.

Coming from India, P7M-India explained his experience with English language proficiency like this:

They ask me how come your English is so good and I tell them yeah in India is - like recent studies show that India is the largest English speaking nation of the world. Yeah it has 1.2 or 1.1 billion, right? And the schools and the majority of the schools are English-speaking schools. And my parents are two different languages so the common language at home was English. And because of British influence, like UK - Britain - colonized India for almost 400 years. So all of our government organizations, all of our - everything is English, most of it. You have English and the native language. So that’s what I tried to explain that - because most of the colleagues, some of them are White colleagues, and say how come you speak so good English and I have to educate them telling them, oh because in our school we studied English. Everything is English.

Coming from Liberia via the United States, P9M-Liberia attested that he experienced his proficiency in speaking and writing English prior to migrating to Alberta as follows:
I didn’t have a language barrier. And then the other thing is my writing abilities. So compared to other people who are starting different, in French countries, and other countries that have limited English and other things like that and report writing and time management and other things like that.

**Challenges Associated with English Language Proficiency**

Low English language proficiency was viewed negatively in regard to professional adaptation among both male and female participants. Even among social workers whose mother tongue is English or who had been formally educated in English since childhood, there was still a sense of a need to undergo language adaptation in order to understand local vocabulary, colloquialisms and expressions (P5F-United States, P7M-India), as two participants explained. P5F-United States stated “I just have to learn colloquialisms still” while P7M-India shared that “sometimes we use British terms words, like for instance, here [in Alberta] you tell a truck and in India we call it a lorry. That’s like certain words – I had to learn the American Standard words”.

Even in cases where migrant social workers were confident enough in their English language capabilities to commence social work practice, issues around vocabulary and word meaning would sometimes catch them off-guard in their day-to-day communications in the workplace. This would occur not only in their verbal communication but also when writing case notes. The participant from Liberia, P9M-Liberia, who received his MSW education in the United States, recalled an episode where he was working with older adults within the Albertan healthcare system and in a case report he referred to an adult incontinence product as a “diaper” which he was unaware was an inappropriate term to be applied to such a product when it is used for an adult. He explained the episode as follows:
In one of my [case] notes I wrote my client was wearing diapers…and oh I got a big slap on the wrist for that from my manager. But, hey, that is part of the learning process! I wasn’t afraid of saying it and it didn’t make me feel bad. It was great that she corrected me! Yes, and now I know; I will never use that anymore. (P9M-Liberia)

For some migrant social workers in Alberta, not only does the vocabulary required to communicate professionally in English need to be developed, in some cases communication style also requires adaptation. As the social worker from the Netherlands, P2F-Netherlands, explained, her issue with communication style was her “Dutch honesty” or “directness”, which she realized may be perceived as “rude” by some Canadians. She explained her experience with the differences in communication styles as follows:

I feel that people in the Netherlands are more direct. I feel sometimes - and don’t be offended or anything - I feel like people in Canada sometimes say one thing but then they make it look, or they make it sound much nicer and prettier than what they actually think inside. And so I sometimes feel like there’s double standards and I find that hard to work with. I don’t know if that makes sense…I do - like I have friends too - like a good friend of mine is married to a Dutch guy here in Canada and she talks about that too. Dutch honesty. Just the directness and I don’t know our - I think to Canadians it might sometimes sound rude whereas I appreciate that directness so I guess that’s kind of a difference… I just try to be very nice, just kind of respecting, and checking in, and making sure…I wouldn’t be offending anyone or whatever… I would still wrap it up kind of nice, like, by Dutch standards. That doesn’t mean that it’s still nice here [in Canada], right? Standards are a little bit different [in Canada] so, I did check that sometimes.

(P2F-Netherlands)
Three participants, both male and female, (P1F-Romania, P4F-Israel, P8M-India) discussed language proficiency in English as being a barrier to becoming employed as a social worker in Alberta, as the following quote from P1F-Romania illustrates: "Coming from another country it is difficult, first the language. It is so difficult. I would have [an] accent and my vocabulary wouldn’t be so developed like other people that were born and raised here [in Canada]". P8M-India similarly reported, “if I apply for things like, they [employers] won’t get the things they are expecting from me, especially the language. So without the language [English] it is very difficult”.

Challenges with English language proficiency, mentioned by both male and female participants, sometimes led to feelings of frustration (P8M-India) disillusionment or disempowerment (P1F-Romania, P4F-Israel) as migrant social workers sometimes felt misunderstood when they were attempting to communicate with colleagues and service users (P1F-Romania, P2F-Netherlands, P4F-Israel, P8M-India, P10F-Phillipines). P4F-Israel stated “deep inside of me, I always felt I could do more if only I was more comfortable with the language [English]”. P8M-India reported “I don’t want to waste their [colleagues’] time so I keep quiet. So, I am restricted by myself because of this language [English], sometimes”. And, P10F-Phillipines asserted that “whenever I would be asked [in job interviews] what are your challenges and weaknesses I would always say my English”.

Both male and female participants recognized that in order to provide effective social work services to service users in the Albertan context it is necessary to be able to skillfully communicate in English. P1F-Romania reported that there was incongruence between her self-perceived readiness to provide social work services to service users in English and the assessment of her language ability by an immigrant serving organization. As she explained:
When I came to Canada, I did not know English at all. I never had training. I was just picking up a few words from movies and songs... I went to [an immigrant-serving agency] they tested me... and I was qualified to take free classes, English classes. So I went to these English classes for probably three months and after that they tested me again and they said “I don’t qualify anymore for the free classes. I’m good enough to work with my English”, but I did not feel... comfortable enough to go to counsel somebody... It is different working [as a] cashier or any other place, probably my English would be okay. But to work in this field [social work] you need more. (P1F-Romania)

Discrimination was also experienced regarding potential employer’s assumptions about English language proficiency, as P7M-India explained:

One thing I feel an employer [in Alberta] should know is that most of the people coming from India know English. Sometimes I feel one of the barriers over here [in Alberta] is they think the immigrants don't know English…. They’re going to ask me okay you have to get your English done. I did my undergrad - my major was English. I have a BA in English Literature. So I told them [employers] I have all this, why you have to ask me to do that?

**Strategies to Enhance English Language Proficiency**

The greatest element that facilitated the professional adaptation of both male and female migrant social workers who were experiencing English language proficiency issues was openness, acceptance and support from their workplace colleagues (P1F-Romania, P4F-Israel, P8M-India). A participant from India, P8M-India, noted that the language adaptations did not only occur on his part, but rather they were a two-way street as his Canadian colleagues also
adapted to his accent and learned how he expressed himself through language. Similarly, the participant from the Netherlands, P2F-Netherlands, highlighted the need for migrant social workers not only to understand their service users and colleagues, but also to be understood by them. She explained that in her experience “sometimes things I said were just interpreted or perceived different just because of the language barrier” (P2F-Netherlands).

Language and communication is of significant concern for some migrant social workers as they need to be able to be understood and understand others in order to practice social work effectively. One participant mentioned that he continuously works on his word usage and accent in order to try and sound “more Canadian” (P7M-India). Other strategies to facilitate language adaptation employed by migrant social workers in Alberta include taking pronunciation classes (P1F-Romania), asking service users for assistance with vocabulary (P7M-India), practicing conversational skills on a daily basis outside of work (P1F-Romania, P8M-India, P10F-Phillipines) and speaking English at home with family members (P2F-Netherlands).

Two participants, one male and one female, shared that they delayed entering the social work workforce in Alberta due to their concerns about their English language abilities (P1F-Romania, P8M-India). P8M-India, for example, purposely took a job outside of the social work profession when he first arrived in Alberta with the goal of improving his English language skills before entering into professional social work practice. P1F-Romania explained how her need to learn English well enough to practice social work in Alberta caused a delay in her entry into the social work workforce once she arrived in Alberta: “I didn’t trust my English… even after six months I didn’t trust enough my English to be able to have a social work job… I continued my education in English and…after 11 months I got a job”.
Theme #4: Preferential Status within the Social Work Labour Market in Alberta

Male participants mentioned arriving in Alberta with pre-existing expectations surrounding their ability to access the social work labour market quickly (P7M-India, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia). Conversely, female participants did not discuss holding such expectations and instead seemed to arrive in Alberta with an open-mind, ready to encounter the labour market conditions whatever they turned out to be. For the male participants their expectations about accessing the labour market often did not match with the reality of their lived experience once they arrived in Alberta. One participant arrived in Alberta with a social work position secured pre-migration (P6M-United States); all other pursued employment opportunities post-migration and this was described as a challenging and disappointing experience.

As P7M-India, who was working with youth at a group home at the time of the interview, shared: “When I came to Canada I never thought I was going to work with kids. I was going to work in the hospital or some non-profit organization that dealt with adults… now with kids I’m building a new experience”. P7M-India perceived that his prior experience in medical social work with an adult population in India “never helped” him to obtain a social work position in Alberta commensurate with his specific prior professional experience.

Obtaining Employment

A wide variety of timeframes for securing a social work position in Alberta were identified and these did not follow a discernable gendered pattern. Among the participants who arrived in Alberta without a social work position secured in advance, P9M-Liberia obtained a social work job the quickest, taking only one month to obtain a position in the social work field once he received his credential recognition. This was also after working as a construction labourer immediately upon arrival in Alberta while he was awaiting credential recognition from
the ACSW, an experience, which he described as “painful” and resulted in learning the importance of education: “Education is important because labour is a hard thing to do. I wasn’t cut out for hard labour. It was hard work. And they work really hard and they’re paid very little. That is really sad” (P9M-Liberia). As a husband and father of young children obtaining a social work job was imperative in order to provide financially for his family, and therefore he settled for a position for which he was over-educated and over-qualified, even leaving some of his qualifications off of his resume in order to create the appearance of being a stronger candidate for the specific position for which he applied.

Both male and female participants experienced challenges with accessing the labour market and obtaining employment as a social worker in Alberta. Specific challenges that participants reported encountering included English language proficiency issues, lack of Canadian work experience, lack of familiarity with the Canadian labour market and hiring practices, and discrimination. Discrimination was the largest challenge experienced by both male and female migrant social workers in Alberta in terms of accessing the social work labour market. The next section will explore the discrimination experiences in greater detail.

**Discrimination during the Job Seeking Process**

Participants reported perceiving discrimination during the job search process based on race, the country in which they received their social work education and a lack of Canadian work experience. Some White participants also acknowledged the role of their White privilege during their job searches. Others reflected a degree of uncertainty about labeling their experiences as having been discriminatory, even as they reported feeling that potential employers had treated them in a biased manner.

**Preference for North American credentials and Canadian experience.** One way in
which migrant social workers felt discriminated against during the hiring process was reactions from potential employers to their foreign social work education, with the exception of social workers educated in the United States. It was the perception among some participants that Albertan social work employers prefer to hire domestically educated social workers. This was despite internationally educated social workers being registered and having their credentials formally recognized by the ACSW, as this quote from P2F-Netherlands demonstrates:

I think they do prefer people who have a degree from let’s say [University of] Lethbridge or whatever. Like some place they know over someone, like they don’t know, and I understand that they don’t know what the program in the Netherlands was like and it might be like some sort of crappy program for all they know.

Conversely, my exchange with P6M-United States illustrates how university education in the United States is perceived to be acceptable to Albertan social work employers:

Interviewer: Did you feel any form of discrimination during your job search?

P6M-United States: No. And in fact I would say probably quite the opposite. I think people were…I think I got actually bonus points, if you will, in the end, for having been trained at [name of American university] and my background. I think it was actually an asset, so not in terms of the job interview or that, no.

However, P6M-United States also suggested that during his initial job search, when he received a lack of response from employers, he attributed the lack of response to his foreign credentials:

I was applying for jobs within the health care system…and wasn’t getting any responses and I was kind of puzzled because I thought I had some good credentials and some good experience. I had worked in-patient psychiatry, I had worked in out-patient, done private practice, I’ve done clinical supervision, you know. But I thought, well you know, there’s
a [university social work education program] right in town and there’s probably a direct feed of graduates from the [social work education program] and that’s probably why I’m not getting responses. They’re training, kind of, their own folks.

The perceived preference for domestically educated workers was viewed by participants as being coupled with the preference for Canadian work experience:

If they look like I got my Masters in Social Work, okay, fine that’s great, but still when they say experience and with this degree, if somebody is applying from here in Canada, one of the applicants is born and worked here [Canada], and if he or she got kind of this experience and this degree and we got for a plain kind of job, they have the kind of expectation like a Masters in Social Work and different experiences, these things and they will hire for a very good position this experience and this degree. (P8M-India)

Three participants (P2F-Netherlands, P7M-India, P8M-India) identified the lack of Canadian work experience as a barrier to accessing the social work labour market. As two participants elaborated:

I sometimes thought that not having any references from Canada was kind of a barrier too. Just because I hadn’t worked anywhere here [Canada] yet, then my references were in the Netherlands and people were not very willing to even email there [the Netherlands] to kind of get a reference so that was kind of a barrier too, I found. (P2F-Netherlands)

Nobody was offering me a job. They told me you need Canadian experience and I was asking how I can get Canadian experience unless you offer me a job…. They’re telling me I need Canadian experience but how am I going to gain it? It's easy for them to tell me I need more Canadian experience but where am I going to gain it if nobody is opening
a door for me? That's what hurts me. But where am I going to gain the experience they want me to gain? (P8M-India)

In one case, a participant chose not to apply to a particular employer because a co-worker had already experienced discrimination when applying for a job there: “One of my co-workers, he went to one agency, I don't want to mention the name of it, and he came back telling that I can't work there because there's too much discrimination” (P7M-India).

**Racial discrimination and White privilege.** Race was also identified by some of the participants as a barrier to accessing the social work labour market in Alberta. Two racialized male participants (P8M-India, P9M-Liberia) reflected that they experienced discrimination due to race during their attempts to access the social work labour market in Alberta. The following exchange with P9M-Liberia illustrates this point:

Interviewer: And with getting your first social work job in Canada, what was the most challenging part of that?

P9M-Liberia: That is a very funny story. I think the first one is racism itself - the first one is racism.

P8M-India also identified racism as an issue: “I feel there’s discrimination…like colour or language or whatever it may be”.

In keeping with concerns about experiencing racial discrimination in accessing the social work labour market in Alberta, a White female respondent acknowledged the role of her White privilege in her successful hiring as a social worker in Alberta:

I have to say, just as a comment, that I know it’s very sad that I’m saying that, but that’s what I heard, that I was lucky that I’m Caucasian. It’s very sad for me to tell this. I know that that’s a factor in the ability to get a job. It’s unfortunate. (P4F-Israel)
Uncertainty about perceptions of discrimination. I identified that some participants, both male and female, seemed to be hesitant to label their experiences as discrimination. In a few cases participants explained that they suspected that they were being discriminated against due to the fact that they were immigrants, but I interpreted that they did feel comfortable stating this as a matter of fact due to a lack of concrete proof or evidence of overt discrimination. To elaborate, in some cases perceptions of possible discrimination manifested in pondering about the discrepancy between the numbers of job applications the participant sent out, versus the number of invitations to interview that were received, as this exchange with P3F-New Zealand demonstrates:

Interviewer: Did you feel any form of discrimination during your job search?
P3F-New Zealand: I don’t know. I know I sent off a fair number of applications and was not contacted back on the majority of them so, I can’t - I don’t know what the selection process was and whether there was any discrimination there.

P9M-Liberia shared a similar reflection on his job search experience: “I have applied for numerous jobs right? And some of them [employers] wanted - some interviews I went to and I was sure, I was sure I would be taken and I wasn’t taken. And I really don’t know why”. From the above quotations from participants’ narratives I believe that even in the face of perceived bias it can be challenging for migrant social workers to identify themselves as being on the receiving end of discrimination. Further theorization on the processes of discrimination and Othering experienced by migrant social workers in provided in chapter six.

Challenges with Understanding of Canadian Labour Market

Challenges experienced with understanding the functions and operations of Canadian labour market, namely hiring practices, centered on the job search and application processes. A specific issue reported by participants was determining types of jobs that they might be
considered suitable for. Two respondents (P2F-Netherlands, P6M-United States) explained their experiences with this problem:

I found that I wasn’t really understanding some of the jobs either. Like I applied for, I think, a variety of jobs like where you maybe not even needed a social work diploma or whatever kind of education to maybe, I applied to some where a masters would have been favourable, I guess, or preferable. I didn’t really know, I didn’t really sometimes understand. (P2F-Netherlands)

I was applying for jobs within the health care system…and wasn’t getting any responses and I was kind of puzzled because I thought I had some good credentials and some good experience. …And quite inadvertently on my part, I applied for a management position and that’s where I got the response. They wanted to interview me. So the difference was learning that I was in a different employment model where union seniority meant something and not having union seniority meant something. You [migrant social workers] were the last to be looked at just based on things like that, which was not in my purview. (P6M-United States)

In contrast, P3F-New Zealand identified how similarities in human resources practices between her country of origin and Canada was perceived to be an asset, as she elaborated: “The job seeking process is similar to the one I was familiar with. So I understood how the process worked”.

Being from a country of origin where the social work labour market is perceived as functioning in a similar manner to the social work labour market in Alberta (such as New Zealand) appears to be perceived of as being advantageous to migrant social workers during the job search process because the past experience the migrant social worker has from their country
of origin could be transferred and applied to their experience in Alberta. On the other hand, migrant social workers who originated from a country of origin with a social work labour market that differs significantly from that in Alberta (such as the Netherlands and the United States), do not have a transferrable experience to draw from and must engage in new learning and adaptation to their new context.

**Strategies to Obtain Employment as a Social Worker in Alberta**

Although migrant social workers in Alberta engaged a variety of specific strategies in order to obtain employment as a social worker the two most commonly used were engaging in volunteer work (P2F-Netherlands, P4F-Israel, P5F-United States, P7M-India, P8M-India) and/or networking (P3F-New Zealand, P4F-Israel, P5F-United States, P7M-India). Overall, female participants named a wider variety of specific strategies used to obtain employment as a social worker in Alberta than did male participants. Several participants reported using multiple strategies as opposed to relying on just one method of seeking and securing employment as a social worker. Two specific strategies, reporting fewer skills and qualifications, and working outside of the social work profession, were also discussed in detail, as illustrated below.

**Reporting fewer skills and qualifications.** Two male participants (P8M-India, P9M-Liberia) and one female participant (P10F-Philippines) employed a strategy of reporting fewer skills and qualifications than they possessed in order to be considered for particular employment opportunities. As P10F-Philippines reported, this strategy was adopted out of a perceived need to do so in order to obtain employment opportunities: “I have to downgrade myself when I first applied for a job”. All three of the participants (two male and one female) who engaged this specific strategy are also members of ethno-racial minority groups, revealing a relationship between racialization and this specific strategy for obtaining labour market entry in the social
work profession in Alberta. P9M-Liberia explained his specific use of this strategy as follows: “What I did was - in my application I didn’t write I had a Master’s degree, I only wrote I have a degree in Social Work and I am willing to do the work”.

In the case of P9M-Liberia, he acknowledged that, “the jobs I applied for were way below my skills”. He justified this by stating that employing the strategy of reporting fewer skills and qualifications allowed him to position himself “where I needed to start from to get my Canadian experience”. From his perspective, his extensive work experience in the United States actually served as a disadvantage to entering the social work labour market in Alberta. P9M-Liberia explained that it was “difficult” to get “someone to hire me knowing my experience that I had”. Thus, reporting fewer skills and qualifications, and then accepting being underemployed was a temporary strategy to address his need to earn an income in order to provide financially for his family by helping him to gain faster entry into the Albertan social work labour market.

Indeed, as noted above, P9M-Liberia successfully obtained employment as a social worker in Alberta the quickest out of all of the participants, with the exception of P6M-United States who had a social work position secured prior to his arrival in Alberta.

P8M-India also discussed engaging a strategy of reporting fewer skills and qualifications on his resume. In his case, even though he knew he could foreseeably be offered a management position in social work due to the fact he held a MSW degree, he did not want that level of position due to feeling like it would be above his skill level to take up such a position while he was adapting to social work practice in the Albertan context. Instead, P8M-India stated a preference to take a step-wise approach to increasing the sophistication of his social work practice to match his qualifications as he adapted and gained more experience with practicing in the Albertan context, he contended that:
We don’t want the qualifications we have…because… we will get a manager’s position. And we are not asking for those things. We don’t want them because we know that we cannot manage… we wanted to get the basic jobs related to social work and then learn everything. Then we can get it step-by-step.

P8M-India preferred to start work in an entry-level social work job where he could more easily focus on his professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta and work on his English language skills so that he could climb the ladder of sophistication of practice and seniority over time. He even preferred to start in a support worker role, rather than a professional social work position, as P8M-India purported: “Even if it says not a social worker, a case-worker position, it is very much similar to the social work position, so that would be very good for me”. An intersectional analysis would apply a critical lens here and question whether this participant truly desired to engage this strategy as a personal choice or if it was an adaptation to an internalized sense of inferiorization (Mullaly, 2002). Such a sense of inferiorization could have emerged for example, based on his earlier experience of having his prior professional social work experience and credentials invalidated by the ACSW through being made to complete a 1500-hour provisional registration process despite his extensive social work experience and Master of Social Work qualification in India (Mullaly, 2002). Further application of the concept of inferiorization to the experiences of the participants in the present study is provided in chapter 6.

Working outside of social work. As a strategy to work toward his specific career goals P8M-India engaged in volunteer work within his local social services sector while working at a local retailer and awaiting his credential recognition for a few months prior to applying on social work jobs. For P1F-Romania, it took close to one year to obtain social work employment in Alberta due to a combination of making a personal choice to delay seeking a job while she
learned English and then once she decided to seek employment she experienced difficulty obtaining work due to a lack of Canadian work experience. In particular, once she decided to return to working within the social work profession, P1F-Romania was unable to immediately find a social work position. Therefore, she obtained a position as a childcare worker at a facility where she worked for approximately four months before receiving her first social work job interview. In this case she was working at a job for which she describes herself as being over-educated and over-qualified for. This however, allowed her to obtain valuable Canadian work experience, which eventually led to obtaining employment as a social worker.

**Theme #5: Experience of Discrimination Based on Social Identity**

The challenge with professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta experienced most frequently by both male and female participants was discrimination. The discrimination experienced by participants in the present study is consistent with findings from research regarding the experiences of migrant social workers in the United Kingdom (Hussein et al., 2011a), New Zealand (Fouche et al., 2014b) and Canada (Brown et al., 2015) who also reported being discriminated against. Concerns about being discriminated against and experiences of discrimination took unique shapes and forms for each participant that experienced it as an issue. In general, the discrimination experienced by participants appeared to be based on social identities, namely, various intersections of race, ethnicity, nationality and age/appearance. Gender-based discrimination was not explicitly discussed by any of the participants. In addition to the discrimination experienced during the job seeking process identified above in theme #4, participants reported being discriminated against by service users, by colleagues, and while spending time outside of work in their communities. Being discriminated against directly by colleagues or service users was a shared experience among many of the participants (P1F-
Romania, P4F-Israel, P5F-United States, P7M-India, P8M-India, P9M-Liberia, P10F-Phillipines). To illustrate, P8M-India shared the following experience of being discriminated against by service users in his workplace, a shelter for homeless people. In response to questioning about discrimination from service users P8M-India replied:

Absolutely that’s my experience…. People are staying with us for shelter… so; some of them are really struggling with problems… So when we get a chance we are talking with them. First time when I say ‘hi, how are you?’ Like that, they will just not [be] accepting, as [if they are saying],’ who are you?’… They don’t want to even talk with me.

P7M-India reported being discriminated against by the youth he was working with, based on his nationality and ethnicity: “Yes [I have experienced discrimination] with the kids because they just follow what the adults do. So I've been called a Paki and I'd tell them I am not a Paki, man. I'm from India”. The White female participant from the United States (P5F-United States) also reported experiencing discrimination, in her case, from her service users, also based on nationality. This shows that discrimination based on nationality can transcend across intersection of gender and ethnicity. As P5F-United States explained “I’ve had a little discrimination, kind of indirect, sort of covert, because I’m an American”.

The male participant from Liberia, P9M-Liberia, who self-identifies as Black, named racism from service users as a specific form of discrimination. He explained that:

Last week I had a client who refused to see me because I am Black. Yes, they literally told the case manager that he does not want me entering his room and I was standing right there hearing that, and he refused to shake my hand.

However, the sole White male participant (P6M-United States) and one of the White female participants (P3F-New Zealand) did not mention being discriminated against by service users.
In another example of discrimination, P1F-Romania shared her experience of being discriminated against by colleagues:

I felt sometimes some people don’t trust your [my] skills... I don’t want to judge anybody but especially Canadian co-workers tend to, not to judge, but you know, to think if you didn’t do your training in Canada, then maybe it’s not the same or good enough. I had overall a good experience working everywhere in this field but of course there are different people everywhere so I met people that didn’t really trust my skills and they were looking at me differently.

P9M-Liberia also reported being discriminated against by co-workers:

In my job itself, there was some complaints against me by some staff which my bosses told me were frivolous. And in my opinion I don’t think - I think if I was mainstream Canadian - I don’t think they would have made any… that someone would make such a frivolous complaint.

Discrimination was also the most frequently cited personal adaptation challenge outside of the workplace among both male and female participants. P7M-India related the following experience surrounding race/skin colour as an example of experiencing discrimination in his community while he was not acting in a professional capacity as a social worker:

For me - like for instance the other day one kid in the market was saying, mom why is that guy so dark? And I just laughed at it because what do kids know? So it didn’t bother me much, but I have heard many of my friends saying it bothered them a lot.

P9M-Liberia also discussed social discrimination as pertaining to race:

…. my accent and then my race especially. This is a very conservative province [Alberta] and anyone that looks different from the standard blue-eyed blond hair is looked at
differently. So those are some of the challenges – institutional challenges I had, but you know, but hey it is part of life. That is what you go through when you leave your country. An interpretive analysis of the discrimination experienced by participants is presented in chapter six.

Summary

Through my investigation of the lived experiences of professional adaptation among a group of migrant social workers in Alberta I identified both similarities and differences in the professional adaptation experiences of migrant social workers based on gender and other aspects of their social identities. Through my interpretive analysis, which will be presented in chapter six, I developed five themes related to the participants’ professional migration and adaptation experiences. Applying intersectional theory and a postcolonial feminist lens during the analysis facilitated the identification of critical factors in professional adaptation among migrant social workers in Alberta that overlap and imbricate with gender, and with each other, in myriad ways. In turn these complex intersections shape social identity and impact on the lived experience of professional adaptation. These critical factors include nationality (country of origin), English language proficiency, level of education, age/appearance, and race. Chapter six provides a discussion of these results in relation to intersectionality theory, postcolonial feminisms and the extant literature on professional migration. It also provides a discussion of this study’s limitations, and an evaluation of the study’s quality and rigour based on Smith’s (2011) criteria. Finally, in chapter six, I describe recommendations for supporting the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta along with suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to interpret and analyze the perceptions and lived gendered experiences of male and female migrant social workers’ regarding their professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta. This is the first study to explore professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta, separate from the rest of Canada, as well as being one of the first studies to examine professional adaptation of migrant social workers through a comparative gender analysis. Chapter six presents a discussion of the results of the study that links the findings with the extant literature on professional migration. As with the rest of the study, the discussion is framed by the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and postcolonial feminisms. In this chapter I also discuss the implications of the study, as well as set the foundation for future research. In addition, an evaluation of the quality and rigour of the study based on Smith’s (2011) criteria is provided. Finally, recommendations for policymakers and others with the power to create positive changes regarding supporting and enhancing successful professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta are presented.

Interpretation of the Findings

Conducting secondary data analysis using a relatively new research methodology, namely interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), and two theoretical frameworks, namely intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms, allowed me to develop a supplementary analysis of the participants’ beliefs, perspectives and reflections on their lived experiences of professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta post-migration. My analytical interpretation of the data resulted in the development of five themes that reflected the lived realities of migrant social workers in Alberta, nuanced by comparison of gender based similarities and differences regarding this experience. These five themes are presented in chapter
five. Gaining an understanding of the qualitative differences in how professional migration and adaptation processes were experienced among the diverse participants facilitated the detection of intersecting issues and oppressions as they played out as lived experiences among participants within the specific context of Alberta. Chapter six presents a detailed discussion of my interpretive analysis of the issues and oppressions that shaped participants’ lived experiences.

Gender-Based Comparisons

West and Zimmerman (1987) proposed that gender is simultaneously an “outcome of and rationale for various social arrangements and a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions in society” (p. 126). Taking into account the importance of gender-based distinctions in society, the results of my doctoral study reveal that female and male migrant social workers in Alberta have both similar and dissimilar experiences of professional migration and adaptation.

The first of the five themes identified through the data analysis shows that male and female migrant social workers have different educational and career trajectories that can be divided along gender lines, with males having higher educational credentials than females in almost every case. Another theme (theme #2) is that migrant social workers in Alberta follow traditional gender norms and roles within their family units and these have an impact on professional migration and adaptation experiences. In particular, male participants often fulfill the role of primary breadwinner and females retain a focus on family caregiving, in particular childrearing, in at least two cases delaying their entry into the social work labour force post-migration in order to stay at home with young children. From a feminist perspective the differences in pre-migration levels of higher education and the focus on home versus career post-migration can both be seen as reflecting traditional patriarchal patterns of power and
subordination (Aure, 2013). At the same time, delaying engagement in professional activities, such as working within one’s profession and pursuing credential recognition in the destination country are common patterns among all migrant professionals, as discussed earlier (Murphy & McGuire, 2005; Ngo & Este, 2006; Ronquillo, 2012; Zaman, 2008).

From a feminist lens, gender-based differences in post-migration professional accreditation and labour market attachment are reflective of the larger system of patriarchal power that is pervasive within social systems and structures in Western society and that serve to systematically discriminate against immigrants and women, and in particular, immigrant women (Zaman, 2008). This patriarchal system serves to segment the labour market between men and women and further to stratify it based on racialization and a hierarchy where the Global North is privileged over the Global South. As Zaman (2008) asserted, “the female labour force in Canada reflects a class-based and racialized division of labour between those who are Canadian-born, mostly white and privileged, and those who are immigrants… immigrant women thus become ‘the other’ and racialized, and a division emerges” (Issues facing immigrant women, para. 4).

The stories of female participants who migrated to Alberta in order to follow their husbands or family members, along with the narratives surrounding responsibility for breadwinning among male participants, are consistent with the dominant discourse around migration and masculinity in the academic literature which holds that men are primarily motivated to migrate for economic reasons and their wives or female partners are “passive appendages” or “love migrants” who migrate for personal, family and emotional reasons with a focus on the private sphere of home and family (Aure, 2013; DeSouza, 2004). However, in my analysis the female migrant social worker participant from the Philippines (P10F-Phillipines), provided a distinctive narrative in that she was the principal applicant for immigration in her
family and her motivation to have her family migrate to Alberta was her self-driven attempt to improve quality of living for her entire family. From an intersectional and postcolonial feminist perspective, this participant can be viewed as holding multiple identities, including mother and family provider. This conceptualization of an individual possessing multiple identities is consistent with the intersectional perspective that identity is determined by a variety of social worker and immigrant characteristics and contexts (Mullaly, 2010). In this case, it is useful to view P10F-Phillipines not only at an individual level, but also as a member of a family system and a skilled professional, in order to better understand her roles and identities in various dimensions of her life.

My interpretation of the data suggests that race and gender may combine with numerous other identities to create a disadvantage in labour market access for migrant social workers in Alberta. However, while the migration literature asserts that it is usually racialized female migrants who experience greater difficulties with accessing the labour market in Canada (Al Ariss, 2010; Bucklaschuk & Wilson, 2011; Zaman, 2008), my analysis demonstrates that among participants in this study racial discrimination was also a significant problem for non-White males. One explanation for this pattern is offered by Ashcraft’s (2013) “glass slipper” metaphor. The metaphor contends that over time, occupations come to “appear, by nature, possessed of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that make them suited to certain people and implausible for others” (p. 7). The glass slipper metaphor exposes systematic forms of advantage and disadvantage, which may stem from the intersection of occupation and social identities, such as race and gender, leading to occupational segregation. In this way, we can see that, being a migrant social worker in Alberta, in general, and a racialized migrant social worker
in Alberta in particular, corresponds with structural and systemic barriers in attaching to the social work labour market, as discussed in chapter five.

Citing earlier research, Ashcraft (2013) discusses the association of work and bodies, noting that various “socially coded bodies” (p. 8) (e.g. male or female bodies, White or non-White bodies), are either included or excluded from certain types of labour based on social codes. This work-body association not only shapes actual alignments of physical bodies with occupations, but also serves an ideological or figurative role in constructing and codifying the bodies that are generally believed to be appropriate fits for various occupations. For example, within the medical profession, men are characterized as being most appropriate for the challenging and risky work involved in specializing as a surgeon, whereas women are often believed to be better suited to the “softer” more “delicate” work involved in paediatrics and psychiatry (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 9). Likewise, in the profession of social work, McPhail (2004) has identified that women are often front-line practitioners and men are more likely to be managers, policymakers, administrators and professors. Consistent with both the “glass slipper” effect and McPhail’s (2004) assertions regarding gender segregation in social work, my analysis in the present study shows that, among the participants, men had more education and attached to the labour market in Alberta more quickly post-migration than women. Notably, only the White male participant obtained a management position, which, as discussed earlier, may be explained by Williams’ (1992) glass ceiling effect and Wingfield’s (2009) nuance regarding the glass escalator, namely that management positions are intended for White men, not racialized men.

What is clear to me from studying the experiences of professional adaptation among female and male non-White migrant social workers is that once they arrive in Alberta, the glass slipper does not easily fit. That is to say, their social identities are inconsistent with the ideological
conceptualization of “social worker” held by social work employers in Alberta, leading to discrimination and exclusion or marginalization within the social work labour market.

The glass slipper is an apt metaphor for the experience of the migrant social workers in the present study as it highlights the importance of embodied social identities, intersections among categories of identity, and specific identity markers. As Ashcraft (2013) explains, in order for the glass slipper to fit on Cinderella’s foot, she needed to be a White female of a particular age, with a “dainty foot”: she needed to embody a particular form of “white femininity” (p. 16). In the next section I will apply the glass slipper metaphor to develop an understanding of the complex and multifaceted embodied social identities of the migrant social workers in the present study.

**Gender-Based Comparison of Processing and Coping with Discrimination**

I analyzed that there are gender-based differences in how participants process or cope with their experiences of discrimination. Specifically, female participants tended to internalize discrimination while male participants were more likely to externalize it. As an example of internalizing discrimination, I interpret that P4F-Israel engages in self-blame for experiencing discrimination focused on her English language skills:

> It’s [the discrimination is] because I don’t communicate well. I always felt there are a lot of things that I would like to say, but I am lacking the words, or something, and people at times lost patience with me around that area.

P1F-Romania shared that when she perceived discrimination from others she would remain silent about the issue: “anyway I didn’t have any open conversation about this [discrimination], you know, to be able to give my - to explain myself, but I felt sometimes this.”

On the other hand, P8M-India *externalizes* the underlying cause of the discrimination that he
perceived by blaming other immigrants from his country of origin, rather than himself, for his experience of discrimination based on his nationality:

Why are some of the people from India without permanent residence there [Alberta]? How they came here [Alberta]? I don’t know. Legally or illegally they came here and they are making problems here. That’s too affecting us. Without a proper channel they came here, however they met, through marriage…or I don’t know. I’ve heard of some stories. So, they came here and they’re using drugs and alcohol and they’re making problems and those kinds of things. That kind of expectations they [Albertans] have, the people from here for us [immigrants from India]. Oh, where are you from? India. Oh, India. So people are here like that. So, that problem also is affecting us.

I believe that male participants’ externalization of the causes of discrimination and female participants’ internationalization of the causes of discrimination has to do with issues of internalized oppression and domination, namely, sexism and patriarchy. As Mullaly (2002) contends, oppression not only impacts people materially but also psychologically. According to social learning theory, men and women in Western society have been socialized to view women as subordinate to men. Feminists contend that this socialization is a result of and also perpetuates patriarchal power relations and oppressive behaviours of men and systems controlled by men. Negative conceptualizations of women are thus held and internalized by both men and women. This long established pattern is consistently reinforced over time and therefore it is resistant to change. According to Mullaly (2002), inferiorization is a term that denotes acceptance of one’s status as inferior to the dominant group and a belief that the resulting oppression is deserved and inevitable due to shortcomings of the individual. Inferiorization is characterized by acceptance of a negative self-concept and negative stereotypes ascribed by the
larger society. When a person who has accepted inferiorization begins to behave in ways consistent with a belief that they are inferior then internalized oppression becomes evident. I believe that male participants’ externalization of the causes of their experiences of discrimination and female participants’ internationalization of the causes of their experiences of discrimination has to do with the inferiorization and internalized oppression of women, especially migrant women. Due to women’s, and especially migrant women’s low status within the social hierarchy in mainstream society, psychologically women may be more inclined to internalize and even engage in self-blame for their experiences of discrimination and oppression, whereas for men, there are always others below them on the social hierarchy (namely women) and therefore it is possible to externalize and place blame for discrimination outside of the self.

However, perceptions of discrimination are not static and can change over time. For example, P4F-Israel shared that the more comfortable she became working as a social worker in Alberta, the less she readily perceived discrimination against her: “I grew into the profession here and in my job I felt it [discrimination] less and less”. I would attribute this change to a growing sense of empowerment that this participant felt as she developed a social work identity and affiliation with the social work profession in Alberta. This participant arrived in Alberta in 2002. She had been in Canada for the longest of any of the participants; for approximately a decade. This statement leads to the insight that the amount of time spent in Alberta post-migration may influence perceptions of discrimination, however this factor was not explicitly explored with participants during data collection making it impossible to theorize more broadly within the present analysis. Nonetheless, it is consistent with Syed’s (2008) assertion that due to micro-individual issues related to identity some migrants only feel “settled in the labour market”
once they are employed in “jobs related to their previous experience” (p. 37), and that migrants’ identities evolve over time.

One strategy to deal with discrimination is to rationalize why one is experiencing it. I interpret that P8M-India was rationalizing his experience of discrimination by acknowledging that discrimination is not unique to the Albertan context. Again, externalizing his experience of being discriminated against, he stated that discrimination issues were present in his country of origin, India, as well. In other words, I interpret that he views discrimination as a universal and external phenomenon: “There are discriminations I faced, but in India there are people like – there are also discriminations everywhere you go… everything everywhere has the problems. Everywhere and anywhere, the problems are there” (P8M-India).

In addition to rationalizing his experience of discrimination P8M-India also externalizes it by relativizing it. He did this by hypothesizing that he was likely experiencing less discrimination in Alberta than he might have if he had migrated elsewhere: “Compared to other countries it [Alberta] is good. Like in – some of my friends are there in other Middle East countries and other places over there, they are facing a lot of [discrimination] – in Australia too – they are facing a lot of discrimination by colour or word [language proficiency]”.

Taking another spin on the concept of internalization of discrimination, a combination of ageism and appearance discrimination, or “lookism” (Cavico, Muffler, & Mujtaba, 2013; Patzer, 2008) was invoked as a source of discrimination by the female participant from the Netherlands (P2F-Netherlands). She was the only participant who discussed experiencing age or appearance related discrimination. When asked if she had experienced any discrimination she replied as follows:
No, not my cultural background. I sometimes get age related, because I look very young, but not cultural related, as far as I know… A little bit of teasing with certain habits, but no, nothing major… In a job and during job interviews if I would, like I said I would kind of think, like is it [the reason I am not being hired] my education? I never really directly asked, but I did always ask if they [would] call me back or if I would call them. If I didn’t get the job, why I didn’t get the job? [I] just [wanted] reasons and such so that I would know for next time, or whatever, but I never really directly asked, like is it because [silent pause]. I don’t think I would dare to do that.

Consistent with the theme of female participants internalizing the causes of their experiences of discrimination, I interpret that P2F-Netherlands attributes her experience of discrimination to her personal attributes, namely a youthful appearance, rather than to an external or structural issue. This experience is consistent with the perceived negative characterizations of young Canadian female social workers identified in recent research by Newberry-Koroluk (2014). The young Canadian female social workers who participated in Newberry-Koroluk’s (2014) study reported being marginalized, dismissed and undermined by colleagues based on their age and limited professional social work experience as they struggled to establish credibility as “newcomers” to the social work profession within their respective workplaces.

The two participants who did not mention experiencing any discrimination from service users were the White female participant from New Zealand (P3F-New Zealand) and the White male participant from United States (P6M-United States). I theorize that a combination of White skin colour and high levels of English-language proficiency provide a protective factor or “shield” against experiencing discrimination in some cases, however this generalization should be interpreted with caution as it may not transcend all individual cases, situations, or contexts.
P3F-New Zealand explained her experience with this phenomenon of wearing a “shield” of White privilege in this way:

I think some clients are curious and interested about where I am from. I think, again, New Zealand is a fairly benign country that people have generally positive associations about. So, I think on a superficial level, I think it means people don’t greet me with any particular negative bias based on my race or culture.

My analysis of the role of White privilege and racial discrimination in the professional adaptation experiences of the participants is presented later in this chapter.

**Gender-Based Comparison of Strategies to Deal with Discrimination**

Participants employed a host of strategies to deal with the discrimination they experienced. I interpret that for the most part, female participants attempted to deal with discrimination behaviourally, while the male participants dealt with it cognitively. As discussed above, female participants tended to internalize experiences of discrimination, and they also sought to cope with these experiences by addressing them through interacting with others in particular ways, while male participants psychologically externalized their experiences of discrimination but coped them through internal processes such as engaging in self-talk or rationalization.

Strategies to cope with discrimination employed exclusively by the male participants from India involved employing internal cognitively-based coping strategies including remaining confident in one’s abilities as a professional (P8M-India), ignoring discriminatory actions and words (P7M-India), avoiding internalizing discriminatory attitudes (P7M-India, P8M-India) and engaging in positive thinking (P7M-India, P8M-India). Conversely, behavioural strategies for coping with discrimination employed by female respondents included avoiding people who had
acted discriminately toward them in the past (P4F-Israel) and self-disclosing their nationality and immigrant status in an attempt to prevent being overtly discriminated against in the future (P5F-United States).

I theorize that the different strategies that male and female participants used are characteristic of the female participants’ inferiorization and belief that the oppression they are experiencing is inevitable due to their migrant status (Mullaly, 2002). Behaving in a specific manner due to inferiorization is characteristic of the internalized oppression of women in Western contexts in general and migrant women in particular (Mullaly, 2002). On the other hand, I believe that the male participants’ were able to engage in cognitive rather than behavioural coping strategies to cope with their experiences of discrimination because they are not as strongly inferiorized in Western society as are female migrants and therefore they are less impacted by internalized oppression, reducing the likelihood of their inferiorization being enacted behaviourally and strengthening their ability to address their experiences on a cognitive rather than behavioural level. In essence, the female participants are understanding that their experiences of discrimination are due to some fundamental element of themselves as persons and therefore they hypothesize that changing how they act may prevent future occurrences of discrimination. On the other hand, the male participants are attributing their experiences of discrimination to external causes and therefore they do not view behavioural changes as being necessary in order to prevent future instances of discrimination. Instead the male participants encourage themselves to endure their negative environment which is the source of the discrimination through positive thinking and affirming self-talk.
Discrimination/Oppression along Multiple Axes

Discrimination was raised as a significant issue for both male and female participants in the present study. Research has shown that social workers, as well as other skilled migrants, experience discrimination, disadvantage and other hardships within the areas of social integration, accessing the labour market and pursuing their professional goals once in Canada (Abu-Laban, 1998; Al Ariss, 2010; Bauder, 2003; Brown et al., 2015; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2014). The findings of this study are consistent with such evidence from past research. In the present study, when examining the participants’ narratives from an intersectional perspective, it becomes evident that for each individual a complex interweaving of power, privilege and prejudice based on each person’s social location and identity shaped their lived experience of professional migration and adaptation, including their experiences of discrimination.

To understand the conceptualization of discrimination from an intersectional theory lens, it is important to note that intersectionality theorists reject the concept of “double jeopardy”, a term that emerged out of second-wave feminism to describe dual disadvantage, such as being a women and being Latina, as one example (Mullings & Schulz, 2006, p. 5). Some theorists dislike the double jeopardy concept because they view all socially categorizations of race and gender as social constructions that operate as a “function of each other” (Mullings & Schulz, 2006, p. 5). Thus, for example, the meanings of the terms “woman” and “Latina” are conceived of as being variable and “mutually defining” (Mullings & Schulz, 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, intersectionality theory cautions against universalizing experiences (Choo & Ferree, 2010). It challenges the idea that we can talk of “women’s experiences” or “men’s experiences” as separate from race, instead insisting that all experiences are simultaneously gendered and radicalized (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Mullings & Schulz, 2006). In fact, some forms of
intersectionality theory would challenge any conceptualization of unified and essentialized categorizations (Mehrotra, 2010).

In the present study the interlocking of race and gender proposed by intersectionality theorists is evident in the prominence of discussion of race and racial discrimination in relation to the social work labour market in Alberta among both male and female participants, both White and non-White. This interlocking of race and gender can be viewed in light of Ashcraft’s (2013) glass slipper metaphor by reflecting the central role of the construction of embodied social identities in determining outcomes within the labour market in relation to particular professions.

According to intersectionality theory, undergirding power relations must always be considered when discussing differences amongst people, as these power relations create hierarchies of subordination and domination “where the power of one group rests on the subordination of others” (Weber, 2006, p. 36). These power relations exist at both the macro-institutional and micro-individual levels (Weber, 2006). In this study examples of macro-institutional powers are the immigration policies and systems ability to determine immigration eligibility, the ACSW’s ability to confer or deny access to the profession of social work through the administration of their credential recognition process, and the social work labour market’s ability to recognize or delegitimize experience and qualifications through the hiring process. Examples of micro-individual power relations in this study include thoughts and actions in response to individual cases of discriminatory treatment and deciding for oneself when and how to participate within the social work labour force in Alberta.

In explaining her conceptualization of a “matrix of domination” Hill-Collins (2000) stated, “intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (p. 18). The
challenges that migrant social workers in Alberta face in attempting to access the social work labour market can be viewed as the result of multiple macro-institutional and micro-individual oppressions converging to produce a specific form of injustice, namely economic exclusion or marginalization, which seems to be variably based on a variety of combinations of race, nationality/country of origin, language, age/appearance, or status as an immigrant, which is often read by the social work labour market as a lack of Canadian work experience and being “foreign” or “Other” (Mullaly, 2002).

The construction of migration social workers as Other serves to form an identity group for migrant social workers, both collectively and individually. In essence, to be a migrant social worker is to be a member of the Other, subordinate, group that is contrasted with the dominant group of Canadian-born and Canadian-educated social workers that is legitimized by powerful macro-institutions such as the social work labour market and the ACSW. Once a subordinated group identification is constructed, it gets reinforced both socially and psychologically by the dominant group through continuous and systematic application to the point that it becomes institutionalized. This ongoing process is the function of the dynamics of oppression that work to maintain the privileges and benefits afforded to the dominant group at the expense of oppressed groups (Mullaly, 2002; Mullaly, 2010). Although there are various legal protections against overt discrimination and oppression in present day Western democratic societies such as Canada, the dynamics of oppression continue to operate at a systemic level and promote marginalization, exploitation and powerlessness in ways that are “hidden” and even “unintentional”, although it is important to state that even today not all oppressive acts are unintentional or “covert” (Mullay, 2002, p. 40).
Interestingly, no participants mentioned experiencing gender-based discrimination in their professional adaptation to social work in Alberta; however, intersectionality theory holds that just because gender was not specifically mentioned by participants does not mean that it did not combine or imbricate with other aspects of participants’ social identities, such as racial markers and cultural group affiliations, to form the foundation of their experience of oppression and marginalization (Hill-Collins, 2000). Nonetheless, it is interesting to consider why the role of gender in professional adaptation and gender-based discrimination more specifically, were not discussed by participants. Was this discourse somehow silenced during the interview process? Was there minimal awareness among participants of the role that gender played within their individual lived experiences? Or, did the participants genuinely view gender as a non-issue? Although we cannot know for certain since this issue was not discussed directly with the participants themselves at the time of interview, I interpret that Guillaumin’s (1995) concept of the process “naturalization” may play a role in this occurrence. Naturalization is similar to the concept of inferiorization (Mullaly, 2002), discussed above. Both terms encompass the idea that the differences that cause a particular group of people to be subjected to oppressive treatment are viewed as being legitimate within a given context. More specifically, naturalization refers to the belief that gender inequity is a “result of natural differences between men and women” rather than being a product of socially constructed and institutionally reinforced patriarchal domination (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010).

Due to the workings of the process of naturalization, it is possible that the female participants in the present study did not perceive of themselves as being members of an oppressed group based on their gender and therefore gender was not discussed as a point of reference or categorization in regard to experiences of discrimination and marginalization among
female participants. Likewise, the concept of naturalization would conclude that the male participants are unlikely to name gender as a factor in shaping their lived experiences as they are members of the dominant gender group in Western society and therefore their gender may not be viewed as a contributing factor in their experiences of Othering. This explanation is supported by Gianettoni and Roux’s (2010) assertion that members of the dominant group (in this case the male participants are a member of the dominant group when solely considering their gender) lack awareness of themselves as a “specific” and relatively cohesive group. Instead they are seen as the norm or as a “universal point of reference” for comparison with other less powerful groups (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010, p. 375). The concept of naturalization helps to illustrate how deeply inscribed sexism is to the point that may appear intrinsic and therefore is not viewed as being readily apparent; it goes unnamed, is minimized and is unrecognized (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010). However, seeking change in this regard is important because when sexism is not named, discussed and challenged the process of naturalization continues unabated thereby legitimizing sexism. One way to challenge the naturalization and legitimization of sexism is to make it more visible by highlighting the ways in which patriarchal gender relations cause women to be Othered (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010).

It is also interesting to consider interconnections among sexism, racism, ageism and lookism, or appearance-based discrimination. Invoking the glass slipper metaphor discussed earlier (Ashcraft, 2013), discrimination in the form of lookism and ageism were raised by one female participant who suggested that service users thought that she appeared to be youthful and in turn, discriminated against her because of her appearance and age (P2F-Netherlands). Personally, I have had similar experiences in the past while working as a social worker, and therefore this participant’s narrative prompted me to engage in reflection on the notion of
culturally and socially prescribed appearance and age norms for social workers in Alberta, and
the prejudice and marginalization that can be experienced by social workers who are deemed to
contravene these standards (Cavico et al. 2013; Mullaly, 2002; Patzer, 2008). As both the
participant who experienced lookism/ageism (P2F-Netherlands) and I are White females from a
similar age cohort I hypothesize that my sense of connection to her experience has to do with our
common positioning at several of the same or similar intersections within the matrix of
domination (Hill-Collins, 2000). Being a relatively young, female professional myself I
identified with this participant’s struggle to be treated respectfully and equitably within a
professional social work culture that is heavily influenced by the sexist and ageist dynamics of
broader Western society (Mullaly, 2002). At the same time I recognize that both P2F-
Netherlands and I are White and therefore we have had these experiences despite our White
privilege. In incorporating a glass slipper perspective here (Ashcraft, 2013), I believe that being
of a relatively young age and having a youthful appearance are not part of the acceptable social
identity profile for a social worker in Alberta, and thus these physical characteristics become
markers of bodies whose place within the profession is questioned, penalized and delegitimized
(Hill-Collins, 1993). In essence, youthful looking female social workers are Othered.

Although just one participant discussed the experience of experiencing ageism/lookism I
have still included it as an important part of my analysis. The fact this was only one person’s
experience from within my sample (see Table 4.3 for identification of the social identity profile
of each participant) does not make it insignificant or non-salient to my analysis in light of the
hermeneutic and idiographic nature of IPA research. In fact the non-discussion of age and
appearance among other migrant social workers is reflective of the fact that the rest of the
participants appeared to be to most appropriately classified as having a mature age and physical
appearance, therefore I would expect that their lived experiences would be different from P2F-Netherlands’ in this respect. Furthermore, as a mature age and appearance seems to be associated with the accepted social identity profile of a social worker in Alberta none of the participants may have recognized their age and appearance as holding a salient impact on their professional adaptation due to the fact that they occupied the privileged category in this regard. As established above, due to the power of naturalization the dominant more privileged group is unlikely to name or recognize their privileged positioning due to their identification as being the social norm (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010). In this case, social workers of mature age and appearance are unlikely to recognize that their age and appearance is privileging them in relation to younger more youthful looking social workers.

The intersection of age, gender and appearance, especially youthful age and physical appearance, has not been well addressed or problematized. As discussed, the “glass slipper” (Ashcraft, 2013) for a social worker in Alberta is focused on physical appearance in the form of visible social markers of identity. I suggest that in the context of the Albertan social work labour market, and likely other labour markets elsewhere, this has not only to do with race, namely skin colour, but also age and appearance of youthfulness or maturity. While race has been well established in the academic literature as a social identity marker that leads to marginalization and exclusion among immigrants within the Canadian labour market (Guo, 2015), the significance of other age and appearance markers, whether these are characteristics of White, or non-White individuals, should not be trivialized. An intersectional perspective holds that race, age and appearance all intertwine together with other aspects of social identity, such as gender, in complex ways within the matrix of domination (Hill-Collins, 2000). However, a critique of current conceptualizations of ageism and lookism, for example, is that they have been developed
in isolation, without consideration for how they interrelate with other social identity markers, in particular, gender (Granleese and Sawyer, 2006). I would extend this critique to suggest that the interrelationship of age and race has also been under-theorized.

In regard to age and gender, Granleese and Sawyer (2006) contend that men and women experience age and gender discrimination in the workplace in unique ways. In their study of lookism, ageism and gender within academia, Granleese and Sawyer (2006) found that young female academics take steps to “play down their looks” in an effort to minimize their perceived physical attractiveness as they believe that being attractive is a disadvantage to their career progression (p. 500). Conversely, young male academics did not report taking such considerations into account. Adichie (2015) has written about her lived experience with this phenomenon as follows:

I am trying to unlearn many lessons of gender I internalized while growing up. But I sometimes still feel vulnerable in the face of gender expectations. The first time I taught a writing class in graduate school, I was worried. Not about the teaching material…instead I was worried about what to wear. I wanted to be taken seriously. I knew that because I was female, I would automatically have to prove my worth. And I was worried that if I looked too feminine, I would not be taken seriously. I really wanted to wear my shiny lip gloss and girly skirt, but I decided not to. I wore a very serious, very manly and very ugly suit. The sad truth of the matter is that when it comes to appearance, we start off with men as the standard, as the norm. Many of us think that the less feminine a woman appears, the more likely she is to be taken seriously. A man going to a business meeting doesn’t worry about being taken seriously based on what he is wearing – but a woman does. I wish I had not worn that ugly suit that day…. I have
chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femininity. And I want to be respected in all my femaleness. Because I deserve to be. (pp. 38-39)

Linking appearance with age, research from the UK has shown that women under the age of 35 in various occupations are excluded from receiving promotions and management-level positions due to concerns about younger women needing to take “career breaks” in order to focus on maternity and parenting. Therefore, younger women are systematically discriminated against in some workplaces (Granleese & Sawyer, 2006). In a study of women in the financial services sector for example, women between the ages of 30 to 40 years old faced a type of double-discrimination where they were considered too young for some forms of promotion and too old for other opportunities (Granleese & Sawyer, 2006).

Furthermore, perceptions of gender, age and physical attractiveness can become “entangled” (Greenleese & Sawyer, 2006, p. 502). Women are generally more likely to be judged by others according to their physical attractiveness than are men (Greenleese & Sawyer, 2006). As discussed above, Granleese and Sawyer (2006) found that young female academics view their physical attractiveness as “counter-productive” in that it makes them feel “vulnerable” and “liable to control” within the male-dominated academic domain (p. 510). However, the roles of stereotypes based on interrelationships of age, gender, physical appearance and occupation have not been well studied to date (Greenleese & Sawyer, 2006). We do know, however, that age and level of professional experience are often perceived of as being linked, with older age being equated with being more experienced, which carries certain benefits within some professional contexts (Greenleese & Sawyer, 2006). I would argue that this is the case in the Albertan social work labour market, where having a more mature physical appearance privileges people who possess that appearance within the social work labour market not only in terms of
job opportunities, but also in terms of the respect and rapport that is developed with service users and colleagues (Newberry-Koroluk, 2014).

I believe that it would be worthwhile to explore whether or not generational cohort stereotypes also play a role in ageism in the Albertan social work labour market, however this has not yet been studied. For example, Western society in general, has developed some negative perceptions of the generation that I and other young female social workers fall into, the Millennials. Millennials are often painted as being “lazy, entitled, spoiled, immature, unprofessional and lacking in communication skills” (Kreissel, 2016, n.p.). Such generational cohort stereotypes are unhelpful to young female social workers that are already likely dealing with age and gender related biases in the workplace. Reflecting on her personal experience as a young female social worker, Novell (2013) stated that there are career difficulties associated specifically with “being young and female” which may include a “desperate need to try and prove yourself” and to “break through the glass ceiling” and further, that doing these things as a young female social worker is a particularly “unique and troublesome problem” (para. 1). It is interesting to me that both Adichie (2015) and Novell (2013) spoke directly to this perceived need for women to “prove” themselves to others professionally, whether it is in academics (Adichie) or professional social work practice (Novell).

The experiences of young female social workers may indeed be unique, especially from the experience of male social workers (Newberry-Koroluk, 2014). For example, Novell (2013) discussed being told by a practicum supervisor not to wear dresses to work in case male clients perceived her wearing a dress as being “flirtatious” (para. 5), she was also not allowed to wear “too much makeup” (para. 6) to which her reaction was to feel “outraged” (para. 4). Again, there
is a parallel here with Adichie (2015) not wearing lip gloss in order to be taken seriously by her graduate students.

Novell (2013) shares that a male client physically assaulted her within her first year of social work practice. Such violence can be viewed as an extreme manifestation of women’s oppression (Sisneros et al., 2008). After the violent incident, in order to maintain her personal safety, one of Novell’s strategies has been to ensure that she dresses “appropriately” (Novell, 2013, para. 5), which includes not wearing any “trendy” fashions to work. Novell (2013) refers to being young and female as “unchangeable characteristics” that create “challenges” (para. 9) within social work practice. Novell (2013) contends that “negative perception” is “unavoidable” for young female social workers (para. 8).

In a similar vein Adiche (2015) wrote that all of her life the “male gaze” has acted as a “shaper” of her “life’s choices” (p. 40). As a woman, I personally know what it feel likes to be a subject of this gaze and to feel its judgments which I also have allowed to shape my choices and actions both personally and professionally as a social worker. Novell’s (2013) words are a powerful reminder that the “male gaze” is a gendered phenomenon, and that it is also a sexualized and ageist gaze that permeates Western culture, reflecting patriarchal domination over women’s bodies, identities, actions and expressions, including domination by physical violence in some cases. The experience of being dominated by the power of the male gaze is likely further stratified by racialization, however this has not been well addressed and warrants further research in order to explore and more definitively understand this phenomenon within the context of the social work profession. It would be a White privileged position to discuss ageism, sexism and lookism without also discussing racism, however, there is limited discussion available in regard to the intersections of these specific social identity markers in the academic
literature. For example, in her discussion of the male gaze, Adichie (2015), a Black woman from Nigeria, only refers to the male gaze in regard to her gender and not her race, therefore, powerful insight in regard to the male gaze is provided through her telling her story as a women, but discussion of a racialized aspect of this experience is absent in her work. Nonetheless, I acknowledge social identities such as race and nationality intersect and serve to disadvantage women to various degrees and in a multitude of ways, not only in the ways that myself as a Canadian-born White women, or Novell (2013), or P2F-Netherlands, as other White woman, have experienced. I look forward to further articulation of these experiences by women of colour and immigrant women so that their telling of their unique experiences can become part of the cacophony of voices seeking changes to the status quo – to smash the glass slippers that do not easily fit and to design new shoes to walk in so we can do our work free from the male gaze while wearing our “girly skirts” and “lip gloss” without fear of being delegitimized as professionals, or of physical violence, regardless of our national origins or skin colour, respected in our femaleness, because we deserve to be (Adichie, 2015).

In contrast to the non-discussion of gender, age or appearance, nationality was a topic of significant discussion during the participant interviews. As was the case with the Chinese immigrants studied by Guo (2013), the participants in the present study reported that potential employers discriminated against them based on their national origins and ethnicities, regardless of their credentials or professional practice experience. Hierarchical differentiation in social relations based on nationality where an “opposition” exists between “nationals” and immigrants is a common occurrence in Western nation-states, often leading to the stigmatization of immigrants (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010). Guo (2015) expressed concern that the devaluation and denigration of immigrants’ skills and qualifications within the Canadian labour market is
intentionally employed as a strategy of “disentitlement to employment” which has been reinforced over-time forming a “systemic barrier” to the labour market for immigrants based on nationality, language skills and race (p. 245). As one solution to this issue, Gibb and Hamdon (2010) suggest that within the labour market, rather than automatically viewing immigrants as being likely to require “remedial education and training,” dominant discourses and notions of what constitutes “valid knowledge, skills, and education” should be re-thought (p. 197). A stance of being open-minded about the knowledge, skills and contributions of transnational migrants within the emerging “global knowledge economy” may then become reflected in immigration and employment policies, thereby resolving the existing incongruences (Gibb & Hamdon, 2010, p. 198). Also, better understanding and improving processes for recognizing the degrees and professional experience of transnational migrants is a social justice and equity issue, specifically having to do with what Gibb and Hamdon (2010) call the “redistribution of recognition” and “participatory parity” within professions and the economy (p. 198). While these authors were not writing about social work in particular, as the social work profession has been described as being in a state of “flux” (Dominelli, 2010) regarding its identity, direction and agenda (Gray & Webb, 2014), Gibb and Hamdon’s (2010) advice nonetheless seems poignant to apply to the social work profession, both locally and globally.

I analyzed that participants were concerned about the devaluation of their foreign experience and credentials by the ACSW and by social work employers in Alberta. Devaluation of their skills and experience is reflective of the larger negative discourse and stigmatization of immigrant labour in Canada (Bauder, 2003; Gibb & Hamdon, 2010, Guo, 2015). This discourse links back to imperialism and colonization (Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, & Hetherington, 2013; Tamburro, 2013), which has resulted in the perpetuation of Western and Euro-centric domination
of culture, media and social institutions, including education systems, to the point that all people in Western society are “socialized” toward a Western-centric worldview which reinforces, legitimizes and universalizes the cultural norms of the dominant group while constructing Indigenous and minority cultures and perspectives as being Other – subordinate, deviant and inferior (Hill-Collins, 1993; Mullaly, 2002). Schutte (1998) explains that when such “masternarratives” dominate discourse, other speaking positions, including minority group and Indigenous positions, are eliminated and in turn valuable insights are lost or shut down creating frustration and missed opportunities for communication and learning across cultures and differences. Schutte (1998) and Hill-Collins (1993) both challenge those who are in positions of power and dominance to become open to altering their perspectives and their ways of relating to “Others”.

As social work migration endures across the globe, and the profession continues to encounter and confront practicing within the context of globalization, we must communicate across differences and allow our conceptualizations of social work practice to be reconstructed. In social work, with our social justice mission as our guiding light, we have the opportunity to be leaders in developing a diverse and inclusive workforce characterized by equitable credential recognition and hiring practices for migrant and non-migrant social workers alike. Following Mullaly (2002), to become truly anti-oppressive, simultaneous transformative work is needed at the micro-individual, macro-institutional and cultural levels. At the micro-individual level “social care” should be provided to migrant social workers to ensure that they are supported in securing housing, employment, individual counselling, personal development and opportunities to integrate into their communities so that their lived experiences are “palatable” (Mullaly, 2002, p. 171). This individual social care work should be simultaneously linked to building
relationships and taking collective action to create macro-institutional, system-level change in the social work labour market and credential recognition processes.

Social and political action aimed at creating changes that “counteract oppressive conditions, processes, and practices” (Mullaly, 2002, p. 177) faced by migrant social workers in Alberta could result in the ACSW and social work employers taking accountability for having acted oppressively and committing to changing their policies and practices in ways that are more inclusive and non-discriminatory. However, it is likely that some resistance will be encountered during this process. The change creation process is often messy and non-linear, however overtime the effort can result in changing the dominant discourses and altering master-narratives and negative stereotypes. It is at this stage in the change process where long-lasting cultural change can take root (Mullay, 2002), empathy can build and differences can be transcended (Hill-Collins, 1993). As a researcher and a Canadian-born social worker I view myself as an ally with migrant social workers in the effort to improve their experiences of professional adaptation in Alberta. I align with P7M-India who stated that: “I feel that there should be more opportunity… [for] the immigrant social worker” (P7M-India). I also share his desire for policymakers and social work employers to hear this message in order to create macro-institutional level change. P7M-India expressed his desire “to create awareness to the government or to organizations telling [them] that immigrant social workers also have the same skill sets [as Canadian-educated social workers]”. He (P7M-India) shared his personal lived experience of being marginalized within the social work labour market in Alberta like this:

I could be either a medical social worker or psychiatric social worker. I have those training [and] skills. Then I went out of my way to become a community social worker. I trained myself there and now I'm working with kids and I know most of their needs and
wants so I could be a caseworker or something. I know exactly what the kids are going through. I'm working on the floor. I am working directly with them. So how does an immigrant social worker put out his skills? How do these people [employers] say okay we need these kind of people?

He (P7M-India) concluded by sharing his hope that future migrant social workers would have a better professional adaptation experience than he had:

The main reason that I did this [participated in the research] - I wanted to get into the research with [for]…somebody [migrant social workers] coming [to Alberta] in the future. I don't want them to go through the same things that I went through.

**Privilege along Multiple Axes**

I interpreted that participants experienced issues with discrimination and oppression to varying degrees (Mullaly, 2002). My analysis suggests that strong English proficiency, White skin colour, and identifying with countries of origin in the Global North, may be protective factors against discrimination in some cases. In other words, some social identity markers are sources of privilege and may result in opening doors to professional opportunities (Meares, 2010). However, as discussed earlier, intersectionality theory that holds that “categories of analysis” such as race and gender are “distinctive yet interlocking structures of oppression” (Hill-Collins, 1993, p. 26). Therefore, it is important to resist “ranking oppressions” in order to quantify them or to establish a hierarchy of the oppressed via an “additive analysis” that shows how some groups are “more oppressed than others” (Hill-Collins, 1993, pp. 27-28). Instead, Hill-Collins (1993) recommends viewing these categories as “complex web” (p. 26) where dichotomous classifications are replaced by the possibility of having “both/and” positions of being simultaneously “oppressed and oppressor” (p. 28).
Being discriminated against directly by service users was a shared experience among seven of the participants in the present study. Notably however, this was not the case of the White male participant and two of the White female participants. This data suggests that for some participants their White skin was served as a social marker that was somewhat protective in terms of experiencing discrimination within the Albertan context. The combination of White skin, North American social work education and male gender appeared to be particularly advantageous among this group of participants. As a case in point, the White male participant who held a graduate degree from the United States (P6M-United States) was the only participant to have a social work job secured in Alberta prior to migration. In contrast, both male participants from India with equivalent education to P6M-United States were engaged in activities such as volunteering within the profession in order to earn credit toward credential recognition and working in the retail sector. From an intersectional perspective, it is possible to see how particular intersections of identity categories, such as Whiteness and male sex are advantageous in the labour market, while others, such as being non-White, are disadvantageous (Shields, 2008; Zaman, 2008). However, just because P6M-United States was advantaged by his social identity does not mean that he never experienced discrimination or oppression.

The concept of Whiteness being advantageous in the labour market relates to Li’s (2003) assertion that like race, the term “immigrant” is a social construct. Li (2003) asserted that in Canada the term “immigrant” is broadly perceived as being synonymous with “non-White”. Thus, the word “immigrant” can be viewed as a codified way of referring to the social marker of skin colour, with both “non-Whites” and “immigrants” being marginalized and socially constructed as undesirable within mainstream the Canadian society and economy. Overall, the experiences of the participants in this study are consistent with past research findings that have
revealed that among skilled migrants, those who are male, have greater language proficiency in the official language of the destination country, and come from countries of origin in the Global North secure employment in destination countries more quickly and with less effort (Bauder, 2003; Meares, 2010; Scott, 2006). Additionally, skin colour has been identified here as an important consideration in the adaptation experiences of migrant social workers in Alberta. I believe that it is critical that the power structures that uphold White privilege be exposed and re-configured in order to eliminate discrimination and unfair advantage based on skin colour. In Alberta, the actors that can create this change include the ACSW, social work employers, university and college-based social work education programs, grassroots groups, academics and individual social workers. The processes through which this change can be created are discussed above, and are further explained below in the recommendations section of this chapter.

**Interconnecting Discrimination/Oppression and Privilege**

I developed a diagram to illustrate the components of social identity that contributed to the oppression and privilege of the research participants in regard to their professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta (see Figure 6.1). This diagram is based on Sisneros and colleagues’ (2008) web of oppression model which is useful for conceptualizing an individual’s position at various intersections of social categorizations. As Mullaly (2010) contends, where individuals find themselves positioned within a web of oppression is not a personal choice because we are products of our social environments and our familial histories. Nonetheless, our positionalities within the web of oppression can change over time with respect to certain characteristics, such as class. In addition, the relevant elements of a web of oppression are contextually formulated: it is designed to be illustrative of both the context and one’s position or status within each area in the web.
I adapted a diagram (figure 6.1) for visualizing the multiple characteristics of the participants in the present study as they relate specifically to shaping their experiences of professional adaptation to social work practice in Alberta. The diagram is divided into four quadrants. The outer space of each quadrant represents a component of social identity related to participants’ experiences of opportunity and privilege. These outer spaces within each quadrant are characterized by English language fluency, being White, being from a country of origin located in the Global North and having a mature physical appearance. The thick red line that cross-sects each quadrant forms an inner circle. This inner circle represents the social identities related to participants’ experiences of discrimination and oppression, characterized by being an English language learner, being non-White, being from a country of origin in the Global South, and having a youthful appearance. Consistent with the categorical approach adopted in some forms of intersectionality theory (Mehrotra, 2010; Shields, 2008), this line is thick and red in order to demark a rigid border and impermeability between a privileged or an oppressed location within each quadrant on the diagram. This is meant to represent the experience for the migrant social worker in the present moment at the time of interview; notwithstanding that characteristics such as having a youthful appearance will change over time, my focus on was on the lived experience as it was interpreted by me at the time of interview. At the time of the interview, it was not immediately possible to become highly proficient in English if one was not, or to change from a youthful to a mature appearance in a short amount of time.

I have placed gender in the centre circle of the diagram in order to represent how I have foregrounded it within my research, as well as to make clear my analysis that it is indeed central to all of the other components of social identity, that surround it (Griffin & Chavez, 2012; Hayden & Hallstein, 2012). In doing so, I have asserted that gender is equally central with those
social identity characteristics associated with privilege and those associated with oppression.
The dotted lines in the diagram represent acknowledgement that all individuals are simultaneously “fragmented” and “unified” which means that our identities can be multiple; we can be aligned with both the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time whether or not this alignment is partially or fully comprehensible to us in any given moment (Hill-Collins, 1993; Lugones, 2003). I believe that being simultaneously unified and fragmented is an accurate way to describe the complexity and ambiguity of our shifting identities and social locations, continuously opening up possibilities to create new narratives and develop fresh understandings regarding who one is, was, and may become (Lugones, 2003). We are all a part of the whole of humanity, but due to the dynamics of oppression and domination false lines and separations are drawn in our conceptualizations and understandings of ourselves and of others. At both the individual and group levels, fragmentation and unity can be conceived of as coexisting (Lugones, 2003). Likewise, while one’s social identity is comprised of various components, they are all “interdependent” and “codeterminitive” which means that all of the components come together to form the essence of one’s complete social identity and subjectivity (Hayden & Hallstein, 2012).
Lugones (2003) eloquently stated, “cracked mirrors…represent us falsely” (p. 44). While Figure 6.1 represents separate parts of social identity and therefore is akin to being a “cracked mirror” I believe that looking at the pieces of the cracked mirror individually, or in various combinations, can also create new multifaceted perspectives and understandings that may be less apparent when looking at the whole rather than its parts. Lugones’ (2003) concern with examining individual components of social identity as discrete phenomena is that isolating parts from the whole may perpetuate greater marginalization and fragmentation among and within groups (Medina, 2012). While heeding this caution, I also believe that it is important to recognize that our social identities and our understandings of existing social categories are
complex, multifaceted and partial, resulting in an individual being able to be simultaneously and multiply oppressed and privileged (Butler, 2004; Griffin & Chavez, 2012; Hill-Collins, 1993). According to Butler (2004), this point establishes that “full meaning” of social categorizations is unknown and may never be fully uncovered. For this reason what has become known as “settled knowledge” or “reality” or “normal” is actually unstable and open to “resignificantion” and “transformation” (Butler, 2004, p. 28). For example, women and Black men, have not always been considered to be fully human (in the past Black men were seen as animals and women were seen as property) but these views have been largely deconstructed and revised within the Western context (Butler, 2004). This however, does not mean that people who fall under these categorizations are treated equitably in society. The workings of oppression and privilege are always at play in social context. Unequal power relations based on social categorizations such as gender, race, and nationality inform these oppressions and privileges.

Each participant in my study, with the exception of P6M-United States, can be located simultaneously within one or more of the inner spaces and one or more of the outer spaces in the four quadrants represented in Figure 6.1. It is notable that only one participant (P6M-United States), a White male originating from the United States, only occupies social identities in the outer space of each quadrant, and therefore, he is multiply privileged in comparison to all of the other participants.

A key finding from my research, based on the narratives of the participants in the dataset of interview transcripts that I analyzed, is the acknowledgement that social work service users and the social work labour market appears to favour those migrant social workers who can identify themselves in one or more locations in the outer space of each quadrant as represented in Figure 6.1. As noted above, this diagram represents the factors identified specifically by the
research participants in the present study. I have interpreted that in the experience of the participants, social work service users, social workers and the social work labour market disenfranchise those who identify with one or more locations on the inner space within each quadrant. This shows that the oppression being experienced by migrant social workers is not only a personal issue but also largely a structural one. Conceptualization of the oppression of migrant social workers as both a structural and a personal issue is critical for communicating the complexity and magnitude of the problem and designing appropriate response strategies (Mullaly, 2002; Mullaly, 2010).

As Ashcraft (2013) identified, a “glass slipper” perspective is useful in drawing attention to the combination of characteristics or features that “favour certain practitioners” even when they have “little to do with the actual work” (p. 16). Race is one characteristic that favours White practitioners and has little to do with the actual work of social work. Yet, my analysis shows that race played a significant role in the lived experiences of professional adaptation for the participants in the present study. As Ashcraft (2013) further explains, the social identity criteria preferred for certain work is often disconnected from the actual work and the preference for exhibiting those criteria is often strategically fostered over time by those in the dominant group. From a feminist perspective, the glass slipper metaphor fits well with critiques of patriarchal power relations within workplaces in that it helps to explain how women’s bodies are generally not regarded as the appropriate bodies to be performing a variety of paid jobs. This is important because once social workers, social work employers and social work regulators acknowledge that their policies and practices are (even unwittingly) perpetuating systemic oppression, then the ethical imperative to change the status quo becomes self-evident given
social work’s core values and principles regarding fairness and equity and its ethical commit to promote social justice (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005).

Implications

This thesis has both methodological and theoretical implications, which are discussed below.

Methodological Implications

My dissertation research engaged IPA methodology. Using IPA methodology is relatively novel and rare in social work research (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011; Loo, 2012). However, further usage of IPA methodology in social work research has recently been promoted and encouraged (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011; Loo, 2012). Loo (2012) believes that IPA is particularly well suited for cross-cultural social work research due to its emphasis on flexibility, engagement, empathy and reflexivity.

I extended the proposed increased use of IPA methodology in social work research (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011; Loo, 2012) to conducting a secondary data analysis employing IPA methodology. Re-analyzing data from the Canadian project on the professional migration and adaptation of social workers for my dissertation research allowed me to focus on gender and context from a relatively small population (Whiteside et al., 2012). Specifically, I was able to re-analyze a portion of the data that I collected as a research assistant while working on the larger study, as a form of analytic expansion (Heaton, 2004; Thorne, 2013). The investigators from the Canadian study shared the dataset with me through a formal data sharing agreement (see Appendix A).

Two advantages to my approach to conducting my dissertation research are immediately apparent: First, recruitment of research participants for the Alberta site of the Canadian project
was challenging and therefore re-use of existing data provided a way to deepen understanding of
this small and “hard-to-reach” population while exploring a relatively rare phenomena (Heaton,
2004, p. 28). Thus, re-using the data for my dissertation research reduced “researcher
obtrusiveness” (Whiteside et al., 2012, p. 504) and decreased respondent burden (Szabo &
Strang, 1997). Second, re-analyzing the data from the Canadian study had practical benefits in
terms of providing savings on financial costs, time and other resources involved in data
collection thereby making it a pragmatic and efficient way to source data for my dissertation
research (Thorne, 1998; Whiteside et al., 2012). Smith and colleagues (2009), who are
recognized as the developers of IPA research as a distinct method, are open to adaptation of IPA
in a given research scenario, therefore, I feel that my creative use of IPA methodology for a
secondary data analysis was an informative and fruitful intellectual exercise. Nonetheless, other
academics that, as Pringle and colleagues (2011) put it, are “used to operating in the more rigid
world of scientific experimentation and randomised controlled trials” may struggle to understand
the value and complexity involved in engaging the interpretive and hermeneutic elements of IPA.

**Theoretical Implications**

As Mullaly (2010) stated “social workers, like everyone else in our society, are socialized
into the dominant culture and may unwittingly (or otherwise) carry out oppressive acts” (p. 119).
This was a concern that I carried with me into my dissertation research. Engaging postcolonial
feminisms as a theoretical framework was initially aspirational for me in terms my desire to
ensure that I took up an ethical position in working with the narratives of those who may be
defined as “Other” in relation to myself (Hai, 2015). While I acknowledged that adopting a
categorical form of intersectional analysis could reinforce essentialism and dualistic
perspectives, I also wanted to challenge myself to disrupt my own tendency toward binary
thinking because I agree with Hai’s (2015) argument that while dualities, such as male and female, or White and non-White, may sometimes be useful (Butler, 2004; Mehrotra, 2010), they “should not distract us from seeing other sides” (Hai, 2015, p. 497).

Application of intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms to my analysis of migrant social workers’ professional adaptation experiences in Alberta contributed to my development of deep and nuanced understandings about the discrimination and disadvantages faced by this population (Bauder, 2003). I found this framework to be particularly useful for excavating complex instances of discrimination and other institutionalized inequities located within labour market policies and practices, as evidenced by the participants’ diverse experiences with specific activities such as having their credentials recognized and job seeking in Alberta (Abu-Laban, 1998; Austin, 2007; Bauder, 2003; Fulton et al., 2016). Acknowledging multiple sources of oppression in combination with gender, my theoretical framework helped to shape what I believe to be a realistic and authentic conceptualization of the oppression experienced by the participants in the Albertan context (Patil, 2013).

Unfortunately, feminist theories and feminist research continue to be marginalized within mainstream academia (Jenkins, 2014). According to Jenkins (2014), feminist research is subject to “de-legitimisation” due to an apparent lack of objectivity and deviation from the norms of positivistic inquiry. As an example, skepticism surrounding intersectionality theory within academia is particularly reflective of what Hill-Collins (2000) referred to as the “subjugation” of Black women’s knowledge, as well as gender-based knowledge and analyses more generally. Hill-Collins (2000) attributed the subjugation of Black women’s knowledge to its divergence from “standard academic theory” and its distinguishing purpose of “opposing oppression” (p. 9). As Hill-Collins (2000) stated “social theories emerging from and/or on behalf of US Black
women and other historically oppressed groups aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice” (p. 9). Hill-Collins (2000) further explained how the knowledges generated out of lived experiences of oppression are distinct from, but no less valuable than knowledges generated by mainstream dominant groups, in particular, White male academics.

I found that postcolonial feminisms complemented intersectionality theory well and usefully informed my reflective thinking and conceptualization throughout my data analysis process. In particular postcolonial feminisms enriched my analysis through providing a deep understanding of the concept of “Other” and the process of “Othering” (Schutte, 1998). I was able to engage in some profound analysis about Othering and positions of power, including my own power as researcher and interpreter of participants’ subjective narratives. Analytically, postcolonial feminisms were an invaluable tool in this regard as they framed my questioning of participants’ meanings, my interpretations, and my confrontation of my own biases within those interpretations.

In sum, my dissertation research offers contributions on both the theoretical and methodological levels. In terms of theory, the study demonstrates how intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminisms can be used together effectively to inform and build on one another thereby creating a coherent plural theoretical framework (Mehrotra, 2010). Methodologically, the study is unique in that it demonstrates how a secondary data analysis, can be successfully accomplished through the use of IPA methodology in social work.

**Evaluation**

Smith (2011) explicated evaluative guidelines for assessing the quality and validity of IPA studies. These guidelines are based on Yardley’s (2000) principles for assessing the quality
of qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011). There are four criteria for an acceptable IPA paper (Smith, 2011). The first criterion is that the paper “clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA: it is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic” (p. 17). My study is phenomenological in that it explores lived experience, it is hermeneutic in that it is interpretive and attempts to uncover meaning, and it is idiographic in that it is “concerned with the particular” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). The second criterion is that the paper is “sufficiently transparent so readers can see what was done” (Smith, 2011, p. 17). In describing each element of my research process I have attempted to be highly transparent and to “show” each step in my research journey. The third criterion is that the analysis is “coherent”, “plausible” and “interesting” (Smith, 2011, p. 17). I have achieved each of these elements by thoroughly explaining and presenting my research methods (chapter four) and results (chapter five), and then tying these together in the discussion (chapter six). The fourth criterion is “sufficient ‘sampling from corpus’ to show density of evidence for each theme” (Smith, 2011, p. 17). The concept of “sampling from corpus” is primarily concerned with selecting verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts (Smith, 2011). The guideline is to include extracts from a minimum of three participants per theme (Smith, 2011), which I did in the results section (chapter five). A table providing frequency of verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts is also provided (see Table 5.2).

Additionally, in order to be judged as “good” a paper must be “well focused” offering an engaging in-depth analysis of a specific topic based on “strong” data and interpretation (Smith, 2011, p. 17). While the strength of the data was somewhat limited due to my dissertation being a secondary data analysis, I was able to generate what I believe to be a high quality interpretation of the selected dataset through engaging in a dynamic relationship with the text and working
with this specific dataset over an extended period of time. Smith (2011) further stated that IPA studies must be conducted with both “rigour” and “interpretive flair” (p. 23). I believe that with the expert guidance of my dissertation committee I have been rigorous in conducting this innovative research. I view rigour as being the “scientific” element of the study and the “interpretive flair” being a more artistic aspect. In order to achieve such flair I read widely on skilled migration and feminist research and attempted to draw inspiration not only from the explicit research evidence and commentaries that they provided, but also from their diverse writing styles and manners of expression in order to try and ensure my own work was engaging for the reader. As recommended by Smith (2011), I attempted to write in a manner that was “bold and confident” while remaining true to the “trail of evidence” that supported my interpretations (p. 23). Finally, it is the reader who must judge whether the findings are “plausible” and “persuasive” (Smith, 2011, p. 23). Persuasiveness is to be judged on the presentation of evidence to support the claims made by the researcher.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include (a) researcher bias, (b) the dataset and sample, and (c) the nature of secondary data analysis. In regard to researcher bias, although I took great care and caution with managing my Western-centric biases through filtering my initial analyses through a lens of postcolonial feminisms, they were still present throughout the project and shaped my interpretations in ways that may unintentionally perpetuate oppression, especially of non-Western people.

Brocki and Wearden (2006), and Pringle and colleagues (2011) each discuss the importance of IPA researchers discussing any disadvantages associated with their data collection methods. As the present study was a secondary analysis, it involved using a dataset comprised of
transcripts of interviews conducted for the purposes of the larger Canadian study. As Hinds, Vogel, and Clarke-Steffen (2013) explained, it can be challenging to achieve the desired depth of analysis within secondary analysis due to the fact that the theme being studied in the secondary analysis may not have been “uniformly addressed” during the data collection process for the primary study resulting in a lack of “completeness” of the dataset in terms of breadth and depth (pp. 5-6). While my study would potentially have been enriched by studying a different sampling and sorting of the dataset I believe that the purpose of my study was still achieved (Hinds et al., 2013). As sampling and sorting of the dataset was a choice that I made as the researcher this is discussed in more detail in the following section on delimitations.

**Delimitations**

The most significant delimitation of this study is the treatment of gender as a binary social categorization. Consistent with the predominant trend in intersectionality theory, I took a categorical approach to defining gender as a fixed binary entity (Mehrotra, 2010; Patil, 2013). In doing so I aligned with the traditional positivist-informed perspective, which frames gender in terms of duality rather than multiplicity or fluidity. While this categorical conceptualization of gender is consistent with mainstream academic discourse on gender, including within the discipline of social work (Mehrotra, 2010), I realize that I have effectively engaged in the reproduction of a form of essentialized categorization, and thus I have re-created the status quo conceptualization of gender and gender identity which I acknowledge lacks inclusivity and may be viewed as oppressive by some individuals and groups (Dozier, 2005). While I find the anti-categorization movement within intersectionality theory and other gender studies literature to be consistent with my values and beliefs regarding treatment of identity categories, I acknowledge that my approach in my dissertation research treats gender as real and fixed. Treating gender as
MIGRANT SOCIAL WORKERS IN ALBERTA

a fixed binary was a practical approach for this inaugural comparative gender analysis of professional adaptation among migrant social workers. In stating this, I align myself with Hill-Collins (1990, 2000) and others (Butler, 2004; Mehrotra, 2010), who recognize the importance of challenging “the nature of essentialized, homogeneous social categorizations of gender, race, class, and the like” and “simultaneously see the need for strategic essentializing of identities and communities to work toward particular political goals” (Mehrotra, 2010, p. 423). I am mindful of moving beyond reliance on categorical conceptualizations in future research (Daley et al., 2015; Schutte, 1998).

Another delimitation has to do with sorting of the sample. According to my research design I was limited to engaging in purposive sampling from the existing dataset from the Canadian study, a process called sorting (Heaton, 2004; Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). The demographic profiles of the participants in the existing dataset proved to be a limitation as the analysis may have been enriched by having an equal number of male and female participants, and also having greater ethno-racial and national/country of origin diversity. In regard to limitations of my sample I also identified in retrospect post-analysis that the sample was much more heterogenous than I initially anticipated. Therefore utilizing different sorting schemes could have proven fruitful. For example, a sorting of participants only from the Global South or who settled in large urban areas post-migration could have provided me with a more homogenous but equally if not more useful dataset that would have still met the sampling criteria for IPA studies. As a novice researcher and first-time IPA user this is a lesson that I will carry forward into future research.

In opting to re-use interview data from the Canadian study the question of “fit” between the existing data and my dissertation methodology arose while I was writing my proposal.
Together with my supervisory committee members, I concluded that the similarities in the data collection processes involved in both IPA and grounded theory (Smith et al., 2009), along with the specific interviewing techniques applied in the Canadian study, alleviated concerns regarding this issue. As I explained in chapter four, to me it was important that I had collected the primary data myself which allowed me to make interpretations from my firsthand experiences of the encounters that I shared with the research participants for the purpose of a supplementary analysis, specifically an analytic expansion (Heaton, 2004; Thorne, 2013). The data collection procedure was identified as a central point of congruence between the primary and secondary analysis in that it created a fit between the two studies in the following way: The Canadian study used a semi-structured interview guide to elicit detailed first-hand accounts of how migrant social workers experienced their migration and professional adaptation. Primary data collection under IPA methodology would share this same aim and approach (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA calls for “semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews” which is what had already been conducted for the Canadian project (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 365), therefore it was determined that re-use of the dataset using IPA methodology was both appropriate.

Nonetheless, the fact that the primary study on professional migration and adaptation of social workers in Canada and my dissertation research had different aims and scopes was a topic frequently revisited and discussed with my supervisory committee. This was an important and appropriate topic for discussion as it reflects a general question about the “appropriateness” of qualitative secondary data analysis within the qualitative research literature (Heaton, 2004; Hinds et al., 2013). As I was strongly committed to ensuring rigour throughout my research process (as discussed in greater detail in chapter four), I eagerly explored any concerns about appropriateness raised by my supervisory committee members. At the same time, I found that
conducting a secondary data analysis using IPA methodology was a pioneering endeavour with no specific direction provided in the literature. Sandelowski’s (2011) notion of interpretive flexibility gave me confidence to go forward with this effort to “move between and across the lines” of qualitative research practice (p. 349). With the support and guidance of my committee I forged ahead exploring exciting new methodological terrain, determined to work through and overcome challenges as they emerged.

**Self-Reflexivity**

Hill-Collins (1993) stated “each of us must come to terms with the multiple ways in which race, class and gender as categories of analysis frame our individual biographies” (p. 35). For me, a consequence of engaging IPA methodology, which emphasizes the central role of the researcher’s ability to be reflective and analytical while making interpretations (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Wagstaff et al., 2014), along with using postcolonial feminisms, was rich personal self-exploration and self-reflexivity, leading to heightened awareness of myself as a researcher and of my own social identity. For example, I gained new insight into my own White privilege from both engaging with the narratives of non-White participants, and also from interpreting the experiences of participants who identified the role of White privilege in their own lived experiences (Zufferey, 2012). According to Zufferey (2012), “it is important to acknowledge the power of white privilege” because “as a white person it is too easy to deny how white privilege is maintained” (P. 670). However, engaging in a “reflective process does not reduce the white power and privilege accrued” to White people, but it does function to make White privilege more “visible” and to “broaden our knowledge of the effects of white power and privilege” (p. 670). Creating greater awareness and visibility can lead toward the promotion of
Valkonen and Wallenius-Korkalo (2016) highlighted that critical reflection is part of the larger processes of challenging oppression and creating social change, with the development of greater “awareness and knowledge of social structures, inequalities, and oppression” being important for any social worker (p. 8). This includes social workers developing awareness of how they contribute to reinforcing oppression through their personal “ways of thinking, feeling, and taking action” (Valkonen & Wallenius-Korkalo, 2016, p. 8). Reflective work grounded in intersectionality theory has been identified as a useful “analytic tool” for social workers to use in developing complex understandings of power relations and oppression without stereotyping or over-simplifying the dynamics of difference, which may lead to change and development at the micro and macro levels (Valkonen & Wallenius-Korkalo, 2016). I find that my experience in engaging in reflection while conducting this interpretive research echoes Schutte’s (1998) observation that when one conceptualizes “the Other” and takes note of differences between the self and “the Other”, the experience can be “decentering” for the self; however this is generally a positive experience that can lead to new understandings and a “more critical awareness” (p. 54). I am inspired by Lorde’s (1984) words that creating “revolutionary change” requires “escape” from the “oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactics, the oppressors' relationships” (p. 123). Yet, I also identify with Zufferey’s (2012) statement that it is impossible to step completely outside of the “discourses” that construct our identities. As a White person there is much about the experience of racialization and racism that I am unaware of and have not experienced (Zufferey, 2012). Imbricating a postcolonial feminist perspective with intersectionality theory allowed me to make the
limitations of my own positionality and perspective more apparent which in turn helped me to
attune more deeply to multiple components of participants’ social identities and ways to
comprehend and represent them textually.

Given my position of power and privilege in relation to many of the participants I believe
that adopting a postcolonial feminist perspective was especially important in helping me to
confront my multiple positions of privilege (such as being White, Canadian-born and Canadian-
educated) and the potential for me, and my analysis, to be oppressive. It also helped me to
recognize and challenge dominant discourses on race, gender and migration that emerged
throughout my analytic process (Hai, 2015; Mullaly, 2010). One question that I reflected on in
my research journal is whether or not I would have foregrounded gender in the same way if I was
not a person who is privileged by Whiteness. In other words, I critically reflected on the
possibility that my White privilege served to frame my research in a way that downplays the
importance of race and racialization. While this is a real and important insight, I remained
committed to foregrounding gender in my dissertation based on hook’s (2000) assertion that
sexism is the widest spread oppression in Western culture and that this is reason enough to
foreground sexism as the form of oppression that impacts the greatest number of people, whether
they are in the role of oppressor or oppressed. Further, because sexism is so prominent within
Western culture, most people have been “socialized” to “accept” sexism (hooks, 2000). Due to
the fact that all oppressions are interlocking and linked to varying degrees, hooks (2000) asserted
that addressing sexism will have a ripple effect on other forms of oppression, such as racism.
However, only addressing sexism will not fully eradicate other forms of oppression through
indirect means. Racism and other equities are also “fundamentally a feminist issue” (hooks,
2000, p. 53). Struggles against racism, xenophobia, transphobia and sexism should not be pitted
against one another because that is counterproductive to the larger goal of achieving equity and community for and with all persons (hooks, 2000).

Engaging in postcolonial feminist inspired reflection, reading Mohanty (2003) challenged me to take ownership of the fact that due to my social location I see the world through “Western eyes” (p. 499). Throughout my research process I have worked to question and clarify what this means. Although this dissertation is not the place to get into an expansive discussion of this topic as I wish to keep the focus on professional adaptation of migrant social workers and not on myself, I will provide some examples of my self-reflections below as I believe that these highlight my work in engaging intersectional and postcolonial feminist theories within my work.

Through the process of being critically reflective while engaging in research from a cisnormative perspective I have been able to “interrogate [my] own subject position” in identifying as a cisgender woman (Hale 2009, n.p., as cited in Johnson, 2015, p. 25). As a result I have come to better recognize and understand the limitations of gender binarism and the work that lies ahead in challenging the hegemonic ideology of cisnormativity in social work research (Johnson, 2015). As a cisgender woman, the experience of critical self-reflection while conducting a comparative gender analysis for my dissertation has illuminated my cis-centric bias. Now that I am more aware of this bias I will be able to engage more reflexively with gender in future research. This may involve adapting a “sex/gender” perspective where both sex and gender are identified as important elements of identity (Hayden & Hallstein, 2012). Ansara and Hegarty (2014) recommend that researchers “determine participants’ genders by self-report” rather than using other methods such as “given names” or “visual appearance” as these “clues” may be “misleading” and result in “substantial errors or omissions” (p. 265).
In reading Zaman (2008), I reflected on my location of privilege within the social work labour market in Alberta as I am Canadian-born and Canadian-educated whereas the participants were all immigrants. I also contrasted my own positioning with that of the female participants in my study. I recognized that the social identity and categorization that I hold as a White Canadian-born woman positions me closer to the top of the hierarchical system of domination that exists in Western society in general, and the social work labour market in Alberta in particular, than many of the female participants. In this sense, I hold and have more access to power within these hierarchical systems than they do. I acknowledged this power differential with a sense of tremendous responsibility to ensure that I do not abuse the power I hold. At the same time, analyzing the experiences of the female participants and the high value that several of them placed on their roles as family caregivers helped me to gain new perspectives on my role within my own family as I reflected on similarities and differences between their experiences and my own.

During much of my self-reflection I felt a sense of distinction from the female participants that I realized creates space for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their narratives, which I reaffirmed that I wanted to avoid, but which also seemed inevitable given our differences in social identities, privileges and positionalities. In essence, my particular set of Western eyes serves to constrict my vision. I further reflected on my own lived experiences of age and gender-based discrimination and oppression. Through reflection on my personal experiences with gender-based discrimination I felt a sense of sameness and solidarity with the female participants and simultaneously a sense of distance or alienation from the stories of the male participants. Likewise, I identified with the participant who discussed her experiences of ageism and lookism (PF2-Netherlands) due to my own personal experiences with these issues
within professional contexts. Nonetheless, I endeavoured to read all of the narratives with an open-mind and attempt to understand and relate to participants’ experiences in an empathic yet critical manner to the best of my ability given my social identity. This stance is discussed by Binding and Tapp (2008) as consisting of “openness to the other’s position” through adopting a “position of readiness to receive new information, regardless of the consequences to one’s own position” (p. 125). This openness allows for learning from the Other to occur through accessing and “truly listening” to the perspective of the Other (Binding & Tapp, 2008, p. 125).

Finally, I thought about my immigrant grandmothers and my own family’s migration narrative. Through stories and lessons shared within my family I realized that an immigrant narrative also exists within me and shapes my identity and perspectives even though I am Canadian-born. Although my family of origin has now largely assimilated to mainstream Canadian culture through my research I have come to better understand that my family history over the past 100 years is a story of immigration, adaptation and settlement in Canada which I have internalized since childhood. Through engaging in doctoral research on immigration with an immigrant population I have come embrace, re-conceptualize and better understand my grandparents’ lived experiences and their stories of hardship and success in building their lives in Canada. I feel gratitude for their efforts to seek a better life for our family through migration to Canada leading me to experience the privileges that I have today. I believe that part of the way in which I can honour my grandparents is to be of help to other immigrants in supporting their adaptation to life in Canada. At the same time, I recognize that my family’s migration to Canada was connected to colonization of the lands of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada which is upsetting to me because it highlights the oppressor within me and my family history which can be difficult to acknowledge. However, I feel that my “settler” status is important to take
ownership of in my efforts to be anti-oppressive. Mohanty (2003) encourages the colonizers to know themselves as such. This is part of making the “politics of knowledge” visible (p. 511). My work in engaging with these profound reflections and their meaning, influence and significance will continue to influence my identity and future scholarship.

**Future Research**

Hill-Collins (2000) called for “coalition building” among various ethnoracial groups and across genders and classes in order to engage in dialogues about domination and to work together toward social justice (p. 38). She also specifically acknowledged White scholars who are committed to being “antiracist” and rejecting “unearned privileges of Whiteness” as important partners in working collaboratively for social change (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 37). It is my hope that researchers of all ethno-racial backgrounds and genders will continue to conduct research that enhances understandings of the experiences and needs of transnational migrants, as well as to develop and evaluate strategies and solutions to addressing the challenges that this population experiences. I agree with DeSouza’s (2004) assertion that research on immigration, and in particular, research that is gender specific, must engage methodologies and theoretical frameworks that “are able to more appropriately articulate the experiences” of immigrant communities (p. 465).

My dissertation research covers only one small and specific slice of a much broader picture of professional adaptation of migrants in Alberta. Nonetheless, the specific topic of my dissertation, the professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta, can also benefit from further study. While my research adds to the current literature and body of knowledge on professional social work migration and adaptation in Canada, to date only qualitative research on this topic has been undertaken in the Albertan and Canadian contexts. I recommend that
research in this substantive area, both provincially and nationally, should continue. In particular, there are several promising avenues for future research.

First, a follow-up quantitative study for both my dissertation research, and the Canadian study involving a larger sample could confirm, corroborate and expand on the qualitative findings, as well as bring new issues and ideas to light (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative and qualitative research can often be complimentary endeavours. When a quantitative study follows qualitative analysis, as would be the case here, the quantitative data is useful for determining whether or not it would be appropriate to generalize the qualitative findings and to test and confirm broader application of theory beyond its representativeness of the experiences of the participants in the initial qualitative study. Research findings that can be cross-validated in this manner are generally considered to be “well-validated” and “substantiated” (Creswell, 2003, p. 217).

Second, as the current dataset is limited to the narratives of social workers who have obtained credential recognition and employment as social workers in Alberta a gap exists in examining the experiences of migrant social workers from whom the social work labour market in Alberta is inaccessible and/or who are unable to receive credential recognition and professional registration. As Syed (2008) argued, formulating macro-institutional responses to assist skilled migrants with their adaptation will remain a challenge until an “adequate understanding of their micro-level issues and circumstances” has been developed (p. 38). There is clearly a gap in our knowledge in regard to the experiences of migrant social workers in Alberta whose credentials are not recognized and who are not working within the profession. Understanding of these experiences is needed in order to identify the systemic and personal
issues that lead to undesirable professional adaptation outcomes among migrant social workers, and in turn, to develop remedies to the associated challenges and barriers.

Third, collaborative studies involving comparisons of professional migration and adaptation outcomes across jurisdictions, both Canadian and internationally, may be worthwhile in order to better understand contextual factors that lead to best practices and successful outcomes for facilitating the professional adaptation of migrant social workers across cultures and national boundaries. In the current context of globalization and mass human migration, international comparative analyses, both qualitative and quantitative, may also deepen our understanding of both global migration patterns among this specific sector of professionals, as well as the meaning and motivation attached to their migration on a global scale.

Fourth, longitudinal studies involving prolonged engagement with migrant social workers over a decade or longer would help to build better understanding of professional adaptation trajectories over lengthier time spans.

In addition, any support services for migrant social workers that are developed within Alberta or elsewhere as a result of this research or the national study on professional migration and adaptation of social workers should be pilot tested and evaluated using rigorous program evaluation research methods.

Furthermore, work on continuing to “mainstream” gendered analyses and feminisms in migration research is needed in order to ensure that the voices and experiences of immigrant women are heard and valued.

**Recommendations**

When I set out to conduct this study I did so with the belief that creating enhanced awareness of the gendered challenges faced by migrant social workers in Alberta, through
sharing and mobilizing the knowledge gained through this study could serve as a springboard toward the development of interventions, such as program and policy development, community organizing, further research, or changes to legislation, that could offer tangible improvements for migrant social workers in Alberta in regard to their professional adaptation experiences that would be targeted to meet the unique needs of both men and women. My goal was to encourage transformative action in order to create necessary micro, mezzo and macro-level changes (Cho et al., 2013; Patil, 2013; Syed, 2008) and work toward the advancement of social justice and equity for migrant populations, especially as this relates to labour market access and credential recognition among skilled migrants in Alberta and throughout Canada (Mullings & Schulz, 2006).

Alberta is situated within a global knowledge-based economy and has recently experienced an economic downturn that has had a ripple effect on the national economy across Canada (Markusoff, 2016). Within this context both the federal and provincial governments are currently challenged to create programs and policies that ensure competitiveness and productivity in the global marketplace while upholding the values and ideals of the electorate. According to Guo (2013), a key implication of globalization for Canadian immigration has been the development of a narrow focus on skills and employability in immigrant selection policy. Yet, the immigrant selection policy has been disconnected from the everyday challenges of settlement and transitioning to living in a new society (Guo, 2013; Li, 2003), as is evidenced by a lack of comprehensive settlement policies and services (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Certainly, as the present study demonstrates, migrant social workers in Alberta do not appear to benefit from any sort of governmental assistance throughout the credential recognition, professional registration and job search processes. As previous research has established (Al Ariss, 2010;
Guo, 2013), without such supports migrants are more likely to be precariously employed, earn low wages, work part-time rather than full-time, re-locate and experience job insecurity. For example, it has been shown that foreign-educated immigrants working in regulated professions are less likely than Canadian-born workers to be employed in their field of study (Zietsma, 2010). As of 2006, 62% of Canadian-born workers working in regulated professions, were employed within the profession for which they trained, while in comparison only 24% of foreign-educated immigrants were employed in the regulated profession that they studied, however it should be noted that statistics regarding social work were not included in this analysis and that Alberta’s match rates for immigrants to jobs in regulated professions are above the national averages (Zietsma, 2010). Furthermore, immigrants with the highest match rates in Canada were those who studied in English-speaking countries with education systems that are similar to that in Canada, such as Ireland and New Zealand. On the other hand, the lowest match rates for training to jobs have been recorded among migrant professionals who obtained their degrees in “developing countries” (Zietsma, 2010). However, the gap between Canadian and foreign professionals in terms of matching jobs to qualifications and skills lessens the longer that migrant are in Canada (Zietsma, 2010). The experiences of migrant social workers in Alberta echoes these findings, and further demonstrates that racialized immigrants in particular suffer from underemployment, especially during the early years of post-migration transition and adaptation (Guo, 2013).

It has already been established that socially and racially-based discrimination against immigrants is entrenched in the Canadian labour market (Guo, 2013). My research demonstrates that the social work labour market in Alberta is not immune from this reality. However, all is not lost. Research has also identified that new immigrants to Canada can benefit from the provision
of services that remove barriers to their professional and personal adaptation in the following areas: “language, employment, housing, daycare, education, health, counselling, legal and social services” (Guo, 2013). My research demonstrates that in regard to migrant social workers’ professional adaptation, support with some of these elements, namely language, employment and childcare would be beneficial. It would be useful to take gender-based similarities and differences in regard to needs, challenges and opportunities experienced by immigrants in Alberta into consideration when developing policies to address these issues.

According to Ashcraft’s (2013) glass slipper metaphor, the glass slipper effect should be seen as disadvantaging an occupation as a whole, not just those who are occupationally excluded. In essence, by discriminating against migrant social workers, the entire social work profession suffers by excluding the contributions of some members of the profession and skewing the representation and knowledge base within the profession toward those who are members of the dominant groups in society. The social work literature demonstrates the importance of “inclusive” workplaces that attend to the diversity of their work force, both in the human and social services, and in other settings (Barak, 2000). Workers are said to directly benefit from enhancing diversity and inclusion of the workforce through improved retention and satisfaction, broader community engagement, learning from the innovative practices of others and developing problem-solving skills, which can result in increased quality of services provided (Community Foundations of Canada, n.d.). Having a diverse work force is also consistent with social work values and principles, including social justice, respect for diversity, cultural sensitivity and equity for all (Barak, 2000; Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2003).

As women and ethnoracial minorities experience greater social exclusion and oppression in general, they are in turn a high proportion of users of human and social service programs
(Barak, 2000). These service users often, although not always, prefer, benefit most from, or feel most comfortable with working with staff with whom they can identify based on shared background experiences or group affiliation (Barak, 2000; Yan, 2008). Both social workers and service users can experience added challenges when working across diversity and difference. For example, Yan (2008) studied the “multifaceted” tensions that exist for social workers when they engage in cross-cultural helping. Yan (2008) argued that the “different experience” of visible minority social workers must be recognized and that “special training to prepare visible minority workers in dealing with…racist behaviors…and their own anxiety of confronting racist behaviors” should be provided. Yan (2008) also recommended that the issue of “cultural coherence” between the social worker and the service user be addressed by articulating how “other cultures” including those of individuals, organizations, and society at large “may influence our clients” and how various forms of “cultural tensions may affect [the] interventive process” (p. 327).

Statistics Canada (2005) estimates that one in five Canadians will be a member of a visible minority by 2017, with immigration being the “most important factor” (Immigration most important factor, para. 1) in this “rapid growth in the visible minority population” (Immigration most important factor, para. 1). Taken together, I believe that the above factors present a strong argument for the social work workforce to mirror the diversity in the Canadian population which would require that migrant social workers be supported and encouraged to join the social work labour force rather than being excluded from it. Ashcraft (2013) states that changing existing patterns of occupational exclusion requires shifting an occupation’s “social identity profile” so that the occupation is viewed differently in society than it has been in times past. Social identity profiles are changed over time through efforts made toward workforce “diversification” and the
“creative reconstruction of the work itself” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 20). Below I will offer some specific suggestions and strategies for diversification of the social work workforce in Alberta.

**Credential Recognition and Professional Registration**

A specific area that I believe requires attention from policymakers is the credential recognition and professional registration process for migrant social workers in Alberta through the regulatory authority of the ACSW. According to my analysis of the experiences and narratives of the participants in this study, the current credential recognition and professional registration process for migrant social workers in Alberta serves to devalue, and in some cases invalidate, the professional knowledge and experience of certain migrant social workers once they arrive in Alberta. Like other migrant professionals in Canada (Guo, 2013; Ngo & Este, 2006), in some cases, migrant social workers in Alberta appear to be receiving a lack of transparency, fairness and equitable recognition of their prior education and experience from the ACSW. This issue is not unique to social work or to the Albertan context. In fact, it has been identified across numerous professions in Canada (Brown et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Gibb & Hamond, 2010; Guo, 2013). The frustrating and disappointing experiences of migrant social workers with credential recognition processes in Alberta parallels the experiences of other migrant social workers across Canada (Brown et al., 2015). Fraser has termed this phenomenon of a lack of transparency and fairness in the credential recognition system “recognitional injustice” (as cited in Gibb & Hamdon, 2010, p. 192).

In the present study, the experiences of the two well-experienced MSW-qualified social workers from India who were granted provisional registration status and were required to complete 1500-hours of supervised practice before they could become fully registered as social workers in the province of Alberta illustrates recognitional injustice in social work credential
recognition and professional registration with the ACSW. These two cases speak to Gibb and Hamdon’s (2010) concern about the processes of “invalidation” of particular knowledges, especially those of migrants, resulting in the non-recognition of foreign credentials, post-secondary education and professional experience. As Brown and colleagues (2015) identified, requiring additional supervised practice hours through completing a provisional registration process can contribute significantly to process delays and other challenges for migrant social workers in securing employment in the social work profession. In essence, some social workers are penalized for their “foreignness” and required to demonstrate their capacity to practice within the local context while others are exempted from this prerequisite to full licensure as a social worker. Within Alberta variability in these requirements among social workers from the same country of origin was recognized by P10F-Phillipines who stated:

In my situation, in my case, I felt I am fortunate and blessed. Social workers from the Philippines that I did work with, they were either asked to earn credit hours [in a practicum], some credit hours in class, or both. In my case, I wasn’t asked or required by the ACSW…no, my transition was good.

Applying Ashcraft’s (2013) glass slipper metaphor offers the insight that social work credentials from outside of Canada challenge the ACSW’s current prototypical social worker profile. Many migrant social workers, especially those educated outside of the United States, do not fit “naturally” into the ACSW’s current credentialing and registration process. In turn these migrant social workers are framed as being “Other”, which can result in invalidation and non-recognition of their credentials and prior professional experiences (Ashcraft, 2013). Such recognitional injustice is reflective of the social hierarchy in broader mainstream Canadian society which results in the oppression of subordinate groups, including immigrants, especially
those who are non-White, female and English language learners (Mullaly, 2002). It also
demonstrates that the social work credentialing system in Alberta is structurally arranged to
disenfranchise migrant social workers, especially those from the Global South, for the benefit of
Canadian-born and Canadian-educated social workers who form the dominant group in this case
(Mullaly, 2002).

As Mullaly (2002) states, this relationship of disenfranchisement is not innate or
inevitable, rather it is a direct result of “human choices and actions” and therefore it is
“changeable” (p. 32). In order to address the inequities in the current social work credentialing
process in Alberta I recommend that the ACSW work with its partners such as IQAS and the
Canadian Association of Social Workers to re-develop its processes for facilitating credential
recognition of migrant social workers in order to make these processes more transparent, fair,
supportive and inclusive.

The Forum of Labour Market Ministers published an informative framework for the
proposed re-development of the credential assessment and recognition processes in 2009. The
document is titled *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment of Recognition of Foreign
Qualifications* (FLMM, 2009). The purpose of the document is to provide a “new, joint vision
for governments to take concerted action to improve the integration of immigrants and other
internationally-trained workers into the Canadian labour market” (p. 4). The FLMM’s
Framework (2009) is based the following principles: fairness, transparency, timeliness and
consistency. The Framework calls for multiple pathways to credential recognition to be clearly
laid out to internationally educated professionals including options for direct certification, skills
upgrading and career planning advice on pursuing work in related alternative occupations when
applicant’s qualifications do not meet the requirements for credential recognition (FLMM,
A specific example of skills upgrading option is for the ACSW to partner in the development of a social work bridging program in Alberta, which is discussed in greater detail below.

**Labour Market Access and Attachment**

Devaluing and invalidating foreign credentials and experience is an established pattern among Canadian employers across professions and industries (Basran & Zong, 1998; Bauder, 2003; Gibb & Hamdon, 2010; Guo, 2013). This pattern has implications in terms of wages and occupations of professional migrants (Guo, 2013). In order to cope with such circumstances, migrant professionals may “(resort to) apply for professional jobs lower than their caliber” in order to increase their prospects for entering the labour market (Syed, 2008). I refer to this strategy as self-deskilling. My analysis of the participants’ narrative accounts in the present study are consistent with the patterns of devaluing foreign credentials, issues in labour market access and attachment, and self-deskilling established in the earlier research on professional migration cited above. In particular, I analyzed that migrant social workers in Alberta who migrate, either directly or indirectly, from countries of origin in the Global South such as India, Liberia and the Philippines, appear to experience greater issues with deskilling than those from the Global North, for example, the United States and New Zealand.

To illustrate, one participant (P8M-India), discussed his strategy of self-deskilling in order to develop greater English language proficiency and gain Canadian work experience. He successfully employed this strategy to work toward his specific career goals. As part of the execution of this strategy, the individual engaged in volunteer work within the social services sector while working at a local retailer and awaiting his credential recognition for a few months prior to applying on social work jobs in Alberta. The strategy that he employed seems to have
been well planned given the realities of his specific situation and preferences, however it may not have been necessary had a comprehensive system to support his professional adaptation been readily available to him upon his arrival in Alberta.

Another issue that I found disproportionately impacts the participants who migrated from the Global South is discrimination. Unfortunately, discrimination against migrant social workers, especially those from countries in the Global South, appears to be institutionalized within the social work labour market in Alberta. Evidence from the Canadian study on social work migration and adaptation (Brown et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016) suggests that discrimination among migrant social workers within the social work labour market occurs across Canada and is not unique to the Albertan context in particular. This is consistent with past research on professional migration, which has described discrimination against skilled migrants to be “entrenched” to a degree that it “restricts” their access to the labour market (Syed, 2008, p. 29). Syed (2008) stated that the “occupational success of skilled migrants in host economies is strongly influenced by their ethnic origin” and that “migrants with the largest cultural difference from the host country may experience the most discrimination” (p. 34). The economic imperative for addressing these concerns is self-evident. As Li (2001) and Guo (2013) have attested, when skilled migrants are unable to re-enter their professions the economic costs to immigrants and to Canadian society can be considerable. In addition, social workers make important contributions in health and social service delivery in Alberta in both the public and non-profit sectors (Government of Alberta, n.d.). As discussed above in relation to workforce diversity, supporting the successful labour market attachment of migrant social workers may be beneficial for the outcomes of consumers of health and social services in Alberta. Therefore, it makes sense to offer supports and services that promote their labour market access and
attachment. The supports and services offered should be evidence-based and focused on addressing the specific needs of migrant social workers, including their differential needs and preferences based on gender, ethnocultural background and other aspects of their individual and collective social identities.

As identified above, migrant social workers are generally in need of support with English language proficiency, labour market access and, if desired, childcare services. Research has established that in English-speaking areas migrants who are English language learners, or come from non-English speaking backgrounds, typically have lower income levels than migrants who are proficient in communicating in English (Syed, 2008). Therefore language can be viewed as one of the larger social issues within Canadian society that impact immigrants’ labour market experiences, along with institutional racism and social exclusion that must also be addressed in order for migrant social workers to be fully recognized and included within the social work labour market. Social and economic policy change at governmental and institutional levels is required in order to address these larger social issues. Gibb and Hamdon (2010) have called for a “redistribution of recognition” which would involve reforming existing policies that permit the devaluation of foreign education and credentials (p. 198).

In Alberta, we can and must do better in terms of removing barriers to successful professional adaptation for migrant social workers and other professional migrants. Political will is required in order to make progress on meeting the needs of migrant social workers and ensuring that the credential assessment and recognition systems acknowledge their skills and experiences (Guo, 2013). Now that the federal Express Entry system for skilled migrants has been in place for over one year (CIC, 2015), the next step in terms of immigration reform is for the federal, provincial and municipal governments in Alberta and across Canada to work together
to develop an inclusive, systematic and accountable framework for supporting immigrant settlement and labour market access and attachment that takes gendered and racialized needs and realities into account. It is possible that at the federal level, a retroactive GBA+ analysis (Status of Women Canada, 2015) of the Express Entry program would yield useful data in gaining a better understanding of how the program disadvantages and privileges migrants based on their specific social identities and characteristics, and in turn, what specific strategies can be implemented to ameliorate the problems associated with the disadvantages created by or inherent within the system.

Induction, Orientation and Transition

Within the context of Alberta, the ACSW and post-secondary education programs in social work could educate their students, who are future social work practitioners, to work within a globalized social work context (Midgely, 2016), and to support the professional adaptation of migrant social workers within their future workplaces as a professional and ethical obligation.

A study by Creese and colleagues (2008) found that migrants are willing to engage multiple strategies in order to receive credential recognition and suitable employment in their fields of study, including “re-skilling” in the local context when opportunities to gain education and work experience in their new context were made accessible. Likewise, international research on the professional adaptation of migrant social workers out of the United Kingdom and New Zealand has identified that migrant social workers require support and training in order to successfully adapt to practice in a new context (Beddoe et al., 2012, Fouche et al., 2014b; Sims, 2012; Welbourne et al., 2007).

One example of a “re-skilling” initiative for migrant social workers in Alberta could include developing a bridging programming, or offering other formal support programs and
services for migrant social workers, especially those who receive provisional registration status with the ACSW and are required to complete 1500-hours of work experience supervised by a Registered Social Worker. According to Sattler and colleagues (2015), bridging programs are designed for “internationally educated immigrant professionals who have completed formal training in another country but who may not have the educational, professional or language requirements necessary to become licensed to practice in Canada” (p. 3). As many social work education programs in Alberta are already engaged in providing continuing professional education, and all social work education programs are engaged in linking community agencies and social work students together for field experience in the form of practicum, much of the infrastructure that may be needed in order to develop social work bridging programs in Alberta is already in place.

However, the concepts of bridging and re-skilling must be taken up cautiously so that they do not reproduce oppression, White privilege, and dominance (Guo, 2015). Guo (2015) has expressed concerns that in Canada skill is “coloured”, “gendered” and “classed” (p. 236). In turn, immigrant re-skilling programs in Canada have often taken on the role of a “social engineering project” that aims to “manufacture” subjects who are “docile” and will easily “conform to Canadian norms and workplace cultures” (Guo, 2015, p. 236). While social work is a regulated profession that must adhere to specific professional standards, re-skilling programs that are developed for social workers in Alberta should be cautious about their methods and content in order to ensure that they do not reflect a “colonial mentality” (Guo, 2015). Social work as a profession has been criticized in recent decades for being dominated by White, Western and middle-class discourse rooted in imperialism (Zufferey, 2012). The curricula developed in any re-skilling or bridging programs for migrant social workers in Alberta should
attend carefully to the concerns raised about the precedence of privileging Western values, practices, knowledges and traditions in contemporary social work education and practice (Zufferey, 2012). Perpetuation of Western-centrism in the perspectives, literatures, theories and policies taught in such programs would be a disservice to many migrant social workers and their future clients and colleagues (Zufferey, 2012). In particular, Indigenous knowledges, as well as knowledge about diverse cultures and cultural practices, including those originating from the Global South, should be incorporated into the curriculum of any such programs.

In discussing tales of caution, Guo (2015) provides the example of immigrant re-skilling programs that attended to “soft skills” and “accent reduction” as matters of “presentability” and “employability” as inappropriate and assimilationist. Such an approach to re-skilling is racist and does not attend to actual matters related to workplace competence. According to Guo (2015), “the hidden agenda for the promotion of soft skills is the Whitening of immigrants through the promotion of ‘Canadian’ ways of thinking, acting, and behaving” (p. 245). In essence, looking and sounding “non-native” has been associated with “incompetence and deficiency” (Guo, 2015, p. 244). As stated above, social work re-skilling programs must ensure that their curricula do not discriminate and devalue migrants in this manner.

One bridging program for internationally educated social work professionals in Canada is currently operating out of Ryerson University’s Chang School of Continuing Education in Toronto, Ontario (G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education, Ryerson University [Chang School], n.d.). According to the website for this certificate-level bridging program, the objective is to prepare internationally educated social workers to be able to work in the social services sector in Ontario (Chang School, n.d.). While the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada fund the Chang School’s bridging program, participants in the program
also pay a tuition fee of $5800 per person (Chang School, n.d.). The Chang School’s certificate program offers participants knowledge and skill development through coursework at Ryerson’s School of Social Work, a practicum placement, mentorship, job-search support through Ryerson University’s career centre, and opportunities to attend and participate in forums and conferences. The certificate program is only available to migrant social workers that can provide proof of residency in the province of Ontario leaving migrant social workers in the rest of Canada without access.

I propose that in Alberta, we explore adapting this type of bridging program to fit our current provincial context. An immediate recommendation is to ensure accessibility of the program by eliminating financial barriers through full governmental funding of the program, as the program offered by the Chang School in Ontario carries a significant cost in the form of tuition fees. Past research has established that cost, length of time required to complete the program, and immediate financial needs in terms or providing basic necessities for self and family members, are barriers to skilled migrants pursuing “re-skilling” opportunities at local universities (Creese et al., 2008), especially among female migrants (Iredale, 2005). Therefore I recommend eliminating the financial barrier for individuals in order to facilitate participation of all migrant social workers, not only those who are financially capable of affording the program.

In developing a social work bridging program in Alberta it may also be useful to look at the models of successful existing bridging programs offered at Albertan universities, such as the University of Calgary Werklund School of Education’s Bridge to Teaching, an accredited program aimed at preparing “experienced foreign-trained teachers to teach in Alberta schools” (University of Calgary, 2016, n.p). Again, however, cost modelling needs to ensure that the program is accessible to migrant social workers with limited financial resources. A drawback to
following the model of the Werklund Bridge to Teaching program is that tuition fees are approximately $7500 per student (University of Calgary, 2016). Overall, what is needed in Alberta is the resources, both human and financial, to plan and implement targeted, relevant and accessible programs and services that facilitate the professional adaptation of migrant social workers. Indeed, among their recommendations for designing effective bridging programs, Sattler and colleagues (2015) highlight the need for “input and support from all levels of government, employers, regulating bodies, professional associations, postsecondary institutions and settlement agencies” (p. 5) coupled with “sustainable and coordinated funding” from government through “federal-provincial cost-sharing” (p. 6).

**Conclusion**

The findings of my dissertation research illustrate an intersectional analysis of the lived experiences and perceptions of migrant social workers in the Albertan context. By enhancing understanding of these experiences and perceptions through research, policymakers, regulators, employers and educators are provided with evidence of the need to improve the professional adaptation experiences of migrant social workers in Alberta. The findings of this study detail the challenges experienced by male and female migrant social workers while the discussion outlines specific areas of support that should be addressed at the policy and program levels.

Bringing a gendered-lens to the present analysis has brought forward new knowledge and insights regarding professional adaptation of migrant social workers in Alberta. Sharing the participants’ narratives has brought critical information to the forefront that policymakers in Alberta can learn from as they plan future immigration and settlement policies and programming for social workers from both economic and social perspectives.
As a doctoral researcher and fellow social worker, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with these participants and to hear and interpret their lived experiences of professional adaptation.
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APPENDIX A: DATA SHARING AGREEMENT

DATA SHARING AGREEMENT

dated the 29th day of December, 2014

BETWEEN:

Principal Investigator: Annie Pullen Sansfaçon
Data Provider

Co-Supervisor/Co-Investigator: John Graham
Data Provider

Co-Investigator: Marion Brown
Data Provider

AND:

PhD Student: Amy E. Fulton
Data Receiver

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this Agreement is to formalize the terms and conditions for sharing of data for the purposes of doctoral research to be completed by Amy E. Fulton.
2. Data Sharing

In this Agreement, "Data Sharing" means:

Sharing all interview data collected for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRRC) funded project entitled A qualitative investigation of the migrants' experience and their professional adaptation into social work practice in Canada, Reference # SHHRC 425-2012-0391, University of Calgary Conjoint Research Ethics Board (CFREB) file #6923. This agreement only covers the original interview transcripts and audio recordings.

3. Use of the Shared Data

The use of the shared data will be for academic purposes in keeping with existing institutional ethical standards and approvals*. The primary use of shared data will be for secondary data analysis to be completed by Amy E. Fulton for her doctoral research, titled Migrant Social Workers' Experiences of Professional Adaptation in Alberta, Canada: A Gender-Based Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

The data receiver agrees to give full recognition to the National SSHRC Study "A qualitative investigation of the Migrants' experience and their professional adaptation into social work practice in Canada", acknowledging the research team (Pulleen Sansfaçon, Brown and Graham) and the funding number (SHHRC 425-2012-0391) in all future publications (including the dissertation) and other dissemination activities (oral, written or audio, web-based or else). The full data set from which the dissertation analysis is drawn is the intellectual property of the SSHRC research team.

4. Accuracy

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure that the data being shared is complete and up-to-date.

5. Confidentiality and Security

5.1 Each Party will make reasonable arrangements to maintain the security of the data in its custody, by protecting it against such risks as unauthorized access, collection, use, disclosure or disposal.

5.2 Each Party will implement this Agreement in conformity with existing institutional ethics standards and approvalse regarding confidentiality.

5.3 Each Party will advise the other Party immediately of any circumstances, incidents or events which to its knowledge have jeopardized or may in future jeopardize:
   • the privacy of individuals;
   • the security of any computer system that is used to access the data.

6. Method of Data Sharing

The data will be shared electronically via Dropbox or another equally accessible and secure means.

7. Data Retention
The data receiver will ensure that the data is retained at the University of Calgary for a period of time commensurate with the current standards of the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

8. Modification or Termination of Agreement

This Agreement may be modified or terminated at any time by agreement, in writing, of all parties. The parties undertake to provide one another ample written notice regarding any proposed or required modifications to the Agreement.

9. Term of Agreement

This Agreement will be in force during the period commencing June 20, 2014 and ending December 31, 2016. The data receiver shall have continuous access to the data during the term of the agreement.

Agreed to by:

Signature redacted.

Annie Pullen Sansfacon

August 27th, 2014

Date

Signature redacted.

John Graham

Date

Signature redacted.

Marion Brown

August 27, 2014

Date

Signature redacted.

Amy E. Fulton

December 9, 2014

Date
*The original research project for which the data was collected has been approved by the Université de Montreal Research Ethics Committee (CERFAS-2012-13-035-D / May 4th 2012), University of Calgary Conjoint Research Ethics Board (CFRES-6923/June 8th 2012), and Dalhousie University Research Ethics Committee (2011-2495, August 22, 2011).
APPENDIX B: PHASE TWO SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview schedule (Second stage)

Background information

Can you tell me some background information about you including where you have immigrated from, and how long you have been in Canada for?

Probes: have you moved directly to Montreal / Halifax / Calgary? Have you lived in other places in Canada before settling here?

1. **Could you tell me about your social work educational experience in your country of origin?**
   Why did you choose social work? Where did you study, how long was the programme, and what did it involve? What is the most significant learning you have made during your social work study? How is social work practice understood in your country of origin? Would you say there is a dominant form or model of social work practice in your country of origin? What is it? Are there any values that are put forward in your training? Are there any theoretical perspectives that are dominant in your training?

2. **Can you tell me about your social work professional experience in your country of origin?**
   Can you describe the most significant social work job you had? What made it significant to you? Did you work in the country of origin as a qualified social worker before moving to Canada? If so, how long for? What field? Thinking about your experience prior moving to Canada, do you think your professional experience in your country of origin was coherent with your educational background? Was it possible to apply values, model or theoretical perspectives in your work as a social work in your country of origin?

3. **Can you tell me about your experience of immigration to Canada**
   What was your motivation to immigrate over here? What was your immigration status at arrival? Did you have a social work job offered? What did you choose Canada? Why did you choose Montreal/Halifax/Calgary?

4. **Can you tell me about the process of getting your qualification recognised to work as a social work in Canada**
   Can you describe the process for your qualification recognised? Did you have to undertake courses or testing in the process of getting your social work qualification recognised? If so, what were they? Were they helpful?

   A) **IF THE PARTICIPANT HAD THE QUALIFICATION RECOGNISED**:

   What was the most important challenge in getting your qualification recognised? What was the most important challenge in getting a job in social work? Did you have to accept a job in another field before practicing social work in Canada? How did it help? Did you learn anything new? How was it useful?
B) IF THE PARTICIPANT HADN’T THE QUALIFICATION RECOGNISED:

Why are you not member of the board of OTSTCQ/Calgary/Halifax? What were the barriers to getting the qualification recognised? Is there any aspects that helped you in the process (professional, personal, and social)? How this process of recognition of qualification affects you?

IF THE PARTICIPANT DID NOT GET THEIR QUALIFICATION RECOGNISED, AND SHE/HE HAS A JOB IN SOCIAL WORK / SOCIAL INTERVENTION, KEEP GOING WITH THE INTERVIEW. OTHERWISE, TRY TO GET MORE INFORMATION RELATED TO QUESTION 4 AND THEN MOVE ON TO QUESTION 10.

5. **Can you tell me about your experience of searching your first social work post in Canada?**

What was the easier aspect about getting a job in social work? Did you have any difficulties in getting it? What were they? What is the impact of this experience on your adaptation in Canada? Did you feel any form of discrimination during the job search? Can you talk about it?

6. **Can you tell me about your experience of taking your first social work post in Canada?**

When was it? How long was it between when you left social work in the country of origin and your first job as a social worker in Canada? Which client group where you working with? What setting? What was your first impression of the social work profession in Canada as you observed it around you?

Have you experienced any form of discrimination from colleagues, managers or clients / service users? Can you tell me more? What was the context? How did you react? How did it affect your adaptation process? What was your first discrimination experience in your life? Did you consider any solution? Why did you choose to go in this way (looking for the values during the process)? What was the impact of this discrimination experience into your practice? Colleagues? Clients?

7. **Can you tell me about your adaptation to social work practice in Canada?**

7.1 **Social work organisation**

How would you describe the process of settling in to the agency where you first worked in Canada? What were the challenges? What is difficult or easy to adapt to social work organisation? Can you tell me what makes it more or less easy to adapt to their in the organisation? Do you feel that the organisation support the adaptation / integration of new workers? How the organisation could be more helpful in the adaptation / integration process?

7.2 **Work with colleagues**

Can you describe how you adapted to working with colleagues? What was the most challenging feature of your work with colleagues? What was the most easy or natural one? What did you do to be accepted by your colleagues? Are there any aspects you feel you had to leave behind with regard to your relation with the colleagues? What were the reasons? To what degree did you feel your relations with colleagues in your country of origin were
similar to those you experienced in your job in Canada? What were the most challenging features of your work within the organisation? What were the most easy or natural ones?

7.3 Social work practice and direct intervention
What makes easier to adapt yourself into social work in Canada? Reflecting on your experience gained in your country of origin (professional, personal and educational), how did they help or not to your adaptation to social work practice in Canada? How long did it take you to get used to/feel comfortable with the practice here? What was helpful in the process? How did you overcome with challenges?

How can you describe the language adaptation? What did you find the most difficult/easy with regard to the language adaptation? How did you overcome it? What would have been helpful? Did any of the challenges with regard to the language affect your relation with colleagues and or clients?
How did you feel your expected roles and tasks including client’s evaluation in social work were coherent or not with what you had learned and experienced in your country of origin? What was different? What was similar?

7.4 Direct work with clients/groups/community
Can you describe how you adapted to work with clients in Canada? How do you feel your education and your experience in the country of origin influenced your relationship with clients? How do you feel your education and your experience in the country of origin influenced your analysis of your clients’ situation? Do you think your way of working with client has remained unchanged? If there have been any changes, how did they happened?

8. Could you discuss of the transferability or not of your experience and knowledge to Canadian Social Work
How did you feel your past experience and other knowledge prepared you to work with clients? Are transferable do you feel they are? Can you give me an example?

Do you feel that those gains are beneficial or detrimental to your practice? If so, can you give us an example and explain why you see it that way?

Are there any experience or knowledge you feel that were not transferable at first but seems more pertinent now? Is there any experience or knowledge that are still not transferable? Why do you think so?

Are there any important aspects of your practice (skills, values, knowledge, theory, analysis) you feel you had to leave behind with regard to your practice with clients here in Canada? To what extent do you feel you have been able to continue to apply the models, values, practice, skills and analyses you gained in your country of origin to your Canadian experience?

As a migrant social worker, what is the most challenging aspect of your work with clients? What is the easier or more natural one? How do you think your experience of immigration and adaptation can help you in your practice in Canada (for example, in relation to the adaptation a clients could experiment)? Please, can you describe a situation to illustrate your thoughts?
9. Now, I would like to discuss about the values that you put forward in your personal and professional life.

Can you tell me a little bit about your personal values, that is, what is important for you in your life? Do you feel there are any changes in your values since you moved to Canada? Why? Can you explain how you feel those changed?

At the beginning of the interview, you discussed your professional values as practice in your country of origin. Do you feel there have been any changes in your professional values since you started practicing in Canada? If yes, how can you explain this difference? How did you feel about this change? What does help or mitigated this change?

10. I would like to talk about your personal and professional identity.

We will start with the concept of identity at a personal level: Can you tell me what the concept of identity means for you? What makes up your identity? Thinking about your understanding of identity, do you feel there have been any changes that occurred between your life in your country of origin, and now? Can you explain more? Please can you illustrate your thought by an example? What could explain those changes in your identity (drill to know the reason of the change)? What could explain the stability in your identity (drill to know the reason of the change or stability)?

We will now talk about professional identity, as a social worker? What do you understand by professional identity? What is it made of? With regard to your comprehension of your professional identity, do you feel any changes occurred from when you practice in your country of origin to today? Can you give some examples? more? What could explain those changes? If no change occurred, what can explain this stability? (drill to know the reason of the change or stability)?

Can you draw some parallels between your professional identity and your personal identity? How does your professional values fit or not in your personal identity? How do you feel you’re the process of adaptation has shaped your identity?

11. I would like you to tell me if and how you feel your experience has contributed to change practice around you.

Are there any aspects of your practice gained in your country of origin that you feel have influenced the social work practice around you? What are they? What aspects social work practices in your country of origin have a contribution to make to Canadian social work? To what degree do you feel able to influencing practice with regard to these aspects? Why? If you could change something, what would it be? To what degree your experience and knowledge can contribute at this perspective? Tell me about the difficulties and successes you have encountered. What are the key advances you have been able to put forward with
regard to your practice with clients? With colleagues? Within the organization? Were there any gaps in the service you deliver which your practice experience and education background have contributed to identify and change.

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of personal adaptation? Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your professional adaptation into social work practice in Canada?

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about how your social work experience, education, values and understanding of the profession in the country of origin shape social work interventions in Canada?